

Undergraduate Research Assistantship Report 2025: Globalization and its Historians

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Introduction

The project 'Globalization and its Historians' involved research on the history and historiography of globalization to assist Dr Elizabeth Ingleson in writing a chapter on globalization in an edited volume on the history of the 20th century. Globalization as a term refers to the increased interconnectedness of our world in many realms, including political, economic and technological, but each of these realms is vast, complicated, and at once distinctive and codependent on the other realms. Thus, the term itself is ambiguous and debated. This is why researching globalization necessitates researching the *historiography* of globalization, because the framing of the term and the phenomenon helps explain how globalization was defined in different eras, and how this definition evolves.

Research, Methods and Findings

My role in this research consisted of three main parts: a literature review, assessing the different temporal framings of globalization, and researching alternative visions of globalization.

Literature Review

The first big task was to compile a literature review on the history of globalization, starting from when the term was first popularized by Theodore Levitt, and concluding with the most recent books about globalization that came out as late as 2025. This involved researching which books have been key reference points for globalization, deciding which ones are relevant, and categorizing them into sections to account for the differing framings of globalization in different disciplines, including geopolitical framings, historical framings, economic framings, and technological framings, just to name a few. I used a combination of Internet research and Library Search for this task. For most titles listed, I added a description with some commentary linking to the broader themes of that section, and globalization more broadly. For example, one interesting pattern was that economists' framings of globalization were often more positive compared to other disciplines. Another more amusing trend was the tendency of authors to claim they had predicted globalization in some previous work, demonstrating how the human ego factor affects the academic framing of globalization.

I also synthesized this sectioned literature assessment into a simpler literature review with only the title, author and date of each book, arranged from newest to oldest.

Temporal Framings

Next, I was tasked with going through the literature review I had made, reading the introductions or first chapters of each title, and analysing how each author frames globalization in time. The main aspect of temporal framing that Dr Ingleson wanted to uncover was how each author related globalization to *their* present. For example, in the 2000s, globalization was related to 9/11, which was portrayed as a reaction against globalization, or the 2007 financial crisis, which was depicted as a consequence of the fragility baked into financial globalization. In the 2010s, the counter-globalization

movement was symbolized by Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, so many authors framed their narrative on globalization in relation to that present. This ‘countermovement’ also sparked some defences of globalization, a trend which made me more attuned to the evolution of positive versus negative portrayals of the phenomenon, especially compared to the highly positive assessments of globalization emerging in the 1990s, when globalization was in its heyday. I emphasized this fluctuation in my findings, even though normative judgement on globalization was not the focus of the original task of temporal framing. This demonstrates how I got to use my own agency and analysis to propose additional frameworks for the research, making the work a truly collaborative and fulfilling endeavour.

Another part of analysing temporal framings was differentiating how each author defined the start of, and ensuing ‘waves’ of, globalization. Some reached as far back as the year 1000 to understand globalization, but most maintained a 20th and 21st century focus.

Although this was not part of the temporal framings task, another theme I saw emerging in many of the introductions and first chapters of these works was diverse views on how globalization stemmed from and affected the East versus the West, or the Global North versus the Global South. I became attuned to these differing interpretations because I knew the next part of the project would involve analysing ‘alternative’ globalization, or visions of globalization emerging from socialism and the Global South. Thus, I got a head start on this part of the research by highlighting quotes and ideas that conveyed divergent perspectives on globalization in an East/West or Global North/Global South framework. A key correlation that emerged, predictably, was that the positive portrayals of globalization abounding in the 1990s tended to view globalization as a Western/Global North force that benefitted the Global South, whereas the more critical perspectives emerging especially after the financial crisis focused on how the Global South is often excluded from the fruits of globalization, or exploited to extract the gains of globalization.

Alternative Globalization

The final stage of the project was reading a range of works on ‘alternative’ visions of globalization, especially socialist and Global South conceptions, which tend to be sidelined in the literature. This part involved more close reading than the other research stages. The literature on ‘Red [socialist] Globalization’ convincingly showed that globalization and socialism are not always mutually exclusive, especially in trade, markets, financialization and economic interdependence, and that the lines between financial globalization, neoliberalism, neoclassical economics and socialism are more blurred than the traditional narrative portrays. In this literature, neoliberalism is shown to have some socialist roots and iterations, and the Soviet Union is revealed to have been more integrated into the global economy than Cold War narratives suggested. Although these unorthodox narratives on globalization have significant merit and spotlight aspects that are wrongly neglected in the globalization canon, sometimes they perhaps overemphasize these aspects at the expense of balanced analysis.

In analysing the content of these works, I also found myself identifying the different broader methods of analysis deployed by different authors, with some emphasising material and structural factors in the shaping of globalization, and others stressing ideational and agential driving forces.