

10-1-2004

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Recommended Citation

UB Law Forum (2004) "Westbrook's Book Focuses on Making Sense of Globalization," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 17 : No. 1 , Article 38.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol17/iss1/38

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Faculty Books

Westbrook's book focuses on making sense of globalization

Argues that 'markets' are now the dominant form of governance; globalization limits the rise of aggressive, militarized nationalism

Globalization is trumpeted by some and demonized by others as a pathway to either unprecedented global prosperity or increased poverty, among other benefits and ills. A new book by a University at Buffalo law professor attempts to make sense of the debate and forge a new era of understanding by examining the powerful cultural and political implications of a force that is transforming the way we live and view the world.

In *City of Gold: An Apology for Global Capitalism in a Time of Discontent*, David A. Westbrook, associate professor of law in the UB Law School, argues that "markets not nations" have become the dominant form of global governance. And while the emergence of globalization has created its own set of problems —

including the fact that people and governments have yet to fully grasp what it means to live in a "globalized" world — Westbrook says globalization has achieved its primary goal: It has successfully stunted the emergence of aggressive, militarized nationalism, as was practiced by Germany, France, Great Britain and the United States prior to World War II.

In Westbrook's view, globalization is not a recent phenomenon, as is commonly described, but rather is more than 50 years old, set in motion by political decisions made in the aftermath of World War II. "Globalization was adopted for essentially political reasons because the nation-state — as exemplified most perfectly by Hitler's Germany — had become simply too dangerous," he explains.

"Globalization limits the creation of this type of power by fragmenting institutions' and people's ways of looking at the world," he adds. "If we have a fragmented and overlapping set of affiliations, we can't — as we did prior to World War II — create a world in

which large militaries, large economies and large politically mobilized populations all meet at the Rhine."

According to Westbrook, when economies are radically dependent on events in other parts of the world, and when people have contacts across political and geographic lines — through travel, marriage, work, etc. — it becomes difficult to build the militarized nation-states that gave rise to World War II.

"Prevention of future wars required suppression of nationalism," Westbrook writes in *City of Gold*. "The vehicle for such suppression was economic integration.

"So we integrated Europe and globalized much of the world," he explains. "As a result, marketplace activity should be seen not as social relations that are opposed or ancillary to politics, but as political activities in their own right. Much of our politics today is done through markets."

The concepts of "nation building" proposed for Kosovo and Iraq are modern examples of how the process

of globalization restricts the growth of militarized nation states, Westbrook points out.

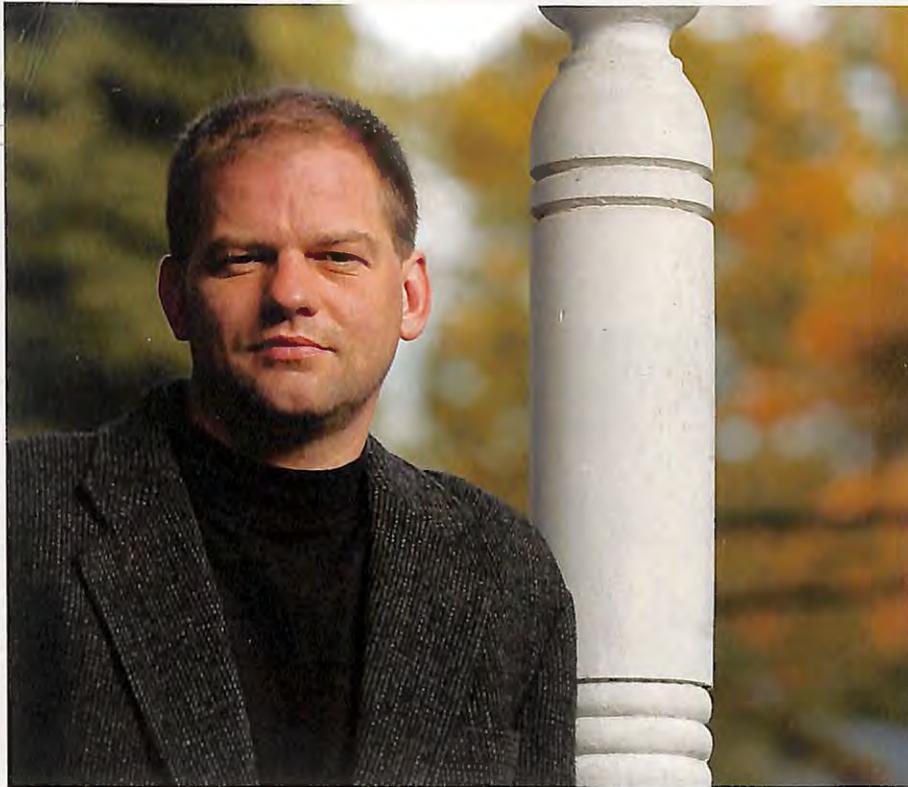
"By 'nation building' we don't mean creation of independent nations that are free to go to war," he says. "We mean creating nations where people have profound economic and cultural attachments that transcend geographic borders, which limits the ability to create a focused military machine that can inundate its neighbors."

The emergence of globalization, however, has outpaced our understanding of what it means to live in such a world, Westbrook says.

"We're aware that we are going through a transformation, but we're not very good at articulating what we mean by globalization," Westbrook says. "We've had a difficult time thinking about what it means to live in a world in which we understand our political relationships to be market relationships.

"This book addresses that problem," he continues. "It asks very traditional political questions, but does so in the context of market relations — in terms of the institutions of money and property — rather than the democratic relations among citizens that inform most modern political thought and social criticism. In contrast, most contemporary thinking about globalization tends to view the market as a machine operating outside of our experience, and certainly outside of our politics."

In Westbrook's opinion, anti-globalization protests in Seattle, Prague and Miami are partly an attempt to orient



"In 'City of Gold,' one of our best young international law scholars grapples with the promise and perils of globalization. David Westbrook brings imagination, realism and moral seriousness to a set of problems that for better or worse are transforming the way human beings live in every corner of the world."

*— Mary Ann Glendon,
Learned Hand Professor of
Law, Harvard University*

ourselves in this new political reality.

"By and large, I think the protests are about something else than what the protestors claim. Call it discontent with modern life. *City of Gold* is simultaneously an effort to articulate the discontent many of us feel with our situation, and an effort to make some peace with that situation — which is why the book is called an apology."

Though globalization has prevented the growth of aggressive, militarized nationalism, it has come at considerable cost, Westbrook argues. Considered as a way of doing politics, globalization can provide only unsatisfying answers to the classic questions of political thought, he says. "It offers little in the way of truth, provides little sense of community and little hope for justice," he explains.

Westbrook argues that the usual ways we think about political economy, the languages used by both detractors and defenders of globalization, no longer are adequate. Economics, progressive social thought and rights-based liberalism are all "exhausted philosophies," he says. "Such thinking remains instructive, but it has entered the tradition, along with the Greeks

and the medieval scholars and many others, and cannot be used unself-consciously for contemporary purposes," he adds.

What is needed now is an awareness that global markets can be shaped to achieve social and political goals, Westbrook contends. "When you define markets, you're making choices about the way people live together," he argues. "We must begin to imagine how we want to structure our markets, and thus how we want to live in this new world."

But while such thinking is commendable, much of social life will remain organized by markets, and therefore will remain dissatisfying and limited in the way that markets are, Westbrook concludes.

