



Unit 9 Overview

A series of trends connect us to the world of 1750, including 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) from 1750 to today 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.



00:01

Colby Burnett and Kim Lochner in conversation: Kim hands Colby a stapler

Kim opens Colby's gift

So, I got you a little last overview present.

Oh!

Yes—so I, I got you this.

The Sabertooth 3000 with Double Hand technology? How did you know?

I... Um... Colby, this is... half a packet of Tim Tams.

I was hungry.

Hi, I'm Kim Lochner, and along with Colby Burnett, we're introducing Unit 9: Globalization, Internationalism, and Nationalism.

00:36

Art montage of pieces that depict revolutions around the world

Painting shows a birds-eye view of a massive trading port

Photographs of the telegraph, a steamship; a telephone, an airplane

We began this course by looking at an era we called the Long 19th Century. Over four units, we explored a series of revolutions beginning around 1750. These revolutions organized people into different communities. Revolutions in political systems and values created the idea of the sovereign individual and the nation-state made up of participating citizens. These same revolutions also emphasized the idea of universal rights—rights held by everyone everywhere. All of these ideas, and others, spread along networks that connected people around the world. They spread through technology that allowed for more and faster communications. Industrialization 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.

01:54

Colby Burnett Contrasting photos: A bustling city vs. a very poor village; wealthy people in a courtyard vs. a child working in a dangerous factory

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 even great suffering for some.

*First World War: 1914-1918
Second World War: 1939-1945
The Cold War: 1946-1991
Decolonization: 1946-1970s*

Beginning in 1914, as we have seen in the last three units, a series of conflicts broke out, one after another. These conflicts brought the issues of difference and inequality into focus, but they weren't solved. The First and Second World Wars were swiftly followed by two more struggles: the Cold War and decolonization. The Cold War was largely a conflict between capitalism and socialism. Which could better address the economic problems of the world? Which could provide opportunities for everyone? Decolonization was mostly a struggle for political, economic, and cultural equality for those in the colonized world.

02:50

The Cold War and decolonization happened at about the same time. Why? Because over the last half-century or more, we have all become increasingly tied together through a process called globalization.

Kim Lochner

Global network: footage of fast air travel

Global Communities: photo of the United Nations HQ

Global production and distribution: products built and then shipped overseas

03:50

Globalization: global transportation and communication networks. photos of chains that are now around the world, such as McDonalds in Russia and Legoland in Dubai

04:47

*Colby Burnett
Chart shows a red line (inequality between country groups) rising*

Chart shows the blue line (inequality within regions or countries) declining between 1900 and 1960; since then, the line has started to climb (increase) again.

06:00

*Kim Lochner
Photograph of Detroit around 1914 – a bustling city*

Automobile factories in Detroit

People who study globalization have offered many different definitions for the term. But no matter how we define it, we are describing the process through which interactions and connections have become increasingly global. We can examine this process 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's 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.

Globalization is sometimes described as causing a “flattening” of experience around the world. This means that as we connect, share culture and ideas, and perhaps become more equal, the world looks “flatter” to some who study it. But other scholars have suggested that globalization is really “lumpy” because of the way in which differences remain among communities and people.

In this unit, we explore this debate. We ask: To what degree do we all have lives similar to each other today? To what degree are we different? What explains these variations and commonalities? Although some do believe that the world is becoming flatter, looking at the data calls that into question. In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that globalization can cause inequality, as well as reduce it.

Let's look at data detailing economic inequality. This chart shows two types of inequality over 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 growing 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 begin to close the gap. The world is becoming less unequal. But wait—there is another data line that we also need to look at. This blue line looks at 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. Then, 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 1914, it had a massive and diverse population, including large communities of African Americans, Latinos, and recent immigrants from Europe. They worked in the new American auto industry which gave Detroit its nickname, the Motor City. They produced much of the country's metalworks, paints, and railcars.

Smiling workers in Detroit

These industries shipped goods around the country and around the world, benefiting from globalization. Labor reforms meant that workers received benefits like the 40-hour work week, a novelty in the country. Detroiters volunteered in the two World Wars, where many died. But these conflicts also expanded the city's industry as tanks rolled off assembly lines that had once made family cars.

07:18

But, by the 1960s, Detroit was experiencing many of the problems that illustrate the downside of globalization. Not everyone agrees about what quite went wrong. But we 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. The Detroiters most 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.

Photograph of a Detroit factory with mostly broken or destroyed windows

08:15

*Modern-day photo of downtown Detroit, partially under construction
Colby Burnett*

Today, Detroit is trying to climb back out of its depression by re-inventing 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.

Photo montage: religious gatherings, nationalistic parades, family connections

The problems of inequality, despite or because of globalization, 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. So does extended family, even when it's spread around the world through immigration or trade. 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 to compete for resources. A lot of the conflicts in the world today result from a combination of disputed claims to resources, differences in ethnicity, and histories of suffering on both sides. 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.

A building with a sign that reads "REFUGEES WELCOME"

09:37

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 those of 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.

Colby and Kim in conversation

So, is this goodbye?

Yeah, but I'm sure the next two-and-a-half centuries will be just as interesting. And hey, maybe we can come back and do a course on that period.

But in 250 years, we'll be...

Preserved on microchips that can have our consciousness uploaded into robots.
Yeah.