

## Introduction

This study explores the deep history of kakaw (aka cacao) and the plant's role in modern chocolate production. Long before the arrival of Europeans, the Maya drank bitter kakaw beverages daily and ritualistically, believing the plant to be a gift from the Gods. Along with their associated nutritional and spiritual value, Kakaw beans also served as currency among the Mayans. Since these days, the ongoing legacy of settler colonialism and global capitalism has robbed the Mayan people of this sacred plant and devastated the culture in which it played a part. Today, multi-national corporations enslave children to produce cacao to fuel the commercial chocolate industry. This project is meant to spread awareness of the atrocities committed by multi-national corporations and to educate those on chocolate's not-so-sweet history.



Figure 1: The natural form of a cacao pod and the beans it produces.

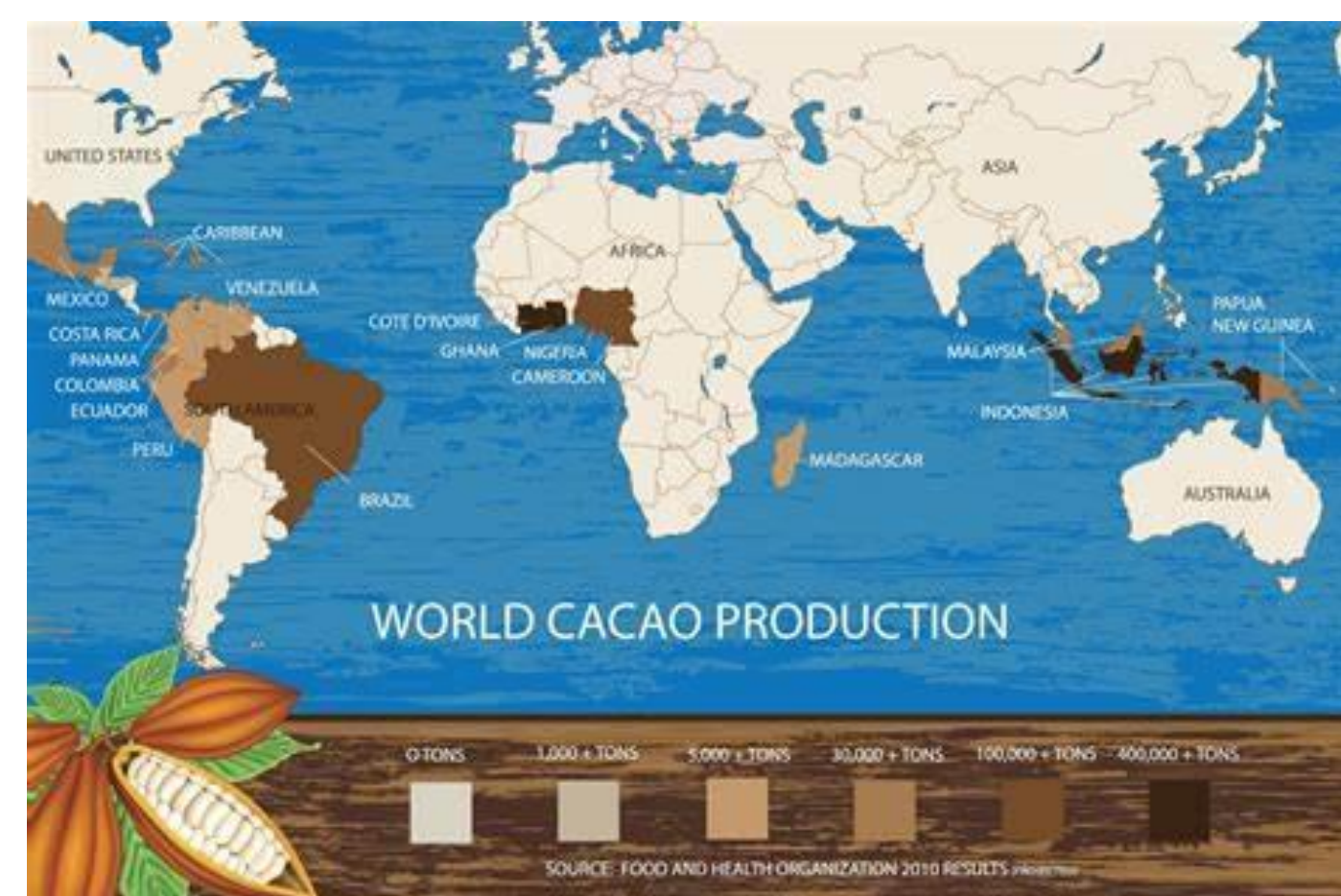


Figure 2: World Cacao Production, the darker areas indicate higher cacao production values.

## Methods:

The following details the methods used to gain a deeper understanding of Kakaw (cacao) and how people's relationships to it have changed through time.

- Much of this study involved conducting extensive literature reviews of both published works and online content related to the history of cacao.
- Included in this review were published interviews with plantation workers.
- A survey of North Country businesses and the types of chocolate for sale in these locations: The Potsdam Co-Op, ALDIS, Price Chopper, and Nature's Storehouse.

- A. I compared pricing between "ethically sourced" and conventional chocolates.
- B. Assessed the range of ethical "certifications" - or lack thereof, used to sell chocolate.

Figure 3: Methods Used to Acquire Chocolate.



Figure 4: Ethically sourced chocolate found in and around Potsdam, New York.

## Findings:

### A. Archaeological and Historical evidence of Kakaw:

- Huaca Montenegro, a 400-meter stone spiral built for spiritual reasons indicates that cacao would be found in the upper part of the Chinchipe-Marañon basin, 2,000 years before the Olmecs; circa 5,500 year ago.
  - Additional sources attribute Mesoamerican cultures with the domestication of cacao. Dozens of kakaw vessels have been excavated from the Valley of Oaxaca, Mexico alone. While many sources say the Olmecs were the first to domesticate cacao, there is no written history.
- Most information we have on the cultural use of kakaw stems from the Maya regions because it was a staple in their culture. The ancient Maya viewed kakaw as a sacred object in their lives.
  - They used kakaw in every aspect; currency, medicine, baptism, births, deaths, cacao ceremonies, to commune with the Gods, even paintings from the time show the importance of kakaw in court events such as marriages.

## Findings Continued:



Figure 5: Huacas Montenegro, Peru. The site where the oldest evidence of cacao was found.

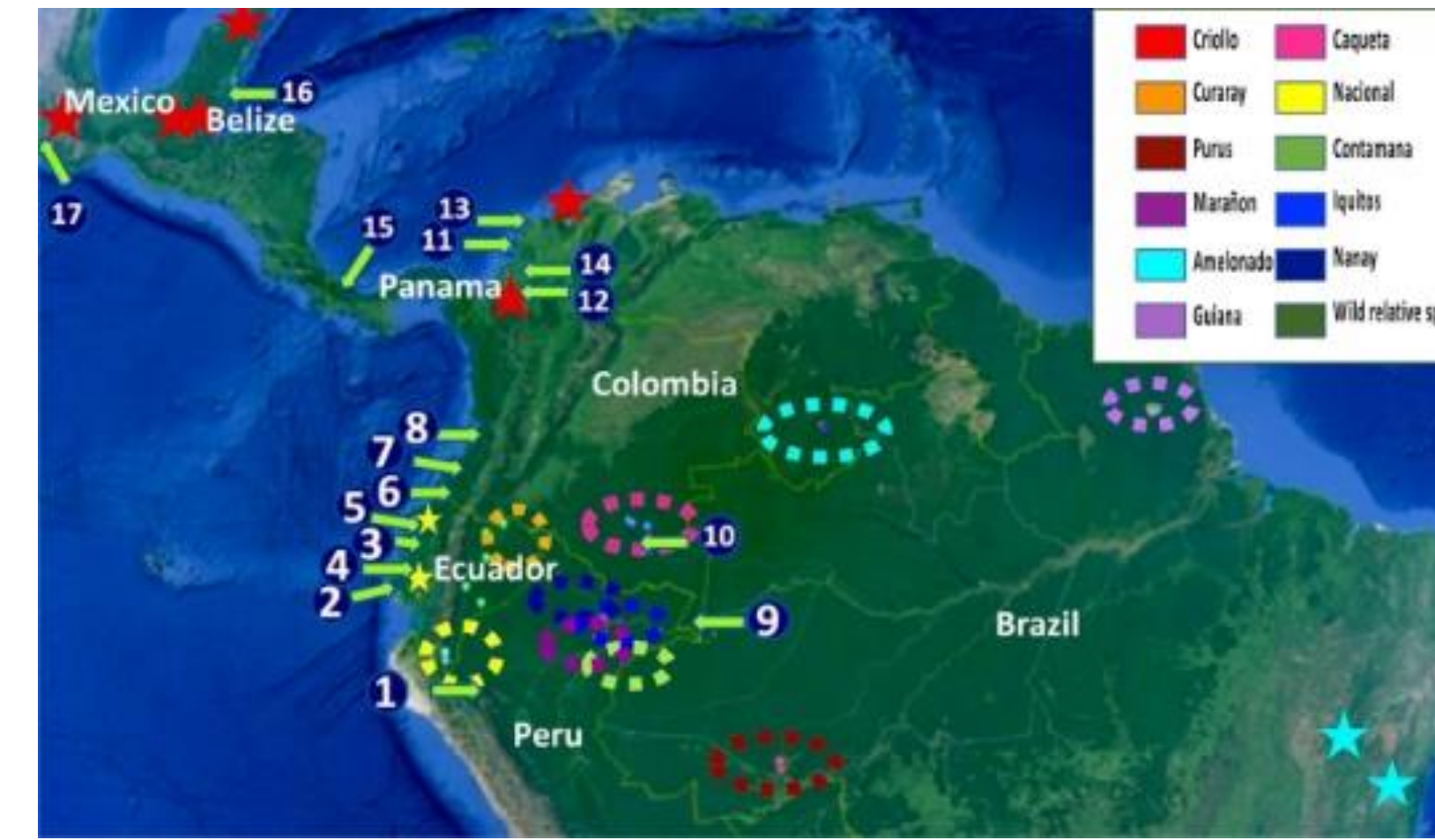


Figure 6: Archaeological Sites where cacao residue was found on ceramics in Mesoamerica and Central America.

### B. Today:

- Kakaw remains an important part of Maya life as well as other Indigenous peoples in the area.
- Kakaw (cacao) ceremonies are now marketed by many U.S. businesses claiming they are appreciating Mesoamerican and Maya culture - when in fact they are appropriating it.
- 1.6 million West African children have been trafficked and forced to work on cacao farms using dangerous tools, chemicals and toxins, and more harmful labor methods.
- Direct quotations from people who have been freed from cacao farms. One man stated, "When asked what he would tell people who eat chocolate made from slave labor, he replied that they enjoyed something that he suffered to make, adding, "When people eat chocolate, they are eating my flesh."

- Ages 12-16, some recorded as young as 5
- 40% are girls
- 14 hours a day of labor
- Chainsaws
- Machetes
- 100lb+ sacks of beans "some bags were taller than me"
- Agricultural chemicals and toxins
- Cheapest food available
- Sleep on wooden planks
- No access to clean water or bathrooms
- 30% do not attend school

Figure 8: Common characteristics of cacao farms



Figure 7: U.S. Department of Labor

- Supreme Court case Nestlé USA and Cargill v. Doe, six people from Mali sue Nestlé and Cargill for being trafficked into the Ivory Coast as children and forced to work on cacao farms.
- 2001, heads of Mars, Hershey, Nestlé USA, and others signed the Harkin-Engel Protocol which pledged to end "the worst forms of child labor" in four years. In 2005, 2008, and 2010 they repeatedly missed the deadline to end child labor in their cocoa supply.
- The Mars corporation and Barry Callebaut, both companies sued for their involvement in child labor on cacao farms now have a large part of their websites donated to Humans Rights within cocoa production.
- Research on chocolate companies, both conventional and ethically sourced, displays very different pricing and very different morals.



Figure 9: The core values now listed by Callebaut's website.

## Discussions:

- Forced to acknowledge these abusive practices, the companies have resorted to distracting consumers by expressing concern over child labor and slavery while still profiting off it.
- The world's largest chocolate manufacturers have formed various initiatives to supposedly address child labor and slavery in cocoa production, but these initiatives have done little to remove either abuse.
- Cargill's "Cocoa Promise" program say they seek to have "1,000,000 farmers 'benefiting' from the services by 2030. Nestlé's Cocoa Plan only works with 5% of cacao farmers in the Ivory Coast.
- 1/4 and 1/3 of all cacao is grown under a certification label. Fairtrade, UTZ, and Rainforest Alliance are the most known sustainable and ethical labels to be found on certain products. Recent information shows that certifications may be untrustworthy.
- If certifications can be falsified, what can we do to stop the use of child labor? The answer is to get involved, spread awareness, speak to your peers about this issue, and email these mass corporations about your disdain for their actions.

Figure 10: 2019 Chocolate Scorecard by Green America



Figure 11: Common Sustainable company logos



## Conclusions:

- Corporations need to do more to end child labor in the cacao industry. Evidence has shown that chocolate companies have the power to end the use of child labor and slave labor by paying cocoa farmers a living income for their product within their 103-Billion-dollar industry.
- Ferrero Rocher, located at the bottom of the 2019 Chocolate Scorecard (see Figure 8), could provide a living income for all 90,000 cacao farmers producing its cocoa and still pay the Ferrero family about \$233 million a year.
- All chocolate companies and cacao producers must have a living income policy so that workers are not suffering.
- The Maya viewed kakaw as a product used to create humanity, and Mayan Gods are stated to have bled onto kakaw pods, intertwining kakaw and their blood. The medicinal, healing, and spiritual properties of kakaw are a staple in Maya culture and this importance should not be forgotten or exploited. Purchasing sustainably sourced chocolate is the first step in giving kakaw of this horrible legacy that multinational corporations have given it.

## Acknowledgments & Sources:

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