Chapter Two: **THE EVOLUTION OF GLOBAL POLITICS**

What Will History Say?

We all know that 2020 will be remembered for the global pandemic and the killing of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and several others by local police, that resulted in a resurgence of demands for social justice and accountability for law enforcement in the United States. But the Black Lives Matter movement and COVID-19 represent what historian Margaret MacMillan describes as “junctures where the river of history changes direction.” Both events challenge the ‘way things are’-the status quo-and force us all to ask what is a good society and what is a democratic and humane society? In her brief essay in the *Economist* (May 9, 2020), Professor MacMillan describes our challenge: *we face a choice: to build better ways of dealing domestically and internationally with this challenge (and prepare for inevitable future ones) or let our world become meaner and more selfish, divided and suspicious.*

MacMillan is talking primarily about the COVID-19 pandemic but she could also be talking about the pandemics of hate, racism and injustice. She is arguing that many of the reactions to these challenges have exposed the ‘dark side” of our world.

Clearly, COVID-19 is a crisis fueled by globalization and incidents of racism, hatred and violence that happen in one country quickly become global phenomena due to the power of social media and global networks of social activists. Unfortunately, globalization has also exposed our vulnerabilities and the weaknesses of our institutions of global governance. How effective has the UN been in encouraging cooperation to deal with this pandemic? What about the role of the WHO? To be fair, rising nationalism and populist movements led by authoritarian leaders have made it difficult for any collective efforts. In this health crisis, everyone seems to have put up the sovereignty barriers and emphasized policies. Clearly, leaders and citizens alike have put their own interests ahead of the interests and needs of a greater community.

The world seems to be without leaders who are able or willing to convince other leaders to invest in creative, effective and collective responses to the pandemic and social injustices in communities across the world. The United States created the liberal world order after WWII and the period of *Pax Americana* lasted for over fifty years. In the last few years, the US has abandoned its leadership role: *the throne is empty*. At home, there is no Franklin Roosevelt creating new social programs and employment in policy areas that improve quality of life for all of society. There is no Great Society program or new civil rights legislation coming out of the White House today. A crisis like this one is an opportunity to make essential reforms in areas of law and order and create social programs that address critical needs in areas of health, housing, education and welfare. But, this is not happening.

Globally, democratic regimes are in an ideological battle with illiberal populist demagogues who are undermining liberal institutions in Europe and Asia. Further, authoritarian regimes in China and Russia are extending their spheres of influence and competing for economic and political power in what might become a new Cold War atmosphere defined by great power rivalry. The world may need a new architect and leader of a new liberal international order. At this time, no one appears to be stepping forward to lead and promote democratic values and collective action to address the current crises. Perhaps this new order will be led by Jacinda Ardern, the current prime minister of New Zealand or Sanna Marin, the prime minister of Finland or the veteran leader, Angela Merkel of Germany? Maybe this new system of global governance will look like an ideal Kantian system where democratic countries promote cosmopolitan rights and the world is no longer controlled by competing great powers who put national interests above human interests. One might hope that for the good of the global community, these two major challenges may force the community of nation-states to address their reluctance to share resources and act collectively to address the present perils and all future challenges.

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Discussion Questions

1. How are these global challenges fueled by the increasing breadth and depth of globalization?
2. Does the persistence of social justice issues such as racism and ethnocentrism suggest that nationalism is a more powerful force than the liberal internationalism or what we knew as *Pax Americana*?
3. Who will lead in this new era defined by such dangerous global forces of hate, injustice and disease?
4. Where do you stand on the choice described in the essay by Professor MacMillan?
5. How will history remember this time?