Sweaty Work: The Human Expense of Sweatshops

In the modern world, free trade policies across national borders allow corporations to employ workers in foreign, mostly underdeveloped, countries and exploit them in order to drive down production costs on the items that the American public loves to buy. These sweatshop workers are, by definition, paid poverty-level wages, forced to work in conditions that are harmful and unsafe, and denied humane treatment. The use of these sweatshops around the globe by well-known American corporations is relatively unheard of by most U.S. consumers, although it concerns the denial of human rights to millions of powerless people. It is a highly secretive, shameful practice that could taint the reputations of many large corporations if exposed, for the use of these factories, especially by U.S. companies, is that prominent. The buzz of the fun, easy consumer recreational shopping experience would be killed by the revelation of the conditions that exhausted workers toil in behind chained doors for large American corporations. Almost everyone supports these sweatshops in one way or another, albeit unknowingly, which is why it is such a universal issue. Fashion is such an integral part of American culture, t-shirts and jeans are practically a uniform in Southern California that reflects the surf culture and the casual, laid-back attitude infused in almost everything that they do, yet most consumers do not know the real truth about the items that they are wearing. Behind the labels of over 60% of the world’s clothing lies a story of children and adults living in unimaginable poverty, working fifteen hour shifts in unsafe conditions, and being harassed by their employers and prevented from unionizing (Ross No Sweat 15).

Overseas manufacturing is one of the most competitive forms of outsourcing. This leads to the constant lowering and ignoring of labor standards in factories that the U.S. subcontracts its work to, but does not own. In a world of such economic inequality, where the income gap between the rich and poor is
astounding, those in poverty are scared to lose their jobs, so they virtually enslave themselves to these sweatshops. This struggle to keep up leads to modern day quasi-slavery that is fueled by companies in the U.S. and other countries, for these are the powers that govern the world’s economy. Apparel is a global industry where hundreds of countries are producing for a small number of importing nations. According to Andrew Ross, a Professor of American Studies at New York University and a prolific author whose work mostly focuses on the workforce and popular culture (“Andrew Ross”), states that the forty largest firms in the world now control well over 80% of the global retail market (Ross No Sweat 25). The never-ending hunt by large, powerful corporations to knock just three more cents off the manufacturing cost of an item that will be marked up by at least 400% has led to some of the most appalling breaches of human rights (Ross No Sweat 25). And what for? To get the money in their pockets, keep the shelves stocked, and to keep the American public happy and spending. Exploitation in the global apparel industry is a universal, seemingly unsolvable problem. Those who have the power to change conditions in sweatshops do not want to for the sake of profit and those who hold a lot of it—the consumers—are not entirely aware of this issue.

The trade agreement that is most attributed to the rise of sweatshops in the Western Hemisphere is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the United States, Canada, and Mexico that went into effect on January 1, 1994 (Gereffi 7). The agreement eliminated taxes on half of all U.S. goods shipped to Mexico and led to an increase of manufacturing jobs moving out of the country due to lower labor costs. It also allowed for American corporations in Mexico to pay factory workers low wages, provide few or no benefits, bypass American laws that protect workers’ health and safety, and discard waste into the local river without having to honor any U.S. government environmental regulations (Gereffi 9). In other words, in a modern economy where free trade is encouraged, the result is that U.S. companies heavily outsource their manufacturing labor to factories around the world whose practices would supposedly be illegal in the U.S. (although over 50% of U.S. apparel factories are sweatshops, according to the U.S. Department of Labor).
Such an opportunity for American corporations to make a steep profit and ignore any of the limitations or financial needs of their workers leads to frequent gross human rights violations. University of California, Los Angeles student Arlene Benjamin traveled to Honduras in 1999 to explore the conditions of apparel factories that supply the U.S. She was prompted to make this trip after visiting her school’s bookstore to buy her sister a UCLA t-shirt and noticing that the shirts for sale were made in countries in Central America, as well as Israel and Taiwan. Arlene went to the Free Trade Zone in San Pedro Sula, Honduras with her mother, Medea Benjamin, a prominent workers’ rights activist, with intentions of exploring the conditions of the factories, or maquiladoras, in which brands such as Champion (who supplies the UCI Bookstore with their popular emblematic sweatshirts), Nike, and Tommy Hilfiger operate (Sweating for a T-Shirt). Beginning in the 1980s, these special “Free Trade Zones” were set up in countries like Mexico and Nicaragua, where numerous large corporations go to have their products manufactured. These zones were promoted and paid for with U.S. tax dollars and businesses pay hardly any taxes at all in exchange for bringing jobs to these developing countries (Sweatshop Scandal).

Arlene was denied entrance to all of the maquiladoras, but through interviews with the workers, she was told of what happens inside. Workers toil in the humid, unventilated factories for 10 to 12 hours a day, often longer with forced overtime, earning $3 a day when the cost of living is $8 (Sweating for a T-Shirt). Factory owners put chains on the doors to keep workers inside until the early hours of the morning in order to fill an order that is due to ship to the U.S. There are no maternity benefits, workers’ bathroom breaks are strictly regulated, if not prohibited, and sexual harassment is common. The right to form a union and bargain for higher wages and fairer treatment is strongly denied, leaving the workers vulnerable to this kind of exploitation. If they refuse to sleep with a manager or work overtime, they are fired. These workers are too poor to risk losing the only job they have. Many develop health conditions like pulmonary bronchitis, byssinosis, and skin allergies from the dust and chemicals in the factories, and workers who become ill are not compensated for their medical expenses; rather, they are fired. After all of this hard work and suffering, maquila workers are not allotted a fair share of the profit they help to generate. Of a
baseball cap that sells for $20 in the U.S., a mere $0.08 goes to pay the garment workers who assembled it. Everything they make is exported and the factories involved do not pay taxes on the products to the country, so Honduras stays poor (Sweating for a T-Shirt). Sadly, all of these elements are common threads that run through most of the sweatshops of the world, not only the Honduran maquiladoras.

In the late 1990s, there was a surge of exposés like Arlene Benjamin’s, due to a new vulnerability in the global apparel industry following the Kathie Lee Gifford scandal in the summer of 1996. The National Labor Committee (NLC) linked Gifford’s Wal-Mart clothing line to sweatshops in Honduras and New York, revealing the use of child labor and other abuses of human rights (Ross No Sweat 35). One such resulting documentary is the NLC’s “Mickey Mouse Goes to Haiti: Walt Disney and the Science of Exploitation.” Who knew that the children’s clothing sold at Anaheim, California’s Disneyland was made by the strained hands of garment workers in a developing country? No one would have thought that the hopeful image of love and friendship that Disney pushes is stained with the sweat of thousands of third-world laborers. Charles Kernaghan, an influential member of the NLC, presents this film, revealing the working and living conditions of garment workers for Disney, Inc. in Haiti’s sweatshops. On average, the workers earn $0.30 an hour, or $2.40 a day (Mickey Mouse). Often, when an order deadline needs to be met, they will work for 50 hours straight (Ross No Sweat 15). Their wages are determined by piece-rate, but the quotas are set so high that they can only make, at the most, minimum wage. In the fight for better pay, workers are asking for $0.58 an hour, when it costs $0.65 to buy a plate of food from a street vendor. The typical home of a Disney worker is an eight-by-ten foot shack with no running water, where ten families share a hole in the ground for a toilet and the children are raised on coffee and sugar water (Mickey Mouse).

Haiti is such a special, severe case, for it is an especially vulnerable nation that is literally trapped by economic limitations, prejudice, geographical borders, and language barriers. It is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and debt is a constant for its people. Haiti’s third of the island that it shares with the Dominican Republic is extremely overpopulated, which has led to a depletion of its resources and a
barren landscape that hinders its people from growing any crops. Its residents have no money to leave the island, and even if they did, they could not, for Dominicans are prejudiced against them and do not welcome them. Another problem that prevents them from leaving Haiti is that the national language is now Haitian Creole French, a tongue unique to that region. The children who can go to school—although at $2.63 a week to send three children to school, most parents cannot afford tuition (Ross No Sweat 97)—are no longer required to learn standard French, so they are unintelligible to the outside world. Haitian workers’ children will never own a Disney toy, let alone experience the feelings of security and hope that most American children take for granted. Disney’s defense when asked why they will not pay Haitian factory workers a higher wage is that the cost of living in Haiti is low. The truth is that Haiti imports 70% of what it consumes, meaning that food can be just as expensive as it is in the U.S. (Mickey Mouse).

Another issue is that, even though 95% of the population is black, there is a lot of discrimination in the factories, while every factory owner shown in the documentary is either white (of French descent) or mulatto. Even the Haitian state does not do anything to protect these workers who are trapped by their dire situation.

More Disney products and memorabilia are manufactured in Thailand, where 90% of the factory workers are women, who are also treated as nameless tools for the manufacture of U.S. products (Made in Thailand). As filmed in “Made in Thailand” by Eve-Laure Moros and Linzy Emery, the workers’ shirts have nametags stating each person’s function: “Cutting,” “Sewing,” “Checking,” or “Packing.” Women are forced to take contraceptives and all workers are told to take stimulants and megadoses of Vitamin B in order to stay awake and work faster. This is the only way that they can keep up with the factory’s demands. No one will hire them or keep employing them after they reach the age of 45, for they are worn out, and after working endlessly for decades, they suffer from the same diseases that the maquila laborers and workers in sweatshops around the world develop from the dust and cotton from the garments that destroy their lungs. If they complain to the manager, they are sent to the factory “doctor,” who either denies that they are ill or tells them that they did not develop it from the factory (Made in Thailand).
Workers all around the world are tired of being treated as slaves to the free trade economy, but the solution is not to start closing down sweatshops. In a 1997 *Hard Copy* special called “Sweatshop Scandal,” a Nicaraguan *maquila* worker was asked what he would like to say to U.S. corporations who are outsourcing to sweatshops. As translated from Spanish, he stated, “I’d like to ask they try not to dirty their name with the blood and the sweat of the workers of the Free Zone.” Workers still look up to the large American corporations with the hope that one day, they will do the right thing and clean up their factories around the world. Currently, Nicaraguan apparel workers make $0.15 an hour. They say that a raise to about $0.85 an hour could take them from extreme misery to livable poverty (*Sweatshop Scandal*). Like these workers, Haitians want the manufacturing jobs to stay in their country, but they want humane treatment and better pay. As written in a letter to Disney, Inc., the NLC states that it “fully supports Walt Disney’s decision to source production in Haiti. The Haitian people desperately need investment and jobs, but they need jobs with dignity, under conditions which respect their basic human rights, and which pay wages that allow them and their families to survive...Leaving Haiti would be a terrible mistake” (qtd. in Ross *No Sweat* 95). Paying a relatively decent wage should not be a challenge to profitable U.S. corporations. After hearing the minimum wage and the price of a Pocahontas t-shirt that they assembled translated into their currency, the Haitian workers replied with a mixture of yells, laughter, and cries of anger and frustration (*Mickey Mouse*).

Even as exposure of these sweatshops to the U.S. public increases through documentaries and programs like those mentioned above and evidence against American corporations piles up, they have made an art out of covering up the reality. They continually send out innocent messages that disguise their inhumane practices and make them sound like they are doing a favor to the third-world countries that they exploit. Lee Scott, the CEO of Wal-Mart, the largest corporation in the world, while giving a speech retrieved from archived footage for the documentary “Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price,” states the following sensational message. “We added 125,000 new jobs around this world this past year. Good job! Jobs with benefits, jobs that will have profit sharing and retirement savings accounts for our associates, but
most importantly to me, jobs that come with opportunity for personal development.” Yet, none of the
198,000 young women who work in Wal-Mart sweatshops in Bangladesh are going to have enough money
left over from their $0.13 to $0.17 an hour wage to invest in a retirement account (Wal-Mart). An equally
hypocritical message is this one, also from Scott: “We focus on doing the right thing and doing things right
every time.” Yet, it is not the right thing to send employees from the corporate office to sweatshops to
teach the factory workers how to lie during an inspection. Disney is also guilty of covering up their
inhumane practices with untrue press statements. As reported by the NLC, “Disney repeatedly states that,
despite vigorous and numerous attempts to investigate conditions, it can find no violations at its apparel
contractor plants in Haiti” (qtd. in Ross NoSweat 95). Such blatant lies from the offices of American
corporations who claim to have high standards and integrity reveals that they must have a lot to hide.

So what should the consumer believe about the origins of the products that he or she is purchasing?
The label can no longer be trusted, in a world where “Made in the U.S.A.” labels are a lie, often stitched on
in Asia or Central America to attach fake moral integrity to the items that American corporations are
pushing to sell. The consumer guide written by the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile
Employees (UNITE) reveals that “the care tag tells you how to treat the garment but not how the worker
who made it was treated” (qtd. in Ross NoSweat 10). In order to test out how reliable the “Made in the
U.S.A.” label is and to find out where most of the clothing sold in Newport Beach, California’s Fashion
Island mall is made, I called a few of the stores. The employee at Lucky Brand, a popular women’s store
that sells pricey jeans and casual wear with an all-American, authentic feel, told me that the denim wear is
made by hand in the U.S. while garments that require special details like embroidery and beading are
shipped from other countries, including China. Usually, when a label states that a garment was made in the
U.S., it was made in an urban center like Los Angeles or New York. I asked the employee if the factories
were located in L.A.—a city with over 140,000 immigrant apparel workers (Ross LowPay 2)—and she
said that they probably were. When asked if she knew anything about the conditions in these factories, she
replied, “Well, it is L.A., and you know there are specific labor laws that they are supposed to follow, but it
This reply articulates perfectly the point that I have been making. There are labor laws everywhere and every person deserves his or her human rights. Yet, when it comes to business and making money, these things tend to be dismissed.

After searching deeper, I found that Lucky Brand was the most honest of the retailers that I called. The manager at Anthropologie, a high-end clothing and home goods retailer, told me that her store carries clothing from many different designers and from many countries of origin. Anthropologie, whose name implies that their items are works of folkart, has a powerful appeal to consumers. This attractive charm is in the ethnic-looking, handmade element to their pieces. But handmade by whom? When I asked the manager if any of the designers advertise the fact that they are sweat-free, she told me that the Michael Stars and A.G. brands manufacture in the U.S.A. After going onto the Michael Stars website, where delicate, feminine dresses and sweaters commonly run for $200, the product details ambiguously state, “Country of origin: Imported,” which really does not specify exactly where the garment came from (Michael Stars). A.G. jeans, which sell for around $150, are “made in the U.S.A. of imported fabric” (Neiman Marcus), meaning that sweatshops were probably utilized somewhere in A.G.’s supply-chain, for Mexico is the leading manufacturer of textiles imported into the U.S. (Gereffi 9). The bleach used to fade the denim that is made into the popular stonewashed jeans burns the workers’ hands (Sweatshop Scandal). It is sad to think of what laborers suffer in order to supply the American public with their favorite pair of designer jeans, a new staple in American pop culture and fashion.

Max Studio, a retailer specializing in sleek, modern (and expensive) designer clothing, gave me similarly misleading answers. The employee told me that some of the store’s clothing is made in the U.S. and some is made in China. I went to the website to see if I could find more information and noticed the philosophy of Max Studio: “Most importantly, the company is very focused on the integrity of the construction in every individual object it produces…The Max Studio Network is our ever-expanding web of retailers, manufacturers and distributors who share the Max Studio vision and dedication to quality” (Max Studio). Unfortunately, there is no information given on the website about the country of origin of
Max Studio’s products, and when I tried to find a corporate office phone number to call, I was linked directly to e-mail. Finally, when I found a discount designer clothing website that includes some information about the country of manufacture, I clicked on the first five Max Studio clothing items that appeared on the page, and all stated that they were “Imported.”

What does the retail industry have to hide? American corporations hide the facts as much as they can through labels and false statements. More locally, what do Fashion Island retailers have to hide? Could it be that a few, if not all, of them are pricing up their merchandise by such shocking percentages that it would hurt their sales if the public knew? Imagine this scenario: a Juicy Couture 100% cotton white crew-neck women’s tee with a screen-printed logo and with no special hand-done embellishments (like buttons, zippers, embroidery, fancy stitching) is selling for $98.00 at Fashion Island’s Neiman Marcus. Assuming that this item was made in an L.A. sweatshop (reducing shipping costs) and the cotton jersey was bought by the pound from large exporters like China and Mexico, the total labor cost would be around $0.12, with a total cost of about $3.00 per shirt for Juicy, as the bulk importer. This makes for a steep retail markup of 3,267%, meaning that Juicy makes over 800 times the total of what the numerous laborers who toil over one t-shirt make.

The biggest problem contributing to the continual denial of human rights to workers who have become modern-day slaves to the apparel industry are the people who hold the power to cover up the truth. While factory owners overseas have the power to pressure laborers into working for lower wages by threatening to fire them, it is those who claim to represent workers in other countries that conceal the reality to anyone outside of the sweatshop doors. As revealed in “Sweating for a T-Shirt,” Graciamarta Aguero, of the Honduras-U.S. Chamber of Commerce, says that the maquila workers are “considered to be privileged workers. They work in a very nice environment.” When asked by Arlene Benjamin if the female workers are denied maternity benefits and permission to go to the restroom, Aguero calls these scenarios “isolated cases,” dismissing the speed and heat that the workers toil in by saying that San Pedro Sula is very hot and humid and that they are just trying to meet their quotas for the day. In another interview, Henry Fransen, of
the Apparel Manufacturers Association, glorifies employment rates in Honduras and denies that the factories should be called sweatshops at all, stating to Arlene that, “If you were to see the conditions, I think you would probably leave here impressed.” Unfortunately, Arlene and Medea Benjamin were not allowed entrance into any of the local factories. Clearly, exploitation as a global problem is furthered and concealed by those representing the laborers in other countries, for they do not have the interests of the workers in mind.

Those in power are just trying to keep the business model moving at any cost—factory owners are interested in profit, while representatives are trying to keep the image of corporations who outsource their work clean and the reality away from consumers. The business model functions to maximize profit by delivering products as quickly as possible to retailers, lowering labor costs, meeting consumer demand, and offering competitive prices in the global market. In order to keep up, suppliers try to lower their prices in any ways possible. Unfortunately, the first place where cost-cutting occurs is at the bottom of the supply-chain to the group with the least amount of bargaining power—the workers. On top of that, “governments eager to attract foreign investors to their shores erode workers’ rights in order to offer a cheaper, more flexible workforce” (Oxfam 6). How can the fight for human rights for sweatshop workers succeed if no one in power is on their side?

Many proposed solutions to the sweatshop problem that might be able to be put into effect in the modern economy either have too weak of an influence or yield some kind of negative result that overshadows any improvement. A proposed solution may sound like it would be effective, but when you trace the supply-chain down to the worker it ends up having a negative result. For example, one can say that he or she will only purchase non-sweatshop manufactured goods from specialty labels, but then what would happen to the women in the maquiladoras who are sewing the clothing that shoppers are not buying? A solution is not so easy to reach, for an ideal one would improve the working and living conditions of these garment workers by allowing them some more of the profit of a $250 Nike shoe that costs $0.83 to make (Ross Low Pay 100). Unfortunately, U.S. corporations are unwilling to do this and the changes that
they do make, only after constant pressure by organizations like the NLC, are weak and ineffective. Many times, these “solutions” still allow the companies to continue doing their business as usual. For example, after intense pressure to clean up their factories, the Gap (involuntarily) agreed to post their codes of conduct in every maquiladora that they outsource to in Spanish and allow independent inspectors to regularly monitor working conditions (Ross Low Pay 35). Unfortunately, the Gap benefited more from this move, due to the public perception that they had helped to stop the abuse of workers, than the laborers themselves. During inspections, factory workers are taught to lie with the threat of losing their jobs if they do not. Corporations are simply not willing to risk losing profit in order to treat their workers fairly.

The corporate practices of profitable, competitive brands often contradict the ethical standards that they claim to enforce. Puma, a German-based sportswear and footwear brand known for its appealing fusion of function and style, has joined worker-education programs and the Fair Labor Association (Oxfam 54). It has also employed a team of inspectors to monitor its factories. However, Puma’s buying practices undermine the ethical policies that they have put into motion, for larger orders and shorter deadlines continue to push their workers to exhaustion (Oxfam 7). Corporations need to take a close look at their practices and stop depending on the endless exertion of powerless workers to help them achieve unprecedented sales growth.

Some U.S. brands are making money off of the popular reaction from most Americans that they would buy clothing that is sweat-free, even if it means paying a little more. The most profitable of these brands is American Apparel. The company utilizes what they call a “Vertically Integrated Manufacturing” business model, performing all stages of the production of their apparel in one building in downtown Los Angeles, California, from weaving the fabric and sewing it to the design and advertising stages (American Apparel). American Apparel cuts costs in all levels of manufacturing by removing the middleman from the supply-chain, not by abusing its workers. All labor is done on-site and workers earn from $10 to $18 an hour (Ross Low Pay 1). Employees enjoy so many unprecedented perks and benefits that only a few can be mentioned. The garment workers receive free, on-site massages and yoga classes and all employees
have dental insurance for less than $1 per week, as well as free parking and English classes. They are allowed as many restroom breaks as they need and can take brief personal calls on their cell phones or use a free office telephone, all while being paid by the hour—not by piece-rate (American Apparel). Although the company operates on a seemingly impossible system, American Apparel grossed over $30 million in 2002 (Ross Low Pay 1) and it is one of the fastest-growing apparel brands in the U.S. Their clothing is priced no higher than average, for their most popular item, their women’s 100% cotton fine jersey short-sleeve tee sells for $15.00. American Apparel sells their products online and in their stores both locally and globally, with locations ranging from Huntington Beach to Israel to Japan (American Apparel).

The American Apparel business plan is working. They actively advertise that they are a sweat-free brand, with a brief mission statement printed on every price tag attached the items that they sell. Their clothing appeals to the American public—it is fresh, casual, and guilt-free. American Apparel hires amateur photographers to take photos of their friends and employees modeling their clothing. The photos that appear in their stores and advertisements are raw and artsy, not airbrushed and glossy, giving the label an urban, popular feel. The only glitch in this seemingly perfect solution to sweatshop labor is that the clothing is 100% American-made, meaning that it does nothing to help workers in other countries out of poverty. Although the founder, Dov Charnay, acknowledges this, he hopes that his idea “will become a business model that will make sweat-free production universally applicable” (Ross Low Pay 3). No Sweat, another American-based sweatshop-free label, has done just this. Created shortly after American Apparel in 2002, No Sweat outsources to a number of factories worldwide, including Bangladesh and Mexico. The company’s founders, a group of prominent labor rights activists, acknowledge that garment workers everywhere need jobs with decent pay and fair treatment (Ross Low Pay 6).

Clearly, business-savvy labor rights activists have developed a way to bypass the sweatshop, inventing a better, cleaner system. Sadly, however, the question remains unanswered: what exactly can the consumer do to stop labor abuses? He or she is at the top of the supply-chain and, since everyone wears clothing, the consumer holds the power. As previously mentioned, the answer is not to boycott sweatshop-
produced goods because, unfortunately, sweatshop jobs are the only jobs that many people in developing
countries have. The first step towards helping these workers who are threatened into voiceless submission
is awareness. Word-of-mouth and joining a larger human rights organization are two effective ways to
raise concern on issues that the media and businesses try to hide. Labor rights organizations are continually
working to ensure fair labor standards for workers all around the world. The three organizations most
involved in anti-sweatshop campaigning are the NLC, The U.S. Department of Labor, and UNITE (Ross
No Sweat 28). It is organizations like these that, through films and written exposés, the laborers’ voices are
heard and the true practices of companies that claim to have integrity and respect for their workers are
revealed. Every one of these organizations accepts donations on their websites and offers current
information on the working situations in countries around the globe.

There are also more accessible ways of joining an anti-sweatshop movement, including joining an
organization like the Clean Clothes Campaign, which calls itself a “consumer campaign,” for it depends on
the power of the consumer to affect change in the global retail industry (Clean Clothes). On the website,
linked to every call for support is a text box where consumers can easily and quickly send e-mails called
“protest letters” directly to those involved in every stage of production—including the corporate heads of
large companies, factory owners, retail buyers, and local public authorities—demanding appropriate action.
Sample letters in the local language are even provided for use by consumers who want to send a letter, but
do not speak the language. The website also posts the responses of such companies, as well as current
reports on the situation in the specific sweatshops featured and any improvements made (Clean Clothes).
More locally, consumers have the option to call or visit the corporate offices and outlet retail stores of
popular brands and inquire as to the working conditions in the factories that they employ. At some local
sweatshops, the most determined consumers could follow Professor Steven Mailloux’s mantra to “think
globally, act locally” (Mailloux) and actually visit the factories, or even organize a demonstration.
Although exploitation is one of the results of globalization and free trade, the problem is much more local
than consumers might think, with sweatshops in Orange County neighborhoods like Little Saigon and Santa Ana.

If nothing else, one simple thing that every consumer can do is look for the country of origin on the label of their favorite clothing item. Whether it was made in the U.S.A. or in Korea, everyone should ask him or herself two things. First, whose hands this item passed through; and secondly, at what price. By humanizing these faceless men, women, and children and putting an image to the struggles that they suffer through, maybe this will raise concern for them and foster support that they have never had. Starting somewhere, a worthy effort has to be made for the workers who are toiling away for poverty-level wages every day. Millions are being overlooked and silenced by the power of wealthy corporations and the media. These workers are slaves to an industry that has developed a highly profitable—yet morally wrong—system that operates on the naiveté of the unsuspecting American public. The anti-sweatshop movement is a call for humanity; it is a call for the decent treatment of human beings. The exploitation has already gone too far and it is time for everyone to help those who cannot help themselves.

The U.S. Department of Labor
www.dol.gov

The National Labor Committee
www.nlmnet.org

UNITE
www.unitehere.org

The Clean Clothes Campaign
www.cleanclothes.org
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