GLOBALIZATION AND IMPERIALISM

Chalmers Johnson's book, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (Metropolitan Books, 2004), is a comprehensive and profound deconstruction of U.S. imperialism. He traces the roots of empire to the Spanish-American War of 1898 and gives primary attention to the growing militarization of U.S. culture, government, and foreign policy. Of interest here is his chapter on economic globalization. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. maintained global hegemony primarily through its economic empire. George W. Bush has chosen rather to rule the world primarily through absolute military superiority.

Proponents of globalization claim to be following economic principles that are both inevitable and beneficial for all countries, including Third World countries, while in fact it enables the rich countries to continue exploiting and marginalizing the poor countries. "There is no known case in which globalization has led to prosperity in any Third World country, and none of the world's twenty-four reasonably developed capitalist nations, regardless of their ideological explanations, got where they are by following any of the prescriptions contained in globalization doctrine." (262) The 130 poor countries have been denied the very means by which the rich countries have reached relatively stable prosperity. They have been forced into the dependent mold of high indebtedness followed by structural adjustments (removal of tariffs, privatization of public services, removal of capital controls, ending of national priorities) imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which are "surrogates for the U.S. Treasury."

The World Trade Organization was created in 1995 "to manage the growing trade rivalry among the leading industrial countries ... and to ensure that the Third World was prevented from using trade as a legitimate instrument for its industrialization, thereby threatening the neoliberal global economic structure." (269) Perhaps the most blatant abuse has been the prohibition of tariffs and subsidies to benefit Third World agriculture, even as the U.S. and the European Union continue to subsidize their own agricultural products, undercutting local production and threatening the livelihood of millions of small farmers all around the world. "The level of overall subsidization of agriculture in Western countries rose from $182 billion in 1995, when the WTO was born, to $280 billion in 1997, and $362 billion in 1998. By 2002, European Union subsidies to agriculture were six times the total amount of foreign aid that all rich countries gave to the poor." (270)

Another heinous strategy of the rich countries and WTO has been to prevent Third World countries from using foreign technology through the Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement, thus guaranteeing monopoly profits for First World corporations and deepening poverty for the Third World. Most painful has been the struggle for concessions on urgently needed generic drugs for the treatment of HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and other tropical diseases—opposed primarily by the U.S. government.

1. How does this analysis compare with popular views of the global role of the U.S.?
2. What is your own understanding of the recent and current role of the U.S.?