
THE CITIZEN

for Social Responsibility

Spring 2001

How much is that diamond in the window ?

Did you buy a special someone a diamond ring, diamond studded earrings, or perhaps a diamond brooch lately ? Is there anyone that you know, who is thinking about getting married and looking to buy a diamond engagement ring ? Perhaps your parents, or someone else that you know, is considering celebrating a special event or anniversary by purchasing a diamond as an appropriate gift. Was that diamond purchase cheap ? Maybe too good a deal to pass up ? Chances are high indeed that you have answered yes, to one or more of the above cited questions. Chances are that you bought the diamond ring in a small jewelry store, or a large retail outlet, but do you know where that diamond was mined ? Do you know where that diamond came from, who mined it, who carried it from the river bed or the mountain, or the deep mine shaft of some forlorn and unknown land ? Did that diamond cost someone their life ?

We here in America, bear a large part of responsibility not only to ask such questions, but also to know the answers. "Why ?", you ask, because 65% of the world's diamonds are purchased by the United States market, both for consumer and industrial uses. And the market is huge. The world diamond market accounts for a total of \$7,000,000,000 a year. By far, the main source of diamond mining originates in the continent of Africa, in countries such as Angola, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, South Africa, the Congo and Ghana. In some of these countries, diamond mining has been an industry of long standing. However, what most people are not aware of, is that there is an underground trade in diamonds, which is causing the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people who live in these countries. They are poor Africans, and largely women and children. The illegal trade of which I write is referred to as the market of "conflict diamonds."

In Angola, for instance, the democratically elected leftist government has been battling a rebel force of thugs and murderers, who for decades have received training and funding from the Central Intelligence Agency, in fact since the mid 1970's. The rebels who call themselves UNITA, and are led by Jonas Savimbi

have been responsible for countless slaughters of innocent civilians and the placing of thousands of land mines, making Angola the most heavily mined nation on Earth. In the past few years, rebel armies, such as UNITA, lost US government financing and support, and have since financed their wars by the sale of precious stones like diamonds.

The source of these underground diamonds which are known as "conflict diamonds" emerge mainly from Angola, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Money obtained by the sale of the gems is then used to buy weapons. In order to obtain these diamonds, rebel armies are killing thousands of civilians who live in regions of diamond mining. Their goal is to terrorize civilians and drive them off their lands, and to obtain cheap labor which is utilized in the mining and smuggling operations. Most of the victims have been women and children who have been raped, and maimed intentionally in order to create a climate of terror. A recent visit by U.S. Congressmen Tony Hall, D-Ohio and Frank Wolf R-Virginia, to refugee camps, has documented the extent of the violence committed by these armed thugs and the suffering of the countless civilians who continue to be victimized for the benefit of the underground diamond trade. Refugees had many of their hands, arms, or legs amputated by the rebels solely to terrorize the farmers and villagers, and thereby steal their land. Both congressmen have been instrumental in focusing attention on this issue at our nation's capital, and are attempting to pass U.S. legislation intended to curtail the traffic of "conflict diamonds."

The diamond lobby, however is resisting efforts to create an international agreement of Certification of Diamonds, a process by which legitimate diamonds would be marked by laser or other processes. Nations found violating the international agreement allowing the purchase of non-legal diamonds by corporations or individuals within their borders, would be sanctioned by the international community. In effect, such an international agreement and accompanying sanctions would "dry up" the market for "conflict diamonds." Most conflict diamonds find their way to the jewelry markets in Belgium, Israel, London and the New York diamond center, which feeds most of the American market. Flush with money, rebel armies then

obtain weapons from eastern European countries such as Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia.

As an American I am proud to see that some of our Congressmen are showing concern and moral responsibility, by attempting to do something to remedy the situation. We should remember that America shares responsibility for the current carnage for several important reasons;

1. During the cold war we supported rebel armies like UNITA which fought against leftist governments in Africa, such as Angola's. After the Soviet collapse, the U.S. distanced itself from such covert operations and essentially cut off direct ties to these rebel armies. We helped train them, and we supplied them and essentially America helped to create some of the instability in the African continent for our own security interests.
2. Since we dominate much of the diamond trade, we therefore help to generate most of the profits which are helping to indirectly fund these rebel armies.

Thus we should be concerned, as consumers and as human beings, whether the diamonds we buy, as symbols of affection, or jubilation, are tainted with the blood and suffering of countless human beings who are at the mercy of the merciless.

Congressman Hall introduced **bill H.R. 918** on March 7, 2001, however to date that bill has been buried in committee and its future is in doubt. The lobbying efforts of the "diamond lobby" to stop this legislation have proven to be very strong. The following is a brief history of the "Clean Diamonds Act-Bill H.R. 918" in the House of Representatives;

- 3/7/01 Bill H.R. 918 introduced
- 3/7/01 Referred to Committee on Ways and Means
- 3/7/01 Referred to Committee on International Relations
- 3/7/01 Referred to Committee on Financial Services
- 3/13/01 Referred to Subcommittee on Trade
- 4/10/01 Referred to Subcommittee on International Monetary Policy

According to U.S. government estimates the conflict diamond market will market \$10,000,000,000 this year, it will be laundered through countries like Liberia, and banking centers in Europe and in the United States, much of these funds will wind up facilitating trade in narcotics, arms, and other criminal enterprises, and will serve to continue to spread war on the African continent.

Losing the vote...

The result of the last Presidential election is still fresh in the memory of many of us. A recent article in the Village Voice, proclaimed that the American people had been duped, that the U.S. Supreme Court had essentially helped to legitimize a fraud upon the American people, in fact how else can we accept such a decision, that declares a candidate who gets half a million more votes than the actual "winner" of the election, the loser? It was strange indeed, since the loss of the election was made possible at the "hands" of a state where the "winner's" own brother is the governor. Details, such as attached chads, or the legitimacy of the electoral college pale in comparison to the right of a people to be governed only by those whom the majority chose to elect to positions which shape our collective future.

Universal suffrage can be said to be the most important of our "rights". Indeed it is the tool of not only democracy but of democratic government, it is its pillar of strength, its vision, the great equalizer amid economic disparity and the injustices faced by the powerless and the weak in a society. We should all remember, and never forget that the right to vote was once the privilege of only wealthy white men. Racial minorities, women, young adults, the poor and the working classes at different times in our history were all denied the right to vote. Yet today many of us take this for granted, we forget to vote, we find reasons to avoid the voting booth, and some lucky enough to have that Tuesday as a holiday in order to be able to vote, go instead shopping, or simply go home to *relax*. SHAME!

Voting members of the population have steadily decreased their presence in the voting booth, during the past decades. Adding to this indifference and apathy, has been another facet that many of us have not noticed, a dwindling African-American voice in the vote tallies. 13% of African Americans, 1.4 million men cannot vote ever, because they have been legally disenfranchised (in 46 states) as a result of having been convicted of a crime. They statistically make up 36% of the total disenfranchised population and if current trends continue, the rate for disenfranchised black men could reach 40% (according to the international organization **Human Rights Watch**). Most of them were convicted of drug related infractions.

Although African Americans have, as a group, been the recipients of improvements to their general welfare as a result of President Johnson's war on poverty which was declared in the mid 1960's, ever since they obtained the right to vote, ever since Civil Rights laws were passed and enforced, their status as victims of injustice and racism were bettered but in the last two decades these strides have been lessened and a significant problem called racism persists. All we have to do is gaze with objectivity at the newspapers of our day, and note a national pattern of violence and racism directed at black Americans, whether it be police brutality directed at blacks, or affirmative action being declared reverse discrimination. In effect the record is clear, African-Americans suffer higher levels of chronic unemployment, inferior health care, higher death rates and inner city neighborhoods constituted in large part by their numbers still battle drug addiction with, little access to treatment options.

The **Human Rights Watch** statistics are indicative of an assault on the civil rights of a people who number as a significant minority in the USA. It raises the specter of other issues concerning the harsher sentences of African Americans and seriously questions whether there exists equitable treatment of all citizens in our society. Disenfranchisement is only a facet of the problem, democracy is hereby being placed in question and so is our own fabric of government that declares itself to be— of the people, by the people and for the people.

The food we eat. Profits at any cost ?

Most of us have heard the expression that the American Midwest is the bread basket of the world. It's true ! In fact our agriculture produces enough food to practically feed the entire world's population. Alas, much of our food is wasted and ends up in the garbage, rather than actually feeding people. We dispose of a great percentage of food because there is so much of it. Think of your own habits. How much food do you throw out ? What percentage do you throw out daily ? Weekly ? Think of how much food you throw out a year !?

For years, if not in fact for decades, we have, as a society, taken our food supply for granted. As citizens of a wealthy nation we consume more than our share of needed calories, which results in the current

trend towards obesity. Take a look at the people around you. The vast majority of Americans are overweight. Part of the explanation for this can be found in the fact that our food supply is overabundant and easily accessible. Another explanation often quoted by dietitians is that we spend our leisure time consuming junk food and unnecessary calories without even thinking, partly because of the pressures of a consumer oriented market economy. In other words, we are bombarded by constant advertising to fulfill our needs through food--and as a result we buy, buy, buy—and eat, eat, eat— even though biologically there is no need to do so.

Consumerism is the driving force of our economy and of our way of life. Profits from increasing sales of products, which includes food, provides jobs and great wealth to corporations and to many of us. But at what cost to ourselves and to the future inhabitants of our planet ?

We are bombarded by hundreds, if not thousands, of messages daily, to buy all sorts of products. We are mentally conditioned to think that we must buy a product in order to be successful, or even normal. You think not ? What are luxuries like expensive cars, jewelry, and even brands of perfume and cologne, if not reflections of status. In our society we are mentally conditioned to do more than buy products, we purchase an image for ourselves. Products, such as clothes, cars, jewelry, homes and so on, establish a level of status and power, in the eyes of our peers. Many items which we purchase are not essential for our survival, but we often equate perceived needs with actual needs.

The market economy, consumerism, has but one goal at heart--**PROFITS, seemingly at any cost.** Companies in that drive will buy out competitors, merge, move or close down facilities, relocate to other parts of the world and in the process abandon employees who at times have worked their entire lives for such firms. Labor and resources for production are no longer limited by geography, or national boundaries. Hence the term of a global economy. Profits are the ultimate preoccupation, and as such, the challenge to meet the "fat bottom-line" brings with it an attitude to do what is necessary, even if morally questionable. Companies which produce products for consumption effectively make money by producing and marketing their products as cheaply as possible. In a consumer society, from the perspective of corporations, there are no human essentials or unneeded items. Everything is

a product for consumption which can generate either a profit or a loss. And the product which ultimately gets produced and delivered to the marketplace is the product which is "profitable." The interesting question is how profitable something has to be in order to be profitable to produce? The pharmaceutical companies, many headquartered here in New Jersey, which market certain drugs have profit margins of several hundred or a thousand times greater than what an item costs to produce. Companies which market AIDS medication and hold patents expect foreign governments to pay market rates for such medication even in cases of medical emergency as is the case in the continent of Africa, even though nations are impoverished and cannot afford to purchase such expensive drug treatments for each patient. Some AIDS patent medications are at a level of profit of several thousand percent! Is this how we should define profit? At the cost of human lives? Talk to a farmer and most have much smaller profit margins, if any at all. Everything depends on the weather and on crop yields and crop quality.

In the last decades, farming in the United States has progressed from agriculture dominated by the independent farmer to very large corporate farms which are ruled by what we have attempted to define above—the profit motive, independent of any other considerations, indeed independent of ethics, or even common sense. We have all heard of genetic engineering but how many of us truly understand what this technology may mean. Critics of this technology state that man is acting like God; even scientists have stated that as man alters the normal pattern of evolution, the balance of nature is changed unalterably forever and that we cannot know the consequences or even prepare ourselves for the unforeseen. Corporate scientists are altering the genetic blueprint of cereals, vegetables, fish, and many other organisms. Not as experiments, but rather to produce "enhanced" food products that will grow faster, reproduce more quickly, be deadly to parasites and yet be consumed by people, and reflect "more durable" qualities. These corporations are essentially thinking above all else—"bottom line", profit, profit, profit. What kinds of actual products are these? Some of them are already on your table:

Cheerios, Wheaties, Total, Corn Chex, Lucky Charms, Trix, Kix, Golden Grahams, Cinnamon Grahams, Count Chocula, Honey Nut Chex, Frosted Cheerios, Apple Cinnamon Cheerios, Apple Cinnamon Cherrios, Frosted Wheaties, Brown Sugar and Oat Total, Basic 4, Reeses Puffs, French Toast Crunch (all products of General Mills);

Frosted Flakes, Corn Flakes, Special K, Raisin Bran, Rice Krispies, Corn Pops, Product 19, Smacks, Froot Loops, Marshmallow Blasted, Fruit Loops, Apple Jacks, Crispix, Smart Start, All-Bran, Complete Wheat Bran, Complete Oat Bran, Just Right Fruit and Nut, Honey Crunch Corn Flakes (all products of Kellogg's).

Even fish are now being genetically altered, at least one salmon farm in the Pacific Northwest is spawning genetically altered fish following a blueprint set to a company's idea of "profitability." A recent study at Purdue University has concluded that such fish could lead to extinction of the species if these genetically altered fish escape into the wild, in just a few generations. Such occurrences at fish farms are a common occurrence. In 1999, 300,000 escaped from one fish farm alone in Washington State. The Food and Drug Administration FDA, which is supposed to regulate such practices, has done nothing. There still is no requirement for corporations to label whether the food you purchase at your supermarket has been genetically altered in any way.

If this concerns you, if you also think that there are items that are not just products but rather necessities which should be above the profit motive then add your voice to the fight to stop gene altered food. Should we as people be used as guinea pigs by corporations in their drive for bigger profits and a higher stock price? Whatever your opinion, discuss this vital issue with others.

How safe is the milk your children drink ?

Some farmers are squeezing more milk out of their cows by injecting them with an artificial growth hormone so that they will produce more milk than nature intended. This chemical is called Prosilac and it is manufactured by the Monsanto Company. The chemical is a synthetic bovine growth hormone referred to as BGH. Often this milk is comingled with other milk in tanks that may or may not be treated with BGH. This has made milk one of the first genetically engineered foods ever to be fed to American families. BGH use is common practice in the milk industry of several states.

In Illinois, for example it is illegal for dairies *not using BGH* to advertise it. The rationale it would seem is to "protect" companies who are using BGH in their herds and selling their milk in the marketplace.

In the state of Florida, journalists working for the Fox network were prohibited from broadcasting their investigative report which labeled BGH as a public hazard. These investigative journalists, one of whom is Jane Akre, were threatened with loss of employment if they persisted in their attempt to inform the public as to the dangers of BGH.

Dr. Samuel Epstein, a research scientist at the University of Illinois stated that "there is highly suggestive if not persuasive lines of evidence showing that consumption of this milk poses risks of breast and colon cancer." Dr. Epstein who works at the Illinois School of Public Health is an expert on the environmental causes of cancer. He is opposed to Posilac use. BGH use has been prohibited in Europe, Canada, and New Zealand, yet as a result of Monsanto's lobbying, it was approved by the FDA.

While drugs for human consumption require two years of carcinogenic testing and extensive birth defect testing, BGH which impacts children and others who are exposed to its presence in milk, was approved by the FDA after 90 day testing on a rat population of thirty rats. While the U.S. has approved 50 varieties of genetically modified crops, Britain has yet to approve one. And WHO, the World Health Organization, an agency of the United Nations has urged countries to proceed cautiously with biotechnology and its impact on the foods produced for consumption.

Monsanto is the same company that has brought us such "great" products as Agent Orange (2-4-5-t), Dioxin and PCB's, all of which have proven to cause cancer in human beings who are exposed. In the Fall of 1994 Canadian Television quoted a Canadian Health official as reporting that Monsanto offered \$1-2 million if her government committee would recommend BGH approval in Canada without further data or studies of the drug.

Corporate power, the power of money in this country is incredibly strong, profits talk big, while safety and the interests of ordinary people are of little concern. While special interest lobbies, like that of Monsanto and other companies continue to rule in Washington, our general welfare as consumers and as citizens are continually put at risk, all for the sake of larger and larger profits, which go into the pockets of an incredibly small percentage of the American people. *Whatever your viewpoint on this issue you can let the FDA know how you feel, WRITE;*

*FDA Commissioner Jane Henney
5630 Fishers Lane, Room 1061 HFA 305
Rockville MD 20852*

EDITORIAL

AMERICA'S CHILDREN

While America's wealthy have grown wealthier under the Reagan, Bush and the Clinton administrations, the poor of this nation have gotten poorer. Reagan's "trickle down" theory was a sham. During the 1940's child poverty rates fell by one third. They fell again by nearly a third in the 1950's and again in the 1960's, as a result of policies instituted by Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Johnson. In the 1970's the pattern changed, 15.7% of America's children were in poverty. Long term progress in lowering poverty rates was halted by 1973, during the Nixon reign. By the 1980's the chance of an American child being poor reached 20.5% of the population. By the 1990's that percentage had increased to 21.0%. Today almost 12 million American children lack health insurance, 20% of black children and 33% of hispanic children are uninsured, compared to 10% of white children. Infant mortality rates are highest for black infants, higher even than children born in some third world nations, according to United Nations' statistics. Nationally only one in ten who qualify for child care assistance is receiving it. Studies which have tracked the progress of the quality of the care received by children aged 3 through second grade, found that quality care results in higher school performance, and lower instances of behavioral problems later on.

Nearly 66% (2 out of 3) students who graduate high school never obtain a college degree. Currently our nation has a shortage of teachers, nurses, engineers, scientists, and other highly technical professionals. Rather than spend trillions on tanks, bombs and such things, shouldn't we as the richest nation be taking care of the children of America? In 1998 38% of hispanics did not complete high school, while 12% of blacks and 7% of whites met that category. A thoroughly educated population can only serve to benefit America, but then again, those who come to learn about history begin to question priorities.

We no longer have cotton plantations, but wealth is still created, albeit in other ways. What has not changed is the low priority by those who control the wealth of this nation, in educating and caring about those who perform the labor that creates the wealth. I guess if every child went to college there would be no one left to work at the fast food restaurants, or collect our garbage, or be doormen, or janitors, or seamstresses... Resulting instead in too many doctors, lawyers, engineers, nurses, teachers...and a change in our way of life.

It is said education is very costly, but is not ignorance far costlier ?

For our society to permit a continuing pattern of poverty, and a lax equitable treatment of those who are to be found at the lower levels of our society, is simply to continue the status quo— to continue our society as it currently is, without a perceptible improvement in health care, in education, and in other quality life issues such as substance abuse prevention. It is in short to permit economic injustice to persist so that a few may enjoy the fruits of wealth. Without unemployment how could factories produce at low cost ? Large numbers of unemployed insure that our industries can find cheap workers, and permit handsome profits for the captains of industry. How indeed could the chairman of the Board get his \$5 million salary without unemployment ? And how could the bulls of Wall Street survive ?

I guess the plantation owner has changed dress, but he still rides his black steed, carries his whip, and the children of the very poor still can't read or write, and know not how to pay their doctor.

update on past issues

1. Twa flight 800

James Sanders, investigative journalist, has lodged a civil action in federal court alleging a **federal level cover-up**, surrounding the altering of evidence by federal investigators, of the downed aircraft TWA flight 800, which cost the lives of 230 men, women and children on July 17, 1996.

2. Newark schools substance abuse prevention

The Citizen for Social Responsibility has been in constant contact with the Newark Public Schools since our initial investigative report on the status of drug abuse prevention education in the City of Newark was published in our June 2000 issue. We have since presented a proposal to the Newark Advisory School Board and to the Newark Superintendent of Schools, in November, 2000, concerning the implementation of a supplementary program of reinforcement of the substance abuse prevention message. The program is sponsored and to be paid for by our organization. Its implementation is sought at three pilot schools located in the most affected wards of the city—the central and west wards.

We have experienced ongoing resistance by the Newark Public Schools, and they have only responded to our communications after repeated insistence. The department responsible for substance abuse prevention education has been virtually non-responsive and evasive, and has denied receiving some of our communications. We find this fact deeply troubling and possibly indicative of a much more serious underlying state of affairs at the Newark Schools. The Citizen hopes to serve the Newark community by implementing our program, and by following up on our investigative reporting on this crucial issue.

If you would like to contribute an article for publication by **The Citizen**, concerning an issue of importance to the community and in accordance with our mission statement, submit it to the attention of our Editor at the fax number

Include with your article, your name, address, phone number and a list of sources or bibliography. All items submitted will not be returned. It is implied that submission authorizes **The Citizen** to publish the item.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Citizen for Social Responsibility was created as an educational tool which seeks to examine critical issues in our society which are not being addressed, by motivating public debate and discussion. It is solely an enterprise which does not seek profit as its reason to exist.

More Information

1. On drugs can be found on the Internet concerning symptoms, treatment, referrals, research, and parenting at;

www.drughelp.org

www.casacolumbia.org

www.christians-in-recovery.org

www.redribbonworks.org

2. Concerning TWA flight 800

www.4-justice.org

3. On Altered Food and milk

www.truefoodnow.org

www.foxbghsuit.com

4. Losing the vote

based on Human Rights Watch statistics; publications

G1202 Racial Disparities and; *G1003 Disenfranchisement*

Human Rights Watch, 325 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY

5. America's Children

based on statistics collected by the Children's Defense Fund, (*The State of America's Children, yearbook 2000.*)

25 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass 02108

6. On conflict diamonds

http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_936000/936253.stm

THE CITIZEN

for Social Responsibility,

a non-profit corporation

Main Post Office

Federal Square

P.O. Box 25496

Newark, N.J. 07102-9998

Reg. Office: A Delaware Corp. 001210802-3216946

NJ reg. 0100815812

Till next time, we bid you well.