Today, as countries across the globe become more closely connected by economic trade and technology, so too do cultures become more intertwined. There is now a Starbucks inside the once inaccessible Forbidden City of Beijing, China; there are McDonald’s restaurants all over India selling not burgers but vegetarian items such as the McAloo Tikki Burger; there is a rage for Japanese anime in small town America; and we hear East Asian influences on African-American hip-hop bands such as the Wu-Tang Clan. The term used with reference to the economic practices that spurs such global influence and cultural exchange is “globalization.”

While “globalization” as a term has existed since 1944, it was a landmark 1983 essay entitled “Globalization of Markets” by Harvard professor and economist Theodore Levitt that brought the term into popular use. In recent years, the complex nature of globalization has caused a polarization of opinion into two camps: those against globalization who see it as a new form of Western domination and a destructive practice that takes advantage of developing counties, and those who see globalization as bringing progress and financial help to improve living conditions and human life across the world.

One way to understand the debate is to consider the op-ad in Figure 15.1, in which corporate ads encircle the earth. As you look at this image, you might begin to see the two opinions about globalization. On the one hand, you might see these corporate logos as connecting diverse nations and bringing economic prosperity to developing countries. On the other hand, you could see the corporations as literally choking the earth. The image of the United States, visually located under the CNN label, could be seen either as one of leadership and guidance (with CNN informing the world through the news) or instead as the source of so many companies that seek to make profits from developing nations across the globe. Your visual analysis of this image might lead you to see globalization as a positive force, or what Thomas Friedman calls “a new milestone in human progress and a great opportunity for the world.” Alternatively, you might begin to side with Naomi Klein’s perspective that outsourcing equates with sending American workers to steal good jobs from people in struggling countries.

FIGURE 15.1 This image of the world as embraced or constricted by international corporate monopolies reveals two different perspectives on Globalization.
Throughout the rest of this chapter, we’ll study the issues and the debates surrounding globalization as a phenomenon. We’ll start with one of the most contentious issues: the increasing prevalence of big corporations, such as McDonald’s, that conduct business in countries where such practices might change local customs, cultures, and values—even the very look of a country’s national identity. We’ll also question how long such corporations can last in a constantly changing world—and we’ll consider Mark Rice-Oxley’s question whether Disney, Nike, and McDonald’s can endure as icons of wealthy Western society.

Next, we’ll look at globalization from another angle of vision. Specifically, what happens when East meets West? The second section will explore how Eastern cultural icons—from Hello Kitty to anime, Buddhist religion to India’s Bollywood cinema—have in turn shaped Western practices, pastimes, and fashions. As writer and photographer David Wells argues, India in particular is one developing country that now “sees itself as equally important as Russia, China and the U.S., believing it has much to offer the rest of the world.” We’ll look at how globalization moves in both directions, with all countries influencing each other both economically and culturally.

Finally, we’ll tackle some of the more economic and political questions in the globalization debate, and we’ll read articles about the growing connectedness of world communities through trade, commerce, technology, and travel. We’ll explore perspectives, from Brian Behlendorf’s claim that outsourcing can help bring about world peace to Naomi Klein’s assertion that “free-trade policies are a highly efficient engine of dispossession.” As you delve into the complex issue of globalization presented from many vantage points throughout this chapter, you can begin to shape your own perspective about our changing world.

MCDONALDIZATION

In many ways, McDonald’s and the golden arches have become symbols for globalization because they are such visible signs of the export of U.S. culture and business. As the American-based fast-food chain McDonald’s has continued to expand into new markets across the globe, it has been met with both voracious criticism and supportive praise. The image in Figure 15.2, for instance, captures a demonstration where the restaurant name has been transformed from “McDonald’s” to “McDomination.” You can see the famous golden arches, but the word above it—“RESIST”—turns the symbol from a sign for a fast-food store into a sign of what the protesters see as global oppression or “McDomination.”

What’s at stake, is that McDonald’s sells more than food; it creates what blog columnist Paul Feine calls “McCulture” or a way of life that it imports to various countries around the world (http://www.aworldconnected.org/Stories/id.113/story_detail.asp). This is often very good for the nation, Feine argues, in terms of bringing hygiene, nutrition, and entertainment for children, among other bene-
fits. But critics of McDonald’s, such as George Ritzer, see McCulture as a threat to human creativity. As we’ll learn, Ritzer contends that McDonald’s sells a “false image” of world unity through shared food preferences. Ritzer coined the term \textit{McDonaldization} to mean “the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world” (\textit{The McDonaldization of Society} by George Ritzer, p.1).

This, perhaps, is the crux of the debate: when another restaurant opens across the globe with the golden arches on top, do we see McDonald’s as the example of an American company exporting Western looks, values, poor eating habits, and economic practices including heavy consumerism and use of natural resources? Or do we see a model of international development that shows respect for local cultures, customs, and practices? We’ll address these questions in the pages that follow.

We’ll also look at how McDonald’s as a corporation works hard to design visual rhetoric for its restaurants, its ad campaigns on billboards, and even its Internet identity.

The McDonald’s Website in China, for instance, shown in Figure 15.3, uses the hip image of a young Asian musician who holds his hands up in a rap gesture and is surrounded by pop-up buttons that evoke trends in Chinese youth culture from music to games. As the screen shot of the Website reveals, McDonald’s marketing campaigns employ rhetorical strategies effectively to entice the Chinese youth audience with careful attention to color, layout, emotional appeals, shared values, and the nation’s own goals.

By contrast, the Website for McDonald’s in Sweden, seen in Figure 15.4, represents a different identity for the company. Notice the traditional setting of the library filled with dusty books, the plastic magnetic letters on a black board, and the old-fashioned feel to the Website. Instead of one hip youth in a game-like atmosphere, the Swedish Website suggests tradition, home-schooling, and very young children learning to eat from McDonald’s. The visual design of this site suggests a company that has embraced Sweden’s traditional values and love of family, using food and education to perpetuate those values.

\textbf{Reflect & Write}

- Look closely at the Chinese Website and the Swedish Website in Figures 15.3–15.4. Why do you think there is more coverage of people actually eating the food in one versus the other?
- How are American cultural values, fashions, and musical trends reproduced in Web design ads such as those shown here?
**Student Writing**

Dexian Cai, Student essay on McDonald’s “I’m Lovin’ It” commercials in Singapore: “West Meets East: The Evolution of McDonald’s Marketing in East Asia”

**COLLABORATIVE CHALLENGE**

Together in a group of three or four, surf the McDonald’s Website for any country that interests you and discover what argument each specific ad strategy or restaurant design makes about both McDonald’s and the home country. Take several screen shots and then, in groups of two or three, compose captions for each of these visual texts; the captions you write should indicate your interpretation of the meaning of the image. Present your visual rhetoric analysis and your collaborative writing to the class.

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**Mark Rice-Oxley** is a correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor, where this article appeared on January 15, 2004. He has written stories on British manners and the “Gross National Happiness Index”; most recently, he performed the role of David Copperfield at the West Yorkshire Playhouse.

**In 2,000 Years, Will the World Remember Disney or Plato?**

*Mark Rice-Oxley*

Down in the mall, between the fast-food joint and the bagel shop, a group of young people huddles in a flurry of baggy combat pants, skateboards, and slang. They size up a woman teetering past wearing DKNY, carrying *Time* magazine in one hand and a latte in the other. She brushes past a guy in a Yankees’ baseball cap who is talking on his Motorola cellphone about the Martin Scorsese film he saw last night. It’s a standard American scene—only this isn’t America, it’s Britain. US culture is so pervasive, the scene could be played out in any one of dozens of cities. Budapest or Berlin, if not Bogota or Bordeaux. Even Manila or Moscow.

As the unrivaled global superpower, America exports its culture on an unprecedented scale. From music to media, film to fast food,
language to literature and sport, the American idea is spreading inexorably, not unlike the influence of empires that preceded it. The difference is that today’s technology flings culture to every corner of the globe with blinding speed. If it took two millennia for Plato’s “Republic” to reach North America, the latest hit from Justin Timberlake can be found in Greek (and Japanese) stores within days. Sometimes, US ideals get transmitted—such as individual rights, freedom of speech, and respect for women—and local cultures are enriched. At other times, materialism or worse becomes the message and local traditions get crushed. “The US has become the most powerful, significant world force in terms of cultural imperialism [and] expansion,” says Ian Ralston, American studies director at Liverpool John Moores University. “The areas that particularly spring to mind are Hollywood, popular music, and even literature.” But what some call “McDomination” has created a backlash in certain cultures. And it’s not clear whether fast food, Disney, or rock ‘n’ roll will change the world the way Homer or Shakespeare has.

Cricket or basketball?

Stick a pin in a map and there you’ll find an example of US influence. Hollywood rules the global movie market, with up to 90 percent of audiences in some European countries. Even in Africa, 2 of 3 films shown are American. Few countries have yet to be touched by McDonald’s and Coca-Cola. Starbucks recently opened up a new front in South America, and everyone’s got a Hard Rock Café T-shirt from somewhere exotic. West Indian sports enthusiasts increasingly watch basketball, not cricket. Baseball has long since taken root in Asia and Cuba. And Chinese young people are becoming more captivated by American football and basketball, some even daubing the names of NBA stars on their school sweatsuits. The NFL plans to roll out a Chinese version of its website this month. Rupert Murdoch’s satellites, with their heavy traffic of US audiovisual content, saturate the Asian subcontinent. American English is the language of choice for would-be pop stars in Europe, software programmers in India, and Internet surfers everywhere.

America’s preeminence is hardly surprising. Superpowers have throughout the ages sought to perpetuate their way of life: from the philosophy and mythology of the ancient Greeks to the law and language of the Romans; from the art and architecture of the Tang Dynasty and Renaissance Italy to the sports and systems of government of the British. “Most empires think their own point of view is the only correct point of view,” says Robert Young, an expert in postcolonial cultural theory at Oxford University. “It’s the certainty they get because of the power they have, and they expect to impose it on everyone else.”

Detractors of cultural imperialism argue, however, that cultural domination poses a totalitarian threat to diversity. In the American case, “McDomination” poses several dangers.

First, local industries are truly at risk of extinction because of US oligopolies, such as Hollywood. For instance in 2000, the European Union handed out 1 billion euros to subsidize Europe’s film industry. Even the relatively successful British movie industry has no control over distribution, which is almost entirely in the hands of the Hollywood majors.

Second, political cultures are being transformed by the personality-driven American model in countries as far-reaching as Japan and the Philippines.

Finally, US domination of technologies such as the Internet and satellite TV means that, increasingly, America monopolizes the view people get of the world. According to a recent report for the UN Conference on Trade and Development, 13 of the top 14 Internet firms are American. No. 14 is British. “You have to know English if you want to use the Internet,” says Andre Kaspi, a professor at the Sorbonne in Paris.

A main problem is that culture is no longer a protected species, but subject to the inexorable drive for free trade, says Joost Smiers, a political science professor at the Utrecht School of the Arts. This means that it is increasingly difficult for countries to protect their
own industries. France tries to do so with subsidies, while South Korea has tried quotas. Such “protectionist” tactics meet with considerable US muscle, Dr. Smiers says. “America’s aggressive cultural policy ... hinders national states from regulating their own cultural markets,” he says. “We should take culture out of the WTO.”

Another danger, detractors say, is the consolidation of the communications industry into a few conglomerates such as AOL-TimeWarner, Disney, and News Corporation, which means that the “infotainment” generated for global consumption nearly always comes from an Anglophone perspective. “You can’t go on with just three music companies organizing and distributing 85 percent of the music in the world,” says Smiers. “It’s against all principles of democracy. Every emotion, every feeling, every image can be copyrighted into the hands of a few owners.”

**American, with a twist**

A backlash is being felt in certain places. In Japan, locals have taken US ideas like hip-hop and fast food, and given them a Japanese twist, says Dominic al-Badri, editor of Kansai Time Out. In Germany, there is still strong resistance to aspects of US pop culture, though there is an appetite for its intellectual culture, says Gary Smith, director of the American Academy in Berlin. In France, resistance is growing partly because of frustrations over the Iraq war—but partly because Americanization is already so advanced in the country, says Mr. Kaspi.

He notes one interesting anecdotal sign of US influence—and the futility of resistance. France has repeatedly tried to mandate the use of French language in official capacities to check the advance of English. “But most of the time, the law is impossible to apply, because if you want to be understood around the world you have to speak English,” Kaspi says.

In the Philippines, even the best US ideals have caused complications. “The pervasive American influence has saddled us with two legacies,” notes respected local commentator Antonio C. Abaya. “American-style elections, which require the commitment of massive financial resources, which have to be recouped and rolled over many times, which is the main source of corruption in government; and American-style free press in which media feel free to attack and criticize everything that the government does or says, which adds to disunity and loss of confidence in government.”

Meanwhile, for all the strength of the US movie industry, sometimes a foreign film resonates more with a local audience than a Hollywood production—and outperforms it. For instance, Japan’s “Spirited Away” (2001) remains the top-grossing film in that country, surpassing global Hollywood hits like “Titanic.” In addition, British TV has influenced and served up competition to US shows, spawning such hits as “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?”, “The Weakest Link,” and “American Idol.”

**1,000 years from now**

So how much good does American culture bring to the world? And how long will it last? Ian Ralston cautions against sweeping dismissals of US pop culture. British television may be saturated with American sitcoms and movies, but while some are poor, others are quite good, he says. “British culture has always been enriched by foreign influences. In some ways American culture and media have added to that enrichment.” Others note that it is not all one-way traffic. America may feast largely on a diet of homegrown culture, but it imports modestly as well: soccer, international cuisine, Italian fashion, and, increasingly, British television.

As to the question of durability, some experts believe US domination of communication channels makes it inevitable that its messages will become far more entrenched than those of previous empires. “The main difference now in favor of American culture is the importance of technology—telephone, Internet, films, all that did not exist in ancient Greece or the Mongol empire,” Kaspi says. “American influence is growing, it’s so easy to get access to US culture; there are no barriers. “Disney is
known worldwide now,” he adds. “Plato is more and more unknown, even in Greece.”

But not everyone thinks American culture will stand the test of time. “It remains to be seen whether the Monkees and Bee Gees are as durable as Plato,” says Professor Young, with a dab of irony. “Let’s have another look in 4,000 years’ time.”

Reflect & Write

- How does this article immediately engage your interest as a reader with two particularly vivid opening paragraphs? Discuss the detailed names in the opening and how they relate both to globalization and to what Mark Rice-Oxley calls “McDomination”?
- How does the writer both construct an audience and create a unique persona through word choice? What word choices make this article targeted at a specific demographic?
- How does the article integrate quotations as research and as appeals to authority? What is the effect of this rhetorical strategy on you as a reader? What is the effect of this on the writing as a text?
- What structure of arrangement does this article employ? Return to Chapter 6 to understand and refresh on strategies of Arrangement.
- How does this article itemize its arguments logically? Map out the strategies of rebuttal, concession, and qualification.
- Notice the writer’s careful analysis of trends in globalization. Locate your own examples and conduct your own analysis of these instances.
- Write: Compose a narrative about visual rhetoric of globalization in the world around you. What instances of globalized culture strike you as having “staying power”?

This article appeared in the June 1, 2004, edition of the China Daily, an English-language newspaper published in China. Sometimes called the “Window to China,” the China Daily and its Website (chinadaily.com.cn) are dedicated to providing the world with information about China and its role in the international community.

KFC and McDonald’s: A Model of Blended Culture

CEOs of America Tricon Global Restaurants, the group that owns KFC and Pizza Hut, promotes Traditional Peking Chicken Roll at a KFC restaurant in Shanghai.

At present, there are more than 1,000 KFC restaurants in China, and they are increasing at annual rate of 200. A new KFC restaurant opens every other day. Western counterpart McDonald’s also continues to expand its premises.

Having arrived on the mainland in the early 1990s, McDonald’s has more than 600 restaurants in nearly 100 cities. Although there have been fewer golden arches in America, its native country, in the past two years, China’s McDonald’s have grown at a rate of 100 restaurants per year.

The total income of fast food restaurants in China now stands at 180 billion yuan RMB, and KFC and McDonald’s account for eight percent. What kind of magic has
brought them such success in China? How do they sustain growth rates? Their standardized business operation apart, the key is excellent intercultural management.

Western Fast Food Chinese Style

Alluring the captious customers is a hurdle every foreign fast food restaurant must clear. The novelty of these fast food restaurants initially won many customers. Although cheap and commonplace in America, at the time the Chinese government’s opening-up policy was newly enacted, fast food was exotically foreign enough to whet Chinese people’s curiosity about the outside world. Managers took advantage of this by charging the relatively high prices of 10 yuan for a hamburger, and 5 yuan for a Coke.

By the mid-1990s, there were 100 fast food restaurants around Beijing, the convenience, efficient service, comfortable environment, pleasing music and jovial atmosphere garnered fans. Office workers enjoyed grabbing a quick bite on their way to work, and friends enjoyed relaxing over a Coke. However, certain eagle-eyed managers noticed that some people never dropped in when they passed by. Some customers complained that fast food was not as good as their Chinese cuisine, and that it lacked variety. McDonald’s and KFC restaurants were almost empty during the traditional celebrations of Spring Festival and Mid-autumn Festival, while Chinese restaurants were heaved and bustled.

The reason? Cultural differences. Fast food restaurants like KFC and McDonald’s are distinct American brands. Differences between China and US politics, economics, social development and ideology became obstacles to international enterprises operating in China. Corporate culture could not be understood or accepted here, especially in the restaurant field, where culture plays a crucial role.

So the solution was to adapt: when in Rome, do as the Romans. Deep-rooted in the Chinese consciousness is the traditional culture of food and drink that features color, fragrance, flavor and variety. Fast food simply does not compare. Now that curiosity had faded, people returned to their own more extensive cuisine. Under such circumstances, the only way out was to combine the two different cultures. Fast food restaurants have been learning to absorb elements of Chinese culture.

Since the summer of 2001, KFC has introduced many Chinese items onto their menus. Preserved Sichuan Pickle and Shredded Pork Soup was one of the first. Consumers felt their traditions were being respected when they could taste Chinese cuisine at a foreign restaurant. The soup proved a success, and Mushroom Rice, Tomato and Egg Soup, and Traditional Peking Chicken Roll were soon added to the menu. KFC also serves packets of Happy French Fry Shakes that contain beef, orange and Uygur barbecue spices.

Not content to lag behind, McDonald’s Vegetable and Seafood Soup and Corn Soup were introduced, and the company worked to modify the restaurants’ design. During the 2004 Spring Festival, McDonald’s on Beijing’s Wangfujing Street attracted many people with a traditional Chinese look, decorating their interiors with paper-cuts of the Chinese character Fu (Happiness), magpies and twin fishes, all auspicious symbols.

Inter-cultural Management Mode

KFC and McDonald’s have absorbed the Chinese cultural elements of showing respect, recognition, understanding, assimilation and amalgamation, while maintaining the substance of the Western culture of efficiency, freedom, democracy, equality and humanity. This inter-cultural management mode, with American business culture at the core, supplemented by Chinese traditional culture, provides reference for international enterprises which need to adjust, enrich and reconstruct their corporate culture to enhance local market flexibility.

There are, however, certain conditions essential to intercultural management mode. On the objective side, there must be similarities in environment in order for the two cultures to connect and synchronize. KFC and McDonald’s embody an accommodation of the
The fast tempo of modern life: a product of development and a market economy. Their resultant speed and efficiency are only meaningful in countries with a market economy. China’s rapid economic development offered the environmental conditions corresponding to fast food culture. Services offered by fast food chains express their full respect for freedom, an American value, as well as the psychological statement of Chinese open-mindedness that yearns to understand and experience the Western lifestyle. Two cultures proactively crashed, connected, and assimilated. KFC and McDonald’s use the localization strategy to re-express American business culture, with profound traditional Chinese cultural emblems, catering to local customs on the basis of standardized management.

Reflect & Write

- Notice the heavy reliance on logos in this article. What might be the reason for using so many statistics, facts, and dates in presenting this argument about the integration of McDonald’s into Chinese culture?
- Summarize the argument of this essay. What side of the globalization debate is represented here?
- Who is the audience for this essay? What details and descriptions suggest this to you? What aspects of the writing would need to change in order to address a different audience?
- Write: Copy down the menu of a fast food restaurant in your college town, one that is very different from the food in your home town. How do menus create a visual representation of the cultural community?

The two pieces that follow appeared in Rutgers University’s newspaper, the Daily Targum, in October 2002. The Targum ran the first piece, written by 2001 Rutgers graduate Joseph Davicsin, in its October 16th edition; “Globalization or McDonaldization?” appeared in response the following day. Its author, Jeremy Sklarsky, was a first-year student at Rutgers at the time.

The Daily Targum: Two Opinions on McDonaldization

Corporations Leave Small Business Behind
Joseph Davicsin

Three months ago, a coffee shop opened on Church Street—where the used CD store “Tunes” was—called Basic Elements. This shop offered homemade beverages and food at prices comparable to similar chain stores. I say “offered” because, as of recently, the place has flown the coop like so many boiler room scams. I later saw the proprietors at Starbucks doing espresso shots and mumbling Wicca chants

Globalization or McDonaldization?
Jeremy Sklarsky

I am writing in response to Joseph Davicsin’s commentary about international corporations conquering the world and eliminating “mom and pop” establishments. Davicsin’s comments exemplify some of the most commonly held misperceptions about globalization and corporations.

Globalization is not an enemy. It is an international, socioeconomic-political system. Due to advances in information technology, the rise
at the Cranium board game. Basic Elements
deserved a hell of a lot more than it was
given—a crappy side street with little visibility,
despite being right near the Court Tavern
(which I know for a fact that you frequent
because I can never get a square foot of space to
stand on when I’m in there), irregular hours—
which is understandable in a quality place run
by two people (you can’t expect Walmart)—and
most of all, our apathy.

Our apathy is linked largely to globalization,
which is trying to unite the planet in blanket
sameness so that you can experience a thrill at
the notion of shopping at a Gap in Prague and
eating at a McDonalds in India. Now, something
in your mind should tell you there’s something
wrong with going to a McDonalds in India. The
idea of going abroad is to experience new things
outside your microcosm. But alas, the success of
these businesses in pandering their crack all over
the world has gotten people comfortable with
this sameness. We stick to the chains because
they’re familiar, convenient and plowed into our
faces on a regular basis. When you get that taste
of mocha, you’re hooked and nothing else seems
to matter.

Of course, if it were simply laziness and
chemical brainwashing causing the underdogs to
fail, it would be easier to rectify, but life is never
that simple. There’s also the notion of capital to
think of. Corporations like Starbucks have
enough money to keep their prices relatively the
same no matter where you go, so there’s not only
uniformed coverage, but also uniformed prices.
The same cannot be said of the localized stores
because they have less coverage and really need
the extra money to stay alive, forcing them to in-
crease their prices to compete. This delegates
them to the “fine arts” category in which only the
wealthy can indulge, resulting in an even split be-
tween cheap and prevalent and expensive and ex-
clusive, with the midways—i.e. the moderately
priced Basic Elements—getting squished in the
ever-shrinking gap. Our culture becomes the
following: Either you go to McSystem for victuals
or spend exorbitant amounts of cash on the
trendier French fry.

Then, of course, there’s the small matter of
demand, and that’s when convenience takes prece-
do...


dence. Anyone who still reads out there will have little hope of finding a Recto & Verso when the majority only cares about getting textbooks and spirit clothing. The alternative is Barnes and Noble. If you want a real alternative you have to walk the world over to Pyramid Books in Highland Park, which, judging by the abundance of romance novels infesting their shelves, leads me to believe that they too are trying desperately to stay afloat.

Countless fables tell of local pizza places rejecting the system, but are they really? Or are they just biding their time before Burger King offers pizza for breakfast? They too seem to be getting increasingly gimmicky (check out King’s Pizza and the ultimate tax write-off that is their widescreen TV) and streamlined (toppings ranging from tortellini to ecstasy). There are still a few locales, like Noodle Gourmet, that do solid business on their own two legs, but it’s not enough. What we need to do is alternate our habits a little. Back to coffee—like Café 52? I know you do because I see you bastards flood it every Monday night for the free music, then try West End on alternate nights. Spread out! Balance the pros and cons of each place and try to find a niche in one when the other doesn’t meet your needs. But above all, give newer places your undivided attention because they may not be around long enough without you. Show the smaller places that there’s a need for them and that quality need not mean pricey. And don’t let companies know where you’re going, lest they turn that into a trend as well. Be as random as a chaos pendulum.

Reflect & Write

Map out the points of each argument. How does each writer use concrete examples and structure his perspective through carefully chosen rhetorical appeals?

Davicsin emphasizes the necessity of what he calls “visibility” and small establishments. How does his language create a favorable image for local

no two countries with a McDonald’s has gone to war with each other since McDonald’s arrived in their countries. In Friedman’s own words, people in countries that have developed an economy at the level needed for McDonald’s to be successful would rather “wait in line for burgers instead of in line for gas masks.”

Davicsin refers to corporations as though they are some supernatural enemy imposed upon us by some external forces. Where did they get all of their money? And why are they so successful? A chain like McDonald’s or Starbucks Coffee has had so much success for one simple reason: They are just better than the “corner shop.” But chances are, if a local store can make a lower-priced product of higher quality, it will thrive. Take another corporation—Pizza Hut. Pizza Hut just isn’t that good. Result? There are hundreds of individually owned pizza parlors around America. We shouldn’t, however, support every local pizza place just for the sake of fighting corporations—that’s just silly.

I’m not suggesting globalization or corporations are perfect—they are far from it. Many Third World countries would probably be better off if the World Bank or IMF behaved better. And corporations could probably afford to pollute a little less and pay their workers a little bit more. But that’s really not the issue. The point is that globalization is not a choice. The real question is how everyone is going to act in order to benefit from its existence. If local coffee shops wish to thrive in the globalization system, they’d better be damned good, otherwise Starbucks will run them out of business—and for good reason. Consumers deserve to consume good products. If the only reason to go to a local burger joint is to prevent the domination of McDonald’s, then I’ll have another Big Mac.
stores in contrast to his disparagement of “blanket sameness” across the globe?

- How does Sklarsky structure his rebuttal? What points does he choose to refute and do you follow the logic of his conclusion? Which piece is more persuasive to you, and why?

- Write: Draft a response to both pieces, synthesizing and advancing beyond the debate between Joseph Davicsin and Jeremy Sklarsky. Be certain to quote passages from both in your own article. Where might you publish your composition?

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**Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, George Ritzer has published extensively but is best known for his “McDonaldization thesis.” He has published numerous books, including The McDonaldization of Society (1993) and The Globalization of Nothing (2004). This interview was conducted by One-Off Productions in February 1997.**

**Interview with George Ritzer**

**One-Off Productions**

You have described the McDonaldised society as a system of “iron cages” in which all institutions come to be dominated by the same principle. So what sort of world would you like us to be living in?

Well, obviously (laughter) . . . a far less caged one. I mean the fundamental problem with McDonaldised systems is that it's other people in the system structuring our lives for us, rather than us structuring our lives for ourselves. I mean, that’s really what McDonald's is all about. You don’t want a creative person clerk at the counter—that's why they are scripted. You don’t want a creative hamburger cook—you want somebody who simply follows routines or follows scripts. So you take all creativity out of all activities and turn them into a series of routinised kinds of procedures that are imposed by some external force. So that’s the reason why it is dehumanising. Humanity is essentially creative and if you develop these systems that are constraining and controlling people they can’t be creative, they can’t be human. The idea is to turn humans into human robots. The next logical step is to replace human robots with mechanical robots. And I think we will see McDonaldised systems where it is economically feasible and technologically possible to replace human robots with non-human robots. I’d like to see a society in which people are freed to be creative, rather than having their creativity constrained or eliminated.

To what extent do you think McDonald’s threats of lawsuits and censorship are an attempt to control their public image?

Well, I think they are certainly not the first or alone in trying to control the public image that they have, and of course their public image has been very important
to them. I suppose it could be related to the control idea, you are accustomed to controlling everything else so why not try to control that public image.

How important is McDonald’s image?

Well, the fact is of course that they are producing what everybody else produces—there is very little to distinguish the McDonald’s hamburger from anybody else’s hamburger, except maybe the special sauce or something like that. Basically they have to manufacture a sense of difference and a lot of that manufacture has to do with the fun and the colours, the clowns and the toys, and the squeaky clean image.

How much duplicity do you think there is going on here in terms of the image McDonald’s presents?

I think there is a duplicitousness about McDonald’s in the sense that it wants to portray an image of children and happy employees and one big joyous happy family and everyone having a good time. I think that American corporations in various ways try to create a duplicitous image, a false image. I mean that’s what, in a sense, successful capitalism is about it’s “WE ARE THE WORLD” and a number of major companies have tried to do essentially the same thing.

You say very rightly that it’s not just McDonald’s—but why do you think that you, and Helen and Dave, and other people keep choosing McDonald’s as the one to pick on?

They are the icon and McDonald’s is chosen by critics because it stands for a variety of things. I mean, from my point of view, it stands for efficiency and predictability. For other people it stands for America and America’s influence throughout the world, so it gets picked up as a positive model. Although all of these things are virtues, the problem is that they are taken to such extraordinary lengths by McDonald’s that they end up producing all kinds of irrational consequences so that the irrationalities outweigh the rationalities.

Do you go as far as to say that McDonald’s represents capitalism?

Well it's a funny kind of capitalism that McDonald’s represents because after all capitalism—American capitalism—for generations was the symbol of the huge smoke-stack industry, steel and automobiles . . . but it is not the automobile industry that represents America around the world now it is McDonald’s and Disney and Coca Cola.

Do you think going into McDonald’s, particularly in other countries, is more like entering the Western Dream than just buying a product?

It’s not just that you are buying a product—you are buying into a system. In the 1940s there was a big flap in France over what was called a Coca Colonisation. The French were very upset about the coming of Coca Cola to France. They felt
it threatened the French wine industry, it threatened the French way of life. But that was just the influx of an American product—what we have here is the influx of an American way of life, which is to trivialise eating, to make it something that is fast, make it something that's to get done and over with.

But it's striking to me that the last time I was in Paris the Parisians appeared to have embraced this kind of fast food phenomenon. You have developments of fast food croissanteries where this model French way of life—the croissanterie—has been reduced to fast food. French bread is more and more treated on a fast basis rather than lots of local bakeries baking their own distinctive kind, so if the French succumb to this in the realm of food then it strikes me that there is little that is safe from the expansion of this process.

The significance here is not buying the big Mac, it's buying the system, buying the whole package and being part of America, that's the key.

Do you think this process is ever going to be reversed?

Well the caged imagery suggests that there is an inevitability to it. Clearly, all the trends are in the direction of the greater spread of McDonald's or greater spread of the process of McDonaldisation. And there is certainly plenty of room for it to expand into other cultures, and there are still many cultures which are completely or relatively completely unaffected.

But there are also always counter-reactions, there are also always all sorts of things that are coming up from the people that represent innovations and creations. I mean you are not going to get innovations and creations from McDonaldised systems. Those innovations and creations—those non-McDonaldised ways of doing things—are going to well up from the people. But what makes me most pessimistic is that anything that's any good, anything not successful, some entrepreneur or organisation is going to come along and make great to rationalise it, make great to McDonaldise it, trivialise it, they are going to turn it into a system—a cash counter—and generate money. There is nothing that seems to be immune to this process, no aspect of life that seems to be immune to it. It's difficult to think of things that can avoid the process.

Does it mean that it is appealing to some fundamental call of human nature?

Well, sociologists don't believe in human nature. You never say human nature to a sociologist because if it was human nature that really mattered, then sociologists would be out of business. I think that there are a variety of things that people need at some level, like some degree of efficiency in their lives and some degree of predictability. What McDonald's has done is pick up on those and transform them into a system. I don't think people need the level of efficiency that McDonald's provides for them or want that level of efficiency . . . it's not something that is innate.

Another sort of pessimistic aspect to this is that you have children born into this McDonaldised world, you have people being trained, being lured into the system by the commercials and the toys and the clowns and the bright lights.
They are trained that this is the way you eat, this is the way a hamburger should taste, this is how a French fry should taste, salty-sweet. These are the standards and so you if try to say to people of this generation “well look, this is not really how a hamburger should be, here is a home cooked hamburger” they will likely turn their nose up and say “well, that doesn’t taste like. . .”

There are really, it seems to me, only two groups that historically have been critics of the process of McDonaldisation. They are the people who were born before the process and knew a different way of life and then were stunned by the development of McDonaldisation, or people from non-McDonaldised cultures who see this influx and are able to react. But once that generation that was born before McDonaldisation dies off, and once all these other cultures are McDonaldised, well where is the opposition going to come from . . . from children who have been trained by McDonald's or gone to McDonald's schools and done everything that they had to do from one MCDONALD'S SYSTEM AFTER ANOTHER?

Obviously McDonalds and related corporations are spending billions of dollars to socialise children into this system so that this becomes their standard.

One of the basic premises of McDonald's is to focus on quantity, low price (or what appears to be low price) and large quantities of things and inevitably what suffers when you emphasise quantity is quality so they are serving what is at best mediocre food.

But why do you think that Dave and Helen are able to criticise the process?

You see I don't think that England is as McDonaldised as the U.S.A. In Europe you have some degree of McDonaldisation but nothing to the degree that this process has proceeded in the U.S. So there would be examples of people in other cultures who, because of the nature of that culture and the large number of non-McDonaldised aspects of that culture, would be sensitised to it. I think fewer and fewer Americans are sensitised to it, question it. I mean they don't know anything else, you are going to go and eat you go to fast food restaurant and eat. You mentioned the French cuisine and I think one of the trends in the future of McDonaldisation is the McDonaldisation of higher-up restaurants, of haute cuisine. You already see sort of middle range restaurants and restaurant chains in the U.S. now. Red Lobster or a chain like that is selling fairly upscale food but you now see signs that some elegant restaurants are trying to move in the direction of developing chains. So the challenge is going to be how do you McDonaldise a system by retaining quality because all McDonaldised systems have sacrificed quality. It's the process that's the problem here.

Do you think that the issue should be broadened to include more than just the specific case of McDonald's?

Yeah, see for me it's that they've set in motion something which is so much bigger than they are, that this process is so much broader than what they are. In fact, McDonald's could disappear tomorrow, or could go out of business tomorrow and this process would continue on. You might have to give it a
different name but the process would continue, I mean the process has a history long before McDonald’s. In Weber’s theory of rationalisation and in Weber’s model was the bureaucracy, the German bureaucracy, and we’re living in an extension, a massive extension of that process with a new model in the fast food restaurant. The fast food restaurant, or McDonald’s could disappear but that process will be transformed into some new form.

Is there a 1984/Brave New World kind of element to this?

The Brave New World/1984 image is one of centralised control. What McDonaldisation means for me is kinds of microsystems of control or whole systems of microsystems of control. Actually Michel Foucault, the French poststructural theorist, talked about these micropolitics of control, micromechanisms of control and I think that what’s being set in place here is not an iron cage, but innumerable mini iron cages and there are so many of them and they’re so widely spaced throughout society that the iron cages envisioned here is one where you simply have your choice of which cage to enter but there’s nothing but cages to go to.

What effects does a McDonaldised society have its people?

I think that McDonald’s has a profound effect on the way people do a lot of things I mean it leads people to want everything fast, to have, you know, a limited attention span so that kind of thing spills over onto, let’s say, television viewing or newspaper reading, and so you have a short attention span, you want everything fast, so you don’t have patience to read the New York Times and so you read McPaper, you read USA Today. You don’t have patience to watch a lengthy newscast on a particular issue so you watch CNN News and their little news McNugget kinds of things so it creates a kind of mindset which seeks the same kind of thing in one setting after another. I see it in education where you have, in a sense, a generation of students who’ve been raised in a McDonaldised society, they want things fast, they want idealic nuggets from Professors, they don’t want sort of slow build up of ideas, you gotta keep them amused, you gotta come in with the Ronald McDonald costume and quip a series of brilliant theoretical points or else they’re going to turn you off. It’s quite amazing what they’ve done, what they’ve undertaken here.

What do you think of what Helen and Dave are doing?

I think that clearly, from very small beginnings, they’ve created a worldwide movement here, worldwide attention, and have laid the basis for a real potential threat to McDonald’s and the process of McDonaldisation. We talked about this earlier, the possibility of bringing together these disparate groups and I think that McDonald’s has got to devote, I mean if they want to prevent this from occurring, they’ve got to devote some attention to how to diffuse and strategically keep apart these oppositional forces that seem likely to come together, to focus on it.
as a negative force. I mean if there really comes to be a time where McDonald’s is viewed as this evil force in the world by a significant number of people, then that becomes a real threat to the organisation. But again I want to point out that even if McDonald’s disappeared tomorrow, even if they closed their doors because of the McLibel trial the process would continue apace.

15 Do you eat at McDonald’s?

Only when I’m in the iron cage and it’s the only alternative. I mean, you do find yourself in the United States in a situation especially when you’re on the highways now where there is no place to go other than a fast food restaurant. One of the big developments on American highways is that virtually all of the rest stops have been taken over by the fast food chains and so if you’re driving on the highway and you wanna eat you’re gonna eat in a fast food restaurant.

There is no alternative unless you get off the highway and then all of the restaurants that are immediately off the highway are going to be fast food restaurants too, so you’ve got to search quite a bit to avoid eating in a fast food restaurant. So occasionally you just find yourself now in the States where that’s your only alternative and of course again that’s the ultimate iron cage. I mean, when the whole society’s like that, where you just cannot find any kind of alternative, you just throw up your hands and say “ok, I’m gonna eat this way, I’m gonna do things this way”.

Reflect & Write

- How does George Ritzer introduce quite an innovative angle into the debate over McDonald’s with his opening points on “dehumanizing” robot conditions? Does he make this argument successfully?
- Ritzer’s focus on McDonald’s “public image” takes into account the toys, the Website, and the commercials. What do you learn about the power of visual rhetoric from this interview?
- What argument is Ritzer making about historical shifts? How different is the “automobile industry that represent[ed] America around the world” compared to “McDonald’s and Disney and Coca Cola”? What’s at stake in terms of cultural values?
- When Ritzer brings in foundation texts—such as Weber’s model and Foucault—what happens to the depth of his argument? How do such references transform his ethos as a writer?
- How does Ritzer make use of the cage image in this piece? How does he apply his focus on McDonald’s to the news and society more broadly? Do you find these applications effective?
- Write: Compose your assessment of the conclusion. What other questions would you like to ask this author?
COLLABORATIVE CHALLENGE

Gather with two or three classmates at a shared computer space. Visit the Comprehensive Activist Website, McSpotlight available through the Envision Website (http://www.mcspotlight.org/mcfun/). Conduct a rhetorical analysis of the online features. Spend some time at the Special Page for Family Fun, Subverted Billboards, and Animation. Watch the 30-second Quicktime ad for Peter Heller’s Jungleburger, a documentary that focuses on the Costa Rican cattle raising and meat export business and investigates how the fast food industry affects third world countries. Then compare Peter Heller’s Jungle burger to the McDonald’s commercial found at http://www.mcdonalds.com/usa/fun/tv.html. What argument is each text making? How is the image of McDonald’s constructed in each one? As a group, write a review of each one, then storyboard your own film in response to these two texts.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE ISSUE

1. What type of writing or persuasion do you find most compelling? Mark Rice-Oxley’s researched article? The competing Daily Targum pieces? The interview with George Ritzer? How do the visual and written texts both contribute positions on the issue of McDonald’s in the world theater?

2. Compare the different texts in this unit. What is the persona, audience, stance, and argument of each one? What logical appeals are used to construct an argument? (See Chapter 2 to refresh your understanding of logical appeals.) How does each text use strategies of visual persuasion, whether through embedding images as evidence in the text or through evoking visual aspects of culture? When you are done discussing each text, pick two of the articles that seem most rich to you and write a rhetorical analysis comparing them.

3. Compose an opinion essay or blog in response to one of the conversations about McDonald’s you have encountered here. Send your short article to the campus newspaper or post it on a blog site.

4. Look at Mark Rice-Oxley’s article and analyze the visual descriptions of culture in its opening paragraph. How do visual details construct an argument about the way in which culture has changed as a result of globalization? How does this visual rhetoric narrative establish the premise of the argument? What details are particularly American forms of visual culture and which seem to have become more international? Now compose your own visual rhetoric narrative about the elements of contemporary culture that have changed your town or community.

5. In what ways are sports a means of transnational communication and connection? Do you agree with Rice-Oxley’s implied argument that the infiltration of American sports, such as baseball, football, and basketball indicates America’s imposition of power on other countries? Compose an argument in response. Include images from transnational sports intersections, such as a still shot from the Visa Check Card commercial showcasing Yao Ming in an American Chinatown with Yogi Berra, or the Nike ad depicting LeBron James in China.