

Is Sustainability a Privilege?

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Fast fashion and being able to shop with these brands is a privilege that a lot of people in the global north don't realize that they have. The common consensus among people is that they expect the average American person to put quite a lot of emphasis on materialistic and quite judgey in regards to economic things, especially ones that relate to one's status in society. Heavy association with brand names but preaching how sustainably sourced every article is, and yet people's capacity for solidarity and activism end when they begin to be slightly inconvenienced. Sustainably sourcing your clothes especially is a hot topic of debate, as brands like Shein have been trending upwards since the start of the pandemic. A study found that "The average Shein customer is female, earns \$65,300 in annual income, and reported spending \$100 per month on women's clothing." It's interesting to think about that, since the target demographic should be people who usually don't have the resources or funds to afford other options. Another fun fact is that, "Environmental, social, and ethical business practices ranked among the lowest priorities for all American shoppers surveyed." Shopping sustainably and being ethical is difficult, so take it into consideration that you shouldn't be shaming people who don't have the same privileges as others. And yet, based on a common consensus sustainability requires copious amounts of privilege. Why are the peanut butter jars that are easily recyclable costing over two times more than a regular jar? Why is locally grown and raised beef a whole lot more money? Many people have privileges in choosing your diet. The places that you choose to shop. Where you work, or even who you support. Millions of people are going to bed hungry every night, and don't have the privileges that some take for granted. Not everyone has access to clean water or prioritizes using less plastic because basic needs must be met before facing the pressure of thinking of the planet. Furthermore, not a lot of people have the ability or the education to learn to set aside money, especially since most scrutinies are of a major systemic issue like incredibly low wages. Even places like Boulder Colorado are a perfect example of how sustainability can be a double edged sword. Boulder has been surrounded by green space since about the 50's, and it is a very protected green space. One of their many rules is that you can't tear down a building that was built in the 90s due to the fact that it is considered historical- instead of building sprawling anthills that would situate a lot of people. There are strict enforcements on building there, so that the inhabitants can see the mountains- especially untouched. This contributes to a population cap on the city, therefore, they can be a whole lot more picky on who gets to live there, which then raises the cost of living. For reference "1.3% of Boulder's population is African American or Black". Any low income or minority family can easily be pushed out. Income is high so that your typical people can even afford to live there either. Boulder "residents have a median household income of more than \$99,000 per year". These types of issues lead you to think if we should even have closed off green spaces because of the population cap potential, or if it's okay

for only the elites to have access to beautiful and untouched nature. Clearly some consideration was given on this issue since around 2022, the UN also recognized that a “safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment” is a human right. Even though this isn’t a totally sealed deal, countries aren’t legally required to oblige, but this motion has got more people thinking about positive changes that they can make towards humans or their environment. Ditching fast fashion isn’t going to happen anytime soon, but hopefully more zero waste options could be popularized. Do you think that sustainability should be a natural human right?

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