

# **The Impact of Globalization on U.S. Workers:**

## **Discussion of the Issue in American Society**

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### **Abstract**

Globalization is addressed and discussed differently in various sectors of American society. Although economists tend to have one view of globalization - namely, that it increases efficiency and is a benefit to U.S. workers - this economic reality is not the only opinion present. The media, popular culture, government, and think tanks all have something to say about the issue and address it in different ways. Public opinion about globalization is radically different from the traditional Neoclassical economic stance, as is the view adopted by some sociologists. A comprehensive analysis of these many viewpoints can provide us with a more inclusive look at globalization as a force affecting American workers.

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Does globalization benefit U.S. workers? For economists, the response is almost unequivocally ‘yes.’ Economists since Adam Smith have proclaimed that the division of labor within an economy benefits all parties involved – and global competition, therefore, benefits the U.S. by creating efficient production of goods and services within the world economy. Although globalization creates substantial overall gains for the U.S., certain populations of American workers have been adversely affected in the short-term. Beginning in the 1980s, international trade and outsourcing increased due to the use of the Internet and overall improvement of electronic communication (Bhagwati 93), causing the wages of unskilled workers in the U.S. to fall drastically in both real and relative terms (Feenstra 240). As a discipline, economics celebrates globalization – and consequently, many economists view the complaints of workers with impatience and disregard. U.S. workers are expected to tolerate the short-term job losses and wage cuts in order to gain long-term benefits in the lower cost of goods and services. However, other sectors of American society – such as the media, public opinion, popular culture, government, think tanks, and sociology studies – contain voices expressing a greater degree of sympathy for workers who have lost jobs or accepted lower wages due to globalization.

As economists, it is important to consider such ‘external voices’ from sectors of society outside traditional economics. These voices represent the context of globalization – the human aspect, and a complex set of thoughts and opinions which are not ordinarily graphed or plotted in economic models. An acknowledgement and exploration of the public debate enriches the discussion of globalization both as an economic and a social reality. This paper will investigate individual examples and individual representations of the aforementioned five sectors of society, in an attempt to examine and analyze some of these external voices.

## Voices in Public Opinion

As revealed by Letters to the Editor in popular newspapers, and by public opinion polls, the general public's attitude towards outsourcing appears to be characterized by sarcasm and skepticism. It seems that the public is sarcastic toward economic policymakers as a group, fearful of an uncertain future, and skeptical that globalization is actually a benefit. The outstanding majority of Letters to the Editor in the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times reflect dissatisfaction with the number of jobs outsourced in the U.S. and with the ensuing job loss/wage cuts caused by outsourcing. As they respond to editorial columns and articles printed in newspapers, these Letters to the Editor are full of wry humor. In a retort to an article written by an Economics professor at Dartmouth (Douglas Irwin), a respondent writes:

“Thank you, Professor Douglas Irwin, for educating us working stiffs about the benefits of sending our jobs overseas. I can't tell you how reassuring it is to hear this from someone like yourself who has lifetime job security, a comfortable six-figure income, a work week well under 40 hours, and no annual performance reviews.” (“If Outsourcing is So Good...”)

This comment sheds light on the dynamics of the relationship between professional economists and the ‘common man’ in America affected by globalization. Individuals who feel that they could potentially be affected by job losses, reorganizations, or wage cuts – and whose feelings are strong enough to prompt them to write a letter to the editor – do not feel that the uncertainty of their current situation is remedied by Neoclassical economics. Their reaction is anger toward the principal proponents of globalization and outsourcing: government and university economists. Readers of Irwin's article do not simply absorb its principles automatically, but instead weigh the credibility of the writer, concluding that he can afford to believe in the benefits of outsourcing because he has greater job security.

Another Letter to the Editor – a response to an editorial by New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof, which states that companies outsource jobs because American workers' education is inferior to foreign workers' education – displays similar statements. The respondent says:

“Mr. Kristof tells us that similar fears of outsourcing a few years ago were unfounded because in the end ‘free trade worked.’ That is hard to reconcile with the expansion of America’s trade deficit. When the day of financial reckoning arrives, we will find that the problem was not that our children lacked skills, but that our leaders – and pundits – refused to deal with economic reality” (“Why Outsource? Letter”).

Members of the public call into question the benefits of globalization, bringing into light empirical economic problems which have not yet been solved. Accusations are aimed at governmental officials and other leaders who focus on the predicted benefits of the globalization process without addressing the concerns of the common man.

Opinion polls also show significant public dissatisfaction with the outsourcing of U.S. jobs. In a Roper Public Opinion telephone poll, subjects were asked “Do you think increased outsourcing of jobs to other countries has done more to help or to hurt American workers?” 77% of respondents said that it did more to hurt American workers. A second poll asked whether participants thought that outsourcing was a serious issue. 55% said it was a “very serious” problem and 30% said it was a “serious” problem. However, poll results appear to differ depending on how the question is phrased. In a third poll, listeners were asked to indicate which statement was closest to their views: ‘Outsourcing is bad for the economy because it sends good jobs overseas’ or ‘Outsourcing is good for the economy because it keeps the cost of goods and services down.’ 50% of people agreed strongly with the first statement, indicating a more

balanced array of opinions if the question is worded differently. (Roper Public Opinion Online).

Two polls had somewhat intriguing results. If the polls can be considered representative of the American public, then the public is split evenly concerning the perceived power of the government to 'go back on' globalization. 47% of people thought it was realistic that the U.S. government could enforce a decision to tell U.S. companies not to outsource anymore. 50% thought it was unrealistic. A large sector of the population believes that it is within the government's power to somehow back out of the global economy. Also, it appears that concern over losing a job is very dependent on income/class. A poll of national adult investors – whose financial situation would allow them to invest - revealed that 64% were “not worried at all” about losing a job to outsourcing (Roper Public Opinion Online).

### **Voices in Media**

In various media outlets - from television news programs to newspaper articles - different journalistic methods are used to explore the issue of outsourcing and whether it is beneficial or detrimental to American workers. Certain journalistic techniques present both sides of the issue effectively, whereas others are more biased. The CNN news show Lou Dobbs Tonight, for example, aired a feature entitled “Exporting America” from November 2003 to October 2004, focusing on the number of U.S. jobs lost to outsourcing. On show episodes, Dobbs states that outsourcing is harmful to American workers and hence ethically reprehensible, entirely ignoring the argument that outsourcing increases efficiency. Other news sources are fairer to the debate, acknowledging both the plight of workers and the economic necessity of globalization.

Dobbs makes a number of emotional appeals to decry outsourcing, and moral appeals to end “a problem that’s is [sic] reaching crisis proportions,” to end the “struggling” and “pain” of

“this country’s working, hard working, middle class” (“Exporting America” Transcript). On the November 10 and 11, 2003 episodes, Dobbs airs the news report of a CNN correspondent interviewing laid-off textile workers at the Pillowtex plant in Kannapolis, NC. The job losses become a moral issue when a quote from an unemployed worker is aired, saying “We just want anyone to stop and stand up and say, hey, this isn’t right. And those people are few and far between.” On “Exporting America,” the outsourcing of jobs is not just an efficiency issue, but a morality issue and a lack of appropriate nationalism on the part of companies who outsource. Dobbs asks “At what point do you say the pain is too great for Americans?” and says “What I’m crying out for is a solution because it cannot – can it, go on?” Dobbs looks into the future of outsourcing and is horrified by what he sees. Dobbs expresses his personal conviction to expose all the consequences of “cheap foreign competition and labor” on U.S. workers, saying that “when you’re in pain, shouldn’t you cry?” (“Exporting America” Transcript).

The show draws a large amount of attention to one side of the issue through its use of repetition. By airing the show every night for nearly a year, viewers receive the impression that a new, striking victimization of U.S. workers is occurring every second. Dobbs’ show makes use of the importance of balance in the news – the amount of continuous coverage of a topic by a news outlet shows how much Americans should be concerned about the topic. “Exporting America” was a regular feature of the show, much like regular coverage of the Iraq war – implying to viewers that the detrimental effects of outsourcing are just as serious as the Iraq war, and that the American people should be just as infuriated about outsourcing as many are about the troops in Iraq.

The show is noteworthy for what it does not mention – very little discussion of free trade economics or the beneficial aspects of globalization. Instead, the show juxtaposes the angelic

images of the American worker and smaller American corporations with an overbearing and inhuman image of U.S. based multinational corporations. Like the workers, Pillowtex suffered, and was “driven out of business by foreign cheap labor.” One quote from a Pillowtex representative selected for the show reads “our people adapted. They were loyal. They would do anything to make this company survive. We just...just were not successful.” On the other hand, multinational corporations are seen as the enemy. Later on in the show, Dobbs interviews former U.S. Ambassador to China James Sasser. When asked why U.S. workers are losing their jobs to globalization, Sasser says, “I don’t want to get into the position of defending the multinational corporations here. But I’m saying they are a powerful political and economic force in this country. And they’re the ones who push globalization.” Professional economists are blamed too. Sasser says, “the economists tell us that over time, globalization will level out. It’s going to be a very, very painful process, I think.” Sasser doesn’t talk about the economic reasons why outsourcing is necessary (creating competition in a global market for increased efficiency and productivity, etc.). His position is one of sympathy and resignation as he states “that’s just the way the cookie crumbles these days” (“Exporting America” Transcript).

A New York Times article titled “Does Outsourcing Cost More Than It Saves?” is fairer to both sides of the debate. The article is an interview of the chairman of Harman International Industries (an electronics company), conducted by the Editor-in-Chief of Chief Executive magazine. The article briefly explores the moral aspect of whether outsourcing is right or wrong, but the interviewer himself makes no statement about it, unlike Lou Dobbs. The interviewer asks, “Do you believe that chief executives have some moral responsibility to keep jobs in the United States?” Harman responds: “I haven’t said a word to the effect that I have this point of view, because it’s an expression of nationalism. I’m not trying to keep jobs. That’s one of the

consequences of my point of view, but it's not the thing that creates the point of view." After asking the question and allowing Harman to express his views on the issue, the interviewer suppresses his personal opinions and pursues the topic of efficiency.

The interviewer makes no value judgments about whether outsourcing is good or bad. Instead, the article focuses on a new and different entity in business – Harman is a company which refuses to outsource. Harman evaluates the debate over outsourcing from the perspective of what is best for the American people as consumers. He says, "you have to lovingly make [your products] and care about their quality. It's difficult to wrap numbers around that and prove it, but I think it's central. When you yield it to somebody else, you in effect abandon it." In a way, the article conveys his concern for American workers – but concern for them in their role as consumers of his product, not concern for them in their role as his employees. The interview focuses on Harman International Industries efficiency as a business, asking questions such as: "Companies that are rushing to outsource say the labor savings are enormous. Are they missing something?" and "Do you sacrifice something if you outsource work?" As a seemingly more objective journalistic source than "Exporting America," the New York Times article focuses on Harman's business practices, but also requires him to comment on the existing moral debate.

### **Voices in Government**

A period of concentrated governmental discussions on the effect of globalization on U.S. workers occurred during the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement in the mid-90s, and also a decade later during the Bush-Kerry presidential debates. Debate over globalization in regards to the NAFTA was centered on the Agreement's potential effect for U.S. jobs and wages. Critics of NAFTA worried that the Agreement would take away jobs from U.S.



workers and decrease wages. The Agreement was signed after decades of low wages for unskilled workers during the late 70s and 1980s due to technological advances and globalization, making the debate even more fierce.

In the 1995 Economic Report of the President, the Council of Economic Advisors maintain a general consensus that free trade is the most beneficial economic policy for the U.S., although freer trade may cause repercussions of income inequality at home. The Report implies that his sad truth is something that must simply be accepted – it is a side effect which the American people must bear in order to support the United States' place in the global economy. The 1995 ERP looks toward free trade as a way to create good relationships between nations and to benefit other nations' governments. It states that NAFTA creates “a more prosperous and stable Mexico” and “encourages specialization that benefits both countries” (222, 221). As Adam Smith stated in the Wealth of Nations, the ERP states that division of labor benefits all parties involved (Smith 168). The trade agreement is called “historic” and is acclaimed throughout the report (220). The report acknowledges the public debate over NAFTA, realizing that many critics in the media thought that NAFTA would siphon jobs away from the U.S.. It says that “so far there is little evidence of the sucking sound that critics had alleged would accompany NAFTA. Indeed, the sounds most associated with NAFTA are those of trains, trucks, and ships loading cargo...” (222), triumphantly pointing toward the success of the Agreement.

The ERP also acknowledges that many unskilled workers suffered a decrease in pay during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, and attributes it to technological improvements and globalization. There is, on one hand, a deep sympathy for unskilled U.S. workers, for whom “the American dream faded.” The Report indicates intentions to create programs to assist

workers adversely affected by this drop in income. However, there is also a sense that the CEA wishes to distance themselves from this reality. Unskilled American workers are supposed to “respond to the challenges and grasp the opportunities afforded by the new economic system.” Workers are supposed to bounce back, and are expected to find a way to deal with the fact that the government’s economic policy is at the present time beneficial on a global scale, but not necessarily on a local one.

President Clinton’s speech to the American public on Sept. 13, 1993, upon the ratification of NAFTA, also states that NAFTA would foster a more democratic Latin America through its growing economy. He says that “for decades, we have preached and preached and preached greater democracy, greater respect for human rights, and more open markets to Latin America. NAFTA finally offers them the opportunity to reap the benefits of this.” His speech reflects the economic law that free trade leads to specialization, which leads to economic growth. For Clinton, “NAFTA means jobs, American jobs, and good-paying American jobs.”

Clinton also acknowledges the public debate, realizing that many Americans were fearful that NAFTA would take away jobs and cause unemployment. In order to convince his listeners, Clinton uses an emotional appeal. Clinton says that free trade makes America better for future generations, appealing to the human desire to protect and provide for the young and innocent. He says that ““the only way we can pass on the American dream of the last 40 years to our children...is to adapt to the changes which are occurring.” He imbues a sense of responsibility in the audience, asking them to accept “something which will enable us...to create a future that is worthy of our children and grandchildren.” The speech also appeals to the audience’s sense of courage, saying that “most Americans...are vulnerable to the fear tactics and the averseness to change that are behind most of the opposition to NAFTA.” In a nearly military charge, Clinton

asks his listeners: “are we going to compete and win, or are we going to withdraw?” The combination of economic logic and emotional appeals construct the effectiveness of the speech.

Moving forward to 2004, Democratic candidate John Kerry’s speeches in the 2004 Presidential Debates featured a different type of emotional appeal – a more personal address and vow on Kerry’s part to explicitly protect the interests of U.S. workers. In the October 14, 2004 debate, Kerry criticized the fact that the U.S. tax system subsidizes businesses that outsource, saying: “I don’t want American workers subsidizing the loss of their own job.” Kerry is realistic about economic fact, however, emphasizing the point that it is impossible to get rid of outsourcing. Yet Kerry gathers the audience’s support (and potential votes) by stating his desire to create a “level playing field” for workers. Like President Clinton, Kerry uses military language as well, saying that he will “fight” and do battle for the good of U.S. workers. Kerry says: “I’m going to fight for a fair trade playing field for the American worker. And I will fight for the American worker just as hard as I fight for my own job. That’s what the American worker wants” (Debate Transcript). As in Clinton’s speech, emotional appeals add to the effectiveness of the statement.

### **Voices in Think Tanks**

In their discussions about outsourcing and U.S. workers, think tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the American Institute for Economics Research (AIER) appear to agree on the necessity of outsourcing. Articles published by each think tank state that outsourcing increases productivity and efficiency in the American economy, despite the temporary job losses affecting workers in certain industry sectors. However, there is a wide variation, both within and between think tanks, on the degree of sympathy for U.S. workers

reflected by the articles. James K. Glassman, a writer for the AEI, strongly criticizes those who advocate protectionism. Another writer for the AEI (Douglas Irwin) shows a great deal of sympathy for the plight of workers. A Research Report published by the AIER takes the same approach.

All three articles are written in a tone of tried patience with the non-economist public, stating that the debate over free trade is nothing new. James K. Glassman says that “Outsourcing... is simply another form of trade. And trade, as economists since Adam Smith have pointed out, is beneficial to both sides of the transaction.” The intimation is that the debate over free trade has been rehashed since the 1700s, and that the repetition of the same arguments can be wrenching to the nerves. Douglas Irwin says that “the claim that trade should be limited because imports destroy jobs has been trotted out since the sixteenth century.” The historical repetition of arguments against free trade is also described in the AIER Research Report, saying that “throughout American and world history, worries about job losses and other adverse effects of free trade have been used to justify erecting barriers to it.” Opposition to outsourcing is an old issue, an unwillingness to endure temporary discomfort to achieve what is best for the American economy. In the eyes of these writers, it is a confrontation that is expected and dutifully endured, like a parent expects a child to rebel during the teenage years. Just as a parent may endure a child’s temper tantrum while doing what is best for the child, the writers of these articles defend outsourcing/free trade in the face of criticism from the American public, knowing that outsourcing will create a better economy.

Glassman’s article, however, indicates that his patience is wearing thin. He does not sympathize with American workers who have lost their jobs because of outsourcing, saying that the debate over outsourcing is part of an American “culture of complaint.” He is irritated with

the “clamor over outsourcing,” saying that the public reaction is “whining, whining, complaining.” People who favor a more protectionist stance are “crybabies,” part of an American culture who “seek redress for practically every grievance, including the fact that they are fat.” He says that people should endure the temporary setbacks of outsourcing, and stop debating whether it is good or bad public policy. According to Glassman, “life in America has improved so much in the past century that we have forgotten what it is to struggle.”

Glassman predicts a future world where American’s “whining” about outsourcing has led to “a decadent and complacent America.” The odds of an economy surviving in this future society are “not on your life.” He adopts a morally superior tone, pointing his finger at blue-collar workers who have lost their jobs. He exclaims, “Not fair! Was life ‘fair’ to the forebears of today’s complainers when they came to America without a job or grasp of the English language, without education, without welfare? Was life fair to the Americans who made their way to, say, the plains of South Dakota, fighting vicious weather and difficult farming conditions?” For Glassman, jobless people should simply learn to deal with their situation.

Douglas Irwin and the AIER Report, however, exhibit greater sympathy for workers. In his article, Irwin says: “we can understand why the plant owners and workers and politicians who represent them might prefer to avoid this foreign competition.” After saying that he “understand[s]” the situation from an emotional perspective, Irwin returns to traditional economic reasoning to show why foreign competition is necessary. The world economy must return to an equilibrium, and firms’ wages must adjust to the market wage. As the numbers of workers and jobs change in one part of the world, there will be adjustments to the number of jobs and amount of wages offered elsewhere to return the system to equilibrium. Firms do not unilaterally determine wages, Irwin says, they must pay the market wage. Outsourcing increases

our productivity and efficiency, whereas protectionist measures “shift American workers away from things that they produce well” and lower productivity.

The AIER Report also establishes an emotional understanding of the American worker. The report says that “frustration and fear over such job losses is understandable” (41) and that “it is not easy for the workers who lose their livelihoods to international trade” (46). It acknowledges that “the emotional appeal of policies that protect us from losing jobs to foreign workers will always be great,” then follows this sentence with the reality that “restricting trade will not create jobs, benefit consumers, or promote prosperity” (47).

After conveying this sympathy for those unemployed because of outsourcing, the Report returns to economic reality. Globalization, including outsourcing, is necessary because it “create[s] jobs and raise[s] our standard of living” through increased productivity. The side effect is temporary job loss in certain sectors. Although “job security is a goal that carries great emotional appeal...it is not the goal of economic activity. If it were, most Americans would still be working on farms,” the report says (47).

The Report is understanding about the problems of the unemployed, but firm about the necessity of globalization. The Report encourages its audience to assess the viewpoint through which it analyzes the economy. Whereas non-economists tend to view the economy through the lens of their own personal experiences and plights (such as unemployment due to jobs being outsourced), the report reminds its readers of the importance of taking a more inclusive view of the economy as a whole. It states that “one reason for this lack of public support is that the costs of free trade are highly concentrated and visible, while the benefits tend to be diffused and invisible” (42). Professional economists have a birds-eye view of the entire economy and can make decisions which benefit everyone (in terms of added productivity, increased efficiency).

The report tells readers to change their perspective and realize that economists have a more encompassing view of the United States' role in the global economy.

An even more sympathetic voice in the think tank literature comes from the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) in its Issue Guide on Offshoring. Focusing on globalization's impact on white-collar workers, the Issue Guide says that workers are right to be anxious about globalization. The Guide states that its purpose is to "argue against any complacency regarding offshoring's impact on American workers," confident that offshoring is causing a negative impact on workers and that workers should not sit down and take it. According to the guide, the current rate of offshoring places "steady downward pressure" on wages and is a potential danger to the stability of the economy. Although globalization benefits the U.S. in terms of its economic presence around the world, the EPI says that a change should take place in the government to assist workers – that government policy "needs to insure that U.S. workers are compensated for the extra risk they now bearing due to competition with workers all over the globe" (Offshoring Issue Guide).

### **Voices in Popular Culture**

The issue of outsourcing and its effect on American workers has been addressed by a number of pop culture outlets, including comic strips, TV programs, and movies. Humor is used to address and discuss the resentment that laid-off American workers may feel toward workers in foreign countries who now have their jobs. For example, in an episode of the popular TV show "The Simpsons," Homer Simpson must move to India after his manufacturing job is outsourced there. The humor comes from many angles, exploring multiple facets of the ways in which most Americans think about outsourcing. The episode uses satire to demonstrate the ways in which

outsourcing is damaging to American workers.

In the episode, Homer and his co-workers are required to view a video on the benefits of outsourcing. Featured in the video are a number of workers who are ridiculously enthusiastic and supportive of the fact that they have been fired from their offshored jobs. Workers in the video say: “It’s a miracle! They moved our factory to a third world nation. Now I have more time to play the lottery. Ka-ching!” Of course, no person who has lost their job would say this. However, the satire allows the episode to explore the fact that laid off American workers with little education (such as those who might work in manufacturing jobs) might not have the education/skill set to know not to waste money while they are looking for another job. They might start making unwise financial decisions like playing the lottery too much, causing them to lose what money they do have.

As a second angle of humor, the episode makes fun of American companies who outsource, portraying them as conniving and unsympathetic with the plight of workers. When Homer and his co-workers ask their supervisor: “Does this mean we’re losing our jobs?” Mr. Burns replies: “No, no. Your jobs are safe. They’ll just be done by someone else in another country.” In this episode, Mr. Burns represents the leadership of American companies who outsource. This quote implies that U.S. companies who outsource jobs are sneaky and never provide straight answers to their workers. At the end of the episode, when Mr. Burns’ plans to employ Indian workers are thwarted, he says “I guess we’ll have to relocate to an area where the workers are more desperate and ignorant...Springfield.” The implication is that U.S. companies who outsource are looking, on purpose, for workers who are “desperate and ignorant” to exploit. U.S. manufacturers are portrayed as ‘the bad guys.’

The third angle of humor in the episode is an exploration of the realities of globalization.



No matter how much Americans may complain about outsourcing, the episode seems to state, it and other elements of globalization are not going to go away. After it is announced that the Indian manufacturing plant will be supplying energy to America, the scene changes to a customer in a bar, who says to the bartender: “You know, Moe, that sign is powered by non American workers.” The bartender replies: “So what? The beer’s German and the TV’s Japanese.” Just as imported Japanese televisions and imported German beer will not go away, neither will outsourcing. A second reality of globalization has to do with education. Whereas American industry is ready for globalization, the Americans whose jobs are being outsourced are not. When Homer gets off the plane, he says: “This isn’t India! Where’s the University of Notre Dame?” Homer Simpson has apparently confused India with Indiana. Since Homer is supposed to represent the ‘ordinary’ American man, this scene implies that education has not sufficiently prepared the average American for the worldwide cultural and economic integration which will eventually result from globalization.

The fourth, and last, angle of humor in the episode addresses the resentment many U.S. workers feel towards people in other countries for taking their jobs. The episode discusses two forms of this resentment: prejudice toward people of a different race and culture, and the fact that jobs are going to people who may be more qualified but will work for less money. This Simpsons episode parodies these resentments. Initially, the Indian workers employed by Homer’s plant are portrayed as savages/barbarians for practicing Hinduism. They start worshipping Homer as if he is a god, implying that the Indians worship Americans and are not smart enough to do otherwise. Later, this portrayal is flip-flopped. It is revealed that the Indians are not worshipping Homer, but paying him homage for introducing them to American concepts of workers benefits – overtime pay, onsite day care, union privileges, etc. The trick is on Homer

– when he thought the Indians were praying to him in another language, they were actually repeating the word “unions.”

However, this humor is not humorous to all. Although the portrayal of the Indians is flip-flopped later in the episode, it is not at all culturally respectful to have made fun of Hinduism in the episode in the first place. On YouTube.com, a video posting website where clips from this episode can be viewed, a YouTube user posted the comment “this is demeaning and racist.” Other users responded back, denying that the show was at all racist or prejudiced. Whether or not the episode is offensive is up for debate, however, the fact that it has the potential to be offensive is notable. It is as if the combination of humor and globalization in pop culture is a breeding ground for someone to be offended, simply because humor does not reach across all cultural barriers.

The same problem – the fact that the use of humor to discuss globalization can be seen as racist or prejudiced – occurs in a Dilbert comic strip. The comic strip focuses on an Indian worker who, after immigrating to America in search of a white-collar job and better future, realizes that all the American white-collar jobs have been outsourced to back home to India. When the man says “I moved here from India to take this job! Now I’ll have to go back!” his co-worker matter-of-factly replies, “tell Sandeep I’ll need some more photo copies.” On the one hand, this comic strip effectively explores a conundrum which might have actually affected some people in real life. On the other hand, the last statement can be seen as culturally insensitive. Depending on how one reads the comic strip, the name “Sandeep” appears to be used to represent any/all individuals of Indian origin, in the same way that “Billy Bob” might (offensively) be used to represent White males from mountainous regions of the U.S. People of Indian descent may be offended at the universal use of “Sandeep” to represent Indian workers.

The comic strip brings up an important and rarely discussed issue; however, it appears that the message of the comic strip may be overlooked because some readers may see the humor as insensitive or offensive.



This is also an issue in the new independent film called “OUTSOURCED.” The trailer of this film is also accessible on YouTube.com. The film tells the fictional story of an American salesman who must train his replacement in India after his job is outsourced. The trailer explores the fact that many Americans become very upset when their phone calls are routed to workers overseas. When one worker at a call center in India tries to adopt an American accent and pretend he’s in Chicago, the person on the other end says, “Yeah, right,” and slams the phone down. However, certain moments in the film could be seen as highly offensive to people of Indian descent. At one point, the salesman mocks a so-called ‘Indian accent,’ waving his head from side to side and speaking in high pitched noises. It seems very likely that this section of the movie could offend someone.

Through humor, the Simpsons episode, the Dilbert cartoon, and the trailer for “OUTSOURCED” all explore very real elements of the impact of outsourcing on the lives of U.S. workers. However, the use of humor to address cultural differences sometimes has the potential to offend. At the same time, these elements of pop culture provide something to which the ‘average American worker’ can relate. Within their respective fictional environments, Homer Simpson, the Dilbert workers, and the salesman in “OUTSOURCED” are all ‘average

people' with whom a viewer can identify.

### **Voices in Sociology**

As a discipline, Sociology appears to take a very different approach to the topics of globalization and outsourcing than does the professional economic literature or other sectors of society. It appears that sociologists approach globalization from one of two angles. They may devise theories about the role of globalization as a social force within a historical framework of cultural trends, as does Professor Douglas Kellner in his article "Theorizing Globalization." Alternatively, they may rely on economists' findings about globalization and take a 'hands off' approach to the topic, as do Professors Martina Morris and Bruce Western in their article "Inequality in Earnings at the Close of the Twentieth Century." Kellner's article neither sympathizes with workers nor touts the necessity of globalization – it completely ignores this debate. Instead of discussing whether globalization is good or bad – from a normative perspective, as other sectors of society do – sociologists talk about globalization as a pattern and a social trend.

Instead of arguing for or against globalization, Kellner's article argues for a particular way in which it should be viewed. He says that globalization should be seen as a multifaceted cultural and historical development, not caused solely by economic advances or technological advances, but to a multitude of changes in various sectors of society. Kellner calls this viewpoint a "critical theory" of globalization (286). He uses language similar to that of Literature professors, extrapolating terminology commonly employed in literary theory and applying it to the study of globalization. For example, Kellner writes about the "dialectical framework" in which globalization should be discussed, the advantage of viewing globalization through the

“discourse of the postmodern,” the “cultural forms” which have impacted the globalization process, the “global historical configuration of post-Fordism, or postmodernism, as an emergent cultural logic of capitalism” (285, 300). He is also not afraid to invent terminology – he calls protectionism “globophobia” and the support of globalization “globophilia” (286).

Since many sociological changes have contributed to the progress and development of globalization, he (repeatedly) calls it a “complex and highly ambiguous system” (287). In this article, the goal is not to explain the intricacies of that complexity or to get rid of the ambiguity, but to awaken his readers to the fact that it is most advantageous to view globalization as “complex and highly ambiguous.” He warns against either economic or technological “determinism and reductionism” which would give either economics or technology sole credit for the progress of globalization (289). Kellner emphasizes the fact that all sectors of society are equally responsible.

Throughout the article, Kellner uses the historical style to focus on the multitude of reasons why globalization should be viewed in terms of its ambiguity. First, globalization has shown itself to have both positive and negative features throughout history. Kellner gives the example that, without increased technological connectedness between various countries of the world, the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks would not have occurred. However, if we did not have the Internet and global communication networks, we would be at a loss. This duality creates an ambiguity. Also, as Keller points out, anti-globalization arguments have often been expressed via communication media which would not exist without globalization – for example, the Internet. Without the Internet as a global communication device, protectionist sentiments would not be able to reach as many people. This is an intriguing irony and another “ambigu[ity]” of globalization.

Kellner understands that protectionist arguments are not feasible in reality. He calls protectionist movements “subcultures of resistance” which “one should take...with the proverbial grain of salt” (294-5). However, unlike the professional economic literature which tends to completely dismiss these arguments and not focus on them any longer, Kellner says that these arguments are valuable because they provide a point of discussion. Protectionist sentiments “express fissures and openings in the system for critical discourse and intervention” (295). By providing a ground for “discourse,” even impractical arguments are valuable to the sociologist.

### **A View of the External Voices**

That Kellner’s article focuses on discourse – the way globalization is discussed – brings us back to the focal point of analyzing the way globalization is talked about in various sectors of society. The fact that globalization is analyzed by sectors of society other than just the professional literature adds a great deal to the discussion, and allows the issue to be evaluated from multiple points of view. Although there is an economic reality of globalization – that it is necessary and beneficial for the U.S. economy as a whole, despite its side effects – there is also a social reality of the experience that many workers endure, in terms of wage cuts and job losses. An effective conversation about globalization, therefore, must include perspectives from all sides.

It is possible to imagine each of these many perspectives as occupying a position on a spectrum: from non-sympathetic toward the plight of workers to very sympathetic. On this spectrum, there are two extremes. The most conservative viewpoint – expressed by professional economists, think tank authors such as James K. Glassman, and government documents such as

the 1995 ERP – emphasizes the point that some individuals will have to endure hardships in order for the U.S. to succeed in the global economy. At the opposite end of the spectrum, public opinion and pop culture appear to display the greatest amount of sympathy and understanding for what workers may have to endure. However, between these two extremes there is a large middle ground or ‘gray area’. It is difficult to characterize many sectors of society as entirely supportive or entirely non-supportive of workers. There are both sympathetic and non-sympathetic attitudes toward workers within the media, think tank literature, and government. The ‘greyest’ of the grey areas occurs in the Sociology literature, where globalization is not addressed in terms of benefits and detriments, but in terms of the rhetoric and phraseology used to talk about our globalized economy. These various voices convene and converge into a diverse conversation on the impact of globalization.

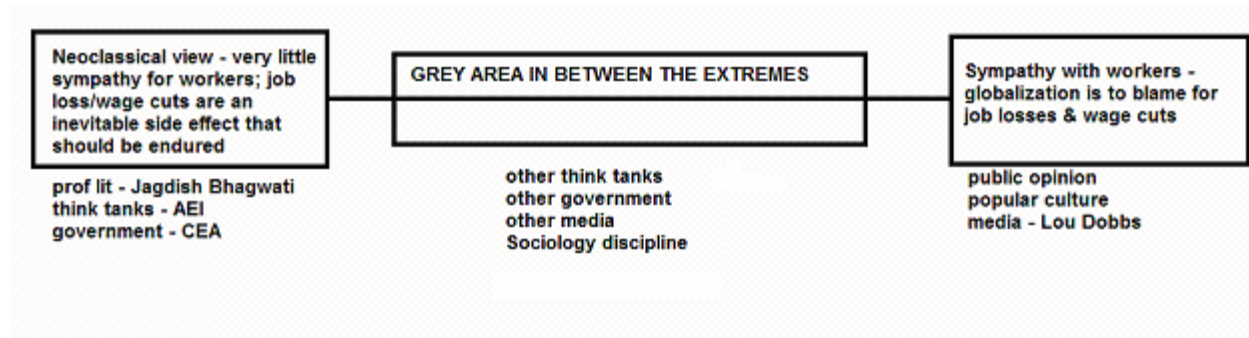


Image: A graphic representation of the various voices in the discussion.

This type of well-rounded conversation can only occur by involving voices outside the professional economic literature – namely, those voices which establish the other end of the spectrum, such as pop culture, public opinion, and ‘disreputable’ journalism such as Lou Dobbs “Exporting America.” Just as solely considering pop culture, public opinion, or “Exporting

America” would not give an observer a full view of the economic necessity and benefits of globalization, solely considering the professional economic literature would not give an observer a full view of the resentment/dissatisfaction/anger that many American workers feel about losing their jobs or having to take wage cuts.

Furthermore, the diversity of these voices in many sectors of society makes it more likely that the non-economist public will be exposed to a well-rounded view of the issue. Most Americans receive their news, on a daily basis, by a minimum of three sectors: the media, pop culture, and the addresses of government officials. At least one of these sectors is likely to contain a voice defending globalization, and at least one of these is likely to contain a voice sympathizing with workers. Without the presence of both these perspectives, coming from various angles from various parts of American society, the conversation about globalization would be very limited.



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