

1200 UNIT 9:

Globalization

1900 CE to present



Colby Burnett



Kim Lochner



Unit 9 Overview

The world has changed a lot since 1200. In this course, you've encountered trends such as increasing political rights, growing systems of production and distribution, and faster and more sustained networks of communication. But while these revolutions have created vast wealth and opportunity, they also allowed only limited change for some, and caused suffering for many. The increased interconnectedness of the world (globalization) allows us to see how we all share similarities, but it also presents the dangers of increasing differences among communities and the inequality between them.



0:01

Kim Lochner and Colby Burnett in conversation on video chat.

Kim takes a sip of Coca Cola

Howdy Kim!

Good day Colby!

Hey, I need a good example of globalization for my students, any ideas?

Hmm well, if you think about it, you and I are living examples of globalization. We're on opposite sides of the planet, but we speak the same language, we watch a lot of the same TV shows, read a lot of the same news...

Do you like peanut butter and jelly?

Definitely. Do you like vegemite?

Good Lord, what planet are you from?

Hi, I'm Kim Lochner from planet Oz.

And I'm Colby Burnett.

We're introducing Unit 9: Globalization 1900 to the present.

0:44

Montage of artworks from around the world; an animated map shows communities around the globe being connected by networks of exchange

We began this course over 800 years ago. In the year 1200, a diverse tapestry of human communities stretched across the Americas, Afro-Eurasia, and the Pacific. But gradually the threads of this great tapestry were weaved together as long-distance exchange networks expanded and thickened. These exchanges helped launch new trans-oceanic connections in the early modern period from 1450 to 1750. As the Columbian Exchange knitted the world together in a single global system change intensified.

1:21

Painted depictions of revolutionary battles around the world

Around 1750 we entered a period we call the long 19th century and saw a series of revolutions that created our modern world. Political and national revolutions organized people into different communities and also created two big ideas. One was the idea of the sovereign individual and the other was the nation-state made up of participating citizens. These same revolutions also emphasized the idea of universal rights: rights held everywhere by everyone. All of these ideas spread along networks that had connected people for centuries, but the speed with which they spread was increased by another revolution.

2:05

Images and video footage of innovations that came about during the industrial revolution, including steamships, airplanes, and modern-day factories.

The Industrial Revolution gave us the steamship and the telegraph, then the telephone and the airplane, and then the jet and the internet. These innovations were part of a revolution in production and distribution that allowed people to create products in great volumes to trade around the world. All of this was supported by a new economic system—capitalism—that made some people very rich.

A montage of artworks and photos show inequality: a painting of wealthy townspeople in front of a great building is contrasted with a photo of small children working in a factory

2:51

Wartime footage; crowds of people stand outside of a sign reading "free soup"; a wildfire rages

3:38

Footage of an airport; a photo of the UN; Video of a complex electronic being built; a large shipping container

*Screen reads:
Globalization: global transportation and communication networks;
photos of worldwide chains like McDonalds and KFC*

4:32

A photo of a very busy and worn down town

But we also learned that these revolutions were uneven and unequal. They were uneven because they created more rapid transformation in some places than others. And they were unequal because they created vast benefits for some people but only limited change for others and caused great suffering for some.

In the 20th century two world wars, the Cold War, and decolonization made it clear that conflict started in one part of the world rarely stayed local. Economic events like the Great Depression quickly turned into global crises and environmental crises in one place began to affect people far away. Why? Because over the last half century or more we have all become increasingly tied together through a process called globalization. People who study globalization have offered many definitions of the term and many different dates for when it started. But no matter how we define it we are describing the process through which interactions and connections have become increasingly global. This process sped up and intensified especially during the 20th century.

We can examine globalization through our three frames. First, we can see that a global network has developed. It ties us all together through rapid transportation and communications.

Second, we've developed a global community. We all recognize that we live in an interlinked world.

Finally, there is a global system of production and distribution. We build complex products often in a chain that connects several countries and then ship them to many other countries. But as I mentioned, there isn't universal agreement about what globalization means.

For instance, it is sometimes described as causing a flattening of experience around the world. In other words, as we all connect, share culture and ideas and perhaps become more equal, the world looks flatter to some who study it, like we're all on the same level more or less.

But scholars have suggested that globalization is really lumpy. Because its effects are so uneven, it creates inequalities among communities and people. In this unit we explore this debate. We ask, "How are our lives today similar and different and how can history help explain these variations and commonalities?"

Chart shows inequality between and within groups with two lines on the same chart. Recently, inequality between groups started to decrease. But Inequality within groups has been rising.

6:00

Images of wealthy areas are contrasted with photographs of people that are unhoused.

Looking at the data changes the idea that globalization produces a flatter world. In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that globalization can cause inequality as well as reduce it. Let's look at economic data. This chart shows two types of inequality of the past two centuries. The first is inequality between country groups, represented by this red line. Country groups constitute different regions of the world. Some regions, as we have previously learned, became richer through industrialization and imperialism in the long 19th century. Others became poorer. We can see that difference by looking at the red line. It shows gradual inequality between richer regions like Europe and North America, and poorer regions like Africa, Latin America, and South Asia. This trend continues throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, until recently, when the poorer nations began to close the gap.

The world is becoming less unequal, but wait, there's another data line we also need to look at. This blue line tracks inequality within regions or groups of countries with similar income. This line shows that equality within these country groups stayed about even until the early 20th century. Then it began to decline as societies became generally more equal. But in the last 30 years that trend reversed itself and inequality within each country group began to rise.

So what does that mean? Is inequality overall on the rise or the decline? How can we tell? We'll look at some answers to this question more closely in this unit. We can also try to understand the challenges and opportunities of globalization by switching scales and zooming in to look at local stories like Detroit, Michigan.

Detroit was one of the greatest success stories of the Industrial Revolution. By 1900 it had a massive and diverse population including large communities of African Americans, Latinx communities, and recent immigrants from Europe. In the early 20th century many worked in the new American auto industry, giving Detroit its nickname the Motor City. They produce much of the country's metalworks, paints, and railcars. These industries ship goods around the country and the world, benefiting from globalization. Labor reforms meant that workers receive benefits like the 40-hour work week, a novelty in the country. Detroiters volunteered in the two world wars where many died. And yet, these conflicts also expanded the city's industry as tanks rolled off assembly lines used to make family cars.

6:55

Photographs of Detroit as a bustling city early in the industrial revolution show busy workers and large automotive factories

By the 1960s however, Detroit experienced many of the problems that illustrate the downside of globalization. Not everyone agrees on exactly what went wrong, but we do know that as the rest of the world caught up with capitalist industrialization, factories moved to other regions. Many of these regions had fewer protections for workers, so their production costs were lower. Detroit found it hard to compete. As unemployment rates grew crime increased and living standards dropped. For people in Detroit, the worst affected were factory workers. Managers and specialists, many of whom kept their jobs, moved out to the suburbs. A huge economic divide opened between those who lived in the suburbs and those who remained in the declining city centers. The 2007-2008 global financial crisis only made these problems worse.

7:43

8:35

*Modern day photographs
of Detroit*

*A woman works in
a facility, wearing a
protective mask*

*Photos show people
holding up flags that
represent their country;
another photograph shows
a sign on a church that
reads "refugees welcome"*

9:47

*Colby and Kim in
conversation over video
chat*

Today, Detroit is trying to climb back out of its depression by reinventing itself, a difficult task. As with many cities around the world some attempts at improvement have led to gentrification. Gentrification is a process by which cities become wealthier, but only by displacing the poorer residents to less desirable, often rural regions.

And as the Covid-19 pandemic threatens to create yet another economic recession, Detroit faces a new but familiar uncertainty. The problems of inequality, whether because of globalization, or in spite of it, mean that people still turn to their local communities for their identity and for support.

Religion matters to many, so does national citizenship, so does ethnicity. Often these identities are a source of stability in a complex and changing world. But they can also cause conflict among groups and communities struggling to survive and thrive as global pressures push them together or force them to compete for resources.

Even as the deterioration of our environment through climate change exacerbates these conflicts and threatens the most vulnerable among us. It also reminds us that we share many global challenges in common.

A lot of the conflicts in the world today result from a combination of disputed claims to resources, differences in ethnicity, and historical grievances. People in these situations often turn against global identities as a result. Instead, they seek support among their own smaller communities defined by similarities like religion, ethnicity, or neighborhood. This isn't inherently a bad thing but it presents us with a challenge. How can we live both locally and globally at the same time? How do we embrace our own identities while respecting and cooperating with other people and communities? To help us plan for the future, we need to explore how people can be both global and local at the same time in different places. To do this we must understand the historical trends that have brought us to this point.

Okay, I'll never understand vegemite, but we both like kiwis.

That's New Zealand, not Australia.

Weiner Schnitzel?

Austria! I feel like you're doing this on purpose. (music playing)