

no gap.

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Humanities

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The World's Sweatshops: Their Origin and Future

The title should be down a line.

Sweatshops are ignored, barely discussed, and denied. Yet, sweatshops do not just affect the workers who work in them, braving unsafe conditions and harassment, all for a meager wage. Sweatshop labor also affects the many consumers who buy the products made by those workers without knowing it. Without enough media coverage, and the complications of a global market, we still have a long way to go before we can really be sure where the products we buy came from. It is time for people to inform themselves about the dangers these workers face, the controversial nature of sweatshops, and how we can effect change. To do that, it is important to look at how sweatshops originated. That way we can understand part of the complex connections between the sweatshop industry, poverty, and the state of the working class.

Solid intro, but the first line is a bit distracting because it makes a vague claim - they are ignored and so forth by who? How do you know this?

There is no one definition for a sweatshop. There are a few common definitions that branch off the same theme. The U.S Government Accountability Office (GAO) classifies a sweatshop as "a business that regularly violates both wage or child labor and safety or health laws." (U.S. GAO 1988). Baylor University, in its Sweatshop Awareness Campaign, defines a sweatshop as, "a workplace where workers are subject to extreme exploitation, including the absence of a living wage or benefits, poor working conditions, and arbitrary discipline, such as verbal and physical abuse." Though both these definitions are fairly similar, they both miss part of the definition that separates a sweatshop environment from a non-sweatshop environment. Robert S. J. Ross, in his

parallel? where did you get this def.? I don't see anything from Baylor in your works cited.

book, Slaves to Fashion, states, "...definitions or observations of sweatshops include the idea of 'oppressiveness,' and this, while it has physical meanings, is also cultural, psychological, and emotional." Fear and power, unfortunately, are strong motivators, and can be used to ensure that workers feel as though they have no rights, thereby making them more likely to stay (Ross 20-22).

Great discussion of the def. of sweatshops - good use of sources - make sure to cite them all!

The word "sweatshop" as it is used today, has a history of its own. The workers who worked in what we would call a sweatshop now, were being "sweated" and the officers that employed them were the "sweaters." The term later evolved from the workers themselves to a more broad sense of a factory itself employing the workers.

source)

Sweatshops have not always been overseas. Sweatshops in America started around at the beginning of the 19th century. It is also a known fact that throughout our country's history, there has usually been someone else who has done hard labor for others. That is an integral part of what makes our society work.

I'm not sure why you state this obvious fact here.

At that time, the growing demand for clothing prompted the need for cheaper labor. "Sweaters", as the contractors were called at that time, were used more often than before. This system was adopted to distance the worker from the buying public, and allow the contractors and companies to have more power. John R. Commons, an economist, wrote in 1901 that, "The man best fitted to be a contractor is the man who is well acquainted with his neighbors, who is able to speak the language of several classes of immigrants, who can easily persuade his neighbors or their wives and children to work for him, and who in this way can obtain the cheapest help" (Ross152).

Good quote - but you are not explicit enough about how it supports your point.

Daniel O'Leary, a New York City labor inspector, described this scene of the working conditions he witnessed in 1900: "Workers toiling in dark, humid, stuffy

basements on Division St, children of eight years and women, many of them far from well, sweating their lives away in these hellholes." (Ross19)

At that time, the majority of workers in the industry were women, and were called seamstresses. Around the start of the 1800s, workers' pay began to drop, which caused workers problems as they tried to afford basic needs, such as food and rent.

At the same time as seamstresses were being paid near to nothing for the garments they worked on, the industrial revolution was getting underway. According to Peter Liebhold, author of Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A History of American Sweatshops, a website on the history of sweatshops, this was because of the higher demand for products, and the growing technology and resources to produce more, workers were working longer hours for lower wages than before (Liebhold). In a search for work, companies turned to children. Children, it was believed, would be less likely to strike, more compliant and could work for much less money.

The early twentieth century was the height of child labor. Children were known to be employed at mines, glass factories, textiles, agriculture, and as newsboys, messengers, peddlers, and bootblacks. The communities surrounding the factories began to be alerted to the child labor problem and several states adopted bans against child labor. Pressure was put on the factories to improve working conditions and stop employing children. This led to several groups uniting against sweatshop labor, especially for children (Child Labor Public Education Project) ←

This movement eventually led to the Fair Labor Standard Act of 1938. It included requirements on the legal working age, minimum wage and set standards for hours of

work and a system for overtime. This act continues to help guard workers' rights in the United States, but hasn't prevented the problem of sweatshops in the long run.

The start of the 20th century brought multitudes of immigrants entering the United States in search of a new life and job. Immigrants were often exploited by factory managers because of their desperate need for work. The factories themselves often became living and working spaces for a massive number of workers, the majority of them immigrants. Disease, lack of sleep and nourishment, all were common and caused the death of many workers.

Within the United States, there was more awareness of the poor conditions in sweatshops, after the Fair Standards Act was put in effect. Life magazine's 1938 August issue pronounced that sweatshops were dead and many people agreed. The era of WW2 also brought increased manufacturing and almost full production. The benefits were apparent for workers, with prepaid health insurance, pensions, and union contracts.

For several reasons, there was a comeback of sweatshops during the late 1960s. Many of the reasons can be attributed to the global economy. In response to this, the retail industry changed many of its production habits. For instance, many of the companies hired out their production to a third party. This means that people working for say, Woolworth's, weren't actually making the clothes.

This paragraph is not fully developed. I'm leaving to know much more.

There was also much more competition for the money of the growing population. This population was a result of the baby boom, and also a steady number of immigrants emigrating from their homelands. This meant more jobs were made for these workers. Most of these factories produced garments because there was the most demand for them.

the most is compared to what?

There was hardly media attention to working conditions, at this point. Sweatshops were

one of the last things on the country's mind, what with the Vietnam War and a civil rights movement underway.

There was still an outcry among some circles, and soon awareness grew. As the 1970s arrived, ^{Source?} so did the overall use of unions. Unions were a common right for a working person and workers were more aware of their rights, and demanded better pay because of this. As a result of this, companies moved their factories to ~~other countries,~~ in Central America and Asia. *Jump transition.*

But, on August 2, 1995 in El Monte California, police arrested 8 officials in charge of several sweatshops producing clothing. 72 illegal Thai immigrants had been found working in a fenced area with about seven squalid buildings that served as working and sleeping quarters. It was found that they worked for a big corporation. This scandal was enough to put sweatshops back into the public mind. *Source?*

The Clinton administration responded by making a committee with representatives of industry, labor, government, and public-interest sectors. This was called the White House Apparel Industry Partnership. Their goal was to come up with non-binding and optional code of conduct for companies and their manufacturers. The Department of Labor also made a group, called "No Sweat" to help combat sweatshops.

Despite the group's efforts, many corporations were able to "reform" by ending their involvement in a sweatshop, calling themselves "sweat free", and then moving their factories to a new country. These abandoned countries were left in the dust, suddenly without work or money from the company, while the new factory continued to exploit its workers, starting the cycle anew. Though their were many sweatshop protest and anti-sweatshop programs starting that are still around today, the problem of sweatshops has

not been satisfactorily fixed. Yet again, this complex issue was forgotten and left to the next person to figure out.

The reason why sweatshops exist is complex, but much of it can be traced to many companies' desire for lower product prices and lower production cost. (Co-op America). It is not just the companies who desire lower prices. There has always been a market for cheap goods.

Today, the majority of sweatshops are located in developing countries whose citizens are struggling to make a living. These countries are desperate to be able to compete globally, have their citizens employed, and gain some foreign capital. With starving people, and no other way out, sweatshops often become the only way for a developing country to gain its way into the global market.

that - who is only for a person
Companies who move their manufacturing factories into developing countries seem like they are offering a good deal for those countries, since this seems to guarantee that the company will continue to provide support to the country and its people. Often, this means dangerous conditions and a low wages for the workers involved. But then again, what other choice is there? Often these companies are the only ones interested in investing in these countries.

The key to understanding the problem of sweatshops is to realize how complex the problem actually is. How can we be sure that sweatshops are really all that bad for the workers? According to Nicholas D. Kristof of the New York Times, "We in the West mostly despise sweatshops as exploiters of the poor, while the poor themselves tend to see sweatshops as opportunities" (Kristof). Visiting sweatshops in Africa, he conceded that yes, sweatshops often mean bad conditions for its workers (Kristof). But he believes

that it is a reliable job for people who desperately need a source of income to survive. This is an argument that is echoed by other supporters of sweatshops in third world countries. Robert W. Tracinski writing for Capitalism Magazine states, "Were these people victimized by being offered jobs in clothing factories? Quite the contrary: they now have more economic opportunities than were available before -- and that's why so many of them voluntarily choose to work in these factories" (Tracinski). These writers also both interject that their sweatshop worker's wages, though they seem low by American standards, are usually enough for someone to live on fairly well in their countries. There are always conflicting sides, one worker says they are glad to just have somewhere to work, while others say that they have been abused and worked under horrible conditions.

Great discussion of the other side - so why are they wrong?

Good transition

Evidence for the latter can be found in many instances. The Co-op America Website's page on "Ending Sweatshops" details sweatshop occurrences, including the following two cases.

A New Delhi garment factory which made clothes for Gap Kids, was infiltrated by a London reporter in October 2007. The reporter found that 10 year old children were working as slaves at the factory and that most had been sold by their families. The children worked for 19 hours each day and were beaten regularly. The factory owners would often deflect child labor charges by forcing the children into sacks so that they could not be seen by the Gap's sweatshop monitors (Guide To Ending Sweatshops)

Good that these examples are so recent.

Wow! So is this kind of abuse the exception or the rule?

In December of 2007, Chinese workers for Wal-Mart were found by the National Labor Committee to be working under unhealthy conditions. While making Christmas ornaments, the workers worked 95 hours a week, with toxic paints, glitters, and glues, all

without protection. There was no medical care or sick days available to the workers ^{who} ~~that~~ got sick from the exposure. These are only a few of the examples of the injustices put to sweatshop workers. (Guide to Ending Sweatshops)

People are still protesting against sweatshops, and no permanent progress has been made to halt sweatshops. That is not to say that there is nothing to be done to stop sweatshops.

Consumers have many more options about where they can buy their products.

There has been a heightened interest in the Fair Trade movement, as people begin to realize that the "no restrictions" Free Trade agreements that the United States has recently been involved in, can cause even more competition for the workers in countries who are struggling to support themselves.

This last point needs more support and explanation.

It is important to know what to look for as a consumer. The most important job for the consumer to prevent injustices is for them to become more informed. Many citizens accept the news they hear to be correct and take companies' claims at face value. As we go through our day, we need to continue to ask ourselves questions about how the product was made and where. It is not enough just to boycott the companies who we know to have violated human rights. We need to pressure companies to improve conditions instead of closing their sweatshop factories. Ask questions, such as, where were these products made and in what conditions. Let companies know that you care about where their products are made. Write letters to corporations, and your local senate representatives telling them that sweatshops are an issue that needs to be dealt with. Even with these actions, we need to find an alternative.

*Good concrete solution
Examples of successful pressure campaigns would have been helpful.*

Fortunately there are several effective companies that do offer alternatives. The most effective ones have a mission that directly involves workers needs and rights. This is much more reliable than a company "pledging" to never produce sweatshop goods again, and then moving somewhere else. Non-profit companies are also a good bet because they are not motivated for their own gain.

Great distinction! - but you can't just dismiss all for profit

There are several companies who stand out as alternatives and provide an example for the way a company should run. Ten Thousand Villages is a non-profit whose mission is to provide direct "relationships" between the consumer and worker. It was founded by Edna Ruth Byler, who in 1946, traveled to Puerto Rico. She was especially intrigued by the embroidered crafts that were being sewn the women who lived in the community that she visited. It was upsetting for her to learn that these talented women were not able to make a decent living. This discovery prompted her to buy many of the products and bring them back home with her so that she could spread the word about these women and give them the profits of their wares. As Edna kept traveling, she continued to bring back wares from artisans of the area. The popularity of these products grew, and more and more stores began to start over the United States. Today, Ten Thousand Villages has ties to many other fair trade organizations that connect them to unemployed or needy artisans in many developing countries. These organizations make sure that the artists are able to have enough to pay for food, education, health care, and shelter.

business - your previous suggestion to prove businesses should have been well developed.

Source?

Consumers can find out exactly who made their product and some of their history. The workers use their own expertise in a particular craft and are paid well for their services.

The No Sweat company has a different approach but is just as effective. Workers have a working and certified union. Their mission is to create open source apparel, meaning that consumers know exactly where their clothing was assembled and manufactured instead of the company's hiding away this information. The founders, Natalia Muina and Adam Neiman started, No Sweat, in 2000. The website shares information about wages, conditions, and pictures of all 9 factories. The factories are in a variety of places. These manufacturers are in New Jersey, Palestine, Nicaragua,

Indonesia, Toronto, Chicago, and Philadelphia. Adam Neiman, the founder, has personally inspected one of the factories in Palestine.

(How does he know that children were + stuffed in sacks?);

These are only a few sources for sweatshop free goods. Others can be found at Coop America's web site, which contains a list for a variety of green and sweatshop free products and where to find them.

There is still world poverty, and sweatshops with bad conditions. People have been rehashing past arguments without looking out how things could change. I feel that people need to re-think a way to support struggling countries without employing their citizens in bad environments. The only entities that pay attention to these countries are the big corporations, who often come with a price. Does it have to be like this?

I believe for things to really change, consumers need to be able to change their attitude towards how they shop. Do we really want the cheapest possible clothes, even if they are from a sweatshop? According to a study made in 1995, 3 different research companies conducting a search and found that consumers would be willing to pay 28% more for products that they knew were not made in sweatshop conditions. (Guide to Ending Sweatshops, Co-op America website) This is hopeful sign.

It does seem hard to believe, but consumers have a lot of power. If enough people stop buying something, or pressure a company, change can happen. We can change the "cheap market." If a significant number of people pledge to buy sweatshop free products and do so, it will eventually affect the big corporations who are still producing sweatshop clothing today. This is not the final step towards a sweatshop free world, but a first step.

Nice final note.

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