Lower Manhattan, 11 March 2002
Six months after the terrorist attacks, beams of light commemorated the destroyed twin towers of the World Trade Center and those who perished in them. (AFP Photo/ Doug Kanter/Getty Images)

- What are the main benefits and dangers of growing political, economic, and cultural integration?
- What roles do religious beliefs and secular ideologies play in the contemporary world?
- How has technology contributed to the process of global interaction?
The workday began normally at the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan on the morning of September 11, 2001. The 50,000 people who work there were making their way to the two 110-story towers, as were some 140,000 others who visited on a typical day. Suddenly, at 8:46 A.M., an American Airlines Boeing 767 with 92 people on board, traveling at a speed of 470 miles per hour (765 kilometers per hour), crashed into floors 94 to 98 of the north tower, igniting the 10,000 gallons (38,000 liters) of fuel in its tanks. Just before 9:03 A.M., a United Airlines flight with 65 people on board and a similar fuel load hit floors 78 to 84 of the south tower.

As the burning jet fuel engulfed the collision areas, the buildings' surviving occupants struggled through smoke-filled corridors and down dozens of flights of stairs. Many of those trapped above the crash sites used cell phones to say good-bye to loved ones. Rather than endure the flames and fumes, a few jumped to their deaths.
Just before 10 o'clock, temperatures that had risen to 2,300° Fahrenheit (1,260° Celsius) caused the steel girders in the impacted area of the south tower to give way. The collapsing upper floors crashed the floors underneath one by one, engulfing lower Manhattan in a dense cloud of dust. Twenty-eight minutes later the north tower pancaked in a similar manner. Miraculously, most of the buildings' occupants had escaped before the towers collapsed. Besides the people on the planes, nearly 2,600 lost their lives, including some 200 police officers and firefighters helping in the evacuation.

That same morning another American Airlines jet crashed into the Pentagon, killing all 64 people on board and 125 others inside the military complex near Washington, D.C. Passengers on a fourth plane managed to overpower their hijackers, and the plane crashed in rural Pennsylvania, killing all 45 on board.

The four planes had been hijacked by teams of Middle Eastern men who slit the throats of service and flight personnel and seized control. Of the nineteen hijackers, fifteen were from Saudi Arabia. All had links to an extremist Islamic organization, al-Qaeda* (the base or foundation), commanded by a rich Saudi named Usama bin Laden*, who was incensed with American political, military, and cultural influence in the Middle East. The men were educated and well traveled, had lived in the United States, and spoke English. Some had trained as pilots so that they could fly the hijacked aircraft.

The hijackers left few records of their personal motives, but the acts spoke for themselves. The Pentagon was the headquarters of the American military, the most technologically sophisticated and powerful fighting force the world had ever seen. The fourth plane was probably meant to hit the Capitol or the White House, the legislative and executive centers of the world's only superpower. The Twin Towers may have been targeted because they were the tallest buildings in New York, but they were not just American targets. The World Trade Center housed 430 companies involved in international commerce and finance.

Among the dead were people from more than half the countries in the world. New York was the site of the attack, but the World Trade Center was a powerful symbol of the international economy.

The events of September 11, which became commonly referred to as 9/11, can be understood on many levels. The hijackers and their supporters saw themselves as engaged in a holy struggle against economic, political, and military institutions they believed to be evil. They believed so deeply in their mission that they were willing to give their lives for it and to take as many other lives as they could. People directly affected and political leaders around the world tended to describe the attacks as evil acts against innocent victims.

To understand why the nineteen attackers were heroes to some and terrorists to others, one needs to explore the historical context of global changes at the turn of the millennium and the ideological tensions they have generated. While the advancing economic, political, and cultural integration of the world is welcomed by some, it seems threatening to others. The unique prominence of the United States in every major aspect of global integration, as well as its support for pro-American governments overseas, also elicits sharply divergent views.

Global Economic and Political Currents

The turn of the millennium saw the intensification of globalization trends that had been building since the 1970s. Growing trade and travel and new technologies were bringing all parts of the world into closer economic, political, and cultural integration and interaction. The collapse of the Soviet Union had completed the dissolution of territorial empires that had been under way throughout the twentieth century. Autonomous national states (numbering about two hundred) became an almost universal norm, and a growing number of them had

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*al-Qaeda (ahl-KA-e-duh)
Usama bin Laden (oo-SAH mah bin LAH-din)
## Chronology

### Politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Al-Qaeda attacks American destroyer USS Cole in Yemen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Terrorists destroy the World Trade Center and damage the Pentagon on September 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>United Nations weapons inspectors return to Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>United States and Britain invade and occupy Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Terrorists bomb Spanish trains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Hamid Karzai becomes first democratically elected president of Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Terrorists bomb London transport system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Iraqis adopt new constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Anti-American president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad elected president of Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Iran announces ability to enrich uranium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Iraqis elect new government</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Hamas movement defeats PLO in Palestinian election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Israel attacks Hezbollah in Lebanon in response to its seizure of Israeli soldiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>In midterm elections, American voters rejected Bush policies.</td>
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### Economics and Society

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001–2003</td>
<td>Terrorist attacks trigger global recession</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Shanghai Cooperation Organization formed</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>U.S. withdraws from Kyoto Protocol on global warming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Al-Jazeera television in Qatar begins broadcasting statements by Osama bin Laden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Euro currency adopted in twelve European countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Ten new members admitted to European Union</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

embraced democratic institutions. The rapid integration of world trade and markets had convinced world leaders of the need to balance national autonomy with international agreements and associations.

### An Interconnected Economy

The heated expansion of trade, global interconnections, and privatization of government enterprises that gained momentum with the dismantling of Soviet-style socialist economies in the 1990s cooled abruptly in the wake of 9/11. The rate of growth in world trade fell from 13 percent in 2000 to only 1 percent in 2001. The importance of the United States, and therefore of American economic and foreign policies, to the world economic system appears clearly in Map 33.1, which shows global disparities in national economies and per capita incomes in 2002. The gigantic U.S. economy, larger than the economies of the next five countries combined—Japan, Germany, Great Britain, China (including Hong Kong), and France—also consumed by far the largest portion of the world's natural resources, including over a quarter of annual global oil production.

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Map 33.1 Global Distribution of Wealth  Industrialization and good government have given the citizens of Japan and Western countries access to tremendous wealth. Elsewhere, warfare and political mismanagement have slowed or reversed economic growth, while high population growth (see Map 32.2) has slowed increases in per capita wealth. In nearly all countries the distribution of wealth among individuals varies tremendously. Wealth is clearly concentrated in some parts of the world, but its geographical distribution is more complex than the often-cited divide between a rich north and a poor south.
Economic growth in China and India resumed quickly after the shock of 2001, and the very large populations of these two countries marked them as future world economic powers. Their growth put particular pressure on world energy supplies. OPEC's manipulation of world oil prices, combined with political events like the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and Iraq's ensuing invasion of Iran, had caused crude oil prices to soar between 1973 and 1985. But aside from those years, the average price of oil remained consistently below $20 per barrel (adjusted for inflation) throughout the second half of the twentieth century. In the year 2000, however, oil prices began a new period of increase caused not by OPEC but by rising demand, especially in the United States and Asia, and by political turmoil in the Middle East (see below). By the middle of 2006, the price of a barrel of crude had crept past $70, with little prospect of a reversal of the trend. This increase not only boosted the national incomes of major producing countries such as Russia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, but it also caused energy security to overtake the formation of international trade associations as a matter of global economic concern.

Among the regional trade associations that had come into being to promote growth, reduce the economic vulnerability of member states, and, less explicitly, balance American economic dominance, the European Union (EU) was the most successful (see Map 33.2). Twelve member states adopted a new common currency, the euro, in 2002, making the Euro-bloc a formidable competitor with the United States for investment and banking. Ten new members from eastern Europe and the Mediterranean were admitted to the EU in May 2004, and other countries, including Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania, had aspirations to join.

Despite the EU's expansion, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which eliminated tariffs among the United States, Canada, and Mexico in 1994, governed the world's largest free-trade zone. However, a heated debate in the United States over illegal immigration across the Mexican border, as well as conservative fears that Spanish speakers might somehow dilute American culture and identity, limited popular enthusiasm for the agreement. The third largest free-trade zone, Mercosur, created by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay in 1991, decided in 2002 to allow the free movement of people within its area and gave equal employment rights to the citizens of all member states. Other free-trade associations operated in West Africa, southern Africa, Southeast Asia, Central America, the Pacific Basin, and the Caribbean.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which formed in 2001 with China, Russia, and four former parts of the USSR—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan (KAH-zahk-stahn) Kyrgyzstan (KER-gihz-stahn) Tajikistan (tah-JEHK-ih-stahn)
Map 33.2 Regional Trade Associations, 2004  International trade and development are major concerns of governments in developed and developing countries. NAFTA, Mercosur, and the EU are free-trade areas. The other associations promote trade and development.
and Uzbekistan—as members, originally pursued common security interests, such as combating separatist movements and terrorism. But its announced twenty-year plan for reducing barriers to trade and population movements took a step forward in 2006 when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the president of Iran, a country with observer status, signaled Iran's desire to expand relations with the SCO. Bringing Iran's oil-rich economy into alignment with a rapidly developing China and a similarly oil-rich Russia, then recovering from the period of post-Soviet economic turmoil, promised to complicate the world economic and political picture.

Because of the inequalities and downturns that are intrinsic to free economic markets, the global bodies that tried to manage world trade and finance found it hard to convince poorer nations that they were not concerned only with the welfare of richer countries. In 1995 the world’s major trading powers established the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO encouraged reduced trading barriers and enforced international trade agreements. Despite a membership of 149 nations by 2006, the WTO had many critics and regularly encountered street protests during its ministerial meetings. Some protesters feared that low-cost foreign manufacturers would shrink the job opportunities in richer states, others demanded continuing tariff protection for local farmers.

Countries in economic trouble had little choice but to turn to the international financial agencies for funds to keep things from getting worse. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (see Chapter 31) made their assistance conditional on internal economic reforms that were often politically unpopular, such as terminating government subsidies for basic foodstuffs, cutting social programs, and liberalizing investment. The bitter pill of economic reform sometimes paid off in long-term improvement, but it could also fuel popular criticism of the international economic system and of the governments that acceded to its demands.

The emphasis on free trade led to changes in government-to-government aid programs. During the Cold War countries had often gained funds for economic development by allying themselves with one of the superpowers. Not surprisingly, when the Cold War ended, foreign economic aid to poor nations fell by a third. On an African tour in 2000 President Bill Clinton told African countries that the days of large handouts were over and that they would have to rely on their own efforts to expand their economies.

In the face of rising criticism at home and protests at international meetings, however, world leaders rethought their positions and pledged to increase attention to the problem of economic despair, especially in Africa. At a Millennium Summit in September 2000 the states of the United Nations agreed to make sustainable development and the elimination of world poverty their highest priorities. A 2002 United Nations meeting in Monterrey, Mexico, called for special commitments to Africa. Late in 2002 President George W. Bush proposed a substantial increase in American foreign aid. In practice, however, special consideration of Africa’s economic plight seldom resulted in major increases in support.

Globalization and Democracy

The last decades of the twentieth century saw rapid increases in democratic institutions and personal freedom. In 2003, 140 countries regularly held elections; people in 125 had access to free (or partly free) press; and most people lived in fully democratic states.

The great appeal of democracy in modern times has been that elections offer a peaceful way to settle the inevitable differences among a country’s social classes, cultural groups, and regions. Although majority votes swing from one part of the political spectrum to another, democracies tend to encourage political moderation. Moreover, wars between fully democratic states are extremely rare.

Democratic gains were made especially in the nations of eastern Europe that had been under Soviet control, though some newly democratic states became subject to great mood swings among the electorate. In Ukraine, for example, the election in 1999 of Viktor Yushchenko, a reform-minded prime minister, came undone a year and a half later when a no-confidence vote supported by communist hardliners and big business interests removed him from office. Violent demonstrations followed in which protesters demanded the impeachment of the authoritarian president Leonid Kuchma. Kuchma yielded in 2004, and his hand-picked candidate seemingly outpolled Yushchenko in the election to succeed him. But when international monitors presented evidence of massive electoral fraud, pro-Yushchenko demonstrations, designated “the Orange Revolution,” led to the Supreme Court invalidating the results. After a new election in 2005, Yushchenko finally became president. This experience, which had parallels in other former Soviet territories, demonstrated that working democracies can be hard to establish in countries with a history of authoritarianism.

Uzbekistan (ooz-BEHK-ih-stahn)
Asian democracies proved somewhat more stable. Beginning with free parliamentary elections in 1999, the populous state of Indonesia moved from years of authoritarian and corrupt rule toward more open political institutions. The following years witnessed many problems: a violent independence movement of the Aceh district of northern Sumatra, the secession in 2002 of East Timor after years of brutal Indonesian military occupation, terrorist bombings on the island of Bali in 2004, and a devastating earthquake and tsunami in 2004. But democratic elections were regularly held. The losing candidates left office peacefully, and the populace at large accepted the results.

In India a major political shift occurred in 1998 when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured an electoral victory that ended four decades of Congress Party rule. The BJP success came through blatant appeals to Hindu nationalism, the condoning of violence against India’s Muslims, and opposition to the social and economic progress of the Untouchables (those traditionally confined to the dirtiest jobs). In 2004, however, in a major upset, the BJP lost a national election to the Congress Party and peacefully handed over power.

In sub-Saharan Africa, democracy had mixed results. Nelson Mandela, the leader of the African National Congress (ANC) who had become the first postapartheid president of South Africa in 1994 (see Chapter 32), left office in 1999 and was succeeded by the deputy president and ANC leader Thabo Mbeki. Mbeki was reelected in 2004. The lively politics of this ethnically diverse country have been a model of how democracy can resolve conflicts. Nigeria, Africa’s most populous state, also tried democracy in 1999 when General Olusegun Obasanjo, running on an anticorruption and reform platform, was elected president after decades of military rule. However, his reelection in 2003 was tainted by voting irregularities, and a campaign by his supporters to amend the constitution so he could run for a third term failed in 2006. In the meantime, Nigeria was wracked by periodic Muslim-Christian violence in the cities of the north and east, and a guerrilla movement in the Niger Delta aimed at sabotaging and threatening the oil industry in order to gain more of its benefits for local communities.

**Regime Change in Iraq and Afghanistan**

The most closely watched experiments in democratization took place in Iraq and Afghanistan, countries that the United States invaded in response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. While the use of Afghanistan
Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. After two terms under the comparatively liberal, but ineffective, government of President Mohammad Khatami, voters in the Islamic Republic of Iran elected a relatively unknown conservative in 2006. President Ahmadinejad has taken confrontational positions on international affairs, notably his denial of Israel's legitimacy as a state and his assertion of Iran's right to develop nuclear technology. This has enhanced his domestic popularity, while convincing many analysts that with the American defeat of Saddam Hussein, Iran had become a major power in the Middle East and the Islamic world. (IRNA/Reuters/Corbis)

as a safe haven for Usama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda organization was the unequivocal justification given for the overthrow in December 2001 of the militantly religious Taliban regime that protected him, the rationale for invading Iraq underwent a change. During the leadup to the war the American government contended that Iraq was a clear and present danger to the United States because it possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons that it might supply to terrorists like bin Laden. In November 2002 the Bush administration persuaded the United Nations Security Council to pass a resolution ordering the return of United Nations weapons inspectors to Iraq and requiring the Iraqi government to specify what WMDs it still possessed. When the new United Nations inspectors failed to find any evidence of banned weapons, a split widened between those nations wanting to continue inspections and those, led by the United States and Britain, wanting to intervene militarily. Abandoning efforts to gain explicit Security Council authorization, an American-led “coalition of the willing” began the invasion of Iraq with a massive aerial bombardment of Baghdad on March 20, 2003. Twenty-five days later the United States declared that “major fighting” had ended, little realizing that a guerrilla insurgency would continue for years.

Though Iraq then fell into a deep state of turmoil because the coalition army was too small or otherwise unprepared to prevent the looting and destruction of government facilities and other lawlessness, a thorough search was launched for prohibited weapons. This search failed to turn up any WMDs, just as intelligence analysis failed to uncover any evidence that Saddam Hussein, Iraq's fallen dictator, had been in league with Usama bin Laden or had played a role in the 9/11 attacks.

However, American concern for WMDs was not eliminated. North Korea had an open program to build nuclear weapons, and Iran was suspected of having a covert plan based in part on technological aid secretly given by the head of Pakistan's successful nuclear arms program. Iran's outspokenly anti-American and anti-Israeli president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, elected in 2005, and North Korea's dictator Kim Jong-il presented the United States with difficult challenges, but the military invasion option chosen for Iraq was not talked of.

The failure to find Iraqi WMDs having become an embarrassment to the United States, President George W. Bush declared that the rationale for invading Iraq had actually been to liberate the Iraqi people and substitute democracy for oppression. Though an intense debate followed within the United States about whether the Bush administration had used deception in leading the nation into war, the question of whether the war would ultimately be termed a success or a failure came to hinge
on the establishment of democratic institutions in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Though Afghanistan had a far less developed economy and was suffering from the devastation caused by years of guerrilla war against the Soviet Union and from the harsh and stifling rule of the Taliban, the democratic process started well with an assembly of traditional tribal leaders selecting Hamid Karzai as interim president in 2002. Two years later Karzai was elected president in Afghanistan's first democratic elections.

Unfortunately, the power of the new Afghan government did not extend effectively over the entire country. Traditional warlords retained control in some areas, and in 2006 an effort by the Taliban to regain power gave rise to assassinations and guerrilla warfare in various parts of the country. Though the United States was able to enlist the participation of NATO forces in helping to police Afghanistan, the number of foreign troops and the amount of monetary aid made available to the Karzai government were insufficient to ensure either security or economic recovery. To the frustration of the countries trying to help Afghanistan with its many problems, opium produced for the world drug trade remained a mainstay of the country's farm income.

When the "major fighting" ended in Iraq, the United States and its allies established a Coalition Provisional Authority to govern the country while democratic institutions were being designed. After sixteen months of American direct rule, the authority appointed an Iraqi Governing Council composed mostly of Iraqi exiles who had opposed Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. The council adopted a Transitional Administrative Law to serve as a temporary constitution and then passed authority on to an Iraqi Interim Government, which in turn gave way to an Iraqi Transitional Government elected in January 2006. This election, the first under a constitution adopted three months earlier, marked the culmination of the democratization process.

At every turning point along this twisting path to democratic rule, the United States declared that Iraq was finally emerging from chaos and anarchy, but in fact the growth of democracy was mirrored by the spread of a lethal resistance movement that attacked coalition forces and Iraqis who were helping them, especially newly recruited soldiers and police. When the elections produced a parliament in which Shi'ite political parties, representing the country's majority population and closely aligned with Iran, formed the largest bloc of votes, the insurgency increasingly targeted Shi'ite civilians and mosques. In response, Shi'ite militiamen, some of them incorporated within the government's security forces, attacked Sunni Arabs in Baghdad and elsewhere. The question was soon being asked whether Iraq was on the verge of, or already in the midst of, a civil war. Though the Bush administration continued to claim that, despite the violence, democracy would eventually succeed in both Iraq and Afghanistan, public opinion polls showed that most Americans had doubts about this and worried about how and when American troops might be able to return home. In the 2006 midterm elections, opposition to the war led to Democrats capturing both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

With the democratization process in Afghanistan and Iraq in question, other Middle Eastern countries hesitated to follow American urgings to liberalize their political systems. Though some small oil-producing countries in the Persian Gulf took cautious steps toward democratization and Kuwait for the first time allowed women to vote in 2006, large countries like Egypt and Syria talked about liberalization but continued to suppress most critics. These countries were fearful that free elections would lead to Islamic political parties gaining a share of power, or even forming a new government, as the religious Shi'ite parties had in Iraq. The capture of 23 out of 128 seats in the Lebanese parliament by the Lebanese Shi'ite movement Hezbollah in 2005 and the absolute majority of seats won by the militantly anti-Israeli Hamas movement in elections for the Palestine Governing Authority in 2006 seemed to confirm this fear, since both movements were strongly religious in their goals and policies. Attacks launched by Israel against both Hamas and Hezbollah in response to kidnappings of Israeli soldiers in 2006 suggested that fear of domination by Islamic movements might in the future become more important than democratization in the Middle East, regardless of American policies.

**TRENDS AND VISIONS**

As people around the world faced the opportunities and problems of globalization, they tried to make sense of these changes in terms of their own cultures and beliefs. With 6 billion people, the world was big enough to include many different approaches, whether religious or secular, local or international, traditional or visionary. In some cases, however, conflicting visions fed violence.

**Faith and Politics**

Religious beliefs increasingly inspired political actions during the second half of the twentieth century, and the trend intensified as the new century began (see Map 33.3). Though for Americans this change reversed two centuries of growing secularism, Western analysts did not agree on the cause of the religious revival.
Map 33.3  World Religions  The distribution of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam reflects centuries of missionary efforts. Hinduism and Judaism have expanded primarily through trade and migration. Chinese governments have actively curtailed religious practice. As religion revives as a source of social identity or a rationale for political assertion or mass mobilization, the possibility of religious activism across broad geographic regions becomes greater, as does the likelihood of domestic discord in multireligious states. (Data from The New York Times 2003 Almanac, ed. John W. Wright [New York: Penguin Books, 2003], 484–488. Copyright © The New York Times Company, 2002.)
Evangelical Protestants became a powerful conservative political force in the United States, particularly during the presidency of George W. Bush. Catholic conservatives led by Pope John Paul II, who died in 2005, and his successor Pope Benedict XVI forcefully reiterated politically sensitive teachings, such as opposition to abortion, homosexuality, marriage of priests, and admission of women to the priesthood. In Israel, hyperorthodox Jews known as haredim played a leading role in settling the West Bank and Gaza, the Palestinian territories captured by Israel in 1967, and vehemently resisted both Israel’s unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 and subsequent plans for withdrawal from parts of the West Bank. And in India, Hindu zealots made the BJP party a powerful political force (see above).

Yet Islam became the focus of most discussions of faith and politics. The birth of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the revolution of 1979 made the current of Muslim political assertiveness, which had been building in several Muslim countries for twenty years, visible to all. But by the year 2000 acts of terrorism perpetrated by non-Iranian Muslim groups claiming to be acting for religious reasons were capturing the headlines.

Terrorism as a political tactic by which comparatively weak militants used grotesquely inhumane and lethal acts to convince a frightened public that danger is everywhere and the government is incapable of protecting them has a long history. But the instantaneous media links made possible by satellite communications, and the tradition in the news business of publicizing violence, increased its effectiveness from the 1980s onward.

Bombings, kidnappings, and assassinations made political sense to all sorts of political groups: secular Palestinians confronting Israel; national separatists like the Tamils in Sri Lanka, Basques in Spain, and Chechens in Russia; Catholic and Protestant extremists in Northern Ireland; and racist militias in Rwanda and Darfur, to name a few. But Muslim groups gained the lion’s share of attention because they targeted the United States and Europe, concentrated on spectacular attacks, drew from Muslim populations all over the world, and made effective use of video and audio communications from their charismatic leader, Usama bin Laden.

Born into a wealthy Saudi family and educated as an engineer, bin Laden fought against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and there recruited and trained a core group of fighters called al-Qaeda. Though his family disowned him and Saudi Arabia stripped him of his citizenship, his calls for a holy war (jihad) and his portrayal of the United States as an evil puppet-master manipulating both non-Muslim (e.g., Israel, India, Russia) and Muslim
(e.g., Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia) governments to murder and oppress innocent Muslims made sense to millions of Muslims, even if only a very few committed themselves to follow him into battle.

Al-Qaeda blew up the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, crippled the U.S. Navy destroyer Cole while it was making a port call in Yemen in 2000, and then capped everything by crashing hijacked jetliners into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001. Though the “global war on terrorism” declared in response by President Bush successfully destroyed the Afghan government that had given bin Laden safe haven as well as the dictatorship of Saddam Husain that the United States claimed was a real or potential supporter of terrorism, bin Laden and his primary deputy, the Egyptian Ayman Zawahiri, could not be found. Further terrorist attacks—by Indonesians on tourists on the island of Bali in 2002, by North Africans on commuter trains servicing Madrid in 2004, and by English-born Muslims on the London transit system in 2005—made it clear that the current of violence unleashed by al-Qaeda had become decentralized and that recruits and cells might no longer be taking orders from bin Laden. In the meantime, the primary center of terrorist activity had shifted to Iraq, where suicide bombings became commonplace and a growing insurgency attacked coalition soldiers, the Iraqi citizens who worked for them, and Iraqis who belonged to opposing Muslim sects.

In trying to explain a current of violence that could strike anywhere in the world but seemed to be centered on Muslims, some analysts argued that the religion of Islam encouraged violence against non-Muslims. The counterargument pointed out that terrorists came from many backgrounds and that the vast majority of Muslims saw their religion as one of peace. Others maintained that rigidly conservative Muslims like Usama bin Laden were blindly opposed to freedom and modernity. The counterargument pointed out that al-Qaeda used modern military and propaganda techniques and that many of its operatives, like bin Laden himself, graduated from modern technical programs. A third school of thought felt that the United States instigated al-Qaeda’s wrath through policies like supporting Israeli and stationing troops in Saudi Arabia. The counterargument pointed out that the United States had also championed the Muslim cause in Bosnia and driven the secular dictator Saddam Husain out of Kuwait, an act that most Arab governments supported.

Whether Islam and the West were destined to fight one another in a “clash of civilizations,” as political scientist Samuel Huntington predicted, or whether their differences would eventually be resolved within a common “Islamo-Christian civilization,” as Richard W. Bulliet maintained in response to Huntington, fear of terrorism became pervasive throughout the world, and many peaceful Muslims found themselves suspect because of their beliefs.

**Universal Rights and Values**

Alongside the growing influence of religion on politics, efforts to promote adherence to universal standards of human rights also expanded. Religious leaders had been the first to voice the notion that all people are equal, but the modern human rights movement grew out of the secular statements of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) and the U.S. Constitution (1788) and Bill of Rights (1791). Over the next century, the logic of universal rights moved Westerners to undertake international campaigns to end slave trading and slavery throughout the world and to secure equal legal rights (and eventually voting rights) for women.

International organizations in the twentieth century secured agreement on labor standards, the rules of war, and the rights of refugees. The pinnacle of these efforts was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, passed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, which proclaimed itself “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations.” Its thirty articles condemned slavery, torture, cruel and inhuman punishment, and arbitrary arrest, detention, and exile. The Declaration called for freedom of movement, assembly, and thought. It asserted rights to life, liberty, and security of person; to impartial public trials; and to education, employment, and leisure. The principle of equality was most fully articulated in Article 2:

> Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, or political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.²

This passage reflected an international consensus against racism and imperialism and a growing acceptance of the importance of social and economic equality. Most newly independent countries joining the United Nations willingly signed the Declaration because it implicitly condemned European colonial regimes.
The idea of universal human rights has not gone unchallenged. Some have asked whether a set of principles whose origins are so clearly Western can be called universal. Others have been uneasy with the idea of subordinating the traditional values of their culture or religion to a broader philosophical standard. Despite these objections, important gains have been made in implementing these standards.

Besides the official actions of the United Nations and various national governments, individual human rights activists, often working through international philanthropic bodies known as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), have been important forces for promoting human rights. Amnesty International, founded in 1961 and numbering 1.8 million members in 162 countries by the 1990s, concentrates on gaining the freedom of people who have been tortured or imprisoned without trial and campaigns against summary execution by government death squads or other gross violations of rights. Arguing that no right is more fundamental than the right to life, other NGOs have devoted themselves to famine relief, refugee assistance, and health care around the world. Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), founded in 1971, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 1999 for the medical assistance it offered in scores of crisis situations.

While NGOs often worked on individual situations in specific countries, other universal goals became enshrined in international agreements. Such agreements have made genocide a crime and have promoted environmental protection of the seas, of Antarctica, and of the atmosphere. The United States and a few other nations were greatly concerned that such treaties would unduly limit their sovereignty or threaten their national interests. For this reason the U.S. Congress delayed ratifying the 1949 convention on genocide until 1986. More recently the United States drew widespread international criticism for demanding exemption for Americans from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, created in 2002 to try international criminals, and for declaring that “enemy combatants” taken prisoner during the “global war on terrorism” should not be treated in accordance with the Third Geneva Convention (1950) on humane treatment of prisoners of war. While these two actions grew out of America’s acknowledged role as the one superpower capable of intervening in military crises anywhere in the world, the American withdrawal in 2001 from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol requiring industrial nations to sharply reduce emissions of pollutants that damage the atmosphere (see Environment and Technology: Global Warming) reflected a purely economic interest, namely, a fear that curbing emissions would impose great cost on power producers, vehicle makers, and manufacturers.

**Women’s Rights**

The women’s rights movement, which began on both sides of the North Atlantic in the nineteenth century, became an important human rights issue in the twentieth century. Rights for women became accepted in Western countries and were enshrined in the constitutions of many nations newly freed from colonial rule. In 1979 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of
Global Warming

Until the 1980s environmental alarms focused mainly on localized episodes of air and water pollution, exposure to toxic substances, waste management, and the disappearance of wilderness. The development of increasingly powerful computers and complex models of ecological interactions in the 1990s, however, made people aware of the global scope of certain environmental problems.

Many scientists and policymakers came to perceive global warming, the slow increase of the temperature of the earth's lower atmosphere, as an environmental threat requiring preventive action on an international scale. The warming is caused by a layer of atmospheric gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and ozone) that allow solar radiation to reach earth and warm it but that keep infrared energy (heat) from radiating from earth's surface into space. Called the greenhouse effect, this process normally keeps the earth's temperature at a level suitable for life. However, increases in greenhouse-gas emissions—particularly from the burning of fossil fuels in industry and transportation—have added to this insulating atmospheric layer.

Recent events have confirmed predictions of global temperature increases and melting glaciers and icecaps. Globally, the five warmest years on record were 1995, 1997, 1998, 2001, and 2002. Record heat hit northern Europe in the summer of 2003. Greenland glaciers and Arctic Ocean sea ice melted at record rates during 2002, and a huge section of the Antarctic ice shelf broke up and floated away. Andean glaciers are shrinking so fast they could disappear in a decade, imperiling water supplies for drinking, irrigation, and hydroelectric production. Drought has affected much of the United States in recent years, and in 2002 Australia experienced the "Big Dry," its worst drought in a century.

Despite this evidence, governments of the industrialized countries that produce the most greenhouse gases have been slow to adopt measures stringent enough to reduce emissions because of the negative effects they believe this could have on their economies. There is also fear that it may be already too late to reverse global warming. The pledges that representatives from 178 countries made at the first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 to limit their increase in greenhouse-gas production have so far been ineffective. Fearing limits on gas emissions could cripple their plans for industrial and economic expansion, many nations hesitated to sign the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the first international agreement to impose penalties on countries that failed to cut greenhouse-gas emissions. It was a major environmental victory when Japan added its signature in March 2001, but to the consternation of many world leaders President George W. Bush rejected the agreement. Ostensibly, he acted because he was unconvinced by the scientific evidence for global warming and reluctant to impose burdens on American businesses, but global security concerns also made the environment a lower American priority. Until the destructive effects of global warming, such as the inundation of coastal regions and large cities by rising sea levels, match the destruction of terrorists, the political focus is unlikely to shift.

Flooding in Bangladesh  Typhoon-driven floods submerge the low-lying farmlands of Bangladesh with tragic regularity. Any significant rise in the sea level will make parts of the country nearly uninhabitable. (O. Aubert/Sygma)
All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and in 1985 the first international conference on the status of women, sponsored by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, was held in Nairobi, Kenya. A second conference in Beijing ten years later added momentum to the women's rights movement. By 2006, 183 countries had endorsed the 1979 convention.

Besides highlighting the similarity of the problems women face around the world, international conferences have also revealed great variety in the views and concerns of women. Feminists from the West, who had been accustomed to dictating the agenda and who had pushed for the liberation of women in other parts of the world, sometimes found themselves accused of having narrow concerns and condescending attitudes. Some non-Western women complained about Western feminists' endorsement of sexual liberation and about the deterioration of family life in the West. They found Western feminists' concern with matters such as comfortable clothing misplaced and trivial compared to the issues of poverty and disease.

Other cultures came in for their share of criticism. Western women and many secular leaders in Muslim countries protested Islam's requirement that a woman cover her head and wear loose-fitting garments to conceal the shape of her body, practices enforced by law in countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, many outspoken Muslim women voluntarily donned concealing garments as expressions of personal belief, statements of resistance to secular dictatorship, or defense against coarse male behavior. Much Western criticism focused on the African custom of circumcising girls, a form of genital mutilation that can cause chronic infections or permanently impair sexual enjoyment. While not denying the problems this practice can lead to, many African women saw deteriorating economic conditions, rape, and AIDS as more important issues (see Figure 33.1).

The conferences were more important for the attention they focused on women's issues than for the solutions they generated. The search for a universally accepted women's rights agenda proved elusive because of local concerns and strong disagreement on abortion and other issues. Nevertheless, increases in women's education, access to employment, political participation, and control of fertility augured well for the eventual achievement of gender equality.

Such efforts raised the prominence of human rights as a global concern and put pressure on governments to consider human rights when making foreign policy decisions. Skeptics observed, however, that a Western country could successfully prod a non-Western country to improve its human rights performance—for example, by granting women more equal access to education and careers—but that reverse criticism of a Western country often fell on deaf ears—for example, condemnation of the death penalty in the United States. For such critics the human rights movement was seen not as an effort to make the world more humane but as another form of Western cultural imperialism, a club with which to beat former colonial societies into submission. Still, support for universal rights has grown, especially because increasing globalization has made common standards of behavior more important.

**Global Culture**

Along with the human rights movement, other kinds of cultural globalization were also proceeding rapidly at the turn of the millennium. A global language, a global educational system, and global forms of artistic expression have all come into being. Trade, travel, and migration have made a common culture necessary. Electronic communications that were once confined to members of a jet-setting elite have enabled global cultural influences to move deeper into many
societies, and a sort of global popular culture has also emerged. These changes have angered some and delighted others.

The Media and the Message

Although cultural influences from every continent travel around the world, the fact that the most pervasive elements of global culture have their origins in the West raises concerns in many quarters about cultural imperialism. Critics complain that entertainment conglomerates are flooding the world's movie theaters and television screens with Western tastes and styles and that manufacturers are flooding world markets with Western goods—both relying on sophisticated advertising techniques that promote consumption and cultural conformity. In this view, global marketing is an especially insidious effort not only to overwhelm the world with a single Western outlook shaped by capitalist ideology, but also to suppress or devalue traditional cultures and alternative ideologies. As the leader of the capitalist world, the United States is seen as the primary culprit.

But in truth, technology plays a more central role than ideology in spreading Western culture. Even though imperialist forces old and new shape choices, strongly democratic forces are also at work as people around the world make their selections in the cultural marketplace. Thus, a diversity of voices is more characteristic of cultural globalization than the cultural imperialism thesis maintains.

The pace of cultural globalization began to quicken during the economic recovery after World War II. The Hollywood films and American jazz recordings that had become popular in Europe and parts of Asia continued to spread. But the birth of electronic technology opened contacts with large numbers of people who could never before have afforded to go to a movie or buy a record.

The first step was the development of cheap transistor radios that could run for months on a couple of small batteries. Perfected by American scientists at Bell Telephone Laboratories in 1948, solid-state electronic transistors replaced power-hungry and less reliable electron tubes in radios and a wide array of other devices. Just as tube radios had spread in Europe and America in the decades before the war, small portable transistor radios, most made in Japan and elsewhere in Asia, spread rapidly in parts of the world where homes lacked electricity.

Because the transistor radios sold in Asia and Africa were designed to receive shortwave broadcasts, they brought people in remote villages the news, views, and music that American, European, Soviet, and Chinese transmitters beamed to the world. For the first time in history, the whole world could learn of major political and cultural events simultaneously. Although such broadcasts came in local and regional languages, many were in English. Electronic audiotape and CD players added to the diversity of music available to individuals everywhere.

Television, made possible by the invention of an electron scanning gun in 1928, became widely available to consumers in Western countries in the 1950s. In poorer parts of the world TVs were not common until the 1980s and 1990s, after mass production and cheap transistors made sets more affordable and reliable. Outside the United States, television broadcasting was usually a government monopoly at first, following the pattern of telegraph and postal service and radio broadcasting. Governments expected news reports and other programming to disseminate a unified national viewpoint.

Government monopolies eroded as the high cost of television production opened up global markets for rebroadcasts of American soap operas, adventure series, and situation comedies. By the 1990s a global network of satellites brought privately owned television broadcasting to even remote areas of the world, and the VCR (videocassette recorder) brought an even greater variety of programs to people everywhere. In the following decade DVD players continued the trend. British programs found a secondary market in the United States, Canada, Australia, and other countries. As a result of wider circulation of programming, people often became familiar with different dialects of English and other languages. People in Portugal, for example, who in the 1960s had found it difficult to understand Brazilian Portuguese, have become avid fans of Brazilian soap operas. Immigrants from Albania and North Africa often arrive in Italy with a command of Italian learned from Italian stations whose signals they could pick up at home.

Further internationalization of culture resulted from satellite transmission of TV signals. Specializing in rock music videos aimed at a youth audience, MTV (Music Television) became an international enterprise offering special editions in different parts of the world. Music videos shown in Uzbekistan, for example, often featured Russian bands, and Chinese groups appeared in MTV programs shown in Singapore. CNN (Cable News Network) expanded its international market after becoming the most-viewed and informative news source during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, when it broadcast live from Baghdad. CNN's fundamentally American view of the news stimulated broadcasters in other countries to develop their own round-the-clock coverage. Al-Jazeera, based in the Persian Gulf emirate of Qatar, broadcast...
various statements by Osama bin Laden from 2001 onward and offered video footage and interpretation that differed greatly from American news coverage after the war in Iraq began in 2003.

The Internet, a linkage of academic, government, and business computer networks developed in the 1960s, began to transform world culture in the early years of the twenty-first century. Personal computers proliferated in the 1980s, and with the establishment of the easy-to-use graphic interface of the World Wide Web in 1994, the number of Internet users skyrocketed. Myriad new companies formed to exploit “e-commerce,” the commercial dimension of the Internet, and college students were soon spending less time studying conventional books and scholarly resources than they were exploring the Web for information and entertainment. Blogs, or weblogs, offered a vehicle for anyone in the world to place his or her opinions, experiences, and creative efforts before anyone with access to a computer.

As had happened so often throughout history, technological developments had unanticipated consequences. Although the new telecommunications and entertainment technologies derived disproportionately from American invention, industry, and cultural creativity, Japan and other East Asian nations came to dominate the manufacture and refinement of computer devices. In the 1990s Japan introduced digital television broadcasting at about the same time that disks containing digitized movies and computer programs with videolike action became increasingly available. High-definition television (HDTV), mostly in digital format, debuted in the first decade of the twenty-first century and seemed destined to become the global standard. At the miniaturized end of the visual scale, cell phones became increasingly used for taking and transmitting pictures and connecting to the Internet.

The Spread of Pop Culture

New technologies changed perceptions of culture as well as its distribution around the world and among different social classes. For most of history, popular culture was folk culture, highly localized ways of dress, food, music, and expression. Only the educated and urban few had access to the riches of a broader “great tradition,” such as Confucianism in East Asia or Western culture in Europe and the Americas. The schools of modern nation-states promoted national values and beliefs, as well as tastes in painting, literature, and art. Governments also promoted a common language or dialect and frequently suppressed local traditions and languages. In a more democratic way, the transistor helped break down barriers and create a global popular culture that transcended regional great traditions and national cultures.

Initially, the content of global pop culture was heavily American. Singer Michael Jackson was almost as well known to the youth of Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania) and Bangkok (Thailand) as to American fans. Basketball star Michael Jordan became a worldwide celebrity, heavily promoted by Nike, McDonald’s, and television. American television programs such as Wheel of Fortune and Friends acquired immense followings and inspired local imitations. American movies, which had long had great popular appeal, steadily increased their share of world markets.
But the United States did not have a lock on global pop culture. Latin American soap operas, telenovelas, had a vast following in the Americas, eastern Europe, and elsewhere. Bombay, India, long the largest producer of films in the world, began to make more films for an international audience, rather than just for the home market. And the highly successful martial arts filmmakers of Hong Kong saw their style flourish in high-budget international spectacles like director Ang Lee’s Academy Award–winning Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000), and the Matrix trilogy (1999–2003), which relied heavily on the skills of Hong Kong fight choreographers.

Emerging Global Culture

While the globalization of popular culture has been criticized, cultural links across national and ethnic boundaries at a more elite level have generated little controversy. The end of the Cold War reopened intellectual and cultural contacts between former adversaries, making possible such things as Russian-American collaboration on space missions and extensive business contacts among former rivals. The English language, modern science, and higher education became the key elements of this global elite culture.

The emergence of English as the first global language depended on developments that had been building for centuries. The British Empire introduced the language to far-flung colonies. When the last parts of the empire gained independence after World War II, most former colonies chose to continue using English as an official language because it provided national unity and a link to the outside world that the dozens or hundreds of local languages could not. After independence, representatives of former British colonies formed the Commonwealth on the basis of their shared language and commercial ties. Newly independent countries that made a local language official for nationalist reasons often found the decision counterproductive. Indian nationalists had pushed for Hindi to be India’s official language, but they found that students taught in Hindi were unable to compete internationally because of poor knowledge of English. Sri Lanka, which had made Sinhala its official language in 1956, reversed itself after local reporters revealed in 1989 that prominent officials were sending their children to English-medium private schools.

The use of English as a second language was greatly stimulated by the importance of the United States in postwar world affairs. Individuals recognized the importance of mastering English for successful business, diplomatic, and military careers. After the collapse of Soviet domination, students in eastern Europe flocked to study English instead of Russian. Ninety percent of students in Cambodia (a former French colony) chose to study English, even though a Canadian agency offered a sizable cash bonus if they would study French. In the 1990s China made the study of English as a second language nearly universal from junior high school onwards,
but it also forced an English-medium school in Hong Kong to teach most subjects in Chinese.

English has become the language of choice for most international academic conferences, business meetings, and diplomatic gatherings. International organizations that provide equal status to many languages, such as the United Nations and the European Union, tend to conduct all informal committee meetings in English. English has even replaced Latin as the working language for international consultations in the Catholic Church. In cities throughout the world, signs and notices are now posted in the local language and English.

The utility of English as a global language is also evident in the emergence of an international literature in English (see Diversity and Dominance: World Literature in English). The trend has been evident for decades in former British colonies in Africa, where most writers use English to reach both a national audience and an international one. Wole Soyinka, the first sub-Saharan African to win the Nobel Prize in literature for 1986, wrote in English, the national language of Nigeria, rather than his native Yoruba. When Arundhati Roy won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1997 for *The God of Small Things*, a novel set in her native state of Kerala in southwest India, she was part of an English-language literary tradition that has been growing in India for a century. V. S. Naipaul of Trinidad, winner of the Nobel Prize in literature for 2001, is a good example of the way global migration has fostered the use of English. Naipaul’s ancestors had emigrated from India in the nineteenth century.

World literature remains highly diverse in form and language, but science and technology have become standardized components of global culture. Though imperialism helped spread the Western disciplines of biology, chemistry, and physics around the world, their popularity continued to expand even after imperial systems ended because they worked so much better than other approaches to the natural world. Their truth was universal even if plants and animals continue to be classified in Latin and the less common elements are called by names originally derived from Latin and Greek. Global manufacturing could not function without a common system of applied science. Because of their scientific basis Western medicine and drugs are increasingly accepted as the best treatments, even though many cultures also use traditional remedies.

The third pillar of global elite culture is the university. The structure and curricula of modern universities are nearly indistinguishable around the world, permitting students today to cross national boundaries as freely as students in the Latin West or the Muslim world did in medieval times. Instruction in the pure sciences varies little from place to place, and standardization is nearly as common in social science and applied sciences such as engineering and medicine. There may be more diversity in the humanities, but professors and students around the world pay attention to the latest literary theories and topics of historical interest.

While university subjects are taught in many languages, instruction in English is spreading rapidly. Because discoveries are often first published in English, advanced students in science, business, and international relations need to know that language to keep up with the latest developments. The global mobility of professors and students also promotes classroom instruction in the most global language. Many courses in the Netherlands and in Scandinavian countries have long been offered in English, and elsewhere in Europe offering more courses in English was the obvious way to facilitate the EU’s efforts to encourage students to study outside their countries of origin. When South Africa ended the apartheid educational systems that had required people to study in their own languages, most students chose to study in English.

Because global elite culture is so deeply rooted in years of training, complex institutions, and practical utility, it is less subject to fads and commercial promotion than is global pop culture. Because such elite culture is confined to a distinct minority in most places, it poses little threat to national and folk cultures and, therefore, is much less controversial.

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**Enduring Cultural Diversity**

Although protesters regularly denounce the “Americanization” of the world, a closer look suggests that cultural globalization is more complex and multifaceted. Just as English has largely spread as a second language, so global culture is primarily a second culture that dominates some contexts but does not displace other traditions. From this perspective, American music, fast food, and fashions are more likely to add to a society’s options than to displace local culture.

Japan first demonstrated that a country with a non-Western culture could perform at a high industrial level. Individuality was less valued in Japan than the ability of each person to fit into a group, whether as an employee, a member of an athletic team, or a student in a class. Moreover, the Japanese considered it unmannerly to directly contradict, correct, or refuse the request of another person. From a Western point of view, these Japanese customs seemed to discourage individual initiative and personality development and to preserve traditional
World Literature in English

The linguistic diversity of the world is part of its richness, but it is also an impediment to global communication. In this essay novelist and Indian diplomat Shashi Tharoor explains why he chooses to write in English. His decision to use English is not unusual among writers in India and many other lands where English is not the first language. Mr. Tharoor has worked for the United Nations since 1978. In 2002 he became Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.

For the record, the national languages of India are Hindi (spoken by 30 percent of the population) and English, which dominates communication among India's elite. Fourteen other languages are official at the provincial level, with English having official status in the provinces of East Bengal, Kerala, and Orissa.

As an Indian writer living in New York, I find myself constantly asked a question with which my American confreres never have to contend: “But whom do you write for?” In my case, the question is complicated by both geography and language. I live in the United States (because of my work at the United Nations) and I write about India; and I do so in English, a language mastered, if the last census is to be believed, by only 2 percent of the Indian population. There is an unspoken accusation implicit in the question: Am I not guilty of the terrible sin of inauthenticity, of writing about my country for foreigners?...

This is ironic, because few developments in world literature have been more remarkable than the emergence, over the last two decades, of a new generation of Indian writers in English.

Beginning with Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981, they have expanded the boundaries of their craft and their nation's literary heritage, enriching English with the rhythms of ancient legends and the larger-than-life complexities of another civilization, while reinventing India in the confident cadences of English prose. Of the unintended consequences of empire, it is hard to imagine one of greater value to both colonizers and colonized.

The new Indian writers dip into a deep well of memory and experience far removed from those of their fellow novelists in the English language. But whereas Americans or Englishmen or Australians have also set their fictions in distant lands Indians write of India without exoticism, their insights undimmed by the dislocations of foreignness. And they do so in an English they have both learned and lived, an English of freshness and vigor, a language that is as natural to them as their quarrels at the school playground or the surreptitious notes they slipped each other in their classrooms.

Yet Indian critics still suggest that there is something artificial and un-Indian about an Indian writing in English. One critic disparagingly declared that the acid test ought to be, “Could this have been written only by an Indian?” I have never been much of a literary theoretician—I always felt that for a writer to study literature at university would be like learning about girls at medical school—but for most, though not all, of my own writing, I would answer that my works could not only have been written only by an Indian, but only by an Indian in English.

I write for anyone who will read me, but first of all for Indians like myself, Indians who have grown up speaking, writing, playing, wooing and quarreling in English, all over India. (No writer really chooses a language: the circumstances of his upbringing ensure that the language chooses him.)

Members of this class have entered the groves of academe and condemned themselves in terms of bitter self-reproach: one Indian scholar, Harish Trivedi, has asserted (in English) that Indian writers in that language are “cut off from the experiential mainstream and from that common cultural matrix... shared with writers of all other Indian languages.” Dr. Trivedi metaphorically cites the fictional English-medium school in an R. K. Narayan story where the students must first rub off the sandalwood-paste caste marks from their foreheads before they enter its portals: “For this golden gate is only for the déraciné to pass through, for those who have erased their antecedents.” [R. K. Narayan (1906–2001) pioneered writing in English in Madras in the 1930s, publishing three dozen novels and many short stories and essays.]

It's an evocative image, even though I thought the secular Indian state was supposed to encourage the erasure of casteism from the classroom. But the more important point is that writers like myself do share a "common cultural matrix,"
albeit one devoid of helpfully identifying caste marks. It is one that consists of an urban upbringing and a pannational outlook on the Indian reality. I do not think this is any less authentically "Indian" than the worldviews of writers in other Indian languages. Why should the rural peasant or the small-town schoolteacher with his sandalwood-smeared forehead be considered more quintessentially Indian than the punning collegian or the Bombay socialite, who are as much a part of the Indian reality?

India is a vast and complex country; in Whitman's phrase, it contains multitudes. I write of an India of multiple truths and multiple realities, an India that is greater than the sum of its parts. English expresses that diversity better than any Indian language precisely because it is not "rooted" in any one region of my vast country. At the same time, as an Indian, I remain conscious of, and connected to, my pre-urban and non-Anglophone antecedents: my novels reflect an intellectual heritage that embraces the ancient epic Mahabharata, the Kerala folk dance called the ottamthullal (of which my father was a gifted practitioner) and the Hindi B-movies of Bollywood [the large movie-making industry of Bombay], as well as Shakespeare, Wodehouse and the Beatles.

As a first-generation urbanite myself, I keep returning to the Kerala villages of my parents, in my life as in my writing. Yet I have grown up in Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi, Indian cities a thousand miles apart from one another; the mother of my children is half-Kashmiri, half-Bengali; and my own mother now lives in the southern town of Coimbatore. This may be a wider cultural matrix than the good Dr. Trivedi imagined, but it draws from a rather broad range of Indian experience. And English is the language that brings those various threads of my India together, the language in which my wife could speak to her mother-in-law, the language that enables a Calcuttan to function in Coimbatore, the language that serves to express the complexity of that polyphonous Indian experience better than any other language I know.

As a novelist, I believe in distracting in order to instruct—my novels are, to some degree, didactic works masquerading as entertainments. Like Molière I believe that you have to entertain in order to edify. But the entertainment, and the edification, might strike different readers differently.

My first novel, The Great Indian Novel, as a satirical reinvention of the Mahabharata inevitably touches Indians in a way that most foreigners will not fully appreciate. But my publishers in the West enjoyed its stories and the risks it took with narrative form. My second, Show Business, did extremely well with American reviewers and readers, who enjoyed the way I tried to portray the lives and stories of Bollywood as a metaphor for Indian society. With India: From Midnight to the Millennium, an attempt to look back at the last 50 years of India's history, I found an additional audience of Indian-Americans seeking to rediscover their roots; their interest has helped the American edition outsell the Indian one.

In my new novel, Riot, for the first time I have major non-Indian characters, Americans as it happens, and that is bound to influence the way the book is perceived in the United States, and in India. Inevitably the English fundamentally affects the content of each book, but it does not determine the audience of the writer; as long as translations exist, language is a vehicle, not a destination.

Of course, there is no shame in acknowledging that English is the legacy of the colonial connection, but one no less useful and valid than the railway, the telegraphs or the law courts that were also left behind by the British. Historically, English helped us to find our Indian voice: that great Indian nationalist Jawaharlal Nehru wrote The Discovery of India in English. But the eclipse of that dreadful phrase "the Indo-Anglian novel" has occurred precisely because Indian writers have evolved well beyond the British connection to their native land.

The days when Indians wrote novels in English either to flatter or rail against their colonial masters are well behind us. Now we have Indians in India writing as naturally about themselves in English as Australians or South Africans do, and their tribe has been supplemented by India's rich diaspora in the United States, which has already produced a distinctive crop of impressive novelists, with Pulitzer Prizes and National Book Awards to their names.

Their addresses don't matter because writers really live inside their heads and on the page, and geography is merely a circumstance. They write secure of themselves in a heritage of diversity, and they write free of the anxiety of audience, for theirs are narratives that appeal as easily to Americans as to Indians—and indeed to readers irrespective of ethnicity.

Surely that's the whole point about literature—that for a body of fiction to constitute a literature it must rise above its origins, its setting, even its language, to render accessible to a reader anywhere some insight into the human condition. Read my books and those of other Indian writers not because we're Indian, not necessarily because you are interested in India; but because they are worth reading in and of themselves. And dear reader, whoever you are, if you pick up one of my books, ask not for whom I write: I write for you.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS
1. What does Shashi Tharoor mean when he states that his novels could only have been written in English?
2. What is the relationship between national literature and global literature?
3. What does the author mean when he says that for writers "geography is merely a circumstance"?

Conclusion

Have we entered a golden age, or is the world descending into a fiery abyss? The future is unknowable, but the study of history suggests that neither extreme is likely. Golden ages and dark ages are rare, and our understanding of our own time is easily swayed by hopes, fears, and other emotions. If the exuberant optimism of the 1990s now seems excessive, the pessimism of the early 2000s may in time seem equally far off the mark.

What is undeniable is that the turn of the millennium has been a time of important global changes. The Iron Curtain that had divided Europe since the end of the Second World War fell, taking with it the tensions and risks of the Cold War. The great Soviet Empire broke up, while dozens of countries joined new economic coalitions. The bastions of communism embraced capitalism with varying degrees of enthusiasm. As trading barriers tumbled, world trade surged, creating new wealth and new inequalities in its distribution. Yet international terrorism and the proliferation of nuclear weapons cast shadows on the future, and the aggressive response of the United States to the attacks of 9/11 caused some people to worry about a new form of superpower imperialism.

History teaches that change is always uneven. The rate of change in global telecommunications and international economic institutions was notably faster than in international political institutions. The nation-state remained supreme. The structure of the United Nations was little different than at its founding six decades earlier. States resisted limits on their autonomy, and the more powerful ones took unilateral actions, whether supported or opposed by international public opinion. Rather than giving ground to globalization, many older ideas and values continued to be strong. The less powerful adapted slowly, dug in their heels to resist change, or raised voices and fists against it. Protests forced new attention on global poverty, disease, exploitation, and environmental damage that globalization caused or failed to relieve. Adjustments were made, but on the whole change on these fronts also came slowly. It is possible that historians surveying the broad sweep of history will one day conclude that the attacks of 9/11 constituted a watershed that significantly deflected the world's political evolution. But it is equally possible that the most potent development of the first decade of the twenty-first century will ultimately prove to be the Internet, with its unlimited potential for affecting the course of cultural change throughout the world.
KEY TERMS

globalization  p. 950
World Trade Organization (WTO)  p. 955
weapons of mass destruction  p. 957
terrorism  p. 960
Usama bin Laden  p. 960
Universal Declaration of Human Rights  p. 961
nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)  p. 962
cultural imperialism  p. 965
global pop culture  p. 966
global elite culture  p. 967

SUGGESTED READING


Among the many books on the Middle East crisis are Mahmood Mamdani, Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror (2004); Fawaz Gerges, The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global (2005); and Rashid Khalidi, Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America’s Perilous Path in the Middle East (2004). Terrorism is well covered by Bruce Hoffman, Inside Terrorism, 2nd ed. (2006), and Mia Bloom, Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror (2005).


The interrelationships between high culture and popular culture during the twentieth century are treated from different perspectives in Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (1996); Peter L. Berger and Samuel Huntington, eds., Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World (2002); Tyler Cowen, Creative Destruction: How Globalization Is Changing the World’s Cultures (2002); and Diana Crane, Nobuko Kawashima, and Kenichi Kawasaka, eds., Global Culture: Media Arts, Policy (2002). Two very readable books by James B. Twitchell detail the rise of popular culture in the United States and present various reactions to this phenomenon: Carnival Culture: The Trashing of Taste in America (1992) and Adult USA: The Triumph of Advertising in American Culture (1996).


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