World As Text

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Week of 10/20/11

Mountains Beyond Mountains, Not for Sale

I do not think I care all that much for Paul Farmer’s personality, but as a doctor and humanitarian, he is extraordinary. Within the first couple dozen pages, the reader learns about the strange way he interacts with patients with the sign he leaves for one patient, Joe. I actually liked that. Bedside manner and just overall relations with patients is critical to being a good doctor, and that is something Farmer obviously possesses. And his caring for the overall good of people, especially those in need, comes to light with his travelling to Haiti and Zanmi Lasante. So no, nothing about him is “bad,” but he is still a kind of, hard to like character throughout the reading.

There are at least a million depending on the work he does in Haiti alone, and all of the money comes from a public charity, which is hard to believe. I always thought the government had an enormous hand in the money that gets spent on healthcare around the world, and even if that is the case, what Farmer does seems more effective. But it also seems like he is trying to fix something. In his case, “‘I feel ambivalent about selling my services in a world where some can’t buy them’” (24). People who are in the medical field, among others, should feel ambivalent about this, and should do something about it.

His work is very oriented around the patient. “‘You can’t sympathize with the staff too much, or you risk not sympathizing with the patients’” (25). They come first to Farmer. When it came to the personal lives of the doctors, “‘you must never let a patient know that you have problems, too’” (29). And the care he gives is all encompassing. “‘Giving people medicine for TB and not giving them food is like washing your hands and drying them in the dirt’” (34). If
change is going to happen and people are going to get better, bigger changes will have to happen, and all basic needs will have to be met.

I was actually surprised with how much I agreed with what he said about white liberals. They “‘think all the world’s problems can be fixed without any cost to themselves. We don’t believe that. There’s a lot to be said for sacrifice, remorse, even pity’” (40). I always think of white liberals as people who go out and makes changes for the better, but, as I have read countless times, it is the people who live where the problems are who are the ones who make lasting change, despite the best intentions of the white liberals. So much can be said for sacrificing, and if all the white liberals who cared were willing to do that, this would be a much different world. And it is not like Farmer came from some privileged, white, liberal background, but instead did have a, what we would consider in America, difficult childhood. But it definitely shaped him and made him a better person for it.

When going to expensive schools and being exposed to wealth, though, it almost changed Farmer. “‘I was pretty taken by it, by wealth… Nearly taken in’” (55). But, luckily, he was not, and managed to stay down on earth where he could help those who need it, instead of focusing on collecting his own wealth. Before the end of college, “He’d come to admire his father’s distaste for putting on airs,” and focused on the genuine (56). Because of this, he looked into medical anthropology, which started him on his course of helping others and looking at larger systems.

Farmer had a way of making a situation that would be scary for others something that no one should bat an eyelash at. Despite the horror that Ophelia saw in Haiti, Farmer was able to change how she saw things, and appreciate them on the larger scale. Through him, she realized, “‘Oh dear, oh good, my life has changed’” (74). Although each relationship changes people, to
sit down and actually realize the impact that one person has had is rare, but Farmer has that
ability, and things were never the same for her.

Farmer cared enough about the people of Haiti to study their culture and history. “He
attended Voodoo ceremonies, talked to peasants about their lives” and became completely
immersed in the culture (78). Most of this came through experiencing Haiti, instead of studying
with books or other sources. It is in Haiti that liberation theology made sense to Farmer. He
believes that everyone hates the poor, but God, in fact, loves them more. Such a strange thought.
A God, that is omniscient loving the poor more, but doing nothing to keep them from suffering.
I do not understand. Farmer tried to explain it, but then seems to not understand what omniscient
means in the true sense of the word. But I digress. This is what works for Farmer. Good for
him. At the center of liberation theology, though, is “to provide a preferential option for the
poor” (81). This makes sense for everyone, although I could see why so many would object to it,
turning a blind eye to basic ethics. These poor people need so much, but have no way to pay for
it, so who will? Those who have? They do not want to give it up, for the most part, so money
stays where it has always been, and the poor continue to suffer. So people need to look out for
them, and liberation theology is one way this can happen.

Then Farmer made me mad. “The fact that any sort of religious faith was so disdained at
Harvard and so important to the poor – not just in Haiti but elsewhere, too – made me even more
convinced that faith must be something good” (85). Why? This is just such wrong logic. Did
he not think it was about education? People in countries like Haiti are by and large uneducated,
so they pick faith. Okay. People in schools like Harvard are obviously educated and have,
through means of logic and the need for evidence, have come to the conclusion that the ancient
belief of some indescribable thing in the sky that cares about us sounds a little fictional. What
about that makes religion “good?” It does not make it good or bad, and if it makes a person
good, well, good for that individual. The religion itself is not “good.” One should not become
religious because uneducated people are. How could he? And he claimed to not believe in the
religious dogma and whatnot, so I am, once again puzzled. Why not just be spiritual or a
humanist? Why organized religion? Why perpetuate it?

Still, if liberation theology is what fueled so much of the good that he continues to do, it
is hard to criticize it. What he did in Haiti was “from scratch” because of the deplorable
conditions there (90). He wants rich people to feel guilty about the poor, which is not all that
ridiculous a request. They deserve to. We all deserve to, but I think instead of letting it weigh us
down, it should empower action. And some very rich people do by donating large sums of
money. Everyone can do something.

In Not for Sale, I did not want to read about the child soldiers of Uganda. I knew it was
going to be hard to read, but in retrospect, I should have expected that of all of the chapters. This
was just one of the problems in the book I had heard the most about through various means. I
was pretty familiar with the history, but reading the stories of the individuals never gets easier.
One of the most heartbreaking thoughts actually came from the parent of a child soldier, stolen
away and lost. “Parents suffer so much when their children are abducted and held in captivity…
when she is abducted, you always wonder what is happening. You can never forget” (Batstone,
92).

The life for the children is not any better than that for the parents, especially because they
know what they are subjected to, and do not have the privilege of simply wondering. There are
people committed to helping these children, though, just as there are people committed in every
cause. One woman committed to helping these children realizes, “These kids were innocent;
they had been forced to assume the role of a soldier,” despite them having the capability to hurt others (103). There were also bigger, government forces working to make the situation better in Uganda, and to curb the child soldier population. “In August 2006, the Ugandan government and the LRA signed a truce to the war,” but the “ICC further complicated the political situation in Uganda when it issued warrants for the arrest of LRA leadership” (114). Although this was all done with the best of intentions, things take time to heal.

Reading about Margaret was different than many of the perspectives I have read before. When she was 11, she became a wife, although “She had no precise idea what it meant to be a wife” (115). No one at the age of 11 should have to actually think about that. She was still a child at this point, but was subjected to the rapes and chores that many “wives” endure.

The idea of the rehabilitation centers for the former soldiers seems like a really good idea. It is a place where they can break out of their “slave mentality” that they were subjected to as soldiers (122). Again, I see trouble with religion associated with this slave mentality. These boys would, in part, fight because of “God’s plan for Uganda” (122). What if these boys did not believe that Kony could interpret the words of God? Would their ties to him be so strong? And the idea of rehabilitation works in harmony with the tribal ideal of “bring[ing] warring enemies together to put aside their grievances, share a meal, and drink from the bitter cup” (130). They would rather forgive and progress than dwell on the past and punish people.

These children will need more than just brief counseling after all they have endured. In fact, “‘These children need love. These children need peace. These children need concrete futures” (135). This is the same story for all children who are enslaved and trafficked, and even those who are not. These are basic human needs, and everyone deserves to feel love or to know
peace and have a future they can count on. This is why ending war and bring education to all parts of the world is so important.

**Week of 10/27/11**

*Mountains Beyond Mountains, Not for Sale*

In this part of *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, I learned that the United States blamed Haiti for the AIDS that appeared in America. The things Americans said about Haitians were awful, and gave the country a bad name. How terrible of America to assume that, just because Haitians have a different culture, that something like that could lead to AIDS. But when America is looking for someone to blame, it does not usually take it all that long. So when people do care about this culture and work to make it better, it becomes difficult. Farmer, at times, found himself realizing how difficult the position is, and, although rarely got mad about it. When a tough decision had to be made, and his safety was in danger he asks, “*What the fuck do you want me to do!*” (Kidder, 115). This seems like a question that Haiti could be asking the world. In a place with such troubles and instability, many of which are out of the hands of the people, finding a solution can be frustrating.

There is also the fact that lower incomes usually reflect poorer healthcare across a nation. Many of these people “have brown or black skin,” are women, but “what they all have in common is poverty” (125). Healthcare is a basic human right, and it is sad to see income having such an affect on people’s access to it. The example in the book is TB. It does not exist in the wealthy world, but plagues the poorer nations. So, PIH expanded from Haiti to help more people and to bridge this gap.

The next place they moved to was Peru, with the hope that the idea would catch on elsewhere. It was not easy, but helping the world’s poor is more important than taking the easy
way out. It was hard to convince Peruvian officials that PIH really wanted to help with TB and make the medical system better because “‘there’s no TB in the United States’” (144). But PIH does not care about anything like that. People come first, no matter where they are from, and especially when viable intervention is possible. Still, they tried in Peru, and it became expensive, but to them, worth it, but it also meant looking for more money, something that is key to PIH working. People were always looking out for PIH financially because of all of the good that it does. Were it not such a good and patient centered program, I do not believe the money would come in as it did.

When I saw that chapter four in Not For Sale was about Europe, I was quickly able to correctly assume the problem started in Eastern Europe. From Eastern Europe, the victim is usually from a country that was once part of the Soviet Union. These girls then finds themselves all over the globe, not wanting to be anywhere but home.

In this individual story in the chapter, the victim was tricked by an acquaintance in, at this point, an all too familiar story. This trafficker promised to go with her, but soon enough, it was found out that the victim was going alone in a sense, but she was together with other girls stuck in the same situation. And once these girls get stuck, they start to feel like less than human, which no person should ever have to feel like, as seen in the letters to Padre Cesare. The abuse and the feeling less than human that these girls have to endure is unimaginable, and how they survive and are able to thrive and live even semi-normal is a testament to what people are capable of.

Eastern Europe is a strange place, borne of a broken communist regime. Now that the curtain that separated it from the rest of the world is gone, problems there are more visible than ever. For example, “Nearly every orphanage in eastern Europe overflows its capacity and has a
line of kids waiting to get in” (147). So, older children are then forced to leave the orphanages, and without skills or a foreseeable future, become potential commodities for sex traffickers. They are then horribly exploited in unthinkable ways that make one wonder about what humans are capable of on the negative scale.

While on the topic of what awful things people are capable of, the Russian mob finds itself in the center of the sex trafficking scandal. They have connections and they know how to make money off trafficking. And it is not like being responsible for trafficking has consequences in these countries. Other countries, yes, there are harsher punishments, but forgetting invisible divisions that break up countries, there needs to be global regulation on this, and global dealing out of consequences. This type of behavior is inexcusable, no matter where one is from. This involves the cooperation of police around the world. “The complicity of law-enforcement authorities in sex trafficking is not peculiar to eastern Europe; it is a worldwide phenomena” which is disgusting, and shows the worst of what we offer (169).

There are many factors that keep the trafficking going, and one consistently noted is poverty. It really does make people desperate like nothing else, and needs to be addressed whenever solutions are thought of. But it is just as important to get the people who are suffering being trafficked out. They are individuals living a life that no one should be subjected to. This is happening all around the world, and although some women are able to escape, some cannot, and they need help.

**Week of 11/03/11**

*Mountains Beyond Mountains, Not for Sale*

People are able to learn from the PIH has done, like the TB treatments in Peru. Optimism is apparently scarce in the modern medical community, but people, like those in PIH still have
hope. The wider medical community had the “notion that one should provide the greatest good for the greatest number, and it was expressed in the language of realism” (Kidder, 165). Medicine had to be “cost-effective” (165). This is difficult to truly determine, though, because with drugs, “the price is high because only one company makes it,” and then becomes the only source (169). There are people in this world, like the Dutch, who are more interested in affordable drugs than others, and this seemed appealing to PIH. Generics have the power to treat people, but at a much more reasonable price and with the power to reach more people. It just seems natural that this would be a solution for anyone trying to treat the desperate and impoverished.

Farmer feels an intense responsibility for the wellbeing of those he cares for. “The problem is, if I don’t work this hard, someone will die who doesn’t have to. That sounds megalomaniacal. I wouldn’t have said that to you before I’d taken you to Haiti and you had seen that is was manifestly true” (191). Having this attitude is a constant motivator, and one that we should all be envious of.

I am glad that Farmer likes Cuba. I always thought of it as an intriguing place, and he made it sound as such. They really do have a good medical system, especially for somewhere so impoverished. He understood that they were a “good example” of how to “manage poverty” (194). In Cuba, Haiti was always on his mind, although he appreciated being away and seeing how things work over there. This medical system has lead to Cuba having “the lowest per capita instance of HIV in the Western Hemisphere” (203). He wished that Haiti were more like Cuba, and with good reason. He learned a lot there, and everyone reading along learned a lot, too.

The Not for Sale story about Peru was very interesting. There is obviously a massive problem in the country with keeping children safe and off of the streets. When given a place to
stay that was not all that big, more than 600 children came off the streets to be safe, so it is not like they wanted to live in danger on the streets.

Some children get thrown out by their guardians, as unimaginable as that is. In one example, an eight year old was forced to try and find work, and when she came back unsuccessful, was forced to leave and could not come back until she was able to contribute. So where does an eight year old go? To the streets, perhaps to fall victim to the clutches of a sex trafficker? This is especially easy in “communities that lack social power,” and in places like Peru where hundreds, if not thousands of children are sleeping on the streets at night, social power does seem to be lacking indeed (Batstone, 190). It also makes social and class mobility seem more real, and like in the example earlier, money and power really do mean a lot, even giving up children. There also needs to be a stable government that is willing to look out for their people, which is something many developing countries do not have. Some know that in their countries, “‘We are ruled by corruption and greed’” (208). For anything to really change, this has to stop being the norm. Saying that, though, is a lot easier than making that actually making it happen.

Week of 11/10/11

Mountains Beyond Mountains, Not for Sale

Paul Farmer seemed shockingly human here, in this section, and was willing to admit that. After having a child of his own, he realized, “‘So you love your own child more than these kids,’” despite the fact that, “All the great religious traditions of the world say, Love thy neighbor as thyself. My answer is, I’m sorry, I can’t, but I’m gonna keep on trying, comma’” (213). I actually really appreciated this. Loving every single person the same amount simply is not possible, especially when kids get involved. But he still wanted to try. Admitting that he does
not, though, was a good look into what actually goes through the average person’s mind. We should all want to love everyone equally as a person, but there are struggles.

Farmer decided, after some contemplation, that PIH should get involved in Russia, despite it meaning spending more time in a different corner of the world. This is when the major look into TB started. And the problem there was severe. “The epidemic he’d seen in Siberia’s prisons was worse than anything he’d seen in Peru, and in some respects anything he’d witnessed in Haiti” and given the horrors in those places, that meant that this was an extreme problem that they were facing (222). This TB problem, in exposure with other illnesses that were going untreated, like AIDS and other STDs is “gonna be a fucking disaster” (228). But there are connections between organizations that make treatment expensive and difficult, like “alliances between the Ministry of Health and Russian drug companies” (231). This does not deviate too far from some of the problems in the US, and what causes trouble all around the world.

Unlike many other people, Farmer believes “prisoners deserved attention first” (232). So many people shun and look down on prisoners as less than human, but he knew that they deserve care because of the risk they were put at by being in prison, and because they are human. He preferred working with people like prisoners because, “… playing the game of international health politics didn’t come easily to him” despite being good at it (234).

Money is a problem for most organizations, and PIH is no exception. They use their money wisely, but they always need more. The organization “used only about 5 percent of donations to administer itself, and all the rest on services to patients” (245). Still, it was always a concern because there are always more people who need treatment that does not come without cost. They are an example to others, and their work has been an influence in the work of huge organizations like “‘the U.S. Congress, the WHO Commission on Macroeconomics and Health,
the White House, the U.S. Treasury, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, etc”” (257). But Farmer is not all that happy about this, and believes that these bigger organizations should not have to have such a small group as an example, which is an absolutely valid point because they should have been working more like him from their start.

By the end of this section, Farmer was torn between two passions. He heard one passion as his “friends and allies saying he should concentrate on the big issues of world health and, at the other ear, the groans of his Haitian patients” (260). These are two difficult passions to be torn by. Which way can he do the most good for the most people while still satisfying his own wants and desires? So goes the life and decisions of Paul Farmer.

The ending of Not for Sale is about the United States, presumably because a lot of readers are from here, and want to know what it means for us. Thinking about slavery in the United States is unusual because this is “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” But what free, courageous people would allow this to happen anywhere, let alone on their own soil? It is either time to rethink what we believe about ourselves, or really do something about slavery. Still, here, “Most victims originate in China, followed by Mexico and then Vietnam” (Batstone, 213). The fact that there are even people and nationalities to list means we are not doing enough.

The people in the United States are unaware of the problem, and this is not just a broad statement about the uneducated. It holds true for millions of Americans from all backgrounds. But America is making changes, and despite people not knowing what is really happening, courts are becoming more aware and willing to punish people for committing such an inhumane crime. One trafficker got “the harshest sentence delivered to a trafficker prior to 2005 – life in prison” (224). These are the kind of consequences people like him should receive, and I would like to
see a trend like this continuing. Congress is also set on making traffickers pay for their crimes, and passed TVPA in 2000 to protect victims and ensure consequences for traffickers (231).

One great way to look at helping to fix the problem is to believe, “to help someone in need felt like a gift” (237). If more people felt that way, instead of seeing others as a burden or whatever, the world would be a happier place. The story about the A Cappella choir is very troubling because this was supposed to be done as a way to help people in need, but instead turned into exploitation. Why would somebody exploit these children and ruin what America is to them forever? If money is the only reason, I have no answer. There is just no way to ethically rationalize his behavior. But it is okay. He is dead now.

The end of the book was a good look into what can be done and who is doing it. I am glad that it was included, and will find myself looking back on it.

Week of 11/17/11

*Half the Sky, Cesar Chavez, Mountains Beyond Mountains*

The beginning of *Half the Sky* is an echo of everything that has been learned in this course. The stories of families selling their children into a life that they thought would be better or due to desperate circumstances. Then the truth becomes clear the person who was trafficked, and the abuse and raping begins without a sight in end other than death.

Another recurring idea is that people simply do not know about the problem, which is completely true. In this book, they early on believed that “the oppression of women was a fringe issue, the kind of worthy cause the Girl Scouts might raise money for” (Kristof, WuDunn, xiii). But they were soon made aware of the truth, and became passionate. And these problems happen all around the world, the West included. “In America, millions of women and girls face beatings or other violence from their husbands or boyfriends,” despite being among a country
that has collected a number of rights for women (xv). The abuses in other countries are extreme, but it is important not to lose hope. “If girls get a chance, in the form of education or a microloan, they can be more than baubles or slaves; many of them can run a business,” but first, changes have to happen to make that acceptable, and a norm (xviii). In fact, “‘Investment in girls’ education may well be the highest-return investment available in the developing world” (xx). This could solve so many problems in other countries because these problems are economic, but it could mean a tradeoff in culture shifts and the loss of tradition.

Although America has an ever-increasing presence in India, that is where the problem is greatest. “There are 2 to 3 millions prostitutes in India,” and many of them never wanted that life (5). The same cannot be said of any countries where women choose to be prostitutes, but the real problem is when they are forced into it against their will or through trickery. The life as a forced prostitute is miserable and one too many succumb to. In order to ensure the girls stay, “the business model is to break the spirit of girls, through humiliation, rape, threats, and violence” (10). This is terrifying, but realities for millions of women who finally give up and give in. And the problem is not getting better. In fact, it is getting worse for a number of reasons, including the spread of capitalism, increasing globalization, and AIDS in the modern world. Corrupt police officers and others play a role here, and have come to value things like bribes over protecting the people they are supposed to serve.

There are people who try to help, but there are certain ways that work better than others. For example, closing sweatshops to prevent child labor may actually be a problem for children who then find themselves selling their body soon after. Education seems to be what works the best, in that educating both the privileged and those who are in danger can only be a good thing.
Those who are privileged will be able to help, and those in danger who are educated will probably be more successful.

There are politics associated with prostitution around the world, which can make it a difficult topic to tackle. Everywhere where women are sex slaves, they “are perceived as discounted humans” (24). To combat this thinking, and what is seen as valuable, political action will have to take place. There are different ideas about prostitution, like legalize-and-regulate or all out banning it, but neither have worked to successfully eliminate prostitution or keep it slave free. I have always been a fan of the legalize-and-regulate prospect, but I can see how that would not completely cure the slavery issue. More thinking needs to be done, and more solutions need to be brought to the table. And when thinking about these things, “our focus has to be on changing reality, not changing laws” (32). There has been some action taken and a number of groups are working on this issue, but it obviously has not been enough because the scale of it is still so grand.

*The Gospel of Cesar Chavez* was actually a pleasant surprise. The words were basically completely his own, and he seemed like such a genuine person. He seems more “human” than someone like Paul Farmer, like someone who can understand the flaws and motives of others. There were quite a few quotes that particularly stuck out to me. In the chapter “Abuelita or Grandmother Theology,” he said, “Although my mother opposed violence, I think the thing that she really cracked down on the most was being selfish. She made us share everything we had. If we had an apple or a tiny piece of candy, we had to cut it into pieces” (Garcia, 27). What a great way to raise a child, and obviously, it stuck.

I was so glad to read, “It’s not necessary to have a religion to act selflessly. I know many agnostics who are more religious in their own way than most people who claim to be believers.
While most people drawn toward liberation or radicalism leave the church, I went the other way. I drew closer the Church the more I learned and understood” (32). Take that, Paul Farmer. I am glad that the Church was a place to Chavez to go to and strengthen his beliefs, but that he acknowledged so many people who are good avoid organized religion. The further I went from religion, the better a person I became. It makes someone appreciate life and realize the value of human life, and should push someone to be better. I think he understood this.

Chavez was a believer in the power of human dignity. He said, “We must never forget that the human element is the most important thing we have – if we get away from this, we are certain to fail” (39). This is pure truth, and should guide how people go about living. For the poor, he believed, “Time accomplishes for the poor what money does for this rich” (44). I had to think on this for a while, and decided that there is a lot of truth in this. Change comes over time for most people, while rich people can make it happen with money. Change dictated by time is usually more sustaining, but it involves patients and thinking into future generations, which can be difficult, but undoubtedly worth it.

Chavez was one to self-sacrifice. “[I]n giving yourself you will discover a whole new life of meaning and love (55). This is very inspirational, and something to look forward to for anyone who is sacrificing for a greater good, something that I hope to do in whichever way works out in the future. Chavez once again shows his humanity when admitting, “I am not a nonviolent man. I am a violent man who is trying to be nonviolent” (64). This is something that seems difficult to admit, but makes being nonviolent more realistic for everyone. When people are passionate about an issue, it is easy to become violent. There is something so natural about it, but an evolved mind can see the power of being nonviolent, and what it will mean for the
cause. His attempts at being nonviolent, against his natural instincts, shows how committed he was.

People can be cruel and can uncomfortably easily dehumanize one another. “We are men locked in a death struggle against man’s inhumanity to man” (90). That has been true for too long. There are so many people who are inhumane, and there are those who are willing to fight against that. Chavez was one of these people, and they exist, in massive numbers across the globe. He was also a reflective man. “I had a lot of time to examine my past, and I was able to develop self-criticism and examination. I began to see that there were more important things than some of the problems that upset me, such as my administrative problems. I lost most of my emotional attachments to them” (108). Emotional attachments to insignificant things are often a hindrance, and in losing them, so much more can be accomplished.

Finally, his caring about all people is a key to what makes him such a positive influence. “La Raza? Why be racist [?] Our belief is to help everyone, not just one race. Humanity is our belief” (131). That is the best belief to have because it is the only thing that will enduringly matter.

Also, this week came the end of *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. The story about John and the struggle about what deserves how much money. Still, learning from Farmer, a member of PIH said, “I’m looking at only one child’” (Kidder, 270). Each person, no matter where he is from or what it will cost, deserves to be treated as an individual and with all of the means possible. And he did end up dying, but the money and effort was worth it so “his mother can grieve in private instead of an open ward with flies all over her face?” (277). This case gave some PIH conviction, but also showed some of the futility associated with it.
Farmer liked hiring local people to work for him, especially after being patients, which is very important to sustainability. Of the people who are still patients, he believed, “it’s identifying the patients in gravest danger and giving them priority,” along with his “‘preferential treatment for the poor’” (286). These are themes that have stuck with him, and are part of what has made his work so successful. Another interesting conversation that Farmer took part in was about the relative value of money. “… a young attending physician makes one hundred thousand dollars, not twenty, and that’s five times what it cost to try to save a boy’s life – that just makes you sound like an asshole’” (289). And it really does. As a culture, America is too focused on money and profit, and do not think about how much we earn compared to what it costs to save a life, something that one cannot attach a dollar value to. Especially when there is so much that is unfair for the people of Haiti, we think about collecting obscene amounts of money. It just sounds ridiculous.

Giving some insight into why PIH is unique and will stand the test of time, Farmer realizes his willingness to do things that others simply will not. “… a reluctance to do scut work is why a lot of my peers don’t stick with this kind of work” (294). He also “‘feel[s] most alive … when I’m helping people’” (295). These parts of Farmer give a look into why he is successful, and what people who want to be like him should aspire to. In that way, he can “avoid futility” and “his patients tend to get better” (295). All of these things work together to make PIH the success it has become.

In the epilogue we see the success of PIH. “Its influence has spread,” which was comforting and a good thing to hear because of all of the good that it can do (305). They are spread across the world with limited resources, but they get by because they are needed and the generosity of individuals. It also exists because of the high percentage of indigenous workers
they employ, thus, empowering and making sustainable change. Finally, we see that, “one person can make a difference in this world isn’t the whole truth” (311). We need others to help us if we really want to make a difference, but the power of the individual is enormous, nonetheless.

**Week of 11/24/11**

*Half the Sky*

When thinking about how much movement has been made toward egalitarianism in this country, reflecting on what it means to be a woman in another country is important to do before making assumptions about what women should do. Around the world, “One of the reasons that so many women and girls are kidnapped, trafficked, raped, and otherwise abused is that they grin and bear it” (Kristoff and WuDunn, 47). It really is hard to imagine, especially growing up in a time where the struggles of women in this country have become so minimal and taken a backseat to issues that affect everyone. These women in other countries know no other. Nurtured in them is a sense that they are to do what they are told, instead of the modern American tradition of having a voice.

It is not like the future for women in other countries is hopeless, though, but change does not come easily. The best way to implement change is through education and empowerment. “Education and empowerment training can show girls that femininity does not entail docility, and can nurture assertiveness so that girls and women stand up for themselves” (47). Before this education and empowerment, women fall victim to whatever punishment men can dole out. “Sexual humiliation” is “an effective and low-risk strategy to intimidate challengers and to control the community” (49). It is so strange to think that men would even think to do that. It is just so degrading and among the worst things a person could do, especially with the importance
of honor. That is part of why education is so important. It protects people from abuse. “In developing countries, tormenting the illiterate is usually risk-free; preying on the educated is more perilous” (50). The educated can take a stand and learn what they need to do to hold people responsible, while the illiterate find themselves in a position of helplessness.

Alongside education is empowerment, and the two can go hand in hand when done properly. With this empowerment, “women themselves become more assertive and demanding” instead of just accepting and being who others want them to be (53). Throughout the texts, there have been people who are willing to make this education and empowerment a reality, while working to keep people out of slavery for good. These people aim to change the entire system, and know that to make real progress, they must look for changes that are “political and cultural remedies, and frankly, charisma” in those making the change happen (55). These changes would be more sustaining if there were large numbers behind the movements, but so often, the change is spurred by the actions of an individual, and, in social entrepreneurship, especially women. They are able to see that to make the changes sustainable, they must keep the women in these countries educated and out of the cycle of slavery.

I chose to read the chapter about “Family Planning and the ‘God Gulf’” not really knowing what to expect, but obviously intrigued. Within the first page, I was upset. “George W. Bush cut off funds to Marie Stopes and the entire consortium, all around the world, because Marie Stopes was helping to provide abortions in China” (131). That is when I knew what this chapter was about, and what makes me so mad about American foreign policy. Who the Hell do people like Bush think they are when they make decisions like this? He cut funding around the world over something that he is wrong on. I know that people are anti-choice for some reason, but they are wrong. And I hate saying that people are wrong. I like trying to see from other
people’s point of view and reasoning it out, and in some skewed way, most people are “right” in some sense about what they believe. But there are no two sides on this one. People have tried to explain it to me again and again, but I always end up near tears, so troubled by their backward and inexcusable thinking. Forcing women to have babies is on the same level as the sexual humiliation because it is so inhumane.

Still, this illogical thinking shapes American politics and funding around the world. This is based in religion, which is ridiculous in a nation that was built on the idea of being secular and being able to choose a religion, or freedom from it. But because conservative Christians like Bush make it, somehow, to the presidency, “barring funds to any foreign aid group that, even with other money, counseled women about abortion options or had any link to abortions” is possible (132). It is hard to believe that this is a reality, but, unfortunately for countless women across the world, it is true. These anti-choice people are hurting women across the world and making the situation worse. What they do “result in more abortions,” despite the lies they would have people otherwise believe (134). And the abortions that do happen will be unsafe and without regulations that would exist in a hospital.

The call now is to find common ground because no one is going to budge. Everyone can agree that the number of abortions should decrease. Almost half of all pregnancies around the world are unplanned or unwanted, and not enough contraception is available to lower this number at this point. Women should be in control of their birth control because men are just interested “planting a seed” and not staying to raise the child. Smaller families should be encouraged, and reducing childhood mortality so that parents can be assured the child will live to adulthood. Once again, education is key, and historically, has been key to keeping families small.
Also in this section is a discussion about AIDS and HIV. Once again, within a page or so, I was outraged. The big problem with AIDS was “indifference” (136). Indifference? Who the hell could be indifferent when people are dying? Well, one Republican who has held status over the years, Pat Buchanan said, “‘The poor homosexuals – they have declared war against nature, and now nature is exacting an awful retribution’” (136). It is stuff like this that makes me want to leave this country. The authors said it perfectly when they asked, “Someday people will look back and wonder: What were they thinking?” (136). So because America decided not to care, abstinence programs became the norm instead of trying something that would actually make a difference. It took the election of Obama to change these policies and restore funding to where it needs to go. But distributing condoms was not what eliminates AIDS, either.

Not all of what religious conservatives have done is negative, but personally, I cannot see past so much of the evil they are responsible for. In reality, “25 percent of AIDS care worldwide is provided by church-related groups” (142). Additionally, “the Catholic Church as a whole has always been more sympathetic to condoms than the Vatican has been” (142). I never understood this, but I approve. I always thought, if you are going to call yourself a Christian, doing what is written in the Bible should come first, and why I have never wanted to commit myself to any religion. So, the religious are more likely to give their time and money, and more liberal people want to see government money going to humanitarian causes. Perhaps a middle ground can be met where more liberals become more self-sacrificing, and the religious realize that government money can do good. Coming together seems to be the key. This was also a theme in the story about the women who wanted money to go to these foreign healthcare endeavors, and the power of people coming together, which is always inspiring.
I also read the chapter “Is Islam Misogynistic?” and answered, almost aloud, “yes.” Honestly, all Abrahamic religions are, despite how they have evolved. Yet the book begged to differ, despite mounds of evidence that I have heard over the years. Still, I gave it a chance, but I am not all that convinced. Sure, “Muslims sometimes note that such conservative attitudes have little to do with the Koran and arise from culture more than religion” (150). There are many conservative cultures where women are not treated so poorly. According to a number of European nations, the United States is pretty conservative, but our women can walk around basically naked. So culture? Maybe not. When they said, “The Koran explicitly endorses some gender discrimination,” something that is indisputable, I was confused about them earlier saying that the religion is not misogynistic (151). There are questions about the validity of translations or what has been recorded and what has not, but honestly, no woman would adhere to the rules of Islam if she were not forced to, so it is hard to understand why they do not leave the faith.

There are feminists within the Islamic religion. I found that hard to believe. They do not understand the Western obsession with dress, and can see the contradictions within the religion based on gender. Now, I am a painfully logical person, so nothing about this makes sense. And then the families make this worse, valuing tradition over their daughters and other women. It is unreal, and is grounds for disowning a family. And it is known that oppressive cultures struggle, especially when there are more males than females. Still, the trend continues and hurts the economy and progress. Just… why?

When going into these places, it is important to learn about the culture and respect it. Help is welcome “as long as it does not seem to threaten their culture” (161). Still, Westerners ignore this fact and bring with them their culture instead of “writing the checks and carrying the
bags in the back” (162). They know that they want education and skills, and through these things, the women will find security and the ability to break the chains of an oppressive society.

All of these works worked together so well. I know I should say a lot more about the book *World Poverty*, but I have found that many of its themes and major ideas are told through the other texts and do not need to be repeated. I have learned so much through these texts, and have been given the tools and inspiration to both do something and teach others.

**Week of 12/01/11**

**Gene Sharp**

Gene Sharp has done some phenomenal work in the field of nonviolence. He compiled 198 nonviolent techniques in the work *The Methods of Nonviolent Action*. Many of the techniques he mentions seem like common sense, but when made available to read, and then put in action, have the ability to change the world. So many of these techniques have been used and been successful in the past that including them as methods for future revolutions or movements is helpful. The fact that there are, in this collection alone, nearly 200 methods of creating change without being violent speaks to what a large movement this has become. These all have the power to challenge some wrong, and recently, have been used to do so.

Upon interview in *The Science of People Power*, one quickly discovers that Sharp is definitely not a violent or arrogant man. Although he was not directly part of the revolution in Egypt, his words carried mounds of influence. He understands that all people can be part of the movement, despite coming from a background that is often associated with violence, like Islam. He understands that he cannot give direct advice in places like Egypt because he does not understand the culture there fully, but his collected nonviolent methods can be used under all circumstances because they are universally applicable. Like PIH and Farmer, Sharp also has
trouble with money and funding his projects, even though they both have to potential to do so much good. All he wants to do is collect money to do research on nonviolence, and to deny that is to deny that power which will bring the future and more democracy and egalitarianism across the planet.

In, How Egypt happened: Gene Sharp and Optor and Years of Organizing, one discovers the kind of people are making the revolutions in the Arab world happen. Although Sharp is an old man himself, the people that he inspires are, largely, young and wanting to see change. They understand the power of technology, and have the passion to foresee a better future. This is a “movement dedicated to spreading democracy in a region without it” full of people who want their voices heard (Miller). They, using technology and the power of nonviolence, is what made the revolution a success, and will deeply impact the future of that part of the world.
Works Cited


