Lesson Eight

Our failure to move beyond such a view has led to the tragedy of our times: that we are more connected than ever yet feel and act more disconnected.

THE TRAGEDY OF OUR TIMES

A woman in Haiti wipes sweat from her brow as she sifts through pile of trash. This small pile sits upon a larger pile which is itself on top of what can only be described as a mountain of trash, extending several hundred meters in every direction. Most of the trash in that mountain has been shipped thousands of miles from other countries. A fire fuming with black toxic smoke burns in the background along with a small emaciated cow looking for something to eat. She picks through rotting meat, blood-stained needles and shards of broken glass looking for anything of value – maybe a bit of metal or if she is very lucky, a piece of discarded jewelry, that she can exchange for money.

The products she sifts through have their own remarkable story to tell. Most of them are pieced together from materials extracted from all over the world, put together by humans in other places around the world, shipped to still other places in the world to be used and consumed, and in some cases handed down and around to others in other parts of the world, until finally they end up here. She rummages through the tattered clothing and fabrics to see if there is anything worth saving. She is not particular about the style, color, brand, or even the size – anything reasonably clean and whole can be worked into something worth keeping. There are empty soda cans, plastic bags, bottles and other plastic waste – each with their own global story to tell.

If we could hear the stories we would have a pretty good picture of the world as it is today. Take for example just a single t-shirt, as NPR's Planet Money did in 2013. They followed the birth of a t-shirt from a cotton farm in Mississippi. The cotton from this farm is shipped to Indonesia to be transformed into yarn, and then into fabric. The fabric then goes to Bangladesh to be sewn into a t-shirt by women paid about $80/month. The finished t-shirt is packed into a shipping container bound for Miami. The long journey from Bangladesh to the United States costs just 7 cents. The labor to sew the shirt costs 12 cents. The cotton in the shirt costs 60 cents to produce. After adding in profit margins, insurance, and duties the O'Rourke Group found that a retailer will pay about $5.67 for the shirt and put it up for sale for about $14.

But what is the true cost of that shirt? What did it cost the environment to make that shirt? How much water? How many tons of CO2? What did it cost the workers? What was the total impact on their health and well-being? The story of our world is sewn into the fabric of that shirt, and woven into

the tragedy of our times: that we are more connected than ever, yet feel and act more disconnected. Products seem to appear on the shelves and racks of stores or arrive at our doorstep from Amazon as if by magic, revealing no hints at where they came from, or the relationships that are necessary to create them. Karl Marx famously referred to this as "commodity fetishism" – the relationships that tie us together to the people who produce the things we buy are captured in a single number, the price. And so we consume at an ever-increasing rate with little regard for our connections to the earth that provide the materials or to those people in faraway lands who transform them into products. The average American will throw away 80 pounds of clothing this year.

Some of that will end up in a pile of trash somewhere in Haiti, where a woman wipes sweat from her brow as she sifts through the pile. She is dark-skinned, clearly of African descent, speaks French, and lives on an island in the Caribbean, thousands of miles away from both France and Africa. How do we end up with an African woman speaking French living on a pile of trash in Haiti? To answer that, we have to unravel 600 years of world history and rethink a few of our assumptions about how the world works.

YALI'S QUESTION

Why are some countries so rich and others so poor? This was Yali's question. Yali was a famous local politician in New Guinea in the early 1970s. In 1972 he ran into Dr. Jared Diamond on a New Guinea beach and asked him a series of probing questions about the history of humankind, building up to the key question: "Why is it that you white people developed so much

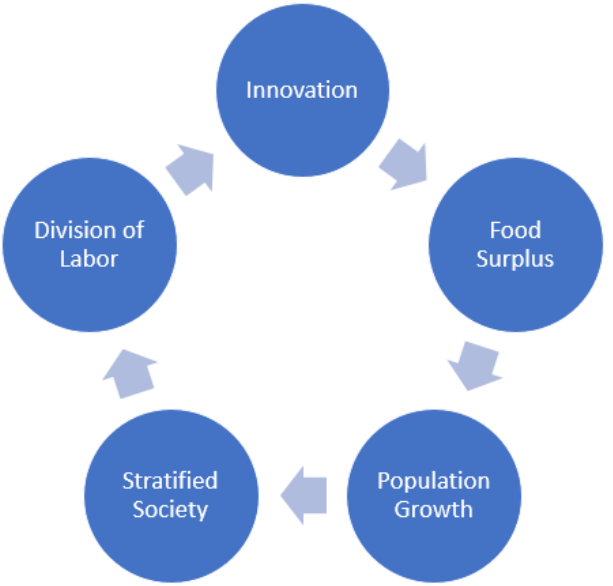
cargo (material goods and technologies) and brought it to New Guinea, but we black people had little cargo of our own?"

It took Diamond nearly three decades to formulate an adequate response. In his Pullitzer Prize winning book, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, he starts by carefully dismantling racist arguments suggesting that Europeans might be genetically superior or more intelligent. Instead, he works backwards through history to discover why, by the early 1500s, Europeans had so many advantages over people in the Americas that allowed them to conquer the Aztec and Incan empires. By then the Europeans had domesticated horses, guns and steel swords, ocean-going ships, large-scale political organizations and phonetic writing systems, as well as resistance to several deadly epidemic diseases. In short, Diamond argues, guns, germs, and steel gave them the key advantage.

But those were just the proximate factors enabling their success. Diamond then spends the rest of the book digging into the deeper ultimate factors that led to Europeans having these advantages over others. As a geographer he pays especially close attention to the environment and the shape of the continents, pointing out that Europe is on the western edge of the massive Eurasian landmass. This landmass has 13of the 14 large mammals that have ever been domesticated, along with nearly all of the major grains with the exception of corn. This combination of large domesticated mammals and domesticated plants meant that by 6,000 years ago the Eurasians were using large draft animals to power their plows, providing more calories and fueling population growth.

In addition, the Eurasian landmass is very wide from east to west, creating a large continuous stretch along the same line of latitude where people could share their farming innovations and other ideas and technologies. Being along the same line of

latitude meant that they would share a similar climate and environment, so innovations in one area along this line were likely to work in other areas along this line as well. As a result of this massive exchange of innovations and ideas, the whole of Eurasia, from Europe to China, was home to many of the largest early empires. Their innovations and the ability to share them led to still more innovations. A positive feedback loop emerged:



Innovations create a food surplus which allows for population growth. As population grows society becomes more complex and stratified. More job types are created, increasing the division of labor. With more and more people engaged in work other than the manual labor of production,

more innovations become possible. Some of these innovations will increase food surplus, and the cycle continues.

Meanwhile, since many of the worst diseases that have plagued humankind originate in domesticated animals, the people of Eurasia were exposed and built resistance to a wide range of diseases that would be new to people in the Amiercas.

When Europeans first came to the Americas in the late 1400s these diseases came with them. By some estimates nearly 95% of all indigenous Americans died from these diseases. Smallpox, measles and chicken pox spread from original European contacts and traveled faster than the Europeans themselves. Key leaders of major American civilizations such as Incan Emporer Huayna Capac died from these diseases, setting off wars of succession before Europeans actually walked into these empires themselves. Among the Aztecs, the Spanish were able to exploit tensions that had been exacerbated by disease to get some Aztecs to fight on their side. By 1531, the most significant American empires, the Aztec and the Inca, had both been defeated. Spain and other European countries set off on an age of exploration to see what they could learn about and acquire from this new world.

WORLD SYSTEMS

Jared Diamond's Guns, Germs, and Steel argument is often criticized by anthropologists for focusing too much on Europe's technological advantages and overlooking the the relationships and interconnections formed between societies since the early first contacts he describes in the book. In short, Diamond's book gives an excellent argument for why some countries were rich and others were poor up until 1492, but

little to help us understand why some countries are rich and others poor after over five hundred years of global trade and exchange.

In 1972 Frances Moore Lappe' was contemplating the same question as Diamond but came to a very different conclusion. He realized that he had always assumed that the world was divided into "two worlds" – one included those countries where agricultural and industrial revolutions had propelled their people to prosperity, and the other included those countries that due to lack of resources, proper climate, corruption, or a lack of work ethic had not undergone these revolutionary changes. But the more he researched the history of these separate "worlds," the more he recognized that the two worlds were not separate at all. He came to question the notion of a "first world" and a "third world" as separate worlds and started to tear down the "two worlds" perspective. He came to understand that the "two worlds" have been connected for over five hundred years, and that the poverty of one might in fact be necessary for the wealth of the other. They are the result of an ongoing historical process with its roots in colonialism.

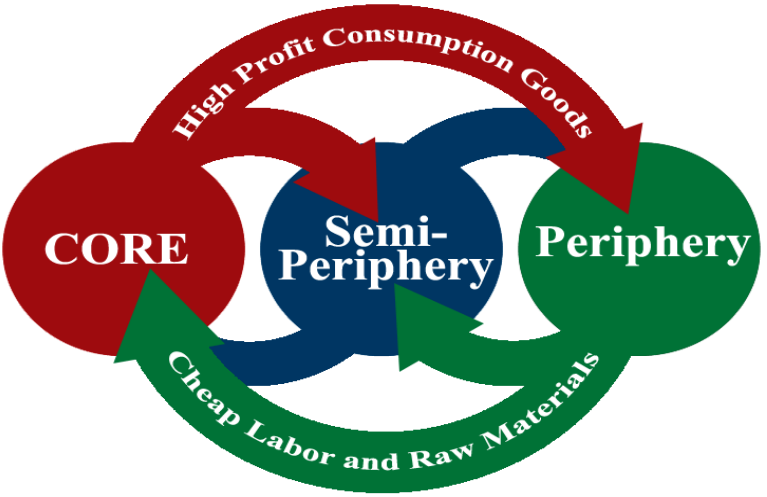
As Europeans colonized the world they transformed societies that were growing food for their own subsistence into exporters of cash crops for European consumption. They used their military might to capture lands and then levied taxes or created large plantations that forced locals to produce cash crops like sugar, coffee, cocoa, and tobacco. Or they put colonized peoples to work in dangerous mines, extracting precious metals such as gold and silver. The silver mines at Potosi in present-day Bolivia fueled Spanish trade and conquest. The fertile lands of the Caribbean were turned over to sugar production to serve the sweet tooth of European's

growing consumer class. The American South turned to cotton and tobacco production.

European colonization brought together the old and new worlds into a global economy and a global ecology. Foods, plants, and diseases spread throughout the world, along with ideas, values, technologies, money, and commodities.

As Lappe' considered these interconnections he realized that thinking about why rich countries are rich and poor countries are poor might be a biased way of framing the question. These are not two separate worlds. They are part of a single world system. The wealth of the so-called "first world" is directly dependent on the poverty of the "third world." In a famous essay addressing the question, "Why can't people feed themselves?" Lappe joined Joseph Collins to argue that the problem is not that some countries are underdeveloped. Instead, these countries might be better understood as being in a constant process of *being underdeveloped* within a world system that profits from their lack of development.

Sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein has developed this idea into a model that has been highly influential in anthropology. Wallerstein argues that the world system is made up of a core, semi-periphery and a periphery. Cheap labor and raw materials provide the core with the means to produce high profit consumption goods which then flow back to the periphery.



Wallerstein's World System Theory Model

The slave trade was perhaps the most profound example of this world system in action. Due to the decimation of indigenous Americans by European diseases there was ample land for Europeans to settle, but not enough labor. Meanwhile, Africans, by virtue of sharing the same continuous land mass with Europeans, had already built up resistance to European diseases and had a few of their own, like Malaria and Dengue Fever, that made Africa difficult to conquer and settle. So instead of settling Africa, Europeans traded with the more powerful African nations. The most notable "commodity" they traded was people: African slaves. The slaves were brought to the Americas to work in the vast sugar, cotton, and tobacco plantations.

This brought about what is sometimes referred to as the triangle trade. Slaves from Africa were shipped to the Americas to produce sugar, cotton and other raw materials, which were shipped to Europe to produce rum, clothing and

other manufactured goods, which were then shipped back to Africa to trade for more slaves which were brought to America to produce more sugar and so on. Europe grew rich on the hard labor of African slaves, not simply on their technological superiority.

The world systems model demonstrates a very different kind of feedback loop than the one driven by technology and innovation we saw earlier. In this model, the rich colonizers get richer at a rate far greater than the poor laborers that fueled the economy. The growing wealth set the stage for the industrial revolution in Britain.

The industrial revolution only elevated the need for raw materials, while also increasing the European's capacity to conquer new lands and acquire them. Remote regions of Africa and the Amazon that had been impenetrable and difficult for Europeans to settle started to come under European control behind the onslaught of machine guns and armaments shuttled in on a growing network of train tracks.

By the late 1800s the European powers were engaged in the "scramble for Africa," strategically colonizing every bit of land they could grab, laying down train tracks that would slowly drain Africa of its natural resources in rubber, copper and other precious materials.

As had occurred in the Americas and Asia, local subsistence farmers in Africa were forced to transform their production to serve the global market. Northern Ghana shifted production from nutritious yams to cocoa. Liberia produced rubber; Nigeria, palm oil; Tanzania, sisal; and Uganda, cotton. All of them became dependent on global trade for their subsistence.

But perhaps the worst was the Belgian Congo which was transformed into a massive slave plantation 76 times the size

of Belgium itself. There African slaves were forced to meet quotas harvesting rubber to serve the growing demands of the new auto manufacturers. If a village failed to reach their quota some villagers would be killed. Severed hands of the dead were offered as proof of death, which in turn created a trade in severed hands. At least 2 million and as many as 15 million Congolese lost their lives during the rubber boom - a genocide that rivals the holocaust of WWII. International outrage led to the ouster of King Leopold from the colony in 1908 and the nightmare was over. But the colonial history of the Belgian Congo and other African nations continues to shape the global economy and the massive inequalities we see today.

A STORY OF RICH AND POOR

Consider for example two communities on the opposite ends of the world system. Rüschlikon, a small village in Switzerland, received over 360 million dollars in tax revenue from a single resident, Ivan Glasenberg, in 2011. That amounts to $72,000 for each of the village's 5,000 residents. It is one of the richest communities in the world. Glasenberg is the CEO of Glencore, one of the most powerful companies in the world, specializing in mining and commodities. If we follow the commodity chain back to its source, we find copper mines like the Mopani copper mine in Zambia, where 60% of people live on less than $1/day, the residents struggle to find adequate food and health care, education is difficult to attain, and the air and water are frequently polluted by the mines. The GDP per capita in Switzerland is the highest in the world at just over $75,000. Zambia is among the lowest at under $2,000. In fact, Glencore's revenues alone are 10x the GDP of Zambia.

Over a 10 year period in the early 2000s, $29 billion dollars worth of copper was extracted from Zambia, yet Zambia only collected $50 million/year in taxes while spending over $150 million/year to provide electricity for the mines. Zambia was actually losing money on their own resources. How did this happen?

During the "scramble for Africa" the region was proclaimed British Sphere of Influence administered by Cecil Rhodes and named, "Rhodesia." When copper was discovered it became one of the world's largest exporters of copper, but the wealth did little to improve the lives of Africans. By the time Zambia gained independence in 1964 they were rich in resources but lacked the knowledge and capital to mine those resources. Nonetheless they successfully operated the mines under national control for over a decade and their economy grew on their copper profits. By the mid 1970s they were one of the most prosperous countries in sub-Saharan Africa. But in the 1970s the price of copper dropped dramatically as Russia flooded the market with copper. Like many other countries who depend on exports of natural resources, their economy collapsed along with the prices.

The Zambian economy was in crisis and had to look to the International Monetary Fund and Worldbank for big loans. But soon they could not keep up with their loan payments. Like other developing countries, the loans that were supposed to save them became crippling. For every $1 they were receiving in aid from rich countries, they were spending $10 on loan interest. By the year 2000, with copper prices falling again, Zambia was in crisis and could not receive any more loans. The copper mines were privatized and sold to companies like Glencore.

They were trapped in a system that left them no more options. They wanted to demand a higher price for their copper, but their impoverished neighboring countries would undersell them.

Over the next decade the cost of copper soared and Glencore made massive profits. But the lives of Zambians did not improve because none of that money found its way into Zambia. As a large multinational corporation Glencore was able to avoid paying taxes in Zambia through a practice called "transfer pricing." Glencore is made up of several smaller subsidiary companies. Their Zambian subsidiaries sell the copper for very cheap to their subsidiaries in Switzerland, which has very low taxes on copper exports. Then the Swiss company marks up the price to its true market value and sells the copper. On paper, Switzerland is the largest importer of Zambian copper (60%) and one of the world's largest exporters of copper, yet very little of this copper ever actually arrives (and then leaves) Switzerland. This little accounting trick is in part why copper accounts for 71% of the exports from Zambia but only contributes .2% to their GDP.

Meanwhile, it is the residents near the mines that must pay the tax on their environment and health. Occasionally the sulpheric acid used in the mines seeps into the ground water, turning their tap water blue and sending hundreds into the hospitals. Residents complain of respiratory infections from the sulpher dioxide in the air.

This is obviously unfair, but Zambia does not have the financial resources to fight Glencore's army of lawyers. This is just one more chapter in a long history that consistently places Zambia on the weaker end of power. At the dawn of colonization they faced the military might of the British and lacked the power to defend their land. They entered at the

bottom of an emerging global economy and have never had the resources to educate their public and prepare them for success. They now find themselves trapped in cycles of poverty. Without a strong tax base they cannot support strong institutions that could raise health and education to create jobs that could create a strong tax base.

STRUCTURAL POWER & COMMODITY CHAINS

In 2004 I was applying for my first professional job and had a big interview at Kansas State University – a dream job as it would put me close to family and back at my alma mater. I could not afford a suit for the occasion, so my dad offered to buy me one. The interview went well, and the suit became one of my most prized possessions. It reminds me not only of that successful day when I landed my first "real job" but also of my father's love and support that he showed all along that long journey. But I wonder, who else contributed to that wonderful day that served as the culmination of my education? Who harvested the wool for my suit and where did it come from? Who wove that wool into fabric? Who sewed that wool into the suit itself? Who brought it to the store?

For such a task Wallerstein developed the idea of the "commodity chain" to map out the "network of labor and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity." To counter the extent to which the true cost of commodities are often hidden from view he meticulously maps out all the inputs that go into a commodity at each stage of its production, from the equipment, tools, energy and labor right

down to the food the workers eat to produce the energy that allows them to work.

My suit's label says it was made in Canada, but a documentary produced about the company that made the suit shows that it is a global garment, touched by hands all over the world.

The wool comes from Tasmania, an island off the cost of Australia that is covered in sheep. But the sheep are not native to the land. They were brought there by Australian colonizers in the 1800s. Violence along with the new diseases brought by the colonizers nearly wiped out the entire native population. Of the 6,000 original inhabitants, just 200 survived by 1830 when a missionary moved the remaining Tasmanians to a new island in hopes of saving their lives. More disease and malnutrition ultimately led to their complete extinction. Their genocide is part of the story of my suit.

It would seem most efficient to just produce the suit right there in Tasmania or somewhere else in Australia, but cheaper labor can be found elsewhere. So after the wool was harvested from Tasmanian sheep it was sent to Amritsar, India where workers were paid about $3/day to transform the wool into fabric. Again, it would seem to make the most sense to just complete the suit in India where the fabric is produced, but there is even cheaper labor available.

The shoulder pads were made in Korea, the lining in China. Only the buttons on my "Canadian" suit were made in Canada. All of these parts came together in Germany where they were shipped east until they could find the cheapest labor they could find in Russia, where the workers were paid about $2/day.

When asked about the low labor costs, the CEO of the company posed a question in response, "Are we exploiting this

labor market or are we helping them? I mean, that's the $65,000 question." Economists almost unanimously agree that despite the low wages, these low wages are better than nothing and are essential for helping the people and their countries rise out of poverty. The workers themselves are grateful for the work, but still fight for better wages.

The CEO himself does not feel like he has much power to change the situation. On the one hand, he has consumers demanding a particular price point. If he pays higher wages and has to raise his price, another company will offer the lower wages and beat his price with the same product. "There is always someone out there to give it to them," he says. "And if we are not going to give it to them, then our competitors will. And God Bless our competitors, but no, we would rather do the business."

His comments are a perfect demonstration of structural power. The power is not held by the CEO. The CEO is simply in a position of relative power and wealth within a structure of power. The power is in the structure itself.

The idea of "structural power" was developed by Eric Wolf to describe how power works in the complexities of the real world. Rather than thinking of power as a "thing" or a "force" that someone "has," Wolf noticed that power is always embedded in relationships. He means to note that power does not only operate within a structure but can also organize and orchestrate the structure itself, specifying the direction that resources flow and the distribution of resources and capabilities. In the case of our CEO, he may not "have" power (and therefore cannot himself transform the system on his own), he instead sits within a structure of power that gives him a large share of the resources and ensures that additional

resources flow his way, while the $2/day workers draw a much smaller share of the resources.

A 2007 study of the production of the iPod demonstrates just how complex the global economy has become and how the profits and resources still flow toward the core even while products are increasingly made all over the world. The 2007 iPod was made up of 451 parts, none of which were made by Apple. The hard drive was made by Toshiba, a Japanese company, but Toshiba also outsources its production to companies in the Philippines and China, and those manufacturers may outsource the production of some of their components to still other manufacturers. Ultimately all of these parts come to China for assembly. The assembly itself costs $4. Everybody along the chain makes money from the final $299 retail sale, but who makes the most of the profits? Despite most of the labor throughout this long process being done in China, the Chinese will only receive about $3 in profit. Toshiba, a Japanese company that designed the hard drive, will receive about $19. In all, Japanese companies receive about $26 in profit. The big winner is the United States, which captures about $163 of the $299 of value - $80 of which goes to Apple. Most of the value is created through design and knowledge rather than raw physical labor or raw materials.

Knowledge and creativity have now emerged as one of the primary means of creating value in today's global economy, while raw labor and raw materials remain cheap. Unfortunately for the world's working poor, it is difficult to get a good education in their impoverished communities while trying to live on $2/day. In this way, the structure perpetuates itself and Wallerstein's original world systems model still holds in demonstrating how core countries can continue to gain wealth and power over poor countries in a world system. Cheap labor,

cheap raw materials, and cheap manufacturing of periphery countries continue to provide a large source of wealth for companies in core countries, which now hold a distinct advantage in complex knowledge that allows them to design cutting edge products.

STRUCTURAL POWER & STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Life on $2 per day is difficult to imagine. Some people immediately counter that life on $2 per day in a poor country is different than $2 per day in the United States because you can buy so much more with $2 in a poor country. But this is to misunderstand the statistic. When the World Bank reports that over 700 million people are living on less than $2 per day, they are using an approach called "purchasing power parity" to adjust the numbers so that $2 per day in a poor country is exactly what you would imagine it to be like to live on $2 per day in the United States.

Imagine what this would be like. You would not be able to afford rent, so you would be homeless. You would probably do your best to make yourself a little shack out of whatever scrap materials you could find. You would not have electricity, running water, or a toilet. You may find yourself walking several miles to find clean water and carrying it back to your small shack every day. You would spend some of your money on coal or wood to burn for heat and cooking. The bulk of your money would go toward food – mostly cheap staple foods like rice and potatoes. This is what life is like for about 1 billion people on the planet who live in the world's slums.

Over 700 million people do not have access to clean drinking water. Nearly a third of all humans do not have access

to a toilet. As a result, nearly 80% of all illnesses in developing countries come from unclean water. As Dean Kamen has noted, we could clear half of the hospital beds in the world just by providing clean water to everybody on the planet.

The structure of power that binds us together in a world system makes us all complicit in these problems at some level. Each one of us might only be one person, but collectively we make the world what it is. The idea of structural power can make it feel like there is nothing to be done. Like the CEO of my suit, we might just say, "if not me, then somebody else" and let the structure roll on. But there is also a hopeful message within the idea of structural power. It can be a constant reminder of four very important ideas:

1. We are the structure.
2. It is what we make of it.
3. Participation is not a choice. Even the choice to not participate is a form of participation.
4. How we participate is our most important choice.

As we face up to this very important challenge to decide how we will participate in the structure, and what sort of structure we will help to create, it can be useful to examine the damage – the structural violence - that our current structure is doing to the world and the disadvantaged.

In the past 3 decades we have used about 1/3 of the natural resources currently available to us. It is possible that new technologies will reveal new resources that we cannot yet imagine, but there can be no doubt that our collective consumption patterns as humans is dramatically reshaping the world. The US has used up 95 percent of its original forests.

The US population makes up 5% of the global population yet uses 1/3 of all the resources consumed each year. Botanist Peter Raven has estimated that if everybody in the world lived like Americans, we would need three planets to support everybody.

The high consumption rates of Americans is a relatively recent phenomenon. If you have ever spent time with someone who grew up in the 1930s, you know that there was a time in American history in which people valued low consumption levels and sought to save money and energy however they could. But after WWII, businesses and economists worried that we might slip into another depression if spending levels did not rise. They started pursuing ways to increase consumption through two strategies: planned and perceived obsolescence.

Planned obsolescence is the creation of products that break, wear out, or become unusable so that people have to buy new ones. Smartphones with inaccessible batteries that wear out and operating systems that are not upgradeable or supported after a few years are a prominent modern example that leads most people to have a box or drawer full of old phones. Planned obsolescence is the art of creating products that people "use up" rather than use. For example, you can purchase a good mop that you will use for the rest of your life. Or you can purchase a cheap "Swiffer" duster with a disposable head that you "use up" and have to continuously replace. You can purchase a high quality jacket that you will use for 30 years, or you can purchase a cheap jacket that you will "use up" this year.

Perceived obsolescence uses marketing to create a fast-paced fashion trend so that shoes you purchased last year are no longer in style this year. A fashionista can often identify

precisely when a pair of shoes was created just by examining the color, the shape of the toe box, the width of the heel, the style of its straps, or even just the style of the stitching.

As communications and manufacturing technologies have improved, companies are able to create a dazzling diversity of constantly changing fashions and provide the clothing at a very low cost. This has created the world of "Fast Fashion." In the world of Fast Fashion there are not just 4 seasons a year. There are 52 seasons.

But as we now know, there is a cost to low-cost clothing, and much of that cost is paid by the developing world who stand on the other end of the world system. While American teens rush to purchase the latest fashion at Gap or H&M, their teenage counterparts in Bangladesh leave their home villages to work in harsh, often toxic, conditions – wearing masks as protection – for less than $2 per day.

Their working conditions are not just uncomfortable. They are often dangerous. A factory collapse at Rana Plaza killed 1,129 workers in 2013 and that was just one of several major disasters that year that killed thousands. Such appalling conditions are driven by a constant need to seek lower and lower prices to serve the demands of fast fashion. The same year as these disasters was also the best ever for the garment industry, as it brought in over $3 Trillion.

The situation in Bangladesh is not unlike it was in the United States 100 years ago. In 1911, garment workers in New York City sweatshops were making 14 cents/hour under difficult working conditions. A fire broke out on the 8th floor of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. The workers moved for the exits but the exits were blocked to prevent workers from taking breaks or stealing cloth. As the flames drew closer and the smoke became unbearable, workers started leaping from the

8th floor so that their families could give them a proper burial. People watching thought they were bales of clothing being thrown to the ground. 146 died.

One hundred years later, on December 14th 2010, a fire broke out on the 11th floor of a garment factory in Bangladesh. The workers moved for the exits but the exits were blocked to prevent workers from taking breaks or stealing cloth. As the flames drew closer and the smoke became unbearable, workers started leaping from the 11th floor so that their families could give them a proper burial. People watching thought they were bales of clothing being thrown to the ground. At least 27 died.

Knowing that the situation in Bangladesh is so similar to what occurred in the US 100 years ago should not make us complacent or think that the problems will right themselves with time. As Martin Luther King noted in the height of the civil rights struggle, "such an attitude stems from a tragic misconception of time and a strangely irrational notion that there is something in the flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills."

After the 1911 fire in New York City 100,000 people marched in the funeral procession and 400,000 lined the streets. The tragedy of that fire fueled a labor movement that continued to build momentum until the fair labor standards act of 1938 ensured that sweatshop conditions would no longer be tolerated. As Charles Kernaghan, director of the Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights says, "The middle class was built in this struggle coming out of the Triangle. Now we're seeing everything that the American people had won and struggled for is being destroyed."

As this is written, workers throughout the developing world are rising up just as the workers of New York City did, and demanding a higher wage. The workers who died in the

Bangladesh fire were making Gap jeans. The jeans sell for $27. The workers were paid 28 cents/hour. They took to the streets demanding a raise. They wanted 35 cents/hour. The police were sent out to stop the protest, attacking them with clubs, rubber bullets, and water cannons. They put die in the water so they could identify protestors and arrest them later.

And it is not just Bangladesh. All over the developing world, state military and police forces are called out to help keep wages low. In Cambodia, 4 protestors were killed in 2013 for demanding that the minimum wage be raised to $160/month (just over $3/day). Like other developing countries, Cambodia is desperate for foreign business and they fear that raising wages will chase away foreign investment. So they keep wages low and fail to enforce labor and safety laws.

What would it cost us to provide a living wage to these struggling garment workers around the world? About 25 to 50 cents per t-shirt. Shima, a Bangladesh garment worker featured in Andrew Morgan's 2015 documentary, "The True Cost," sums up the structural violence of structural power when she says, "People have no idea how hard it is to produce these clothes. I believe these clothes were produced by our blood." She starts to tear up as she considers those who died at Rana Plaza and concludes, "It's very painful for us. I don't want anyone wearing anything that is produced by our blood."

LIVING ON TRASH

Eventually this global dance that produces so much ends up producing mountains of trash. The average American produces about 4.5 pounds of trash every day. Just 1 percent of what we take from the earth is still in use six months later. About 2.4 million pounds of this trash enters the Pacific Ocean

every hour. It gets picked up by the currents and gathers in the Great Pacific garbage patch, an island of plastic waste in the Pacific. Photographer Chris Jordan went to an island in this region where humans have never lived and found baby albatrosses dead on the beach. Some of them had decomposed enough to show that they were full of plastic. The rest of our trash is burned and piled into landfills. Sometimes it is sent overseas where informal trash sorters try to eke out a living looking for whatever they can find of value.

We do not send trash to Haiti, but we do send our used clothing. Americans throw out 80 pounds of used clothing every year. Only 10% of the clothes we donate to charity get sold in the United States. The rest are shipped abroad to place like Haiti where they undermine the local garment industries by selling used clothing much cheaper than it can be made locally. In Haiti the local clothing industry has all but disappeared, leaving thousands unemployed.

So we end this chapter right where we started. An unemployed woman of African descent who speaks French is living off of trash on an island in the Caribbean. How did it happen? Her ancestors were brought to the island on French slave ships, in quarters so tight that they slept in their own excrement. Her ancestors worked in chains at the hands of whips in brutal conditions to produce luxury goods for the French. Her ancestors eventually said enough is enough. They rose up and fought back. They won. Their victory forced the French to abandon their American lands. The French sold the Louisiana Purchase to the United States, so that my own home states of Nebraska and Kansas became part of the emerging world power.

The French, the United States, and other European powers resented Haiti for their uprising. In those days most

people did not believe that blacks were full citizens, let alone capable of running their own country. Thomas Jefferson, the president at the time, was a slave owner. The US and others refused to recognize the Haitian's sovereignty. They refused to trade with them. The French threatened to attack and forced them to pay $21 Billion to compensate French slave owners for their "lost property" (their own bodies were "the property.") It took them over one hundred years to pay off the debt.

So they entered the 20th Century billions of dollars in debt, with no money to fund schools, hospitals, roads and other essential needs of a prosperous nation. As a result, over 70 percent are uneducated. 59% live on less than $2/day. 30% are food insecure. Almost 1 in 10 babies will not live to their 5th birthday. They are strong and work hard to find a way, even if it means living off of a mountain of trash.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO BE YOU?

Look at me, look at me, I'm a cool kid
I'm an individual, yea, but I'm part of a movement
My movement told me be a consumer and I consumed it
They told me to just do it, I listened to what that swoosh said
Look at what that swoosh did. See it consumed my thoughts
Are you stupid, don't crease 'em, just leave 'em in that box
Strangled by these laces, laces I can barely talk
That's my air bubble and I'm lost, if it pops
We are what we wear, we wear what we are
But see I look inside the mirror and
think Phil Knight tricked us all
Will I stand for change, or stay in my box
These Nikes help me define me, but I'm trying to take mine, off

- Mackelmore and Ryan Lewis, WING$

In one of my favorite pictures I am riding my bike with my kids, hauling a canoe, and wearing a t-shirt that I purchased from Target for $8. It represents so much of who I am, but as I look at it I am also aware that my identity is propped up on things. I am who I am because I consume in a certain way. The products I purchase have a history, most of it hidden from me, that ties me into relationships all over the world.

The origins of something as simple as a t-shirt are hard to determine. It connects me to people all over the world, but who specifically? The shirt says, "Made in Bangladesh" but I wonder whose hands actually sewed my shirt. I wonder who manufactured the cloth. I wonder where the cotton came from. I wonder what it really costs to be me. Here is an analysis of my true cost:

My choice to give up my car and ride a bike is an obvious indicator that I make choices in life to limit the violence I do to the world and to others. I try to limit my consumption and purchase products that support a fair wage and good living conditions for others. But there is still a cost to my purchases and activities that I do not bare.

The first step toward re-shaping the structure and creating a better world is to see how our own actions are already shaping the structure. In this challenge, you will be analyzing your true cost by considering all the things that you own and consider what they truly cost the world – not just what they cost you to purchase -but what they costs the world to produce. Consider the materials and where they came from. Consider the hands that touched it that shaped those materials into the product. Consider how those materials and final product were shipped around the world to come to you.

CHALLENGE 8:

HUMANS OF MY STUFF

Your challenge is to trace the origins of something you own, trying to find someone in a foreign country who actually helped create it.

Step One: Take a picture of yourself with things that most represent who you are. Include at least one item that has international origins (this should be easy).

Step Two: Focusing on at least one item that has a global history, try to calculate the "true cost" of that item by tracing its journey backwards through the commodity chain. Try to answer the following questions:

1. Who sold it to you?
2. How did it get to the place of sale? (distribution)
3. Who assembled the item? (production)
4. Where did the raw materials come from and how were they extracted? (extraction)
5. What were the costs to the people and environment along this journey?

Step Three: Your ultimate goal is to actually meet someone who helped produce the item in a foreign country. This will be very difficult, but the attempt will demonstrate just how much our connections to other people in the world are hidden from us. If successful, ask them to take a picture of themselves with the item they help create.

Step Four: If you failed in Step 3, do one of the following to increase your empathy and understanding of the people who helped create the item you now own:

1. Find a large jug or bucket and fill it with 5 gallons of water. Try to carry it 1 mile, a typical daily activity for those living on less than $2/day.
2. OR live for a day on $2/day without any use of electricity or running water. You may walk to the nearest location to use public water and toilet facilities and can spend up to $2 on food for the day.