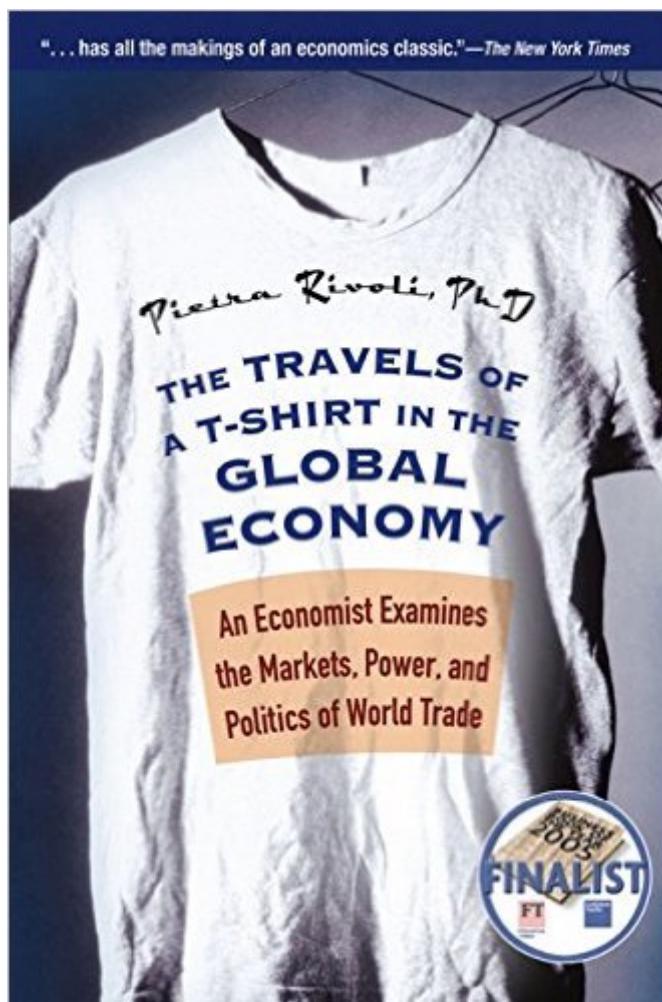


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The Travels Of A T-Shirt In The Global Economy: An Economist Examines The Markets, Power, And Politics Of World Trade



Synopsis

Praise for THE TRAVELS OF A T-SHIRT IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY "Engrossing . . . (Rivoli) goes wherever the T-shirt goes, and there are surprises around every corner . . . full of memorable characters and vivid scenes." â "Time "An engaging and illuminating saga. . . . Rivoli follows her T-shirt along its route, but that is like saying that Melville follows his whale. . . . Her nuanced and fair-minded approach is all the more powerful for eschewing the pretense of ideological absolutism, and her telescopic look through a single industry has all the makings of an economics classic." â "The New York Times "Rarely is a business book so well written that one would gladly stay up all night to finish it. Pietra Rivoli's The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy is just such a page-turner." â "CIO magazine "Succeeds admirably . . . T-shirts may not have changed the world, but their story is a useful account of how free trade and protectionism certainly have." â "Financial Times "[A] fascinating exploration of the history, economics, and politics of world trade . . . The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy is a thought-provoking yarn that exhibits the ugly, the bad, and the good of globalization, and points to the unintended positive consequences of the clash between proponents and opponents of free trade." â "Star-Telegram (Fort Worth) "Part travelogue, part history, and part economics, The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy is ALL storytelling, and in the grand style. A must-read." â "Peter J. Dougherty, Senior Economics Editor, Princeton University Press author of Who's Afraid of Adam Smith? "A readable and evenhanded treatment of the complexities of free trade . . . As Rivoli repeatedly makes clear, there is absolutely nothing free about free trade except the slogan." â "San Francisco Chronicle

Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Wiley; 1St Edition edition (June 30, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0470039205

ISBN-13: 978-0470039205

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (141 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #528,903 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #100 inÂ Books > Business & Money > International > Exports & Imports #152 inÂ Books > Business & Money > International > Global Marketing #185 inÂ Books > Business & Money > Industries > Fashion & Textile

Customer Reviews

Spurred by a Georgetown student anti-sweatshop protest, Pietra Rivoli took up the task of tracing the life of a (tacky souvenir) t-shirt she buys in Florida, to examine the economics and politics of this non-trivial segment of the apparel industry. Why she buys the t-shirt in the first place remains a mystery. Why she needs one from Florida that she will likely discard is even more of a mystery. She made me think about studying the American practice of souvenir shopping and excess consumption. But her t-shirt has a story worth telling. Rivoli first adeptly traces the history of cotton as a critical world commodity, including the struggles in England two hundred fifty years ago by the wool industry to combat the comfort of cotton, going so far as to prohibit the use of calico and the requirement that people be buried in wool. The questionable economics of slavery moved cotton production to the United States, but it was and still is the intervention of technology, research and financial capital that made cotton farming so much more productive today. Nonetheless, the ability of Texas farmers to market "low quality" cotton can best be attributed to both technology and federal price supports, up to 19 cents on a 59 cent pound of cotton. Cotton, while still a major commodity in global trade, has probably declined in relative value and share of the world economy. What we may be seeing is more of the slow death of the importance of a dated commodity and less of a "race to the bottom" that she suggests. She then takes us to t-shirt and apparel manufacturing and employment, now on the wane in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. People mistakenly think that these jobs are being sent to China. They're not. In fact, they're just disappearing.

Every so often I read a book that makes me wish I could build a course around it. I would love to teach a media literacy class from Marshall McLuhan's "Understanding Media", or a human geography class from Jared Diamond's "Guns, Germs, and Steel", for two examples. I had that rare feeling also for Pietra Rivoli's "The Travels of a T-Shirt In The Global Economy", except that in this case I was able to bring that urge to fruition. Teaching high school economics is challenging, to say the least, and rarely lends itself to any one singular vision. It is a survey course, with state-mandated standards that must all be checked off by the end of the year. Aside from textbooks, which usually leave much to be desired, meaningful text almost always must be drawn from a plethora of sources, sorted by the standard addressed, and photocopied or projected onto a screen for the students. This is why Rivoli's book is such a windfall for econ teachers. This is a book that directly addresses and informs most of the introductory economics standards. The author draws insights on various economic concepts directly from economists, policymakers, farmers, laborers, scientists, business owners and others. Heavy use of primary sources like these is of great benefit

in the classroom. You can see ears perk up when excerpts (in the book) from Eli Whitney's letters are read, or from letters written by young women working in textile mills, for a few examples. With regards to standards addressed, I will mention just a few of the many. Productivity is an early focal point of the book, and slavery, the cotton gin, the tractor (after the mule), advanced fertilizers, and genetically modified seeds are all explored, and those passages make for great lesson starters.

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