Title: “The Story of Stuff: How Our Obsession with Stuff is Trashing the Planet, Our Communities, and Our Health and a Vision for Change.” Author: Annie Leonard Publisher: Free Press (Simon & Schuster) Length: 252 pages Price: $26.00 (hardback) Reading time: 6 hours Reading rating: 5 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy) Overall rating: 3 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

There are plenty of things you are not going to like about “The Story of Stuff: How Our Obsession with Stuff is Trashing the Planet, Our Communities, and Our Health and a Vision for Change.” Written in first person, often the information presented seems to be merely the author’s opinion and not documented fact (although there are endnotes). The first person voice also reads strident at times, and you will not like that. It is also hard to keep focused on the book and while not elaborately written, it is a slow read. And you are not going to like the author’s seemingly simplistic solutions to complex and difficult problems. Most of all, you are not going to like how the book forces you to look at the way we live, what we buy and priorities that seem out of whack.

The Story of Stuff actually started as a film and you can watch at 20-minute video on the topic online at <http://www.storyofstuff.com/>. The book is a more comprehensive look at environmental and social issues associated with the exploitation of natural resources, toxic manufacturing, unnecessary waste, exploitation of workers and the stresses of a consumer society. Author Annie Leonard has spent twenty years looking at manufacturing, waste and the “materials economy” with organizations including Greenpeace International, The Funders Workgroup for Sustainable Production and Consumption and the Global Anti-Incineration Alliance.

Think of your favorite cotton t-shirt, morning cup of coffee, or hot showers for examples. You are not going to like Leonard pointing out that your favorite cotton tee takes 256 gallons of water to produce or your morning cup of coffee requires 36 gallons. Love that hot shower? Well, the PVC in the shower curtains poising your children; not much to like there. Through a personal look at our “stuff,” Leonard explores the product- cycle of the things we buy and use every day, t-shirts, lap tops, aluminum cans, and exposes the true costs associated with that “stuff” from extraction to disposal on a global scale. You are not going to like thinking about the natural and social costs created by a consumer driven buy and throwaway society. On a personal level, you are not going to like how her discussion of the how the accumulation of stuff stresses families and forces us to work harder to afford all that “stuff.”

Business won’t like that the book compels us to consider the implications of a society that no longer demands so much stuff, or so much packaging with so little life and so much waste. Leonard argues that growth at all costs is not a mantra that can carry us through the 21st century. What will business do when consumer demand change? Or when the planet can no longer sustain the way business is done? What shift will take place when consumers look locally for healthy and less environmentally harmful food for their children? What will happen to consumer-oriented business when consumers stop wanting all this “stuff”?

The book raises legitimate questions about how we use natural resources, conduct business and what is in the future for a wasteful consumer society. It would be impossible to read this book and not think about the legacy we are leaving our children and their children. You won’t like that either.

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