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JIHAD VS. McWORLD

TERRORISM'S CHALLENGE TO DEMOCRACY

WITH
AN
INTRODUCTION
BY THE
AUTHOR

"Mr. Barber is . . . the first to put Jihad and McWorld together in an inescapable dialectic . . . [it] stands as a bold invitation to debate the broad contours and future of society."
—BARBARA EHRENREICH, *The New York Times Book Review*

BENJAMIN R. BARBER



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How Globalism & Tribalism Are Reshaping the World

As soon as you hear the conceit of this book--that there are two great opposing forces at work in the world today, border-crossing capitalism and splintering factionalism, and that they are the two biggest threats to democracy--you know it rings true enough to be worth reading. Although capitalism could have only grown to current levels in the soil of democracies, Benjamin Barber argues that global capitalism now tends to work against the very concept of citizenship, of people thinking for themselves and with their neighbors. Too often now, how we think is the product of a transnational corporation (increasingly, a media corporation) with headquarters elsewhere. And although self-determination is one of the most fundamental of democratic principles, unchecked it has lead to a tribalism (think Bosnia, think Rwanda) in which virtually no one besides the local power elite gets a fair shake. The antidote, Barber concludes, is to work everywhere to resuscitate the non-governmental, non-business spaces in life--he calls them "civic spaces" (such as the village green, voluntary associations of every sort, churches, community schools)--where true citizenship thrives.

Jihad vs. McWorld Details

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Author : Benjamin R. Barber

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From Reader Review Jihad vs. McWorld for online ebook

Erik Graff says

Barber's analysis of the current world situation seems sad but basically true. The engine for the contrapetalism tearing peoples apart, both as groups and as individuals, is global capitalism. The corporations substantially regulate the regulators, their resources allowing them to control politicians, "public" institutions and political processes, even in the "democracies" wherein media control promotes mind control. People resist, again, both as groups and as individuals, or, often out of fear, they are co-opted into the system. The resistance is often ugly, misinformed and desperate--and it will continue.

Barber's "solution" in this book focuses primarily on building civic institutions. His other books emphasize the importance of education for everyone (as if that won't be, as it is, increasingly turned to the interests of global corporatism) and promote a kind of Swiss federalism to politically affiliate societies. While nice ideas, they don't seem very promising. Barber is no radical, but then radical reform would require crises mobilizing coherent and enduring movements, something like the socialist movement of the last century and a half, and that itself is an uncertain proposition.

Stephanie says

Provocative, but not incendiary. Barber makes some very valid assertions yet fails to effectively argue for his thesis (which we are left to unearth ourselves as he doesn't detail it too clearly). Rather than inciting action through his writing, the author enumerates everything he dislikes about Western civilization (indeed, Earth as a whole) as an attempt at elucidating the dichotomy that is Jihad vs. McWorld. There is value in this book, but it is not necessarily found in the disappointingly shallow content.

Ilana says

A little too dramatic and pessimistic for my taste... and poor choice of of a high content word like jihad, to which the author explains in his book, and-- understandably so-- now days regrets his use of it.

Joseph Stieb says

A low-ish score for this uneven, hyperbolic, and vague book that nevertheless has a very compelling central claim. Barber contends that the globalizing market forces of unrestrained McWorld have sparked a backlash in the form of jihad. By jihad (a regrettable term), he means the ethnic, nationalist, and religious backlash to what Barber sees as the homogenizing, hollow goods and images of McWorld. Many people find globalization to be a major threat to their traditions, homelands, and values, and they try to return to a golden age of tribal, national, or religious greatness to defend themselves. They become obsessed with their identity and group and often violent towards outsiders. Jihad and McWorld can co-exist (in fact, jihad might be impossible without the technology of McWorld) but the true victim of this struggle is democracy, to which both forces are opposed.

Barber's best point is that the unrestrained capitalism of neoliberal globalization has wrought havoc on the lives and values of many people, especially in the Third World, and that structures of control similar to those existing at the national level must be extended to the global level if globalization is to live up to its promise of more peace and prosperity. The US, for example, does not allow market forces to go unrestrained at home and often compensates and protects those who lose out to market interests and outcomes (Think Progressivism, New Deal, Great Society, etc). These safety nets, however, are often lacking at the international level, leading to "wild capitalism" that has seriously messed up certain countries (Russia, for instance). The rub, then, is to extend structures like those that exist at home to the international sphere. I can't say that Barber has a very clear idea of how to do this other than the creation of a global civil society.

One big flaw of this book is a basic lack of evidence. The author is a political theorist, so the book is heavy on abstraction and theorizing but low on data and case study. Barber uses national or local case studies as exemplars of global trends. His cases are drawn largely from inside the West. For example, he devotes about as much time to Quebecois and Basque separatism as all of Asia. Strangely enough, he doesn't factor in the legacy of imperialism at all to this backlash, treating episodes of jihad within Western societies as equivalent to the more civilizational backlash going on globally. Lastly, he doesn't reckon with the fact that the second age of globalization has seen more people lifted out of poverty, largely through the lifting of economic, informational, and technological barriers between and within nations, than any other point in human history. Moreover, this has also been an age of far less war, disease, and persecution than any other. Critics of globalization and neoliberalism like Barber focus on the dark side of globalization (and it's a big one) rather than weigh the problems against the gains. Moreover, Barber's real critique of globalization is that it is spiritually hollow and destructive of local cultures, values, and meanings. This is a very subjective take compared to the problem of poor third world people working in dangerous, low-wage factories or being driven out of agricultural or small scale production by cheap imports. Rather than griping like an old man about the vapidness of popular culture (most people just prefer football and Michael Jackson to theater and opera, sorry), he should have dealt more with the economic effects of globalization.

The biggest problem of the book, however, is the blurring of conceptual lines between McWorld and his vague argument for a global civil society. Barber argues that democracy on the global level is jeopardized by both McWorld and jihad. McWorld ostensibly just doesn't care about democracy, seeking to subvert it with cash donations, lobbying, and multinational avoidance of national claims to tax revenue and regulation. Jihad prefers tyranny of the majority (or secession of the minority) and the rule of the in-group to liberal democracy. Civil society, however, nurtures successful democracies by providing people with meaning, community, and a means to political and economic power that is inclusive and based on citizenship, not just group membership or consumerism. So how can global civil society be created when people are divided by geography, history, identity, etc? Barber offers no clear answer, but I think that McWorld offers the best opportunity for this. In McWorld, people engage in a popular, consumer culture that has them watching, eating, wearing, and idolizing many of the same things. It makes it possible for them to travel to, communicate with, and understand other cultures even if they are consuming them, in a sense. Americans, Europeans, Asians, Africans, etc are watching the same sport and pop stars, trying each other's foods, and seeing what life is like elsewhere. McWorld has created bridges between cultures in the interest of profit. Add to that social media's general shrinking of the world and expanding of our ability to socialize. Obviously, global consumers can become the global citizens of civil society when as they realize common interests and values and begin to act on those values. Barber is either too old or too reflexively negative to see this positive potential within McWorld.

This is a classic bigthink kind of book, and I know, as a history guy, I have to be skeptical of my tendency to pick apart big picture arguments. Still, there are serious problems with the details and general structure of this book, even if the central claims hold up reasonably well. It's yet another illustration of how being

negative often passes for being critical, especially in academia. I think a much stronger version of this story (ethnic/religious/national backlash to globalization) is Amy Chua's *World on Fire*, which has a far wider and more in-depth range of case studies.

Brett says

Jihad Vs. McWorld is an astonishing and insightful book--the best non-fiction I have read all year. I only wish I had read it sooner. It was first published in 1995, though there is a new introduction from the author post-September 11. This is a thoroughly engaging exegesis of the conflict between ethnic tribal nationalism and globalization.

If we usually think of the major ideological forces of the 20th century as communism and fascism, then Barber may have found what the major forces shaping the 21st century are. By Jihad, he does not mean Islamic religious warfare, but more generally fundamentalist, parochial interests that are deeply distrustful toward Western modernity. By McWorld, he means a variant of the Marxist idea of hegemonic power, though it is not connected to an individual nation-state, but rather driven by multi-national corporate entities.

Barber's analysis both readable and sophisticated. He presents a convincing argument that these forces are powerful and in conflict with each other, and moreover, that both forces are profoundly anti-democratic in their effects. McWorld has largely changed the way individuals in the West think of themselves, exchanging being a citizen for being a consumer. The fundamentalists that support what he terms Jihad look backward a pretend golden age that would strip away the rights and openness that are associated with modern democratic government. Barber also exposes how these forces in conflict are also codependent, each needing certain aspects of the other.

If there's a weakness in the book, it is in Barber's solutions to these issues. He calls for a renewal of democratic sensibility; reinvigoration of our common spaces (his defense of the word "public" in the term "public option" for health insurance in a recent Huffington Post article is, I think, an example of what he might mean by this) and voluntary civic organizations, a la Putnam in *Bowling Alone*. It's well and good to suggest this, but something else altogether to suggest a method of accomplishing this. Although he doesn't outright say so, I think Barber also realizes the difficulty there, which would go some way toward explaining why the book is relatively pessimistic about the prospects for a functional democracy returning anytime soon.

In the years since the book's initial publication, I think it's become increasingly clear that McWorld's mindset has replaced a democratic mindset in the U.S. and McWorld increasingly seems to have Jihad backbedding around the world, though September 11th was an awful reminder that fundamentalist forces still can lash out with great lethality. Nonetheless, even after the 2008 elections, which saw a significant increase in citizen engagement and activity in the electoral process, we seem to have a government that remains incapable to serving the basic needs of the polity. Perhaps that is too hyperbolic, but perhaps not, either. The fact that there could be legitimate debate on that point says a lot in itself.

Justin Dell says

I suppose you could think of this text as a neo-Rousseauian polemic against very free-market capitalism and

runaway materialism. The author sees laissez-faire economics as responsible for a rise in tribalism within societies (what he unwisely terms "jihad") and excessive individualism and consumerism ("McWorld"). Both react against, but also mutually reinforce, one another. Barber laments the decline of the nation-state as the guardian of democracy, the only real embodiment of sovereignty, and the only check against the power of international capital. In reading this book, I could not help but think back to the eighteenth-century Whiggish (small "r") republicanism that called for virtuous societies as the safeguards of liberty and warned against excessive luxury as vitiating the spirit and integrity of free peoples.

Barber's text was written in the 1990s, and so many of its references will seem anachronistic or quaint to the modern reader (like his references to VCRs as the cutting edge of multimedia technology). Unfortunately, the book was published just a few years before 9/11 and the War on Terror, making its use of the then little-known word "jihad" very regrettable, as the contemporary understanding of that word is much more specific (or perhaps politicized) than the generalized meaning Barber attaches to it as denoting blood-and-soil tribalism. When Barber wrote this book, he identified nationalism as a greater threat to democracy than religious fundamentalism - a view that seems so shockingly out-of-touch today.

Interestingly, Barber's text would have definitely seemed "left-wing" when it first came out. Its screeds against "globalism," free trade, common currencies, elites, multinational corporations and so on had, and still have, a decidedly leftist flavour. Opposition to free-market fundamentalism was almost exclusively the work of unions, left-wing professors, socialist parties and the like. Interestingly, in the Trumpian world of today, "globalism" is now largely the target of the political right, especially in the United States. It is now the American right of Donald Trump that attacks free trade, common currencies, outsourcing and offshoring, open borders, the media, elites, and so on. The Left, while perhaps not quite championing these things, has certainly cozied up to them, perhaps because it now sees in these allies in its fight for greater diversity in the Western world - what would appear to be its preeminent concern these days.

I suppose what Barber and Trump have in common is disenchantment over the social costs of maximum economic efficiency. Whether Trump, like Barber, wants greater "democracy" to ameliorate these defects is debatable, though. Both men seem to feel that the massive social changes wrought by the economic shift to digitization is correctable through state policy. The underlying assumption with this opinion is that globalization is itself the work of policy - policy that just has to be undone - rather than change caused by the inexorable march of technology.

The Overflowing Inkwell says

Really enjoyed Part I of the book, especially the detailed outlines of who owned what and where. The rest of it.....I didn't care for his insistence that "Jihad" could be made to mean literally any cultural expression at all, preserving native languages or vanishing dialects became direct warfare against McWorld that was laughable and should be stopped, returning to old-fashioned methods/clothes/foods/anything a silly notion that wouldn't fix anything, without pausing to think that perhaps those returns weren't 100% just "I hate McWorld! This will fix it!" A good deal of it is recognizing that for a lot of these people groups - particularly native peoples, like the Cree Indians he mocks in his section on Canada - they were trod upon for centuries by domineering outsiders, and still managed to hold on to such amazing things as language and customs and they're finally grappling onto a breath of fresh air. It's not ridiculous or dumb that they now have to add new words into their vocabulary to describe modern inventions, or that they would still want to distance themselves from the modern, white, countries they were forced into the margins of. That's not Jihad against McWorld, that's a people who has received enormous abuse wanting some breathing space from their

abusers.

As much as he rants against capitalism, his book with the provocative title, enhanced by the clearly Muslim woman on the cover, was all for the profits and money. He backs up in the Afterword, saying he just didn't understand that people would take such offense to his misuse of the word Jihad to mean people in European countries daring to demand you speak Catalan in the Catalan universities, and that he really does like Muslim people, honest. You just had to buy his book and read the whole thing to understand: he really just meant parochialism! Why he couldn't just have used that word, or a word similar to it, on the title? Because of the profits he thought he could achieve by shocking you.

I really did enjoy the parts dissecting McWorld and the insidious, unchecked advertising and information collection, made all the more dangerous by the modern laptop and cell phones we have perfected since 1994. I enjoyed the parts talking about the need for public, civic space; the parts on how and why things went sideways in ex-Communist countries. I don't know a whole lot on that latter subject, and it was interesting to read about. That middle section on Jihad though, just feels really poorly supported, and uninformed about some of the things he derides. Glad to be finished with it.

Andy says

I really had high hopes for this one. Wow, did it disappoint. First of all, the new introduction to the paperback version, chock full of that immediate, post-9/11 guilt tripping/hand wringing, almost made me throw the book across the room and pass on the whole endeavor, but once the actual substance of the book started, it was a lot easier to take. Much of his take on globalism is acceptable, though he contradicts himself (especially in the crappy intro) by alternately pointing out its transnational nature and equating it with America.

I was not convinced at all by his central tactic, namely lumping all of the various forms of idiosyncratic government, ethnocentric culture, provincialism, traditionalism, and religious orientation (whether or not fundamentalist) under the rubric "Jihad". I can accept that there are some similarities between some of these cultural aspects, and their effect on the nation-state can be similar to that of "McWorld", but the author takes the point too far. This often goes to the extreme of refusing to differentiate radical Islam as a unique problem player on the world stage unto itself, and just portray it as a reaction to "McWorld"/America, rather than a movement with a history of its own, that started long before that of the USA.

I might also mention that this work apparently was adapted from a shorter piece, and it often shows. There is a lot of padding, which can lead to awkwardly written, sometimes mind-boggling sentences, like this one: "Many modern nation-states have generated national industrial policies aimed at strategic coordination of economic policy and domination of international markets by their business corporations on the theory that the nation's citizens will somehow be benefited by supporting corporations even if corporations decline to return the favor." ...Whew!!

Carol Storm says

This book is a must read, not only for the analysis of Islamic fundamentalism and global Jihad, but for the

way it skewers the emptiness of American popular culture as well. I literally could not put it down!

Mark Hammell says

Amazingly prescient book. Written in the late 1990s and it's incredible how much of what Barber describes has come to pass. He does a great job describing the fundamental forces driving so much of the conflict we see in the world today and, unlike most of the articles you'll read, actually attempts to describe how we can come to resolution.

Daniel says

What a phenomenal book, takes on the unforeseen results of globalization that have brought about such significant change in the world for the past 20 years and while it was written in 1995, turns out to be spot on for the current foreign policy moves our country has made recently.

I wish that I had read this book when it came out and had 6 years to mull over it's arguments before the attacks of September 11th. I think that it grounds the reasons for the attack very clearly in the shifting attitudes of global finance, trade, imperialism, nationalism and religious fundamentalism framing the conversation in a cogent and well researched way as opposed to the way the main stream media decided to force feed us "facts" as the became apparent. Barber doesn't try to sugar-coat his statements or wrap them up in the flag. He merely presents evidence that globalization has a tendency to marginalize what he calls "the terminal world" while at the same time undermining democratization of exploited and underprivileged peoples across the world, fomenting the very causes linked to Jihad.

There is no morality argument here about which side is good and which side is bad, merely the presentation that both sides exist and that one comes as a reaction to the other. I think that I would have had a much better understanding of the motives behind many of the people that the United States continues to fight in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Iraq (as well as through other parts of the world) if I had read this prior to September 11th. The battle lines for the fate of the world had been clearly drawn long before then and they weren't necessarily drawn there by world leaders and nation-states.

This book reads very much like Robert Reich's "Supercapitalism" only on a foreign and global scale, attempting to explain the schisms that were about to affect the American consciousness in a very big way. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in American foreign policy and the challenges we face moving forward, especially as our society moves more and more toward corporatism.

??■AzZaN J.S.■? says

Although this book is a hard one to read in my opinion, as the Author makes large bombastic statements in long run on sentences that are too exhausting to keep up with and challenging to decifier fully at times (making me believe that perhaps the book isn't exactly my cup of tea), however I caught myself loving the angle of which he presented his arguements both for and against Jihad and Mc World.

I especially like his afterword sagement of the book where he clearly demystifies his arguements if not tries

at least to break down the book's sections into straightforward points that I found to be helpful for me to sum up a wholistic idea of the book.

I however didn't like the book's cover which I thought was a bit misleading as the intention of the Author when it came to represent the term Jihad with the Arabian Islamic lady, whereas his true intention as he puts it in his Afterworld and several places within his book was to use the word in a broader more loosely fashion as to refer to "all traditional cultures of the world of which people are steadfast bond to their heritages and confirmed senses of nationalisms and the struggle to maintain their values in the face of the changing times and world". Guess the word "Jihad" which literally means "struggle" does paint a good picture instead of the long weary description of mine.

I could've honestly rated the book higher if it weren't dedicated to a certain audience (namely students of politics or seasoned professors of geo-politics and economics) of I which I felt excluded ...to say the least ^_^. This book is not for everybody that's for sure, as I myself fought the urge to drop it half way done a couple of times, if it weren't for its highly sophisticated and elaborated discussion points, amazing wording and lexicological allure.

Amanda says

The ideas discussed within this book are extremely interesting, however at times they are terribly dated or geared at a very specific group of international theorists. Being a student who is just starting to study politics with a limited background on world issues and western geography, some of the examples mentioned within the book go completely over my head. In chapter 14 he incessantly talks about various countries and their past conflicts without introducing his readers to even the slightest bit of information to follow along. At other times, and this is purely because I am reading this in 2012, Barber talks about issues that are no longer relevant or those that have been solved over time (for better, or worse.)

What I did enjoy was that the majority of the book was solid and packed with inquisitions into where we are headed in terms of globalization and democracy. In this sense, a decade is a small fraction of time that is relatively unchanged and Barber's guesswork and somewhat socratic means of interpretation were very beneficial.

Gerald says

At the time I read this book (soon after it was published in 1995) Barber's concepts were new to me, His main premise in the book is that the opposing forces of tribalism and consumerism are creating a tension in the world that leads to interesting and often volatile consequences. The last twenty years have seen this concept play out countless times and although I haven't read the book in this century, I feel that it will remain insightful for those looking to gain greater understanding of our complex and often baffling world.

Edith says

This book pretty much predicted something like 9/11/2001 would happen to the US. Hmm, if only someone had been paying attention ...

Sean Packard says

Highly recommend

For those searching for a soul - not a soul bestowed by God or the God that consumerism has become, find a voice in Benjamin Barber that very often materializes the nagging thoughts in your head and the tugging emotions you struggle to describe. Modern society advertises and sells you everything you need to be a complete human, but ask yourself - do you feel complete?

Sami says

Barber's analysis of how savage capitalism and forces of those who haven't been able to reap the comfortable fruits of it fight back is still very much worth reading. Though the term "jihad" in the title may seem that this book is about the Muslim world vs. the West, the book is about something completely different.

As Barber states at the beginning, he is not trying to analyse only the hardline Muslim counter-reaction to the West. What Barber does analyse is the relationship between McWorld -- a world of comfortable, airconditioned, and uniform living where every mall is alike and everyone manifests one's highly individual persona by wearing the same sneakers and using the same smartphones everyone else does -- and Jihad -- a world of discomfort, scarcity, and hard labour where there aren't any malls, or they're too expensive for the majority to even enter, and everyone is busy making cheap t-shirts to be sold in those malls somewhere else.

Some readers will inevitably find Barber's dialectic between those two worlds way tinted with not so fresh winds of Marxist dialectical analysis. However, regardless of Barber's leanings when it comes to dialectical analysis, his description of these two separated, yet interdependent worlds is valuable and interesting on its own, even if you don't agree with his conclusions.

Patrick says

Although Barber had interesting points in the book and causes one to think about how globalization and parochial and provincialism points of view threaten liberal democracy around the world, I found the book overly verbose and circuitous in its arguments. His basic thesis is globalization in reducing individuals into consumers in order its sole goal for profits undermines liberal democracy both at home and abroad by selling people what is possible instead of actively engaging people in shaping their own society, (democratic civic virtue). As a result of the lack of a soul as well as extreme individualism that market fosters, an intense counter force that is ethnic pride, nationalism, and religiousness has taken route across America and in its extreme form the Islamic fundamentalism that created 9/11. I do not think it is a coincidence that the rise of Christian right as a strong political movement in the US during W years mirrors that Islamic fundamentalism in the middle east following the unfettered rule of secular globalization that characterized the Clinton years. This collective communal response to the forces of capitalism devoid of the soul and its corresponding humanity is dangerous to liberal democracy because it places an "us vs them" mentality that goes against civil liberty, rights of the minority, and the corresponding exchange of ideas at the heart of democracy. Whereas he states the potential dual forces of McWorld and Jihad as a threat to

Democracy, he suggests a way to rectify this is through engaged citizens that work through civic institutions that are concerned over the public welfare rather than special interest causes or narrow political elections.

Introduction to 9/11: The author rightly points out that the only cure to Jihadism is democracy in these countries with a thriving middle class and thus takes a more holistic approach as a solution to terrorism rather than a more surgical approach favored by the military. Because only by giving people a voice within their own countries as well as a means to live (ie: home, cloth, buying food) will they no longer want terrorist to speak out for them. Basically, by giving these people a democracy and a middle class existence will you give them a stake at living life. After reading the Hamid's *Reluctant Fundamentalist*, I can see how blind Capitalism can be compared to Fundamentalism because they both are global within their reach, devoid of human emotion thus consequences, and tend to have a singular goal.

He rightly sees Capitalism as simply a tool. But whereas he sees globalized Capital as a force for bad, I see it as a force for good especially if it is coupled with diplomatic pressure from the US to democratize that country's economy.

Introduction: He uses the term jihad to mean sectarian violence and the MacWorld as free-flow global capitalism. Although externally antithetical both ideologies share in it a propensity for operating outside the nation-state democratic institutions and thus can be seen as anarchic. His challenge is the fact that global capitalism and democracy go together or one leads to the other. As he states, communist China, Singapore, and Vietnam are all autocratic regimes that have a thriving capitalistic system. Because where capitalism needs security to thrive, it does not necessarily need democracy to thrive. What he fails to realize in my view is that a capitalist system provides an environment in which liberal democracy can thrive once a majority of people of that country have a vibrant middle class. Thus, a capitalist system serves only as catalyst for democracy itself.

This theory will be tested out in Egypt. By all accounts Egypt seems to have a good enough middle class that is moderate in its views toward Islam. Now can they successfully transition from an autocratic capitalist rule to a more liberal democratic rule is the biggest question?

Chapter 1:

He states that current multi-national companies only see profits and hire globally without any loyalty to one country. This is the way global capitalism should work that is it should flow toward countries with the greatest profitability for its companies. What is poignant about this fact is that company profitability sometimes goes against the US need for fostering national jobs for its citizens. This brings up an interesting point, if multi-national firms even ones that originate from the US have completely decoupled itself from national loyalty, then why is the US still subsidizing some of these companies as well as giving people who have capital, capital-gains tax breaks that may benefit the multi-national bottom-line but do not necessarily benefit the US economy while at the same time taking money from American coffers in a time of increasing deficits?

I think in the advent of irreversible globalization that has shifted manufacturing jobs overseas, the capital-gains tax break should be targeted towards investments that will actually help innovative new American companies grow and succeed as well as increasing tax breaks and subsidies to these companies. I think more and more American prowess in the economy will heavily rely on an innovative entrepreneurial spirit that can create new industries and thus new jobs. We have to face the fact that jobs that can be offshored will be offshored and nothing we can do will change that.

Chapter 2:

Barber complains that America is more and more dependent on other countries. This does not take a genius to come up with this statement because the global supply-chain makes sure that America is interdependent with other countries for its needs. But he highlights an interesting point, that most of the oil reserves are in countries that may become politically unstable due to either ethnic divisions in that country or autocratic nature of that country that are at odds with democratic aspirations of their people.

I think if anything this has become an imperative for America to seek alternative energy sources to energy. I think the whole alternative clean-energy movement is a great thing in America. Although I am not heavily pro-environment, I do see the need for clean-energy industry movement to grow because since America is the predominant consumer of energy and given all forms of energy is limited then it makes sense to have technology that will harness renewable energy and thus grow a new industry.

Republicans want to drill in the US for oil but I do not like this idea right now. I think we should tap oil reserves in the US if "all hell breaks lose" and we are in a global war that makes us decouple from the rest of the world. So I think all the remaining oil reserves in the US should be saved only for national security disaster in the scale of WWIII and should not be tapped before then just to depress oil prices for an American consumer addicted to oil.

As for the decoupling of the American consumer from oil and our relationship to oil companies. I do not think that oil companies will ever go out of business even without American government backing given the rise of the global middle class, they will always find customers willing to fuel their business. So, I think the oil companies can actually diversify their portfolio and invest in clean renewable energy in the US while selling their oil abroad to the growing global middle class. This way the US clean renewable energy industry will be the new energy source for the world and oil and other energy industrial sectors can survive by shifting their resources to the new renewable energy industry when this type of energy can become scalable.

Chapter 3&4: In these two chapters he tries to shock people into seeing how globalization is a bad thing. In chapter 3, he states that most countries manufactures for other countries instead of their own countries and he tries to shock us into thinking that is a bad thing because it makes us more dependent for other countries. I do not see this as a bad thing for example the fact that US products for exports means more jobs for the US and international imports that we receive are presumably cheaper than we can produce in the US thus is a good thing for US consumers.

In chapter 4, he tries to shock us by stating that corporations are increasingly becoming political in their branding of itself by showing consumers that they are global corporate responsible citizens. I actually think this is a good thing if global corporation advertise them as responsible global citizens then, they have to live up to that image or their brand suffers. He states its a bad thing that corporations take advantage of social issues in order to market itself. While its true corporations market itself in the sole goal in order to make money, using marketing to highlight social issues is also a good thing because it shows social issues that might have not been brought to an awareness of the consumer. For example for me, the only reason I have been increasingly more environmentally conscious is due to the advertising by companies that purport to be environmentally friendly. Other than through this venue, I would not have cared about the environment because that is not my inherent interest. Also if one wants to, one can block out advertisement with the new technology of DVR, one can ignore advertisements of one chooses. Also for me personally, an increase of multitude advertisements have created an environment in which advertisements have become white noise that I ignore.

The only issue in which advertising can be seen as a negative are in countries in which there is low penetration of advertising and thus are more visible and in traditional countries in which advertising becomes a stand in for "western values" in which can be seen as antithetical to the traditional societies values. Given that these companies are multi-national entities, how can we lessen the cultural friction that these companies present themselves and thus adversely affect us?

Chapter 5: Barber states that even though the US is losing the deficit war in terms of manufacturing jobs, and possibly software jobs, we are winning the war in terms of new service jobs of the 21st century because like always we create an industry out of thin air and run with it. I think this is really how we ensure the US success in the future is to continuously innovate and have the environment in which entrepreneurship/risk-taking thrives because traditionally this is where we are at our best. Of course as industries mature, we will get foreign competition from abroad so the best course of action is to let economics play out and just create new global industries into which we dominate.

Chapter 6-9: The chapters deals with the dominance of media in international markets, thus making the American ideal, the global ideal. Although this is great in terms of American cultural hegemony. The culture that Hollywood showcases to the world tends to be American superficial culture of sex, violence, and materialism. Is this how we want to portray ourselves to the world? I do not know how to change this without regulation which I am adamantly against. I guess one can change this by making people in the US conscious of the fact that these are not values we want as a society. Once the images change, then Hollywood films will change and thus American cultural images will change too. He cites the more we consume the infotainment telecommunication culture the more we disengage from the real world. I guess the best way to combat this, is to make sure the internet becomes an adjunct to our lives instead of living life on the internet.

Although I myself tend to be an ardent proponent of free-market globalization, he does bring up interesting points in that the media industrial complex sole purpose is to grow and make profits to that end it does not look toward "good cultural values" that most Americans profess to. Also the most troubling aspect of these chapters is the fact that these media outlets have engaged in "synergy" which is basically monopoly of the media outlets which in the end decreases consumer choice. So by deregulating the barriers b/w these various industries in the name of increasing consumer choice, we have in effect limited consumer choice because an increasing amount of media are concentrated in the hands of a few.

Jihad:

He states that "nationalism" against the other is the chief mechanism of jihad in which once important in the creation of the nation-state is now dangerous b/c it fractures the nation-state from within. His use of nationalism is more akin to tribal, ethnic, and religious loyalties that makes up American "multi-culturalism" rather than loyalty to a nation. Whereas multi-culturalism takes a benign form in America which means each individual's background is celebrated, in other parts of the world the provincialism (against cosmopolitanism) and parochialism (local government self-determination) can lead to ethnic cleansing wars a la Bosnia, Rwanda, and Iraqi sectarian violence. I actually like the idea of multi-culturalism in terms of preserving once background culture as long as a dominant nationalistic pride predominates. In the US, this means believing in the Constitution and the beliefs of the Founding Fathers as well as English being spoken as the official language so there is some sort of commonality that binds Americans.

He also talks about the eroding state controls of autocratic regimes of the East because of enculturation of McWorld culture. In the book, he focuses on China as although they have been successful so far in placing a political clamp against democracy are exceedingly unable to block western culture from swamping China

because they have become main players in globalization. Since the book was published two more autocratic regimes that started out with a hybrid government have fallen in favor of Democratic leadership, that is Indonesia and South Korea. Perhaps this is another good reason to compete with China's economy head to head because in the long-run without Democratic reform their economy will lose.

He rightly questions whether multi-culturalism can thrive in a democracy especially in former-Soviet Union where he states that in theory are both democratic and capitalistic but in actuality are neither. But, I think for a true democracy to happen it cannot happen overnight rather it takes time. America, the founder of modern day democracy, took 200 years to get it where it is today that is equal rights for both men and women, black and white even though in theory it was like this 200 years ago.

Finally, he gets to the heart of the issue of whether Islamic fundamentalism that so grips the middle east can coexist with capitalistic liberal democracy. As we understand it today, liberal democracy and Islamic fundamentalism cannot coexist because fundamentalism necessitate complete submission to God's tenets so it goes against anything modern. He also points that America's Christian fundamentalist, although using McWorld to further its purposes (via Evangelical Mega-churches), share this anti-modern sentiments with their Islamic counterparts. The only way to turn Muslim countries into stable liberal democracy is to actively favor moderate forms of Islam like Sufism while at the same time forcing autocratic rulers in the country to liberalize their economy to foster a growing middle class so when the wave democracy eventually takes route in those countries then they are less likely to decouple themselves from the global economy. Like the US, I see a role for these Fundamentalist in government as long as they do not take over the government. I think the Iraq and Egypt experiments in democracy will highly tell on how to proceed forward especially on the issue of can the Muslim Brotherhood thrive inside a democratic Egypt in which they have a stake but not a majority stake in government?

MacWorld vs Jihad:

While Barber rightly points out that todays problems are international by nature such as terrorism, the environment, ill-gotten capital, global epidemics, weapon proliferation, and illegal immigration, his prescription for a confederation of world democratic governments is interesting concept; but how is a Confederation of democracies different from the UN, NATO, or the EU? He also makes an argument that capitalism undermines the interest of democratic citizenship. While I can see this in 3rd world countries in which multi-nationals can dictate the terms into which they enter the market, I do not see this a problem in 1st world countries in which there are strong governmental mechanisms regulates government worst abuses. I think the way to solve international problems is through the international bodies UN while leveraging capitalistic mechanisms.

He does make a strong case against newly unfettered capitalist reform in a setting of weak democratic institutions which caused chaos in Russia and to some extent other former Soviet sphere of influence states such as East Germany. In Russia at least the early capitalist reform and the resultant increase in organized crime and unemployment caused a significant backlash that resulted in present government and economy that has facade of a democratic market-system but is actually a state-run oligarchy head by Putin, the strong man behind the power. Similarly, the opening up in East Germany to capitalistic forces and the resulting high unemployment rate led to a backlash neo-Nazi groups which are xenophobic and rise of communist party into local government.

Perhaps the best way to foster permanent liberal democracy is to have an autocratic regime friendly to the US and transition it to a market-economy first. While an autocratic regime can slow the "shock value" of immediate capitalist market, the reform of the market into capitalist structure gradually undermines the

autocratic regime. This seems to have worked well in Chile, Indonesia, and South Korea all friendly to the US so they transformed their economies to a market-economy before making the step to a full fledged democracy while prodding by the State Department to liberalize their governments that eventually led to free elections. I hope this will happen in Egypt too.

I have no doubt that China will follow this path too if they really want to compete with the US in the global economy. The question is will the US be ready to compete with a liberal democratic China unfettered by governmental constraints currently placed on entrepreneurship of its people.

I like Barber conclusion of how to stop the forces of McWorld and Jihad from further destabilizing Democratic institution of a nation-state. His answer to this quandary is to go back to 19th century America in which civic institutions in which engaged citizens are empowered to do something for their communities instead of being passive spectators so common in today partisanship politics or otherwise disinterested consumers who are only interested in their individual wants. These engaged citizens do not act as special interest groups that are narrowly defined by their individual causes but rather in civic institutions that benefit the public as a whole.

In the international arena, he advocates the formation of Confederation of ethnicities at their heart having civic institution that has its heart engaged citizens in order to have a foundational basis for democratic institutions. In order to combat the profit-driven McWorld running over weak democratic governments and sectarian Jihad, he advocates using a global network of engaged citizens via the internet to monitor the worst abuses of McWorld and Jihad.

Rhys says

I read this book within 24 hours. I thought it was very much going to be a critique of Islamic Jihad as a reaction to the Neoliberal order. Instead, 'Jihad' for Barber is more concerned with tribalistic, exclusivist, nationalistic identities that emerge as a reaction to an all-encompassing, soulless and faceless imperialist economic-system that destroys culture worldwide in order to create homogeneity for saleability; a world to be dominated by hedonistic consumerism driven by markets that is fundamentally incompatible with engaged, democratic citizenry. I think it was worth reading, but certainly the cover is not entirely representative of the content.

Catherine says

Surprisingly, given the title, this book is over ten years old although this British edition has a foreword post - but not much post - 9/11. The Jihad of which it speaks is more to do with the impulse towards fragmentation of states, petty nationalism and tribalism than specifically religious movements, while its McWorld is the forces of globalisation - almost entirely commercial. The key point seems to be that the relationship between the two is one of mutual dependence as much as, or probably more than, the commonly accepted mutual destruction. While there are some amusing nuggets - especially reading it during the News of the World phone hacking scandal - the tone is serious. I thought in aiming to present arguments for his thesis thoroughly Barber ended up coming across as over-earnest and the book too long. A decently edited edition might have more impact.

