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Sweatshops: How Can We Change An Industry That is So Inherently Intertwined With Today's Culture?

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ARE YOU FUNDING A SWEATSHOP?

How can we change an industry (like sweatshops) that is so inherently intertwined with today's culture?

By Victoria Chavarria, Rebekah Loker and Brenda Torres

DISCLAIMER

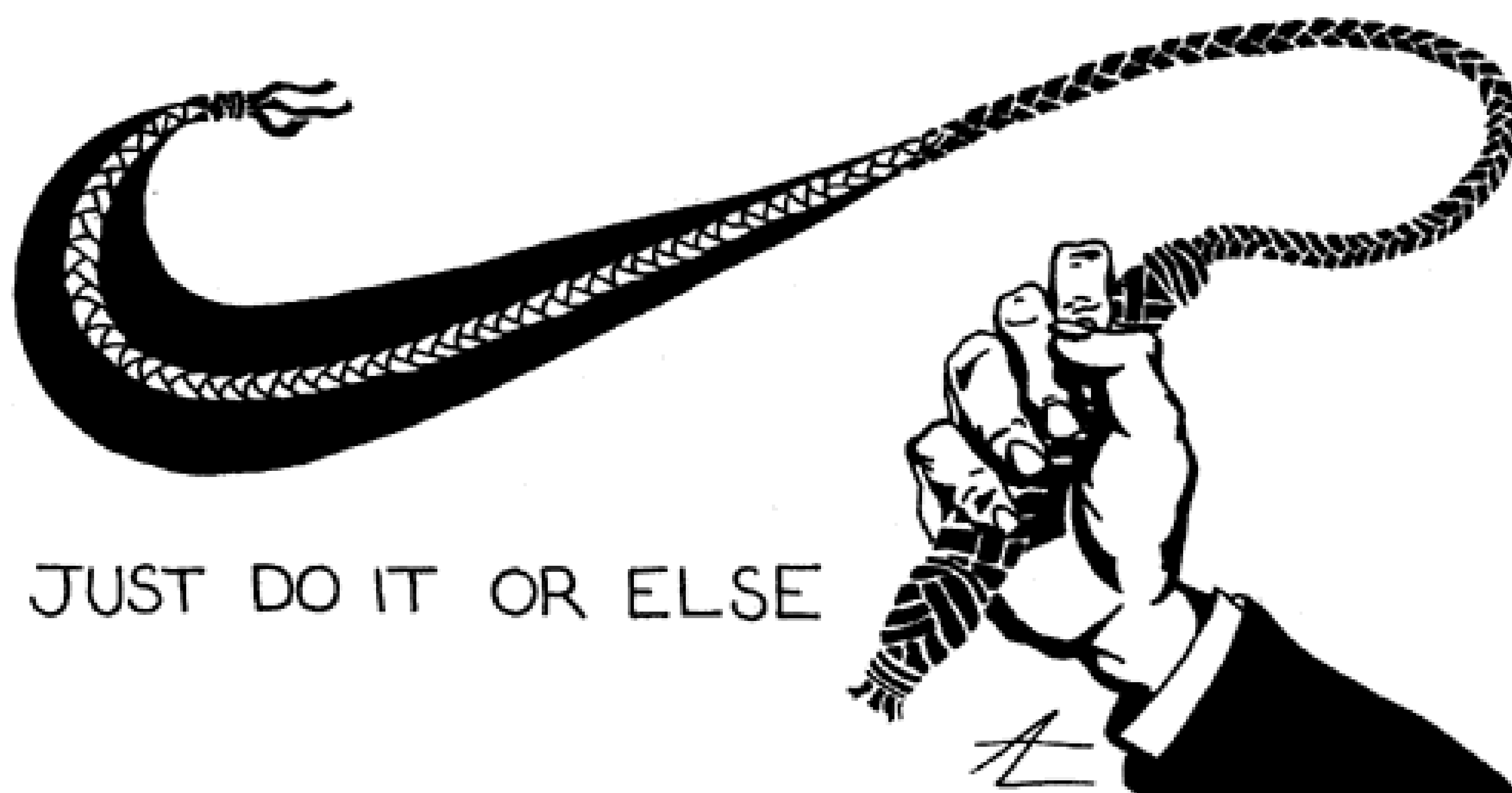
Sweatshops may seem like an altogether horrific thing, but in reality, many sweatshops pay 3-7 times what is paid elsewhere in those communities. Therefore, it is a bad idea to prohibit sweatshop labor because taking away sweatshops would increase poverty and decrease opportunities for workers. Therefore, the eradication of sweatshops is unrealistic, but a transformation is necessary.¹

WHAT IS A SWEATSHOP?

- According to the U.S. Department of Labor, a sweatshop is a factory that violates two or more labor laws.
- A sweatshop has poor working conditions, hours that are unreasonable, unjust wages, child labor, and lacks proper work benefits.
- Men and women are forced to experience abuse that is physical, sexual, and emotional.
- In sweatshops, employers enforce routine birth control and pregnancy tests to bypass women's health benefits.
- Often sweatshops don't allow their workers to go to the bathroom or take breaks and lock doors and windows to ensure compliance.²

SWEATSHOPS IN TODAY'S WORLD

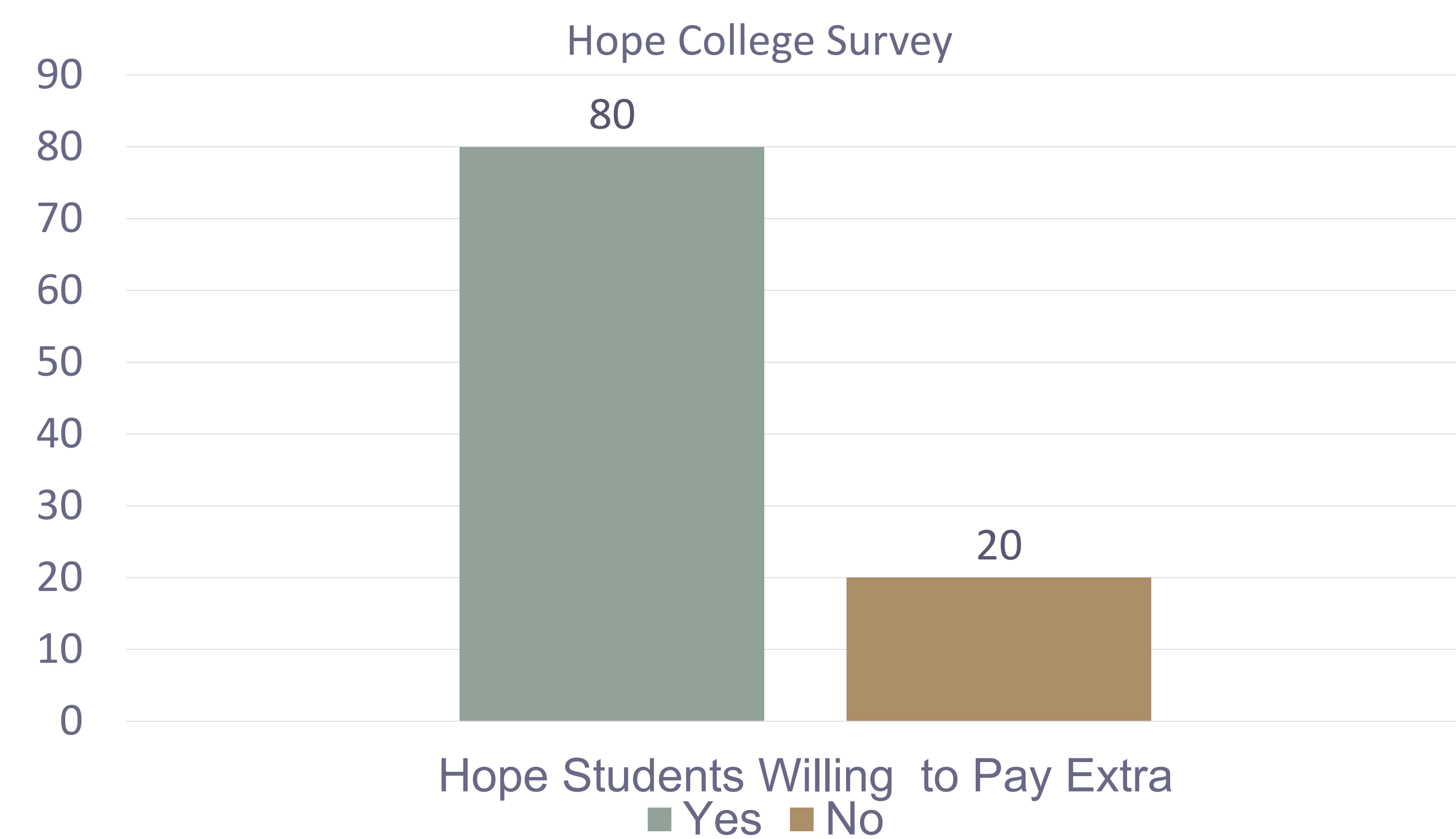
- Many Western brands were discovered in the rubble of the Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh that headlined in the news in April 2013, including The Gap and Benetton.³
- In India, over 55 million children are involved in child labor.
- Over 100,000 children are involved in child labor for the production of chocolate in the Ivory Coast.⁴
- 15-year-old workers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia are forced to work overtime to produce uniforms for the U.S. army and air force.⁵
- Western companies such as Nike, Adidas, Ikea, Kohls, Walmart, Haynes, T-Mobile, American Apparel, Converse, Levi's, Sears, Disney, Victoria's Secret, and Old Navy have been known for breaking labor laws, labeling them sweatshops.⁶



DISNEY CRUSHING DREAMS

- Located in Haiti, China, and Bangladesh are various factories that are responsible for the production of Disney costumes.
- The women and children who are employed by these factories make an astounding 28 cents an hour.
- The workers, who are all between the ages of 10 and 30, are encouraged to not get pregnant or they risk the possibility of losing their jobs.
- There are 4-5 accidents a week at one factory many employees have lost their fingers.
- These sweatshops that Disney funds are still running because the U.S. government can't take initiative due to the fact that the sweatshops are not on American soil.⁷

CONSUMERISM FUELS SWEATSHOPS



"Many Americans are unaware that their appetite for consumerism fuels a deeply controversial industry."

- Foxconn, a sweatshop in Shenzhen, China that makes products for Apple, Dell, and Hewlett-Packard, has been known to cause suicidal tendencies in its employees due to military-style drills, "self-criticisms" that they are forced to read aloud, verbal abuse from supervisors, and being forced to occasionally work 13 consecutive days and sleep at the factory.
- Following 17 suicides, Foxconn tried to prevent further deaths by installing safety nets under dorm windows. After further consideration, the company decided to double salaries.⁸
- Studies have proven that doubling the salary of sweatshop workers would only increase consumer price by 1.8%.⁹
- Because people are unwilling to stop buying their favorite brands, we decided to survey 100 Hope College students and discovered that over 80 would be willing to pay extra for the assurance that sweatshop workers would begin to get wages they could survive on. However, the problem that still remains is the horrible work conditions within sweatshops.

HOW CAN YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

- Help the anti-sweatshop movement gain energy by educating people and companies about ongoing sweatshops in today's world.
- Join a campaign.
- Sign a petition, like the living wage petition at the Clean Clothes Campaign
- Ask questions about the products you're buying
- Join the movement at United Students Against Sweatshops
- Buy fair trade, union-made, local, or secondhand clothing.



In order to change an entire industry, we must first change ourselves and pray that the change echoes into a transformation of our culture. We as a culture need to begin to place more value on human beings than on our own appetite for consumerism.

For more information visit:

<http://usas.org/>
<http://www.greenamerica.org/>
<https://www.freetheslaves.net>



CITATIONS

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