**Genocide in Xinjiang**

Over the past few decades, a new global power in the form of China, under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), has risen. With a dictatorial government, the second largest economy in the world, and a military of over 2 million active personnel, China has vast influence around the globe. We have seen the CCP take advantage of their power, whether it be the crackdown on freedom in Hong Kong or the military threats on the vibrant democracy of Taiwan. We have even seen them use their power in dealing with the coronavirus and their COVID coverup and corruption of the World Health Organization. However, today’s subject is not about any of these, but is instead about the current genocide of the Uyghur people in Xinjiang.

The Ughyur people are a mostly Muslim group of people living in the north-western region of China, known as Xinjiang, officially known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). With a population of around 12 million, they are considered an ethnic minority in China, and while the XUAR should have some powers of self governance, in reality, the CCP has strict control over the region.

The story of the forced labor and ultimately, genocide of the Uyghur people, starts in 2003, when local CCP officials created programs that transfered rural Uyghurs to perform agricultural and factory work throughout China. Authorities at that time relied on tactics such as coercion to recruit participants, however, this only became international news around 2017 when internment camps started being built and were claimed to be “re-education” camps. Through leaked documents and survivor accounts, we know that these camps were run as high security prisons, where physical, mental, and sexual torture occurred. In July of 2019, officials announced that the re-education camps were closed and that the trainees graduated. However, these people, in reality, were either transferred to prisons to serve long sentences or were assigned to factories across China to become slave labor.

In October of 2019, a video surfaced on the internet showing hundreds of bounded and blindfolded men being led from a train in the Xinjiang region which evoked many worrying connections to the Holocaust in the 1940’s. Then, in around June of 2020, it was revealed that the CCP forced hundreds of thousands of minority women to use intrauterine devices, sterilization, and even abortions, for the goal of curbing China’s muslim population. This, according to international convention, is a genocide: “the intent to destory, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group”.

In March of 2021, various Western clothing brands such as Nike, H&M, Burberry, Adidas, Converse, etc, all expressed concern over allegations that the Uyghur people were being used as forced labour to pick Xinjiang cotton, which supplies around 20% of the world’s cotton. This came after several western countries imposed sanctions on China, and have caused these companies to be erased from China’s digital world and online platforms. With companies starting to understand and acknowledge the atrocities that are being committed in Xinjiang by the CCP, the big question is: what as a society can we do to stop this?

**Study Questions:**

1. International organizations such as the United Nations (UN) have in their “what we do” section the words: “Protect Human Rights”. Yet, China is still an active member of the United Nations. As an international organization that was created at the end of one of the biggest genocides the world has ever seen, does the UN have a heightened obligation to do more than condemn China with words for their human rights abuses? And if not, what message does that send to the world?
2. How do we balance the economic advantages of dealing with China and the unethical practices they are committing?
3. Should countries only intervene in active genocides only when they know they can win and with little consequences (consequentialism) or should countries always intervene due to it being morally correct (deontology)?
4. How much is human life valued? And how does a country and a society decide when to risk the lives of their people to save other lives?
5. Does intervention in terms of sanctions and such matter when the actual genocide is not stopped? At what point, if we have an obligation, is our obligation fulfilled?

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**The Road to Hollywood**

Child stars have long been viewed as cultural icons, and integral pieces of the American entertainment industry. Take, for example, the Olsen twins (Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen), who gained widespread recognition for their shared role as Michelle Tanner on the ABC sitcom *Full House*, after being cast at just six months old. Their highly prosperous careers continued throughout the 1990’s and early 2000’s, during which time the pair quite literally became the faces of the child entertainment industry: their music videos grossed over 500 million dollars, they starred in countless film and television productions, and according to Forbes magazine, they’ve been among the richest women in entertainment every year since 2002 (since the twins were at the age of 15).

But this immense fame at such a young age begs the question, “at what cost”?

As with many other child actors, Mary-Kate and Ashley never made the choice to act themselves; those decisions were made for them, as the pair were under the jurisdiction of their parents and other authoritative figures at the time of their debut. Having practically been born on the set of *Full House*, the twins stayed in the public spotlight for over a decade under the command of others. By the time they were allowed to make their own choices, the Olsens abruptly shied away from their fame, kept their distance from the public eye, and were even suspected dead. In 2010, shortly before leaving the entertainment industry, Mary-Kate Olsen opened up about her experience as a child actor in an interview with Marie Claire magazine. Characterizing herself and sister Ashley as “monkey performers”, she stated that she would “never wish (her) upbringing on anyone”.

Mary-Kate’s negative recollection of her time in stardom is not without reason. The Olsens were often plagued, from early on in their performing careers, with encounters of sexual abuse and assault from managers, producers, directors, employers, and fans. In the years leading up to the twins’ 18th birthday, numerous fan sites popped up with “countdown timers” to track the moments until the young celebrities reached adulthood, and thus their age of consent. This disturbing predatory behavior isn’t unique to the Olsens. Nearly every child celebrity has encountered such perverted behavior from fans or authoritative figures, and these experiences leave a deep scar long after they occur. “I remember on my 18th birthday I came out of my birthday party and photographers laid down on the pavement and took photographs up my skirt, which were then published on the front of the English tabloids the next morning,” said Harry Potter star Emma Watson at a HeForShe press conference in 2016. “If they had published the photographs 24 hours earlier they would have been illegal (considered statutory rape), but because I had just turned 18 they were legal.”

Various opinions exist on the ethicality of children in the entertainment industry. Aside from pointing out the industry’s long history of sexual abuse, critics claim that parents of child actors often exploit their children for personal gain. Whether for the purpose of creating a positive social image, fulfilling personal dreams of stardom through their children, or for monetary reasons, many parents are willing to cash in benefits from their kids, sometimes against the child’s own will or knowledge. In addition, regulations regarding child acting are few in number, vary based on location, and often are worked around. In most states, minors under the age of 16 working as actors are exempt from child labor laws, and the only regulation is to have a work permit (though California has more extensive policies). Additionally, some projects film in remote locations specifically to evade regulations intended to protect the child. Longer work hours or risky stunts prohibited by California, for example, might be permitted to a project filming in British Columbia.

However, others argue that exposing your child to a variety of activities, especially those that the child has expressed a degree of interest in, is part of being a good parent. And while there are certainly parents out there who force their children to participate in activities against their will, we as a society cannot necessarily condemn that activity blanketly unless the activity is clearly exploitative and dangerous to the child. Furthermore, even though many child actors tend to grow up miserable, dysfunctional, or in a downward spiral of drug abuse due to the unhealthy childhood experiences they fall into, there are numerous other child actors (ie: Shirley Temple, Brooke Shields) who grew up to lead normal, healthy lifestyles. But is this just akin to claiming that child abuse is tolerable because some victims recover from its wounds? Or is this a valid justification for pushing children into show business?

**Study Questions:**

1. Is it ethical for parents to push their children to enter the entertainment industry? Why or why not? (Note that this question is not asking whether or not the industry as a whole is ethical, though that should certainly be considered in your response).

* Would this vary with the intent of the parent?
* Would this vary with the will of the child (given that the child is expressing strong interest/disdain towards entering the industry)?
	+ Should children be regarded to have the cognitive capability to make such decisions for themselves?

2. In what ways is the ethicality of the child entertainment industry similar to the ethicality of youth sports leagues, child pageant shows, or even a parent signing their child up for music lessons? Are these examples similar in magnitude?

3. Should there be more regulations in place to ensure the wellbeing of child actors? Why or why not? If so, what measures should such regulations take? How should they be enforced?

4. The ever-expanding development of CGI (computer generated imagery) has opened the door for new possibilities in film and entertainment, such as replacing child actors with computer generated graphics. However, such imagery still has a long way to go before completely resembling reality. Given the possibly traumatizing experiences brought on by child acting as well as the rise of CGI technology, should the child entertainment industry be abolished for good? Or is there value in letting the industry live on? Why?

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