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Topic Essay 3: Kinzer- “Overthrow” Review and Reflection

When describing history, there are many events and/or processes that have given it its structure over time. Among the most important concepts that have indeed shaped today’s history is globalization. Globalization refers to the idea of a closer world, both in terms of politics (i.e. foreign affairs) and economics. As the world isn’t always connected as it was in recent history, it took for the advent of empire building and progression of technology to establish long-distance connections between faraway lands. Especially regarding the former, an empire would not only lead to globalization but also advocate it. Stephen Kinzer’s “Overthrow,” discusses how the U.S. took up an imperialistic role that essentially granted them new territories via annexation and/or foreign government interventions. The ultimate purpose of doing such would be for the growth of the U.S. economy; whether in harvesting crops or obtaining resources for sea travel.

Prior to reading “Overthrow,” my understanding of globalization was basically a definition describing the engagement of several countries across the world in a variety of affairs. As already pointed out, some of those affairs include political and economic ones. To further elaborate, globalization describes the relation of close, intertwined networks of nations under a common system. This common system would undermine the ideal of having individual cultures in favor of creating a world-wide integrated environment necessary for the spread and growth of overseas and foreign economic practices and vice versa (such as the European Union and formerly, the Soviet Union—an extreme case of globalization over a widespread area).

Upon reading “Overthrow,” my prior understanding of globalization was correct and supported by Kinzer’s introduction. The introduction basically summarized and told of how the U.S. has had a history with toppling foreign governments, staging coups, and ordering regime changes—all for the guaranteed protection of U.S. interests in those regions. Furthermore, the U.S. would engage in these actions to spread their idealisms to “lesser peoples” and claimed that Manifest Destiny was their duty to uphold in occupying lands beyond the continental states. Following from these details, I can definitely say that the introduction relates to globalization. For one thing, the intention that the U.S. has had in protecting their interests abroad seems to say that they promote a sphere of influence that is built on business concerning the U.S. in Central America (while not necessarily looking out for businesses that were already operating indigenously in those countries). And second, by the U.S. intending to spread their customs abroad, another sense of globalization (in this case, the importance of displacing foreign cultures with a westernized one) is experienced. In other words, since the U.S. was extending its focus on their culture outside their boundaries, a global effort was realized (first in neighboring Central America and second, in Asia via sea travel and “island hopping”).

The section of “Overthrow” that I have read and analyzed is the first part which discussed the U.S. foray into imperialism. To summarize, Kinzer opens up the section with the first major overthrow of a foreign government at the hands of the U.S., Hawaii (which was taken down by little more than a few diplomats sent by the government). Next, Kinzer explains how the U.S. involved itself with the Spanish-American War with the intention of taking Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, the latter which had not been well known to the government. Finally, the section ends off after explaining the U.S. intervention in Central America; specifically, in

Nicaragua and Honduras where the U.S. overthrew their leaders for not supporting and recognizing U.S. entitlement to buy property for crops and businesses.

From these scenarios, the connections to globalization are evident. With Hawaii, the U.S. sought to annex it because of tariffs that hindered its profitability from exports; by bringing the island to the union, the U.S. expanded its territory, a result of globalization. With acquiring Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, the U.S. engaged in further globalization practices by maintaining their stance of needing to keep those islands for strategic purposes. Namely, as the U.S. was growing, so did its need to travel across the world to access European and Asian markets; as a result, it was crucial that the U.S. would obtain overseas ports to refuel ships. Cuba and Puerto Rico helped in that they provided access to the Caribbean and the Philippines to Asia. Lastly, U.S. efforts in taking down prosperous regimes in Nicaragua and Honduras led to globalization in its own right. To elaborate, Kinzer points that before U.S. intervention, these regimes (which originated from revolutions, akin to the American Revolution) had set these countries to a path that would lead to peace and prosperity via economic, political, social, and national reforms. When the U.S. overthrew these regimes to protect their interests, Nicaragua and Honduras suffered from poor leaders that led to instability and uprisings that ultimately made these countries go backward, all for the sake of making the region more connected to the U.S. instead of letting them develop in their own natural ways.

Overall, Stephen Kinzer's "Overthrow" sheds light on a topic that is not without by association: globalization. Just by reading part one, the book establishes how the U.S. would achieve the goal of globalizing by overthrowing regimes via imperialism. Parts two and three

would build on that by showing how the U.S. would later spread its influence on countries as part of the Cold War and Post-Cold War era. In my opinion, this book has a vital role in explaining what globalization means and how it is achieved; in essence, it is a process that comes off by force from powerful nations (hence the name of the book). Even though the book focuses on how the U.S. imposed globalization through overthrowing foreign governments, we cannot ignore how European and Japanese empires did the same, if not similar. Therefore, as a result of this, the world today and many of its second and third world countries are involved in an ever-changing global society, interconnected by both economic and political means.