



Interviewee: Amy Stewart

Title: Be glad for the flower workers

Duration: 3 minutes, 7 seconds

Introduction

We North Americans are wont to feel a little uncomfortable at the thought of poor people in Ecuador or Kenya laboring to produce luxury goods for our consumer tastes.

In this Skype-recorded episode of Bookpod, Amy Stewart, author of *Flower Confidential*, *Wicked Plants* and other books related to the soil, talks about how she sees the workers in the global industrial flower complex.

Presentation

You know, one of the things that I really realized, especially when I was traveling through Ecuador, is this notion of, "Oh, how awful that they're producing this luxury good that even they can't afford." Like, you know, "Oh, what a frivolous waste of their time." It's a little bit disingenuous for Americans to say, because our country was founded in the exact same way.



We of European ancestry came here. We chopped down natural resources, we put them on boats and we shipped them back to Europe. No one in the United States could afford the timber or the tobacco or any of the other products that we were either growing or mining or logging. We sent them back to a more established or wealthy country who gave us money in exchange, and we built a nation on that basis.

I think for us to now look at Latin America or look at Africa and say, "Oh, you shouldn't do that. What a terrible idea. I think you should go back to being a subsistence farmer. That would be better for you."

Well, you don't see any of us being subsistence farmers. I'm not a subsistence farmer. You're not a subsistence farmer. I think the fact that they were cultivating a luxury product to sell to countries that have money are exactly how countries get money. Where else are they going to get money from?

You know, I went to Latin America thinking, "Oh, I'm going to be so horrified and I'm going to want to boycott Latin



American flowers. And, in fact, the opposite was really true. I think that we should buy flowers that are certified through one of the many programs out there that certify the labor standards and environmental standards.

But I think the bottom line is that if you ask people working on a flower farm, you know, would you like Americans to stop buying these flowers so that you can go back to doing whatever you were doing before you were working on this farm?

And they will all say, "No! Are you kidding me? I need this job. I can take a shower at work I don't have running water at home. It's very nice to take a shower once a day."

And you're sort of like, "Oh, yeah. Huh. I guess that would be nice."

So, it did change my perspective, but not in the way that I thought it would.



Valedictory

For more information about Amy Stewart, visit her website
at www.amystewart.com.

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MacLeod.

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