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Globalization and Sweatshop Labor: the Role of Student Activism in Educational Institutions and Ethical Business

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**GLOBALIZATION AND SWEATSHOP LABOR:
THE ROLE OF STUDENT ACTIVISM IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS
AND ETHICAL BUSINESS**

**A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors
by**

Molly Moss

May 2012

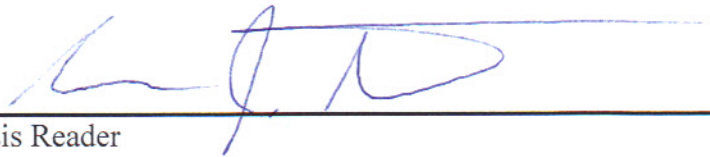
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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'L. J. D.', is written across a horizontal line.

Thesis Reader

Accepted By:

Director, Regis University Honors Program

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Preface

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge all of the people who made my time at Regis University and the process of writing this thesis meaningful. My goal for this thesis was to write something personal and grounded in my own experiences. With the help of my advisor, Dr. Gil Gardner and my reader, Dr. Damien Thompson, I have put my story and my heart into this work. Of course, my passion for social justice and interest in the topic of this thesis would not be what it is today without the influence and guidance of many amazing people. Some of these people are, of course, my family (without whom none of this would have been possible), Dr. Bowie of the honors program, Dr. Plumley and Dr. Garza who are my academic advisors, and all of the wonderful staff and faculty of the Service Learning and University Ministry Departments.

This thesis is not a comprehensive analysis of poverty, world injustice, or the economic structure of our globalized world systems. However, it is a peek at my journey of recognizing large scale injustice and some of the wonderful ways people are working to better the lives of others around the world. I have tried to use my time at Regis University to advocate for those who are marginalized and I hope that this thesis can be an acknowledgment of the power of student engagement and the continuous question of “how ought we to live?”

An Introduction to the Issue of Sweatshop Labor

“Go from a meeting with your academic advisor to meeting friends at the game without stopping to change! This powerblend hooded sweatshirt is ready for just about anything, thanks to the cotton/polyester fleece, drawstring hood, pouch pocket, and rib-knit cuffs and bottom hem.”

This is an excerpt from an online webpage of Regis University’s bookstore. This description is for a “Champion Regis University Powerblend Hood,” a sweatshirt that cost a mere fifty-four dollars (eFollett). One of Regis student’s favorite choices for Regis apparel, the true cost of this sweatshirt is higher than most students realize. Champion is a subsidiary of Sara Lee, one of the top ten largest apparel producing corporations in the world. Sara Lee also owns brand name companies like Hanes and contracts with Universities around the country. Despite Sara Lee’s massive distribution rates, it is hardly an example of an ethical business model. Shortly after the turn of the century, Sara Lee received an unprecedented amount of bad press following the reveal of information stating workers in Sara Lee factories were fired, threatened, and harassed for asking for higher wages. Known as the “10 for 10” deal, workers in Coahuila, Mexico asked for a raise so they would be paid ten dollars a day in return for Sara Lee garment prices raising by ten cents per garment. In case the numbers were not clear enough, the sweatshirt in Regis University’s bookstore costs fifty-four dollars and the worker who made it is paid ten dollars a day. In Addition, these numbers are an improvement over previous wages –

an improvement that many workers paid for dearly.

This is how I was introduced to the concept of sweatshops. As the current Director of Social Justice and Spirituality at Regis University, I am in charge of educating Regis students on various social justice issues. However, being elected chair of the Sweatshop Free Committee was not something I walked into knowingly. In the spring of 2008, members of the Executive Cabinet of Regis University's Student Government Association (RUSGA) began evaluating how to spend student fees in a more ethical manner. Through preliminary research and the dedicated efforts of a few students, the original Sweatshop Free Policy was introduced to Regis' senate for discussion and ratification. The scope of the policy was limited because students were unsure of how feasible it would be to change the purchasing practices of the university. Therefore, the policy was directed specifically towards RUSGA and student clubs. They believed that if an organization was using student fees to purchase apparel, the corporations making that apparel should be held to a high ethical standard reflective of the Jesuit tradition of Regis University. Thus, the first edition of Regis University's Sweatshop Free Policy and the Sweatshop Free Committee came into being.

The majority of student clubs received this policy with little resistance. While it took several months for the policy to become widely known, there was never strong opposition. However, while it was easier to pass the original legislation, there was a large gap in the research done for why this policy was worth putting in place. Because of this lack, there was little research to be offered when students began question the policy. For example, the Student Body President of the 2010-2011 school year was not as quick to

welcome the policy as previous student leaders. He asked for research and cause for why more student fees were being put towards costlier apparel. While students involved in RUSGA were originally frustrated by the seemingly large step back in policy reform, a fresh look at the issue revealed many flaws with the original policy and complexities that had been overlooked.

In the spring of 2010, members of the Sweatshop Free Committee launched a fresh look into the issue of sweatshop labor. Approaching the issue from the perspective of a Jesuit institution devoted to being in service of others, student leaders were dedicated to analyzing all areas of the issue, including the economic and social implications. While the injustices of sweatshops were blatantly apparent to the 2008 committee, more research was done to better understand the complexities of the justice issue at hand. Students found a line of argument that proposed sweatshop labor is beneficial to the third-world nations it affects. Nicholas Kristof, a journalist and op-ed columnist for the New York Times, is in support of sweatshop factories because, he writes, “a job in a sweatshop is a cherished dream, an escalator out of poverty” (Kristof 1) for many people in third-world nations such as Cambodia. He quotes women in Phnom Penh who believe that a factory job is a better option than scavenging or farming. He is but one voice among individuals who believe that, in the words of David Korten, “rich countries best help poor countries by increasing their own consumption to increase demand for the exports of the poor countries, thus stimulating their economic growth and lifting their poor up from poverty” (Korten 85).

In response to the belief that a sweatshop job is a viable tool for economic growth, Green America (formally known as Co-op America) asserts that American companies using a lack of governmental regulations in third-world nations to skirt paying a living-wage to laborers is unethical and unjust. A non-profit working to promote ethical consumerism, Green America writes “notice the goal here: as we work for an end to sweatshops, we are demanding that these companies improve the conditions, wages, and opportunities in their factories” (Aravitz 1). If the goal on Regis University is to truly act in service of others, this includes workers around the globe. While international trade is a convoluted subject that is open to a variety of interpretations and opinions, it was the belief of the 2010-11 Sweatshop-free Apparel Committee that Regis should stand for the just treatment of all workers and use its considerable consumer power as a University to try to better the lives of others whenever possible. They went to senate and stated that while theorists like Kristof might assert that sweatshop jobs are better than no jobs, as students of the Jesuit tradition they must believe that ethical and safe jobs are better than all other options.

However, deciding to support the sweatshop free movement was only a first step to creating a more comprehensive policy. Possibly the greatest oversight of the original policy was the blind allegiance Regis University forged with sweatshop-free company American Apparel. Soon members of the 2010-11 Sweatshop Free Committee felt that without enough primary research done, the University had fallen complacent with their current purchasing decisions. It did not take much investigating to realize that the university had put its trust in the wrong company by relying solely on the questionable

American Apparel for all apparel needs. Further research into American Apparel uncovered a myriad of sexual harassment suits against CEO, Dov Charney. While American Apparel is a sweatshop-free company, they are anything but ethical with their highly sexual advertising and questionable hiring practices (IBTimes 1). Having realized that we were not adhering to the spirit of the Sweatshop Free Policy (which was to support ethical and just business), members of the committee realized they would need to provide better options to the Regis population.

In the spring of 2011, the Sweatshop Free Committee, now under my advisement, approached Student Senate yet again with revised legislation and a tentative action plan for the upcoming years. With senate passing the legislation by a vast majority, it is clear that the student body at Regis University wishes to see the Sweatshop Free Policy continued and expanded. However, the work is far from being done. The new legislation calls for all areas of the university, not only student led groups, to be sweatshop-free in the foreseeable future with the goal of becoming one of the first 100% sweatshop free universities in the world. This entails the current Sweatshop Free Committee to examine the resistance and willingness of all departments at Regis University to purchase only sweatshop free apparel. Thus, in the 2011-2012 school year, the committee hopes to interview key administrators and department heads on their knowledge, willingness to adopt this policy, and the hindrances they see to becoming a sweatshop free department. The committee will then use this information to better create a procedure outline that can be implemented in various departments to ease the transition of becoming a sweatshop-free campus. My own investigation pertaining to sweatshop labor and global labor policy

will grow alongside this local research. By the end of my senior year, I hope that what I have learned can be used to lead Regis University towards becoming a model for other universities working to support ethical businesses and policies.

Chapter 1: The Humble Beginnings of Sweatshop Labor

My own journey in understanding how why sweatshop labor and other exploitive international trade policies existed started when I was offered the opportunity to travel to Ghana, Africa with a service group through Regis University. This experience opened my eyes to the fact that the luxuries I took for granted on a daily bases are not so available to all people and often come at the expense of the lives of many in distant countries. I witnessed American greed in its purist state when I spoke with displaced families on Newmont Mining's newest mining ground and learned of others struggling in much the same way on coffee and cocoa plantations. This trip did more for me than stun me out of my privileged American upbringing. It also brought into sharp focus the clear historical and systemic root causes of underdeveloped nations – nations prone to be exploited for cheap labor and loose governmental protections.

In order to grasp the causes for why such practices are prevalent throughout the world, affecting the profiteers and the exploited, one must first recognize the socio-economic system at work. Sweatshop labor arose from liberal trade policies. While I am not an economist and I do not claim to understand the complex theoretical rationalizations for exploitive labor practices, I do recognize the social and political motivations behind them. The basic understanding of liberal economics is that in a competitive economy, it is best to produce a product for as little and possible and sell it

for as little as possible while buying other goods for as little as possible. Liberal economists argue that it is the natural friction between wanting to sell cheap and buy cheap that keeps the market fair and equitable for all. That might be true, if the economies and governments of the world could ever live in a purely free-market world. However, we do not and we never have. Howard Zinn wrote in his final work after a long career as an economist and human rights activist, that it is one of the great myths of the United States that our country ever functioned as a fully free market and that we would prosper if only we went back to that structure. In reality, our society has a government that protects its people from an exploitative economy and does not allow human rights violations in the name of profit.

Luckily for the market fundamentalists, there have always been countries without a government like ours that are vulnerable to exploitation. It is important to recognize that the capitalist West has decided for the whole world that international business and economics should be rooted in a market based system. They did so knowing that many of the countries affected by this system do not have the infrastructure necessary to negotiate on behalf of their people and protect them from exploitation. Economist David Korten writes that a blind dependence on liberal economics has led to “a conscious and intentional transformation in search of a new world economic order in which business has no nationality and knows no borders.” He continues, “it is driven by global dreams of vast corporate empires, compliant governments, a globalized consumer monoculture, and a universal ideological commitment to corporate libertarianism” (Korten 121). However, this was not some happy accident for the wealthy and powerful nor did it simply occur in

the 20th century alongside mega corporations like Sarah Lee and Wal-Mart. The most important lesson I had to learn in my journey of understanding why sweatshop labor flourishes is recognizing the historical roots of the West exploiting the Global South for profit and leaving behind a figurative playground for future capitalists. Part of my experience in Ghana was a course on Ghana's history and the African Diaspora in the United States. In this course I was exposed to the author Walter Rodney. Rodney believes that we cannot understand the unjust system of economic trade seen today without recognizing its roots in the first true form of "globalization" in recent history: colonization. Rodney encapsulates this idea when he states,

"Under colonialism the ownership was complete and backed by military domination. Today, in many African countries the foreign ownership is still present, although the armies and flags of foreign powers have been removed. So long as foreigners own land, mines, factories, banks, insurance companies, means of transportation, newspapers, power stations, etc. then for so long will the wealth of Africa flow outwards into the hands of those elements" (Rodney 33).

As I said before, the current practice of exporting labor through trade did not arise suddenly. It is no coincidence that the same nations which were deeply abused through imperialism – India, the Caribbean, and many countries on the African continent – are also still being used for their resources today. Rodney calls this occurrence underdevelopment. Just as nations and peoples were expected to give their resources with little or no return, underdeveloped nations are still expected to agree to the terms of larger more powerful nations or be left to their critically stunted infrastructure for support. Many of these nations were left so devastated by colonialism (or were never left to

develop independently but rather simply went from being victims of slavery to victims of lopsided trade agreements) that they are unable to provide for their people. Being “underdeveloped” does not fully capture the state of nations facing exploitive practices from larger developed nations. Rodney states “it can be shown that the underdeveloped countries are the ones with the greatest wealth of natural resources and yet the poorest in terms of goods and services presently provided by and for their citizens” (Rodney 29). In fact these nations often have significantly lower GDP, less technically trained workers such as doctors and educators, and less regulations on social benefits like healthcare systems and schools (Rodney 24-28).

After my time in Ghana, I began to see injustice everywhere. From the food I ate to the clothes I wore, I could not escape that fact that I was a participant in a globalized system that underdeveloped some in order to provide luxuries for others. My interest in Regis’ Sweatshop Free Policy stems from a desire to somehow participate in a different system, one that does not use historical slavery and corruption to fuel its economic model. My research into this idea quickly led me to looking at development organizations like the World Bank, and the IMF. These organizations were created to correct the problems of the poor in underdeveloped nations and are supposed to be leaders in the field of international development. In particular the World Bank was created after World War Two in order to get affected countries back on their feet. Since that time, the World Bank and the IMF have acted as development agencies that advise nations on how best to correct economic and structural weaknesses in the country.

However, what seemed like an easy solution quickly proved itself to be far more harmful than I first believed. I learned that in many instances, the World Bank often fails to account for systemic causes to poverty or create development models that promote self-sustaining improvements. Often times these development plans focus on expanding areas of a country that can be beneficial to outside nations (which does not necessarily promote positive growth for the nation). David Korten offers an example in which the World Bank worked on “developing” Costa Rica’s foreign debt problems. He writes “the policies imposed by the IMF and the World Bank shifted the economic incentives away from small farms producing things Costa Ricans eat toward large estates producing for export” (Korten 49). As a result of this shift, he writes that the income gap in the country has increased dramatically and the country is ever further dependant on foreign support. Lynn Horton, professor at Chapman University wrote “World Bank good governance seeks to constrain unequal accumulation and privilege in the public sector, but leaves largely unaddressed structural inequalities in the private sector and the conflation of economic and political power in the public sector” (Horton 1). Ultimately countries are left indebted to these aid organizations and face massively unequal societies where wealth and power is in the hand of a few. Korten writes “the reality is that most borrowing countries have been able to service international debts only by increasing their international borrowing. The more they borrow, the more they become dependent on international borrowing...” (Korten 153) He later compares this trend to a drug addiction. I quickly became disillusioned that such pathways would ever lead to a shift in how the world’s globalized systems treat its most vulnerable individuals.

I next stumbled upon research on the topic of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). I thought that I had found a solution that I could take solace in. CSR is a large and ambiguous term. Most corporations use this term when describing actions of their company that carry a moral or ethical meaning. Mark Schwartz writes “virtually all attempts to define the social responsibility of the corporation include the notion that corporations have obligations toward society beyond their economic or fiduciary responsibilities to shareholders” (Schwartz 3). Basically CSR is the catch all phrase for when a company does things like host a benefit for a local charity or adopts a costly green initiative.

CSR provides companies with a framework to act responsibly but does it provide companies with the right motivation to do so? As I researched CSR further I started to recognize that “socially responsible” programs were being done to attract business and turn larger profits. As being “green” or “fair trade” became more popular, CSR boomed in almost every industry. However, what I realized was that the companies were not getting any more ethical; they were just getting smarter about how they portrayed themselves to their consumers. CSR might be a legitimate tool for some businesses to act wisely when considering things like labor rights and fair compensation for natural resources. The problem with CSR as a solution to the current exploitive global trade system is that it can never be validated in regards to its intentions. Luis Fry comments “it has been difficult in past studies to distinguish between what corporations actually do and what their executives say they do” (Fry 94). Once again, the solutions seemed lackluster and shoddy at best.

So how do all of these systems that seemed promising (but proved to be no better than current globalized economic systems) relate to my journey of finding a solution to practices like sweatshop labor? They all helped me to better understand the complex interconnectedness of historic injustice and modern day policies. They taught me that large scale, top down approaches that try to retrofit public interest to a inherently selfish economy are not effective. Finally, they proved to me that it is not enough to merely ask corporations to act with a moral conscience. David Korten said it best when he wrote “these experiences left me with a deep conviction that real development cannot be purchased with foreign aid monies. Development depends on people’s ability to gain control of and use efficiently the real resources of their localities” (Korten 5). How can a globalized system be structured to ensure the development of resources for all people and ensure equitable relationships between companies, workers, and consumers? This question led me to the apparel company Alta Gracia.

Chapter 2: The Ethical Business Model in Practice

The first step in discovering a company that truly innovates the apparel industry is recognizing companies that only appear ethical on the surface. Regis University's original Sweatshop Free Policy relied heavily on apparel from United States based company, American Apparel. American Apparel was something of a trail blazer, as the first sweatshop free company to sell its apparel in direct competition with main stream apparel companies like Gildan and Champion. American Apparels success as one of the first branded "sweatshop free" companies was the consumer trend of purchasing ethically made products and with the rise of the "fair trade" symbol as a standard for ethical purchasing, the market is open to companies wishing to profit on being socially responsible.

Reminiscent of the many large companies I studied when looking at the topic of Corporate Social Responsibility that boast about their socially responsible projects, American Apparel was just that company for the apparel industry. Columbia student, Rebecca Chan writes "American Apparel, a large clothing company that prides itself on its high labor standards, saw dramatic growth after it began advertising itself as a sweat-free company with a profitable business model" (Chan 21). American Apparel proved for a short period of time that socially responsible companies can be financially sound. However, American Apparel undermined their own success through numerous scandals

that left the company's ethical label, from which it built its entire advertising scheme, in ruins. American Apparel unethical practices including sexual harassment suits against CEO, Dov Charney and a strong anti-union tenor to its policies debased their ethical image and left the company floundering. Because of the bad publicity and poor management of their CEO, American Apparel is now going bankrupt. The lifespan of their company was short but did provide a valuable lesson to those hoping to market ethics as a consumer tool: if you say it, you better back it up.

Speaking from the viewpoint of a university that adopted a Sweatshop Free Policy, putting money and support into a company like American Apparel is in direct opposition to what we had intended to accomplish through creating the policy in the first place. In fact, having realized that we were not adhering to the spirit of the Sweatshop Free Policy (supporting ethical and just business), Regis University's Student Government is in the process of reevaluating what companies we want to invest in with University resources and student fees. Furthermore, we hope to revitalize the policy to what its original intentions were: working towards making Regis University 100% sweatshop free instead of falling complacent to relying on American Apparel for all of our needs.

The prime company Regis University is looking towards to replace American Apparel is Alta Gracia. Alta Gracia is a company that is sourced out of the Dominican Republic. Workers in their factory are paid 350 times the living wage so that they can have opportunity for upward mobility out of poverty. This company was formed largely

out of student efforts to end sweatshop labor in the Dominican Republic. Formerly a Russell Athletics sweatshop factory, the space was reclaimed by the very student protestors who forced the closure of the Russell factory. Recognizing that putting foreign workers out of jobs was worse than allowing the company to mistreat them, these students began what is now known as “United Students Against Sweatshops.” The same students also formed the Human Rights Consortium with acts as a watchdog group against sweatshop practices. These students and the business men and woman from Knights Apparel, the parent company to Alta Gracia, have so far proven that being socially responsible can be successful. Chan writes “Similar to Starbucks beginning to source more fair trade coffee, this could signal more mainstream adoption of what was previously a highly specific, specialized movement” (Chan 22). One thing is for certain, this small company, still in its infancy, has shown an amazing amount of promise. Unlike companies like Starbucks which are trending towards ethical standards because of consumer pressure, Alta Gracia’s entire business model is based on building strong labor standards and bettering the lives of their workers while providing a high quality product to their customers.

While other companies use ethics to market their products (as is seen with CSR), Alta Gracia grew from human rights activism and its policies prove that such a model can be successful. Georgetown professor, John Kline, who had the privilege of documenting the creation of Alta Gracia, comments “Alta Gracia’s higher wages can be off-set by productivity gains, lower marketing costs and somewhat reduced profits” (Kline 3). He claims that the economics of the company are sound and that the company and

independent groups like the Human Rights Consortium will not let the competitiveness of the market impede the moral framework of this fledgling company.

So do the beginning promise of American Apparel and the rising success of Alta Gracia prove that socially just companies can be major competition for corporations who rely more on cut-throat, “race to the bottom” business models? Perhaps it is too early to tell. One thing is for certain: socially responsible companies will never see profits anywhere near those of other major corporations as long as their competition’s profits are based in paying as little as possible to their employees. Alta Gracia says that this is all just a part of the trade off. One thing that makes Alta Gracia so counter to most businesses out there is that they have made the sacrifice to not make as much profit as they potentially could. Alta Gracia has made the economic decision to sell their shirts at the same price as their sweatshop competitors. James Kline wrote during the early stages of Alta Gracia’s formation, “If successful, this venture may challenge conventional wisdom that the apparel industry’s competitive wage structure requires using the cheapest labor in areas where unemployment and poverty leave workers without alternatives” (Kline 6). And indeed it has. On websites like “ethixmerch.com,” 200 of Alta Gracia’s fair trade, sweatshop free shirts cost only six dollars apiece. This is in line with most University apparel providers. So far, this risk has paid off in spades for the small company. Bookstores and University organizations are more than willing to purchase from a company that does not break their budgets and supports ethical practices. Alta Gracia has proven to the business world that it can be responsible and sustain itself as a company.

Moreover, this company proves that activism can create real social change. In 1997 “students at Duke University organized Students Against Sweatshops and persuaded their administration to require apparel companies licensing the Duke label to sign a code with good labor standards and permit monitoring visits to factories making the clothing” (Kline 7). This act prompted the start of the Unites Students Against Sweatshops. From this effort sprung an entirely new way of looking at business. What started as students standing up to an injustice that truly had no alternative options became a movement strong enough to do what scores of marketing executives and labor organizers could not – they created a socially responsible company that worked for its employees and consumers instead of against them. No gimmicks, no loopholes, this company turns the apparel industry on its head.

Of course, Alta Gracia is not the end point in the issue of sweatshop labor. No matter how successful their business becomes or how many universities chose to offer their clothing over other options, they are only one company. This one company has a hefty role to play in the global economic system that governs today’s markets. The fact is that Alta Gracia has an uphill battle, one that is unjustly placed in front of them because of trade policies that favor the wealthy of the worker and the mega corporations over small business. We still live in a system that caters to those unscrupulous enough to exploit underdeveloped nations and which panders unfettered consumerism over balanced lifestyles. The point is that this company is not enough. This is where I see institutions like Regis University playing a vital role in demanding change in the service of others. Regis, as a Jesuit institution, finds itself in a position to educate and advocate

for policy shifts and business models like Alta Gracia's to better the lives of those it works for each day.

Chapter 3: Person Centered Development as a Model for Living the Jesuit Mission

All of my research of sweatshop labor and the development of foreign nations culminated when I read David Korten's "When Corporations Rule the World." A book that lays out Korten's journey of understanding international relationships and development in much the same way as I saw my own journey developing, it focuses on the simple conclusion that development must be centered around people. At the very start of his work he posed the question "what would development look like in instead of being growth centered – with people treated only as a means of achieving growth – it were people centered – with people being both the purpose and the primary instrument?" (Korten 5) Such a simple but profound question goes to the heart of how our world values one another and even ourselves.

Korten list three steps towards effectively instituting a people-centered movement. First, "the problem is broken down into manageable pieces." He states that people feel disempowered when facing a global crisis but if the issue can be tackled one piece at a time, it can lead to a shift in thinking that can change the entire system. The second step is recognizing these changes "involves direct human engagement." Korten believes that change cannot be done by sending money to distant needy but rather by recognizing how one person's life can affect your own. We must share in each other's hardships in order to recognize the necessity of change. Finally, "it builds toward a new

political and spiritual consciousness” (Korten 299). In order to truly create change on a global scale, it is paramount that people recognize that serving others is both a spiritual and political decision. Loving one another is something we are called to do by a higher moral standard but accepting this challenge is recognizing that our political and economic decisions play a major role in protecting the rights of all people. We are all then charged with the responsibility of acting on this understanding.

Person centered development calls for every institution and company to function primarily for the people rather than its own self interest. This is quite a hefty mission seeing as how current practices value nothing but the bottom line. As was seen with Corporate Social Responsibility, even ethical decision making is only done when it can be enacted without hurting a company’s profits or can be used to further market the company to an ethically aware consumer base. Alta Gracia provides the answer. This company was created for the people of the Dominican Republic by rights activists who wanted to fill a void in the current markets. One of the key components of Korten’s person centered development model is that it calls for development to not function from the top down but rather to radiate out from the community level. Though Alta Gracia functions as an international company (providing products for the United States while being based in the Dominican Republic), the company is highly invested in that community. Executives of Alta Gracia routinely travel to the factory’s local community to see how they can best support the people working with them and their families. As Korten explains, “the community profits by having its members fully employed at the highest possible wage” (Korten 318) and this policy is not at odds with the company’s

bottom line because they are invested in people more than profit. So far this model has been successful, despite common business theories that state profit should always be the bottom line. It works because there are consumers willing to choose Alta Gracia products over other companies because of their strong person-centered development.

One of the largest criticisms I faced while developing the opinion that the best way to counteract economic injustice is to invest in ethical companies was that it dehumanized the consumer. In other words, the view that people can use their purchasing power to invest in strong companies treats people solely as consumers and that their only wealth is through their ability to buy products. While I do not disagree that changing the globalized economic system through participating in the current world market is unlikely, I do think that offering an immediate solution to all individuals can be empowering. I believe that one of the major reasons for why corporations and corrupt governments have been allowed to mistreat their people and employees for so long is because citizens have been convinced that it is the only way. We have been taught that paying a living wage to all workers would drive the price of a product up too high for us to buy. Furthermore, we are sure that companies would do the right and moral thing if only it were possible but it is not so we believe they are doing what they can already. The most important part of institutions like Regis University publically making the decision to support ethical companies is that it shows its students that we have the ability to affect change for the better. Korten writes “we must transform the system itself by reclaiming the power that we have yielded to the corrupted institutions and taking back responsibility for our own lives” (Korten 294). By claiming the consumer power to sway

the market from corrupt to person centered companies, we can show one another that we have the responsibility to do what we can, when we can, to better the lives of others.

During my time at Regis University, I have been inundated with the idea that a Jesuit education is to be used in the service of others. While I believe that there is no higher purpose than to use one's education for the betterment of one's community and protecting the rights of all people, it is also important for the institution itself to act in the service of others. Regis does this already in many ways from funding programs like the Institute on the Common Good and creating a service learning program that provides volunteers for many local non-profits. The Sweatshop Free Policy is but another program that allows Regis as an institution to embody its Jesuit values. It is necessary for Regis to practice what it teaches, especially because companies like Alta Gracia make achieving this goal fairly simple.

For too long, corporations have been allowed to dictate what ethics are worth valuing and what are not practical in our market society. For too long, individuals and corporations have hid behind large bureaucratic development agencies that merely push liberal trade policies that value foreign investment over true development. People have sat by and felt helpless at the amount of poverty and injustice that exists in the world because they are sure that the safeguards put in place are doing what they can but unfortunately, "the argument that the well-being of the poor depends on economic growth comes mainly from professionals development workers, economists, financiers, corporation heads, and others who have no problem putting food on their tables" (Korten 42). Companies like Alta Gracia are able to hear from those doing the work what they

need in order to be successful and happy people. With policies like collective bargaining and the use of independent watch dog groups like the Human Rights Consorium, it can be verified that Alta Gracia is operating ethically. There is no excuse for an institution like Regis University to not invest in a company like Alta Gracia. Regis is an educational facility that teaches that compassion, servanthood, and care for people are truly values to aspire to. Investing in a policy that fosters person centered development is putting these values into action.

Chapter 4: A Reflection of Campus Action on Adopting a Sweatshop Free Policy

All over the world factory workers are being exploited to bring customers the unethical products that they are demanding. However, people know little about what the actual conditions of these factories are and what the workers go through to feed their families each day. The workers are paid sub- standard wages, they are not allowed to create unions, their contracts will be terminated if they become unable to work even if it is due to an illness or family tragedy, and the list goes on. This issue is not insurmountable though. There are ways in which individuals and groups can get involved and make a difference, especially at an institution like Regis University. This university has considerable buying power and the social justice framework to create positive social change. The most influential way to get involved with this issue is to promote sweatshop free companies which fight against these horrible conditions for their workers.

In the spring of my junior year, I was appointed chair of the Sweatshop Free Committee and was entrusted with carrying forward a revised Sweatshop Free Policy in the upcoming school year. Throughout my fall semester I recruited influential leaders and engaged faculty to tackle this task with me. The new policy was ratified by student senate and entails making Regis a sweatshop free campus. My committee of student leaders and faculty sponsors included Jenn Evon, Director of Community Involvement, Maggie OConnor, Social Justice committee member, and Eve Passerini, Sociology professor.

This committee accomplished many amazing steps in the 2011-2012 school year and exceeded the goals I had originally set. A part of my journey on the Sweatshop Free Committee was cataloguing the work done by the committee during my time researching and working on the Sweatshop Free Policy. I will begin by outlining the steps we took in the fall semester and I will expand on them later in the chapter. Our first goal was to speak with Regis University's senate about ordering sweatshop free for their clubs. The committee spoke with them at their November meeting and they agreed to purchase sweatshop free. Our second step was to hold a meeting with the Office of Counseling and Personal Development and discuss the department adopting the Sweatshop Free Policy. The committee and I learned many valuable lessons from this experience that were used in meetings with other departments around campus. We benefited from learning organizing techniques such as creating agendas and connecting our issue with the interests of the departments. The third component entailed us engaging with the Regis Community to learn what they knew and felt about this policy being adopted on campus. We set up a tabling event in the student center and spoke with both students and faculty about the Sweatshop Free Policy on Regis' campus. To further the conversations with those who have typically been less exposed to the sweatshop free issue, we begin our conversation with athletics through personal connections we have with student athletes.

Despite many challenges to implementing widespread change, the committee and I saw major progress on the education and implementation of the Sweatshop Free Policy on campus. The first of these successes was with student senate. I believe that approaching senate was a way of educating student leaders on campus in order to gain

their support of the new policy. The committee challenged club leaders to stand up and use their leadership talents among their own organizations to support a policy that aligns itself with the mission of Regis University. We chose to connect with these leaders because they are our peers and can continue advocating for this policy in future years after graduation seniors (like myself) leave the university. In this way, the passion that sparked this policy will not deplete from year to year. In addition, the Student Senate had a built in accountability system due to the fact that they are headed by the Student Body Vice President. We met with the Vice President separately before speaking with senate and she agreed to order sweatshop free t-shirts for the student senate participants. The Vice President has proven to be an influential ally throughout the year and she has been a contact at numerous steps of my work with the new policy. Her influence in many different sectors of campus is a great example of how gathering support from student leaders can lead to true social change that radiates throughout the campus.

Another success in the fall semester was meeting with the director of the Office of Counseling and Personal Development, Chaney Givens as well as Cindy Wander who is in charge of two students groups Active Minds and Choices which run out of the department. I knew that approaching departments that are unaffiliated with Student Life Offices on campus were particularly important. Because these departments are in no way obligated to adopt the Sweatshop Free Policy (aside from the wishes of the student body that they do so), each department had to commit individually on a policy switch. I knew that there was no way to force departments into agreeing so we approached these meetings strategically, trying to find the department's interest in the policy. As a

committee, we were well prepared for our meeting with the Office of Counseling and Personal Development. We made sure to bring an agenda to the meeting and knew exactly what we were asking from the department. The office was more than willing to purchase sweatshop free apparel and we asked them to report back their purchases to the Sweatshop Free Committee whenever they purchased apparel in the future. They wanted to be part of the movement and be an example to push other departments in the same direction that they are headed. The important thing that I realized about the success of this meeting is that we did not go into it pitching our idea and hoping that they would jump on board, but rather we wanted to reach their interest and stir their own passion for the cause in order for them to create their own policy for apparel purchase. Community activist, Ernesto Cortes, is quoted in Mary Beth Rogers' book Cold Anger as saying, "If I want to organize you, I don't sell you an idea... I try to kindle your imagination, stir the possibilities, and then propose some ways in which you can act on those dreams and act on those values and act on your own visions. You've got to be the owner" (Rogers 17). I recognize that a change in thinking will not be sustainable if the department does not take charge of their own initiatives and hold themselves accountable. While I did agree for the office to send us their information about sweatshop free purchases they make in the future, our main goal was to make them aware of the issue and inspire them to act on their own values as a department. The Sweatshop Free Committee will continue to be a resource with departments around campus and will keep in contact with those adopting a Sweatshop Free Policy.

Though the policy took some Major steps forward, the committee did struggle to reach all students on campus. In fact, the committee encountered people who opposed the new policy on campus. These oppositions came up during the committee's tabling project. We placed our table in the student center lobby and asked students to come forward and sign our petition. We explained that we wanted to thank Regis University's bookstore for providing customers with sweatshop free apparel options, but we also would like to see more options in the bookstore as well. When students came forward to sign the petition we engaged in conversation about the sweatshop free companies and asked them what they knew about companies we utilized sweatshop factories for their merchandise. Perhaps one of the most challenging parts of this aspect of the project was being able to understand where individuals were coming from when they opposed our efforts. Community organizer, Saul Alinsky says, "People only understand things in terms of their experience, which means that you much get within their experience" (Alinsky 81). We were trying to keep this quote in mind when speaking with those students who refused to sign our petition.

I want to highlight some of the points of view we encountered to better illustrate the variety of factors that influence this policy. One of the students who opposed Regis' Sweatshop Free Policy was a senior business student. She politely declined signing the petition and walked away without much of a conversation, but I later spoke with her about the issue. I learned that her family owns an apparel business in Denver which works with many companies that are not sweatshop free. Because her family makes a living by working with these companies, she did not want to jeopardize her family's

business by participating in our petition. I responded by saying that we were not trying to put these companies out of business, but rather raise awareness and encourage them to change some of their practices that negatively affect the workers. Another student who declined to sign our petition was a junior communication student. This student had previously been employed by the Nike Cooperation. He said that he believed a part of the contract he signed with Nike made him unable to speak out against the company and their practices in any way. Therefore he was hesitant to sign the petition out of fear for his job. Furthermore, he has been taught that sweatshop labor is necessary for our economy in order to keep prices low and merchandise more easily accessible to customers. We spoke for quite awhile with him about this issue. The main struggle with being able to “get within [his] experience” was that he did not see the sweatshop laborers as experiencing a very hostile work environment. He argued that they simply had a job and should be thankful and happy that they were receiving pay for their work, as little as it may be. We pushed back on his belief by providing him with statistics about the work environment and the stories of families being unable to support themselves on Nike wages. Another thing that we became aware of through our tabling experience was how uninformed consumers truly are about companies and their business practices. We spoke with a third student who is a senior biology major at Regis University. He approached our table and said that he wished the bookstore sold more apparel from Gildan because he believed that they were one of the more ethical companies out there. We told him that this information was not accurate and spoke with him in more detail about Gildan’s actual practices. Gildan, like many other companies claims to be socially responsible and even donates to

multiple charities to seem ethical. When in fact this persona they create is far from their actual practices. This student decided to go and look into this issue more because he was perplexed by the information we gave him and wanted to learn more. We were pleased with our accomplishment even if the conversations were difficult in the moment. It was through these individual conversations that we were able to see change happening within those who we may not have initially connected with on this topic.

My work with the current Sweatshop Free Committee has helped me to better understand what steps still need to be taken to make this policy widely implementable and better accepted on campus. The first of these suggestions is working with the director of Student Activities and the heads of other major departments to create an accountability structure for departments outside of Student Life. I was inspired by Roger's when she wrote, "the first revolution is internal" (Rogers 61). I feel that this accountability piece should only be structural because we know that the people we have spoken to have to believe in the change and hold themselves accountable. If this does not happen, the change will fall apart once the student leader graduates or when an administrator takes a new position. It is difficult to configure a policy that deters departments or clubs from using unethical sources. I feel that it would be much more practical to create a reward system for those who support this change. The idea of having Student Activities subsidize the cost of apparel for organizations that wanted to buy sweatshop free was proposed briefly by the previous Sweatshop Free Committee. I see a reward program that both promotes good decisions and makes accessing those options easier for departments as a good step in increasing the functionality of the Sweatshop Free Policy. Such a proposal

could be implemented as early as the upcoming school year and would do wonders for getting the revised policy into the public eye at the university. However, if the main goal is not to ensure that departments are accountable but rather reinforce positive actions and get word of the policy out on campus, the Sweatshop Free Apparel Committee could also release a public statement or award to departments who best support ethical companies in the spirit of the Jesuit Mission.

The Athletic Department is a major department at the university that will need to be addressed in the near future. The committee and I were hesitant to speak with them this semester due to the fear that we are not prepared to give them the tools needed to tackle sweatshop free projects in an area where there are yet to be feasible options in the realm of apparel. We felt that it was unrealistic to engage in conversation with the administrators because there was extensive preparation that needed to be done and we required the support from administrators such as the Dean of Students and the Director of Student Activities. However, we decided that there were alternative ways to initiate leadership among our peers who are athletes. We did this through short meetings with members from two athletic teams. The Student Body Vice President (whom we spoke to earlier in the year is also a member of the softball team. She spoke with us about a desire of her and her fellow teammates to place a patch over their athletic logos in support of Regis' sweatshop free policy. The Patch Program idea has been thrown around by the Sweatshop Free Committee since first learning of this movement from Jim Keady, a sweatshop free activist who spoke at Regis in 2010. Sociology Professor, Eve Passerini, aided our efforts to connect with student voices around campus by assigning her

Research and Social Methods class the task of interviewing one peer or faculty about their knowledge of sweatshop free options. One of her students spoke with a teammate on the golf team about the sweatshop free issue. This student inquired whether or not her teammate was informed about the Sweatshop Free Policy on Regis' campus and she said no. This student explained the policy and gave her teammate the information she would need to know about purchasing sweatshop free apparel. This student informed me that she chose to approach her teammate because she is a freshman on the golf team and the student believes she would be a leader on the team in future years and will promote this policy in the future.

What these student conversations point to is a need for future contact with the athletic department on the issue of the Sweatshop Free Policy. While not much has been done to provide athletic apparel from sweatshop free sources, perhaps future leaders of the Sweatshop Free Policy should put more support into launching a patch program with a test team to see if it raising awareness of this issue and brings attention to the lack of viable options in this area. Furthermore, the athletic department orders standard apparel and has previously decided against buying sweatshop free because of budget constraints. If the Sweatshop Free Committee can gain support from student athletes, the momentum on the issue could nudge the Athletics Administrators into rethinking this position. No matter what work s done first, it is clear that the relationship between the committee and athletics is an important one to strengthen in the future.

As I mentioned earlier, we tackled educating the student body by setting up a table outside of the student center to engage students passing by in conversation. Our

goal was to get signatures for our petition to the Ranger Bookstore on continuing to sell Alta Gracia, the leading sweatshop free apparel option, in the hopes of using that petition to set up a meeting with them in the future. This is another future step that needs to be taken in order to accomplish the goal of creating an entirely sweatshop free campus. Alongside tackling the various administrations on campus, we especially wanted to get the bookstore to extend their selection of sweatshop free clothing. Many bookstores around the nation (Including school like Notre Dame, Duke, and Santa Clara) already have entirely sweatshop free options in their school bookstores. Especially considering the fact that the bookstore currently sells Champion apparel, which has been noted for its human rights violations, the Sweatshop Free Committee needs to come to some sort of agreement with the subcontractor Follett Books that better reflects the mission of the university. This would be a wise step for the company because of the competitive pricing of Alta Gracia apparel and their rapid growth as a company. It would not only be more in line with the Jesuit ideals, but it would also be a smart business move and potential marketing decision for the bookstore to draw more attention to their products.

Through our experiences from beginning to end with the Sweatshop Free Policy on campus, I feel that a lot has been accomplished and many important steps have been made towards making Regis University 100% sweatshop free. I am excited about the change I am seeing happen at my university and I know the work is far from being done. Further implementation of this policy is crucial for Regis to not only live up to its ethical standards as they are laid out in the Jesuit tradition, but also to be good stewards of student's tuition and fees. Regis has an opportunity to do something great with the

massive spending power available and I feel that it is necessary for this institution to continue to bring this issue to light among students and staff in future years. I know that the Sweatshop Free Policy should continue to be revised and scrutinized to make it more accessible and straightforward to student leaders and department administrators. I think this policy will only continue to grow in the years to come as alternative options for sweatshop free apparel become more readily available. It is my hope that when I visit Regis in the future, I will see how student activism has changed the way the university handles its responsibility to the global poor and the people who work to provide its students with products we too easily take for granted.

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