

Steve Goddard's History Wire

Where the Past Comes Alive

March 16, 2006

Book Alert / Global Capitalism -- Its Fall and Rise in the Twentieth Century

Global Capitalism -- Its Fall and Rise in the Twentieth Century by Jeffrey A. Frieden, Norton '06, \$29.95, 556 pages, ISBN #0-393-05808-5. Index, references (bibliography), source notes. Unillustrated.

No, Virginia, Tom Friedman didn't invent globalism. In fact, as Harvard Prof. Jeffrey A. Frieden tells us in a new book, international trade and finance was well-developed and thriving even before the dawn of the 20th century. But then came Sarajevo, the catalyst that drove nations apart during World War I, whose outcome sowed the seeds for World War II a generation later. In between, the Great Depression caused fearful protectionism, again stifling economic relations between nations. The Cold War didn't do much to help that, so its end around 1990 made possible

for the first time in a century the kind of trade and financial relations that had once been the norm.

Why do we need to know that?, you ask. Isn't globalism long ago a mere historical footnote? The point of Frieden's book is to show how difficult it is to sustain desired globalism, warning us that currency upheaval, foreign policy, and military adventurism are factors which, if mishandled, can easily upset the equipoise necessary for global prosperity. So rather than looking at globalism as a recent phenomenon, it is helpful to realize that it once flourished long ago and that a combination of these factors drove it underground for nearly a century.

Frieden's writing is exceptionally accessible to the intelligent layperson. Particularly interesting is his recounting of how the maintenance of the gold standard and such technological breakthroughs as railroads, telephone, telegraph and steamships first promoted global communication and decreased transportation costs, essential ingredients in sustaining international trade.

Posted by Steve | [Permalink](#)

TrackBack

TrackBack URL for this entry:

<http://www.typepad.com/t/trackback/446890>

9