

Notable Books

FUGITIVE DENIM: A Moving Story of People and Pants in the Borderless World of Global Trade

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CANCER ACTIVISM: Gender, Media, and Public Policy

EX MEX: Migrants to Immigrants

EFFECTIVE FOUNDATION MANAGEMENT: 14 Challenges of Philanthropic Leadership – And How to Outfox Them

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FUGITIVE DENIM: A Moving Story of People and Pants in the Borderless World of Global Trade

Rachel Louise Snyder

288 pages (W.W. Norton & Company, 2007)

Reviewed by Laura Commike

A good way to understand the global nature of society is to look closely at one of its most mundane products – denim jeans. The Levi Strauss jeans that are on sale at the local Target store may trace their lineage to California’s gold fields, but today’s pair of pants is much more worldly. If each pair of jeans carried its own passport, it would likely bear stamps from such exotic locales as Uzbekistan and Bangladesh or India and Indonesia. Today, the denim jeans business is intimately connected to many of society’s most pressing global challenges: international trade, workers’ rights, pay equity, environmental degradation, poverty, overconsumption, and occupational safety, to name but a few.

Rachel Louise Snyder’s engaging and important new book, *Fugitive Denim*, tells the story of globalization by tracing the life of a pair of jeans from the fashion houses that dream up the latest styles, to the fields where the cotton is grown, to the factories where the fabric is assembled. Along each step of the supply chain the author stops to focus on the people and their stories, making the book readable and personal, rather than just a technical description of denim manufacturing.

The apparel industry has long been at the center of social change and controversy. The industrial revolution in late-18th-century England was led by the automation of the textile industry. The 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist fire, which killed 146 young garment workers in

New York City, helped spark the trade union movement and the creation of occupational safety standards. More recently, consumer boycotts have forced Nike and other clothing brands to pay closer attention to the working conditions at their contractors’ factories.

The very nature of the apparel industry puts it at the center of these critical issues. Apparel factories are labor-intensive operations requiring low capital investment. Fashions change frequently, making it easy for clothing brands to switch suppliers. As a result, many brands continuously change suppliers and countries of manufacturing in search of the lowest cost. With such constant movement, factories have little incentive to invest in better working conditions or in employee training.

Nevertheless, many major clothing brands have invested significant resources to combat sweatshops. In the wake of the bad publicity that Nike and other brands experienced a decade ago, clothing brands have put in place codes of conduct and undertaken intensive factory monitoring. Yet poor working conditions remain throughout the industry. Labor conditions are not the only problem facing the apparel business. The industry also faces charges of environmental degradation, such as the use of pesticides in cotton production and environmental pollution from chemicals used to treat denim.

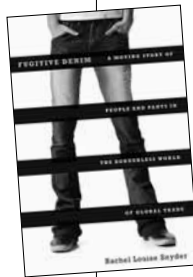
Snyder offers a balanced description of these complex issues, providing examples that demonstrate that the problems and solutions are not always black and white. The author lives in Cambodia and raises questions that encourage the reader to view some of the issues in a different light. Are workers really “exploited” or have they been coached by nongovernmental organizations to

use this term? Although child labor is inexcusable in the developed world, what if the child was instead forced to live on the street? Are jeans really organic if chemicals are used in treating, manufacturing, and shipping the product?

One of the problems with *Fugitive Denim* is that Snyder focuses most of her attention on the successes and very little on the failures. In particular, the book falls short in its description of the challenges of factory monitoring. She could have gone further in pointing out the responsibility that the clothing brands share in creating poor working conditions. For example, when a brand changes an order at the last minute, the factory’s employees have to work longer hours to meet the changed order. Factories often get mixed messages from their brand customers: The brand’s compliance representative wants the factory to meet a high code of conduct, but the brand’s buyer makes purchasing decisions only on price.

Snyder strongly believes that real change will occur only when consumers begin to base their buying decisions on the working conditions under which the jeans were made, not just on the jeans’ cut, color, and fit. Yet this sort of change requires that consumers are aware of their options and educated about the issues. Too often, consumers are not aware of these issues. Further, brand marketers are doing little to create demand for responsibly made jeans by helping consumers become more aware. The question of whether mass-market consumers will pay more for such products remains unanswered – but it’s still worth asking.

Laura Commike is a director of advisory services at Business for Social Responsibility, a global nonprofit that provides socially responsible business solutions to many of the world’s leading corporations.



BEYOND THE WHITE HOUSE

Jimmy Carter

288 pages (Simon & Schuster, 2007)

Reviewed by Joshua Weissburg

Readers of Jimmy Carter's latest book, *Beyond the White House*, will find plenty to remind them of the 39th president; the book has a dogged style and a big-hearted agenda. It is not a smooth positioning piece (Bill Clinton's latest book, *Giving*, comes to mind), but it's hard to shake the impression that Carter's tireless efforts as a private citizen, cataloged one after another, are meant to assure his readers that he was and is more than a well-intentioned but ineffective president.

Beyond the White House is divided into three main sections: "Waging Peace," "Building Democracy," and "Fighting Disease." Each section breaks the Carter Center's efforts (with President Carter at the helm) down into brief essays detailing projects undertaken and results achieved. It is a report of which any foundation would be jealous: cease-fires brokered, elections made right, diseases eradicated. Carter's book will not set the chattering classes atwitter, but I suspect he has little interest in doing so. His farm-raised practicality is never far from sight, either in the writing itself or in the midst of the heated and complex situations it describes.

There are popular writers who make a living tying a book full of anecdotes to a big idea, but Thomas Friedman this is not. *Beyond the White House* amounts to a spectacular foundation report without much in the way of a unifying thesis (livened up with some very memorable anecdotes, to be sure). Readers will likely pick this book up for one of three principal reasons: curiosity about what Carter has accomplished since his exit from office; a common interest in Carter's approach to peace building, develop-

ment, and health issues; or admiration for the man. Readers with a sufficient combination of these to make it through Carter's plodding prose will find it hard to deny that the conventional wisdom about Carter falls very short of capturing his character and accomplishments.

In its dry, just-the-facts style, the book paints a Jimmy Carter of ceaseless initiative, tireless energy, and delightful creativity, ever on his way to tense, late-night living room negotiations with this or that rebel leader, despot, or head of state. In Panama, as polling officials announce fictitious victories for Manuel Noriega's candidates, Carter forces his way on stage, shouting in Spanish: "Are you honest officials or thieves? You are stealing the election from the people of Panama!"

Much of Carter's work has been tremendously effective. But readers will be left wondering what, if anything, advocates and practitioners of peace building, democracy, and health can take away from his successes. The model he describes in tackling these issues manifestly (and sensibly) circumvents conventional approaches to this work. As long as Jimmy Carter leads it, the Carter Center occupies a unique space: a civil society actor only – but one with the connections, experience, and authority of a U.S. president. Standing with Daniel Ortega as the Nicaraguan president receives word that his Sandinistas have lost reelection, Carter does what few advocates for democracy could: He looks Ortega in the eye and urges him to let the results stand because he, Carter, is enjoying an influential "second life" out of office. Why shouldn't Ortega do the same? And so Ortega does.

This dynamic makes Carter's stories by turns frustrating and inspiring. Carter's brilliant successes, particularly

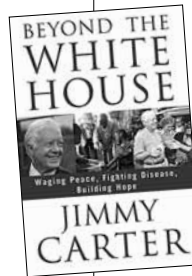
in the area of fighting disease, make one wonder why every former president isn't doing this much good for the world. Yet it is not clear from Carter's accomplishments that the inspired reader could go and do likewise.

But Carter does teach us lessons. His successes are not random or shallow: We see Carter assess the need, the tools at his disposal, and the likelihood of impact carefully before undertaking each new project. Foregoing spotlight causes like AIDS, Carter makes huge dents in "forgotten" diseases – guinea worm, river blindness, schistosomiasis, trachoma are all but wiped out in Latin America and severely curtailed in

Africa because Carter corralled village elders and pharmaceutical companies both to meet the need.

These are clear victories, a rare sighting in the realm of foreign aid. Such successes may not lift the beneficiaries out of poverty as economists measure it, but they are certainly worthwhile. Carter brings three assets to his work that allow him to do foreign aid unusually well: knowledge and connections, strategic focus, and a realistic expectation of results. Economists and policymakers engaged in current debates over whether "foreign aid works" may not be able to replicate Carter's knowledge and connections, but they should certainly follow Carter's lead in terms of strategic focus and realistic expectations. Rather than asking, "Does foreign aid work?" let us instead ask, "For whom?" and "To accomplish what?"

Joshua Weissburg is a project associate at the Aspen Institute's Global Interdependence Initiative, a consultancy that helps to plan, evaluate, and communicate clients' work on improved global health, governance, and economic development.



BREAK THROUGH: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility

Ted Nordhaus & Michael Shellenberger

256 pages (Houghton Mifflin, 2007)

Reviewed by Sacha Zimmerman

We've all been told that global warming is perhaps the single greatest existential threat the Earth has ever faced. And we have all been told that we can each make a difference. Al Gore encourages us to use carbon offsets when we travel – neat little guilt-assuaging donations that promise freshly planted trees and enough new clean oxygen to “offset” your, say, 3,000-mile jet fuel-polluting trip to Las Vegas. Leonardo DiCaprio promotes everything from recycling to solar panels, like those that grace the roof of his multimillion-dollar Hollywood home. And even the queen of consumerism, Oprah Winfrey, has ditched her orgy of products – the “Oprah’s Favorite Things” episode – in favor of a greener attitude; she even handed out nontoxic cleaning products, smart light bulbs, and organic cotton “O” grocery bags last Earth Day.

If you think all of this activism seems well-intentioned but woefully naive, you're in good company. Career environmental strategists Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger have expanded their controversial 2004 essay, “The Death of Environmentalism,” into an important and powerful new book, *Break Through*. Given the rapid advance of global warming and the scope of the imminent climate crisis, shouldn't we, ask Nordhaus and Shellenberger, insist on a much grander solution than the household-by-household “what you can do” approach we've been asked to embrace by the environmental move-

ment? In other words, the planet is in severe danger and biodegradable flatware isn't going to, well, cut it.

It's not that small ideas are bad ideas or that creating a green atmosphere at home is silly – at the very least, most small green ideas are actually better for your health; but if we are going to solve the climate crisis, something on the order of a Manhattan Project is needed. So far, our efforts to curb climate change have been too meek.

So what do we do? Well, for one thing, according to the authors, we need to undergo a complete mental paradigm shift in the way we think about the problem. The authors argue for an end to the negative reinforcement of the environmental movement as we know it: the conserve, recycle, save, reduce, and sacrifice model – what Nordhaus and Shellenberger call the “politics of limits.”

What we need instead is a little American can-do attitude, one that starts with clean energy (i.e., energy that produces zero pollution) and encourages breakthrough technologies that can reduce greenhouse emissions by 80 percent or more: “The transition to a clean-energy economy should be modeled not on pollution-control efforts, like the one on acid rain, but rather on past investments in infrastructure, such as railroads and highways, as well as on research and development – microchips, medicines, and the Internet, among other areas.”

As the authors see it, the environmental movement was born in late 1960s America and Europe – a society in which most Westerners' basic material needs – shelter, food, etc. – were taken care of, a world in which Westerners had the luxury to turn our attention toward the sludge-filled rivers, dying whales,

and smog that we had created. Environmentalism was the result of affluence. But by resting on a politics of limits, environmentalism has outlived its usefulness.

The planet needs a sustainable model of development so that all nations – from Europe and the United States to India and Southeast Asia – can enjoy a prosperous life. Unfortunately, absent a totally new energy system, global warming will continue to worsen.

Perhaps the one irony of Nordhaus and Shellenberger's book is that they aim their post-material worldview exclusively at Democrats, progressives, and liberals, arguing that the time is ripe for Democrats to “embrace a new story about America, one focused more on aspiration than complaint, on assets than deficits, and on possibility than limits.” But just as what the world needs now is beyond the sole province of environmentalists, so too is our need greater than the efforts of just one party. The United States is in the midst of a partisan split so severe that something as important as literally saving the world should probably not be reduced to good political strategy.

There is no doubt the world needs a big change, and the authors are compelling and eloquent in their understanding of the modern environmental movement and the imminent global crisis. Ultimately, Nordhaus and Shellenberger's point is as simple as their title: The world doesn't need more recycled stationery; it needs a breakthrough.

Sacha Zimmerman is in charge of special projects at The New Republic. She is also a contributing editor at Reader's Digest and the author of For America: Simple Things Each of Us Can Do to Make Our Country Better.



CANCER ACTIVISM: Gender, Media, and Public Policy

Karen M. Kedrowski & Marilyn Stine Sarow
(University of Illinois Press, 2007)

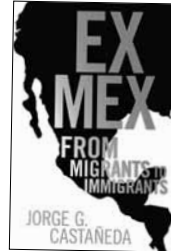
Kedrowski and Sarow trace the breast cancer and prostate cancer movements over the last two decades, analyzing the relationships between activism, media advocacy, media content, and funding. They find that, despite the fact that the two diseases have similar mortality and morbidity rates, the breast cancer movement is far more successful at shaping government policy and public opinion.



EX MEX: Migrants to Immigrants

Jorge G. Castañeda
(The New Press, 2007)

Well-known scholar and former Mexican foreign minister Castañeda weighs in on the nation's most politicized domestic debate. He unravels some of the most widely held myths about Mexicans in the United States: He tells us who they are, why they're here, where they work, and what they want. His book also offers a behind-the-scenes look at secret negotiations between Mexico and the United States during Castañeda's time in office.



EFFECTIVE FOUNDATION MANAGEMENT: 14 Challenges of Philanthropic Leadership – And How to Outfox Them

Joel J. Orosz (AltaMira Press, 2007)

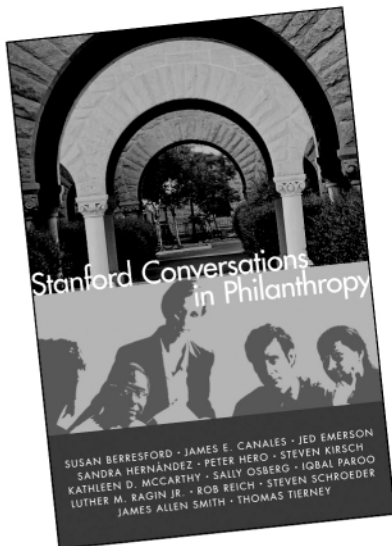
Orosz, founder of the Grantmaking School, one of the first university-based training programs for grantmaking professionals, has written an honest and excellent guide to help new foundation leaders maximize their positive social impact. He outlines 14 inevitable dilemmas unique to the foundation field, and offers practical considerations and strategies for developing solutions.



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