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Deforestation

Etching

The research I did on rhinos, chimpanzees, and elephants that are affected by deforestation inspired my artwork. My work essentially presents the question of how each person can educate themselves and do better for the world in a way that is sustainable for them. How can we find the line between education and incorporation of that knowledge into our daily lives, while not feeling guilty of what we have? How can we take that guilt and turn it into empowerment? In first grade my class did a bake sale to raise money for the Amazon rainforest. I love the aesthetic of the etchings that were done even from the first few weeks, but I didn't have the courage to learn etching until now. I used imagery to show the singularity of the animals, while having them in different colors to show that while they are the same in looks, each one of them is different. My goal was to achieve a clean look in my work to get straight to the point, highlighting each animal and giving each of them a spotlight. During this project I became more confident in myself and my ability to etch and ink the plates. I hope this piece serves as a reminder that we are not the only creatures which inhabit the earth, and that we cannot work to improve the living conditions for just humanity.

The Dangers of Deforestation



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When I was in first grade, my class had a bake sale. I had waited all year for it, with the rest of my class almost as excited as I was. It was called the Rainforest Bake Sale, and we baked

desserts to sell in our classroom. We each chose an animal to read about, then made a poster about the animal, and taped it to the front of our desks. The creature that everyone wanted was the blue butterfly, it was the crown jewel of all the animals. We sat in the music room and the teachers called us up to choose an animal by drawing popsicle sticks with our names on them. I remember feeling anxious, desperately wanting to be called first so I could pick the blue butterfly. My disappointment was immense when my name wasn't drawn, but a girl named Danielle was called up. She walked up, and chose the blue butterfly. I don't remember what animal I ended up choosing, but I was able to get excited about making a poster about it. It was more that the parents went out and bought dessert, or they baked the dessert and had their kids decorate it, but not me and my mom. We made toffee start to finish and packaged them into plastic bags tied with colorful ribbons. They had animal themed sprinkles, my favorite ones having pink butterflies. My neighbor, two years ahead of me, had been telling me all about it, and made me promise to sneak a piece of toffee into my desk to save for her. It was against the rules to save any for our friends who may be in upper grades, and I remember the feeling of excitement that I was breaking the rules. Each grade came in one by one, starting from the youngest grade and ending with the eldest grade, the eighth graders. They came in with their wallets and walked around, looking at our desserts. The first dessert that was sold was the equivalent of being the first person to turn over the paper during a test, that silent moment of triumph. When we sold out of our respective desserts, we were allowed to walk around and buy some from our classmates. It was the day of sugar rushes, with the school having the rest of the day to hang out in class and eat desserts. The money we raised from our desserts was donated to an organization that was dedicated to the conservation of the rainforest. When I chose the topic of deforestation and the Amazon rainforest, it took me back to first grade.

I. Overview

This paper addresses the dangers of deforestation, acknowledging the people, animals, and environment. My knowledge of deforestation was not extensive. I knew that trees are vital to the environment and that they clean our air, but I was not aware of the full impacts of deforestation, which is the point of this paper. I find that it is difficult to think about the environment and the impact of products that we buy. It's difficult to talk about it because we want to help the environment, but there's social pressure to keep up with purchases that the people around us are making. That is the effect of capitalism. Especially because more and more companies are making it incredibly easy for people to buy things and have them show up on their doorstep the very next day. Amazon had 300,000,000 active users, with 197,000,000 people visiting Amazon's website every month (Petrov). That is an incredible amount of people shopping online for items that they don't need. But with the promise of showing up in 2-3 days, it makes the purchases even more desirable, giving us instant gratification when it shows up. Instant gratification is something that I am working on holding back so that I can learn patience. For me, that is the first step to help the environment.

II. Animals are negatively affected by deforestation

Orangutans are critically endangered due to the loss of their habitat. The Orangutan Foundation: A Future for Orangutans, Forests & People states that the reason for orangutan habitat loss is, "...illegal logging, oil-palm plantations, forest fires, mining and small-scale shifting cultivation. By 2080, if current trends continue, it has been projected that the Bornean orangutan will lose 70-80% of its forest habitat" (Orangutan Foundation). Palm oil was something that I wasn't aware of being harmful to the environment, but after reading an article about it, I am able to understand how

destructful it is. Tropical forests are commonly burned down to make room for palm oil plantations, causing the native animals to be forced out of their homes. Plantations also cause soil pollution and erosion, as well as pollution to the air. So many items that people use in their daily lives have palm oil in them. Instant noodles, shampoo, ice cream, detergent, chocolate, and soap are just some of the items that have palm oil in them (World Wildlife Fund). It is something that is so common in daily items without people realizing the impact that it has on the environment. It's so easy for companies to get away with environmental damage if people don't realize what is in their products and how they are sourced. I didn't realize the impact of palm oil and the farms, or how common it is. If we don't start to look into harmful products in our everyday items, animals like orangutans will continue to be impacted.

Another animal that is impacted by deforestation is the Sumatran Rhino. Their status is critically endangered with their population marked as fewer than 80 due to the clearing of their natural habitat to make way for palm oil plantations (WWF). Agricultural businesses are taking over national parks, impacting the animals that rely on the land for safe haven. In Indonesia, a national park is losing its land due to people who are using it for agriculture, with an article stating that, "Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park in Sumatra is losing forest cover due to conversion for coffee and rice by illegal settlers" (WWF). Another animal that is affected are chimpanzees, with their native forests being encroached on as well. Their population status is marked as endangered with 72,700 to 299,700 chimpanzees left (WWF). They especially struggle because of forest fragments, which is where their natural habitat is cut off from the rest of the forest, leading them to be disconnected from natural resources and other populations that live in the area. Habitat loss and forest fragmentation affect the chimpanzees' behaviors, such as their dispersal patterns, diets and social interactions (Jane Goodall Institute). Giant pandas are affected by isolation as well, with

their behaviors being altered due to isolation. They are marked as vulnerable, with their population marked with there being 1,864 left in the wild (WWF). Infrastructure development has an isolating effect on the pandas, making it increasingly difficult for them to find mates and new sources of bamboo.

III. Native people are impacted negatively by deforestation

Indigenous people who live on forest reserves like in Machadinho d'Oeste (in the western Brazilian state of Rondonia), are forced to defend their land from illegal loggers every day. The loggers will come in and scout native trees, like mahogany or ipe, and then have people come in and stealthily take them away. The people who live on the reserves harvest the rubber from the native rubber trees sustainably. The wood in the forest is valuable and the industry is lucrative, so people will take part in illegal logging activity. The harvesters can be people who are incredibly poor, who are backed up by larger gangs or organizations, but still end up not making much. The indigenous people who live on the supposedly protected reservations are forced to protect the forests they live in all by themselves. The numbers of law enforcement are low, and so they are not sent to guard the forest and the people. It's dangerous for the indigenous people to fight off and protect the trees on their own. The Amazon is one of the most dangerous places to be an environmental defender (NPR KQED). Due to the growing agricultural business, Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro has pushed to expand the land that is used, forcing the indigenous people to fight harder to protect their land. "Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's aggressive push to expand large-scale mining and agribusiness in the Amazon has forced indigenous peoples further into the frontlines of the climate crisis, especially as deforestation on indigenous land increased by 74% from 2018 to 2019. Of the 24 murders of land defenders in Brazil, 90% occurred in the Amazon" (DW). The loggers kill and

mutilate environmental defenders as warnings and measures to keep the rubber tappers away, but the tappers continue to protect their forest. The loggers will also take seed-bearing trees, which makes it even more difficult for the forest to grow more trees. The people risk their lives to protect their home, and they are growing tired of fighting to protect the forest, because they can't win (NPR). Jair Bolsonaro has targeted indigenous people since he took office. He wanted to pass a law that allowed people to mine on the indigenous peoples' land legally. In the past, he has also made incredibly racist and offensive remarks targeting the indigenous people. He views them as roadblocks, preventing the agricultural businesses from taking over their land, saying, "[reservas indígenas] sufocam o agronegócio. No Brasil não se consegue diminuir um metro quadrado de terra indígena" *"[indigenous reserves] are an obstacle to agri-business. You can't reduce indigenous land by even a square meter in Brazil"* (Survival). He has actively targeted the indigenous people and their land in an attempt to gain access to their supposedly protected land. He was sued by multiple lawyers for his hateful words and steps he has taken against the indigenous peoples which has led to the genocide of the native people protecting their land. Illegal loggers have also contributed to the rise in death of indigenous people, as when they try to defend their land from those who seek to take the trees down, they are killed. Those who live in the Amazon and near the area face the increasing threat of deforestation, logging, and mining from those who seek to expand the mining and agribusiness.

Where does the timber go after it is taken from the forest? Only about 10% of the timber is sold abroad, and it is sold at high prices. The other 90% is sold at cheap prices in Brazil for domestic construction site use. The wood is used in homes for things like flooring. Because it is from an illegal site, other prices like tax and labor taxes aren't required, with licenses being forged, making it easy to lie about the true origins of the wood. The president doesn't help the native

people, making it difficult for them to defend their land from illegal loggers. It is impossible to defend him and his words because he is clearly attempting to separate the native people from their land, and it is something that he has included as part of his campaign. “Se eu assumir [a Presidência do Brasil] não terá mais um centímetro para terra indígena” *“If I become President there will not be a centimeter more of indigenous land”* (Survival). Indigenous people in Indonesia are also facing a dire situation where they are losing their homes due to Indonesia’s growing palm oil industry. A study found that Indonesia produces tons of palm oil a year, stating that, “In 2020, its production of this commodity amounted to around 48.3 million metric tons” (Statista). Groups of indigenous people like the Orang Rimba have lost so much of their land from palm oil plantations. They lost access to the forest and, in turn, food and water sources. They hunt for food and will sell it to buy things like rice and instant noodles. They are hesitant to use the water that they once relied on, so they save up rainwater to boil and use for things like cooking and bathing. They fear that things like herbicides and pesticides have washed off from the plantations and their usual water sources are now polluted from plantations. Indigenous groups can only defend their land if they have been legally recognized by the government, but there aren’t resources or measures in place to make it accessible for the groups to be recognized. It doesn’t matter if they have been living there for thousands of years if they haven’t been legally recognized by the government.

IV. Sustainability doesn’t equal accessibility

There is also the idea that if everyone switches over to sustainable items, then it will help the environment. The fact of the matter is: sustainability isn’t accessible for everyone. Some people can’t afford to switch over to more sustainable options or change their diet. They don’t have access to items that they can substitute for meat. People in third-world countries can’t just hop on over to their nearest grocery store and buy soy milk, tofu, and nutritional yeast. They don’t have access to

the materials that they would need if they were to change to a more sustainable diet. Having access to sustainable materials and living a sustainable lifestyle is a privilege that not everyone has access to. Not everyone has access to two day shipping to buy glass straws. On that note, isn't it ironic that we use an environmentally damaging company to purchase environmentally friendly products?

One point of capitalism and the social pressure is to keep up with purchases; to just throw out anything that isn't relevant anymore. This contributes to the amount of waste that we generate, and reinforces the idea that we need to keep purchasing in order to stay "relevant" in today's society. Purchasing items that are environmentally friendly can be incredibly expensive, with the rationalization being that it is good for the environment, therefore we can spend \$50 on a phone case. It's okay- it's biodegradable. For me personally, I feel that companies have the capability of taking advantage of sustainable items and pricing them higher. It also buys into the idea that we need to buy more things and throw out old things, because having sustainable or environmentally friendly products is a way that we can prove to people that we care about the environment. We feel better about ourselves because even though we just spent an incredible amount of money on a phone case, it's good for the environment. We then use it as much as possible and talk to other people about the product, subtly trying to convince them that it is worth it. We want them to feel the same instant gratification that we felt when buying something, as well as the feeling that we are now a better person because we bought something that is good for the environment. We need to have validation from others that the purchase that we made was worth it. However, there are people all over the world who don't have access to sustainable or environmentally friendly products. I can't claim that I know what people are going through in their lives or that I know their struggles. I can't speak for them and I can't write this paper with the mindset that I'm better than

others because I have the opportunity to have things that are environmentally friendly or sustainable. That would completely defeat the purpose of this paper if I came at it, especially this section, with the mindset that I'm better than others because I can understand that not everyone can afford these items. That's the problem with the pressure to prove to others that we're "woke." We feel like once we acknowledge that there are terrible things that are happening in the world and to people, we are better than others. Realizing what is going on in the world doesn't make us woke. It brings us to the bare minimum. I think that there is also pressure to know more and more, and there is a fear that what we know isn't enough, and so we are content to buy things to prove that we know what is happening in the world. It feels like too much pressure to learn more, and so we stay in a safe place. We feel that there is too much in the world for us to handle. I can agree that learning about this is overwhelming. There's a struggle in using things that we need and are made for our comfort and understanding that they contribute to the destruction of the climate. There is an immense feeling of stress, especially for me, in leaving the heat and lights on, but also needing them. I feel so guilty and overwhelmed by the pressure to constantly keep up to date on the happenings of the world, and still do right by the environment. I want to work towards finding the right balance between finding sustainable items, and understanding the impact of the usual products that I buy so that I can work on my guilt. I think that this is something that a lot of people feel when they become conscious of the environment, and I think that it is a job of self reflection for everyone to go about in the best way possible.

V. There is still work we have to do

The act of deforestation is incredibly harmful to the environment, the people who live in the forests, and the animals that rely on the environment and the surroundings to survive. There are a lot of

products that we purchase and are included in our lives that have an incredibly negative impact on the environment, even if we don't understand it. It is important to do our research on the ingredients that are in our products and it is important for us to reflect on ways that we can help the environment that are sustainable for ourselves as well. If we continue to stay passive, the environment will suffer at our hands. The only people who can save it is us.

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