
The Story of Stuff Challenges American Consumerism Just in Time for the Holidays



New Online Film Details Costs and Consequences of Consumer Culture

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BERKELEY, Calif. (Dec. 4, 2007) — As the holiday shopping season kicks into high gear, do consumers ever wonder what happens to their stuff from holidays past? “The Story of Stuff” (www.storyofstuff.com), a new short film released today online, takes viewers on a provocative tour of our consumer-driven culture — from resource extraction to iPod incineration — exposing the real costs of this use-it and lose-it approach to stuff.

Last year Americans spent \$456.2 billion during the holiday season, and this year sales are predicted to rise 4 percent to \$474.5 billion.¹ “The Story of Stuff” reveals that holiday consumption is not a seasonal phenomenon, rather an American maxim that has devastating consequences for our environment, third-world nations, working class Americans, personal health and even the general state of happiness in America.

Throughout the 20-minute film, activist Annie Leonard, the film’s narrator and an expert on the materials economy, examines the social, environmental and global costs of extraction, production, distribution, consumption and disposal. Her illustration of a culture driven by stuff allows her to isolate the moment in history where she says the trend of consumption mania began. The “Story of Stuff” examines how economic policies of the post-World War II era ushered in notions of consumerism — and how those notions are still driving much of the U.S. and global economies today.

According to the film, consumer mania may have been born from the post World War II era, but economic manipulation has driven consumerism to where it is today. From the limited life cycle of personal computers to changes in footwear fashion, Leonard demonstrates that products are either designed to be regularly replaced or to convince consumers that their stuff needs to be upgraded. This notion of planned and perceived obsolescence drives the machine of American consumerism year round.

The film features Leonard delivering a rapid-fire, often humorous and always engaging story about “all our stuff — where it comes from and where it goes when we throw it away.” Written by Leonard, the film was produced by Free Range Studios, the makers of other socially-minded, web-based films such as “The Matrix” and “Store Wars.” Funding for the project came from The Sustainable Funders and Tides Foundation. A screening of the film will be held at the GAIA Arts center in Berkeley, Calif. on December 6.

The film’s Web site, www.storyofstuff.com, serves as an interactive launch pad for information and activism. The site features hundreds of organizations working to change the cycle of the materials economy and offers viewers “another way.” The site includes resources and information, a footnoted script, a suggested reading list and ideas for educational activities and discussion topics for local screenings.

¹ Source: National Retail Federation (NRF); derived from U.S. Department of Commerce data.