



MADE IN L.A.

SweatFree and Consumer Awareness Conversation Guide

Made in L.A. is a story about immigration, the power of unity and the courage it takes to find your voice. *Made in L.A.* follows the remarkable story of three Latina immigrants working in L.A. sweatshops and their struggle for self-empowerment as they embark on a three-year odyssey to win basic labor protections from a clothing retailer.

Starting the Conversation

Historically, work in the U.S. garment industry has been performed by poor, unskilled, mostly female immigrants. Because opportunities are few for such workers, many of whom speak no English or lack legal documentation, they are vulnerable to abuse, including poor working conditions, long hours and extremely low wages.

A sweatshop is an employer that violates more than one federal or state labor law governing minimum wage and overtime, child labor, industrial homework, occupational safety and health, worker's compensation, or industry regulation. According to a U.S. Department of Labor study, over 50% of sewing shops in the United States meet the criteria of "sweatshop." [From Sweatfree Tool Kit <http://www.sweatfree.org/toolkit>, pg. 20]

This brief guide is intended to spark conversation, build awareness and motivate viewers of *Made In L.A.* to learn more and possibly get involved. We hope that participants using this guide try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively. Controversial topics often make for excellent discussions. But by their nature, those same topics can also give rise to deep emotions and strongly held beliefs. We hope the questions below help guide you through an engaging and enlightening conversation.

To find out more about *Made in L.A.* and how to get involved, to view the *Made in L.A.* Event Planning Toolkit or to explore conversation guides on other issues, please visit www.MadeInLA.com.

General Questions

Garment Worker Center organizer Joann Lo describes a cycle in which "workers are being paid less because retailers are paying less to manufacturers, who then have less money to pay contractors, and on down the line." Who benefits most from this cycle? Who is harmed by it? Who is responsible for breaking the cycle? What specifically should they do?

What could be done to prevent employers from exploiting undocumented workers? Besides the workers themselves, who would benefit from protecting the rights of these workers?

Ultimately, the garments that Lupe, Maria or Maura produce end up in retail stores. What is the role of consumers in the situations that you see in *Made in L.A.*? What are our responsibilities as consumers?

In *Made in L.A.*, the workers are seeking to hold Forever 21 responsible for what their subcontractors do. In your view, is Forever 21 responsible? What are the pros and cons of holding a company responsible for what subcontractors do? Some retailers have voluntarily adopted codes of conduct for their contractors. In your view, how is this helpful or not helpful?

Should retailers be forced adopt codes of conduct?

We see Lupe at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum and at Ellis Island recognizing links to turn-of-the-century Jewish women garment workers. Why do you think sweatshops have been part of our economic system for so long?

What insights or inspiration did you gain from this film? What did you learn about the film's subjects and about yourself?

Interconnections- Sweatshops, Immigrants, Women and Organizing

Lupe says, "most immigrants come to this country thinking there are lots of jobs. Well, there are many jobs, but they're jobs of exploitation." Why are most of the jobs available to immigrants like Lupe "jobs of exploitation" like we see in the garment factories? How does lack of documentation make immigrant workers vulnerable to exploitation?

At the beginning of the film, Maria says, "We had no other option but to fight." Now that you have seen the full story, why was "fighting" Maria's only option (or why did she think it was her only option)? What else could be done to provide workers like Maria with other options to address workplace complaints and work-related injustices?

In *Made in L.A.* Lupe says "when people organize, they stop being victims." How does organizing help people "stop being victims" even when that very organizing can bring about risks (reprisals, being fired and so on)? What did you learn from the film about the difficulties and rewards of organizing and sustaining a campaign?

How do you see the fight for SweatFree goods as connected to other key issues of our time including globalization, workers rights and women's rights? How do you think improvements in any one of these areas can help improve the conditions of low-wage workers?

Taking Action

Did this film inspire you to take action in your own life? If so, are there simple ways you can make changes in your life to live sweatfree?

Did the film inspire you take action in your community? If so, which parts of your community can become sweatfree? Is there a living wage campaign you can support?

In recent years, many cities, school districts, universities, and other institutional purchasers have decided to make sure they do not support sweatshops by adopting 'Sweatfree Procurement' policies. Such policies insure that all of the uniforms and clothing that they purchase are made under fair and legal working conditions. Would your local or state government or your school pass a sweatfree procurement policy? How can you help support or organize around this work?

Does the organization hosting this event have suggestions about how you can get involved in the Sweatfree movement?

[We encourage each screening host or coalition to determine the right "Action Ask". For detailed suggested actions, visit our Get Involved page at www.MadeInLA.com/get]

Optional Activity

Take a look at the label inside your shirt. Where did the clothes you are wearing come from and how were they made? (Some organizers have done this activity before showing the film to get conversation about sweatshops and the apparel industry started.)



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License. This work can be copied and distributed freely provided you credit the authors and is not modified or used for commercial purposes. To contact the authors visit www.madeinla.com/contact