



Discussion questions for Pietra Rivoli's *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy: An Economist Examines the Markets, Power, and Politics of World Trade*

Preface

- According to the author, Pietra Rivoli, what incident motivated her to write this book? Support your answer with citations from the text.

Prologue

- Provide a detailed description of the T-shirt that is the focus of the author's investigation.
- What role did Patrick Xu play in the life of the author's T-shirt?

Chapter 1

- How does the author answer the following question, which is the title of this chapter: "Are subsidies the reason America has dominated the global cotton industry for 200 years?" (Support your answer.)

Chapter 2

- Use specific examples to support the thesis that the American cotton market has dominated the world market by "ducking the labor markets."

Chapter 3

- "Lubbock is the center of the 'Silicon Valley' of cotton production." Cite specific examples from the chapter to support this claim.
- Explain the impact of genetically modified cotton on production. What corporation has been a leader in this technological advance? What has been the response from Lubbock cotton growers?

Chapter 4

- How has the Citizens-Shallowater Co-op Gin affected Lubbock cotton farmers?
- How have cotton growers been able to get value from cotton production beyond the white lint that becomes cotton fiber used in textiles? (Cite specific examples to support your answer.)
- What has been the primary mission of the Plains Cotton Cooperative Association (PCCA)? What has contributed to the success of the PCCA?
- "According to at least some observers, the definitive source of U.S. cotton farmers' comparative advantage is their ability to get help from friends in high places." Explain and support this statement.

- In May 2008, Congress overrode President Bush’s veto of the 2008 Farm Bill, a piece of legislation that would have resulted in considerable reductions in many of the subsidies paid to wealthy, large-commodity farmers. Senator Charles Grassley said the trick to getting this override was “to smear lipstick on a pig.” What is the meaning of his statement?
- The author contends that the answer to the question “How have cotton farmers maintained their comparative advantage since 1792?” is “not in the data; it is embedded in the story.” How does she defend this position?
- Explain the plight of West African cotton farmers. (Use citations from the text to support your explanation.)
- According to the author, what has been the impact of genetically modified seed such as Bt cotton on growers in developing nations?

Chapter 5

- Explain the significance of the following quotes relative to the information the author was able to gather while in China: “China has a centuries-old tradition of hospitality, even for Nobodies...” and “Chinese culture also has a deep respect for education...”
- Describe the author’s impression of Number 36 Cotton Yarn Factory.
- Of what did Shanghai Brightness Number 3 Garment Factory remind the author?
- Explain what information “Figure 5.2: U.S. Apparel Prices v. Import Share” reveals.

Chapter 6

- Explain the following quote: “The floods of cheap cotton clothing that flow today from China to the United States are almost an symmetric reversal of the trade flows of a century ago.”

Chapter 7

- What is the story behind this chapter’s subtitle: “Docility on a Leash”?
- What steps have been taken over the centuries to keep workers, usually women and minorities, from moving from toiling in the fields to low-skill factory work?
- What did sociologist Ching Kwan Lee discover was a primary motivation behind young women leaving rural areas to work in factory towns?
- What transformation has occurred in the former textile centers of Manchester, England; Charlotte, North Carolina; the state of Alabama; and Osaka, Japan? How has Hong Kong’s apparel industry changed?
- What does the author mean by the phrase “the long race to the bottom?”

Chapter 8

- How does the author explain the following: “Global capitalism and labor activities are not enemies but are instead cooperators, however unwitting?”
- Explain what Nike is doing to provide “corporate social responsibility” activities?
- What were the findings of the Cambridge University case study on the environmental impact of a cotton T-shirt?
- What is the long-term impact of the phthalates found in plastics such as the parrot found on the front of the author’s cotton T-shirt?
- Explain the environmental Kuznets curve.
- According to empirical evidence, which countries have more promising environmental profiles—nations that embrace free trade or those that promote protectionism? Why?
- What did Alexandra Harvey reveal in her work *The China Price: The True Cost of Chinese Competitive Advantage*?
- Explain the author’s story about a photo of Shanghai before the 1949 Communist Revolution from one of her coffee-table books compared to what a photo of modern-day Shanghai might show.

Chapter 9

- Explain the relationship between Auggie Tantillo and Julie Hughes.
- Explain the implications of Figures 9.1 and 9.2.
- Explain the rules for cotton T-shirts associated with “preferential treatment status” in free-trade agreements.

Chapter 10

- What is the author’s answer to the following: “How did the United States—as the self-anointed free trade champion of the universe—end up with such a dauntingly complex and downright silly mass of barriers to the import of T-shirts?”

Chapter 11

- What have been some of the unintended consequences of protecting manufacturing jobs in U.S./Western textile and apparel industries?
- What evidence does the author cite to support Joseph Schumpeter’s theory of creative destruction?
- How did quota allocations help a nation like the Philippines? Since 2004, why have nations that once supported such quota allocations begun to have second thoughts?

Chapter 12

- How did the 2005 surge in imports of Chinese apparel reflect “politically motivated tactics” rather than “market forces,” according to the author?
- Explain how the author’s section subtitled “Try This New Underwear” support the following quote: “Sometimes a wall limits our fortunes; other times a wall can incite much more creativity than an open door.”

Chapter 13

- What happens to America’s castoff T-shirts and how is their plight the first example of a fully functioning free market at work in the story of a T-shirt’s life from the cotton fields to the Salvation Army bin?
- What role does Trans-Americas play in the life of castoff T-shirts from the United States?

Chapter 14

- Describe the Manzese market in Dar Es Salaam.
- Explain how a mitumba market operates.
- What is the basis for Geoffrey Milonge and Ed Stubin’s fears about China?

Conclusion

- How does the author answer the questions posed by the young female protestor at Georgetown University?
- How have Michael Shellenberger’s views about globalization changed since the 1990s?