

KELSEY
TIMMERMAN

AUTHOR OF
WHERE AM I WEARING?

WHERE AM I EATING?

WITH
Discussion Questions
AND A
Guide to Going "Glocal"



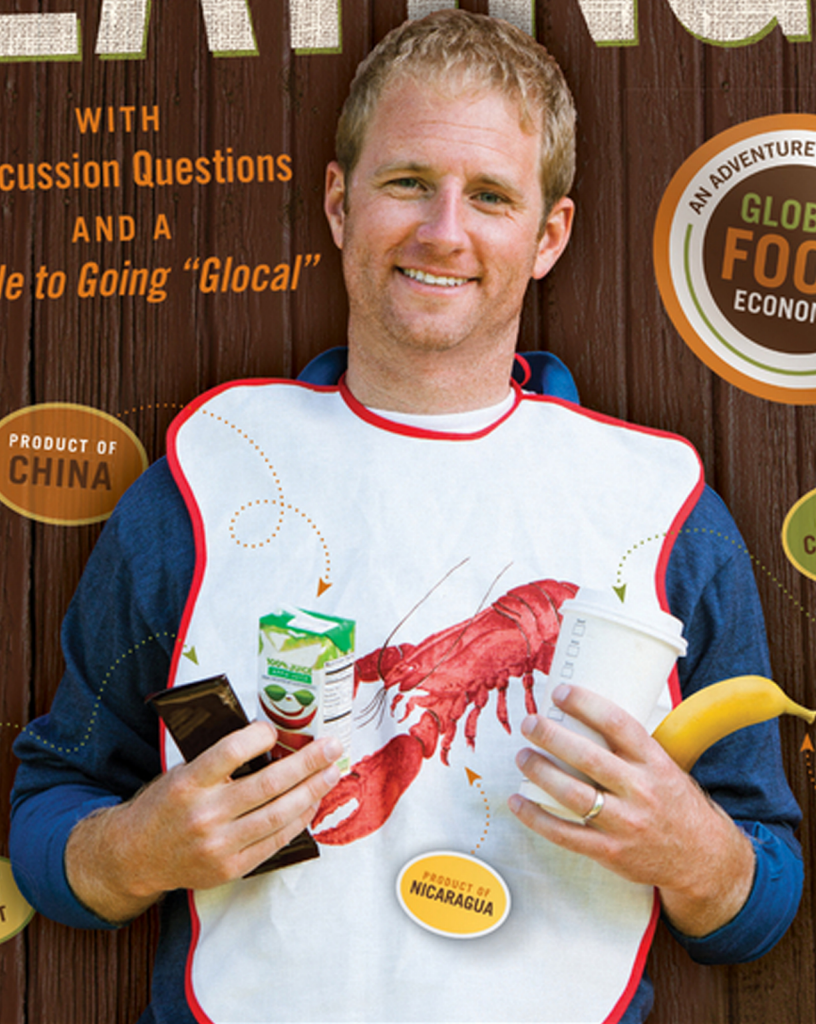
PRODUCT OF
CHINA

PRODUCT OF
COLOMBIA

PRODUCT OF
COSTA RICA

PRODUCT OF
IVORY
COAST

PRODUCT OF
NICARAGUA



**WHERE AM I
EATING?**

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Discussion Questions
AND A
Guide to Going "Glocal"



KELSEY TIMMERMAN

WILEY

Cover image: Brian MacDonald www.WonderkindStudios.com
Cover design: Rule29 Creative www.Rule.29.com

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.
Published simultaneously in Canada.

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ISBN 978-1-118-96652-5 (paper); ISBN 978-1-118-96654-9 (ebk);
ISBN 978-1-118-96653-2 (ebk)

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Harper and Griffin



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Introduction: Our Global Connection

Every person, even a slave, has a name. His was Solo. And since meeting Solo, a day hasn't gone by that I haven't thought about him and what happened when I freed him, and how, if I could travel back in time to the cocoa field where it all went down, I would do everything differently.

I freed a slave. That sounds crazy, doesn't it? First, that slavery exists at all; second, that I was able to allow him the opportunity to act of his own free will; and third, that I could do so although I'm just some guy from Indiana who has a wife, two kids, a mortgage, and a cat named Oreo.

But to think that it's a novelty that my life intersected with slavery is to not have a handle on the world in which we live. You have a connection with slaves as well. We all do. If you eat, if you wear clothes, if you use something with a computer chip, you are connected with someone like Solo. And you are connected with mothers and fathers around the world trying to make ends meet the best way they can.

Once you see how connected we all are, you will never see the world, and your place in it, the same again.

* * *

Hershey, Pennsylvania

"Hello. I would like to take a bath in a big ol' tub of chocolate," I said to the fella who answered the phone at The Hotel Hershey.

My request was met with silence on the other end of the phone.

“Huh,” I thought, “I guess I have to elaborate.”

“Uh, I saw on your website that you offer whipped cocoa baths,” I explained, toning down my request a bit. I figured the person answering the phones at the Chocolate Spa at The Hotel Hershey in Hershey, Pennsylvania, the center of the chocolate universe, would be used to such requests. Guess not, though.

“Sir,” he said, “the cocoa baths are only for women.”

“Why is that?”

“Sir, we have codes.”

For a moment I thought about taking a stand for all that is right. I wanted to shout, “Sexist pig!” I considered becoming the Gloria Steinem of whipped cocoa baths.

“Could I interest you in a cocoa massage or perhaps . . .”; he rattled off a long list of treatments. There was the 50-minute Gentlemen’s Whiskey Body Scrub “for men who don’t want rough skin” that “reverses signs of aging.” There was the stone pedicure, which is “a pedicure and hot stone massage for the feet all in one!” A gentleman can get a manicure or a facial, but ask for a cocoa bath, and you are one step above a prank caller.

“No, thanks. I don’t like people touching me,” I said, wanting to ask more questions about these “codes” but deciding against it.

I had spent the day speaking at Cedar Crest College in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Cedar Crest selected my first book, *Where Am I Wearing?*, as a freshman common reader for all incoming first-year students to read over the summer. I always get so much out of these common read visits. It’s a chance for me to chat with students and professors from many different backgrounds and fields of study.¹

Campus visits allow me the chance to talk with a lot of really smart people. Meeting them has shaped much of my work. When discussing my travels through the West African cocoa industry with the director of the Cedar Crest program, it was suggested that I visit Hershey’s Chocolate World.

Visiting a chocolate amusement park? For research? After what I had experienced in West Africa, after the close call I had, I was up for a little easy chocolate-filled research.

¹If you are reading this book as part of a common read or otherwise and have any thoughts or questions as you follow my global food adventure, feel free to reach out to me via e-mail: kelsey@kelseytimmerman.com; Twitter: [@kelseytimmerman](https://twitter.com/kelseytimmerman); or Facebook: facebook.com/kelseytimmerman.

I called my wife, the most patient wife in the world, and told her that I had some super-important work to do at Chocolate World, and that I would be home two days later than expected. I prepared myself to have the *cheesiest* chocolate experience possible.

I had originally planned on getting a spa package during my stay at The Hotel Hershey; but then I discovered that the Hershey Sweet Retreat overnight package cost \$818. \$818?! That's about the deposit I would need on an apartment if Annie, my wife, heard that I spent \$818 on a spa package for myself while she was at home rearing our two children alone.

So to preserve my marriage I stayed at a cheap hotel and tried to book a 15-minute, \$50 whipped cocoa bath at the spa. I figured immersing myself in a tub of chocolate would be a nice addition to my experience of chocolate excess. After being thwarted by the Chocolate Spa code, I decided to tour the hotel and see what other chocolatey experiences I could have.

The Hotel Hershey overlooked Hershey, Pennsylvania, the town that Hershey's chocolate built, complete with Hershey Kiss street lamps. The palatial hotel was something that belonged in the French countryside, not in rural Pennsylvania. I walked up one arm of a sweeping staircase that reached out to the town. Once inside, I lost myself in the plush carpeted corridors before finding my way to the garden out back. There were pools, fountains, flowers, an ice-skating rink, and a restaurant.

The Harvest restaurant prides itself on featuring food from "field to fork." At this restaurant, origin matters. A few days (or possibly weeks) ago, there was a pig walking around on some local farm. One day he was slaughtered. A chef mixed up some chocolate barbecue sauce and smothered the pig's ribs, someone put them on a plate, and a waitress brought them out to me.

Although the pig was local, the cocoa that went into the barbecue sauce sure wasn't—nor was the cocoa in my Hershey's Classic Chocolate Cream Pie with chocolate crumb crust, smothered in chocolate sauce. (My ordering strategy was to order the entrée and the dessert in which the word *chocolate* was used the most. I passed on the chocolate martini, though.)

Much of the world's—and most of Hershey's—cocoa comes from West Africa. I'm fresh off a trip to Ivory Coast and Ghana, the main suppliers of Hershey's cocoa. After witnessing the harsh realities of the lives of West African cocoa farmers firsthand, I would be lying to say that I didn't come here to compare those realities with the surrealism

of Hershey, Pennsylvania, and Hershey's Chocolate World—a place where a two-hour chocolate-filled spa package costs more than most West African cocoa farmers earn in a single year.

The thing is, I *loved* Chocolate World. I took the Chocolate Tasting Adventure class, in which Dr. Livingston McNib shared his knowledge of chocolate via live satellite feed from the fictional chocolate-producing country of Ariba. My fellow classmates and I learned about chocolate's Incan origins (they called it “the fruit of the gods”), about the chocolate trees' biology, and, most important, how to eat chocolate: look, listen, smell, and taste. It's a fine art that doesn't involve chewing. And let me tell you something: if you've ever claimed to not like dark chocolate, you've been eating it wrong. Stop chewing it, let each bite melt on your tongue, and the flavors will slowly reveal themselves—sweet, bitter, fruity, nutty. Trust me on this, as at the end of the class I received an official master's degree in chocolate tasting from Hershey's University. I looked at my degree, looked at the eight-year-old to the left of me and the 10-year-old to the right of me, and, boy, we were all smiles.

I enrolled in the Chocolate Lab, where we discussed the origin of cocoa in more detail. We tasted chocolate and tried to guess whether it came from Jamaica, West Africa, New Guinea, or Mexico.

“Imagine every pod as a Hershey bar,” Gail, decked out in a white lab coat, said as she held up a cocoa pod that supplies enough cocoa for one bar of Hershey's milk chocolate. “One family can harvest only two times per year. They've always done harvesting by hand. Companies the size of Hershey send representatives to the farms to make sure that the farming is done correctly.”

Gail showed us pictures of farmers. They were nameless and storyless and happy and proud. However, I have to give Hershey credit for not pretending, in this class, that its most important ingredient doesn't just magically appear in its chocolate wonderland or come from the fictional country of Ariba.

And then Gail directed us in making our own chocolate bars. We added cocoa nibs and even hot pepper to our bars. I looked at the nine-year-old to my right and the 11-year-old to my left, and we were having the time of our lives.

And that's when I started to notice the looks I was getting from parents.

I was a lone 30-something man bouncing around Chocolate World with an irrepressible, sugar-high grin.

Finally, one of the parents was brave enough to ask me, “What brings you here?”

I told them that I was recently in Ivory Coast hanging out with cocoa farmers. Gail came over. She was interested in my experience but didn’t want to ask too many questions. I discussed how the quality of farmers’ lives was closely tied to the price of cocoa; however, I didn’t tell them everything. We were all enjoying ourselves, and I didn’t want to burst our chocolate bubble.

I expect that the company’s founder, Milton Hershey, would have wanted to know about the farmers.

“[Milton Hershey] measured success, not in dollars, but in the usefulness of those dollars to the benefit of his fellow man,” Gordon Rentschler, director of National City Bank in the 1920s, was quoted as saying in the Hershey museum.

Hershey himself claimed, “I have always worked hard, lived rather simply, and tried to give every man a square deal.”

After the Chocolate Lab, I made my way to the Hershey factory tour. A few decades ago, visitors could tour the actual factory. Today, the “factory tour” has animatronic singing cows and is reminiscent of the Disney “It’s a Small World” ride. I climbed into the second row of a chocolate-colored cart behind a mother and father and their young daughter. At this point I was feeling more than a little self-conscious, as the concerned looks from parents were beginning to add up.

We went past the cows and the river of flowing plastic chocolate. Near the end, there was a sign that informed us we were about to have our photo taken, which was a problem for me. I had no idea what to do with my face. If my smile was too big, I would risk looking like I was having too much fun. If I didn’t smile at all . . . well, who doesn’t smile at Chocolate World? The father leaned in with his daughter and gave a thumbs-up.

We walked off the ride and approached the bank of televisions where our photo was displayed and available for purchase. I had tried my best not to look like a major creeper while the photo was being taken, but, somehow, I had managed to look more so. The photo could’ve been captioned: “Don’t turn around. He’s behind you!”

My eyes were panicked and my smile calculated. I wish I could show you a copy of the photo, but the only thing creepier than a lone dude riding on the factory tour ride is if that lone dude steps off and spends \$11 on a photo of you and your family posing for the camera unaware of his creepy presence behind you.

Finally, accompanied by some adults, I crammed into the last spot on the trolley tour of Hershey, Pennsylvania. The conductor was costumed in suspenders and a short-billed hat. As we rode through town, he told us Milton Hershey's story of bankruptcy and struggle before hitting it big by being the first person in the world to make milk chocolate. His wife Kitty couldn't have kids, so they built a school and took in orphans from around the area and, eventually, from around the country. Today the school has more than 1,800 students and spends about \$110,000 per student per year.² After Kitty died, Milton turned the majority of his fortune over to the school, but no one knew about it until five years later. The Milton Hershey School Trust has the majority of voting shares in the Hershey Company and has 100 percent control over the theme park and The Hotel Hershey. It has more than \$7.5 billion in assets.

"Everything we do is for the kids," the conductor said, as we parked in front of the school. And as the former school director, he should know. That's right—a former director of the wealthiest boarding school in the United States dresses up in period costume and gives tours on a trolley. The Hershey story and the school are *that* important to him. That's the kind of loyalty the Hershey story inspires.

Milton Hershey built a town complete with public transportation, parks, and schools. And then he built another such town in Cuba from which his company sourced sugar. He lived by the silver rule: "Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you." He believed that business could be used as a force for good—and that treating your workers with respect would make them better workers.

I wasn't aghast at the excess and grandiosity of Chocolate World; rather, I was amazed at the excess and grandiose generosity of the man who built it.

So amazed, in fact, that I almost forgot—for just a few moments—about the slave I met in the cocoa fields of Ivory Coast.

* * *

This isn't a guilt trip. Guilt is the last thing I want you to feel or walk away with after reading the stories of the farmers and fishermen I met on my global journey.

²http://articles.philly.com/2011-10-30/news/30339167_1_student-homes-milton-hershey-school-sexual-relations/2.

This isn't to say that I didn't feel guilt when I met scuba divers in Nicaragua who had been paralyzed by the bends as they chased a declining population of lobster deeper and deeper to put luxurious lobster tails on the plates of American diners. Or depressed when I met Colombian coffee farmers whom Starbucks counted in its sustainability certification program, but who had never heard of Starbucks or received any assistance. Or anger when I learned that the glory days of working on a banana plantation in Costa Rica were when planes sprayed pesticides directly on top of the workers as they worked; that is, when workers could support their families. Or fear when I realized what might be in the "product of China" apple juice we were feeding our children.

I don't want you to feel guilty, depressed, angry, or afraid. I want you to feel connected.

I want you to see how connected our lives are with the rest of the world. How we have a lot to learn from one another. How we can live lives that either exploit others or provide others with opportunity. And how our local lives impact the lives of others around the globe. We aren't just local citizens; we are global citizens. We are glocals.

On Christmas Eve in 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. stood before a congregation in Atlanta and delivered "A Christmas Sermon" about peace, justice, and the need for us all to be aware of our global connections.

Dr. King said:

It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality. Did you ever stop to think that you can't leave for your job in the morning without being dependent on most of the world? You get up in the morning and go to the bathroom and reach over for the sponge, and that's handed to you by a Pacific islander. You reach for a bar of soap, and that's given to you at the hands of a Frenchman. And then you go into the kitchen to drink your coffee for the morning, and that's poured into your cup by a South American. And maybe you want tea: that's poured into your cup by a Chinese. Or maybe you're desirous of having cocoa for breakfast, and that's poured into your cup by a West African. And then you reach over for your toast, and that's given to you at the hands of an English-speaking farmer, not to mention the baker. And before you finish eating breakfast in the morning, you've depended on more than half the world. This is the way our universe is structured; this is its interrelated quality. We aren't going to have peace on Earth until we recognize this basic fact of the interrelated structure of all reality.

Once we recognize the common thread of humanity we all share—that we all want our children to live happier, healthier, and more fulfilling lives than our own—we interact with the world, not from a place of sympathy, but from one of empathy.

And when we empathize with others, we don't feel guilt; we feel responsibility. We don't feel sorry for them; we put ourselves in their shoes and look at the world from a new perspective. Not only do issues like slavery and child labor become important to us, but we're able to have a more nuanced understanding of them.

Uncomfortable things will happen in your mind and heart. At least they happened in mine. When you look at the world from Solo's perspective and see the lack of opportunities presented to him, the line between exploitation and opportunity blurs.

I'm not going to tell you what to think. I'm not going to tell you that how you live, eat, and consume is wrong. But I will ask you to care.

The only thing that scares me more than slavery is apathy—that we know injustices such as slavery exist and maybe we just don't care. What scares me is that one day I might drink a cup of coffee and not think of Flor in Colombia who doesn't want to move to the city but would do so for her son, or eat a banana and not think of Juan and his family in Costa Rica who spend Sundays playing soccer on a muddy field.

What scares me more than spitting cobras, paramilitary forces, and near-death scuba diving experiences, all which I encountered while living this book, is the fact that one day I might bite down into a bar of chocolate and not think of Solo in Ivory Coast.

Now more than ever before, we are sacrificing a smaller portion of our budgets for food; others sacrifice much more.

PART

I

Coffee: Product of Colombia



The Starbucks Experience

On most mornings, I drink Starbucks Colombian roast. I grind the beans and brew them in the French press my wife Annie bought me for Christmas.

I'm easily distracted and dangerously curious. One minute I was working, sipping on a fresh cup of coffee, and the next I was trying to figure out where exactly in Colombia my coffee came from. I found my way over to the Starbucks website looking for answers. Here's how Starbucks markets its Colombian roast.

How far do we go for a better cup of Colombian coffee?

Six thousand feet—straight up. Sounds extreme, we know. But high atop the majestic Andes, in a rugged landscape of simmering volcanoes, is where the finest coffee beans in Colombia like to grow. And just as there are no shortcuts through the dirt paths that crisscross the sheer slopes, we take none when it comes to nurturing these treasured cherries to gourmet perfection.

This Colombian marvel erupts on the palate with a juicy feel and robust flavors, a testament to the hearty riches of volcanic soils. Its remarkable finish, dry with hints of walnut, lifts this superior coffee into a class of its own. One sip and you'll agree it's worth every step of the climb.

How could I not feel all worldly, hardy, and refined after drinking such a sophisticated cup of coffee provided to me by such a dedicated company?

Not only did I want to *drink* this coffee after reading that narrative, I wanted to *visit* this magnificent land of sheer slopes and treasured

cherries myself. I wanted to meet the people who grow my coffee. So I called Starbucks' press contacts and customer service to see if they could point me in the right direction. I left multiple voice mails. I e-mailed them repeatedly. Finally a customer service agent e-mailed me a response:

Hello Kelsey,

Thank you for contacting Starbucks.

We appreciate your interest in Starbucks.

Unfortunately, the information you are requesting is proprietary information, which we are unable to divulge. We're unable [to] provide information about the company beyond what we make publicly available.

I apologize for any inconvenience this may cause.

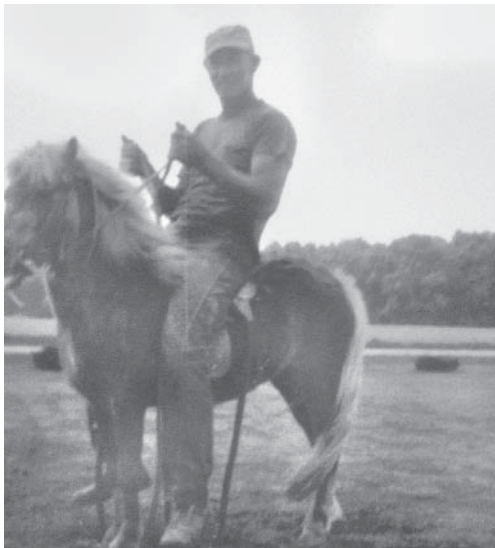
Thanks again for writing us. If you ever have any questions or concerns in the future, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Sincerely,

[A customer service agent who will remain unnamed.]

Proprietary information? Huh, that's funny. I thought farmers were *people*.

My Grandpa Timmerman farmed until he was 82. When he was a kid, my dad rose before the sun, milked cows, tended the gang of free-range turkeys, and then went off to school. Grandpa and Dad delivered, weaned, fed, and killed hogs, chickens, and cows. They grew corn and beans. They worked the land. Their lives revolved around food.



The author's grandfather, Lee Timmerman, on the farm.

Merely one generation later, there's me—a grown man who can't make Kraft Macaroni & Cheese. I can never get it straight; do you add the noodles before or after the water boils? And when does the packet of whatever that stuff pretending to be cheese come into play?

When I attempt to make mac and cheese, my three-year-old daughter, Harper, stares as I fumble at the stove, squinting at the tiny directions on the side of the box. I can almost read her mind: "We are totally screwed if something happens to Mom."

Food is so inconvenient. You look in the fridge and in the pantry to see what you need, you go to the store, you put the food in the cart, you get the food out of the cart to be scanned, you put the food back in the cart, then it's in the trunk, out of the trunk, in the house, in the pantry or fridge, back out of the pantry or fridge, time to cook (or, in my case, microwave), eat, wash dishes, rinse, and repeat. The eating part is okay, especially if someone else is doing the cooking, but other than that, what's fun about food?

If there were a pill to take instead of eating, I would wash it down with a chocolate milkshake.

Lately, however, I've become obsessed with food. Not so much with eating it, but with the labels that appear on it. I've always had a thing with labels, I guess. In 2007, I followed the labels of my favorite items of clothing to their country of origin and hung out with the workers who made them in Honduras, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and China. I wrote about the experience in my book, *Where Am I Wearing?* At about the same time that this book hit the shelves, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) law came out.

From the USDA's COOL site:

Country of Origin Labeling is a labeling law that requires food retailers to notify their customers with information regarding the source of certain foods.¹

Suddenly, the apple juice that I gave my daughter wasn't just apple juice; it was *Product of China* apple juice as were the canned mushrooms I added to my frozen pizza (my idea of gourmet cooking). The bananas were Costa Rican. The blueberries were Chilean. Our freezer had fish from Vietnam and shrimp from Thailand. Our fridge was a United Nations of calories and becoming every bit as global as our wardrobes.

I wrongly assumed that this big ol' country of mine—thanks to the tropical waters of Florida and Hawaii, glaciers in Alaska, and everything

¹As of January 10th, 2013. U.S. Department of Agriculture, www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/COOL.

else in the middle—allowed us citizens to feed ourselves. I supposed that salt-of-the-earth guys like my grandpa and my dad worked the land, and bawdy sailors like the ones on the Discovery Channel’s *Deadliest Catch* trolled our coastal waters for seafood. I naively assumed apple juice was from Washington state, and shrimp came from the shrimp boats that I saw in Key West, where I had worked as a dive instructor years before.

I was wrong.

The amount of food we import to the United States has doubled in the past 10 years.² Eighty-six percent of seafood,³ 50 percent of fresh fruit, and 20 percent of the vegetables we Americans eat come from another country.⁴ In total, we import 319 different types of fruit products from 121 different countries.⁵

Authors like Eric Schlosser (*Fast Food Nation*), Bill McKibben (*Deep Economy*), and Michael Pollan (*The Omnivore’s Dilemma*) have educated us about how industrial our nationwide food chain has become. Thanks to their research, we know that the average food item travels 1,300 miles from the field to our plate. Works like these and films like *Food, Inc.*, *Supersize Me*, and *King Corn* have launched the grass-fed, local, and organic movements.

“While total U.S. food sales grew by less than 1 percent in 2010, the organic food industry grew by 7.7 percent,” bragged Christine Bushway, CEO and executive director of the Organic Trade Association, in an April 21, 2011, press release. “Consumers continue to vote with their dollars in favor of the organic choice. These results illustrate the positive contribution organic agriculture and trade make to our economy, and particularly to rural livelihoods.”⁶

But there’s one trend growing faster than the organic food movement: the global food movement.

²George S. Serletis, “U.S. Agricultural Imports Reached a Record \$86 Billion in 2010 Making the United States the World’s Leading Single-Country Importer of Food Products,” USITC Executive Briefing on Trade, June 2011.

³As of January 10, 2013. “Aquaculture in the United States,” National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, www.nmfs.noaa.gov/aquaculture/aquaculture_in_us.html.

⁴Michael R. Taylor, “Succeeding on Produce Safety,” *FDA Voice*, April 17, 2012, <http://blogs.fda.gov/fdavoices/index.php/2012/04/succeeding-on-produce-safety/>.

⁵Nora Brooks, Anita Regmi, and Jean Buzby, “Trade Data Show Value, Variety, and Sources of U.S. Food Imports,” U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, *Amber Waves* 1, no. 3 (September 2009): 36–37.

⁶“U.S. Organic Industry Valued at Nearly \$29 Billion in 2010,” Organic Trade Association, 2011, www.organicnewsroom.com/2011/04/us_organic_industry_valued_at.html.

During the same period cited earlier, U.S. agriculture imports grew 8 percent to \$79 billion.⁷ Even organic agriculture isn't just about our economy as many may assume; 40 percent of growers and handlers that have earned the USDA certified organic standards are located outside of the United States.

The Omnivore's Dilemma author Michael Pollan traveled the country trying to answer one simple question: What should we have for dinner?

I'm traveling the world asking a different question: Where am I eating?

* * *

“Mas grande?” I ask.

“No.” The barista behind the counter shakes her head, which is topped with a maroon hat that matches her maroon apron. She is holding the biggest cup of coffee they serve at the Juan Valdez Café in Bogota, Colombia—a cup that looks like it would barely hold a double shot of espresso. It's not even close to the size of a short coffee at Starbucks, which only holds eight ounces. And who drinks only eight ounces of coffee these days?



The Juan Valdez Café, Bogotá, Colombia.

⁷Value of U.S. agricultural trade by fiscal year.

It begins to sink in that the largest cup of coffee I could get here is smaller than the smallest cup at my local Starbucks in Muncie, Indiana. In order to meet my typical morning intake of coffee, I would have to order an entire tray.

What a cliché: An American wants a food item to be bigger. The barista tells me how much it costs, and I reach into my pocket. Maybe it's because I haven't had a gallon of my much-needed morning coffee yet, or maybe it's because this is my first day in Colombia and I haven't mastered the currency, but I just stare at the pesos in my hand like a child. Fortunately, the man behind me in line is kind enough to help me count out what I owe.

If you change maroon to green and the larges to smalls, this could almost be a Starbucks. Everything seems measured and considered and focus-grouped. People at Starbucks don't talk about design but about "environmental psychology." They don't talk about simply serving coffee to their customers but rather about shaping the "Starbucks experience." The front counter isn't a counter; it's a "theater." Juan Valdez cafés have taken note.⁸

The line of customers winds past puffy pastries and bags of beans. There are travel mugs and sweatshirts and hats available for purchase. It's as if you were visiting an amusement park and needed to memorialize the fun you had here by buying an overpriced T-shirt and becoming a walking billboard.

Etched, emblazoned, and stitched on every marble, plastic, cloth, and wood surface is a man and his donkey. Juan Valdez stands proudly alongside his mule, Conchita, before two rising peaks in the distance. This logo is one that's familiar to most people in the United States; in fact, a 2000 logo study determined that the Juan Valdez logo was recognized by 85 percent of Americans, making it more recognizable than Nike's swoosh at 84 percent.⁹ In 2003, Juan Valdez and Conchita appeared alongside Jim Carrey in the film *Bruce Almighty*. The Colombia Coffee Growers Federation—represented by the Juan Valdez logo—paid \$1.5 million for 23 seconds of fame on the silver screen.¹⁰ Carrey's character Bruce—who has taken over for God while he's away on vacation—decided to "manifest" his morning

⁸CNBC documentary *The Coffee Addiction*, September 29, 2011.

⁹See Rohit Deshpande and Alexandre de Royere, "Café de Colombia," Harvard Business School Case 502-024, June 2004.

¹⁰Sherry Day, "Move Over Starbucks, Juan Valdez Is Coming," *New York Times*, November 29, 2003.

coffee. Suddenly Juan appeared at his window and filled Bruce's cup. "Ahh...now that's fresh mountain-grown coffee from the hills of Colombia," Bruce sighed.



You probably don't recognize the author, but you probably *do* recognize Juan Valdez and his mule.

But without Starbucks' help—and without Bruce's deific ability to manifest coffee farmers with a single thought—how was I going to find the farmers who produced my Starbucks coffee? Colombia is nearly twice the size of Texas, and since a fair amount of the country sits above an altitude of 6,000 feet, it truly *can* be described as “atop the majestic Andes Mountains in a rugged landscape of simmering volcanoes.”

When I was in Costa Rica two months earlier working as a banana farmer (Part III), I met a student at EARTH University who

came from Colombia's Nariño district, a region famous for its coffee. After some searching, I found a Starbucks-produced report on its Coffee and Farmer Equity (C.A.F.E.) Practices program in Nariño. C.A.F.E. Practices is what Starbucks points to when customers ask why it doesn't buy more fair trade coffee. In 2010, 8 percent of Starbucks coffee was Fair Trade Certified.¹¹ A fair trade certification is granted by one of several third-party certifiers, such as Fair Trade USA, the Fairtrade Foundation, or Fair Trade International based on several principles: a set minimum price, a fair trade premium that goes directly back to the producers, supply chain transparency, and specific environmental and social standards. C.A.F.E. Practices is Starbucks' own set of environmental and social standards. The company launched its C.A.F.E. Practices program in 2003 and purchased 86 percent¹² of its coffee through certified farms in 2010.

About one cent of a fancy mocha at Starbucks makes its way back to the coffee farmers in Colombia. A *penny*. That's it. The creation of the Juan Valdez cafes is the Federation's attempt to cut out a few of the middlemen and get more money back to the growers. Colombian growers earn about four cents for each cup of Juan Valdez sold.¹³

The barista handed me my not-so-grande steaming cup of Juan Valdez. Hundreds of filtered photos of coffee growers and their farms decorate the wall behind the counter. They wear wide-brimmed hats and work on steep, emerald hillsides. Ninety-six percent of farmers own less than 13 acres.¹⁴

I take a seat in a wicker chair at a table beneath a heater and set my bag on the ground. Before I even take a sip, a vigilant coffee attendant—Starbucks doesn't have these—tells me to take my bag off the ground. Apparently this is counter to the image that they want to convey.

White sails stretching overhead across steel beams, like a café at a museum of modern art, aren't able to keep out the mist that has rolled over the mountains and drops down onto Bogota.

¹¹William Newman, "A Question of Fairness," *New York Times*, November 23, 2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/11/24/business/as-fair-trade-movement-grows-a-dispute-over-its-direction.html?pagewanted=all.

¹²www.starbucks.com/responsibility/sourcing/coffee.

¹³Day, "Move Over Starbucks, Juan Valdez Is Coming."

¹⁴"Our Coffee Growers," Colombian Coffee Growers Federation, accessed October 3, 2012, www.federaciondefaferos.org/particulares/en/nuestros_caficultores.

I stare deep into my coffee. Marketing copy, certifications, and images of farmers swirl through my head. But where does that marketing copy and the theater end and reality begin?

In a way, this adventure is a prequel to the journey I took while researching and writing *Where Am I Wearing?* Not a prequel in terms of my own life but in terms of the lives of the garment workers I met. The growing cities of Guangzhou (China), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Phnom Penh (Cambodia), and San Pedro Sula (Honduras) are swelling with new arrivals from the countryside. Forty million farmers a year move from the country to the city.¹⁵ Most of the garment workers I met had previously worked in the fields of their home villages or sent money home to their families who still worked in the fields.

Yesterday's farmers are today's factory workers. It's a shift that our own nation underwent, too, as evidenced by my own family history. When my grandpa was born during World War I, 30 percent of Americans were farmers. Today, less than 1 percent of U.S. citizens farm. And as our food economy goes global, we're even less in touch with our food.

The worst place I've ever been in my entire life is the Phnom Penh city dump in Cambodia. That place is hell on earth. All day long dump residents dive into piles of burning trash that produce clouds of toxic smoke, looking for something of value. They earn \$1 per day doing this, and most of them were farmers before. They heard about this opportunity to work at the dump. If the worst place I've ever been in my life—my hell on earth—was somebody else's *opportunity* what, then, must life have been like on the farm?

There are 1 billion farmers on earth. Sixty percent of them live in poverty. More than two-thirds of the population is composed of rural farmers in Asia and Africa, but that is changing. It's estimated that by 2050, 70 percent of the world's population will live in the city.¹⁶

Today, 1.5 billion people eat so much food that it causes them to have health problems. They are *overnourished*. Yet, we have 1 billion people who are starving. They are *malnourished*.¹⁷ We are moving to a world with more people and fewer farmers.

¹⁵Doug Saunders, *Arrival City* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 7.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷Raj Patel, *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System*, Preface to the second edition, Kindle edition (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2012).

I have a lot of questions.

Why, how, and by whom is dinner being outsourced? What does this mean for farmers in my hometown in Indiana—and farmers around the world?

Is the increasing global nature of our food economy part of the problem or the solution? Do we need *more* farmers or fewer?

How can we sustainably feed our growing population?

Less than 2.3 percent of imported food is inspected.¹⁸ What does this mean for our national food security?

And, how can we best impact the lives of the world's poorest producers?

Now a generation removed from my farming roots, I'm traveling back along the global food chain all the way to the people who catch, pick, grow, and harvest a few of the imported foods we eat to answer these questions.

Not only am I setting out to meet the workers who nurture, harvest, and hunt our food, I am working alongside them. I'm harvesting bananas in Costa Rica, lugging sacks of cocoa beans in the Ivory Coast, picking coffee beans in Colombia, and hauling trailers of tomatoes in Indiana. I'm exploring the global food economy through my own, out-of-touch consumer eyes and from theirs as boots-on-the-ground producers.

Growing our food gives hope and opportunity—and the lack of both—to the world's poorest producers. The issues are complex, but so are the lives of the farmers, migrants, pickers, and divers. We eat food that maims, kills, and enslaves other human beings. This is an ethical dilemma. In the United States, 325,000 Americans are hospitalized each year because of something they ate—and 5,000 are killed.¹⁹ The globalization of our diets is an issue of global health and of national security.

There is simply no way around it. These men's, women's, and children's (yes, children) livelihoods and our lives are inextricably linked.

¹⁸U.S. Food and Drug Administration, "Annual Report to Congress on Food Facilities, Food Imports, and FDA Foreign Offices Provisions of the FDA Food Safety and Modernization Act," August 2012.

¹⁹Marion Nestlé, *Safe Food: The Politics of Food Safety* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010).