

Consumerism and Global Trade: Consumer Items, Labor, and World Governments

Kristen Bailey, WVU PhD Candidate, designed this lesson plan to accompany the 57th James Morton Callahan lecture by Dr. Minayo Nasiali, “That Dark and Vast Sea: A Clandestine History of Race, Capitalism and Rebel Sailors in the Afro-European Maritime World.” Dr. Minayo Nasiali, Associate Professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, will present her open lecture on April 13, 2023. Secondary Education teachers from across West Virginia and WVU have been invited to the talk and are invited to utilize this lesson plan.

Lesson Plan Goals: This lesson plan is provided in conjunction with the public lecture of Dr. Nasiali, which will address issues of capitalism and labor within the context of empire. One approach to examining capitalism and labor is to consider the impact of consumerism on a global scale. This lesson plan outlines a multi-pronged approach to discussing global consumerism with students. Teachers may elect to use the material in the sequence provided or, depending on their timeframe and goals, use one or two elements to fit into their existing lesson plans and goals. It is recommended that students be provided with the general background information on global consumerism, even if that full component is not used in the classroom. The different components to the lesson plan allow teachers the opportunity to engage their students with different types of primary sources, encourage them to practice critical thinking across sources like oral history interviews, political cartoons, newspaper articles, material culture, photographs, and maps.

- Component One: General background about global consumerism. This includes a brief history of how nations have long engaged in trade outside of their borders to gather raw materials/resources for production in the home country and have simultaneously sought new markets to export their manufactured goods.
- Component Two: This component introduces the subject of government support of consumerism through military protection. Linking consumerism with familiar historic events, including the Boston Tea Party, the Scramble for Africa, and the Gulf War provides nuance to histories previously introduced to students.
- Component Three: The student relationship to global consumerism is brought directly into the classroom with the examination of the stages of production of the tee-shirt, one of the most common consumer items.
- Component Four: Exploration of the labor in the production of items of clothing. This component introduces students to labor in the garment industry by examining a workplace tragedy and resulting workplace safety laws.

This lesson plan contains subject matter that is appropriate for a variety of grade levels. Materials are marked according to appropriate grade level, as follows:

- MS: General middle school students
- HS: General high school students

- HHS: Honors/advanced high school students

A recommended reading section is attached to the lesson plan for teachers wishing to expand an individual component, and includes articles which are also designated by appropriate grade level for potential assignment.

Component One: Global Consumerism

While trade across government borders and across countries is an ancient practice, the modern reach of corporations changed how humans purchase goods. One way to help students understand the ties between world governments and consumerism is to have them explore all of the steps that go into the creation of a marketable product from raw materials. Students should understand that most nations do not manage all of the stages of production within its borders. Using the United States as an example, students can interrogate the ways in which agricultural products or natural resources are harvested, then shipped to other nations for production, then shipped back to the U.S. for the consumer market. Not only is the U.S. part of a chain of production, they are part of a chain of consumerism across the globe.

Another element for students to consider is that global consumerism assumes that people and nations will be both producers of agricultural products or manufactured goods AND consumers of these types of items. In many developed countries, a worldview which focused on consumerism meant that workers had the ability to use their wages to purchase manufactured goods. In this way, wages to support consumerism were expected to stay at a level to support these purchases. When American industrialization took off in the Second Industrial Revolution (after the U.S. Civil War), working for competitive wages became associated with freedom. A nation that was free had laborers who could easily buy into the global consumer market.

MS: John Green's World History Crash Course – Globalization 1: [\(9\) Globalization I - The Upside: Crash Course World History #41 - YouTube](#) provides a background on the practice of global trade. At 0:37, there is discussion about the ways that following the production of a tee-shirt can be a good entry into understanding globalization. At 2:02, there is discussion about American cotton, which is heavily subsidized as an agricultural product. A brief look at the ways that governments regulate the free exchange of raw materials and finished products is at 3:25, pointing to the U.S. as one of the nations which guides global decisions about free trade.

MS: Empire Online/Interactive Map: [Interactive Map - Empire Online - Adam Matthew Digital \(oclc.org\)](#) *This source is provided for WVU Social Studies Secondary Education students and is password protected.*

From this map, the category: “Empires and Patterns of World Trade,” traces historic movement of raw material and manufactured goods during the time period 1870-1914. This provides background on global consumerism that developed when transportation and manufacturing technology evolved at the turn of the twentieth century. Examining the course of trade from the late nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries through the British and French empire links this

element to Dr. Nasiali's talk. This map also provides students visualize the ways that global trade was heavily shaped by major governments of empire.

HS and HHS: Political cartoons are often a thought-provoking exercise for students, who could analyze as a class the *Puck* political cartoon – “From Producer to Consumer” (from the Library of Congress – January 4, 1911, [From producer to consumer / Keppler. | Library of Congress \(loc.gov\)](#)) This cartoon helps illustrate the ways in which global markets are viewed as both producers of raw materials or manufactured goods AND as a customer base for the sale of these items. Both rural and urban sides of the exchange of goods are portrayed, as are the elements of business.



Primary source questions for students:

- What is the general subject of the cartoon? (Ask students to consider the cartoon's title)
- Where was this cartoon published and what does that tell us about the cartoon's audience? Background material on *Puck* magazine can be found at the Theodore Roosevelt Center [TR Center - Puck Magazine \(theodorerooseveltcenter.org\)](#) The magazine was political and relied on visual images like cartoons. Students might understand the satiric tone of political cartoons when compared to modern concepts like

the Trevor Noah show. Students might also note that the name "Puck " comes from the Shakespeare play "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and connotes an audience who might be educated and interested in politics and satire.

- Who are the individuals depicted in the cartoon? Rural figures, urban figures, and two businessmen are easily identified.
- What is the action of the cartoon? The rural actors are transporting raw material (cheese, eggs, honey, flowers etc.), which they have produced to the urban side of the image. The urban figures are sending both money and boxed goods (representing manufactured products) back to the rural side. This lets us know that both sets of figures are consumers and producers - which is the root of global commercialism.
- Are there any important figures missing from the cartoon? Urban laborers are not featured, despite the presence of factories . The presence of the train tracks implies the importance of transportation, but those transportation workers are also absent. Finally, the influence of government is not featured in the illustration.

Component Two: Government Support of Consumerism

A function of the United States government is to protect “relationships needed to expand commercial ties that drive American prosperity.”¹ In component two, students will examine familiar historic world events and consider the role consumerism played in those events. Each event is tied to a government’s protection of its interest in either a natural resource, a manufactured product, or both. In this part of the lesson plan, students are asked to trace the ways governments protect their investments by legislation to support trade, and by using military force to secure their access to links in their consumer chain. Teachers may, again, wish to use one or more of these events, depending on their classroom curriculum.

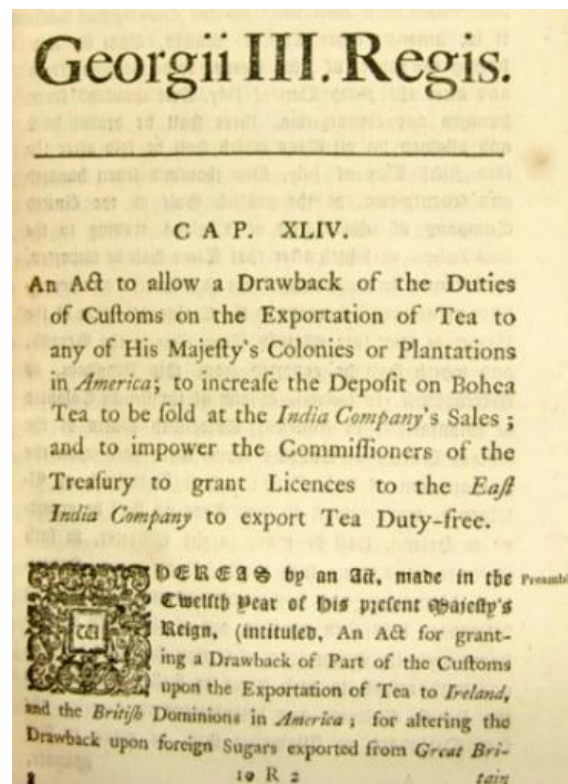
Event Option #1: The American Revolution and the sale and protection of tea.

In the eighteenth century, tea was a consumer item central to the British economy. Established by a royal charter, the East India Company was directly tied to the British economy - it was not an independent private company. The British crown protected the trading rights of the East India Company, and did not allow other British companies to sell tea in Great Britain or its colonies. America, as a colony of the British empire, was expected to be both a producer of raw goods and a consumer market. American consumers, however, were not content to live as labor and consumers without a voice in their own government. The Boston Tea Party is a well-known event of consumer activism which is directly tied to military control.

MS, HS: Video: “What was the Tea Act of 1773?” (History.com). This 3:52 minute video explains the impact of over-production of tea and actions the British Empire took to protect the East India Company. Passage of the Tea Act allowed British merchants to sell directly in the American colonies (cutting out the American merchant). Legislation, including the Townsend Act and the Tea Act increased taxation on multiple consumer products. [\(14\) What Was the Tea Act of 1773? | History - YouTube](#)

¹ [Economic Prosperity and Trade Policy - United States Department of State](#)

MS, HS: Looking at the original language from page one of the Tea Act illustrates the ways a major government (the British Empire) protected the interests of the East India Company. Because this corporate entity was such a powerful player in the general economy of Great Britain, the nation could not allow it to fail, and they instituted official acts to protect the financial interests of this company at the expense of colonists in America.



[The Tea Act | Boston Tea Party Facts | 1773 \(bostonteapartyship.com\)](http://bostonteapartyship.com)

Primary source questions for students:

- Great Britain imposed taxes on particular consumer items by the passage of the Townshend Acts, but most of those had been repealed. The tax on tea remained, because the East India Tea Company was considered “too big to fail.” How does this compare to current affairs (Silicon Valley Bank)?
- This act allowed East India Tea Company to both sell directly to Americans and to not have to pay import tax. As a merchant in colonial America, how might this type of act affect your business?
- These types of decrees were typically posted in public places and/or read aloud to the public. How is the posting of laws in public places different to the ways Americans learn about laws today?

MS, HS, HHS: [The Bostonians paying the excise-man or tarring & feathering / copied on stone by D. C. Johnston from a print published in London 1774. | Library of Congress \(loc.gov\)](#)

Originally printed in London in 1774, the lithograph, “The Bostonians Paying the Excise Man” gives students a glimpse at how tax collectors were treated in the events which led up to the Revolutionary War (two views are provided, a copy of the engraved lithograph in sepia - and a colorized version which may be more helpful for classroom use).

Import taxes on consumed goods were tied to the ways that colonists believed their rights were being violated, and they responded with violence. Students should be prompted to consider the placement of the actors in this scene under the “Liberty Tree” – an actual tree in Boston at the time of the Revolution which came to symbolize early activism against the British monarchy. Violence was also associated with the elm tree known as the Liberty Tree. Colonists hung effigies of prominent merchants and politicians with whom they had objections and the tree served as a gathering location for activities like tarring and feathering.





Primary source questions for students:

- What elements of trade are visible in this illustration? (the ship transporting tea is in the background; chests of tea are being dumped in Boston Harbor; brewed tea is being poured down the throat of the Commissioner of Customs; colonists are also wearing items of clothing - discuss whether these are made in the colonies or imported).
- What roles are different individuals are playing (consumers acting with violence against a government agent).

- What is an “Excise Man”? Discuss taxation and how nations support their own interests by taxing products of import or export and how that can impact consumers.
- What is on the tree? The “Stamp Act” is visible, nailed upside down to the Liberty Tree - this implies that the rule of law had been turned upside down in the colonies, where brute strength overtook the official tax collector set in place by the British government.
- How and why was this illustration received in America and in Britain?

Event Option #2: The Scramble for Africa (1884-1914) – World Governments, Natural Resources, and Colonialism.

Also called the Partition of Africa, this global event was centered on the movements of several European nations to capture the natural resources of mainland Africa. While these nations had previously had a small presence on the continent, it was primarily at port cities, which meant that African nations continued to manage the resources within the deeper continent. After the Scramble of Africa, not only were resources brought out of Africa, but Europeans established a more permanent presence across boundaries of empire which did not take into consideration ancient tribal or ethnic borders. Out of thousands of small areas controlled by tribes, Europeans created fifty-three “nations.” The practice of “civilization,” or forcing European expectations of education, diet, social behavior, and religion, complicated existing relationships. In addition to expectations of behavior, Europeans brought military force to the African continent, a show of force to both the native people and to other Europeans. It has been estimated that 90% of the continent of Africa was divided up among the major European nations after the official partition in Berlin 1884-1885.

African nations were negatively impacted by the Scramble for Africa in a number of ways. Because European lines of boundary were not consistent with traditional tribal borders, violent conflict often arose between tribes. The introduction of European systems of government disrupted traditional tribal rule, and the colonial-style rule did not typically seek input from natives. The widespread harvesting of valuable natural resources for European wealth production meant that there was little cohesive investment in the day-to-day lives of Africans. Traditionally-held native farmland was replaced by cash crops, and the ability of African families to sustain their communities through farming was seriously threatened. Infrastructure was only important if it served to support European investment into mining, timbering, rubber harvesting, and other industries. Africans also found themselves limited to manual labor jobs in natural resource industries and the transportation sector.² Decolonization following World War II brought a host of different problems for African nations, but that remains beyond the scope of this lesson plan.

HS, HHS: General background on “The Scramble for Africa” can be found here: [The Scramble for Africa | St John's College, University of Cambridge](#).

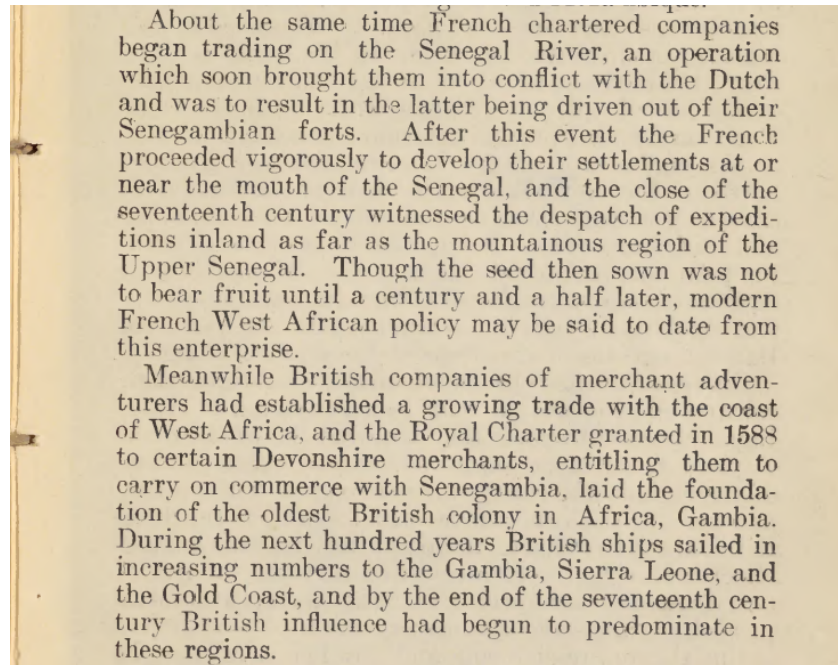
HS, HHS: West Virginia Public Broadcasting hosts a website for teachers which includes a section on the Berlin Conference and the Scramble for Africa here: [The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 | Africa's Great Civilizations | PBS LearningMedia](#). This site includes a video of 6:57 minutes that discusses the official meeting of nations in Berlin to divide the African continent.

HS, HHS: For a classroom video, consider “The Scramble for Africa” (4 Minute Histories), which links the need for raw materials, anticipated consumer markets, and imperialism. [\(14\) The Scramble for Africa - YouTube](#). At 0:35, discussion about the original European coastline ports of trade in Africa. Advancement of Europeans into mainland Africa occurred after technological

² [EFFECTS OF PARTITION OF AFRICA \(geographypoint.com\)](#)

advancements in medicine and transportation. At 2:00, there is discussion about how the Scramble for Africa was portrayed to the general public (humanitarian). The idea of creating new markets for consumer products is at 2:18.

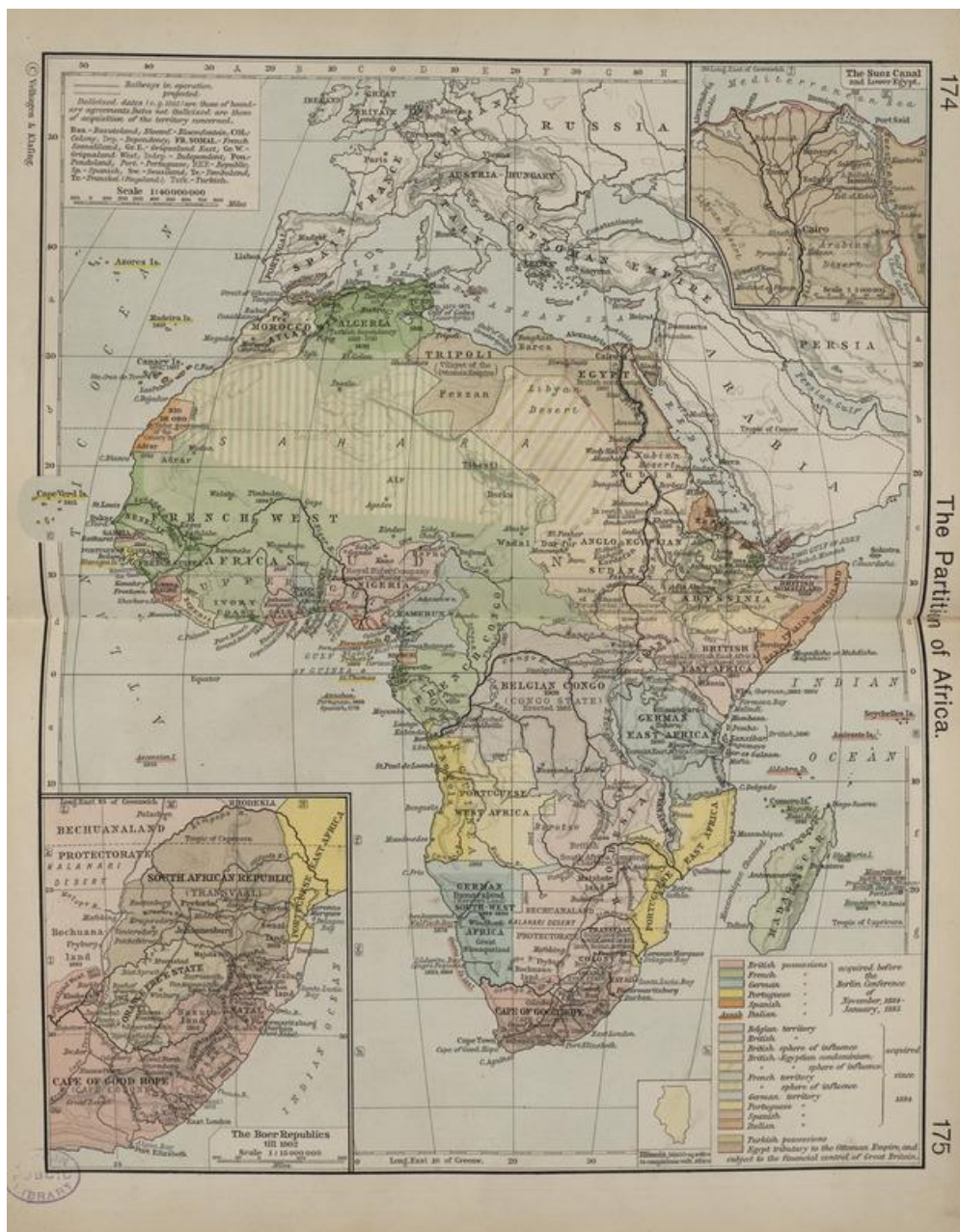
HS, HHS: The British Foreign Office source *Partition of Africa*, 1920 [Partition of Africa. | Library of Congress \(loc.gov\)](#) (full text saved in shared drive here: [The Scramble for Africa - Google Drive](#)) offers supplemental material. Teachers may consider sharing excerpts of this official government document with students to illustrate the impact of global trade on the partitioning of the continent of Africa by European nations.



HS: Newspaper Article: “Mammon in Africa: Railroads Projected All Over the Dark Continent, France Jealous of What Great Britain may do after the War – All Nations Interested in African Resources” from the *Akron Daily Democrat*, December 28, 1899 (full article in shared drive here: [The Scramble for Africa - Google Drive](#)).



MS: Students might also view one of two maps illustrating “The Partition of Africa.” The first was of the time period of the partition, created by William R. Shepherd and published by Henry Holt and Company in 1911. [The partition of Africa - Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center](#)





[The Partition of Africa • \(blackpast.org\)](http://blackpast.org)

Despite European assertions that their presence on the African continent would benefit all parties, there were early signs that the African people were abused physically and economically. In 1890, American George Washington Williams wrote “An Open Letter to His Serene Majesty Leopold II, King of the Belgians and Sovereign of the Independent State of Congo By Colonel, The Honorable Geo. W. Williams, of the United States of America,” which students can read here: <http://blackpast.org>. Williams was a historian and African-American political figure who went personally to the Congo to examine the state of European colonialism. His list of crimes brought the attention of the world to the chronic problems created by the rule of Europeans in African nations.

The impact of colonialism on Africa is discussed in the article “What Was the Scramble for Africa and How Does It Impact the Continent Today?” [What Was the Scramble for Africa & What Are Its Effects Today? \(afritechnews.com\)](http://afritechnews.com)

Primary source questions for students:

- Which European nations participated in the conference to partition Africa?
- What are the consequences of having different nations claiming this amount of foreign land?
- How did European colonialism impact traditional borders of African nations and tribes and the lives of those living in these spaces?
- What types of criminal activity was observed by independent outsiders who visited colonized areas of Africa like the Belgian Congo?

Event Option #3: The Gulf War

The United States became involved in a global military conflict in 1990, which can be traced to both oil consumption and questions of political dominance. Multiple nations around the world stepped in to contribute military force or money to drive Iraqi forces out of the valuable Kuwaiti oil fields. The individual and collective efforts were supported by the United Nations.

An overview of the war is available through the National Desert Storm War Memorial here: [War Overview — Desert Shield and Desert Storm Memorial \(ndswm.org\)](https://www.ndswm.org/).

A map of the Middle East provided by Frontline will help students visualize the locations for the military action of the Gulf War. [Maps - Overview Of The Middle East | The Gulf War | FRONTLINE | PBS](https://www.frontline PBS.org/maps)

HS: A good primary source is the oral history with Margaret Thatcher, available on the PBS Frontline website devoted to the Gulf War. [Oral History - Margaret Thatcher | The Gulf War | FRONTLINE | PBS](https://www.frontline PBS.org/oral-history). Thatcher discusses how important oil is to global economy, helping students understand the impetus behind coordinated multi-national action against Saddam Hussein.

Q: What was the first conversation that you had with the American President, George Bush, was it by telephone, was it personally, what happened?

Thatcher: No, I think that the contacts were done through Charles and I asked immediately, "is the President now coming to Aspen, tomorrow morning", and we had to wait to find that out, and then he was and so all of my thoughts were then on how one would conduct that meeting and the arguments one would put at that meeting.

So the following morning, I woke up early and started to sort out in my mind, the really big issues. I went out for a walk, always lovely in the mountains, and got things worked out in my mind, but it was perfectly clear, aggression must be stopped. That is the lesson of this century. And if an aggressor gets away with it, others will want to get away with it too, so he must be stopped, and turned back. You cannot gain from your aggression.

There was a secondary factor there. That part is the oil center of the world. Oil is vital to the economy of the world. If you didn't stop him, and didn't turn him back, he would have gone over the border to Saudi Arabia, over to Bahrain, to Dubai.....and right down the west side of the Gulf and in fact could have got access and control of 65% of the world's oil reserves, from which he could have blackmailed every nation. So there were two things, aggressors must be stopped and turned back, and he must not get control of this enormously powerful economic weapon.

HS: There is another oral history interview available from Richard Haass, who was the National Security Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs, who discussed the motivation behind Hussein's aggressive military maneuvers - which were related to capturing the wealth of Kuwait (which was the oil). [Oral History - Richard Haass | The Gulf War | FRONTLINE | PBS](https://www.frontline PBS.org/oral-history)

He was extremely needy, economically--largely for his own mistakes-- but all the same, the bottom line was he was extremely needy. Kuwait was extremely wealthy, it had a pile of more than a hundred billion dollars sitting there getting invested. It was extremely weak militarily. Saddam probably figured he could do it quickly, as he could militarily, and the Arab world and the world at large would bitch and moan for a couple of days, and then people would get used to it. And the world would essentially learn to live with it. And the United States, which had left Lebanon a decade before and so forth was not going to do anything. And even if the United States wanted to do something, the local Arabs would never do anything, they would never work with the United States and stand up to Saddam. I think Saddam took the pretty intelligent decision that he could probably get away with it.

Primary source questions for students:

- What is an oral history and why are these primary sources important to understanding an event or topic?
- How does the political background of these sources influence the way that you interpret their oral histories?
- How does oil factor into the decisions for war, based on these oral histories?

Another excellent primary source from the National Security Archive at The George Washington University is National Security Directive 54 from President George Bush, "Responding to Iraqi Aggression in the Gulf" specifically cites "access to Persian Gulf oil," and how the actions of Hussein held the potential for "added damage to the U.S. and world economies." [document4.pdf \(gwu.edu\)](#)

1. Access to Persian Gulf oil and the security of key friendly states in the area are vital to U.S. national security. Consistent with NSD 26 of October 2, 1989, and NSD 45 of August 20, 1990, and as a matter of long-standing policy, the United States remains committed to defending its vital interests in the region, if necessary through the use of military force, against any power with interests inimical to our own. Iraq, by virtue of its unprovoked invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and its subsequent brutal occupation, is clearly a power with interests inimical to our own. Economic sanctions mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 661 have had a measurable impact upon Iraq's economy but have not accomplished the intended objective of ending Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. There is no persuasive evidence that they will do so in a timely manner. Moreover, prolonging the current situation would be detrimental to the United States in that it would increase the costs of eventual military action, threaten the political cohesion of the coalition of countries arrayed against Iraq, allow for continued brutalization of the Kuwaiti people and destruction of their country, and cause added damage to the U.S. and world economies. This directive sets forth guidelines for the defense of vital U.S. interests in the face of unacceptable Iraqi aggression and its consequences. (8)

Component Three: Consumer Items - Clothing

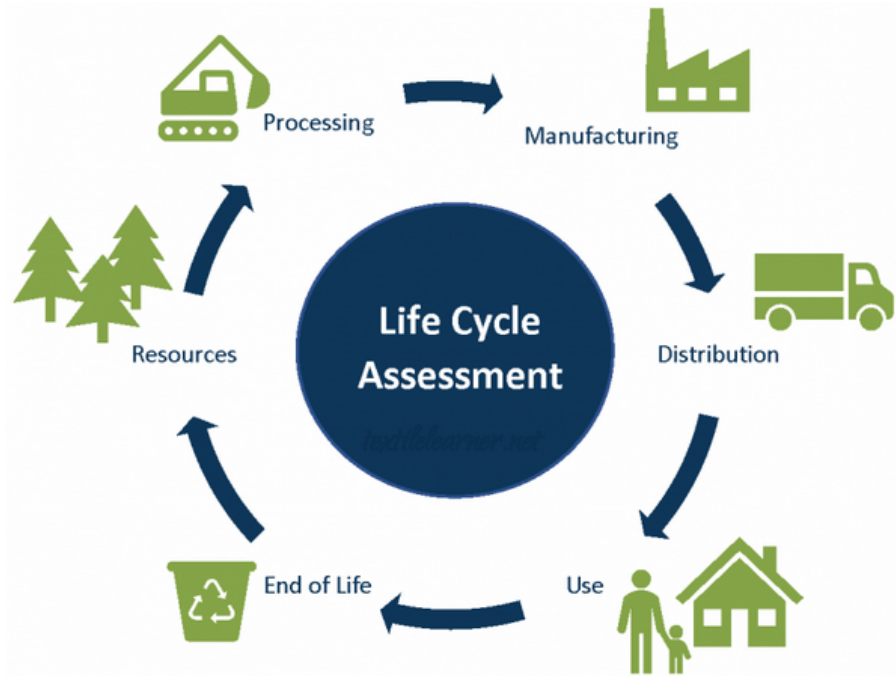
Analyzing a specific product like a tee-shirt or other piece of clothing asks students to consider their role in global consumerism. Students regularly engage in the consumption of items of clothing, often without considering their origin. Because relatively few items of clothing are made from start to finish in one country, this component helps students understand the vast distances and many hands that are involved in the creation of one item of consumption.

HS: Louise Crewe's article "Ugly Beautiful? Counting the Cost of the Global Fashion Industry," frames discussions about fashion into analysis of the various steps involved in the creation of a common consumer item (p. 28 discusses the usefulness of clothing items to connect "the consumer, to people we can scarcely imagine, and reveals that we are complicit in determining the conditions of their production."³) [Ugly beautiful? Counting the cost of the global fashion industry - ProQuest](#)

MS: "The Life cycle of a T-shirt" TED-Ed [\(14\) The life cycle of a t-shirt - Angel Chang - YouTube](#). This video is 6:03 minutes long, and is in cartoon/illustrated format, so highly palatable for all audiences. The use of maps throughout the video illustrates the distances the tee-shirt travels in the course of its production. At 0:40, students should note that there is reference to the agricultural production of cotton - and that "self-driving machines" are picking the cotton. Ask students to consider what this means in terms of agricultural labor. At 0:55, the video references large amounts of water (a vital natural resource for all global residents) and pesticides (harmful to global residents) involved in tee-shirt production. Finally, a consideration which is often missed when thinking about consumer products is what happens with them once they have been purchased. At 3:59, discussion about energy consumption for normal laundry of a tee-shirt illustrates how post-production and sale can still impact the environment.

MS: "Textile Learner" also offers a visual guide to considering the steps involved with clothing production. [Life Cycle Assessment \(LCA\): The Cradle to Grave of Your Clothes \(textilelearner.net\)](#)

³ Crewe, Louise. "Ugly Beautiful?: Counting the Cost of the Global Fashion Industry." *Geography* 93, no. 1 (2008): 25–33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40574213>.



For this primary source activity, it is recommended that students use either a tee-shirt provided by the teacher, or one that a student in the group is wearing. *Note: a tee-shirt can be viewed as an item of material culture and, thus, a primary source for this component.*

Primary Source questions for students:

- What was the motivation to purchase the tee-shirt?
- How did marketing impact the choice of this particular tee-shirt? (consider the role of social media, movies, television).
- Where was the item produced? (encourage students to read clothing tags)
- What was the distance the tee-shirt had to travel in order to reach a consumer market?
- How many people do you think were involved with the production of this tee-shirt? (consider steps including: gathering the raw material, transporting raw material to facility to transform it into components, transporting components to manufacturing facility, packaging item, transporting item to consumer market, people working in the sale sector for the item)
- How often do you think about the labor of the people producing common items like a tee-shirt?

Component Four: Labor and Consumerism

From the agricultural production of raw material, to the multiple transportation steps, to the transformation of raw material into a finished product, clothing is a labor issue easily accessible to students. This component is an examination of a labor issue in the garment industry in early twentieth century New York that shaped workers' rights and workplace safety.

- Textile Labor and Safety Reform - the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire

In 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire brought the work of women (and primarily immigrant women) to the attention of the American public. Factory clothing production at that time was not paid by the hour, but by the piece. This meant that women who produced more clothing items were paid more money, although the wages were terrible, no matter how many items were produced. Because the speed of sewing was so highly valued, scraps of material and thread piled up on the factory floor and around the sewing machines. When fire broke out in the factory at 4:50pm, the scraps were like tinder for the flames. *Note: while the fire occurred at what modern students would assume as the traditional end of a workday, there was no federally regulated workday at the time. These women were working ten hours or more daily, and sometimes seven days a week.* No fire prevention or escape procedures were in place at the factory, so workers attempted to flee the building by any means possible.

History.com has a short video, "The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire," here: [\(10\) The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire | History - YouTube](#). At 0:52, the video describes the shirtwaist. Note that this fire was the single largest workplace tragedy in New York City until the events of 9/11. At 2:28, the video discusses the ways that the community rallied around the funeral of these immigrant women to press the city and state government for workplace protections.

Students should be asked to consider that the women working at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory were producing a popular garment item - the shirtwaist. Today, this item is characterized as a blouse or a top. The Smithsonian Institute notes that, as women (and girls) demanded comfort, the shirtwaist was a prized item. Because the top and bottom of an outfit were now separated, women could change their tops easily if they were soiled or uncomfortable. While different in style from today's tee-shirt, the shirtwaist's use is comparable.⁴

⁴ [Collections Search Results | National Museum of American History \(si.edu\)](#)



MS or HS: Cornell University has a site devoted to the tragedy and the workplace reforms that resulted from this labor event. [Cornell University - ILR School - The Triangle Factory Fire](#).

There are primary sources on this site which include testimonials: example: the testimony of Russian immigrants Isidore and Celia Saltz Pollack [Cornell University - ILR School - The Triangle Factory Fire](#). Clara Lemlich was a member of the Local 25 textile union which staged a 1909 walkout to protest working conditions in sweatshops in New York. [Cornell University - ILR School - The Triangle Factory Fire](#).

MS or HS: *The New York Times* article “141 Men and Girls Die in Waist Factory Fire” is transcribed here: [Cornell University - ILR School - The Triangle Factory Fire](#)

141 Men and Girls Die in Waist Factory Fire; Trapped High Up in Washington Place Building; Street Strewn with Bodies; Piles of Dead Inside

New York Times, March 26, 1911, p. 1.

Three stories of a ten-floor building at the corner of Greene Street and Washington Place were burned yesterday, and while the fire was going on 141 young men and women at least 125 of them mere girls were burned to death or killed by jumping to the pavement below.

The building was fireproof. It shows now hardly any signs of the disaster that overtook it. The walls are as good as ever so are the floors, nothing is the worse for the fire except the furniture and 141 of the 600 men and girls that were employed in its upper three stories.

Most of the victims were suffocated or burned to death within the building, but some who fought their way to the windows and leaped met death as surely, but perhaps more quickly, on the pavements below.

Also available are photographs of the working conditions of sweatshop factories, living conditions for working immigrants in major cities, and women’s trade union groups. [Cornell University - ILR School - The Triangle Factory Fire](#)



This photograph shows an immigrant family at home, but provides information relevant to the garment industry. Women were often unable to earn enough at their factory jobs to survive, so they frequently brought piece work home. The presence of the sewing machine in this photograph indicates that this family depended on the labor of the matriarch, which was not limited to the factory.



This image provides students with a look into a common sweatshop-type factory. The women and men who are working at garment production are seated very close together, and their work space is littered with cloth, thread, and scraps of material.



This photo of the Women's Trade Union League of New York illustrates how important workers' rights were to the city. Local unions soon found it advantageous to join together into the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), who organized strikes in 1909 and 1910. Workers pushed for shorter working hours and safer working conditions for employees in the city's garment factories.

Primary source questions for students:

- What does the photograph of the living conditions for garment workers tell us about their day-to-day lives? (consider the number of adults in the photo - we might assume that more than one family lives in this small apartment).
- How can we tell that factory workers were both producers and consumers by looking at these photographs?
- Do these photos show different roles for men and women?

In addition to the sources included in this lesson plan and the additional recommended reading, there are several online sites which offer a variety of primary sources.

The Library of Congress - “Teaching with Primary Sources” program. [Teaching with Primary Sources Partner Program](#) | [About This Program](#) | [Teachers](#) | [Programs](#) | [Library of Congress \(loc.gov\)](#)

Empire Online/Interactive Map: [Interactive Map - Empire Online - Adam Matthew Digital \(oclc.org\)](#)

The American Yawp [The American Yawp](#).

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**WEST VIRGINIA
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Recommended Reading

Component One:

MS: “Deconstructing Consumerism” a PBS film project entitled “What Would it Look Like?” by Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee addresses the impact of global consumerism on a variety of issues, including the environment. [What Would It Look Like? | Global Oneness Project | PBS LearningMedia](#)

HHS: “How the World Embraced Consumerism” by Kerry Higgs, January 20, 2021 (MIT Press Reader through BBC.com): [How the world embraced consumerism - BBC Future](#)

Component Two:

HS: “How the East India Tea Company Became the World’s Most Powerful Monopoly,” [How the East India Company Became the World's Most Powerful Monopoly - HISTORY](#).

“The Story Behind a Forgotten Symbol of the American Revolution: The Liberty Tree,” by Erick Trickey, May 19, 2016, *Smithsonian Magazine* [The Story Behind a Forgotten Symbol of the American Revolution: The Liberty Tree | History | Smithsonian Magazine](#)

“Economic Prosperity and Trade Policy,” U.S. Department of State, [Economic Prosperity and Trade Policy - United States Department of State](#)

HHS: Background reading: “Why the Gulf War Served the National Interest,” Joseph S. Nye Jr. [Why the Gulf War Served the National Interest - The Atlantic](#)

Students may be interested in the health impact of war on US military personnel. The Veterans Administration has established an information page to address the long term health issues known to be associated with service in the Gulf War. [Gulf War Veterans Health Issues | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#)

Component Three:

In 1930, British Lever Brothers and Dutch Margarine Unie merged to form the global corporation Unilever. Students should be familiar with a multitude of Unilever products, including familiar items like Ben & Jerry’s Ice Cream, Olly Vitamins, food items like Hellman’s, Knorr & Lipton, and skin care products Dove & Vaseline. Students can view the wide variety of Unilever brands in the US at [Our brands | Unilever \(unileverusa.com\)](#).

Component Four:

HS: Frances Perkins, who served as Secretary of Labor under President Franklin Roosevelt, was a college graduate living in New York City at the time of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. Perkins delivered a lecture about the fire at Cornell University on September 30, 1964. A

transcript and the audio of her lecture can be found here: [Cornell University - ILR School - The Triangle Factory Fire](#)

HS: “Realization of Decent Work for All” the United Nations Global Compact [Labour and Decent Work | UN Global Compact](#). This resource provides background information about global oversight of labor issues through the United Nations.

“Here’s Why Low Wages Keep Countries Poor as Well as People” YouTube video from the United Nations Global Compact: [\(14\) Here's why low wages keep countries poor as well as people - YouTube](#). This short video (1:08) explains the ways in which poverty wages can be harmful to business in general, and to the global economy as a whole.

The United States adopted a federal holiday in response to labor uprisings in the late 19th and early 20th century. “History of Labor Day” [History of Labor Day | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#). Laborers in America pushed for a number of important improvements in their work environments over the years - including higher wages, safety measures to keep them healthy, shorter work days/hours to allow them to enjoy the fruits of their labor, and to keep their children free from working. The enactment of state and federal holidays for workers signified that the labor of Americans was central to national success. The passage of labor laws and labor day celebrations coincided with the Second Industrial Revolution in America (after the Civil War). Note that this article, produced by the Department of Labor, cites labor being central to America’s “ideals of economic and political democracy.”⁵

HS: Cross, Gary. “Time, Money, and Labor History’s Encounter with Consumer Culture.” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 43 (1993): 2–17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27672056>.

HHS: The International Labour Organization (an agency under the guidance of the United Nations) established standards for health and safety, which they encourage participating countries to follow. [International Labour Standards on Occupational Safety and Health \(ilo.org\)](#). To tie in with Dr. Nasiali’s talk and to connect consumerism to the transport of products, consider using elements from the “Occupational Safety and Health (Dock Work) Convention, 1979 (No. 152)” [Convention C152 - Occupational Safety and Health \(Dock Work\) Convention, 1979 \(No. 152\) \(ilo.org\)](#) (some specific elements saved in shared drive).

Garment workers together have global organizations to protect their rights. The International Labor Organization, an agency of the United Nations works across counties to develop standards for protecting workers. [International Labour Organization \(ilo.org\)](#) Other public-facing groups work to raise awareness of the labor conditions in the garment industry. *Labour Behind the Label* helps promote the rights of workers by working with consumers, trade unions, corporations, and governments to bring to light unfair working conditions and promote safety and living wages. [Home - Labour Behind the Label](#).

⁵ [History of Labor Day | U.S. Department of Labor \(dol.gov\)](#).

Additional information about the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) can be found here: [International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/illgwu).