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There Is No Bournville in Africa: Chocolate Capitalist, African Cocoa Workers, and International Labor Relationships from the 19th Century to the Present

By Ryan Minor

Abstract: The issue of labor exploitation and the impact of neocolonialism, have in recent years, become extremely important as our global community continues to shrink. This paper focuses on the relationships between European chocolate manufacturers and West African cocoa laborers from the 1870’s to the present day as a means of discussing the complex connections that have developed between industrial capitalism and labor in Africa. This study will address two key questions: One, if labor exploitation is necessary for industrial capitalists to maintain the high levels of profit they desire; and two, if the exploitation of labor becomes increasingly easier the farther away the exploited person is from the society that benefits from their work. These issues will be explored in the context of trade relationships established during the colonial era, between Europe and West Africa, as well as through the various types of labor used in cocoa production including, accusations of slavery. To further complicate these questions, and in order to reach well rounded conclusions, a case study will also be used that focuses on the Cadbury chocolate company, and their dealings in São Tomé, Principe, Angola and Ghana over the last 130 years. In closing, a brief discussion of present day labor issues in the Cote d’Ivoire cocoa industry will be analyzed as well. Overall this study seeks to reveal the complex and often contradictory process of colonialism and capitalism in Africa.
No Bourneville in Africa

Introduction

This study examines the history of the chocolate industry in Europe, and its connections with cocoa production in West Africa (particularly the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe, Angola, Ghana, and The Ivory Coast) where over three-fourths of the world’s cocoa is grown today. As the pages of this study unfold, the chocolate industry will be used to examine the complex relationships between industrial capitalist and labor exploitation (both domestic and international). Cocoa is an example of a luxury product that fetches a premium price for the manufacturer in the world market, while often, bringing poverty and oppression to the laborers and farmers who grow and harvest the crop. The contradiction of wealth for certain sectors of the supply chain and poverty for others is what has motivated my interest in researching this commodity. As this topic is explored, the questions of why this exploitation is happening, how it began, how it evolved, and the justifications given for allowing it to continue today, will all be addressed.

The purpose of this paper is three fold: first, to ask if it is possible for an industrialized capitalist business to create the high levels of profit it desires without the exploitation of a labor force; second, to ask if the exploitation of a labor force becomes increasingly easier, the farther away the laborers are from the core society that benefits from their work (as in the case of international labor exploitation); and third, to lift the veil that exists between the consumer and the human rights violations that often occur at various stages in a commodity supply chain, in order to reveal the darker side of international “free” trade. The chocolate industry’s involvement with African cocoa laborers is a perfect example of this veil, as the abuses have largely been concealed by the companies involved, as well as generally ignored by researchers and the public alike. This paper will attempt to uncover, to some small degree, why cocoa laborers have remained poor, oppressed, and without a voice despite the vast amounts of wealth having been made, over the last one hundred and fifty years, in the European chocolate industry.
A Quotation Before we Begin…

Man has always exploited his natural environment in order to make a living. At a certain point in time, there also arose the exploitation of man by man, in that a few people grew rich and lived well through the labor of others. Then a stage was reached by which people in one community called a nation exploited the natural resources and the labor of another nation and its people.¹

-Walter Rodney

In the quote above, Walter Rodney is writing about colonization. In particular, he is referring to the form of colonization that began to manifest itself in the mid-19th century between Europe and Africa. Imperialism is the term most often used when describing this type of empire building. By the beginning of the 20th century, most African nations were under European imperial control.² The history of European involvement in Africa, beginning in the 16th century, is often a story of brutality, exploitation, and at times, genocide. Over the last five hundred years, millions of Africans have been displaced, sold into slavery, forced to work under horrific conditions, or murdered. There is little debate regarding the countless atrocities committed in Africa under European influence, nor is their discussion the focus of this study. Those atrocities have been well documented over the years by numerous scholars, and do not need to be examined in depth again here. What will be examined in this study, is rather the development of European ideologies formed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that enabled colonizers to justify treating Africans as less than human; as well as, how those abuses have continued to manifest themselves up to the present day.

² There were in fact only two free African nations by WWI: Liberia and Ethiopia.
**Capitalist Ideologies and the Creation of the Factory Worker**

In order for the questions raised in the introduction, to be addressed appropriately, a series of events must first be considered. The first piece of this puzzle, is having a basic understanding of the intellectual thought processes and ideologies of 19th Century European political economists regarding domestic labor, and the way those ideas were translated into society.

**Rethinking Class Structures**

In the early 19th century, Europe was being reinvented. The early ideas of capitalism had taken a firm hold on society, and small business owners were reshaping the world in their image. While this new economic system had yet to be labeled “capitalism,” it is clear that the ideas of the time exhibit many of its early stages. During this time the class structure in Europe, especially in England, was changed drastically, which had polarizing effects on the population. The new middle class, who would eventually be referred to as capitalist, or the bourgeois by Marx, found itself in a position to gain vast amounts of wealth from recent advancements in technology and from the rising ideologies of both business and religious thought. The ideas of Smith and other like-minded political economists were heavily influencing the way new business models were being formed, while at the same time the Protestant Reformation caused a shift in religious thought, which moved people away from communal responsibility to a focus on individual salvation that came through hard work. Both of these ideological shifts were instrumental in defining what would come to be known as the European middle class.\(^3\) The lower class on the other hand, became the working poor, and to many in the middle and upper classes, was considered little more than fuel to keep the industrial fire burning.

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Divisions of Labor and the Birth of the Factory

By its very nature the system of capitalism must constantly progress and expand in order to maintain profits. Immanuel Wallerstein has defined capitalism as “a system that gives priority to the endless accumulation of capital,” and one that seeks to penalize any structural mechanisms that restrict this process; eventually removing the barriers all together or rerouting the flow of goods and services to exclude individuals and firms who are not willing to act accordingly.4

The pinnacle of this new era of profit maximization and market expansion was the creation of the industrial factory system. The factory was a place where large numbers of workers could be confined in a small space under the direct supervision of the manufacturer or a hired overseer. In the factory, the laborer, for the first time, was required to work at a pace set by a master; When to start, how many items to produce, when to take a break, and how many hours in a work day, were all out of his or her control. The introduction of machinery also implied for the first time a complete separation from the means of production; in essence the worker was transformed from a skilled artisan to little more than a ‘hand’ used to keep a machine running smoothly.5

In the factory, efficiency was more important than human contentment and machinery was more valuable than workers lives. Working conditions were horrid, with employees constantly being injured, losing body parts, and even dying from the crude machinery coupled with the long exhausting work hours. Those who survived the work often died at a young age, from exposure to volatile chemicals, or lung malfunctions brought about from years of working in poorly ventilated rooms. If injured or ill, employees had no choice but to keep working or face the prospect of losing their job. During this time, to be unable to work was grounds for dismissal, even if the causes were job related. Once a workers ‘hand’ was no longer useful, most business owners simply found a new fully functional one to replace it. A damaged worker became a hindrance to the accumulation of capital and as such, was removed from the system.

One of the most important writings that shaped this dehumanized view of the working class was Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*; and more precisely, his view on divisions of labor. Smith believed that the maximization of labor output was key in increasing the wealth of a nation. He proposed that the best way to achieve this increase was to divide every aspect of a society into specialized tasks that allowed people to freely find a balance between their passions, natural abilities, and desire for income.\(^6\) When applied to factory work, this process proved to be revolutionary, was soon implemented all across England, as well as other parts of Europe, and did in fact greatly increase production. This division of factory labor eventually came to be known as the assembly line.

Smith believed that the happiness of a nation was heavily dependent on the wealth of the middle class, and argued that they should be allowed to operate with as little constraint as possible from outside agencies, including the state government, or religious institutions. This belief in a “free market” would be one of the most important aspects of his economic ideologies, and would be overwhelmingly favored by the majority of business owners at the time. This line of reasoning also led many economists of the day to conclude that worker’s wages must be kept at a level of subsistence.\(^7\) Smith stated that any increase in wages above this

\(^6\) Smith’s idea on division of labor revolved around the entire society and involved both physical and mental effort. He saw the division of labor, in a system of natural liberty, as a way to allow people to use their talents to increase production, which would lead to more wealth for a nation. Smith did not see his ideas as a means for personal wealth accumulation among all classes. For the purposes of this paper, specialization of labor is used to examine the way his ideas were eventually applied to factory work, as they were the basis for dividing tasks into simple repeatable steps to increase production. Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (New York: Bantam Books, 2003, original pub. date:1776).

\(^7\) Living at subsistence, is when a worker’s wage is just enough income to buy basic necessities like food and shelter, as well as raise a family, who would eventually become the new generation of factory works. Smith did not think laborers should be mistreated, but he did believe they had a specific role to play in the greater system. Smith never saw his ideas as an opportunity for the lower classes to move up the social ladder, but that they could still experience an increase in their quality of life, through advancements made by the business owning class. This process came to be known as living at cultural subsistence. For example: if one compares the living conditions of a worker from 2012 to those of a worker from 1912 one would find that the former of the two has a much higher standard of living, even though both are labeled as part of the same class, and are considered to be living at the level of subsistence for their
level would diminish the returns of the middle class, which could lead them to shut down their businesses, and ultimately cause the wealth of a nation to decrease.

Placing the emphasis on profits over labor conditions, in order to obtain happiness for a nation proved to be instrumental in shaping the climate of thought in Europe during this time. Two major effects that came from this mode of reasoning were: one, massive amounts of wealth for manufacturers from the increased rate of production and the cheap wages paid to workers; and two, the emergence of a new class of impoverished, dehumanized factory laborers who were used to do the repetitive, menial tasks necessary for the increase in production and subsequent wealth for middle and upper classes.

**The Enclosure Movement and the Poor Laws**

As industrialization continued to expand and dominate every aspect of European life, the average working class citizen found their ability to determine their livelihood steadily declining. In Britain for example, “Some 5,000 ‘enclosures’ under private and general Enclosure Acts broke up some six million acres of common fields and common lands, transforming them into private holdings, with numerous less formal arrangements supplementing them.”

This enclosure movement was enacted in order to increase the profitability of the land through the charging of rent; as well as, giving landowners an opportunity to compete with the new middle class, by keeping large herds of sheep, for the purpose of selling wool to the rapidly expanding English clothing manufacturers. To make room for these new enclosures, the lower classes had their respective eras. This increase in the overall quality of life is due to the development of new technologies and products brought about by fierce competition between businesses to dominate the market and make a profit. Smith believed that all classes benefited from these advancements within a generation or two of their initial development, which led to a higher quality of life for all classes as a result. Unfortunately, many business owners have abused the idea of subsistence, paying workers unlivable wages, which led to the exploitation of the working class. These abuses, as mentioned above, were not what Smith proposed. This perversion of his ideas did not always lead to increased happiness for a nation, but rather an increase in happiness for a few, and discontentment for the majority.

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lived on the lands for centuries, were evicted. Once homeless, most people had no choice but to migrate to the cities in search of a place to live and work.

For those who tried to remain in the country a new Poor Law was also enacted to coerce the unemployed to find work or face severe consequences. To be unemployed was to be sent to a workhouse (basically a prison for the poor), beaten, or even killed. These conditions made it nearly impossible for the poor to remain in the countryside since most of the jobs had been recentralized to factories in the cities. “In the 1840s several counties were already on the verge of an absolute loss of population, and from 1850 land flight became general.” 9 With their lands striped away through enclosure, and unemployment laws in affect, the majority of the population could now only survive on wage labor; and as such, fell under the direct control of the emerging capitalist class. Thus the stage “where the exploitation of man by man, with a few people growing rich and living well through the labor of others,” 10 reached fruition.

**Opposing Views on Labor from the 19th Century**

Not all people agreed that an increase in wealth directly translated into happiness for a nation, or that protecting the business owners profits should be the primary objective of a society or government. Two scholars who deserve a brief mention on this side of the debate are Thomas Malthus and Karl Marx. Both of these men questioned the notion that a society could, or should, obtain “happiness” on the backs of the laboring poor.

Malthus questioned Adam Smith’s argument, which stated that increased national wealth always led to increased national happiness. He saw that the working poor, the majority of a nation, rarely benefited from an increase in wealth by the business class, a small minority. Malthus asked if this kind of wealth could ever bring true national happiness? He furthers his argument by stating that even if the worker sees an increase in wages from rising profits (cultural subsistence), as Smith proposed, it does very little to increase the happiness or status of his or her condition, in that soon after the increase in pay is given, an increase in the cost of

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9 Hobsbawm, 153.
10 Rodney, 22.
purchasing provisions will soon follow. This increase in the cost of living would counteract the higher wage, thus leaving the poor in the same social position as before the increase in profits took place. From this conclusion Malthus reasoned that the working poor would never be able to break out of the cycle of oppression the middle class held them in, simply because the upper classes were able to manipulate the market in such ways as to yield maximum profits for themselves.\footnote{M. P. Cowen and R. W. Shenton,\textit{ Doctrines of Development} (New York: Routledge, 1996), 18-19.}

Marx believed that Smith’s system, which he first labeled as capitalism, was full of inequalities. Marx, having been born forty years after \textit{The Wealth of Nations} had first been published, had the ability to write from the perspective of seeing Smith’s system translated into reality. What he saw was a system where the rich were getting richer and the poor were not only getting poorer, but were also being stripped of their humanity. One of Marx major contributions to the discussion on capitalism was the idea of the alienation of labor. Marx wrote,

\begin{quote}
The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. The devaluation of the world of men is in direct proportion to the increasing value of the world of things. Labor produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a commodity – and this at the same rate at which it produces commodities in general.\footnote{Karl Marx, \textit{Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844} (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959), 28.}
\end{quote}

And in another passage he writes,

\begin{quote}
The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the
object confronts him as something hostile and alien.\textsuperscript{13}

Marx believed that a laborer had the right to be connected with what he created; and that it was impossible to be a legitimate member of society, or even fully human for that matter, if one’s work was reduced to the making of an \textit{alien} product, or portion of a product. Once the object of production was no longer understood, but was only seen as a task to be done, the labor itself became a thing of hostility and lost the ability to bring satisfaction to the worker.

From these viewpoints it is clear that capitalism, the socioeconomic system that had taken 19\textsuperscript{th} century Europe by storm, was one that caused division and great debates among political economist and moral philosophers as it evolved from Smith’s original ideologies into reality. These debates were especially strong in regards to the treatment of the working class. Some thought of laborers as necessary cogs in the machine with a subservient role to play, while others viewed them as a group of oppressed, marginalized, and exploited people who had fallen victim to the evils of a system that desired profits more than anything else.

It is also important to note that not all manufacturers in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century viewed exploitation of the working class as an acceptable road to profit; and, while it may be true that the description of the factory system previously described was the common practice of most business owners of the time, there were some notable exceptions. It is necessary at this point of the study to examine one such group of capitalist, Quaker chocolate makers, who believed that one did not have to choose between business profits and worker’s rights.

\textbf{Quaker Capitalism}

Chocolate has been called the “food of the gods”, and has been enjoyed by emperors, kings, nobles and enlightened thinkers for centuries. Cultures have used it as currency, an aphrodisiac, medicine, and simply for the delicious taste. Over the last five hundred years, chocolate has gone from a drink unknown outside

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 28.
the jungles of Mexico and South America, to become one of the most heavily traded and universally loved commodities in the world. Chocolate is made from a bean called cocoa. The trees that grow these beans are extremely fragile, requiring near perfect conditions and warm climates to flourish. Before Europeans were introduced to cocoa in the 16th century, the trees could only be found in the equatorial forest of South and Central America, as well as Mexico. Today the crop is prevalent all along the equator, in multiple continents, including parts of Asia and Africa.

Decolonization throughout the Americas over the course of the 19th century, created instability in trade relationships between the locals and former colonizers; which disrupted the cocoa markets there. At this same time, diseases wiped out large quantities of cocoa trees in certain areas of South America and Mexico. Both of these factors led to a shift in cocoa production, allowing Africa to become a major player by the late 19th century, where these issues were not prominent. Today, three quarters of all cocoa beans sold in the world are grown in West Africa.

From Chocolate’s initial introduction into European society, until the mid-19th century, it was almost universally used in a powder form, mixed with water, to make drinks. The only solid forms were very brittle, bitter, and rarely eaten. Chocolate drinks were served alongside of coffee and tea in social houses and became a favorite among the elite classes of the time. Chocolate, in what would be considered the modern candy bar form, would not be introduced to the public until the later part of the 18th century.

**Van Houten’s Powder and Fry’s Candy Bar**

In 1828 a Dutch inventor, named Coenradd Van Houten, would introduce the cocoa bean to the hydraulic press, in search of a purer form of cocoa powder, and unknowingly begin the processes that changed the way chocolate would be enjoyed by future

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15 To examine the history of cocoa from it discovery in South America to modern times would take more pages than this paper has to offer. For additional historical background see: *The True History of Chocolate* by Coe and Coe (see bibliography).
16 Clarence-Smith, 13-14.
generations. Van Houten’s device used 6,000 pounds of pressure, to expel the fat from the cocoa bean, leaving a finely ground, purer form of cocoa than had previously been possible to create by hand.\textsuperscript{17} Ironically, it was the fatty by-product from this process, that Van Houten found useless, not the refined powder he was after, that revolutionized the industry.

The discovery of what to do with the fat from the bean, called cocoa butter, is credited to a chocolate producing firm from England called Frys. Joseph Fry, a third generation chocolate maker, discovered that by combining Van Houten’s press with a steam engine he was able to control the expulsion of the fat from the bean. Carol Off writes,

\begin{quote}
Van Houten’s machine had been inspired by his determination to produce the finest possible form of dry chocolate powder. The residue – that unappetizing cocoa butter – became a useless by-product. But Fry and his family found a purpose for it. By blending small amounts of melted, clarified cocoa butter with cocoa solids – along with sugar and flavours – the company had a substance they could mould.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

It was out of this substance that the modern chocolate bar was born. Through the invention of this bar, Frys became the premier chocolate manufacturer in Europe by the 1860’s. The success of the bar was due to the fact that it could be eaten right off the shelf, and because of the sweet taste that came from the addition of sugar. During this time, competition began to develop from other companies looking to reap the financial benefits of the growing industry. Of these new companies, the two most notable were Rowntree and Cadbury.\textsuperscript{19} Eventually both these companies would surpass the Frys, but it would be the Cadburys, through their creation of milk chocolate, who would soon be the undisputed rulers of the English chocolate empire.

Besides chocolate production, the Fry, Rowntree, and Cadbury families had another thing in common, Quakerism.\textsuperscript{20} The

\textsuperscript{17} Carol Off, \textit{Bitter Chocolate} (New York: The New Press, 2006).
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 51.
Quakers, a protestant sect of Christianity, had experienced persecution and exile from the Church of England for generations. Holding government positions and attending universities were just two of the many areas of life that Quakers were forbidden from participating in. These hardships shaped the way Quakers viewed their surroundings; as a result they lived by a very strict set of principles, which included a strong work ethic and a belief in the betterment of one’s fellow man. They believed that salvation was attained through hard work, and saw wealth as a tool to improve society, which included alleviating the lives of the oppressed. No Quaker would ever admit to desiring riches for themselves; and accumulating wealth without some form of distribution in the community was considered a sinful act.

As the demand for chocolate grew throughout Europe and the rest of the world, so too did the fortunes of the Chocolate makers. True to their Quaker heritage, these families would use their wealth to make lasting improvements on society and in the lives of the poor. The Rowntrees and Cadburys in particular would lead the charge in alleviating the hardships of the underpaid and overworked lowest class.

The Rowntrees

Joseph Rowntree was preoccupied for much of his life with trying to improve the lives of his employees, providing a library in the factory, education for workers under the age of seventeen, free medical and dentistry services, as well as pension funds. All of these services were unheard of in England during this time, where sweatshops and indentured labour were common practice.21

In 1901, Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, Joseph’s son, published a book researching the condition of the wage-earning class in York, the town where Rowntree’s factory was located. He wrote in the introduction to his work,

My object in undertaking the investigation detailed in this volume was, if possible, to throw some light upon the conditions which govern the life of the

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21 Ibid., 51.
wage earning classes in provincial towns, and especially upon the problem of poverty.\textsuperscript{22}

To obtain this information, he went from house to house in York, interviewing thousands of working class families, in an attempt to understand the root causes of their poverty. Beyond his research, Benjamin Rowntree was also an active member of a group of moral businessmen, who petitioned the government to establish a minimum wage, while also arguing that democratic power should be in the House of Commons (the elected body of government) not in the House of Lords (the appointed body). True to these beliefs, Rowntree, allowed his factory workers to democratically elect managers, and had the rights, wages, and benefits of the workers written down and declared openly by the company.\textsuperscript{23}

**The Cadburys**

Like the Rowntrees, the Cadburys desired to see the lives of the working poor improved and were horrified by the general working conditions in factories of the day. Determined to do something about what they saw, the Cadburys decided to move their operations four miles away from the city center of Birmingham, to the countryside. In 1878 construction began on the new home of Cadbury Chocolate, the town of Bournville, built by the Cadbury family on four and a half acres of open space along the banks of the Bournbrook. The move was completed in September 1879 and was given the name Bournville at that time. The Cadburys adopted a French sounding name, as France had a good reputation for food, in the hope that their chocolate sales would improve.\textsuperscript{24}

Once the factory was complete, George Cadbury set out to work on creating a model village of well-built cottages with large gardens for his employees. During the factory’s construction, sixteen decent sized cottages had been built for key workers. In

\begin{footnotes}
\item[23] Off, 52-53.
\end{footnotes}
1895 more land was purchased and architect Alexander Harvey was employed. Construction on more homes began the following year. The project was called Bournville Building Estate and publicity from the time told of its virtues. Bournville was based on a concept known as “garden cities” which were designed to give workers the benefits of both urban and country life. Each house was to occupy no more than a quarter of its building plot and each garden was "not less than one-sixth of an acre" with at least six fruit trees. Cadbury hoped that workers would grow their own fruit and vegetables in these gardens.\(^{25}\)

By 1905 Bournville consisted of 315 well built homes, gardens, open landscapes, shops, a dining hall, churches, and a cricket pavilion, all centered around the “Factory in a Garden,” and surrounded by clean air, and the rushing river. The village was considered revolutionary for its time, and the Cadburys were soon revered for their benevolence and ingenuity.\(^{26}\) The experiences of factory workers in Bournville would have seemed like a different world from most other laborers of the day. Life was rich and rewarding for those who had been fortunate enough to find work there. The Bournville Village Trust came into being in December of 1900, with its purpose to oversee development of the village for the benefit of the residents. Bournville was an exemplary model of a Quaker city and its residents felt the morals of the sect in every aspect of life. There was an insistence on a healthy diet, having a strong work ethic, attending church, as well as taking care of those around you.\(^{27}\)

The English Quaker chocolate makers had developed a type of industrial capitalism where human rights and equality were valued. By bringing their ideologies to the workplace, these families had simultaneously achieved profits and advancements in working conditions for the poor. These Quakers were the exception in a time when labor exploitation was considered a necessary and

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) It has been argued that a visit to Bournville gave Milton Hershey the inspiration to build Hershey Pennsylvania, the utopian chocolate city that would eclipse the philanthropic work of any business owner at the time it was constructed. Off, 78.

acceptable means to increase profit margins by most business owners. Yet these companies, while going against the traditional capitalist model, not only managed to maintain profits, but increase them dramatically. Was the key to their financial success simply their loyal workforce, who diligently labored in the factories to show appreciation to their benevolent employers? Was it the deeply instilled, frugality and strong work ethic of the Quaker community? Was it the popularity of the new forms of chocolate the industry provided? Perhaps it was a combination of all of these elements working together; or perhaps it was something less obvious. There will be an attempt to answer these questions in a later section of this study, but before the chocolate industry is examined further, the role of technology and the expansion of international trade in the 19th century must be briefly addressed.

Technology, Science, and Imperialism

One of the traits of capitalist societies is fierce competition. In the 19th century this was especially true. Due to the smaller size of most businesses, and the ability to enter a new field of production in a relatively short period of time, no company could hope to maintain a monopoly on a product for very long. This extreme competition forced business owners to constantly strive for, new markets, new ideas, and new innovative ways to produce current items that would give them an economic advantage over their competitors.

One of the benefits of this type of market competition is that technological advancement is achieved at an incredibly high rate. It was during this time of technological breakthrough, that portable engines were first developed and used in the transportation of people and commodities. By the 1880’s Railroads were cutting down shipment times on national and continental commerce, while the use of compound steam engines coupled with advances in shipbuilding, made trans-oceanic commerce more economical as well.28

As capitalism continued to move like a rushing river all across Europe, it was becoming obvious to the business world that domestic markets must be expanded if profits were to be maintained, or allowed to grow, above the current rate of return. It

28 Clarence-Smith, 112.
is during this time that European business owners turned their eyes toward the non-industrialized world, and Africa in particular. Full of potential consumers, natural resources, open lands, and exploitable labor, the African Continent was a capitalist’s utopia waiting to be conquered. Once these new market based relationships with Africa could be established, the continent would offer the industrialized world a new, untapped market in which to sell cheap factory textiles and manufactured goods; while also, increasing European access to the vast supply of natural resources, open lands, and laborers there. Many of these resources were essential to the growth and maintenance of “modern” civilization; and Europe was growing more reliant on them every year.

**European Land Crisis, Legitimate Trade, and Monoculture**

By the middle of the 19th century, many European countries, especially England, were reaching maximum capacity for land use and were in desperate need of additional soil. Moreover, many of the crops central to industrialization could only be grown in tropical climates. These two factors made Africa very attractive to European industrial interests. Among these tropical crops were palm oil, cocoa, coffee, kola nuts, rubber, and other groundnuts.  

Beginning in the early 19th century, many Europeans began encouraging African nations to plant these crops in large quantities. This form of commerce that came to be known as ‘legitimate’ trade, would eventually overrun Africa with what is known as monoculture economies, and in essence, turn much of Africa into an external source of fertile land to feed Europe’s growing economic and industrial needs.  

With new modes of transportation between Africa and Europe achieved by the late 19th century, fostering economic advantages that were previously thought impossible. the idea of colonization began to creep into the forefront of many European capitalist’s minds. Once colonized, Africa would offer capitalist the opportunity to secure their monoculture trade routes as well as

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30 This was partially done in an attempt to rework the existing trade relationships that were no longer an option after abolition outlawed human trafficking in the early 19th century.
obtain access to all of the before mentioned advantages for an
incredibly low cost. It was this advancement in transport, coupled
with the necessity of land, resources, and labor, all available at
incredibly low production cost, which would eventually push
Europeans toward colonization.

**Weapons**

Another aspect of technological advancement manifested itself in
the form of weaponry. The industrialized world was arming itself
with weapons during the 19th century that could do much greater
damage than those from previous generations. These weapons
were necessary for the conflicts between the industrialized powers
of Europe, and for the protection of national borders. The need for
national safety coupled with the fear of invasion had a stimulating
effect on the rate at which offensive weapons and defensive
battlements were developed. These weapons gave industrialized
countries a distinct advantage in conflicts with Africans, when they
began to seize their lands. And while it is true that some Africans
had access to European forms of weaponry through the slave trade,
these armaments were generally of inferior manufacturing and
often malfunctioned.

**Scientific Racism**

Besides the before mentioned advantages, Europeans used
technology and science for far more destructive and sinister
purposes in the colonization of African nations. Scientific Racism
would be used in the late 19th and into the 20th century to not only
prove the “superiority” of Europeans, but also to justify the
subjugation and exploitation of the “inferior natives.” Some of
these “racial scientists,” in “modern” nations, began to question the
idea that all men were actually capable of being equal.

These ideas were in direct contrast to the ideologies of the
Enlightenment movement of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.
Enlightenment philosophers were known for believing that all men
were created equal and that given proper education and laws, could
reach the state of the already “enlightened” Europeans. While it is
an issue of debate as to how much progress was actually attempted
by Europeans toward achieving equality during this time, the
ideology itself spoke of human altruism and universal respect.
Many scientific ideas regarding humanity that were taking root in the late 19th century on the other hand, were often overtly racist, with its supporters publically proclaiming racial inequality, making no attempt to hide their beliefs that non-European races were biologically inferior.

By the end of the 19th century, scientific racism, which took many forms, including phrenology, craniology, eugenics, and racial hierarchy, would be used as a justification to dehumanize non-European races as an inferior sub-set of the species. As Europe and the rest of the industrialized world began to make colossal, technological leaps and bounds over places like India and Africa, these scientific racists would cite examples of innovation, creativity, and modernity to attempt to reinforce their claims that certain races were more intelligent than others.

In his, *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*, from 1915, Arthur de Gobineau wrote that there were three distinct races: white, black, and yellow. He also wrote that the rise and fall of civilization hinged upon these races being kept pure. The reason he gave for this separation was the natural superiority of the white race, who were the guardians of advanced civilization. In excerpts from his *Essay*, regarding black Africans, he writes,

> The negroid variety is the lowest, and stands at the foot of the ladder… His intellect will always move with in a very narrow circle… The very strength of his sensations is the most striking proof of his inferiority… To these qualities may be added an instability and capriciousness of feeling, that cannot be tied down to any single object, and which, so far as he is concerned, do away with all distinctions of good and evil… And finally he is equally careless of his own life and that of others: he kills willingly for the sake of killing…

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In the closing paragraph of his essay Gobineau writes,

> Such is the lesson of history. It shows us that all civilizations derive from the white race, that none

can exist without its help, and that society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it, provided that this group itself belong to the most illustrious branch of our species.  

It was ideologies like these that gave Europeans the justifications to overlook the moral dilemmas of colonization. Armed with superior technology and backed by “scientifically proven” racist ideologies, Europeans took Africa and its people hostage, and used the continent for the sole purpose of aiding in the development of their industrialized society. Thus “the stage was reached by which people in one community called a nation exploited the natural resources and the labor of another nation and its people.”

**Cadbury v. Nevinson**

In order to fully address the connections between exploitation of labor and higher profits for European capitalist, it is important to expand this study to include an examination of the international component of labor along the supply chain. In the introduction to this paper, two questions were posed. One, is it possible for an industrialized capitalist business to make the high level of profits it desires without the exploitation of a labor force, and two, does the exploitation of a labor force become increasingly easier, the farther away the laborers are from the society (as in the case of international labor exploitation).

To answer these questions, the study will now return to the chocolate industry; and in particular, an investigation from the turn of the 20th century, launched to examine claims of slave labor on cocoa plantations in Africa that involved the Cadbury family, and a reporter named Henry Nevinson. The investigation, performed first hand by Mr. Nevinson, regarding the conditions of laborers on cocoa plantations, in Portuguese Angola and two of their colonial islands, would link slavery with the chocolate industry, and tarnish the reputations of some of the most beloved families in Europe.

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32 Reilly, 197.
The First Confrontation

As early as the 1880’s reports began circulating in anti-slavery newspapers in Europe and America, linking cocoa plantations with slavery in Portuguese Angola, and on two islands off its coast, São Tomé and Príncipe. One of these papers, The Reporter, published many accounts describing what the Portuguese called “indentured servitude” as nothing more than a new name for slavery. These reports are what would initially stir Nevinson to action.

Englishman Henry Woodd Nevinson was a professor of history turned investigative reporter, who spent the majority of his life speaking out for the poor and oppressed around the world. In 1904 Nevinson was asked to write a story, of his choosing, for Harper’s Monthly. The topic He chose was the Portuguese labor system in Angola. Nevinson was determined to uncover whether or not the claims of modern slavery, existing behind the guise of indentured servitude, were justifiable. He was also interested in discovering why the British government was so quick to accept Portuguese reports that stated there was no slavery on the plantations, in spite of years of mounting evidence that seemed to prove otherwise.

Before embarking on the journey, Nevinson decided to speak with the Cadburys, who purchased the majority of their cocoa from São Tomé and Principe, to see if they would be willing to help him in his investigation. The Cadburys in recent years had become outspoken activist against the atrocities in the Belgian Congo and of King Leopold’s “civilization” processes imposed on the Africans there. George Cadbury, along with other activist, had criticized the Belgian Government for still practicing slavery, under the name of “indentured” servitude; and, in their claiming that Congolese worked for a wage, and of their own free will, when neither of these things were true. Nevinson thought, given their interest in abolition, the Cadbury’s would jump at the chance to expose the truth about slavery on Portuguese cocoa plantations. What he encountered instead was awkwardness by the Quakers when the subject was brought up in discussion. George Cadbury, the elder of the family, told Nevinson that they were aware of the problem, and that an investigation was currently being launched. That was the end of discussion between the two men.

Cadbury’s reaction bothered Nevinson. Given the family’s history of championing human rights in the work place and
fighting to end slavery in the world, he found their lack of concern perplexing. The Cadburys were not only at the forefront of revealing human rights violations in Africa, but were also subscribers to *The Reporter*, which had published the articles that originally compelled Nevinson to act. Nevinson began to question the motives behind the Cadburys reluctance to speak on the reports from Angola. He wondered if they could approach the topic in a non-biased way, with it being so closely related to the family’s livelihood. Undeterred, and more curious than ever, Nevinson headed for Angola to find the truth. He arrived on the coast of equatorial African in December 1904.

**An Englishman in Africa**

What Nevinson discovered in Angola was just as he had thought and feared. Soon after his arrival in the coastal town of Luanda, he encountered Men, women, and children locally referred to as contracted laborers, boarding the lowest decks of passenger ships headed for São Tomé and Príncipe. Many of these Africans were in shackles, and showed physical signs of torture and malnourishment.

To conduct his investigation Nevinson soon left Luanda to walk the alleged slave trade route himself. Following a local guide, this journey lead him to the interior, eventually back to the coast, onto one of the transport ship he had previously seen in Luanda, and eventually to the islands themselves. By the time he reached São Tomé, Nevinson had already seen more than enough to write his *Harper’s* article. Angola was indeed rampant with a modern form of slavery. In regards to the slave route on the mainland, Nevinson wrote,

> The Path is strewn with dead men’s bones. You see the white thigh-bones lying in front of your feet, and at one side, among the undergrowth, you find the skull. These are the skeletons of slaves who

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33 Off, 60.
34 Ibid., 61.
have been unable to keep up with the march, and so were murdered or left to die.\(^{35}\)

Once on the island, while at a dinner with a few prominent citizens of São Tomé, Nevinson was told by a doctor, that one of the “largest and best managed” plantations had a death rate of one in four among servant children, and that the death rate on Principe was almost one in five among African workers of all ages and genders per year.\(^{36}\)

Nevinson also debunked the claim that a portion of each week’s wage was set aside to aid these “indentured servants” in their return home after their contract was over. He wrote,

> They never send a slave home, and they do not deduct the money for doing it. Neither do they deduct a portion of the wages, which according to the law, might be sent to the mainland for the support of a man’s family till the termination of his contract. They know that a contract only terminates at death…\(^{37}\)

Workers were forced to sign these labor contracts before leaving the mainland, which were automatically renewed over the years when they ran out. Contracts were sold between landowners on the islands, and children of laborers were forced to sign contracts as well when they were old enough. Some 70,000 people were imported this way to São Tomé and Principe before the practice was ended in 1908.\(^{38}\)

For all intents and purposes the cocoa laborers on São Tomé and Principe were slaves. Nevinson had seen the signs of abuse, the lack of freedom, the inability to return home, and the overall inhumane treatment that were all common characteristics of slavery in its most brutal forms. The payment of wages did somewhat validate the indentured servant propaganda; however, it was a minuscule amount of money with most of it returning to the plantation owners, as Africans bought goods at inflated prices from


\(^{36}\) Ibid., 191.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 195.

\(^{38}\) Clarence-Smith, 221.
the plantation stores. The Portuguese could call the system whatever they wanted; what was clear to Nevinson was that in Angola, and on the Portuguese controlled islands of São Tomé and Príncipe, these “indentured” servants were being worked to death at an alarming rate, many to harvest a luxury crop that served no purpose outside of bringing pleasure to the “civilized” world.

A quote by another guest at the plantation dinner referred to above, sums up the views of the colonizers on these islands quite well. The unnamed woman is quoted as saying, “Call it slavery if you like. Names and Systems don’t matter. The sum of human happiness is being infinitely increased.”

From the colonist perspective this quote was true. During this time, São Tomé and Príncipe were being transformed by the profits made off of agricultural exports. Fifteen hundred kilometers of railroads were built on the islands, as well as many ports and roads to aid in transportation. Steamers and sailing ships were common, and telephone lines and electricity were incorporated into the society as well. Truly "modern cities" were springing up on the plantations, built on the profits made by the use of “indentured” labor.

**The Second Confrontation**

Armed with his findings, Nevinson came back to England, and began working on the *Harper’s* Article. Once published, his story outraged the chocolate manufactures of Europe who claimed an over-exaggeration of the situation. To counter Nevinson’s claims, the manufacturers stated they had meet with the Portuguese government, and that their officials had promised to right any injustices that were happening on the islands, in the near future.

Nevinson and other activists were not convinced, with many calling for the chocolate makers to boycott cocoa beans coming from the Portuguese colonies.

Nevinson had shed new light on how the Cadburys and other chocolate manufacturers were able to improve the lives of their domestic factory workers and make profits at the same time. The secret was not only in their work ethic, their unique product, nor in their kindness, but also in a far off, and up to this point easily hidden, exploitable labor force that allowed the chocolate makers

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39 Nevinson, 190.
40 Clarence-Smith, 184.
41 Off, 62.
to purchase cocoa at inexpensive prices from the plantations. These events caused the once revered Quaker chocolate makers to fall from grace in the eyes of the public. It appeared that the desire for profits, even if they were to improve the lives of those around them, had blinded the benevolent capitalist to the realities of their own business practices.

**To Boycott or Not to Boycott…**

The Cadburys’ dilemma in boycotting the Portuguese, at the time Nevinson’s story was first published, would have meant paying much higher prices for the enormous amounts of cocoa they needed per year from a variety of scattered suppliers. This increase in production cost might have meant cutting back on the wages or benefits of their factory employees, raising prices on their products, or taking a decrease in profits for themselves. The manufacturers needed more time to devise a solution that avoided these unprofitable outcomes. As a result, the Cadburys chose to stall the issue as long as possible, by not only refusing to boycott, but also by urging others in the chocolate business to downplay the claims of slavery on the islands, reassuring them that the English Government was working to right the situation. The hesitant stance taken by the Cadburys in regards to these distant labor abuses allows one to examine firsthand the tremendous pull that capitalism can have over one’s decisions. Here was a family, revered as great philanthropists, labor advocates, and abolitionists, confronted with the seemingly simple choice of placing humanity over personal gain as had been done so many times before; yet for reasons that may never be fully understood, they chose to sit idle, while thousands of people were suffering to harvest their cocoa, and encouraged others to do the same.

To justify their inaction, the Cadburys chose to believe that the laborers were not actually slaves, but rather “indentured” servants or “contracted” laborers as the Portuguese had stressed. Ironically, the justifications given by the Cadburys, for continuing to do business with the Portuguese, were the same reasons given by the Belgians to defend labor practices in the Congo; the very same justifications the Cadburys had publicly condemned in their newspapers as nothing more than a whitewashing of slavery.

42 Ibid., 67.
Eventually the Cadbury’s did boycott the Portuguese and convinced the other major players in the industry to follow suit. The boycott did not begin until 1909, four years after Nevinson’s article was first published, and only then because the Cadburys had secured an alternative source for sustainable cocoa in Ghana. What frustrated Nevinson most was the delay in action, and the countless lives that had been lost in the thirty plus years from the time the reports first surfaced until the boycott took effect.

The point to be made from this series of events is that the farther away labor exploitation takes place from an individual, the easier it becomes to ignore or justify. The Quakers had to see the poverty in England everyday of their lives. This constant exposure would prove impossible to ignore for the group of business owners who considered themselves, in theory, advocates first and capitalist second. As a result, the Quakers would fight for the advancement of living and working conditions in England by improving factory conditions, studying and writing about poverty, as well as lobbying for government action on behalf of the poor. This same exposure would lead the Cadburys to build their “garden city” in an attempt to free their employees from the oppression facing the lower classes at the time.

The African cocoa laborers were not so fortunate. There were no philanthropic business owners walking by the plantations on a regular basis being appalled by what they saw. And with the final destination of their crop thousands of miles away, there was little hope that those enjoying the chocolate made possible by their labor, would ever come to their aid. In fact, even when the Chocolate manufactures eventually did stop supporting the Portuguese labor system, they did very little to alleviate the working and living conditions of the Africans who had suffered and died harvesting their cocoa. Instead, these chocolate manufacturers found a new source for beans that was less controversial, and began doing business with those farmers instead. There would never be a Bournville in São Tomé or Príncipe for the African labors of the chocolate supply chain; nor would the Quakers redeem them from their oppressive employers, as had been the case with their English counterparts. The chocolate makers would instead turn to Ghana, hoping to close the wound that had been caused by Nevinson’s report before it could leave a permanent scar on their companies or their personal reputations.


Ghana: The New Cocoa Capital of the World

After the Boycott on the Portuguese began, the European chocolate industry began to purchase the majority of its cocoa from Ghana. In 1909 the first year of the boycott, Ghana had only been growing cocoa for about twenty years. Before 1900 the country was a very small player in international distribution and would have been incapable of handling the volume of cocoa demanded by the major players in the industry. But in the years that followed the boycott of Angola and its islands, when Cadbury and the other major chocolate manufacturers began to rely heavily on Ghana for their beans, the country became the single largest cocoa producing country in the world.

Ghana’s success was born out of the country’s ability to offer European chocolate makers the two elements they desired most after the Angolan slave fiasco. A place where cocoa could be bought in large quantities for low prices, and most importantly, a nation that was under British control with no major reports of slavery within its borders. Ghana was safe, with no sensational news stories for reporters to uncover. There was poverty, abuse, and even some forms of labor that resembled slavery within the nation, but nothing that would outrage most Europeans of the time. To most people, Ghana was just another distant colony in the British Empire, full of impoverished non-European people who did not know any other way to live.

The lives of the majority of cocoa farmers in Ghana were better than those of the laborers on São Tomé and Príncipe, but by European standards they were still very poor. Cocoa production in Ghana has, by and large, always been in the hands of small independent farmers, not plantations as was the case in the Portuguese colonies. It took hundreds of thousands of Ghanaians on thousands of farms to prepare the crop each year. By 1911, Ghana was the leading producer of cocoa in the world, requiring the equivalent of 37 million labor days, or the work of some 185,000 people to cultivate the crop. Family labor was heavily used in the process, and there were probably as many workers as farmers in Akim and Akwapim in 1910.43

Often, migrant seasonal workers were also needed to fill the labor pool. These workers were typically young men from

43 Clarence-Smith, 218-219.
neighboring communities or nations, who were paid the bare minimum wage, by farmers to obtain their services. Farmers often saw their own profits reduced at market as well. Merchants were usually able to pay low prices for cash crops leaving the non-market institution, the farming household, to absorb most of the cost of land, labor and capital required for cultivation and production. As a result of this merchant friendly supply chain, foreigners and wealthy traders were able to profit, while African cocoa laborers and farmers were both left with minimal income to show for their work.

By the 1930’s, through the money brought into the nation from cocoa exports, many people in Ghana were able to live quite well. Cocoa helped build a decent road system, and funded education for the elite of the nation as well. But Ghana was still a British colony, and while it is true that a few farmers were able to experience moderate financial success, the majority remained impoverished and largely unaffected by the profits that their work was producing for the nation.

John Newman grew up in Ghana in the 1950’s and was one of the many elite children who benefitted from the profits of the cocoa industry there. He was well educated, played cricket, and described himself as someone who could have been easily transplanted in the UK with very little adjustment. When he was in his twenties, Newman took a job working for the Ghana Cocoa Marketing Board. It was during this time that he had his first real interactions with cocoa farmers and their living conditions. He was struck by the contrast of his privileged upbringing and the poverty of the farmers and their families. In an interview, he said,

I was offered bad water and I couldn’t drink it. [I said] I will apologize, I can’t drink it, the farmer said you obroni [white person] go away.” It was at this time in my life I began to think, “This is the person who helps create the wealth. I have never been a part of wealth creation, yet I have gone to all the schools and played cricket, I could have been

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45 Austin, 25.
Ryan Minor

lifted and dumped in the UK, and I would have been alright and yet I don’t belong [there] I belong here.47

Here was the lifeblood of the nation, living in filth, uneducated, and poor, while Newman had been living in privilege his entire life as a beneficiary of their labor. From these interactions, Newman decided that he would spend the rest of his life as a consultant fighting for the rights of cocoa farmers and for fair purchase prices on their crops.48

In the last fifty years, little has changed for the Ghanaian farmer. In 2008 the global market for cocoa and chocolate products was roughly seventy billion dollars. Total profits made by Ghana in exports of cocoa were $1.2 billion. This translates to roughly four percent of the total world profit for a nation that supplied over fifty percent of the world’s cocoa that year.49 Most farmers’ villages still have dirty water, mud houses, and no schools for their children. The majority of farmers desperately want their children to get an education in order to escape the cocoa fields when they reach adulthood, but with the price of cocoa regulated in far off commodity exchange centers, most Ghanaians do not receive enough money from their crops to even send their children to school. The Ghanaians, like the Angolans before them have been caught in a system of international exploitation for decades, where a few major manufacturers control the majority of the purchases, and the price as well. With cocoa, as has been the case so many times in the history of international capitalism, the business owning class, is able to extract what they want, for the price they set, from the lowest classes of society who often have no choice but to accept whatever terms they are given. This trifecta of circumstances leaves the African cocoa farmers with no voice, and often very little income as well. The lives of the Ghanaian cocoa farmers, while perhaps better than those of the Angolans, have never measured up to the ideals set forth by the Quakers for their European workers. Many of these chocolate capitalists have been involved in the nation for over a century, and while some have attempted to make minor improvements to the farmer’s lives, there still has yet to be a Bournville built in Ghana.

47 Ryan, 121.
48 Ibid., 121.
49 Ibid., 6.
Cote d'Ivoire, and the Continued Struggles Cocoa Laborers

If there is one positive thing to be said about cocoa in Ghana, it is that the majority of workers have never been actual slaves. In the neighboring nation of Cote d'Ivoire no such claims can be made. Over the last decade, and dating back as early as the 1990’s, reports have been made claiming that between 12,000 and 20,000 children have been stolen from neighboring countries, including Mali and Burkina Faso, and forced to work on cocoa plantations. Cote d'Ivoire is the leading producer of cocoa in the world today. According to the World Cocoa Foundations website, seventy percent of all cocoa is produced between Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and a few other smaller producers in West Africa.

In her book, Bitter Chocolate, Carol Off records a conversation with an ex-Malian diplomat named Abdoulaye Macko, who worked in Cote d’Ivoire to free some of these children. After Macko shows Off a photo album of the boys he has personally met, she writes,

The photographs are startling. Page after page reveals groups of dusty, frightened children, without footwear, dressed in scanty clothing, unsmiling faces revealing poignant details that illustrate the story the former diplomat is telling. There are scores of boys in the pictures, ranging in age from about ten to eighteen; dozens of the photos show the shoulders and backsides of the youths with their open sores and cuts. It’s difficult to know which wounds are from beatings and which are from carrying the heavy sacks, but the sores were all untreated. Most of the boys had been on these

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50 These reports have been backed up by many firsthand accounts, documentaries, and non-profit organizations that are involved in trying to stop human trafficking. Off, 124; UNICEF, “The state of the World’s Children 2011”, http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC_2011_Main_Report_EN_02242011.pdf
farms for months or even years before Macko found them.  

Macko said that most of these children were stolen from their families and smuggled into Cote D’Ivoire by mercenaries, for the sole purpose of being sold to cocoa plantations.  Macko also said that he was able to free some of the children he met, but that it was a very small percentage of the total number of young boys still in captivity.  

With so much of the world’s cocoa crop coming from Cote d’Ivoire, and so much of it harvested by these stolen children, it is virtually impossible to keep slavery out of the major manufacturer’s cocoa purchases today.  Commodity exchange markets complicate these issues further, by co-mingling beans from around the world, with little accountably for how they are grown or harvested.  As a result, most chocolate, unless labeled fair or ethically traded, is made with at least some cocoa from Cote d’Ivoire harvested by these child laborers.  

The Hypocrisy of it All  

The history of the chocolate industry can be divided into two parallel co-existing stories.  One story is of the benevolent, paternalistic Quaker, whose riches flowed like the Bourn River into the lives of their workers, the community, and the fight to see all oppression ended in the world.  These families were the anti-capitalist’s capitalists, who put humanity before profitability and found success in both circles.  The visuals of this story are the advertisements of children playing in grassy fields while eating candy; of young lovers sharing first kisses over hot cocoa and of joy and laughter.  This is the story of delicious chocolate.  

The other story is of a completely different nature.  It reeks of exploitation, oppression, cover-ups, the dragging of feet, and the concern for profits over human life.  It is a story of protecting self-interests while hundreds of thousands of people have suffered under oppressive forced labor conditions or kept in poverty, for over a century.  It is unfortunately a story too often associated with large-scale industrial capitalist business.  The visuals of this story  

51 Off, 123.  
52 Ibid., 124.
are the littered bones of dead slaves along highways, or the
emaciated bodies of living slaves waiting to die, of shackles, scars,
and child labor. This story has no joy, no open spaces for playing,
no love to be shared, and no laughter to be heard. This is the story
of bitter cocoa.

It is obvious, from the events described earlier in this paper,
that the chocolate makers cared deeply for their factory employees,
and used their wealth to make lasting improvements for the
oppressed of their local society. At first glance it would seem that
the chocolate industry was proof that it was possible to make
profits without exploiting labor. However, by considering the
work of Henry Nevinson, and other investigators who have
exposed the exploitation of cocoa workers in Africa over the last
century, one begins to see that there are many facets to the
relationships between laborers and capitalist business owners that
can easily be overlooked or ignored. If one removes enough of
these layers, it appears that even the most moralistic of capitalist,
such as the Quakers, might be responsible for making profits from
dehumanized, exploited labor.

Why is There No Bournville in Africa?

The Cadburys and other Quaker business owners, were publicly
involved in abolitionism; But did this mean that they saw Africans
as equal to Europeans? There is no direct response to that
question, but through an examination of some of the Cadburys
interactions and writings on the subject, an educated assumption
can be made.

In a meeting with the Cadburys during their investigation of
Angola, The Portuguese officials on São Tomé had said, “One
shouldn’t judge labour conditions in Africa by European
standards.” The fact that the chocolate makers continued to
purchase cocoa from the Portuguese after hearing that statement
suggests, at the very least, that they bought into the belief that a
different set of moral standards was acceptable for African labors.
Perhaps even more telling of the way chocolate manufacturers may
have viewed African workers can be found in a private
correspondence from William Cadbury, the nephew of George
Cadbury, to a fellow Quaker Activist. He wrote,

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53 Ibid., 62.
One looks at these matters in a different light when it affects one’s own interest but I do feel there is a vast difference between the cultivation of cocoa and gold or diamond mining [in reference to the reports of the time concerning British abuse in African mining].

Once the surface is penetrated, it appears that the Quaker capitalists, despite all their good intentions and moral ideologies, would fail to completely separate themselves from the pull of profits and the misuse of international labor to achieve wealth. Perhaps the Quaker chocolate makers’ greatest flaw was underestimating the impulse for greed that comes along with money and power. Perhaps in the beginning these families believed they could build a new kind of capitalist empire founded on the value that the lives of all people mattered. Perhaps in their mind all people did not include non-Europeans. The truth will never be fully known regarding these questions.

What can be seen through the patterns observed in this study however, is that even if genuine concern has existed, at various times, on the part of the chocolate manufacturers for the living conditions of cocoa producers, equality has never been the goal. These claims can be substantiated by reiterating once more that there is not, nor has there ever been, a Bournville for cocoa farmers or laborers in any African nation; and, given the overarching nature of the system of capitalism itself, which seeks profits over equality, the chances are there never will be.

An End to Exploitation

It has been over one hundred years since Henry Nevinson first published his findings linking Cadbury and other chocolate manufacturers with African slavery, which eventually led to the boycott on São Tomé and Príncipe. Yet today the same questions are still being asked by new investigators, knowingly or unknowingly, walking in Nevinson’s footsteps; confronting the same human rights violations, being committed by the same companies, in the same industry. These companies, who have

54 Ibid., 61.
continued to drag their feet, look the other way, and cover up their hidden labor exploitations, have shown time and again their unwillingness to act on behalf of the laboring poor connected to their international supply chains.

As we reach the end of this study the question still remains, has there ever been a profitable multinational capitalist business completely free of labor exploitation? Perhaps there has, but given the complexity and interconnectedness of the modern world, combined with the need to expand profit margins in highly competitive markets, the possibility of such a company seems highly unlikely.

Perhaps the answer to this question is not nearly as important as asking the question itself. Perhaps the only way to reach a point where labor exploitation ceases to exist is if enough consumers demand products from manufactures that are fairly traded at each step of the supply chain. As long as the consumer remains ignorant of, or complacent about, where their products come from, or how they are made, companies have no incentive to change their practices. Maybe the more important question to ask, is why consumers allow businesses involved in labor exploitation to remain profitable? Perhaps all of us who consume these goods need to start asking questions of ourselves. Do we believe that paying cheaper prices for products is worth the exploitation of laborers around the world? If we continue to uncritically accept suspiciously low prices on products, are we just as guilty of being driven by greed as the capitalist whom we so often condemned for their selfish actions? As consumers we must all remember that businesses will only manufacture products that sell, and that we have the collective power to change the way products are made, by simply refusing to purchase them until they are made in ethical ways. This is not always an easy thing to do, but ultimately it is always the right thing to do.

**Fair Trade v. Free Trade**

In theory, fairly traded products should not cost the consumer more money. By purchasing direct from farmers, corporations can eliminate expensive middlemen, who currently take much of the farmer’s profits for themselves. Fair trade, in simple terms, is removing these intermediate stages in the supply chain, which allows farmers to receive a higher percentage of the profit from
their labor. This in turn allows corporations, as well as consumers, to pay similar prices for fairly traded products, as those that are unfairly traded currently.

Yes, fair trade costs more money right now, which in turn means our ability to purchase and own products decreases temporarily; but that is only because manufacturers currently consider these items a specialty product. Eventually, if enough consumers demanded fair trade products, the prices would begin to drop. Even if the prices for these products always remain slightly higher than those favored by “free” market capitalist, which typically come from origins of questionable ethics, the choice should still be clear. Until the consumer truly believes in justice for international laborers, strongly enough to ask for fairly traded goods, manufacturers will continue to practice business as usual; which as this study has attempted to show, even in the case of seemingly benevolent multinational capitalist, involves finding and using exploitable sources of land and labor in the pursuit of ever increasing profit margins.
Bibliography


Author Bio

Ryan Minor is currently attending California State University, San Bernardino to obtain a master’s degree in social science with an emphasis in Africa history. He obtained his bachelor’s degree in History from the University of Redlands in 2003. His major academic interests are in West African history, the development of capitalism, issues related to international trade, and labor history. He is hoping to pursue a PhD in African History in the fall of 2013, with the ultimate goal of becoming an African history professor. Besides this contribution to the 2012 History in the Making journal, he has also had the privilege to work as an editor with the journal staff as well. In November of this year, Ryan has also been given the opportunity to present the research for this present study at the Africa Studies Association national conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Ryan currently lives in Beaumont, California, with his wife Britney, and their two young children, Benjamin who is four years old, and Chloe who is three. Outside of academia, and his family, he is also very interested in classical literature, photography, music, film, art, and whenever there is time, riding his bicycle.

Finally, he would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to read this article, and hopes you have found it as fascinating a topic to read through as he found it to research.