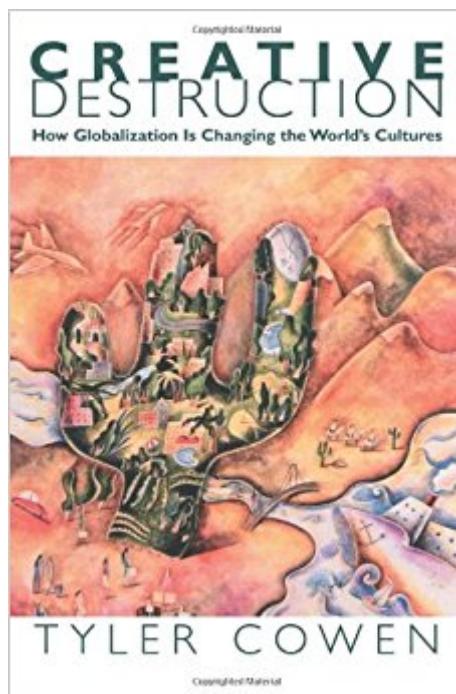


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Creative Destruction: How Globalization Is Changing The World's Cultures



Synopsis

A Frenchman rents a Hollywood movie. A Thai schoolgirl mimics Madonna. Saddam Hussein chooses Frank Sinatra's "My Way" as the theme song for his fifty-fourth birthday. It is a commonplace that globalization is subverting local culture. But is it helping as much as it hurts? In this strikingly original treatment of a fiercely debated issue, Tyler Cowen makes a bold new case for a more sympathetic understanding of cross-cultural trade. Creative Destruction brings not stale suppositions but an economist's eye to bear on an age-old question: Are market exchange and aesthetic quality friends or foes? On the whole, argues Cowen in clear and vigorous prose, they are friends. Cultural "destruction" breeds not artistic demise but diversity. Through an array of colorful examples from the areas where globalization's critics have been most vocal, Cowen asks what happens when cultures collide through trade, whether technology destroys native arts, why (and whether) Hollywood movies rule the world, whether "globalized" culture is dumbing down societies everywhere, and if national cultures matter at all. Scrutinizing such manifestations of "indigenous" culture as the steel band ensembles of Trinidad, Indian handweaving, and music from Zaire, Cowen finds that they are more vibrant than ever--thanks largely to cross-cultural trade. For all the pressures that market forces exert on individual cultures, diversity typically increases within society, even when cultures become more like each other. Trade enhances the range of individual choice, yielding forms of expression within cultures that flower as never before. While some see cultural decline as a half-empty glass, Cowen sees it as a glass half-full with the stirrings of cultural brilliance. Not all readers will agree, but all will want a say in the debate this exceptional book will stir.

Book Information

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: Princeton University Press; 48673rd edition (March 21, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0691117837

ISBN-13: 978-0691117836

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.6 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (10 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #674,407 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #104 inÂ Books > Business & Money > Economics > Comparative #269 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Business & Finance >

Customer Reviews

If you're at all interested in this book, ignore Hoan Chau's review. How does Cowen know Mexicans enjoy the choices available at Wal-Mart? Simple, they shop there and keep it in business. You don't have to like Wal-Mart (I sure don't) to recognize that it doesn't coerce anyone into its store. In an impoverished country like Mexico, it brings in more goods at lower prices than were previously available, thus improving people's standard of living. On creativity: Cowen isn't writing a philosophical treatise on creativity, so if he ignores the "external influences" on it, that's not a just criticism. But it's surprising that someone could read this book and miss the point: Cowen is arguing that the creativity of others is an external influence on an individual's creativity, so the value of global exchange is that our creativity is stimulated by contact with other country's cultural goods. Consider the U.S. without Chinese or Mexican food (or, in my case, the nightmare of not having Thai food). Consider the U.S. without the influence of African music. No spirituals, no jazz or blues, no "Graceland" by Paul Simon. Consider how popular Jackie Chan is, not to mention the more respectable Chinese films such as "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." If you're more highbrow, consider the absence of Mozart or Paganini. Imagine no access to Sun Tzu's "The Art of War" or the Tao Te Ching, or the Bodhisattva. In short, Cowen's point is that the global exchange of cultural goods enriches our lives. Efforts to restrict globalization will restrict the flow of these goods, impoverishing us all in ways that are hard to measure in dollar terms, but are easily understood in terms of cultural vivacity and creativity.

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