

Globalization has traditionally been discussed in terms of a natural occurrence as the world progresses and becomes more connected through time and space. However, I have always been curious about the “natural” side of globalization, as it seems reductive to assume that globalization is natural and had to occur. A logical leap could then be made that it was always “supposed” to occur. However, when looking critically at globalization and development through Cronon’s lens, the seemingly natural progression is not natural at all.

William Cronon critically looks at the idea of the “natural” in *Nature's Metropolis*, and this could fundamentally change the way globalization is discussed. He defines nature in two ways; first nature - that which is formed solely by non-humans, such as the sandy nature of the rivers and lakes in Chicago or mud caused by “poor” water drainage - and second nature - a new kind of natural formation that was shaped by humans to suit their particular needs at that time. By looking at nature as something that can be shaped and molded by humans, and highlighting the distinct difference in those two types of nature, the essence of globalization can be critically examined.

Humans qualify the natural world in terms of how useful it is for their particular goals. Describing natural phenomena as “poor” reflects a human tendency to characterize first nature as either a “natural advantage” or “natural disadvantage,” as Cronon puts it. This characterization of natural functions leads humans to put values on the environment, usually to the detriment of the world around them. Globalization is a product of that kind of thinking, as valuing nature only when it suits human-specific needs means that the world can be exploited for its resources in the search for human progress. However, globalization is a product of colonization, industrialization, and imperialism and powerful humans put institutions in place in the pursuit of these specific goals. Though the environment must have had an impact on these decisions and actions, thinking of them as natural processes seems simplistic, reductive, and ultimately harmful.

Humans had to alter their landscapes and shrink space and time in order to pursue these ends. Breaking free of the notion that globalization (and all that comes with it) is natural allows one to start thinking of solutions to problems that the modern world presents, such as climate change, wealth inequality, and structural racism, to name a few. However, if humans are stuck to an understanding of globalization as inevitable, then these problems must be inevitable as well. Allowing for the possibility that there are other options for the future instead of the pursuit of the Global North’s idea of “progress” means that many of these problems can be addressed.

Cronon, William. *Nature's Metropolis : Chicago and the Great West*. New York :W. W. Norton, 1991.