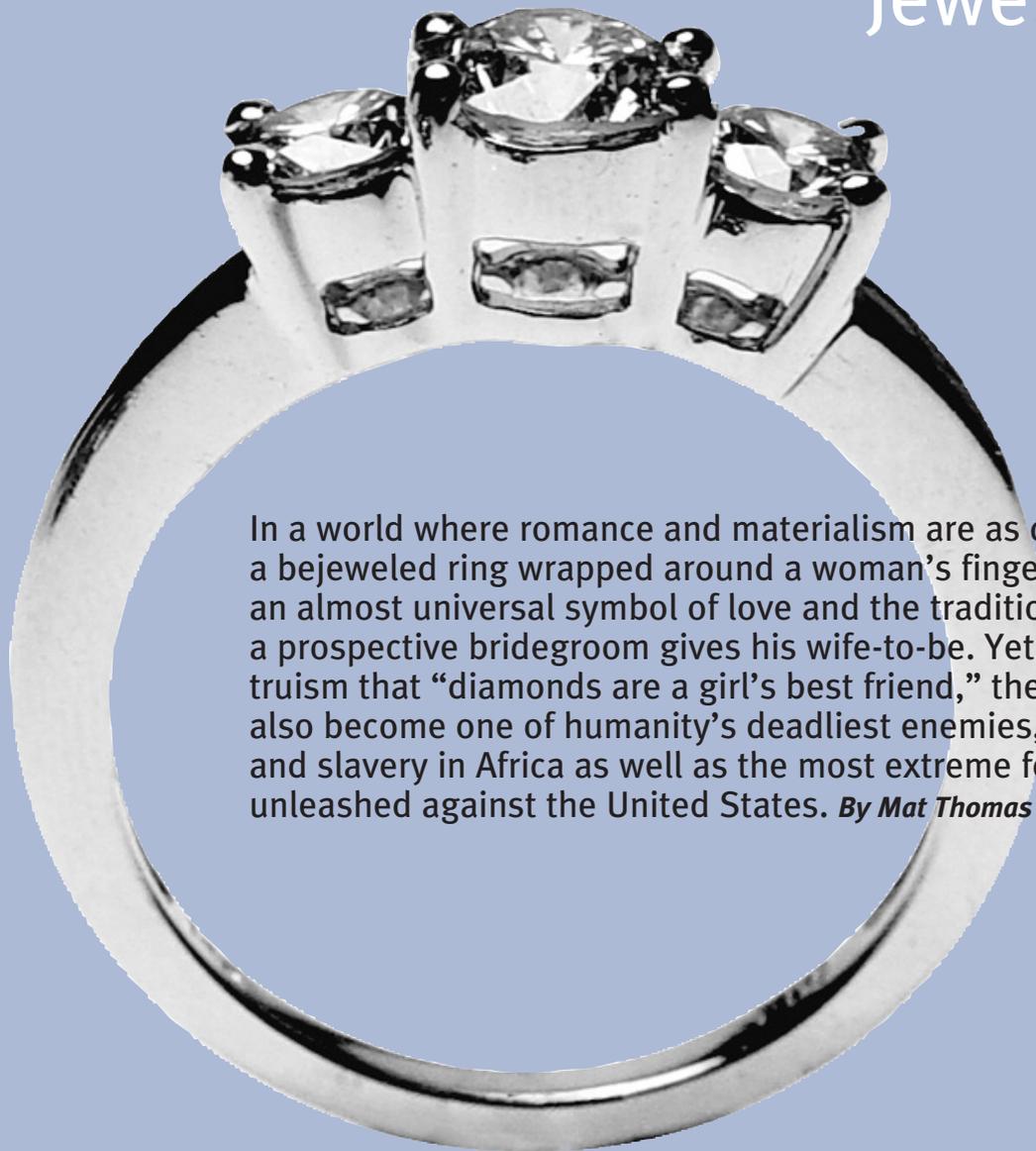


Hearts. & Mines

Jewelry **without**
the cruelty



In a world where romance and materialism are as closely intertwined as a bejeweled ring wrapped around a woman's finger, diamonds have become an almost universal symbol of love and the traditional engagement present a prospective bridegroom gives his wife-to-be. Yet, while it's an American truism that "diamonds are a girl's best friend," these precious gems have also become one of humanity's deadliest enemies, fueling bloody civil wars and slavery in Africa as well as the most extreme forms of terrorism ever unleashed against the United States. *By Mat Thomas*

THROUGHOUT THE 1990S AND CONTINUING into the new millennium, rebel military forces in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo hijacked entire diamond fields and forced their countrymen to mine them, then used the capital obtained from selling raw, uncut gems on the international market to buy weapons. In the process, they massacred, mutilated, displaced and enslaved millions of people while seeking to overthrow established governments. Many of the soldiers engaged in these savage conflicts were children forced to fight under threat of torture and death. Given the widespread poverty in these countries, it is sadly ironic that their vast mineral wealth has been so often used to decimate and destroy rather than develop and enrich their societies.

While Sierra Leone was mired in chaos, al Qaeda took advantage of the situation by using about \$20 million worth of illicit diamonds mined there to pay for the September 11, 2001 attacks. Only after tragedy hit home did the West seem to take notice of the devastating impact that "conflict diamonds" were wreaking upon the world. Compelled to prevent future catastrophes, the international community implemented a new set of trade regulations in 2003 known as the Kimberly Process, which was intended to stop terrorists and anti-government rebels from using diamonds to finance violence, while allowing legitimate diamond dealers to continue their lucrative trade.

Through validating "birth certificates" for diamonds and packing the raw stones in tamper-proof containers upon export, the Kimberly Process has stemmed the sale of conflict diamonds and helped end hostilities in some countries. However, the system is far from perfect, and "dirty" diamonds continue to reach the market with astonishing frequency. Lack of industry monitoring and compliance remain major stumbling blocks, and less than one-third of diamond retailers in the U.S. even know that the Kimberly Process exists. According to a November 2005 report by Global Witness, a San Francisco-based non-profit nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003, illicit diamond sales are currently funding a civil

war in Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), and the major industry trade associations have so far done nothing to intercede.

Another major shortcoming of the Kimberly Process is that diamonds produced in dictatorships guilty of human rights violations are still defined as "clean" under the current protocols. Murder, illegal imprisonment and child labor are not uncommon in government-sanctioned mines throughout Africa, where workers toil in abject poverty with no hope of ever improving their lives. Until such concerns are addressed and resolved, serious ethical dilemmas will continue to plague the international diamond industry as a whole.

As devastating as the diamond trade is to the social fabric in many countries where the unrefined jewels are extracted, the environmental ruination caused by the mining process itself is equally troubling. For each one-carat, gem-quality diamond recovered from the depths, 250 tons of earth are exhumed and sifted. Mining operations dig canyons thousands of feet deep using gigantic hydraulic shovels and detonate explosives to blast hard materials standing in the way of diamond-rich veins. Deposits that collect in river beds are dredged to collect the valuable quarry underneath, obliterating riverine habitats and killing the fish and other aquatic animals who live there.

Fortunately, conscientious consumers do have alternative choices when purchasing diamond jewelry for their sweethearts. Gem-quality synthetic diamonds have recently been developed using chemical vapor deposition and high-pressure/high-temperature production methods. Virtually indistinguishable from naturally formed diamonds, these gemstones are now being sold by select retailers. Such ethically motivated companies use advanced technologies, as well as recycled gold and other materials, to offer options that allow people to remain true to their hearts and their compassionate values. **VN**

San Franciscan Mat Thomas is a staff writer for In Defense of Animals.



Ethically & environmentally motivated jewelers

The best cruelty-free baubles are just a mouseclick away.

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GreenKarat greenkarat.com

Snooty Jewelry snootyjewelry.com

Gem-Quality Synthetic Diamonds

Chatham Created Gems
chatham.com

Gemesis Corp. gemesis.com

Lucent Diamonds
lucentdiamonds.com

Quality Concerns

Diamond Engagement Ring Buying Guide
bridaltips.com/diamond.htm

The Kimberly Process
kimberlyprocess.com:8080