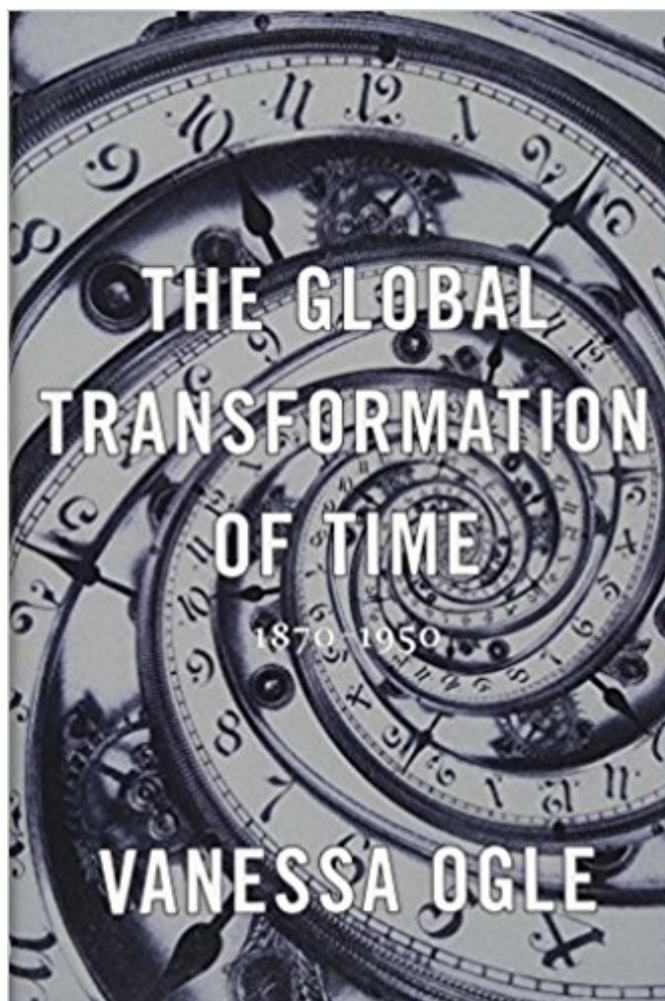


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The Global Transformation Of Time: 1870-1950



Synopsis

As new networks of railways, steamships, and telegraph communications brought distant places into unprecedented proximity, previously minor discrepancies in local time-telling became a global problem. Vanessa Ogle's chronicle of the struggle to standardize clock times and calendars from 1870 to 1950 highlights the many hurdles that proponents of uniformity faced in establishing international standards. Time played a foundational role in nineteenth-century globalization. Growing interconnectedness prompted contemporaries to reflect on the annihilation of space and distance and to develop a global consciousness. Time provided a historical, evolutionary, religious, social, and legal basis for comparing the world's nations and societies, and it established hierarchies that separated "advanced" from "backward" peoples in an age when such distinctions underwrote European imperialism. Debates and disagreements on the varieties of time drew in a wide array of observers: German government officials, British social reformers, colonial administrators, Indian nationalists, Arab reformers, Muslim scholars, and League of Nations bureaucrats. Such exchanges often heightened national and regional disparities. The standardization of clock times therefore remained incomplete as late as the 1940s, and the sought-after unification of calendars never came to pass. The *Global Transformation of Time* reveals how globalization was less a relentlessly homogenizing force than a slow and uneven process of adoption and adaptation that often accentuated national differences.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The powerful lesson of Ogle's book is how the gradual global transformation of time over the course of the twentieth century came to suit many different parties, all of whom thought they had something to gain from new modes of integration and connectivity. The process we anachronistically call "globalization," Vanessa Ogle shows, was made up of forces that often used international means to solve national or parochial problems. (Thomas Meaney Times Literary Supplement 2016-03-11) Ogle is more interested in the ways in which the concept of global time helped create what she calls a "global imagination," in which peoples and societies could be understood as parts of a single, developing world system. In this way, Ogle argues, the standardization of time reflected and reproduced the world's European-led power hierarchies. International clocks and calendars united the world, but they also revealed and sometimes reinforced its inequities. (G. John Ikenberry Foreign Affairs 2016-03-01) Today, we take our global system of timekeeping largely for granted. Yet in her imaginative and thought-provoking new book *The Global Transformation of Time: 1870-1950*, Vanessa Ogle reminds us that standardization and simultaneity had to be invented. Ogle's formidable work contributes to a new history of political economy which takes seriously the ideas, values, and acts of violence behind the emergence of global capitalism. (Ian P. Beacock The Atlantic 2015-12-22) How exactly horological chaos gave way to order is the subject of Ogle's accessible and prodigiously researched book. Ogle has insightful things to say about many topics, from the role of cosmopolitan ports in disseminating new kinds of timepieces, to Islamic calendars, to the curiously moralizing tone of early discussions of using daylight savings schemes to prevent people from squandering precious sunshine hours. Perhaps her most important contribution is to show, via discussion of the various ways that power relations shaped debates relating to time, how foolish it is to view globalization, in any period, as a smooth, value-free process of flattening out. (Jeffrey Wasserstrom Financial Times 2015-10-09) With impressive breadth, imagination, and originality, Ogle has produced an important and genuinely global history of time that reveals the rhythms, directions, unevenness, and contradictory consequences of what we now call globalization. (Geoff Eley, University of Michigan) Writing global history is still a high-stakes venture, and Ogle's *The Global Transformation of Time* is an impressive testimony to the potential of the genre. We get a deep sense of the talk about time and calendars among transnational experts and politicians as well as the everyday intelligence that produced differentiated time regimes—times for travel, for work, for leisure, for religious practice or, as may be, for milking cows—across the globe in Berlin and Beirut, London and

Bombay, and their rural hinterlands. Reading this book is a tremendous intellectual pleasure from beginning to end. (Michael Geyer, University of Chicago) Globalization is all the rage in the 21st century. What technology and cultural factors led to this shrinking world? One of the factors often overlooked, even taken for granted, is our system of uniform time. The progressives who advocated for uniform time found themselves dealing with nationalism, regionalism, and colonialism, as well as resistance from labor, religion, and other groups with a vested interest in the status quo. Ogle provides an intriguing glimpse into the machinations that led to the globalization of time. (T. Timmons Choice 2016-04-01)

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You can look at your smartphone or computer and tell the time to such an exactitude that only scientists in obscure ivory towers need anything more accurate. And, other than the differences in time zones, everyone else in the world can do the same and get the same reading. That there is an agreed-upon world standard for such a thing might be a cause for optimism, especially since a century ago there was lots of worldwide disagreement about marking time. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the period when people started discussing worldwide time and coming to agreements about it. It wasn't always a coldly scientific endeavor, with power plays and nationalism often more important than objectivity, but how we came to the current standard is the story in *The Global Transformation of Time 1870 - 1950* (Harvard University Press) by historian Vanessa Ogle. Ogle tells a careful and well-researched story of how horological chaos was transformed into our current and rather sensible system, and concentrates less on the world conferences that agreed on, say, dividing the longitude line at Greenwich for a standard, than the social, economic, and political forces that pushed for change. Before the time covered in Ogle's book, there was little need to try to synchronize clocks in different locales. It was train travel that showed the difficulties of all those different village times as people started moving long distances at fast speeds. Different railways kept time differently; in 1875, there were six different railway times being used just within the city of St. Louis. In 1883, the railroads decreed a Standard Railway Time, four hour-wide zones across America. It wasn't until the next year that there was held in Washington, DC, an international Prime Meridian Conference, which agreed to use the longitude line running through Greenwich as the starting point for a system of 24 hour zones around the world. One of the ways that universal time was spread was by colonial

governments imposing it upon their colonies. “Universalism was never neutral,” writes Ogle. “The main proselytizers of European time appear to have been missionaries and employers of indigenous laborers. Tribes that had done quite well following the Sun, Moon, and stars had to conform to work hours, and so they had to conform to European time. It was but one aspect of impositions put upon natives, along with rules about clothes, housing, and morals, and as such was an extension of power. Reforming the world time eventually got done, but one of the surprises in Ogle’s book is that calendar reform was avidly proposed, although it didn’t get anywhere by comparison to clock reform. In the early 1900s, businessmen realized that to compare month by month statistics, it would be dandy to have evenly spaced months, thirteen of them, all of which started on a Monday, lasted for four weeks, and ended on a Sunday. Then there could be one day left over each year, which would be independent of in-week categorization. There were different means of making this happen, and vehement arguments between the proposers of the different schemes, but unifying calendars was different from unifying clocks. The big difference was that there was negligible resistance to clock reform from religious groups, but such groups did not like the idea of any calendar change, however logical: “Religious authorities successfully alerted public opinion to the religious objections to the project; their protests made national governments reluctant to interfere with religious sensitivities encapsulated in calendars.” Ogle’s book presents the decades under discussion as a time of vast changes in movement and communication, and the resultant globalization is analogous to many of the changes we are undergoing in our own time. There is a theme here that is quite familiar, that of the sometimes contrary efforts of nationalization and globalization. The changes in designating time were messy and power-driven, but it is at end, however, a hopeful story. Time is vitally important to all of us, and it must mean something good that America, North Korea, Iran, and China, even with their differences and antagonisms, all keep time to the same standard.

Great book

Terrific read about the origins of how we think and measure time around the world.

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