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### The Lack of Environmental Accountability in the Top 1%

Reduce your plastic bag use. Drink from stainless steel straws instead of plastic straws. Eat less meat. Thrift clothes instead of buying from fast-fashion stores. The list for individual daily contributions in reducing the negative effects of climate change is never-ending. Though helpful, and certainly better than doing nothing at all, we cannot keep acting as if these small actions are the end-all-be-all answers to saving our planet. *Oneness Vs The 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedom* by Kartikey and Vandana Shiva exposes the true culprits and solutions to the climate crisis. This past unit has reinforced and enhanced my understanding that the current system of capitalism fostering the growth and power of the 1% holds perhaps the greatest degree of accountability in the increasingly detrimental state of our environment and thus our planet. Because of this, the dismantling of this economic system is necessary in putting an end to climate change.

I begin dissecting my takeaway from this unit with the most eye-opening claim from the Shiva's, that being the idea of interconnectedness. I do so because I learned that the flaw of capitalism and the system supporting the 1% is rooted in the destruction of this oneness. According to the authors, "life and freedom are one, that our freedom, as humans and as members of the earth community, is not separable from the freedom of the earth" (3). This entire ideology is essentially reflecting the idea that before we even think about the economy and the

climate, we must first reflect on our relationship to this planet. What does it mean to be alive on Earth with each other? It forces us to realize that viewing each other as completely separate entities as well as a superior species to nature is entirely problematic. The authors explain this concept by stating that plants and animals depend on one another for survival, within themselves and between each other, and humankind depends on these plants for nutrients imperative for survival. My favorite example they use to illustrate this is India's lifestyle of centralizing its civilization with the forest, teaching us that true democracy is "sharing space with others while drawing sustenance from the common web of life" (5). Essentially, Vandana and Katikey Shiva create a new perspective of thinking about humanity's role in the context of the rest of the Earth that is based on the idea that we are all united.

This necessary discussion of oneness transitions into the ways in which the one percent is threatening humanity and nature and therefore the climate: the billionaires are seeking to destroy the interconnectedness intrinsic to all parts of nature and human life. Originally, I (along with many others, I'm sure) simply attributed the environmental damage caused by corporations to the extensive carbon emissions and fossil fuels they emitted. But the problem seems to be far more intricate than that -- majority of us failed to see the root of the problem. Kevin Stack and Michael Vandenberg in *The One Percent Problem* support this notion in stating that "Solving the climate change problem will be far more difficult, if not impossible, without addressing sources that could frame themselves as one percent contributors" (1402). Thus, we are forced to look deeper into what fuels the one percent. It is not simply the *act* of the billionaires using their power to emit massive amounts of energy, but the *mindset* they've adopted that allows them to justify and evade the consequences of doing so, thus making the challenge of changing their

behavior far more long-term. This mindset the one percent has adopted is the illusion that organisms are machines created and controlled by corporations, instead of living beings with their own cellular processes. This is a result of "two centuries of the fossil fuel-driven Industrial Age" in which "intellectual architecture has been created which artificially separates us from the earth, and from each other" (5). Nature is now viewed as mechanical and inert, simply raw material left for the rich to exploit, designed for fueling industrial capitalism.

Perhaps an even greater threat to society and nature is the stubbornness the wealthy have created: the ways in which they view *intelligence* is entirely one-dimensional and mechanical. This is problematic as it closes them off to actual expert advice and researched facts that prove the destructive nature of their actions. The Shiva's suggest that a solution to this is that we "recognize the diversity of epistemologies and knowledge systems that have helped us in protecting the planet and ensuring our well-being" (10). Therefore, it is essential to recognize that we must also revolutionize the ways in which intelligence is viewed by re-crediting and revalidating both scientific research as well as the lived experiences from indigenous populations, farmers, women, and other oppressed groups that have far more experience with nature.

All these factors combine to formulate the capitalistic economy that is designed to keep the rich in power that in return severely harms the environment. It is a never-ending cycle of the rich using their already-claimed power to become even more rich and powerful. In the chapter titled "Should Corporations Have Rights?" from Kent Greenfield's book *Corporations are People Too*, he seems to make an effort to defend the importance of corporations, but his attempt to do so ironically illustrates this monstrous over-powering machine that is the corporations. He

states that they “are created to be the economic engine of society with the task, individually and collectively, of building wealth over time by selling goods and services for a profit” (61). Why is their task building wealth? Is that their main purpose? To only gain capital? And the by depicting them as the “economic engine” only further proves the fact that corporations hold an aggressive amount of power and control in allocating wealth. And they have all done this by thriving off the "ecological and social ignorance" along with the "greed and the urge to dominate and control" (19). All in all, the ignorance to the union of humankind and nature has paved a dangerously wide path for the one percent to gain capital through people, goods, and plants at the expense of our planet.

I do not oppose any individual efforts in reducing the waste and pollution being left on earth. As a matter of fact, I actively participate in it as well and encourage everyone else to do so. However, reading *Oneworld Vs The 1%: Shattering Illusions, Seeding Freedom* by Kartikey and Vandana Shiva made me realize the cause of climate change and its manifestation as a long-term problem extends far beyond littering and driving your car one too many times. Instead, the inherent dependency and interconnectedness between all forms of life on this planet has been disgustingly disturbed and ignored by capitalism. Thus the true long-term solution lies in revolutionizing the current economic system.

#### Works Cited

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