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Introduction

I have been interested in Latinas in the garment industry for a very long time. It was a mystery to me why, in a country as affluent as the United States, some people were still working in sweatshop conditions and why workers in sweatshops were primarily Latinas. As I did research for this paper, I realized that both in the 1800's and again in the 1970s and 1980s, when competition became really fierce, factory owners and managers hired immigrants, not because they wanted to put out a welcome mat, but because they realized that immigrants were a much more vulnerable and exploitable group of people. In this paper I will trace how once thriving garment industries declined not just once, but twice, causing acceptable working conditions to deteriorate to inhumane conditions.

Imagine a giant pyramid with a wide base that reaches high into the sky. Everyone on earth is assigned a position on this pyramid from the moment of his or her birth. A person's position or location on the pyramid represents his or her position in society, and is determined by innumerable factors, such as gender, race, wealth, education, class, political status and legal status among dozens of other qualities. In America, wealthy white men with post college degrees who are CEOs, lawyers and doctors, whose families have been in the U.S. for several

generations reign at the top of the pyramid, with white women of similar ranking just below them. Those coming into America from second and third world nations –people of color, people coming from poverty, people without a formal education –occupy the lowest spaces at the base of the pyramid, often forced out of mainstream view. Though upward mobility is possible for those at the bottom of the pyramid, those at the top have developed various doctrines and widely held beliefs which are unconsciously accepted by most of society which have been developed -- and are used-- to maintain inequality and socio/economic imbalance (Gramsci, 1973).

Though once a source of national pride and beneficence when unions were strong, and workers had rights and received a living wage, the U.S. garment industry, has, on many accounts, become a source of national shame and exploitation. From the 1930s to the early 1960s middle and working class women and men worked in the garment industry, supported by powerful unions that ensured their rights (Rosen 7). Today lower class and impoverished women make up the garment workforce. Garment workers working outside sweatshops earn the minimum wage, which is not a living wage, and struggle to make enough money to make ends meet. The garment workers who work in sweatshops receive sub-minimum wage pay and often live in poverty (Bonacich and Applebaum 185).

A person's location on the pyramid is directly tied to his or her power in society and the larger world. Garment workers are oppressed through the exploitative nature of their work and occupy low spaces or locations on the hierarchical pyramid mentioned above. Those who work in sweatshops have

particularly low positions in the pyramid. The Latina women who work in sweatshops often have a number of qualities and conditions that confine them to unfortunate locations at the bottom of the pyramid. There are numerous forms of oppression under which Latina garment workers live: They are oppressed as women, as people of color, and as a part of the larger Latino population whose presence in America is constantly questioned. Latinas who have recently immigrated to the U.S. and Latinas who are in the country without documentation face further oppression (Bonacich and Applebaum 7).

Just as an individual's location on the pyramid directly correlates with the amount of power he or she has, a person's location on the pyramid directly correlates with the one's exploitability. Oppression, which corresponds to a person's or group's location on the pyramid and in the world, makes individuals and groups more vulnerable to exploitation. Sweatshops frequently employ Latinas who deal with multiple forms of oppression, in essence capitalizing on their vulnerability to exploit them to a greater degree than other workers.

The Working Definition and Explanation of the term "Sweatshop" for this Thesis

The word "exploitation" is fundamental to understanding and defining the term "sweatshop". A sweatshop is a garment production factory that exploits its workers on one or multiple levels (Bonacich and Applebaum 185). At its very best, a sweatshop is a garment factory that pays its workers wages that fall slightly below the minimum wage, condemning its workers to lives of poverty or near poverty (Bonacich and Applebaum 4). At its worst, a sweatshop gives its

workers piece rate work, paying them only twenty or thirty cents for each garment they complete. In the early twentieth century, sweatshops often lacked the most basic safety features and precautions. Neither the Wolf Muslin Undergarment Company factory in Newark nor the better-known Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York had working fire escapes, which ultimately caused the death of 170 women between them, in fires occurring in 1910 and 1911, respectively.¹ Hundreds of female garment workers suffered from brown lung disease or Byssinosis,² which workers acquired from inhaling cotton dust while they worked. Most garment factories allow their workers only a set, marginal number of bathroom breaks during their shifts.

Sweatshops violate federal employment laws in numerous ways. In addition to paying their workers sub minimum wages, many garment sweatshops require their workers to do substantial overtime work without overtime pay. Some factories force their workers to take work home and sew garments in the evening and nighttime in their own homes. This extension of work into workers' homes is referred to as "homework" and is illegal (Bonacich and Applebaum 184).

The Context of Racism in this Thesis

Racism is a tricky issue to discuss in America, in part because the pre-Civil rights forms of overt, de jure and institutional racism have been replaced with covert, de facto and structural racism, just as public and conscious racism have been replaced with private and unconscious racism. In addition, racism towards members of different racial groups is viewed differently. Although most

racist or racially biased statements against Black Americans are met with (rightful) intolerance and condemned, similar statements about Latinos and Latino Americans often receive less condemnation, and sometimes are met with support. Just as many white Americans harbor unconscious racist beliefs about Black Americans, an equal number, if not more, harbor unconscious and conscious racist attitudes toward Latinos and Latino Americans. White American's acceptance of publicly displayed racial prejudice and racism toward Latinos reveals their hegemonic internalization of negative stereotypes, racial prejudice and racist feelings toward Latinos.

Though the unconscious prejudices and biases of white Americans do not often manifest themselves in the forms of directly racist statements or actions, the unconscious racism and biases demonstrate themselves in white Americans' acceptance of, and failure to fight against racial inequality and discrimination. Many white American Los Angeles residents are aware that many of the Latina women who work in the Los Angeles garment industry work in sweatshops, are poorly treated, and receive sub-minimum wages for their work. Though these people are aware (to some degree) of the exploitation garment workers face in garment factories and sweatshops, virtually no one in the white community fights against this injustice. One wonders if white Americans' reluctance to become more involved stems at least in part from the fact that there are virtually no white American women who are a part of the modern garment industry, making the plight of Latina garment workers in garment factories and sweatshops less immediate and more acceptable.

Racism is not the main focus of this paper, but it is an important factor in the topics I will explore because (to various degrees) it shapes the lives of Latina garment workers. Among other considerations race and racism make it easier for Latinas to be treated exploitatively in the garment industry. The indirect and direct racism that all Latinas, especially those without documentation face, makes fighting for their rights more difficult.

This thesis has seven chapters. The first chapter gives a brief history of the development of the American garment industry. The second chapter focuses on trade deregulation and legislation, government policy and the impact of technological changes on the garment industry. The third chapter discusses oppression Latinas face as women. The fourth chapter covers the racism and racial prejudice that Latinos in America face and how that affects their lives. The fifth chapter discusses the plight of undocumented immigrant Latina workers, and how their compromised legal status in the U.S. allows employers in the garment industry and outside of it to take advantage of them and exploit them. The sixth chapter discusses the concept of exploitation via location. The seventh chapter is my conclusion.

Chapter 1: A Brief History of the Garment Industry in the United States

The U.S. garment industry didn't really begin until the mass production of the Singer sewing machines in the 1830s (Earle). Most Americans made their own clothes at home from machine made cloth that they bought at stores. Men's stores carrying ready-made clothing, such as Brooks Brothers, first appeared in

the 1830's (Earle). This changed with the American Civil War. The need for ready-made clothes exploded when uniforms for soldiers had to be produced quickly and cheaply. The newly created sewing machine was instrumental in the production of uniforms (Earle). The capabilities of the sewing machine also made piecework (workers being paid per garment item completed) more common. The creation of individual garments was often broken down into individual units, with items like coats having one hundred fifty individual operations to make a completed piece (Earle).

With the advent of the sewing machine, garment factories opened in the towns of Lowell and Lawrence, Massachusetts. The garment factories recruited American born young women as workers. The young women employed there worked thirteen hours a day during the week, and eight hours on Saturdays. The women had only thirty minute breaks for meals (Rosen 240).

Though the working conditions these jobs offered were brutal, the young women working in these factories earned more money from their work in the factories than they could earn if employed elsewhere. The Lowell and Lawrence mills paid their workers fifty cents a day. The young women working at Lawrence and Lowell would have earned between thirty and thirty three cents a day for their labor at small garment factories near their homes (Kenschaft et al. 277). Women working at cotton mills in Massachusetts earned forty-four cents a day. Other large mills in the New England area paid the women working at them fifty cents a day. The notable difference in pay between average jobs for unskilled workers

and the garment production jobs in Lowell and Lawrence provided the critical difference in employing these U.S. born women.

After the American born young women began working at the Lawrence and Lowell mills, new garment factories in the area popped up, creating competition with the Lowell and Lawrence mills. To maintain their position in the garment market, the mills reduced the workers' wages. The American born young women quit their jobs and left the mills. European Immigrant women filled the factories' empty seats. (Rosen 240)

The fact that American born women were able to leave their jobs at the clothing factories attests to the hegemonic power of race and ethnicity. Hegemony granted the American born women who worked in the mills a higher social position than their immigrant counterparts. Because of their social position in the hegemonic spectrum, the American born women had a level of security that meant they could find alternative work with an ease the immigrant women didn't have.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, another major change in garment production had occurred. Rather than working in large factories, garment workers now worked in smaller factories. With the emergence of smaller factories, competition became even fiercer. To maintain their place in this competitive market, companies paid even lower wages to their workers. New York City was now the hub of garment production (Rosen 96-97). Immigrants from Europe were coming into the US in droves and could easily find unskilled jobs in the tenements of New York City. They worked in apartments which served

both as their homes and as their workplace. The four and five room apartments, also called tenements, were small, airless, and very hot in the summer. A term for these cramped workplaces was coined: “sweatshop” (Rosen 96). More generally, a sweatshop is any place of work that violates labor laws by paying sub-minimum wages and violates working conditions mandated by the federal government (Bonacich and Applebaum 3).

At the turn of the century, workers began forming unions to gain some power over the exploitive owners and contractors of the garment shops at which they worked. With the security of union backing, workers began striking and fighting for rights, higher wages, and benefits. Two major unions emerged: The International Ladies Garment Workers Union (known by its acronym ILGWU) for female garment workers, and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Association (known by its acronym ACWA) for male garment workers. The unions supported worker’s strikes in the first and second decades of the twentieth century (Rosen 96).

At its peak in the 1950’s and early 1960’s, the garment industry was strong and employed white men and women. Both were supported by unions that protected workers’ rights to a living wage, and ensured safe working conditions for the workers, and enabled workers to fight against unfair policies (Rosen 1). In addition to advocating for fair wages, the ILGWU offered workers a number of benefits, including generous health benefits and support for immigrant workers. The union encouraged its workers (American and immigrant) to vote, and offered

English classes to immigrant workers looking to obtain American citizenship (Rosen 96).

During this same period of relative prosperity in the garment industry, the US government drastically changed its policies regarding textile imports. In particular, the U.S. government allowed far more imports from low wage countries in East Asia by reducing quotas on imported goods, as well as reducing taxes and tariffs on imported goods (Rosen 15-16). This was extremely detrimental to the garment industry and made it less secure. As more clothing imports came into the U.S. from Asian countries, the American garment industry was challenged, and American clothing manufacturers had to adapt to Asian methods and standards of manufacturing. Increasingly, the methods of the Asian garment industries became examples and realities of what the American industry would become.

As pay and working conditions declined, American men began leaving the industry in the mid and late 1960's. The surge in low-cost imported goods from low wage countries weakened the strength of the garment unions. As the once powerful unions weakened, wages again fell and worker rights deteriorated, and the middle class white American women who made up the bulk of the garment workers in the U.S. began leaving the industry to work in higher paying jobs (Rosen 105).

Just as had happened in the Lowell and Lawrence Factories, lower class white women began filling the positions that had been left by middle class white American women. And as competition from Asia continued, wages declined and

working conditions worsened in American factories and lower class white women began leaving the industry in the late 1970s and early to mid-1980s, as the garment industry declined further and sweatshop conditions returned (Rosen 102). Today, the garment industry is almost exclusively comprised of lower class Latina and Asian women workers (Bonacich and Applebaum 20). These women are denied a living wage, are forced to work long hours without overtime pay, and are denied the right to a safe workplace.

Chapter 2: The Impact of Trade Legislation and Deregulation, Government Policy, and Technological Changes on the Garment Industry

At the end of the Great Depression, some Americans became critical of the high taxes and tariffs the United States imposed on imported goods through the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, questioning whether the high taxes imposed on imported goods had contributed to the Great Depression (Rosen 14). Shortly after the end of World War II, the heavy trade penalties of the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act ended with the adoption of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) policy in 1947 (Rosen 14). GATT was designed to encourage trade between nations through internationally agreed upon policies and tariffs. In addition to broadening the opportunities for international trade, GATT sought to create a "...level playing field for the exchange of goods among nations" (Rosen 14). The creators of GATT believed that the broader, more open and egalitarian system of trade created by GATT would generate greater global economic security, which in turn would ensure world peace.

In the years following the creation of GATT, the U.S. recognized the threat of communism in East Asia and worked to prevent the entrance of communism into vulnerable countries. As a preventative measure, the U.S. allowed the importation of garments from factories in countries such as Japan and China, which produced low wage (and therefore low cost) garments and apparel (Rosen 15). The creation of GATT enabled the low cost garments from Japan and China to enter the U.S. market at substantially lower prices than garments produced by workers in the U.S. The increased importation of apparel and textiles from low paying factories in East Asian countries created competition for the U.S. garment industry, which was forced to make changes to compete with low wage work from abroad (Rosen 15). Recognizing what more open trade policies were doing to them, garment industry heads began fighting for limits on imports. In 1961 the U.S. government created quotas on the volume of textiles and garments imported from low wage countries (Rosen 15).

Though the U.S. government provided some trade protection in the 1960s with quotas on imported garments and apparel and modest tariffs, the U.S. government continued to encourage the establishment of garment industries in developing nations that had low wage labor. The U.S. government sponsored the creation and development of these industries in low wage countries to advance the economic growth of less economically developed nations with the hopes of preventing the spread of communism in Eastern Asia.

The emergence of the computer and other technological changes which reduced the costs of shipping and transport in the 1970s changed trade

dramatically (Rosen 111). Clothing companies and manufacturers moved further from the mass production of clothing in U.S. when they recognized that garments could be created in a variety of low wage international locations for less money. Reduced taxes and tariffs made the shipment of garments between nations cheaper, and technology facilitated the coordination of the shipment of garments to convenient locations around the world (Rosen 120). With this, trade regulations and penalties (such as tariffs and taxes) were increasingly diminished, many companies began viewing government trade regulation of trade and penalties as unnecessary and harmful to the concept of free markets and “free” trade (Rosen 127-128).

The outsourcing of labor to low wage nations in different parts of the world had a huge impact on workers in the U.S. garment industry. With much of their workload being shipped overseas, U.S. garment workers experienced significant changes in their working situations. As garment manufacturers recognized the benefits of cheap foreign labor with lower pay and lower workplace health and safety standards abroad, many manufacturers decided to create similar labor environments in the U.S (Rosen 136-148).

Thus by the 1980s, U.S. garment workers experienced drastic changes in their employment realities. As their salaries were cut, the work provided less than a living wage.

Established in 1974, before the days of trade deregulation and globalization, the Multifibre Arrangement protected workers in the garment industry by instituting taxes and requiring tariffs on textiles and garments coming

into the United States (Rosen 15). It maintained its quota and tariff policies through the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s despite the radical shifts in trade that occurred during this time period. Neoliberal economists argued that the quotas and tariffs demanded by the Multifibre Arrangement were detrimental to the U.S. economy because they created difficulties and impediments in the trade market. In 1995, the Multifibre Arrangement and the protection it brought garment workers was terminated on the grounds that it was a hindrance to the progression of economically liberalized garment trade in the international economy (Rosen 21).

The termination of the Multifibre Arrangement brought about the creation of the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC). In many ways the antithesis to the Multifibre Arrangement, the ATC has continually sought to reduce taxes and tariffs and has pushed for the termination of import quotas, eventually eliminating all remaining quotas on imported textiles, clothing, and foot wear in 2005 (Rosen 22). Strongly favoring the outsourcing of labor, the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing established contracts with garment production centers in China and Sub Saharan Africa where U.S. garment and textile companies will produce textiles, garments and apparel at a lower cost than in South U.S. or other parts of Asia (Rosen 22).

A scholar and critic of sweatshops in U.S. and abroad, Ellen Israel Rosen authored the text *Making Sweatshops*, which documents the rise and fall of the garment workers' unions, changes in trade and trade policy, and how the sweatshops of today's world came into existence. In her text Rosen describes the environmental impact of U.S. sweatshops and areas abroad known as export

processing zones, or EPZs (Rosen 26). Export Processing Zones are often located in isolated areas, out of the way away from society's view. The EPZ sweatshops are often surrounded by barbed wire fences, which forbid outside citizens from entering the EPZs, and workers from leaving during their shifts. In this prison like environment, garment manufacturers disregard labor laws and work regulations to ensure their power and dominance over workers. Workers are paid sub-minimum wages that often are a small percent of what they should receive and work under conditions that are universally deemed abusive (Rosen 25).

Though garment factories and manufacturing sites in U.S. are not as brutal as the sites described above, it is important to recognize and acknowledge the ripple effect of how garment production in other countries affects the quality and environment of garment manufacturing facilities in U.S., and how the working conditions and environments of garment factories have declined due to competition from abroad. The termination of quotas on imports brought an onslaught of imported garments into the U.S. To compete with the huge amount of low cost garments coming into the U.S. from Asia, U.S. garment factories had to adopt similar conditions of production by cutting garment workers' wages, reducing benefits, and forcing garment workers to work in less safe and humane conditions (Rosen 25).

Before the advent of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), companies and manufacturers that were a part of the U.S. garment industry provided a living wage to their workers as well as relatively comfortable, safe working spaces and decent working hours. As low cost exports entered the

U.S. at an increasing rate, garment companies had to make cuts to remain profitable. Garment worker's wages were reduced. The reduced wages and need to produce a higher volume of garments forced these workers to work longer hours in working environments that were less comfortable and safe. A number of workers in the United States now work in sweatshop-like facilities for minimum and sub-minimum wage pay. In many garment production facilities, the conditions under which work is produced in countries with developing economies and weaker labor standards are being reproduced in the United States (Rosen 16).

Another important legal change that eventually had a great impact on the U.S. garment industry was the Taft Hartley Act. Created in 1947, this gave state governments the right to ban union shops in their own states by instituting a so-called right to work clause (Rosen 21). Such "right to work laws" prohibit unions from requiring union membership or payment of union dues as a condition of employment and generally have the effect of reducing union influence and bargaining power. The Taft Hartley Act thus limited workers' ability to press for better wages and working conditions through collective bargaining (Rosen 21). Garment workers in the Northeast part of the U.S. who had benefitted from the garment unions there, such as the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, received relatively high wages and relatively comfortable working spaces. Garment and textile workers in the South were not unionized and worked for less money than their Northern counterparts. The Taft Hartley act enabled Northeastern garment companies to close union garment production sites, forcing garment workers in

the Northeast to move to garment production facilities in the South, where they provided lower pay, had less comfortable working facilities and working conditions than their Northern counterparts, and the formation of unions was more difficult (Rosen 21, 80).

The Taft Hartley Act represents a critical point in the deregulation and loss of worker protection in the U.S. garment industry. Though relatively low paying, non-union jobs existed in the South and outside the hubs of the unionized Northeast garment industry before the Taft Hartley Act, the act opened the door to garment worker exploitation by U.S. garment manufacturers and corporations. The exploitation of garment workers continued.

After World War II, the U.S. government worried about the spread of communism into Eastern and Southeastern Asian countries. As a preventative measure, the U.S. government encouraged the establishment of capitalist for-profit garment industries in South Korea, Taiwan, India, Hong Kong and the Philippines (Rosen 21, 38 and 39). Garment production blossomed in three of these countries—Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan—which became known as “the big three” for their gross production of garments. As garment factories and the equipment inside them aged and became out of date, garment companies in the United States lost their competitive lead over east Asian garment production with its new, high quality machines (Rosen 121). With labor costs a fraction of the price of those in the U.S garment manufacturing in "The big three" and other Asian countries became very efficient and profitable. U.S. garment manufacturing companies recognized the value and profitability of East Asia’s low wage, low

cost labor and were forced into competition with manufacturing in these countries.

The salaries of Asian women involved in East Asian garment production were significantly lower in part due to differing currency values but mostly due to the different wage rates in Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and later China. The salaries attest to the actual and relative poverty to which these wages confined Asian garment workers. Asian women working in garment factories earned roughly fifteen cents (\$0.15) an hour, less than a tenth of the one dollar sixty five cents (\$1.65) U.S. women garment workers earned an hour. Asian workers' earnings totaled twenty-eight dollars (\$28) a month in the 1960s (Rosen 82). Rosen writes that Asian clothing manufacturers were able to give such low pay to workers because "...they employed so many young women" (82). Rosen's statement attests to the exploitation of women by garment manufacturers and women's, especially poor women's, inherent exploitability because of their need of money. Like the poor U.S. women who took jobs at low paying, non-union garment factories out of financial desperation, poor women around the world are often forced (due to their poverty) to take whatever jobs they can find, no matter how low the pay.

From the garment industry's foundation and the emergence of the ILGWU in the 1880s and 1930s to its peak in the 1960s, U.S. women employed in the garment industry earned a living wage and worked in comparatively comfortable environments. Women who were a part of the ILGWU received medical benefits

and paid vacations (Rosen 1). Garment workers earned a weekly salary almost seven dollars over the national average for manufacturing jobs (Rosen 98).

The relatively benign nature of the garment industry sixty plus years ago stands in stark contrast to the realities of the U.S. garment industry today.

Chapter 3: The Oppression Latina Women Receive as Women

Around the world Women are oppressed by men. Though some ethnic groups in certain parts of the world may oppress women more and work to negate gender equality more than others, women are given second-class status on every continent. The political/socio/economic well-being and security of a given group of people or region correlates much more directly with the degree of oppression women face than other factors. Affluent women in North U.S. and Western Europe enjoy a large amount of freedom and independence; poor and impoverished women in the North U.S. and Europe have less. In areas of the world in which social, economic and political situations are less secure and more chaotic, women live under varying degrees of oppression and freedom.

Though her article does not discuss men's oppression of Latina women in the garment industry, the article "New Perspectives on Latina Women" by Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo does focus on Latina women's struggles to achieve gender and racial equality with their male and white U.S. counterparts. Early in her article, Hondagneu-Sotelo addresses the construction of Latino male machismo and the subsequent passivity, submissiveness and subordinate nature of Latina women. Hondagneu-Sotelo articulates that the machismo men/ submissive

women “framing” of Latino gender dynamics is a largely inaccurate portrayal of Latino/Latina gender relations, and is based on a “static” or unchanging model of Latino gender dynamics in an earlier time that assumes that ethnic cultural legacies, such as machismo, that were a part of Latino culture in the past continue to be a part of the culture today. The article’s author believes that things change, and that the machismo model once used to explain gender relations is out of date, and no longer a part of Latino culture (Hondagneu-Sotelo 194).

Being forced to drop the concept of machismo and the concept of subordinate and docile Latina women who become submissive and passive in the wake of machismo is eye-opening, mostly because it forces “Westerners”³ to abandon a widely believed in and used construct, created to differentiate themselves from Latinos. As Hondagneu-Sotelo argues, Latina women, like most women around the world, have higher status, more power and more egalitarian gender relations when they work in jobs that provide incomes equal or close to those of their husbands or male counterparts. Reviewing work by other scholars on the subject of female employment and gender equality, Hondagneu-Sotelo gives a good example of this concept at a point in her paper when she discusses the gender dynamics of Latino men and women living in New Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century. Though Latino men had secure employment in New Mexico, they did not earn very much money. Latina women were not formally employed but worked hard for their families and families’ well-being by communally plastering their village’s adobe homes, providing food for their families and growing food for their families (Hondagneu-Sotelo 197-198). The

relative equality of labor in these New Mexican communities gave Latina women a strong power base and allowed them to live autonomous, independent lives.

Latina women's gender equality with Latino men did not last. Many members of the Latino community mentioned above moved to Colorado, which provided relatively lucrative agricultural work. Though husbands and wives worked together in the fields, the economy there offered men more economic opportunities and options for wage advancement in agriculture and other areas. As the earnings of Latino men and Latina women began to differ, and then substantially differ, Latina women lost the autonomy, status and power that they had once had in these formerly Latino communities (Hondagneu-Sotelo 198).

Discussing finances and gender equality in another environment, Hondagneu-Sotelo briefly focuses on the writings of a scholar, Patricia Zavella, in *Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley*, who interviewed Latina women who worked in canneries. Zavella notes that many of the Latina women working in the canneries had seasonal jobs, which meant that they were unemployed for part of the year (Hondagneu-Sotelo 201). The seasonal nature of the women's employment caused them to earn less money than their husbands. The difference in the incomes between the spouses granted these Latina cannery workers little autonomy or independence in their home and family lives (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 202).

In her article "In Pursuit of Latina Liberation," scholar and writer Elizabeth Martinez discusses several topics relating to Latinas position in U.S. society. Martinez devotes the first part of her article to explicating the thorny

relationship between, on the one hand, Latinos and Latinas who were part of the Latino rights movement and, on the other hand, the Latina women who were also part of the Latino rights movement but were interested in gender equality and were part of the women's movement as well (Martinez 1021). Because Latino men had difficulty understanding women's oppression and felt that Latinas who pursued women's rights were less devoted to the Latino rights movement, many of these Latinas received hostile remarks from men in the Latino rights movement (Martinez 1020). Martinez notes that Latino men hurled two razor sharp comments at Latinas involved in the Latino rights movement and the women's rights movement. The first comment was that Latinas involved in both movements were "acting like white women" (Martinez 1020). As Martinez shares, these words were very hurtful to Latina women participating in the struggle for gender equality, since Latino men and women were fighting to end the inequality and second class status given to them by white men and women and their constant oppression by white Americans. By questioning the racial and ethnic alliances of Latina women involved in the women's movement, Latino men implied that these Latinas were traitors to their race and the Latino equality movement (Martinez 1020).

Just as the first comment launched at Latinas participating in the Latino rights movement and the women's movement hurt them, so did the second phrase, "You're being divisive" (1020). Martinez points out that this remark was just as difficult for Latinas engaging in women's rights activities to hear as the first comment, because the last thing these Latinas wanted was to divide or deplete the

power of the Latino Rights movement since these women were fighting for their own rights as Latinas. Latino men's reaction to the Latina women participating in the Latino Rights movement and the women's rights movement revealed several things: their (Latino men's) worries of losing Latina women's support and involvement in the Latino Rights movement and their feeling that Latina women needed to dedicate all of their energy to the Latino rights movement.

As men who had the position of being sufficiently superior in the gender dynamics that they are effectively "genderless" much like white Americans are "raceless," in this context Latino men were blind to the oppression Latina women suffered as women, and could not appreciate that rather than detracting from the strength of the Latino Rights movement, Latinas' involvement in the women's rights movement could make them more fully realized women and stronger leaders. Despite the mentioned Latinas interest and involvement in the women's rights movement, its origin among middle class white women meant that the issues of race and class were not discussed or examined in the white, middle class gender discourse, because the elements of race and class were not issues for the middle class white women leading the movement(Martinez 1021-1022). Just as Latino men were blind to the oppression Latina women faced as women, middle class white women who were a part of the women's movement were blind to the racial and class issues with which Latina women struggled.

Chapter 4: The Oppression Latinas Receive Through Racism and Racial Prejudice

Latinos and Latinas in U.S. frequently face racism and racial prejudice from white Americans. White Americans who live in States bordering Mexico, such as California, Texas, New Mexico, and most virulently in Arizona, dehumanize Latinos and identify them as a threat to their state's resources and "way of life". Many conservative politicians have proposed building fences around the southern border of U.S. to keep Latinos from entering the country. Propaganda circulating about Latino immigrants states that Mexican immigrants in the U.S. wish to take back the land they lost in the U.S- Mexican war, which is now the U.S. states of Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and parts of other states. Propaganda statements like this fuel paranoia in white Americans. Many Americans feel that Latinos all over the country take up too much of the nation's resources in jobs, schools, and public services such as hospitals. As with many other immigrant groups in the United States before them, such as the Italians or Irish, Latinos are seen as bringing crime and disease into U.S. White Americans, including politicians, public figures and news casters, who would be considered racist and bigoted for making similar remarks about other racial, ethnic or religious groups make public statements about Latinos that are accepted and deemed at least halfway appropriate by many. Latinos who live in the United States without full documentation or citizenship are frequently dehumanized by the media and white Americans as "illegals" and "aliens." The following articles offer different perspectives on the manifestation of racism toward Latinos in different locations and times.

In his article “The Settlement Experience of Latinos in Chicago: Segregation, Speculation and the Ecology Model,” the scholar and writer John Betancur discusses the experiences of Latinos who arrived and lived in the city of Chicago from 1916 to 1928 and 1942 to 1964. Though this article does not discuss racism toward Latinos or their employment in the garment industry, it gives good examples of the racism of white Americans toward Latinos. Betancur argues that the Latinos who came to Chicago were effectively imported from their home states and countries by businesses and industries, such as the steel and railroad industries, as a source of labor that would work for less money than their local White U.S. and Black U.S. counterparts (1301). Along with being a cheap source of labor, the Latinos (largely Mexicans) brought in to Chicago were seen as a great solution to labor shortages and a terrific source of temporary labor for short term jobs. Rather than being recognized as full humans with human capabilities and needs, the Latino population of Chicago was seen merely as a set of extra tools or machines meant to aid industries and commerce when needed. Discussing the interrupted nature of Latino employment in Chicago, Betancur writes, “Mexicans have been employed and laid off at convenience, imported, deported and prevented from competing for better jobs” (1302). Betancur’s description conveys how Latinos were seen as having any value or merit beyond that of a dehumanized worker and how white Chicagoans essentially viewed and used Mexicans and other Latinos as machines and tools. The Latinos living in Chicago were viewed as a disposable work force, which was highly convenient to the white Chicagoans who wanted to have extra hands when they were needed

without the responsibility of providing for the “hands” all year long. The fluid nature of Latino employment, unemployment, importation for work and deportation demonstrates their status as commodities that can be and are used without regard to the human or personal significance of their manipulation.

Once they arrived in Chicago, Latinos faced a slew of undesirable circumstances. Most were forced to work in low skilled jobs, earning significantly less than what their white co-workers earned, working long hours, suffering frequent transfers and were effectively forced to live in temporary housing in bunkhouses, railroad camps, cheap hotels, boarding houses and cheap, run down apartments (1303). Most of these buildings were built or made available as temporary living spaces. Though these living spaces were often tiny and in poor condition, the white U.S. property owners that rented the apartments or rooms out to Latinos routinely charged them higher rates much higher rates on space they rented than what they charged European Americans (1303). Betancur shares a white Chicago realtor’s thoughts regarding rent, which said, “Since the Mexicans have come in, the real estate values have declined to almost nothing. But the rental value of the buildings goes up \$10 to \$15 per flat; the Mexicans can only get in a very few places, and they have to pay what is asked” (1303). The realtor’s statement attests to white U.S. property owners’ discrimination toward Latino renters. Because their housing opportunities were so limited, Latinos were forced into housing that strained their budgets and made life more difficult for them. A number of mechanisms were employed to prevent Latinos from moving to more desirable parts of the city and the surrounding suburbs. These included “control of

listings, targeted marketing, claims of affordability, minimum loan amounts, higher closing points for smaller loans or risky areas, restrictions on financing of older houses or homes in racially mixed areas, informal covenants, poor enforcement of regulations, restrictions on children, [and] claims that an apartment was just rented or that a house is under contract” (1308). In addition to confining Latinos to the poorest parts of the city and an overall environment of poverty, the overall housing restrictions placed on Latinos effectively segregated them, along with Black Americans, from higher income, predominantly white Chicagoan sections of the city (1307-8).

Shifting focus from the Chicago area during the first sixty years of the twentieth century to the final decade of the century in California, one sees how racism, even unconscious racism, greatly impacts the lives of Latinos living in America. Although many white Californians do not have overtly racist feelings toward Latinos, group hegemonic racism, personal prejudice and negative stereotypes against Latinos exist. Two California state propositions, one of which targeted Latinos directly, the other indirectly, capitalized on white Californians hegemonically based prejudice towards Latinos. Proposition 187, which appeared on the ballot in 1994, proposed eliminating state social welfare services, such as public education and non-emergency medical care for Latinos who did not have legal documentation. The bill required that all federal employees report immigrants who were in California illegally to authorities. It also required that Latinos suspected of being in California illegally go through the same legal process as those without documentation (Pantoja and Segura 266). The sponsors

of the bill created propaganda that undocumented Latinos from Mexico and other Latin U.S. countries were drawn to California because of its liberal social welfare programs and that they overwhelmed the state's public schools, hospitals, welfare programs and services (Pantoja and Segura 266). The creators and supporters of the bill stated that the "illegal" Latinos in California brought diseases into the state, further straining the State's medical systems. Latinos were also seen as bringing crime and gang activity into the state. Because the proposition encouraged the questioning of all Latinos' legal status in California, it effectively attacked the right of all Latinos to live in California with constant questioning and heckling regarding their legitimacy in the state and right to state services. The authority this bill gave to federal employees to contest a Latino's citizenship or documentation and impose legal action on them for anything seen as dubious forced many, if not most, Latinos to live in a constant state of fear and worry. Noting how the implications of Proposition 187 created an atmosphere of incrimination against Latinos in California. Pantoja and Segura write that the policies created by Proposition 187, "...administratively abolish[ed] the presumption of innocence" (270). Although individuals who live on U.S. soil without citizenship or documentation are in the United States illegally, Segura and Pantoja's statement conveys how the passing of Proposition 187 made Latinos as a whole, and especially Latinos without full citizenship and undocumented Latinos, into full-blown criminals who had to prove their innocence to white Californians and authorities. Sixty-three percent of white Californians voted in

favor of Proposition 187; seventy-seven percent of Latino Californians voted against the Proposition (Pantoja and Segura 266).

In 1996, Proposition 209 was on the California ballot. Though not directly aimed at Latinos like Proposition 187, the bill, which proposed ending affirmative action in the University of California system, lowered Latino Americans' (along with Black Americans') likelihood of attending the low cost, strong academic environments of the state university system (Pantoja and Segura 266). Though members of all racial, ethnic and socio economic groups benefit from receiving college educations, those who are a part of groups historically less likely to receive college educations and are confined to minimum wage and working class jobs benefit the most from college educations, which provide entry into middle and upper middle class jobs and environments, which in turn are more likely to boost group members' economic and social standing, often for multiple generations. Rather than giving minority groups an unfair advantage over hegemonically privileged white Americans in gaining acceptance and access to various opportunities such as acceptance in college, affirmative action only partly levels the playing field to give those who otherwise have lower chance of receiving opportunities a better, more equal chance at winning and achieving positions and opportunities that were formerly out of reach to them.

By eliminating affirmative action programs for Latinos, Latino Americans, Native Americans and others, white Californians refused to give equal opportunities to their Latino, Latino U.S. and Black U.S. counterparts. White Californians' vote to end affirmative action in University of California schools

demonstrates the complexity of white Californians racism and racial prejudice toward towards Latinos, Latino Americans and Black Americans. As with the white Californians who voted for Proposition 187, white Californians' vote to end affirmative action is not a statement of personal, direct, strongly held racism.

White Californians vote to end affirmative action attests to the power of hegemonic racial prejudice, which can cause the dominant group to view measures that benefit less well-off groups as a threat or attack to the dominant group's superior position. The dominant group, white Californians in this case, can protest that affirmative action is unfair to them because it gives minority groups an unfair advantage. In this case, white Californians' superior hegemonic position enabled them to reverse the policy that made the playing field more open and supported equality. Sixty three percent of white Californians voted for Proposition 209 and seventy six percent of Latino Californians voted against the Proposition (Pantoja and Segura, 266).

White Americans are quick to establish stereotypes about newly arrived, recently arrived and resident immigrant groups in U.S. These stereotypes are created to ensure white Americans' position of superiority in U.S.; different racial and ethnic groups are given stereotypes by white Americans when they enter the United States. Along with these stereotypes, the poor among these immigrant groups are categorized into two groups: the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. White Californians' racism toward its Latino population and disapproval of Latino's cultural practices and perceived work ethic causes them to cast working class and poor Latinos as members of the undeserving poor class.

Chapter 5: The Oppression and Exploitation of Undocumented Latino

Immigrant Workers

Many Latino immigrants to the United States face prejudice and racism, and many are seen as a burden to the U.S. economy and social service system by white Americans. Undocumented Latino Immigrants coming into the United States and undocumented Latinos residing in the United States are treated differently than their counterparts who possess documents or have citizenship. Employers who knowingly hire undocumented Latinos and Latinas violate the law. The same employers frequently use their knowledge of Latinos' and Latinas' undocumented status as grounds to exploit them and their labor at a higher level than their exploitation of legal workers.

Though her article does not address the exploitation that Latinos face in the garment industry, thinker and writer Lisa Catanzarite's article, "Brown Collar Jobs: Occupational Segregation and Earnings of Recent Immigrant Latinos," discusses the subordination and exploitation of Latinos, particularly recently immigrated, undocumented Latinos in the labor force. Catanzarite notes the impact of the Immigration Reform and Control Act⁴ (known by the acronym IRCA), enacted in 1986, which made the employment of undocumented immigrants illegal in the United States. Fines were imposed on employers who violated the new law. Citing a finding of the researchers Donato and Massey, Catanzarite shares, "...Donato and Massey (1993)... did find such deterioration and that the undocumented tended to earn subminimum wages after, but not

before, IRCA” (49). Employers’ choice to exploit undocumented workers by reducing their salaries says a lot about the power differences between employers and their undocumented immigrant workers. Rather than suffer the fines imposed on them for hiring undocumented immigrant workers, employers chose to exploit their undocumented workers by restricting them to sub-minimum wage wages. Employers could lower the wages of undocumented immigrant workers without fear of protests from the workers because they (the employers) could fire their undocumented workers at any point with impunity, since continuing the employment of undocumented workers was illegal itself. Presumably, undocumented immigrant workers would have great difficulty obtaining other work, since employers would hesitate to hire them because of the policy established by the IRCA (Catanzarite 68). By continuing to employ undocumented immigrants as workers, employers established a consistently subordinate, submissive, highly exploitable workforce, creating a winning situation for employers and a losing situation for undocumented immigrant workers.

Anti-Immigrant feelings, particularly anti-undocumented-Latino-Immigrant feelings, have been brewing in Southern California for years. Undocumented Latino immigrants are referred to as “illegals” and “aliens” around the country, and debate about the general treatment of undocumented Latino immigrants-whether they have the right to employment in the U.S. and California, what their legal rights should be, whether undocumented immigrant Latinos have the right to social services rages on. This debate came to a head with the passage

of Proposition 187 in California in 1994, described above. Though there have long been Latinos in the state of California who entered into and lived in the state illegally, Proposition 187 brought about a heightened awareness of and militant attitude toward Latinos in California, especially those who are in the state illegally or who lack full documentation. White and other non-Latino Californians who gain knowledge of an individual's or group's illegal or not fully legal status in the state of California but who do not inform authorities of their knowledge can then use their secrecy as a bargaining chip or blackmail, a tool to keep the person in his or her place at the bottom of socio economic hierarchy.

Edna Bonacich and Richard Appelbaum, the authors of the book, *Behind the Label*, which focuses on the garment industry in Los Angeles, discuss the power dynamic between garment contractors who knowingly hire Latinas who are in the United States without documentation, and how the contractor's knowledge of the worker's legal status allows them to exploit the workers all the more. Bonacich and Appelbaum briefly discuss the relationship between undocumented sweatshop workers and the exploitation of garment workers by sweatshop owners, with their statement, "Many of the immigrant workers are undocumented, which means that they often lack the political wherewithal to resist exploitation" (18-19). The writers' statement demonstrates how an employer's knowledge of workers' illegal status enables the employer to exploit the workers with impunity, since the undocumented workers are bound to the employer's silence and protection of their secret.

Further discussing the plight of undocumented garment workers, Bonacich and Appelbaum liken the relationship of undocumented garment workers and exploitative employers to the relationship between slaves and slave-owners in the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries (296). Though they do not equate the two situations, Bonacich and Appelbaum identify striking similarities. Like the African-U.S. slaves of yore, undocumented garment workers who rely on the silence of the heads of sweatshops are powerless to resist the exploitation and burdens factory heads throw at them. The power that the heads of sweatshop have over their undocumented immigrant workers is complete and encompassing, and like the plantation slaves that came before them, undocumented Latino immigrants are, as Bonacich and Appelbaum argue, "...a workforce without rights" (25). Though the exploitation of undocumented immigrant Latinos is not comparable to the exploitation and brutality African U.S. Slaves faced, the situations share some similarities -- an enormous power gap between the worker or slave and the employer or slave owner, the subsequent complete control employers or owners over those working or slaving for them, and elimination of workers' or slaves' rights. Though to very different degrees, undocumented Latino immigrants and African-U.S. slaves are dehumanized by their employers, and are ultimately seen as tools to be exploited (in the Marxist sense) rather than as human beings and workers.

Chapter 6: Explaining Exploitation via Location

A general theme of this thesis is the notion of “explaining exploitation via location.” The term “location” has two meanings in my discussion, and refers both to one’s physical location on the earth and one’s location or position on the social hierarchy pyramid based on one’s gender, race, class, education, wealth and legal status in the United States. Examining these two meanings of the word “location” in the context of the American garment industry, one can identify specific moments in time when the garment industry has developed in regions of the United States in which a particularly exploitable (poor, uneducated, lower class, immigrant or group with questionable legal status) group of people exists. The development of the garment industry in these areas that have a more exploitable population caused me to wonder if the American garment industry developed in these locations because of the exploitable workforces there. The factors in the lives of these workforces (class, race, gender, education, wealth, and legal status) give them a low and unfortunate location on the hierarchical pyramid, leading to various degrees of exploitability.

During and slightly before the first twenty years of the twentieth century, New York City served as a portal for European immigrants coming into the United States and as the hub of the growing garment industry. The availability of work for these immigrants, who were often poor and who frequently lacked the skills necessary for higher paying labor that garment factories and sweatshops provided, offered both employment to the immigrant population and a source of cheap, steady labor for the larger garment industry and factories and shops that

were a part of it. Many of the factories and shops where garments were made were actually unused tenement buildings.

Though not intentionally exploitive, the location of the garment industry's sweatshops in New York City and the city's status as a port for those coming into the United States created an exploitative environment for poor, relatively unskilled immigrant laborers. For immigrants who took jobs in New York City's garment industry, the need for work—even work that paid very little, had long hours and was in hazardous environments—overrode the negative conditions of their employment. The overlap of New York City's status as an entrance for immigrants to the U.S. with the city's exploitative garment industry makes New York City an example of exploitation via location.

In the 1950s, garment production began moving out of New York City into more remote areas, such as western Pennsylvania, upstate New York and Southeastern Massachusetts to avoid the high union labor production costs of New York City. Away from the unions, garment production facilities greatly reduced workers' wages. The garment factories that relocated in western Pennsylvania gained a lot by moving there. As Ellen Israel Rosen points out in her book *Making Sweatshops*, the garment factories that moved into western Pennsylvania could pay workers very, very low wages because of the recent collapse of the local coal mining industry. Rosen writes that this "...led wives and daughters of jobless miners to take jobs at any wage they could" (98). By capitalizing on a recent economic downturn and taking advantage of the area's lowered wages, the garment factories that relocated to Western Pennsylvania took

advantage of the area's poverty and exploited the vulnerability of workers there by taking advantage of their location.

During the same time period, small towns in the South that lacked major industries and had few employment opportunities for their populations began inviting Northern apparel industries to relocate to the South. Garment manufacturing in the South was far less expensive than garment manufacturing in New York City because of Taft-Hartley Act, which was passed in 1947. Also referred to as the right to work act, the Taft Hartley Act made unionization more difficult and allowed garment production companies to pay wages that were well below standard union wages, creating an incentive for garment companies to establish manufacturing sites in the South. By the late 1960s, unions such as the ILGWU were significantly weakened by the relocation of the garment industry to the South. Garment companies' choice to move to the South thwarted union pay regulations and benefits programs for union members. By relocating to the South in areas where the right to work clause was in force, the garment industry chose to end garment worker's protections and rights. The relocation and reestablishment of the garment industry to the anti-union South enabled them to take advantage of and exploit garment workers.

As sweatshops began to re-emerge in the 1980s, Los Angeles became like New York City at the end of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. As a point of entry for many immigrants coming into the U.S. from Asia, Central and South America, many immigrants spend the rest of their lives in the Los Angeles area. Like New York City a century ago, garment

factories and sweatshops have developed in and around Los Angeles. A number of the immigrants coming into America via Los Angeles were poor, and lacked the necessary education and skills for employment in better paying fields. Seeking whatever employment they could find, many immigrant Latina women (along with Asian women) took jobs in garment factories and sweatshops. Few, if any, earn a living wage, which confines garment workers to lives of poverty or near poverty (Bonacich and Applebaum 4). As the authors of the text *Behind the Label* share, garment worker's jobs are very unstable. According to them, a number of garment workers recognize that they are exploited by contractors and manufacturers, but find their employment situations are too vulnerable to fight against the exploitation they face since workers can lose their jobs if they speak up or try to form unions (Bonacich and Applebaum 281). The precarious and vulnerable nature of garment workers' jobs keeps them from ameliorating their situations and fighting for their rights.

The availability of a poor, uneducated immigrant population seeking nearly any form of employment it can get and Los Angeles's location as an entry point for immigrants and as a major garment production center in the U.S. makes it three-pronged vector for exploitation.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Understanding the history of the American garment industry and how certain decisions changed policies, created new realities and evolved, or, to use a

more accurate word, devolved into its current state is key to understanding the world in which garment workers exist.

The American government's decisions to encourage establishment of garment production in East Asian countries as a means of warding off Communism and to import the garments produced by the East Asian countries, its decision to expand and eventually do away with import quotas and its choice to end all forms of protection for the garment industry are responsible for a large part of what the garment industry is today. Policies such as the Taft Hartley Act, which enabled unionized garment companies and factories from the Northeast to move to the anti- union South and drastically reduce worker pay and rights, policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which allowed low cost garments and apparel from low cost labor in Mexico without import taxes or tariffs, and the expansion of free trade policies that dismantled the garment industry's final forms of protection in the name of economic advancement created the framework under which the modern garment industry came to be what it is today.

Globalization and further reductions on import taxes and the wages and working conditions of overseas garment manufacturing allowed greater importation of foreign apparel to the United States. Low cost garment production overseas in low wage countries in Asia thrilled American consumers and forced American apparel companies to lower worker's wages to stay competitive with low cost (due to low workers' wages) East Asian apparel. As more clothes were imported from East Asia, American garment workers' earnings dropped further.

Working conditions declined. As import tariffs and taxes grew smaller, U.S.-based clothing companies began moving their garment production facilities overseas to low wage countries in East Asia, where clothes could be manufactured more cheaply. The working conditions in East Asian garment factories were worse than the working conditions in American garment factories. As American garment workers' earnings dropped, their working conditions did too. American garment companies' adoption of the policies of East Asian garment companies of lower wages paid to workers and lower workplace conditions demonstrates the ripple effect that competition in the apparel market had on the U.S. garment industry.

As the world became more globalized in the 1990s, American garment companies recognized the benefits that lay in exporting their labor overseas. Not only were wages much lower in developing countries, but workers could be exploited more easily in developing countries, since worker protections, such as minimum wage and worksite safety laws were minimal compared to those in the U.S. or non-existent. The flight of much of the American apparel production to East Asia and the working conditions and low pay of the countries there impacted the American garment industry, negatively affecting American garment workers. Low wages and poor working conditions became worse with the return of the sweatshop in the 1980s and 1990s.

When garment unions were strongest they employed lower middle class and working class women and men who earned a living wage from their work in the industry and lived comfortably. As unions, pay, working conditions and the

garment industry itself declined, comparatively higher-class workers left the industry. By the late 1980s and 1990s, the working conditions and pay in many garment factories closely resembled those of their counterparts in East Asian countries.

Enter Latinas into this situation. Few other people carry as much oppression with them as poor Latina women in the U.S., especially undocumented Latina women. Oppressed by men of all races and ethnicities through their gender, oppressed by all non-Latinos through their race, oppressed economically, and , for those who are not documented, oppressed by the legal system, these women have a particularly poor location on the hegemonic pyramid. As noted in the introduction, an individual's or groups' location on the pyramid corresponds with his, her or their power in society and his, her or their exploitability. The multiple levels of oppression of Latinas who are a part of the American garment industry gives them an unfortunate location on the hegemonic totem pole and makes them really vulnerable to exploitation. Though many of the Latinas working in the garment industry are aware that they are exploited, addressing this issue publicly will likely get them fired. The risk of speaking up is particularly high for undocumented Latinas whose bosses know that they are undocumented, since any sign of disobedience can result in their being fired without prospects of another job, being reported to legal authorities, and deported. The delicate nature of these women's employment prevents them from speaking up for better pay, better workplaces and their rights as workers. As the scholars and writers Edna Bonacich and Richard P. Appelbaum state in their text *Behind the Label*, the

modern American garment industry has created a workforce without rights. The same can be said for many of the women workers who are a part of the East Asian garment industry.

The work situations of Latina garment workers in America and Asian garment workers in various East Asian countries mirror one another. As the salaries and working conditions of one group of workers drop on one side in contractor's and manufacturer's efforts to cut costs, salaries and working conditions among the other group of workers drop as well to maintain their presence in the competition. The fact that sweatshops and sweatshop-like workplaces exist throughout East Asian countries and in the United States speaks to the intensity of the competition between the two areas, and both sides' willingness to exploit workers to remain competitive with one another. Until one set of producers (the U.S. or East Asia) is willing and able to agree on basic working standards for their workers, there is little hope that working conditions for Latina garment workers in the United States will improve.

Notes

1. See “In Newark, Wresting a Fatal Factory Fire from Oblivion;” “1910 Newark Factory Fire;” and “The 1911 Triangle Factory Fire” for more information about these fires.

2. A description of byssinosis is available at “Understanding Byssinosis (Brown Lung Disease).”

3. By “Westerners,” I mean Europeans and residents of the U.S. of European descent, such as myself

4. See “[USCIS—Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 \(IRCA\)](#)” for a description of this law.

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