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Bridge Project #3

To be perfectly honest, this project was fairly painful to conceptualize, and I was flip-flopping with my ideas for a fair amount of this project before I settled on what I wanted to do. Initially, I had wanted to create a world map re-envisioned through the lens of endangered species around the world. Realizing the immense scope of that subject, I narrowed it down to address the problems of exploitation that span across the globe in the form of the ivory trade. In the last century, poaching and the systematic abuse of elephants, rhinos, narwhals, and walruses to endangerment. In favour of generating profits and in response to the demands of the global luxury goods market, the exploitation and ultimate killing of these animals has become vastly unsustainable, and the practices employed to satisfy detached, first world buyers in obtaining tusks and horns is frankly cruel and outrageous. This map serves to illustrate the routes that ivory takes from the source- the animal, to the consumer, sometimes continents away. It goes to show that buyers are unaware or choose to be ignorant of the gruesome abuse of these endangered species and opt instead to use their appendages and bodies as flagrant displays of wealth. Through this map, I also hope to shed light on illegal practices that occur in order to sustain this trade and perhaps bring about an awareness regarding the players in this trade, some of which are countries that have announced legislative bans on ivory.

Through my research, I found that elephant tusks are trafficked out of eastern and southern Africa, and make their way to southeast Asia, and perhaps more notably, China. According to my research, the Chinese middle class actively contributes to the demand of ivory products, as they view ivory, or “white gold”, as a representation of wealth and status.

Additionally, ivory is used in the carving of relics and religious sculptures. While there is currently a CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species on Wild Fauna and Flora) plan to ban ivory trade, ivory can still be found on the black market. For instance, the United States have officially banned ivory since mid-2016, but the US still stands as one of the top importers of ivory through back channels and illegal means. In African countries such as Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Namibia, there are ivory stockpiles that when sold, would profit these developing countries but perpetuate the abuse of tusked animals. Unlike rhinos, the tusks of elephants don't grow back, and much of the elephant tusk is embedded within the skull, meaning that poachers would have to kill the elephant before extraction. In the case of rhino poaching, poachers often ignore the excruciating pain of rhinos and take their horns beyond the point of regrowth. This brutality is not only cruel, but shockingly unsustainable, as statistics show that there are less than half a million elephants left and even fewer rhinos. Experts postulate that both species, which are currently endangered, will be extinct by the end of the decade.

At the end of the day, in regards to my final piece, I am relatively satisfied about how I chose to present the subject. However, I wish that I had represented more information on the map, perhaps incorporating more graphic imagery and text. I did a considerable amount of research about the ivory trade, and I don't think that I did enough to reflect the extent of my research. Regarding the grievances I have about this project's parameters, I wish that the assignment was more narrow, allowing us to focus in on a specific region, culture, or country. I personally feel that doing a world map, while opening up avenues for broader interpretation, doesn't allow for a deeper, personal connection with the topic. Additionally, being constrained to a two dimensional final product was a bit perplexing in terms of conceptualization, but ultimately, the parameters of this project were interesting to grapple with.

Citations

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