

“influential” in the West get left out: There’s no place for Jesus, Buddha, or Muhammad; no Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin; no Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud. There are, however, some eyebrow-raising entries: Walt Disney (40), Audrey Hepburn (46), Freddy Mercury (from the rock group Queen, at 52), and Elvis Presley (70). William Shakespeare—highly regarded in *some* literary circles—languishes at number 87, well behind Arthur Conan Doyle (69), the creator of Sherlock Holmes.

Some mystical symmetry seems to be suggested by the list’s book-ends, however. In the final slot, at number 100, is Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry, who forcibly opened Japan to Western trade by sailing his gunboats into the harbor of Edo (now Tokyo) in 1853–54. The Japanese leaders with whom Perry “negotiated”? Those same Tokugawa shoguns brought down by number one—ranked Sakamoto Ryōma.

OTHER NATIONS

An Ethical Cup of Joe

THE SOURCE: “Fair Trade Coffee Enthusiasts Should Confront Reality” by Jeremy Weber, in *Cato Journal*, Winter 2007.

ALONG WITH SCREWING IN compact fluorescent bulbs and lacing up running shoes made solely in factories following fair labor practices, a growing number of socially conscious Americans are drinking “Fair Trade” coffee, hoping to improve the lot of farmers around the world. While there is little doubt that Fair Trade coffee has improved

While Fair Trade coffee has improved living conditions for many growers, a researcher finds a “disconnect between promotional materials and reality.”

living standards for many growers, there is a “disconnect between promotional materials and reality,” writes Jeremy Weber, a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

The Fair Trade system, he writes, promises a living wage to poor farmers organized in cooperatives. In reality, it guarantees organizations of producers a minimum price. By eliminating “unnecessary” intermediaries who siphon off large fees for financing, sorting, processing, and exporting the coffee, the Fair Trade system is designed to funnel coffee profits straight to the people who grow the beans. But tossing out the middlemen means that someone within the cooperative must handle the same tasks. “Each of those activities . . . if not managed effectively and efficiently, can consume much of the higher Fair Trade price before it reaches growers,” Weber says. Moreover, while many Fair Trade drinkers believe that the system guarantees minimum wages to coffee pickers, wage requirements cover only “employees”; many hired laborers on small coffee farms are not covered because their work is “seasonal.” While the Fair Trade Foundation urges farmers to take steps to improve working conditions for all

workers, there is no requirement that coffee harvesters be paid a minimum wage, and some are not.

The Fair Trade movement aims to eradicate “sweatshops in the fields” by guaranteeing co-ops about \$1.26 a pound for coffee regardless of the international price, which dropped below 65 cents a pound in 2001, according to supporters of the effort. But because Fair Trade prices are higher than market prices, there is not sufficient demand for all the available coffee. The Fair Trade Labeling Organizations International estimated that in 2002 the supply of Fair Trade-certified coffee in Latin America, Asia, and Africa was seven times greater than the amount exported as Fair Trade coffee. The rest had to be sold on the conventional market at the market price, Weber says.

To give themselves an edge, many producers have switched to growing organic coffee, but the years-long organic certification process is expensive and demanding and the Fair Trade process itself requires capital. Basic certification costs \$3,200, and most coffee-producing organizations need about \$15,000 in financing to export a cargo container of Fair Trade coffee. The costs threaten to shut out some of the smallest producers Fair Trade wants to help, and to protect the cooperatives that are already operating.

Ask practical questions and spend less time searching for enemies, Weber advises: “If Fair Trade is dominated by those who see mainstream for-profit companies as intrinsically destructive, the movement will remain a fringe, niche market that supports a few privileged groups.”