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The Ages of Globalization: Geography, Technology, and Institutions

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Professor Jeffrey Sachs' new book shows us how globalization has been and will continue to be a driving force for human progress. The book traces the history of globalization through seven distinct ages. Each age represents what he terms a scale-enlarging transformation, expanding both population and production while changing the nature of governance and geopolitics. Depending on the climate, technology, and institutional options available to a particular geography, human progress has been spurred or spurned by globalization.

The Paleolithic Age, dating from 70,000 – 10,000 BCE, marks the formative period for all of human history, where small groups of humans migrated from one place to another. As they carried their tools, know-how, and emerging cultures throughout the world, they adapted to hugely diverse habitats while causing environmental upheaval along the way. The Neolithic Age characterizes an era of globalization by farming. The success of early agriculture hinged on fertile environments where flora and fauna could be cultivated and domesticated. Farming led to larger communities, which allowed humans the time and resources to develop new technologies such as writing, record keeping, and ceramics.

The Equestrian Age is the third scale-enlarging transformation described by Professor Sachs, where the horse reigns supreme in its contributions to economic development and globalization. In specific, the horse provided speed, durability, power, and intelligence, which enabled advancements in farming, mining, manufacturing, transport, communications, warfare, and governance. The Classical age comes next, signifying an era of globalization by politics. Greco-Roman, Persian, Islamic, Mongolian and Chinese Empires disseminate ideas, spread technologies, introduce new institutions, and build infrastructures on a continental scale. Professor Sachs' discussion of the rise of the Mongol Empire, the largest contiguous empire in history, is particularly interesting. The Ocean Age brings the birth of global capitalism, where imperial power extends across oceans and ecological zones. During this age, western production systems were globalized with plantations and mines in the Americas and elsewhere, while profit-oriented privately owned corporations maintained their military operations and foreign policies. Conquest was justified as a God-given right, whereby civilization was brought to the heathens. Financial success became a sign of God's favor and providence.

The Industrial Age represents Professor Sachs' sixth age of globalization, bringing more extensive, deeper, and faster transformation than any previous age. Industrialized nations, including Western Europe and the United States, achieve significant increases in output per person, reductions in extreme poverty, rapid urbanization, and structural shifts away from strenuous physical labor, with more opportunities for education and leisure. The seventh age of globalization, the Digital Age, begins in the 21st Century and encompasses the present. Through advances in information and communication technology, it brings ubiquitous

connectivity to the world creating new patterns of global economic activity, jobs, lifestyles, and geopolitics. However, this age also brings increasing environmental degradation, social inequality, and geopolitical conflict. Professor Sachs' proposes a number of remedies for these global threats, including sustainable development and a more inclusive, participatory approach to political and economic life.

Overall, the book offers a fascinating account of globalization and humanity. Not only does Professor Sachs provide rich historical detail in his description of each age, but he also offers robust data analysis to support his insights. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in how globalization has gotten us to where we are and how we can use it to move forward in a better way.