

## **A Brief History of Globalization**

**Date :** December 5, 2006

**Review of: "A Brief History of Globalization" by, Alex MacGillivray (2006); New York, Carroll & Graff**

*Richard Wilk teaches at the University of Indiana*

This is not an academic book, written instead by an activist with a decidedly anti-globalization position. Nevertheless, because it takes a historical perspective, and sees globalization as a complex phenomenon with contradictory tendencies, the book is an excellent introduction to the topic, suitable for classroom use. MacGillivray is an especially good guide to the long term trends in the velocity of travel, exchange, migration and transportation, avoiding that heated tone of sudden crisis which characterizes so much recent writing on globalization.

Anthropologists will especially appreciate the balanced tones with which he approaches the topic of cultural globalization. He correctly identifies the central paradox that even as the culture industries become ever-more concentrated in the hands of a few major transnational companies, local culture constantly re-asserts itself. Rather than falling into the right-left moral discourses of globalization as a panacea or the ultimate evil, MacGillivray carefully identifies the groups who are winners, those who are losers, and those in the middle who get some of each effect, or get nothing at all. Most important for the readers of this blog, the book gives due place to important consumer goods in global history, from the spice trade through tobacco and sugar, to DVDs and cocaine. This book is an easy and quick read, and it includes enough references to get anyone started on a thorough study of this important topic.