

Where Am I Wearing?

Part III – My Pants: Made in Cambodia

Chapter 12-17

1. Chapter 12 opens on Labor Day in Cambodia. Timmerman explains that Labor Day is not celebrated on May 1st as in other countries around the world, chiefly because of President Grover Cleveland's decision to separate the celebration from the socialist movement by moving it to the first Monday in September. He then claims, "Cambodians commemorate events in the United States that we are officially trying to forget, events that eventually led to factories in the United States paying their workers more for working less. These were events that, extrapolated over time, priced American laborers out of work and led to their jobs being relocated to places like Cambodia where workers' rights and pay are less" (88). Do you agree with Timmerman that workers' rights, labor unions, and government regulation led to jobs being relocated overseas? Could there be other explanations for this economic phenomena?
2. As Kelsey travels through Cambodia with his buddy Kim, he learns about mines, a remnant of the past war and about the Khmer Rouge. In Chapter 13, he quotes a woman named Chlat who told him of her feelings of revenge for the many former Khmer Rouge who are now her neighbors. She claims to think about revenge, but believes that "it [revenge] only creates misery for our society" (96). As an American, this seems unjust to me. What do you think? Could you live next door to your former enemies whom you knew had killed your friends and relatives, all for the good of your society? How do the Cambodians do it? Does culture play a part in their stoicism? Religion? Respect for government?
3. Chapter 14 seems oddly out of place coming in the middle of Timmerman's Cambodian visit to learn about his jeans. What purpose does this chapter serve?
4. In a discussion with Tuomo, Timmerman comments on American's work ethic and family obligations, noting that most American don't support as many family members as do the young women he has met who work in the garment industry. Tuomo suggests that a discussion of family or financial freedom could be philosophical. Considering the financial situation between families in Cambodia who may be supported by a single family member working in the city and sending money home to 7 or 8 family members living together in the village or Americans who earn far more money and have far fewer family members to support—in Kelsey's case, it is only him and his wife. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of each system. Which would you support and why?
5. On the taxi ride back to Phnom Penh, Timmerman recalls economic lessons he learned in college about hunters and gatherers and how they had "a lot more free time to spend with their families" (141). He then comments that family farms and family businesses in the United States are threatened by large corporations against whom the family farm can't compete. He closes this chapter with two sentences: 1. This is progress. 2. This is progress?" (142). What do you think? Is it progress, and if so, how does it (or has it) alter(ed) American society? If it's not progress, what is it and what is it's effect on Americans?

6. In the final chapter of this section, Chapter 17, Timmerman draws an analogy between the city dump and work in a sweatshop. He concludes by saying, “At the dump, one person’s trash is another’s treasure. And in Cambodia, one person’s sweatshop is another’s opportunity” (148). Do you agree with the comparison? After reading about the young women in this chapter, do you have a different opinion about the overseas textile industry than you did before Timmerman put a “human face,” on the issue?