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Claremont Mckenna College

How Environmentalism, Nationalism, and Civil Rights Shape Corporate  
Social Responsibility in the Apparel Industry

submitted to

Professor Jon Shields

by

Chloe Gubbay

for

Senior Thesis

Fall 2021

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## I. Abstract

Now more than ever, fashion has become a way of expressing political identity. The changing moral convictions of corporate leaders and the preferences of their consumers have led to the rise of three popular models of corporate social responsibility: Sustainability, American-Made, and Diversity and Inclusion. This thesis will first describe the history of these three models, and then it will report how fashion businesses have adopted each of the models today. It will further explore the extent to which some models are blended—and why some blends are more popular than others. While some models go together because of our politics, others are more likely to blend despite our politics. Finally, the thesis concludes by considering the current success and limits of these models.

## II. Introduction

A century ago, America's then-dominant Protestant culture nurtured a single model of corporate social responsibility, one that stressed aid to the needy. In recent decades, however, as the nation's entrepreneurial class became more fractured politically, so too have corporate models of social responsibility. Three popular ones have emerged: The first rooted in environmentalism; the second in economic nationalism, and the third in civil rights. These models have remade the apparel industry, driven in part by the moral convictions and profit motives of corporate leaders, and in part by the preferences of their consumers.

To a degree, these models reflect conflicting partisan programs. Thus, rarely do fashion companies committed to an "America-first" nationalism also embrace a progressive one rooted in civil rights, popularly called "diversity and inclusion." Yet some of these clashing models import better into the apparel industry than their polarized political constituencies suggest. For example, environmentalism and economic nationalism—so inescapably at odds in political struggles over other industries, like coal mining—fit comfortably together in the fashion industry, especially in the cases of small- and medium-sized businesses. In such cases setting up shop in America is often the greenest choice.

Before reaching these larger conclusions, though, this thesis will first trace the development of these three models of social responsibility. Then it will turn to ways in

which fashion businesses have adopted each of the models. It will further explore the extent to which some models are blended—and why some blends are more popular and advertised than others. Finally, the thesis concludes by considering the promise and limits of these approaches to social responsibility.

### III. Three Models of Corporate Social Responsibility

In this section, I have outlined the three dominant models of corporate social responsibility that are remaking the fashion industry in the United States.

#### a. The History of Corporate Social Responsibility

Over time, corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs have been implemented into businesses across multiple industries, helping firms survive while also providing some benefit to society. A successful CSR program is said to provide a “win-win-win” outcome: the company makes profits, the customer is satisfied with the product or service, and greater society reaps a positive outcome.<sup>1</sup> The concept is now so widespread that customers often expect to see the social goals of the companies they are buying from before they make a purchase.

It wasn't always thus. CSR in the United States began as corporate philanthropy more than a century ago. In the 1800s, Andrew Carnegie motivated people within his business to donate to social causes. Other titans of industry, such as John Rockefeller, soon followed suit. Nonetheless, the first community foundation wasn't founded until 1914, when Frederick Goff created the Cleveland Foundation. Its purpose was to assess and support the community's needs and to accept gifts from multiple donors rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Benedetto, Anthony, “Corporate Social Responsibility As an Emerging Business Model in Fashion Marketing, *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*.” 2017. 8:4, 251-265, DOI: [10.1080/20932685.2017.1329023](https://doi.org/10.1080/20932685.2017.1329023)

one. Not until the 1940s, however, did businesses, not just employees, come together to support charities.

Howard Bowen, considered by many to be the father of CSR, marked the beginning of modern corporate social responsibility by publishing "Social Responsibilities of Businessmen" in 1953.<sup>2</sup> Bowen believed that large businesses had the resources and thus ability to influence the lives of citizens. In defining CSR, Bowen said that "CSR refers to the obligation of businessmen to follow those policies, take those decisions or follow those action lines that are desired by the objectives and values of our society." According to a Forbes survey, this definition was approved by more than 90 percent of the businessmen of that time.<sup>3</sup>

The definition popularized by Bowen put social responsibility into the hands of individual businessmen. CSR as we know it today, where a business at large takes on the responsibility of various causes, began to flourish in the 1970s when the Committee for Economic Development created the "social contract" between business and society.<sup>4</sup> The social contract outlined three responsibilities: "1) provide jobs and economic growth through well-run businesses, 2) run businesses fairly and honestly regarding employees and customers, and 3) become more broadly involved in improving the conditions of the

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<sup>2</sup> Bowen, Howard, et al. *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*. paper ed. University of Iowa Press, 2013. *Project MUSE* muse.jhu.edu/book/29080.

<sup>3</sup> Farcane, Nicoleta, and Eusebiu Bureana. "History of 'Corporate Social Responsibility' Concept." *Oeconomica.uab.ro*. N.p., 2015. Web. 27 Nov. 2021. Page 36.

<sup>4</sup> The Committee for Economic Development is a nonprofit public policy center made up of chief executive officers of leading US companies. The social contract, called "The Social Responsibilities of Business Corporations," can be found here:

<https://www.ced.org/reports/social-responsibilities-of-business-corporations>

community and environment in which it operates.” The three models I will delineate in the following sections are extensions of these conditions.

Academic literature on the various models and practices of corporate social responsibility has shaped how CSR has been used by businesses over time. Professor at the University of Georgia, Archie B Carroll, generalized the above social contract. His definition of CSR is packaged as a 3-step approach that socially responsible businesses are meant to take on: first, companies adopt principles or values, they then create and execute formal processes to respond to these principles, and finally, they should develop policies to manage specific issues.<sup>5</sup> In the early 1990s, professor Donna J. Wood updated Carroll’s model, adding information on how to assess CSR at the institutional, organizational, and individual levels.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s, academic research on corporate social responsibility rapidly expanded as many of the major companies we hear about today began to communicate their contributions to the public. At this time, moreover, researchers were finding that implementing models of CSR was leading to both better social performance and financial performance for the majority of businesses. Increased financial success became a large motivator for other companies to deepen their commitment to CSR.<sup>7</sup> As more businesses began to implement models of CSR over the years, customers have grown to expect and demand it. According to a 2019 survey by Markstein, an integrated

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<sup>5</sup> Wartick, Steven L., and Philip L. Cochran. “The Evolution of the Corporate Social Performance Model.” *The Academy of Management Review*, vol. 10, no. 4, Academy of Management, 1985, pp. 758–69, <https://doi.org/10.2307/258044>.

<sup>6</sup> Wood, Donna. *Corporate Social Performance Revisited*. Vol. 16, No. 4, Academy of Management, 1991, *Jstor*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/258977>.

<sup>7</sup> Farcane, 2015, page 40.

communications agency, and Certus Insights, a public opinion firm, 70 percent of consumers want to know what the brands they support are doing to address social and environmental issues, and 46 percent pay close attention to a brand's social responsibility efforts when they buy a product.<sup>8</sup>

Over time, the public has seen a diversification of social good through corporate social responsibility. When CSR was born in the early 1940s, the causes that were financially supported were selected by a few wealthy elites. Today, a business can support and promote any of the causes they believe in. Thus, there is much less consensus in the corporate world about what it means to promote the social good. When a brand decides it wants to weave CSR into its business, there are many models that it can choose to implement. Even so, past research suggests that three main models of corporate social responsibility are prevalent in the apparel industry today: environmentalism, Americanism, and diversity and inclusion.

## b. The Sustainability “Green” Model

The fashion industry is one of the largest and most environmentally damaging industries in the world. It pushes the use of natural resources past its limits through mass production. Over the last 30 years, however, people have become more aware of how damaging the industry is and they are more willing to make changes to their purchasing

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<sup>8</sup> “Consumers Expect the Brands They Support to Be Socially Responsible.” *Business Wire*, 2 Oct. 2019, <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20191002005697/en/Consumers-Expect-the-Brands-they-Support-to-be-Socially-Responsible>.

habits to influence the industry, motivating some brands to take on green models of corporate social responsibility.

In the United States, the fashion industry became environmentally damaging when mass production of clothing became common. The opening of the first factories in the 1810s put clothing items more regularly within the reach of the public and not just the elite. By the 1940s, new factory methods increased efficiency and mass-produced clothing started to become widely available and attainable: “What was once regarded as a high-cost product, designed to last and be mended and altered as necessary, [had] since become a disposable item, with little attention being paid to its quality and craftsmanship.”<sup>9</sup> In the second half of the 20th century, Americans were buying clothing at a dizzying speed. It wasn't until the 1990s and 2000s, however, when the public grew aware of the impact of their high rates of clothing consumption, that the term “fast fashion” was coined.

Fast fashion is a term derived from "fast food" and is used to describe clothes that are produced quickly and inexpensively to fit the latest trends. Top fast fashion brands, such as H&M, Zara, and TopShop, are associated with overproduction, waste, terrible working conditions, and destructive environmental impact. More recently, other brands such as Fashion Nova, Zaful, Missguided, and Boohoo have harnessed the online world to produce larger quantities of cheaper products at an even more destructive rate. The fast-fashion model is extremely profitable, as these companies have been able to get away with using unethical practices to produce inexpensively.

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<sup>9</sup> Cline, Elizabeth L. *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*. Portfolio/Penguin, 2012.

The rise of affordable fast fashion led to prolific overproduction and pollution. Today, the typical consumer wears a clothing item only for a fraction of its useful life before getting rid of it, contributing to a doubling in clothing production over the past 15 years. As of 2020, 92 million tons of clothing (mostly cotton or polyester) will become waste every year.<sup>10</sup> The lack of infrastructure for collection and recycling means that an excessive amount of clothing ends up in landfills: less than 1 percent of all clothing is recycled at the end of its use. Moreover, half a million tons of microfibers end up in the ocean every year, equal to over 50 billion plastic bottles.<sup>11</sup> 20 percent of all industrial water pollution is attributed to textile dyeing and treatment.<sup>12</sup> Air quality suffers as well: approximately ~10 percent of all CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are due to fashion manufacturing.<sup>13</sup> The fashion industry, moreover, is incredibly resource-intensive. For example, it takes 20,000 liters of water to produce a single T-shirt and pair of jeans out of conventional cotton.<sup>14</sup>

During the same time that fast fashion brands were growing in popularity in the United States, people also began to realize the detrimental damage the industry had on the environment. Both designers and consumers started to take action, and by 1990 these efforts were becoming more visible. In that year, for example, the *New York Times* and *Vogue* drew public attention to the rising environmental trend in the fashion world.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ellen MacArthur Foundation, “A New Textiles Economy: Redesigning Fashion’s Future,” 2017, [https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/assets/downloads/A-New-Textiles-Economy\\_Full-Report](https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/assets/downloads/A-New-Textiles-Economy_Full-Report). Accessed August 12, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> UNFCCC, “UN Helps Fashion Industry Shift to Low Carbon,” 2018. <https://unfccc.int/news/un-helps-fashion-industry-shift-to-low-carbon>. Accessed August 12, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> WWF, “Sustainable Agriculture: Cotton,” 2019, <https://www.worldwildlife.org/industries/cotton>. Accessed August 12, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Ertekin, Zeynep, Attik, Deniz, “Sustainable Markets: Motivating Factors, Barriers, and Remedies for Mobilization of Slow Fashion” *Journal of Macromarketing*. 2014.

Meanwhile, British fashion designer Katharine Hamnett, considered one of the first designers to combine environmental activism with fashion, gave a speech about the environmental impacts of fashion at the United Nations, sparking fashion brands to evaluate their environmental impact in their messaging. In the following years, designers such as Giorgio Armani, Natalie Chanin, and Stella McCartney founded lines that used sustainable materials, promoted hand-sewn products, and introduced animal-friendly (no leather, no fur) products, respectfully. In the decade that followed, campaigns such as Fashion Revolution Day and Second-Hand September brought attention to the detrimental environmental effects of fast fashion.<sup>16</sup>

The growing awareness of the impact of the fast fashion system also paved the way for the emergence of the slow fashion movement. ‘Slow fashion,’ a term first coined by Kate Fletcher from the Center for Sustainable Fashion (UK) in 2007, links fashion with social responsibility. The “Slow Design Manifesto” presented at the “Slow Design” symposium in Milan in 2006, describes the slow approach as offering the time to produce, appreciate, and cultivate quality.<sup>17</sup> Slow fashion products were originally intended to be an alternative to mass-produced clothing and disposable fashion, but its meaning has been broadened: it now represents an approach in which designers, buyers, retailers, and consumers are more aware of the impacts of products on communities, resources, and ecosystems. Therefore, slow fashion, which is synonymous with

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<sup>16</sup> “About Fashion Revolution.” *Fashion Revolution*, 17 Sept. 2021, <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/about/>. And Davis, Jessica. “Five Ways to Be Sustainable during Secondhand September and Beyond.” *Harper's BAZAAR*, 1 Sept. 2021, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/fashion/fashion-news/a28911531/what-is-second-hand-september/>.

<sup>17</sup> Ertekin, Zeynep, Attik, Deniz, “Sustainable Markets: Motivating Factors, Barriers, and Remedies for Mobilization of Slow Fashion” *Journal of Macromarketing*. 2014. Page 57.

sustainable fashion and green fashion, refers to using an environmentally friendly approach to designing, manufacturing, and consuming clothes that protect our earth. For example, companies that take this mission seriously extend the life of their clothes by using recycled materials and creating high-quality long-lasting goods.

In recent years, it has been evident that consumers in the United States desire to buy sustainable products. The results of a 2019 Accenture survey show that nearly three-quarters of consumers (72 percent) say they buy more environmentally friendly products today than they did five years ago.<sup>18</sup> Additionally in 2019, a Statista survey recorded that 78 percent of respondents stated that purchasing a garment described as eco-friendly made them feel good.<sup>19</sup> Although consumers feel good about sustainable purchases, it is not always attainable or the best option for them, given financial pressures and the ease of purchasing from fast fashion companies. Nonetheless, since the beginning of 2020, *Lyst Insights* has seen a 37 percent increase in searches for sustainability-related keywords, with the average monthly searches increasing from 27,000 in 2019 to over 32,000 in 2021.<sup>20</sup>

Growing consumer interest has motivated many fashion brands to step up their commitments to operate more responsibly. Moreover, as a response to increased customer demand, many fashion entrepreneurs who care about environmental issues have started brands dedicated to sustainable fashion. With all of these new players in the market, the

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<sup>18</sup> Lacy, Peter. *The Circular Economy Handbook: Realizing the Circular Advantage*. 2020. Accessed 15 Aug. 2021.

<sup>19</sup> "Positive Feeling From Eco-Friendly Apparel Product Purchase U.S. 2019." *Statista*. N.p, 2021. Web. 27 Nov. 2021.

<sup>20</sup> "The 2020 Conscious Fashion Report." *Lyst Insights*, 5 Oct. 2021, <https://www.lyst.com/data/2020-conscious-fashion-report/>.

industry is growing: the sustainable fashion market is expected to grow from \$6.35 to \$9.81 billion in 2025 and \$15.7 billion in 2030 at a growth rate of 9.1 percent.<sup>21</sup>

Thanks to these trends, marketers at fashion brands have learned that values-based messaging is an increasingly powerful tool for capturing the rising generation of customers. Hence, references to sustainability in the annual reports of 15 of the world's largest fashion companies have more than doubled in the last five years.<sup>22</sup> Companies also face internal pressure as workers within fashion companies demand a corporate mission that reflects their internal, progressive values. Politically, the American government is also under pressure to bring environmental policies and regulations to fashion that will help them meet global environmental needs. Though President Trump exited the Paris Agreement, an international accord intended to curb catastrophic climate change, the United States officially rejoined once Biden was sworn into office.<sup>23</sup> Joining the agreement puts new pressure on political and fashion leaders to make green changes to the fashion industry.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, sustainable investing, called “green financing” has become much more mainstream, fueled by an increase of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) funds. The total assets in sustainable funds hit a record high of almost \$1.7 trillion at the end of

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<sup>21</sup> The Business Research Company. “Sustainable Fashion Market Analysis Shows The Market Progress In Attempt To Decrease Pollution In The Global Ethical Fashion Market 2020.” *GlobeNewswire NewsRoom*, The Business Research Company, 28 Oct. 2020, <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2020/10/28/2116073/0/en/Sustainable-Fashion-Market-Analysis-Shows-The-Market-Progress-In-Attempt-To-Decrease-Pollution-In-The-Global-Ethical-fashion-Market-2020.html#:~:text=The growth is mainly due,at a CAGR of 9.1percent>.

<sup>22</sup> Kent, Sarah, 2021. *The Sustainability Gap. Business of Fashion*, pp 8.

<sup>23</sup> “U.S. Officially Rejoins Paris Agreement On Climate Change.” *NPR*. N.p., 2021. Web. 27 Nov. 2021.

<sup>24</sup> “Fashion For Global Climate Action” *Unfccc.int*, <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/sectoral-engagement/fashion-for-global-climate-action>.

2020, according to data provider Morningstar.<sup>25</sup> More often, fashion companies have been responding to all of these motivations for change by introducing and highlighting a green model of CSR.

Alan Jope, CEO of Unilever, emphasized that “any company that wants to stay relevant in the future should think about sustainable behavior.”<sup>26</sup> Another fashion company stated in 2021, “for our first ten years, sustainability was not even in the top five reasons why customers choose our company. Now it is one of the top two reasons. Customers want to see data on the environmental impact. Transparency is crucial.” The green model of CSR has grown rapidly in recent years due to people realizing the reality of the state of the environment, and it is not going away. However, it’s hardly the only model of CSR on the rise.

### c. The American-Made Model

There is a certain prestige that comes with a “Made in the USA” label and marketing departments of many fashion brands know it has impressive selling power. Like the countless brands who are promoting sustainability, “Made in America” is today an aspect of social responsibility that resonates with consumers. Both “sustainable” and “Made in America” create a sense of “doing good” for the brand.

A desire for clothing that is “Made in America” is as old as American patriotism. During the American Revolution, the consumption of domestic goods demonstrated

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<sup>25</sup> Kent, Sarah. “The Sustainability Gap.” *Business of Fashion*. 2021. pp.11.

<sup>26</sup> Lacy, 2020.

resistance against taxation from Britain. In response to the British Townshend Acts of 1767 and 1768, Quakers in Boston started the Homespun Movement, which encouraged the purchase of apparel goods that were manufactured in the colonies. The movement also called upon patriotic women to make their own textiles in domestic sewing circles.<sup>27</sup> American women, therefore, demonstrated their newfound independence and allegiance to their country by designing and manufacturing their clothing together.

During this time, the colonists fought to be perceived as an independent political and economic stronghold. There was a push from early American political leaders, therefore, for domestic industrialism. The Tariff of 1789, which was the first major piece of legislation passed after the ratification of the United States Constitution, protected American manufacturers by levying duties on imports that competed with them. According to Kate Haulman in *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America*, “[this] was the first step in Alexander Hamilton’s plan to shape the United States into an industrial nation in the model of England and wean it from dependence on the former mother country.”<sup>28</sup> Since then, a desire for American made clothes has ebbed and flowed often in response to national crises.<sup>29</sup> During World War 1, for example, the American government strongly encouraged citizens to support the war effort by purchasing American-made goods. Purchasing clothing and other goods manufactured domestically

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<sup>27</sup> Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher, and Cairns Collection of American Women Writers. *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*. 1st ed., Knopf, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Haulman, Kate. *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2011. *EBSCOhost*, search-ebSCOhost-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=380323&site=ehost-live&scope=site. Page 214.

<sup>29</sup> Parkins, Wendy, ed. *Dress, Gender, Citizenship: Fashioning the Body Politic*. Oxford: Berg, 2002.

became an accessible way for anyone to support their country during the war, unifying the country. The “Made in America” label was a powerful way to promote patriotism through consumer culture.<sup>30</sup>

Later, in the 1940s, the “American look” began to take its form, distinct from the Parisian trends that were dominating the fashion space at the time. Fashion historian Valerie Steele notes that during the 1940s, "...the term ‘American Look’ functioned primarily as a promotional tool that sold clothes by generating pride in American-made goods.”<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, during this war period, the “American Look” was a form of self-identification and connection that fed into pride for the nation.

Since the 1960s, however, there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of goods manufactured locally due to outsourcing overseas: since then, clothing produced in the United States declined from 95 to 2 percent.<sup>32</sup> This decline is due to the emergence of large textile mills and factories in China and other developing countries in Asia and Latin America. In comparison to American operations, factories abroad offer cheaper labor, raw materials, manufacturing, and they have a greater capacity for larger orders. American labor is much more expensive than other countries, and that premium has increased over time. For example, the average U.S. garment worker makes about 38 times the wage of his or her counterpart in Bangladesh.<sup>33</sup> By 1980, even though 70

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<sup>30</sup> Idacavage, Sara. "Fashion History Lesson: The Evolving Concept Of 'Made In The U.S.A.'." *Fashionista*. N.p., 2021. Web. 27 Nov. 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Steele, Valerie. Introduction to *Claire McCardell: Redefining Modernism*, edited by Kohle Yohannan and Nancy Wolf. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998.

<sup>32</sup> Vatz, Stephanie. "Why America Stopped Making Its Own Clothes - The Lowdown." *KQED*. N.p., 2021. Web. 27 Nov. 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Cline, 2012, Page 44.

percent of the clothing pieces Americans bought were still made domestically, retail chains like Gap Inc. and J.C. Penney began slowly transitioning away from American manufacturing. They instead focused on the design and marketing of clothing and then outsourced production to factories overseas to tremendously reduce costs.

American trade reforms further lowered these costs, especially the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. During this period, early adopters began dividing up each step of the production process, sending work to locations that were the least expensive for the type of work needed. For example, Gap was ordering its clothing from more than 1,200 different factories in 42 countries by 2003.<sup>34</sup> As a result of all of this, between 1990 and 2011, 750,000 apparel manufacturing jobs in the US disappeared.<sup>35</sup>

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average American household spent over 10 percent of their income on clothing and shoes in 1960, which is equivalent to roughly \$4,000 today.<sup>36</sup> The average person bought fewer than 25 garments each year and about 95 percent of those clothes were made in the United States. That number dropped from 70 percent in 1980 to 50 percent in 1990 to a mere 30 percent in 2000. By 2013 the average American household spent less than 3.5 percent of their budget on clothing and shoes, or under \$1,800. Even though they spend less, however, Americans now buy more clothing than ever before: nearly 20 billion garments a year, close to 70 pieces of clothing per person a year, or one clothing purchase every 5 days. Of these 20

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<sup>34</sup> Cline, 2012, Page 53.

<sup>35</sup> Cline, 2012, Page 37.

<sup>36</sup> Vatz, 2021.

billion garments that we purchase a year, only about 2 percent of them are made in the United States.<sup>37</sup>

As Americans got accustomed to purchasing cheaper clothing, they also began to demand more of it. These demands were met by the aforementioned fast fashion industry. While fast fashion allows American consumers to purchase lots of clothing fast, it also yields lower-quality products. This is because items are produced cheaply, quickly, and without oversight from the designers themselves.

Thus, throughout the 2000s, and especially after the financial crisis of 2008, a smaller subset of consumers began to demand high-quality fashion goods.<sup>38</sup> Both newly established American-made brands and those with long histories of domestic production found waves of new customers: trendsetters who forewent cheap fast fashion for long-lasting pieces would both support the economy and help them save money in the long run. During this time, the style of “American Heritage” became trendy, signifying craftsmanship, ruggedness, and patriotism. Examples of the brands that thrived during this period include Pendleton Sweaters, Red Wing Boots, Gitman Bros., Brooks Bros., and Filson. Most of these brands appealed to a subset of fashion-savvy American men.

Today, many consumers try to buy goods made in America, even if they are more difficult to find. According to a 2020 survey by the Reshoring Institute, 70 percent of the respondents indicated that they prefer American-made products, and 83 percent responded that they would pay up to 20 percent more for products made domestically.

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<sup>37</sup> "Spotlight On Fashion Statistics." *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*. N.p., 2012. Web. 27 Nov. 2021.

<sup>38</sup> Pierson, David. "As Trump Pushes For U.S. Manufacturing, 'Made In America' Is Losing Its Luster In The Fashion World." *Los Angeles Times*. N.p., 2017. Web. 27 Nov. 2021.

Consumers take comfort in brands that exclusively produce in America because the tag “Made in America” carries with it the expectation that the goods are high-quality and were made ethically. This is reflected in the survey results: 46 percent of respondents believe that products manufactured in America are of higher quality than those manufactured overseas.<sup>39</sup> According to another survey from Consumer Reports in 2015, 80 percent of people who buy American believe the goods are made under better working conditions. Moreover, many consumers like to purchase American goods for patriotic reasons. The same survey found that 8 percent buy “Made in the USA” to keep manufacturing jobs at home, 87 percent to help the American economy, and 62 percent to be patriotic.<sup>40</sup>

Just as there is an interest from consumers to purchase in the US, there is interest from a subset of business owners to produce and manufacture in the United States for the same ethical and nationalistic reasons. Additionally, President Trump’s push to bring more jobs back to the United States created an incentive for brands with “Made in America” tags. While there are multiple reasons that some companies care about manufacturing exclusively in America, I coined “Made in America” as a model of social responsibility because of the abundance of companies that produce domestically to improve the American economy and create more jobs with ethical working conditions.

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<sup>39</sup> Institute, Reshoring. "Survey Says: Americans Prefer "MADE IN USA"." *Prnewswire.com*. N.p., 2020. Web. 27 Nov. 2021.

<sup>40</sup> "Made In America." *Consumer Reports*. N.p., 2015. Web. 27 Nov. 2021.

#### d. The Diversity and Inclusion Model

The American fashion industry is built on a history of exclusion. Founded on slavery and influenced by unwavering western beauty ideals, the road to inclusion has been long and slow. However, beginning in the 2010s, and especially after the death of George Floyd in May 2020, apparel companies, manufacturers, and the media have faced immense pressure from activists and consumers to revolutionize the face of fashion and increase representation in company leadership. According to *Business of Fashion* journalist Sarah Kent, “the pressure facing fashion companies to operate more inclusively is a reflection of broader social, political, and technological shifts that are creating new opportunities and pitfalls for anyone running a global fashion enterprise.”<sup>41</sup>

In their *Briefing of Diversity and Inclusion in American Fashion*, the Council of Fashion Designers of America describe diversity as “the mix, simply a measure of difference” and inclusion as “a climate in which diverse individuals come together to form a collective whole, enabling and empowering individuals to make contributions consistent with their beliefs and backgrounds.”<sup>42</sup> Increasing diversity and inclusion across the board means building brands that are inclusive of all races, genders, abilities, and body types in their organization, in the way they present themselves, and in the customers they serve. Today, leaders in the industry claim that the future of a fashion brand is reliant

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<sup>41</sup>Kent, Sarah. "Fashion's Long Road To Inclusivity." *The Business of Fashion*. N.p., 2019. Web. 27 Nov. 2021.

<sup>42</sup>Magleri, Joseph. "Briefing On Diversity and Inclusion In American Fashion." *Cfda.com*. N.p., 2019. Web. 27 Nov. 2021.

on them making changes towards diversity, equity, and inclusion, but that was not always the case.

As early as the 16th century, European states invaded the continents of Asia, Africa, and South America in search of resources and cheap labor. In the 1800s, the southern United States was a major cotton producer and exporter. Cotton production increased during the Industrial Revolution, and African people were kidnapped from their home continent and enslaved in huge cotton plantations in the United States and elsewhere.<sup>43</sup> Though the slave trade was abolished in 1808, slavery continued on the American cotton plantations for decades, paving the way for racial segregation. By 1850, 1.8 of the 3.2 million slaves in the country's fifteen slave states were producing cotton. Slave labor was producing over two billion pounds of cotton per year in 1860.<sup>44</sup>

While there are still prominent issues of diversity and inclusion in the fashion industry today, trends towards raising diversity and equity standards in both the corporate, political, and educational spaces began gaining momentum in America during the 1980s. During this time, there was a cultural revolution sweeping through universities and major foundations as well as the mass media, professional associations, the legal system, and the workplace: affirmative action programs. According to Frederick Lynch in *The Diversity Machine*, the rise of affirmative action programs lead to a greater interest in diversity management, which began to influence the American workplace in the 1990s.

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<sup>43</sup>Bailey, Ronald. "The Other Side of Slavery: Black Labor, Cotton, and Textile Industrialization in Great Britain and the United States." *Agricultural History*, vol. 68, no. 2, Agricultural History Society, 1994, pp. 35–50, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3744401>.

<sup>44</sup>Abbott, Franky. "Cotton Gin and the Expansion of Slavery." *Cotton Gin and the Expansion of Slavery* | DPLA, <https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/cotton-gin-and-the-expansion-of-slavery>.

Lynch explains that “...pioneers in diversity management began to build a social policy machine to extend their reach into the American workplace, by the mid-1990s, they had enjoyed considerable success with many major corporations bringing in diversity programming.”<sup>45</sup> By 1995, a survey of the top Fortune 50 corporations by A.T. Kearney Executive Search found that 70 percent had formal diversity management programs in place, 8 percent were developing programs, and 8 percent had scattered programs; 12 percent had no such programs in place.”<sup>46</sup> In the fashion space in the 80s and 90s, brands such as United Colors of Benetton began to pave the way by demonstrating greater representation and communicating diversity and inclusion practices with their customers, inspiring other brands to do so as well.

While awareness of these issues has led to more companies instituting CSR programs for diversity and inclusion, there is still more work to be done in the American fashion industry today. As discussed by *Not What it Seems* author Mel Watt:

“The fashion industry has a long history of misappropriating black culture; stealing the intellectual property of black designers; tokenizing black models as ‘exotic,’ having whitewashed runways; lacking representative social media feeds or press trips; using blackface in advertising; erasing black designers; pushing white European beauty standards; and adopting anti-black hiring practices and workplace bias. These problems are similarly upheld in fashion media.”<sup>47</sup>

Companies are beginning to pay closer attention to these issues, often after being called out for racist behavior. Companies such as Gucci, Chanel, and Burberry all hired diversity and inclusion officers in 2019, and Ralph Lauren has diversity councils

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<sup>45</sup> Lynch, 2002, Page 3.

<sup>46</sup> Lynch, 2002, Page 7.

<sup>47</sup> Watt, Mel. “The Fashion Industry Has a Long History of Racism.” *Not What It Seems*, 28 June 2020, <https://notwhatitseams.substack.com/p/the-fashion-industry-has-a-long-history>.

embedded at every level of the company to offer feedback on everything from product design to recruitment. Greater representation is also beginning to occur in the fashion media space at large. In 2017, for example, Edward Enninful became the first black editor-in-chief of *British Vogue*.<sup>48</sup> A year later Tyler Mitchell photographed Beyoncé for *American Vogue*'s September issue, the first black photographer to shoot a cover in the magazine's history.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, Virgil Abloh became the first black man to be an artistic director at an LVMH-owned brand.<sup>50</sup>

In recent years, companies have begun to respond to the trends towards greater inclusion of models of color and plus-sized bodies through representation in ads, magazines, and runway shows. Fashion's face to the world is becoming more diverse. In 2019 an all-inclusive sizing online retailer 11 Honoré opened New York Fashion Week, with the event's first-ever fashion show featuring plus-size models in luxury designer apparel.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the *Fashion Spot's 2021 Diversity Report* examining runway shows in New York, London, Milan, and Paris proclaimed Fall 2021 as the most racially diverse season on record. From Spring 2015 to Fall 2021, the percentage of models being women of color has steadily increased. As a reference point, in Fall 2018, only 30 percent of models were women of color. Three years later that number jumped to 43 percent.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "Edward Enninful Is Part of the BoF 500." *BoF 500*, The Business of Fashion, 24 Mar. 2021, <https://www.businessoffashion.com/community/people/edward-enninful>.

<sup>49</sup> "Tyler Mitchell Is Part of the BoF 500." *BoF 500*, The Business of Fashion, 24 Mar. 2021, <https://www.businessoffashion.com/community/people/tyler-mitchell>.

<sup>50</sup> "Virgil Abloh Is Part of the BoF 500." *BoF 500*, The Business of Fashion, 24 Mar. 2021, <https://www.businessoffashion.com/community/people/virgil-ablohy>.

<sup>51</sup> Kent, 2021.

<sup>52</sup> Cichowski, Heather. "Report: Fashion Month Fall 2021 Is the Most Racially Diverse Season on Record, but Size, Age and Gender Representation Plunge." *TheFashionSpot*, 25 Mar. 2021, <https://www.thefashionspot.com/runway-news/861726-diversity-report-fashion-month-fall-2021/>.

With the growing momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement, the fashion industry has felt increased pressure from consumers to provide greater transparency into their policies regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion. Thus, fashion companies are working harder now more than ever to implement diversity and inclusion as a model of corporate social responsibility. Designer and advocate Céline Semaan, founder of fashion think-tank Slow Factory, stated in an interview, “For me, an inclusive industry is not only an inclusive spread of models of various sizes and skin colors; it’s a C-suite that’s as diverse, [and] as inclusive, that has embraced different cultures.”<sup>53</sup> Ben Barry, chair of fashion at Ryerson University in Toronto, adds, “What’s missing right now is an understanding that the barriers preventing inclusion are systemic, so the transformation needs to be systemic. Inclusion isn’t a checkmark.”<sup>54</sup> According to the Council of Fashion Designers of America, “in an inclusive work environment, individuals can comfortably express who they are and don’t have to downplay their differences. Their voice is heard and recognized, and ultimately, this empowers them to make their best contributions and do their best work.” Without inclusivity, diversity — in both the media and the leadership of retail companies — is ineffective. In addition to improving diversity and inclusion in the way they represent their brand through models and the media, fashion leaders are taking notice of the importance of embracing diversity and inclusion within their companies.

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<sup>53</sup> Kent, 2021.

<sup>54</sup> Kent, 2021.

In addition to racial diversity, the importance of size-inclusivity has gained traction in the 2000s, despite there still being a lot of work to be done. A study published in 2016 in the *International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology, and Education* revealed that "...the average size of an American woman is now between 16 to 18, which is an increase from 10-year-old data that indicated most women in the U.S. were a size 14."<sup>55</sup> Government statistics show that 67 percent of American women are overweight or obese as of 2021.<sup>56</sup> Yet, plus-size clothing represents only 18 percent of total revenue in the women's clothing industry. With the majority of clothing brands only selling up to size 12, the current state of the industry leaves the average woman with limited options for both style and comfort.

Due to the discrepancy between clothing available for plus-sized women and their portion of the population, many women in this segment feel underserved and frustrated. Similar feelings of discontent exist for women who identify as petite. A 1995 survey of 2,700 American women aged 18 or older found that petite and plus-sized consumers had a significantly higher level of dissatisfaction regarding product availability, fashion selection, and brand offerings. It also found that 57 percent of plus-sized consumers and 45 percent of petites struggled to find stores that carry their sizes. In stores that did carry their sizes, 84 percent of the plus-sized respondents and 62 percent of the petites felt that

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<sup>55</sup> Christel DA, Dunn SC. "Average American women's clothing size: Comparing National Health and Nutritional Examination Surveys (1988–2010) to ASTM International Misses & Women's Plus Size clothing." *Int J Fash Des Technol Educ*. 2016; 10(2):129-136. doi:10.1080/17543266.2016.1214291.

<sup>56</sup> "Overweight & Obesity Statistics." *National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-statistics/overweight-obesity>.

there were fewer options in their sizes than in others. When asked if the number of brands that made clothing that was too limited in their size, 70 percent of the plus-sized and 48 percent of the petite women said “yes.”<sup>57</sup>

Lane Bryant Inc. is the largest plus-size retailer in the United States, and the brand is considered the first pioneer in the size-inclusive space. The company began in 1904 as Lithuanian-born New York dressmaker Lane Bryant was asked by one of her clients to make a dress that she could wear out of the house while pregnant. Bryant’s maternity clothing was very successful, and in 1911, she began to research designing for the “stout figured woman.” Bryant researched measurements of over 204,500 women to create plus-sized designs. In the 1920s, she proceeded to offer a full line for the “nearly 40 percent of all women who were larger in some or all of their dimensions than the perfect figure.”<sup>58</sup> By 1923, sales for full-figured clothing exceeded sales for maternity wear, with Bryant profiting \$5 million a year.

Although Bryant found success, few designers, manufacturers, or retailers followed suit. As Lane Bryant’s business was growing, so was a distaste towards being overweight that characterizes American life. One of the best-selling books in the country at the time, published in 1918, was a weight-loss instructional called “Diet and Health with Key to the Calories” by Lulu Hunt Peters. As diet culture became popular and the ideal of the thin flapper took root, so did feelings of shame for larger women.

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<sup>57</sup> Friedman, Arthur. “The Forgotten Majority: Petite and Plus-Size Women,” *Women's Wear Daily*. April 10 1996.

<sup>58</sup> Bellafante, Gina. “Plus-Size Wars,” *New York Times*, July 28, 2010.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/01/magazine/01plussize-t.html?pagewanted=all>.

Discrimination against people of different weights in the American fashion industry stems from societal prejudices against being overweight. The various forms of discrimination experienced by such people effectively reduce their opportunities in the job market, school, and the marketplace as a consumer. According to Amy Erdman, the author of *Fat Shame*, “Fat people are often treated as not quite human entities to whom the normal standards of polite and respectful behavior do not seem to apply.”<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately, ideals throughout the fashion world and amongst art and design across time have intensified these prejudices. It is not uncommon for fashion designers to disapprove of extended sizes due to their “ascetic vision.” For example, Karl Lagerfeld, a designer of an H&M collection, was offended by the chain's decision to produce his clothing in larger sizes. He stated in an interview, “what I designed was fashion for slender and slim people. That was the original idea.”<sup>60</sup>

In recent years, however, there has been a challenge to the discrimination against larger bodies. The “Fat Acceptance Movement” gained popularity once ideas relating to body positivity and acceptance began being publicized through online websites, blogs, and social media. Vocal activists in this online space, lovingly coined the “fatosphere,” tend to denounce the weight loss industry, question the rhetoric of obesity as an epidemic, and advocate the view that there can be “health at every size.”<sup>61</sup> Many bloggers in this space reject the core belief that fat people are unhealthy. Kate Harding, the founder of the

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<sup>59</sup> Farrell, Amy Erdman. “Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture.” *New York University Press*. Pages 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> “Lagerfeld's High Street Split.” *Vogue United Kingdom*. November 18, 2014. <http://www.vogue.co.uk/news/daily/2004-11/041118-lagerfelds-high-street-split.aspx>.

<sup>61</sup> Rabin, Rony Caryn. “In the Fatosphere, Big Is In, or at Least Accepted,” *New York Times*, January 22, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/22/health/22fblogs.html>.

blog *Shapely Prose*, said in an interview: “One of the first obstacles to fat acceptance is breaking down the question of whether being fat is a choice. No fat acceptance advocate is saying you should sit around and wildly overeat. What we’re saying is that exercise and a balanced diet do not make everyone thin.” Within the Fat Acceptance Movement, there is a subset of women and men who call themselves “Fatshionistas” who typically blog and post about fashion, body acceptance, and the limited plus-size options available in the market. The collective consumer identity that developed in the online space for women who consider themselves overweight and to care about fashion led many of them to advocate for greater choice in the mainstream market.<sup>62</sup>

The consumer demand for size-inclusive clothing is evident. Social media has completely changed the fashion landscape, and women are harnessing the space to advocate for themselves. Nonetheless, designers and retailers in the apparel industry continue to serve this subset in a limited capacity. In an interview with the *New York Times*, the research director of a 2009 Mintel study of the plus-sized market stated: “There is not a deep range of styles in stores devoted to plus-size. They’ll pick up on a single trend, it will dominate the floor space and that will be that.”<sup>63</sup> In recent years, new players have occasionally entered the game, but just as many larger brands have cut back. In 2005, H&M stopped selling plus-size clothes in the United States. Old Navy, Gap, J. Crew, and Ann Taylor have removed plus-size clothing from brick-and-mortar stores and now sell exclusively online. Other retailers, such as Macy's and Forever 21, restrict their

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<sup>62</sup> Scaraboto, Daiane, Fischer Eileen. “Frustrated Fatshionistas: An Institutional Theory Perspective on Consumer Quests for Greater Choice in Mainstream Markets.” *Journal of Consumer Research*, Volume 39, Issue 6. April 1st 2013. Pages 1234–1257. <https://doi.org/10.1086/66829>.

<sup>63</sup> Bellafante, 2010.

larger size clothing to a very narrow selection of colors and patterns distributed unevenly across selected stores.<sup>64</sup> In marketing, representation of various body types is also poor. Often, brands use thin models to sell plus-size clothing articles, as witnessed with Neiman Marcus and Woman Within, a retailer devoted solely to this market.

While clothing availability and media representation for different body types is far from perfect, the number of styles for various body types is slowly but steadily increasing. Analyzing new arrivals within mass-market retailers' private labels reveals that the number of new plus-size styles for women increased by 11 percent from 2019 to 2020. For men, there was an increase of new size-inclusive styles by up to 24 percent over the same period. Other shop-by-fit categories, including petite, tall, and maternity have seen an increase in styles as well.<sup>65</sup> While many large retailers extend their existing ranges to be more inclusive, many new, smaller, online-based brands have been created in recent years as a response to consumer interest in size inclusivity and have found great success.

In addition to racial and size inclusivity, other forms of inclusivity are beginning to be measured in fashion. Age, gender, and physical ability diversity are all beginning to be sought out by consumers, though there is much less research available for these categories. In the findings section, I'll present some of the brands that are most well-known for diversity and inclusion across all categories and discuss what these brands are doing to solve the problem of lack of representation through models of CSR.

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<sup>64</sup> Scaraboto, 2013.

<sup>65</sup> Marci, Kayla. "Is Fashion Really Becoming More Size-Inclusive?: EDITED: Retail Intelligence." *EDITED*, <https://blog.edited.com/blog/resources/fashion-and-size-inclusive>.

## IV. Methodology

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the current landscape of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the fashion world and determine how nationalistic, environmental, and diversity values work together or against one another in the pursuit of good through fashion. To do so, I conducted a study of the brands that are known for leading the industry for three models of CSR: 1) Green, 2) America-Made, and 3) Diversity and Inclusion.

The first step of my thesis was to find vetted online lists with the following searches: “most sustainable clothing brands,” “clothing brands made in America,” and “most inclusive clothing brands.”<sup>66</sup> These searches identified the brands that are most dedicated to their missions. The lists of value-oriented fashion brands that these searches yielded included companies that varied in size, but the majority were small or medium-sized businesses.<sup>67</sup>

After identifying over 80 brands, each was categorized based on the values they promoted on their website and social media. Their mission, values, and impact web pages were closely examined to do so. Brands were discarded if their mission amounted to mere rhetoric. Thus, to be included, brands needed to demonstrate some concrete actions

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<sup>66</sup> Examples of lists: <https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/fair-trade-clothing>;  
<https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/american-made-clothing-brands>;  
<https://ecowarriorprincess.net/2019/03/8-ethical-fashion-brands-diversity-inclusivity-body-positivity/>;  
<https://www.thedenizen.com/journal/10-size-inclusive-plus-size-brands>

<sup>67</sup> I only included those that were founded in or headquartered in America. I also chose to look for brands exclusively founded by American citizens because it would allow me to investigate why some American founders opted for global manufacturing and production while others did not.

towards their stated social goals. After exploring the websites, it became clear that some brands embraced more than one model of social responsibility. Thus, for each of the models a brand showed proof of working towards, I flagged “TRUE.” For the models they did not embrace, I flagged “FALSE.” (see Table 1).

Table 1: 70 Brands Committed to Social Responsibility

1	Company Name	Value Type	Green	American	D&I
2	Patagonia	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
3	Pact	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
4	Quince	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
5	Whimsy + Row	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
6	Reformation	Green & American & D&I	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE
7	Vetta	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
8	Summersalt	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
9	Outerknown	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
10	Levi's	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
11	MATE The Label	Extreme Green	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE
12	Aday	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
13	Fair Indigo	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
14	Able	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
15	Tradlands	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
16	Fair Trade Winds	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
17	Christy Dawn	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
18	Girlfriend Collective	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
19	Back Beat Co.	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
20	Eileen Fisher	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
21	Cuyana	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
22	Amour Vert	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
23	LACAUUSA	Green & American	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE
24	Hackwith Design House	Green & American	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE
25	United By Blue	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
26	Two Days Off	Green & American	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE
27	Setela	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
28	Petite Studio	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
29	American Giant	Extreme American	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
30	Todd Shelton	Green & American	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE
31	American Trench	American & D&I	FALSE	TRUE	TRUE
32	Red Wing Shoe Company	Extreme American	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
33	Oscar Mike	Extreme American	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
34	Nine Line	Extreme American	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
35	Grunt Style	Extreme American	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
36	Origin Maine	Extreme American	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
37	Wrangler	Green & American	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE
38	LL Bean	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
39	Shop Boswell	Green & American	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE
40	Buck Mason	Extreme American	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
41	All USA clothing	Extreme American	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
42	All American Clothing Co	Extreme American	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
43	Goodwear	Green & American	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE
44	AST Sportswear	Green & American	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE
45	Bamboosa	Green & American	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE
46	harvestandmill	Green & American	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE
47	BillsKhakis	Extreme American	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
48	unionshirtsupply	Extreme American	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
49	11 Honore	Extreme D&I	FALSE	FALSE	TRUE
50	Third Love	Extreme D&I	FALSE	FALSE	TRUE
51	Pretty Little Thing	Extreme D&I	FALSE	FALSE	TRUE
52	TomBoyX	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
53	HARA the Label	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
54	337 Brand	Extreme Green	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
55	mara hoffman	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
56	Kirrin Finch	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
57	Official Rebrand	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
58	Universal Standard	Extreme D&I	FALSE	FALSE	TRUE
59	Good American	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
60	Snoozy Sunday	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
61	And Comfort	Green & D&I	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE
62	American Apparel	Green & American & D&I	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE
63	Ivory Ella	Cause Based	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE
64	ASOS KEnya	Cause Based	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE
65	Elegantees	Cause Based	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE
66	Toms	Cause Based	TRUE	FALSE	FALSE
67	Sevenly	Cause Based	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE
68	Feed	Cause Based	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE
69	Serengetee	Cause Based	FALSE	FALSE	FALSE
70	Dearborn Clothing	Extreme American	FALSE	TRUE	FALSE
71	SportPort Active	Green & American & D&I	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE

I also reached out to 50 brands from my list to see if they would be open to an interview, however, only two agreed. Approximately 25 brands said they would either forward my message to their marketing team (these companies stopped responding after they were contacted a second time) or with flat rejections. Even so, interviews with two brands—All American Clothing Company and Universal Standard—add important depth and texture to this study, as a subsequent section will show.

It is important to note that the totals for each category are not representative of their relational proportions in reality, as this database is not exhaustive. While there is much more information available online for lists of sustainable brands compared to brands that solely manufacture in America or embrace diversity and inclusion, that does not mean other brands do not exist. For example, Matt Bigelow of All American Clothing Company later sent me a list of 370 Made in America brands that he had collected over the past year.

## V. Findings: Each Model in the Apparel Industry Today

### a. Overview of Findings

Of the companies I examined, 47 use a Green model, 27 an American-Made model, and 23 a model of Diversity and Inclusion (see Table 2). This chapter draws on brand mission statements to elaborate how each model (Green, American-Made, and D&I) is harnessed by some of the top fashion brands for corporate social responsibility in the United States today.

Table 2: Total Number of Each Model

<b>Totals</b>	
Green	47
American	27
D&I	23

### b. Green

Of the 70 brands reviewed for this thesis, 47 are “Green” meaning that each company selected values environmental consciousness and demonstrates their efforts toward sustainability on their website. There are a few different ways I vetted each company to ensure that they were taking steps to reduce their environmental impact. First, I found most of the companies I collected from lists of “the most sustainable fashion brands.” When I picked a company from one of these lists, I investigated whether

the brand was truly green or not by analyzing their website, specifically their pages on the impact of their sustainability initiatives. A typical mission statement for a Green model of CSR can be viewed on Pact's website: Pact states that their mission is "...to build Earth's Favorite Clothing Company."<sup>68</sup> They do this through their patented Earth's Favorite™ Fiber, Organic Cotton, claiming that growing cotton organically saves 81 percent more water than non-organic cotton and uses no toxic chemicals.

Though Pact's mission statement is typical, it is hardly the most well-known green brand. That honor probably belongs to Patagonia, a brand that is uniquely transparent on their website about their current environmental impact and what their goals are for the future. On their sustainability page, they share facts and statistics about the environmental costs of the industry at large and go on to say that they as a brand want to change how clothes are made. In their last season, 87 percent of their line used recycled materials, which allowed them to avoid emitting 4,300 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. They also have grown their cotton organically since 1996, and they have been investing in other regenerative organic practices. Moreover, they have a "Worn Wear" program where they resell used Patagonia clothes. Patagonia was one of the first companies to start using these sustainable practices. Thus, many of the other, smaller companies on my list likely were inspired by Patagonia to create similar practices.

All 47 Green brands use either organic, recycled, or upcycled fabric; many have buy-back programs; and all use sustainable packaging. There are other ways that companies commit to sustainability as well: for example, Hackwith Design House

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<sup>68</sup> "Pact | Earth'S Favorite™ Clothing Company." *Wear PACT*. N.p., 2021. Web. 27 Nov. 2021.

focuses on small-batch made-to-order products so that they only make what will be sold, ensuring they do not create extra waste.<sup>69</sup> Vetta encourages their customers to have capsule wardrobes, meaning they should only buy a few staple pieces that they can mix and match.<sup>70</sup> Many of the Green brands also have certifications such as the B Corporation Certification, Green Seal, Butterfly Mark, or Fairtrade that confirm their commitments and accomplishments. Moreover, brands such as Whimsy and Row have environmental trackers on their website that measure their environmental impact.<sup>71</sup>

### c. American-Made

23 brands were labeled as “Made in America.” Many of these companies embraced American symbolism in the design of their website, using only red, white, and blue and harnessing the American flag in their logos. Their products, too, were advertised to embody a particularly American “rustic” or “patriotic” look inspired by American roots and culture. Many of them also note the importance of creating American jobs and supporting the American Economy on their website. A few even donate their proceeds and create programs to specifically support American veterans.

Matt Bigelow, the General Manager at All American Clothing Company (AACC), shared his company’s history and vision. AACC was started in October 2002 by Lawson Nickol, who, before that, had been working as a sales manager for another US jeans

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<sup>69</sup> "The Best In Ethical Fashion, Hackwith Design House." *Hackwith Design House*. N.p., 2021. Web. 27 Nov. 2021.

<sup>70</sup> "Vetta." *Vetta*. N.p., 2021. Web. 23 Nov. 2021.

<sup>71</sup> "Whimsy And Row - Quality, Sustainable Fashion Made In Downtown LA · Whimsy & Row ~ Sustainable Clothing & Lifestyle Brand." *Whimsy & Row*. N.p., 2021. Web. 27 Nov. 2021.

manufacturer. One day while shopping, Nickol saw a new style of his company's jeans on the shelf. He was excited to see his company expanding, but when he noticed that the tag read "Made in Mexico" his heart sank. Because Nickol was a big believer in American manufacturing and increasing American jobs, he felt inspired to start his own blue jean company in his hometown of Arcanum, Ohio.

As the General Manager at AACC, Matt Bigelow oversees the daily operations and manages 15 employees. Matt is proud of their mission-based and values-driven organization. He explained that in terms of social responsibility, "...manufacturing in the United States is very important and integral in [their] mission today. It provides a tax base for public services, jobs for folks that like to work with their hands, and relying too heavily on other countries for our imports is not a healthy thing. We're big believers in treating workers' fairly, giving them a good place to work, and seeing that positive ripple effect [on] our economy and also local communities"<sup>72</sup>

Although creating jeans domestically furthers AACC's mission, it also has some green side effects. After all, AACC works with materials and labor sources that are domestic: a pair of jeans that you buy from them comes from cotton grown in Georgia, cut and sewn in Kentucky, and then shipped out of their warehouse in Ohio. Thus, their local supply chain model, inevitably, has a much lower environmental footprint than a global counterpart. Matt acknowledged these truths, explaining: "I love the global world we live in... but supply chains are simply easier when you don't have to deal with that kind of complexity. We know and trust the people we work with." For Matt, though, the

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<sup>72</sup> Bigelow, Oct 2021.

environmental gain that comes from having a local supply chain is just “a happy side-benefit” and not integral to their mission. Thus, they might be willing to tolerate less eco-friendly practices if they benefited American workers.<sup>73</sup>

Matt also explained how their customer demographic impacts their messaging. AACC’s customer base is typically over the age of 45. The company primarily sells men's clothing with a few products geared for women. Regarding their customers’ values, “[Many of our customers] remember when some of these larger blue jeans brands were still produced in America using heavier weight denim and a certain level of quality that would last longer. They grew up with that and they remember what that was like, so they’re looking for that again” (Bigelow 2021). According to Matt, his customers are not excited about getting a less expensive pair of jeans that might not last as long. Matt implies that their jeans have a certain quality that feels “truly American,” and that their customers respond to it. Moreover, they also appreciate how AACC is run: “Many of them are what you would call blue-collar workers as well, so they understand the importance of a strong manufacturing base: they either just appreciate it or they themselves have spent their career working with their hands.”

#### d. Diversity and Inclusion

In the fashion space, Diversity and Inclusion are largely embodied through missions of body positivity and self-acceptance. By bringing in diverse models, brands that embrace a D&I model of CSR show that they make products stylish for people of all

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<sup>73</sup> Bigelow, Oct 2021

heights, weights, shapes, races, abilities, or cultures. Sotela’s mission, for example, “is to create a world where you’re celebrated just as you are. [They] are a size, race, gender, and age-inclusive clothing company and community that celebrates humans in all their forms.”<sup>74</sup> Sotela embraces this model by creating clothes that are “forgiving,” because “bodies evolve and that is human.” Like many brands with a Diversity and Inclusion model, Sotela uses its own sizing that does not include words such as small, medium, or large. Some brands, moreover, go beyond missions of inclusivity and diverse groups of models by sharing their internal D&I commitments. Patagonia and Reformation, for example, have their anti-racist commitments available on their websites.

Other brands uniquely create products for groups of people that have been historically excluded. TomboyX, for example, strives to make clothing that “...anybody could feel comfortable in, regardless of where they fell on the size or gender spectrum.”<sup>75</sup> According to their website, TomboyX is a “...queer-founded brand dedicated to empowering our LGBTQ+ community year-round and advocating for equal representation and celebration of all people... [they] are proud to design and manufacture thoughtful, beautifully made products for all bodies and needs, of all sizes and across the gender spectrum.” An additional pioneering inclusive product type is “Adaptive Clothing.” In response to growing awareness of the needs of consumers with mobility or

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<sup>74</sup> Sotela. “Radically Inclusive Clothing Made For Humans, By Humans.” *Sotela*, <https://sotela.co/>.

<sup>75</sup> “We Fit You.” *TomboyX*, [https://tomboyx.com/?g\\_network=g&g\\_adid=489715994573&g\\_keyword=tomboyx&g\\_acctid=914-082-0587&g\\_campaign=Brand\\_Exact&g\\_adtype=search&g\\_adgroupid=78527116316&g\\_keywordid=kwd-310196417403&g\\_campaignid=6526454537&&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=cpc&gclid=Cj0KCCQiA47GNBhDrARIsAKfZ2rDer\\_H2shD3tjc1qJXSOfptzXfRZyVO9Z4VBKqQ3fcziyqE6y4WWukaAluYEALw\\_wcB&gclid=aw.ds](https://tomboyx.com/?g_network=g&g_adid=489715994573&g_keyword=tomboyx&g_acctid=914-082-0587&g_campaign=Brand_Exact&g_adtype=search&g_adgroupid=78527116316&g_keywordid=kwd-310196417403&g_campaignid=6526454537&&utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&gclid=Cj0KCCQiA47GNBhDrARIsAKfZ2rDer_H2shD3tjc1qJXSOfptzXfRZyVO9Z4VBKqQ3fcziyqE6y4WWukaAluYEALw_wcB&gclid=aw.ds).

health challenges, Tommy Hilfiger, in addition to other brands including Nike and Target, have designed special adaptive collections and products.<sup>76</sup> These clothing lines are innovative in that they are meant to be easy to take on and off for people with disabilities.

One example of a brand that embodies diversity and inclusion in its product line is Universal Standard. Their mission is to be “the most size-inclusive brand. Period.”<sup>77</sup> I had the opportunity to speak with the Chief Customer Officer, Tracy Heller. She explained that, for Universal Standard, “Revolutionary inclusivity means creating unprecedented access to fashion for all of the United States, as we are. In an industry full of divisions, we thought that a size 6 should have the exact same shopping experience as a size 36, so we made it happen. We’re bringing fashion for all up to a Universal Standard.”

The company was started 5 years ago when two friends, who were of different sizes, realized they had drastically different shopping experiences. According to Tracy, “A lot of brands will have a plus-size section, or a separate line of their clothes will be plus-size. But the plus-size clothing will be completely different, less stylish, and less interesting (key here: less than).” Universal Standard’s goal is to show the industry that you can produce every style in every size and still have it be a profitable business.

Universal Standard’s backbone is a unique sizing philosophy that reflects the way women are actually sized in America. Brands that cater to straight-sized women are

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<sup>76</sup> Kelsey Kosinski (University of Delaware), et al. “Commercialization of Adaptive Clothing: Toward a Movement of Inclusive Design.” *International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings*, Iowa State University Digital Press, 1 Jan. 2018, <https://www.iastatedigitalpress.com/itaa/article/id/1208/>.

<sup>77</sup> “Fashion Freedom. Sizes 00 - 40.” *Universal Standard*, <https://www.universalstandard.com/>.

extremely inaccurate compared to the way women are sized throughout the whole country. According to Tracy, 60 percent of women are over the size 12 in the US, but a size 6 to is an average medium. That means that the average woman in America is a size XXL. Instead, Universal Standard's size range reflects the actual skew of sizes in America, eliminating the psychological toll that takes place for all those women who have to continuously buy XXL when they are the average American size.

When discussing the opportunity cost of creating such a size-inclusive brand, Tracy mentioned that Universal Standard takes a lot of pride in the way that they use fit models and fit garments very intentionally and very thoughtfully to ensure that the fit is as good on a size 40 as a size 6. However, creating such a broad size range in this way is very difficult and expensive. This is one of the main obstacles for other brands to adopt this model.

Nonetheless, Universal Standard has done numerous collaborations with brands such as JCrew, Adidas, Erdem, and Rodarte. Through these partnerships, Universal Standard has been able to give these other brands a template for making clothes from sizes 00-40. Tracy also noted that Universal Standard strives to do its best to have its staff members look as diverse as their customer base. Universal Standard is one of many up-and-coming brands that specifically caters to women that have historically been excluded from fashion due to their weight, and they are motivating other brands through partnerships to embrace this social responsibility model of diversity and inclusion as well.

### e. Other Models: Cause Based & Workers' Rights

My research unearthed two other models of social responsibility that I had not anticipated: “Cause-based” and “Workers’ Rights.”

Cause-based brands donate their profits or some of their products to charity. These brands take on an enormous variety of causes and can generally overlap with the other CSR models depending on the cause they support. Toms Shoes popularized this idea with the famous business model of one pair of shoes purchased, one donated to a person in need.<sup>78</sup> Ivory Ella is an example as they donate 10 percent of all profits to organizations like Save the Elephants.<sup>79</sup> Other brands don’t donate but rather have created innovative designs that help people. For example, Shield clothing uses a special patented technology that protects people from electromagnetic rays and radiation.<sup>80</sup>

Additionally, securing workers’ rights is a model of social responsibility that a lot of fashion companies claim to care about. In particular, most of the brands that had missions of sustainability included information about how their workers were treated ethically in their factories. This is likely because the concept of slow fashion often embraces both a supply chain that is good for the environment and safe for workers.

Today, fast fashion continues to rely on the exploitation of garment workers and on extracting resources from the Global South. Slave labor and unsafe working conditions are still prominent in countries like Bangladesh, where brands continue to

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<sup>78</sup> “TOMS® Official Site: We're in Business to Improve Lives.” *TOMS*. Web. Nov 20 2021.

<sup>79</sup> “Ivory Ella® Official Site - Elephant Clothing & More For A Cause.” *Ivory Ella*. Web. Nov 20 2021.

<sup>80</sup> “SHIELD: What is SHIELD Signalproof Apparel?” *Shield*. Web. Nov 20 2021.

harm workers to maximize their profits. Of the 74 million textile workers worldwide, 80 percent are women of color, many of which are operating in previously colonized countries.<sup>81</sup> It is estimated that only two percent of textile workers across the world are making a living wage, meaning that most cannot meet their basic needs. When the Rana Plaza building collapsed in Bangladesh in 2013, killing 1,138 clothing makers and injuring an additional 2,500, American consumers began to realize the devastating impact of fast fashion and ask questions about where their clothing came from and how it was made.<sup>82</sup> Global activist campaigns like *Fashion Revolution's* "Who Made My Clothes?" have mobilized hundreds of thousands of consumers to demand brands to do more to protect the rights of the people along fast fashion's vast global supply chain.<sup>83</sup> This movement demonstrates how social media has revolutionized the fashion landscape, giving visibility and a voice to communities the fashion world has historically ignored. As a result, many sustainable brands have tried to rectify the situation by taking steps to make their factories and labor practices more ethical.

For example, Vetta states on their website along with their other values, "We started Vetta because we cared about the people - the garment workers who are so often mistreated in the fashion industry. We are committed to working with responsible factories that pay workers fairly, protect workers' rights, have safe working

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<sup>81</sup> Legesse, Kalkidan. "Racism Is at the Heart of Fast Fashion – It's Time for Change." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 11 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jun/11/racism-is-at-the-heart-of-fast-fashion-its-time-for-change>.

<sup>82</sup> Omotoso, Moni. "'Who Made My Clothes' Movement - How It All Began." *Fashion Insiders & Co*, 5 Dec. 2018, <https://fashioninsiders.co/features/inspiration/who-made-my-clothes-movement/>.

<sup>83</sup> Kent, 2021.

environments, and prohibit child labor, forced labor, and discrimination. We visit our factories personally, and we work closely with them to manufacture our collections.

We've chosen the factories below based on their expertise and their social responsibility.”

<sup>84</sup> Citing Fair Trade certifications is a common way that many brands, such as Pact and Reformation, demonstrated their commitment to workers’ rights.

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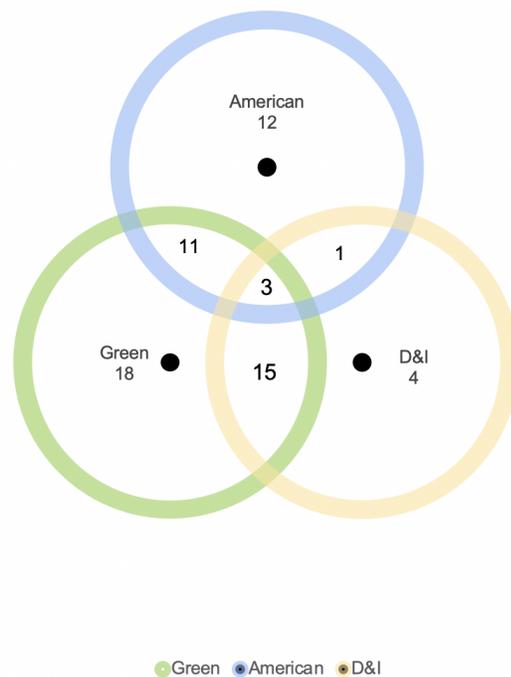
<sup>84</sup> "Vetta." *Vetta*. Web. Nov 23 2021.

## VI. Findings: The Overlap in Models Today

### a. Mixed Missions Overview

In this section, I will discuss the compatibility of these models of corporate social responsibility and explain why some models go together and others do not. Figure 1 demonstrates how many of the 70 companies had blended models.

Figure 1: Compatibility of Models of Social Responsibility



## b. Green and American-Made

Fourteen fashion brands both used Green and American-Made models of CSR (see Figure 1), which suggests they are compatible. Yet this is not necessarily because both models are usually embraced by the same companies. While some Green brands choose to produce in America because they believe it is one of the best ways to further a mission of sustainability, many American brands are Green because they control local supply chains. The aforementioned All American Clothing Company is a good example of the latter case. Since AACC's manufacturing is done in America, Matt explained that they know the farmers that produce their cotton, have oversight of their entire supply chain, and that they have a lower carbon footprint from transportation than their global counterparts. Thus, their environmental practices are merely a "happy side benefit" of American Values.<sup>85</sup>

Most brands, however, were the former case: That is, their environmental commitments led them to set up shop in America. These brands solely promote their sustainability efforts in their values pages and their marketing. For example, Two Days Off and Mate the Label are two sustainable brands that believe manufacturing in America allows them to further their Green mission. Mate the Label believes that manufacturing in the United States allows them to oversee the process and ensure that the environmental costs of travel are limited: "When it comes to our factories, we say the closer, the better. Our supply chain is localized within a 17-mile radius of our headquarters in order to

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<sup>85</sup> Matt Bigelow, 2021.

reduce our carbon footprint.”<sup>86</sup> Two Days Off, meanwhile, produces locally in Los Angeles so they can create made-to-order pieces in small batches. They explain, “We choose to produce this way to avoid waste from the overproduction of sizes and colors that don’t sell.” By producing in-house and crafting pieces based on orders, they reduce waste and can ensure they are creating pieces that will be used and loved. This same method is used by Hackwith Design House, another sustainable company that solely produces in the United States.<sup>87</sup>

While these brands claim that manufacturing domestically helps them be sustainable, domestic production is hardly a necessity for Green companies. 33 other brands centered around sustainability manufacture outside of the United States. As mentioned above, one of the first and most well-known brands for sustainability is Patagonia. Of the 43 factories that Patagonia is currently under contract with, thirteen are in China and only nine are in the United States. Over time, Patagonia has had to make public statements in response to customer and stakeholder pressure about their manufacturing practices outside of the United States. In their “Made in China” report, the brand explains that they create their products outside of the United States because they seek out quality when they source factories, and good factories in the United States are hard to find.<sup>88</sup> They also explain that strong long-term environmental arguments can be made on behalf of manufacturing close to the locations the products are sold, which, for

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<sup>86</sup> “Factories.” *MATE the Label*, <https://matethelabel.com/pages/factories>.

<sup>87</sup> “About Two Days Off.” *Two Days Off*, <https://twodaysoff.com/pages/about>.

<sup>88</sup> “Made in China.” *The Footprint Chronicles*, Patagonia, 2013, [https://www.patagonia.com/static/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-PatagoniaShared/default/dw29ab8345/PDF-US/Made\\_in\\_China\\_EN.pdf](https://www.patagonia.com/static/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-PatagoniaShared/default/dw29ab8345/PDF-US/Made_in_China_EN.pdf).

Patagonia, is all over the world. Since the brand sells their clothing in many countries, they benefit from lower environmental costs for transportation if they produce in those same countries.

When sifting through the green brands, it appears that depending on the size of the company and the practices they are trying to implement, producing in America can either help or harm their environmental mission. For large companies like Patagonia, with customers around the world, there is an environmental incentive for manufacturing outside of the country.<sup>89</sup> Small-to-mid-sized brands, however, do not have the same needs as Patagonia. Brands that have in-house design studios or relationships with local American factories are often much smaller and sell to a selective customer base.

Why aren't more companies genuinely devoted to both Green and American models of CSR? Partly because these models appeal to politically divided citizens. In American politics today, citizens that value issues such as sustainability are rather polarized from those that value an America-first nationalism.

When we look at the world of fashion, however, we can see that at times, such as with these fourteen brands, these values can go together. The companies that value sustainability in fashion do not forgo American manufacturing if it is the best way to attain their environmental goals. Moreover, many of the brands that value American jobs are comfortable with and supportive of the environmental benefits that come from their simplified supply chain. Some are not just complacent, but prideful of the fact that they

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<sup>89</sup> The key problem with outsourcing is that, because it's cheaper, it is often worse for the environment and the workers. As a solution to the sustainability issue, many of the brands who are green and outsource their production exclusively partner with Fair Trade Certified factories or strictly vet their factories to ensure they are up to the appropriate ethical and sustainable standards.

are both improving the environment and supporting Americans with their companies. Thus, CSR in fashion is not as polarized as it would be if it directly reflected America's political climate today. Although it is the case that nationalist and environmental politics can go together in fashion, this is not also the case for nationalist and diversity-focused politics.

### c. American-Made and Diversity and Inclusion

Of the three possible blends, there is the least amount of overlap between American and Diversity and Inclusion with only one brand including the two models of CSR and three brands including all three models of CSR. While all of these companies produce in America, all four of the brands do not have a nationalist mission. The fashion companies that do have a strong nationalist mission do not discuss diversity anywhere on their websites. Unlike many of the brands that only have American-Made as a model of CSR, the brands that have both American-Made and Diversity and Inclusion, such as American Apparel and American Trench, produce clothing that is considered trendy and directed towards younger people. American Apparel, for example, found its success in 1989 as one of the first brands to highlight manufacturing on domestic soil. The company profited by eliminating concerns about sweatshop manufacturing through this model. As a part of their anti-sweatshop mission, they highlight the importance of supporting all people's rights through Diversity and Inclusion.

The lack of overlap between American-made brands and Diversity and Inclusion is driven by politics. The companies that embrace a nationalistic model of corporate responsibility are simply not eager to push models of diversity and inclusion. Thus, this schism reflects the larger political conflict between the America-first nationalism of the Right and the progressive identity politics of the Left. Unlike Green and American-Made models of CSR, which go together despite our politics, the American-Made and Diversity and Inclusion models don't go together precisely because of our politics. The people that create and buy from brands that promote a mission of diversity are largely distinct from those that create and purchase from brands that promote nationalistic views.

#### d. Green and Diversity and Inclusion

In contrast, many of the brands that promote sustainability also value Diversity and Inclusion (18 of the 47), showing that these two value systems largely go together in fashion as easily as they do in our politics. In fashion, the consumers that value environmental awareness and sustainability also tend to value inclusivity. As seen with the following Reformation example, these customers hold the brands they love accountable to their high standards of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Reformation is one of the most well-known fashion brands whose mission is focused on combating climate change. In this study, it is one of the three brands that use all three models of CSR, but that was not always the case. Reformation's mission, front and center on their website, is "...to bring sustainable fashion to everyone." They go on to

say, “We put sustainability at the center of everything we do. It is an evolving goal and definition, and we don’t have all the answers. But we want to focus on efforts that have the biggest impact. It influences four main areas: Product, People, Planet, and Progress.”

<sup>90</sup> Under their Sustainability tab, there are 21 subpages dedicated to the company’s environmental practices. They have public sustainability goals and programs mapped out until 2025. Reformation is known for being uniquely transparent about what they’re doing and where they fall short.<sup>91</sup>

While Reformation is loved for its mission of environmental progress, the brand was under fire in 2020 for allegations of discrimination that erupted against the brand and its former Chief Executive Yael Aflalo. In the aftermath of the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, former employees detailed their experiences of racism at Reformation on social media. Elle Santiago was the first employee to come forward, explaining through a viral post how “...Working for Reformation deeply traumatized [her], and [she] cried many times knowing the color of [her] skin would get [her] nowhere in the company.” Another commenter added,

“I was a part of the Back of House team, made up of predominantly Black people. We did not have water, they did not provide us heat during the winter, and the pay difference between colored employees and white employees was vast. When we

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<sup>90</sup> “Oh Hi, We're Reformation - About Us.” *Reformation*, <https://www.thereformation.com/pages/oh-hi>.

<sup>91</sup> In addition to being sustainable, Reformation also exclusively has factories in LA, which is why it was also tagged as Made in America. On their website, they say, “There are people behind the clothes we make, and we put them first. Too often garment workers are subject to terrible conditions. That’s why we built our own factory in Los Angeles, where we work with awesome people from all over the world. It’s our responsibility to create a safe, healthy, and fair working environment for our teams, and for workers throughout our supply chain.”

“Oh Hi, We're Reformation - About Us.” *Reformation*, <https://www.thereformation.com/pages/oh-hi>.

would voice our opinions and tell them how unjust this was, they told us we were easily replaceable and did nothing to fix it.”<sup>92</sup>

Yael Aflalo, the Chief Officer and founder of Reformation, who was also accused of being personally racist, quickly apologized on social media and resigned. She claimed, “I’ve failed,” and recalled that Reformation’s mission is to bring sustainability to everyone, and part of that sustainability is treating people equally. She also promised, “As a company, we have not leveraged our platform, our voice, and our content to combat the racism and injustice that pervades our country, and that will change, starting now.” Five months after the allegations arose, findings from an internal company investigation were released. The report claimed that they did not find the Reformation workplace to be racist, but did find various workplace issues tied to an overall lack of transparency, inadequate human resources, and a “cliquish” culture that has caused some employees to “feel less included.”<sup>93</sup> After the incident, the company began addressing the issues through a range of actions, including instituting HR processes for operational improvement, highlighting a new Chief People Officer, expanded internal committees made up of everyone from executives to entry-level employees to ensure DEI objectives are fully integrated, created an “All Voices” program, and much more.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> TodayShow. “Reformation Founder Says 'I've Failed' after Racism Accusations from Former Employees.” *TODAY.com*, 12 June 2020, <https://www.today.com/style/reformation-s-yael-aflolo-apologizes-after-racism-accusations-t183582>.

<sup>93</sup> Biron, Bethany. “Reformation Internal Investigation Finds Workplace Culture and Ex-CEO Yael Aflalo 'Not Racist' - despite Rampant Allegations of Discrimination from Current and Former Employees.” *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 20 Oct. 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/reformation-investigation-finds-workplace-and-founder-not-racist-2020-10>.

<sup>94</sup> “Sustainability Report Q3.” *Reformation*, [https://www.thereformation.com/pages/sustainability-report-q3-2020#content\\_block\\_5f873d98911bca008aafc9d6](https://www.thereformation.com/pages/sustainability-report-q3-2020#content_block_5f873d98911bca008aafc9d6).

Reformation, among countless other brands across the world, became a brand focused on Diversity and Inclusion because fair treatment of all people began to be demanded by their customers. As a brand known for sustainability, Reformation was more likely to be targeted than a brand known for being American-Made, such as All American Clothing Company, precisely because it markets itself as a good leftist brand. Thus, the expectations on them are different. The fact that America-first brands are not as often blown up on Twitter suggests that they exist in different political orbits. Nonetheless, now more than ever, the socially conscious customer has the power to impact the models of CSR used by the companies they purchase from. Reformation claimed to care about sustainability but supporting every type of person is essential to that mission, and their customers picked up on where Reformation was slacking. This demonstrates just how impactful our current political climate is on systems of commerce. Moreover, it explains why so many companies that care about sustainability also discuss Diversity and Inclusion in their practices.

## VII. Conclusion: The Promise, Limits, and Future of CSR

The three dominant models of corporate social responsibility are partly a response to growing consumer demand for positive change. More than ever, fashion has become a way of expressing political identity. Because progressive citizens are especially prone to seek socially conscious apparel companies, Green and D&I brands are particularly popular.

Pressures to be sustainable are so great that even fast fashion brands, such as Zara and H&M, have pledged to do better and have launched clothing lines dedicated to sustainable clothing.<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, their efforts may be cases of “greenwashing” —the process of disguising a poor environmental record. Both Zara and H&M have been under fire for how their more “conscious” product launches give a false representation of their sustainability efforts.

Such cases raise a broader question: How well and sincerely do companies pursue their social agenda? How can consumers know if their impact amounts to more than window dressing? Answering such questions is especially hard in the case of companies that claim to be Green. It is hard to determine whether a company is greenwashing in the absence of a standardized method of measuring progress in fashion. To establish such a method, sustainability coalitions have recently been developed by leaders in the industry. The Sustainable Apparel Coalition, for example, is a global, multi-stakeholder non-profit

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<sup>95</sup> “Conscious Exclusive: H&M US.” H&M, [https://www2.hm.com/en\\_us/women/seasonal-trending/conscious-exclusive.html](https://www2.hm.com/en_us/women/seasonal-trending/conscious-exclusive.html).

alliance for the fashion industry developed in 2011. It is made up of over 250 leading apparel, footwear, and textile brands; retailers; suppliers; service providers; trade associations; non-profits; and academic institutions working to reduce environmental impact and promote social justice throughout the global value chain. The Coalition developed the Higg Index, one of many tools to standardize sustainability measurements for all businesses in the coalition. With this data, business leaders can come together to identify weak spots and help improve the sustainable performance of individual companies.

Other coalitions did likewise. The Business of Fashion, for example, released their annual Sustainability Index report, “The Sustainability Gap,” in 2021.<sup>96</sup> Similar to the Higg Index, the mission of the Business of Fashion’s index is to create a transparent and trusted benchmark to track clearly defined, measurable progress towards achieving sustainability goals in the fashion industry. In consultation with a Sustainability Council of respected global experts, the Business of Fashion measured the progress of the five largest public companies by annual revenue in 2019 in three distinct fashion industry verticals—luxury, high street, and sportswear. The industry’s most profitable companies are intended to act as a rough proxy for overall progress. The Index examined each company using 338 metrics across six categories to measure performance against 16 ambitious environmental and social targets set by The Business of Fashion.

Measuring performance was messy due to varying degrees of transparency from companies and different types of metrics. Nonetheless, the index aimed to reduce the

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<sup>96</sup> Kent, Sarah. “The Sustainability Gap.” *Business of Fashion*. 2021. pp.11.

fuzziness of the data available and take stock of progress through like-for-like comparisons, leveraging data. The Index found that the average score, even amongst the industry's most highly resourced businesses, was just 36 out of a possible 100. While this number is low, indexes like the Business of Fashion and the Higgs index hold fashion companies accountable for their environmental impact. They demonstrate an increased interest by customers, activists, the government, fashion company employees, and fashion leaders alike to improve the environmental impact of their brand.

Diversity and Inclusion is likewise becoming more desired as a model of social responsibility in fashion. After the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, many brands including the aforementioned Reformation were called out for racist or exclusive company practices. As a result, some of these brands promised change. Similar to the coalitions for sustainability, groups formed to drive diversity and inclusion in the fashion industry. Aurora James started the 15 Percent Pledge, a drive to get retailers to pledge that 15 percent of their stock comes from Black-owned brands. The Black in Fashion Council and the Kelly Initiative were both created as third-party audits to ensure accountability.<sup>97</sup> Just as with measuring sustainability, data matters for D&I: "One of the key elements of change-making, especially regarding diversity and inclusion, is metrics," Kibwe Chase-Marshall, a writer and a founder of the Kelly Initiative, told *The New York Times*.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Read about the 15 percent pledge and kelly initiative on their websites: <https://www.blackinfashioncouncil.com/> and <https://thekellyinitiative.net/>

<sup>98</sup> "The Fashion World Promised More Diversity. Here's What We Found." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 4 Mar. 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/04/style/Black-representation-fashion.html>.

Although brands acknowledge they have more work to do in public statements, it's unclear if the industry is collectively taking the necessary steps to improve. Part of the problem is that some brands share their metrics while others won't. In 2021, *New York Times* reached out to 64 brands that were best known for their women's wear whose products set trends.<sup>99</sup> They focused on brands that are a part of the runway system and that have more than \$50 million in annual revenue. When interviewers asked each of the brands a set of questions about the percentage of Black employees across various parts of their companies, only four of the 64 fashion brands — Tory Burch, Coach, Kate Spade, and Christian Siriano—tried to fully answer each question.

Even those that do earnestly try to improve face challenges. As with environmentalism, enacting and measuring diversity and inclusion isn't so straightforward. Representation encompasses race, gender, body type, sexuality, religion, physical ability, and culture. While some brands can focus in on one form of diversity and fairly claim to be genuinely diverse in one of these areas, most are unable to do all. Even so, one way all companies can be more diverse is to hire a wider spectrum of people. As a result of the pandemic, however, many brands had to lay off employees and are having a difficult time recruiting again.

The leaders of Green and D&I models of CRS face a similar challenge in the fashion industry: many brands do not measure environmental impact and D&I metrics. Of the brands that do, comparisons are often fuzzy because brands measure different things and use different measurements. Moving forward, coalitions like the ones listed

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<sup>99</sup> “The Fashion World Promised More Diversity. Here's What We Found.”

above can help bring a formal standardized reporting process to fashion, helping accurately measure performance and areas for growth, strengthening each model of CSR.

The future of the America-Made is more uncertain. Although nationalism is enjoying a revival, it tends to appeal to an older demographic. Matt Bigelow of All American Clothing Company, for example, shared that "...the message of environmentalism resonates more and more every day, but it still largely resonates with a younger demographic than the one that we serve at the moment. Our customers are much older, and the patriotic aspect of our business is foundational to their values."<sup>100</sup> Yet even if the demand for American-made clothing eventually declines, green companies will continue to have an incentive to set up shop in America. Thus, American-made clothing may increase even as the corporate model of social responsibility that promotes it withers.

The fashion industry has gone through a revolutionary period where its main players have been asked to step up: for people, for the country, and for the earth. While some large companies have begun to make changes, the path to radical change is slow and tedious. Thus, smaller activist-led fashion companies are entering the space and setting an example with embedded CSR models that put their larger counterparts to shame. These companies, such as the Reformations, Universal Standards, and All American Clothing Companies of our time, have shown that fashion companies can successfully push forward a profitable business that creates more good than harm. Nonetheless, it is still up to these larger fashion corporations to step up to the plate and

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<sup>100</sup> Matt Bigelow, All American Clothing Co. 20201.

begin implementing models of corporate social responsibility, or at least try and fail until they succeed.

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