SECOND EDITION

THE NEW THIRD WORLD

edited by

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Jim Norwine

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Preface

This book aspires to characterize the Third World at the close of the twentieth century. It is *The New Third World* because, truism or not, the world *is* changing, and these changes are not only immense, they are incoherent and contradictory. Every description seems inadequate, which indicates the magnitude of this ongoing paradigm shift and our consequent confusion. Consider just a few examples:

- We are at once converging and fragmenting (i.e., becoming more placeless *and* more local, or at least more anxious to recapture or reify a local identity).
- The developing world fast becomes more Western (e.g., skeptical of convention and constraint) while the postmodern demographics, gated communities, and beyond-the-pale underclass enclaves of places like Los Angeles more and more resemble Third World cities.
- Skin color declines in social import as appearance, being attractive, and "cool," for instance, ascends.
- The skilled overclass and the redundant unskilled underclass expand while the ranks of the middle class become, if not thinner, less secure.
- Possession of natural resources (other than water) now means far less than the geography of intellectual resources.
- We are context-free postmoderns in our everyday attitudes and behaviors yet often consider ourselves "traditional" or even fundamentalist, and this conflict within our own individual, personal valuescapes makes us uneasy.
- We are masters of a largely humanified natural world, which yet lurks, we intuit, awaiting its vengeance.

In 1940, the global population was almost evenly divided (40–60 roughly) between the developed and the developing worlds. Now, only a half century later, three-quarters of all people live in the Third World and most births occur somewhere in that realm.

One might even ask whether there will *be* a First World by the next *fin de siècle*. After about 2050, for example, so-called minority subgroups—

notably Hispanics, African Americans, and Asian Americans—will together constitute a majority of the U.S. population. In color, "complexion," or ethnicity, and even culture, the United States will soon resemble the world in miniature, and by the second or third generation of the new century, Europe will have experienced the same profoundly exciting and challenging transformation. From a perspective based on changing demographics and their possible consequences, then, the Third World seems fast on its way to being, simply, the world.

The First World seems to be disappearing before our very eyes. Or is it merely going underground? What manner of Third World will in fact inherit the world? It is obvious that modern and even postmodern outlooks are in the ascension in the developing world. Egalitarianism is in, hierarchy is out, or at least is on the ropes. For example, most newly arrived immigrants to southern Texas, where I live and teach, are already about half-Americanized (or globalized, if you insist). I am thinking not so much of the nearly universal assumption of the necessity of personal freedom and access to the good material life (e.g., "owning stuff"), but of attitudes and behaviors tied to worldview, particularly among the young: popular rather than high or low culture; self-referential rather than deferential; choice over constraints; maybe even image over reality.

(Irony may be the only postmodern attribute that has yet to make serious inroads among ordinary people in the developing world. Third World consumerism, for example, remains modern or sincere or genuine, for ownership of something like a first home or car or even a nice dress or baseball glove can give genuine pleasure, even joy. In the First World, on the other hand, even our shop-till-you-drop consumerism—even that!—is ironic and *faux*: We would like for new stuff to make us happy, we hope against hope that it does, but we do not expect it to, and it does not.)

The new Third World is coming into its own, is becoming the world, and is transforming in ways—democracies, market economies, modern/postmodern *Weltanshauungen*—that potentially could mean the loss of formerly highly prized traditional virtues. More important, perhaps, traditional outlooks as diverse as those of Black Elk, Saint Francis, and Charles Darwin have assumed that authentic personal identity can only be attained via a submission or a deference of individuals to something larger than self. This notion stands in direct opposition to the contemporary paradigm, already dominant in the First World and rising in the Third, that the self is and must be central because it is the only center that has held.

I hope that *The New Third World* fairly portrays the developing world as it is. As to what it will be, the people of the Third World will have to decide—as those in the rich world seem long since to have done–where their hearts' desires lie. To exaggerate a bit, much of the developing world is shifting almost directly from traditionality to postmodernity

with only a bare minimum of a "modern" phase in between. The profundity of the contrast is fantastically destabilizing. However, it is just possible that the abruptness of this transition (and the lingering resonance of traditional truths—e.g., radical personal autonomy is not synonymous with freedom, happiness and pleasure are not equivalent, submission is not always oppression) might make it easier to avoid the extreme self-referentiality (the phrase "being jerks" comes to mind) that already seems normal, perhaps even hegemonic, in the postmodern West.

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THE PROBLEM OF SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT and the concomitant improvements of levels of living or the quality of life is certainly one of the outstanding issues confronting mankind. Virtually all aspects regarding the problem of development are subject to controversy, and there appears to be little general agreement on anything. Nevertheless, we endeavor to provide perspectives from a variety of specialists on different aspects of this ever-present critical problem.

Development does not appear to be a question of national endowment, such as natural resources or population size, but of capabilities, such as the utilization of resources, technology, and socioeconomic institutions. A definition of development would include the processes of more effective use of resources and increased efficiency in production and distribution, which result in a greater volume and diversity of goods and services for less human physical labor. Some argue that the distributional aspects within society are of major, perhaps primary, concern. To these advocates, the redistribution of wealth or the more egalitarian distribution of income constitutes "true" development. To this same group, and to others, "true" or "real" development consists of "human rights." Human rights generally consist of (1) political and civil rights (i.e., civil liberties and political freedom; this is the concept that is probably most frequently used in Western democracies), and (2) socioeconomic rights (i.e., the right to health care, an adequate diet, education, decent housing, and even the right to employment and rights for women and minorities). In most Western democracies, the socioeconomic aspect of human rights are generally considered to be highly desirable objectives of social justice and government policy rather than "rights." However, this aspect of human rights is most frequently advocated by the underdeveloped world in general, and by radicals and former Marxist regimes in particular, where political and civil rights are about the most restricted anywhere.

The causes of the status of development in the underdeveloped regions are also a subject of great controversy. Some groups, and even specialists,

expound on one particular cause or another, including the social system and structure, culture, limited education and technology, inadequate resources, population growth and pressure, inadequate capital accumulation, colonial and neocolonial exploitation, dependency on other countries or source regions, sociocultural isolation, the capitalist system (nationally and/or internationally), restraints on private enterprise, and so forth. Despite the conventional wisdom that development is a complex issue, many appear to argue that the cause, and therefore presumably the cure, for the condition of the Third World is due essentially to a single dominant factor. Since there is clearly no agreement on that factor, then perhaps another perspective would be that the issue *is* really complex and involves various elements perhaps differing in importance through time and countries.

Some have taken their lack of national development as an implication of lessened national prestige and thereby compensate by alleging that their culture has spiritual and ethical values not found in the higher technological societies. Unquestionably, all cultures have some merit; but in the cultural competition that is occurring—and competition always occurs when cultures come into contact with each other—the trend toward highly urbanized, educated, and industrial-commercial societies is relentless and cannot be denied.

In the national quest for development, the traditional indigenous cultures virtually everywhere are at a serious disadvantage. Many in these cultures (and some from the outside) wish to preserve some or all of their ancient traditions in the face of this cultural onslaught. Since development requires fundamental changes in society and the economy, these more traditional cultures in reality face the options of adjusting in some important degree or paying the price of slower change—less economic growth, lower material well-being, and falling ever further behind the more technological cultures. The choice should be theirs to make, but the consequences must be weighed with extreme caution.

There is a great diversity of approaches to development in the form of economic systems operating in the Third World. These range from capitalist economies, in which there is relatively minor government intervention in the operation of the economy, to varying degrees of state intervention and ownership, to the near-total elimination of private enterprise and virtually full governmental control of the economy seen in "socialist"/communist regimes, few of which now remain. On the basis of recent economic growth, no one economic system appears to have a clear advantage over the others. Nevertheless, beginning in the early 1980s the world trend has clearly been in the direction of less government ownership and intervention in the economy. This movement toward more open economic and political societies accelerated with the collapse of the Soviet system at the end of the 1980s.

Political systems also exhibit a great range within the Third World. There are relatively open multiparty democracies, semidemocracies or partly free societies, and authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Again, no one political system appeared to provide a greater benefit in terms of economic growth than the others until the 1980s. The only clear association that can be made between economic and political systems is that Marxist-based economies (of diverse types) permit no political competitiveness and very limited civil liberties.

By 1991 the ideologically bipolarized world, which had dominated the post–World War II period, had collapsed. The end of the Cold War had an impressive impact on the Third World, creating a new and changing political, economic, and social environment—in essence, a New Third World. The competition between the two superpowers for allies and favored status along with foreign aid and surrogate wars came to an end. Increases, or even the maintenance, of assistance became problematic with budget restraints and trade imbalances in the leading industrial countries. The economies and political structures of the former Second World, notably the Soviet bloc, began to disintegrate and eliminated the continuation of assistance to the Third World. Even earlier, the decline of oil revenues necessitated reductions in aid contributions by the OPEC countries of the Middle East.

The collapse of the Second World also accelerated the demise, perhaps only temporarily, of alternative paths to development. With the debt crisis, starting in 1982, neoliberal/conservative policies for economic development began to gain favor, aided by the elections of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States a few years earlier. These policies generally entailed government deregulation, privatization, and open economies in terms of foreign investment and imports along with greater stress on exports. It was emphasized that the government was to be a less active participant in the development process and that the private sector would be the driving force ("engine") in a more competitive and export-oriented economy.

Lagging somewhat behind was the movement toward greater democracy and human rights, in the Western tradition (political competitiveness and freedom along with civil liberties). Both of these elements—a market economy and democracy—have been received somewhat grudgingly by much of the Third World. In many cases, tough economic measures imposed by international and national lending agencies created hardship as Third World countries attempted to shift their economies. Much of the Third World had a tradition of government ownership and intervention in the economy and authoritarian political rule. These newer measures were supposed to bring about a transformation of the Third World in their economic, political, and social structures.

Furthermore, with the deteriorating economic situation in many countries and the "New World Order" (the disappearance of the Communist threat), military expenditures declined somewhat but even more so did spending on health, education, and other social programs. This weakening of the social-support system had a severe impact in many countries, especially among the poor, and did not bode well for future political stability.

The great attention to economic restructuring and stability and the push for economic development have resulted in perhaps an even greater neglect in social investments. Education, health, and nutrition have undoubtedly sustained significant setbacks in many countries. However, there seems to be a recent growing awareness of social conditions, and perhaps rectifying measures will be implemented.

Another manifestation of change has been the resurgence of ethnic conflict, which has displaced ideology as the major determinant of warfare in the Third World. Ethnic conflict is certainly not new, but it has become even more common recently. The major conflicts have shifted from the more advanced world up to the mid–twentieth century to the Third World in the post–World War II period. With deteriorating economic and social conditions and the weakening of authoritarian rule, the prospects for both ethnic and political conflict will certainly not diminish.

There has also been a move toward regional trading blocs. This originated with Western Europe in the immediate post–World War II period and has spread, with lesser degrees of involvement, to areas of the Third World. For the first time a Third World country, Mexico, has been incorporated into a close trading bloc with advanced industrial countries, the United States and Canada in the North American Free Trade Agreement. At the same time, many Third World countries, particularly those in Africa, have been cut off from traditional trade with previous colonial partners due to new exclusive trading arrangements such as the European Union.

Despite all these recent momentous changes affecting the Third World the more traditional patterns remain, although with some modifications. Some of these continuing features include the following:

1. continued rapid population growth, with a gradual decrease in the rate of growth (but not the absolute annual increase), except for the poorest region, Sub-Saharan Africa, where the potential for even faster growth exists;
2. increasing attention to the protection and preservation of the environment, although this has not near the priority it has in the First World;
3. the uneven distribution of wealth and income, probably most severe in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa and most reasonably balanced in the Orient;

4. the entrenched power of elite groups, who generally resist change, especially that which they cannot control or they consider detrimental to their perceived interests;
5. lack of sufficient economic growth to overcome the pervasive poverty of most of the population;
6. dependency on the First World for technology and assistance;
7. cultural resistance to change and to the general development process in many areas by different groups;
8. the continuing historical pattern that innovations are adapted by societies that are more receptive and able to incorporate changes means that many Third World countries will fall further behind as they do not have the resources to adapt innovations, such as the "information revolution," or they wish to restrict, in part, the effects and consequences of such changes;
9. as the gap continues to grow between the First and Third Worlds, there is *within* the Third World a growing gap between those countries that continue to modernize and grow rapidly, best exemplified by the newly industrialized countries (NICs), and those that are changing gradually or exhibit little growth or transformation.

The diverse and controversial solutions or approaches to development that have been advocated make it clear that there is little overall consensus, and the evidence indicates there is no sure "solution." In the developmental process there are certain policies ("fads") that attain ascendancy at particular times. Currently we are experiencing an emphasis on open economies and political systems, and there are many protestations that improvement cannot be accomplished without both, despite the historical evidence to the contrary. Probably no theory, and few concepts, with regard to the development process has been accepted by the majority of specialists. Furthermore, the situation in many parts of the Third World is desperate and it is not getting better. The time for resolution is not endless.

It is hoped that the following chapters will provide insight into the complex nature of the problem of development. No simplistic solutions have been put forward. Differing options are available and contrasting perspectives are presented. No attempt at conformity or unity of approach has been attempted in these presentations because in the real world these do not exist unless imposed by authorities on a country. We have tried to present as balanced an approach as possible. The reader may assess, interpret, and judge from the writings of these specialists and so choose the perspective he or she prefers and identify the possible solutions.

PART ONE

Thematic and Systematic Patterns