

15.A.5c

Connecticut Students Examine Sweatshops



[Project by Bacon Academy students examines low wages in garment industry \[Norwich \(Conn.\) Bulletin\]](#)

Bacon Academy students got a recent lesson in fashion and economics.

Three students taking the elective Community Activism presented a documentary they filmed titled, “Is It Worth It?” which explored sweatshop conditions overseas in making clothing sold throughout the United States.

Seniors Ashley Brown, 18, and Nicole Scrivano, 18, and sophomore Marcella Schroeder, 15, were inspired to make the documentary by a Community Activism field trip. They visited the Willimantic Wal-Mart, where they looked at clothing.

“We tried to find U.S.-made or union-made clothing. It was very tough to find a match, and store workers were not helpful,” said Scrivano.

According to the Underground Action Alliance Web site, sweatshop pay in China is 23 cents per hour; in Honduras, 30 cents per hour and in Haiti, 30 cents per hour.

Last week, between 600 and 800 students at Bacon viewed the girls’ work, which was presented in the band room throughout the day.

Aurora Chmielecki, 18, a senior, was impressed.

“I didn’t know there were so many sweatshops and that their use was so widespread,” she said. “It was so depressing; I don’t want to support sweatshops, and I’m looking into alternative locations to shop.

“I’m very proud of my friends for making the documentary,” she added.

The documentary is two hours of film boiled down to a 15-minute presentation.

In their visit to Wal-Mart, they found only an extra large pair of pants, a small tank top and a pair of earrings that were made in the United States.

Wal-Mart advertising says working families save an average of \$2,300 a year by shopping there.

Playing off Wal-Mart's slogan, "Always low prices. Always Wal-Mart," the students countered with "Always low wages. Always Wal-Mart."

Wal-Mart responds

Kevin Gardner, senior manager of International Corporate Affairs for Wal-Mart, defended the company in a written statement.

"Our global ethical standards program is focused on helping to improve the lives of workers by making sure supplier factories making products for Wal-Mart comply with the labor laws and standards of the country where they are located," Gardner said. "If factories do not take action, we stop doing business with them."

But the students are quick to point out sweatshop labor is not a practice limited to Wal-Mart.

"There are so many stores that use sweatshops. It's hard to find those that don't," said Schroeder.

The girls made clear not all overseas-made clothing is produced in sweatshops. Union-made clothing also is produced overseas. And not all U.S.-made clothing is made according to the rules.

The documentary included this nugget: The U.S. Department of Labor found 67 percent of Los Angeles garment factories provide workers no benefits and pay less than minimum wages.

The documentary was full of visuals of overseas sweatshops and the girls inspecting clothing labels at stores. Accompanying the visuals was a sound track that included the themes from "The Pink Panther" and "Jaws."

The girls cited American Eagle, Kohl's, Hollister's, Abercrombie & Fitch and Charlotte Russe as the top five clothing stores that rely on sweatshops.

Julia Olczyk, 18, a senior, found the documentary "eye-opening."

"I heard some kids talking about how much they pay for their clothes and the people who make them are paid so little," Olczyk said. "Pants that cost \$80 are made by people who make very little. Now I try to buy union-made or made-in-the-U.S."

What was the student made documentary "Is It Worth It" about?

True or false: They found a lot of US made products at Wal-Mart?

What did 67% of LA garment factories not provide their workers with?

List 3 stores besides Wal-Mart that rely on sweatshops.

What are two things you can look for when shopping to make sure you don't support sweatshops?

These students gave an excellent demonstration of how young people can and should be involved in global and humanity efforts. Explain one idea that you have for an activity such as this.

Optional extra credit or extra assignment: Have students carry out these activities.