

# THE TRUE COST

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## Bullfrog Community Screening & Discussion Guide

Use your film screening of **THE TRUE COST** as a tool for educating your community about the “fast fashion” industry and the environmental impacts and human rights issues associated with the production and consumption of cheap clothing. This guide offers some background information, helpful tips & discussion questions for an informative, rewarding screening. **Good Luck!**

For additional resources, visit [thetruecost.bullfrogcommunities.com/true\\_resources](http://thetruecost.bullfrogcommunities.com/true_resources)

## About THE TRUE COST

This is a story about clothing. It's about the clothes we wear, the people who make them, and the impact the industry is having on our world. The price of clothing has been decreasing for decades, while the human and environmental costs have grown dramatically. The True Cost is a groundbreaking documentary film that pulls back the curtain on the untold story and asks us to consider, who really pays the price for our clothing? Filmed in countries all over the world, from the brightest runways to the darkest slums, and featuring interviews with the world's leading influencers including Stella McCartney, Livia Firth and Vandana Shiva.



Andrew Morgan is an internationally recognized director focused on telling stories for a better tomorrow. His experience includes a broad range of work that spans narrative and documentary storytelling for both commercial and film projects. After studying cinematography at the Los Angeles Film School he went on to co-found Untold Creative, a hybrid filmmaking studio where he currently serves as the creative director. He is a contributing writer for the Huffington Post and speaks regularly on the power of storytelling as a tool in the ongoing fight for human rights around the world.

## About the Director

# ready to watch!

## Ideas and best practices to help make your community screening a success!

**1. Publicize Your Event!** This is the most important step because it not only tells the world what you're up to, but it lets the Bullfrog Community team know what your plans are so we can help you publicize your event. Visit [http://thetruecost.bullfrogcommunities.com/true\\_screenings](http://thetruecost.bullfrogcommunities.com/true_screenings) to register and get the word out about your screening of *The True Cost*.

**2. Visualize Your Goal!** What do you hope to achieve with your screening of *The True Cost*? Your goal could be to generate a lively post-film discussion generally about the effects of fast fashion on people and the environment or more specifically about (1) globalization, the outsourcing of labor, workers' rights and the right to collective bargaining, a living wage, fair trade, and an equitable economy; (2) consumerism, materialism, and their relation to psychology; or (3) GMO cotton, "disposable" clothing, and pollution. Or, you can simply provide an opportunity for your audience to watch and learn together.

**3. Where To Host?** Consider which locations in your area would be ideal for accommodating a community film screening of the size you anticipate: downtown movie theaters, churches and synagogues, town halls, community centers, public libraries, school auditoriums, university and college venues, warehouses at a business and outdoor screenings at parks and playgrounds, and even private homes have been venues for many successful community screenings.

**4. Find A Partner!** Give some thought to who is already working on this issue in your community. Do you know of non-profits, businesses or other groups and organizations addressing/working on issues related to human rights as well as workers' rights in the garment industry, environmental and sustainability issues, fair trade, poverty and economic justice? Can they help sponsor the event? Spread the word? Speak on a panel discussion after the screening? Some potential partners include: environmental and human rights organizations; experts on environmental issues, labor, globalization, poverty and economics, women's studies, sustainability, consumerism and fashion at departments at universities and colleges; nonprofits focused on fair trade, corporate responsibility, workers' rights, economic justice and a living wage; fair trade and sustainable business leaders; and networks focused on democratic workplaces and local living economies.

**5. Invite A Guest Speaker!** Guest speakers and panelists are a great way to encourage discussion and debate after a community screening. When people are engaged and thinking about the issues they will stay engaged long after the screening has passed. Contact representatives of organizations and nonprofits or teachers and professors who have expertise or insight into the issues raised by the film, and invite them to attend and participate in a discussion or Q&A session.

**6. Engage Your Audience!** Use this discussion guide to engage your audience. Included in this guide is a section called **Ready to Talk!** with a few questions to get the conversation started and a section called **Ready to Act!**, a hand-out listing additional resources for further investigation about key issues raised in the film, all to support efforts to prepare your audience to act.

**7. Spread The Word!** Think about the best methods available to you for publicizing the film screening to people in your community. Sending emails, creating event notifications on Facebook or Meetup, using Twitter, and placing screening announcements in local newspapers and newsletters is a good start. Find *The True Cost* screening poster, discussion guide (includes handout), and press photos on [http://thetruecost.bullfrogcommunities.com/true\\_resources](http://thetruecost.bullfrogcommunities.com/true_resources) to help publicize your event.

# background information

## **Human Rights**

### **Who makes our clothing?**

We are increasingly disconnected from the people who make our clothing. 97% of clothes sold in the U.S. are now made overseas. There are roughly 40 million garment workers in the world today; many of whom do not share the same rights or protections that many people in the West do. They are some of the lowest paid workers in the world and roughly 85% of all garment workers are women. The human factor of the garment industry is too big to ignore; as we consistently see the exploitation of cheap labor and the violation of workers', women's, and human rights in many developing countries across the world.

## **Globalization**

The fashion industry represents one of the biggest connection points for millions of people across the world, spanning from agriculture and manufacturing to retail. It has been one of the leading industries to capitalize on the new globalized world of the 21st century. It is harder and harder to believe the free market story that a rising tide will lift all boats. Today (we have some of the highest levels of inequality and environmental destruction the world has ever seen. We must find a way to continue to operate in a globalized world that also values the people and planet.

### **The Brands**

Global fashion brands are bigger than ever before and with annual revenues in the billions, they are now part of an almost 3 trillion dollar a year industry. These brands are continuing to profit hugely from their use of cheaper labor in foreign countries. They also represent a great opportunity for change, to use their influence to benefit their workers. As customers in an increasingly disconnected world, it is important that we feel connected to the workers who make our clothes, as well as inform brands that we care about these people and their voice.

## **Environmental Impact**

### **Disposable Clothing**

The world now consumes about 80 billion new pieces of clothing every year. This is 400% more than the amount we consumed just two decades ago. As new clothing comes into our lives, we also discard it at a shocking pace. The average American now generates 82 pounds of textile waste each year. That adds up to more than 11 million tons of textile waste from the U.S. alone. Historically, clothing has been something we have held onto for a long time, but with cheap clothing now abundantly available we are beginning to see the things we wear as disposable.

### **Cotton**

Cotton represents nearly half of the total fiber used to make clothing today. More than 90% of that cotton is now genetically modified, using vast amounts of water as well as chemicals. Cotton production is now responsible for 18% of worldwide pesticide use and 25% of total insecticide use. The largely untested impacts of these chemicals on both the land and human health are beginning to be questioned by those

working in the industry. As our skin is the largest organ, these chemicals are passed into the bloodstream of the people wearing these clothes.

## Leather

Leather production is increasingly linked to a variety of environmental and human health hazards. The amount of feed, land, water and fossil fuels used to raise livestock for leather production come at a huge cost to the health of our world. In addition to raising the livestock needed, the leather tanning process is among the most toxic in all of the fashion supply chain. Workers are exposed to harmful chemicals on the job, while the waste generated pollutes natural water sources leading to increased disease for surrounding areas. Studies have found that leather tannery workers are at a far greater risk of cancer, by between 20% – 50%.

# ready to talk!

**Your audience will be excited to discuss the issues raised by THE TRUE COST. Here are some questions that will get people talking.**

- 1.** Why are clothing companies outsourcing labor to factories in the Global South? Do you think that so much production has been relocated there because of, or in spite of, the bad conditions that factory workers there face? What effect has outsourcing had on the manufacturing sector, jobs and the Main Street economy in the US and other Western countries?
- 2.** As demonstrated in the film, some economists argue that conditions in garment factories, bad as they may be, are better opportunities for workers in “developing” countries than they would have otherwise. After watching this film, do you buy this argument? Even if the argument is true, does that mean that conditions should not be improved? How are women’s rights particularly affected?
- 3.** Compare the conditions for garment workers you saw in the film to those in factories in the U.S. in the early 20th century. How are they similar and how are they different? Compare the conditions for garment workers to conditions for factory workers in the United States and other Western countries today. What is the difference? What do you think makes conditions better in some countries? What allowed workers in the West to secure better working conditions, higher salaries, health insurance, and a chance at entering the middle class?
- 4.** How important is collective bargaining to workers’ rights? When workers organized and protested the labor conditions in the film, they were met with a fierce backlash from their employers and state forces. Why is worker organizing and collective bargaining so threatening to employers and governments?
- 5.** Given that labor and environmental laws are weaker in “developing” countries, are fast fashion companies’ voluntary codes of conduct sufficient to improve working conditions in garment factories? If not, how can domestic and international law be changed to make this improvement?
- 6.** Garment workers are often exposed to toxic chemicals as are those in surrounding communities. Worker and community health is damaged severely as is the environment in which they live. As standard practice, companies often externalize these costs. What responsibility should these companies have monetarily and otherwise to the health of the workers and communities as well as to the environment?
- 7.** The materials used in the clothing are often a threat to the health of the material producers and the environment in which they live. GMO cotton is often the material produced and used in fast fashion garments. As shown in the film, massive amounts of pesticides, particularly glyphosate, are sprayed on the cotton. (According to the World Health Organization, glyphosate is a probable carcinogen.) The empirical evidence points to detrimental health effects in both Texas and Indian communities where GMO cotton is grown. The large amounts of chemicals used to grow the cotton are also a threat to the health of the wearer of the clothes produced. For the most part, long-term independent studies on the public and environmental health effects of GMOs have been made impossible to conduct. Why is the precautionary principle unacknowledged when it comes to the production of GMO cotton?

- 8.** As evidenced in the film, organic cotton can be grown without threat to the health of the producers, consumers or the environment. Why is organic cotton not the standard? What is preventing it from being so? How can it be changed?
- 9.** The garment industry is the second-most polluting in the world. A significant amount of this pollution is the “disposable” clothing itself. Why is there so much waste? How does this waste effect the environment? How does the waste and acceleration of garment production contribute to climate change? What can be done to reduce waste, the garment industry’s effect on the climate and on the environment in general?
- 10.** Is the prevailing fast fashion model sustainable? What alternatives are there? Fair trade? Democratic workplaces? Do you know of any businesses or networks that are modeling something different? How can you support them?
- 11.** How can consumers affect change on this model? As experts posit in the film, consuming more can have a negative effect on your psyche. Can a change in your consumption habits improve your well-being? How can it improve the well-being of others?
- 12.** The acceleration of garment production is rooted in maximizing profit for the clothing companies, while minimizing the purchase price of garments for consumers. This mirrors a “race to the bottom” mentality in many other industries. Richard Wolff says that we have been unable to properly criticize this economic model in the US. Why must the economic model be challenged? Can the garment industry truly change without fundamental change to this system? How does systems change occur? What are tipping points and how do they relate to systems change? How can you contribute?

# ready to act!

handout

Luke Swanson, co-founder of Tripty, a slow fashion brand, has organized multiple screenings of *The True Cost*. Luke says there are a great many things one can do to change the industry and negate your personal impact. Below are six of his ideas.

- 1. Ask:** “Who Made My Clothes?” ([fashionrevolution.org](http://fashionrevolution.org)) Questioning is an empowering act. If enough of us asked, brands would be more transparent.
- 2. Support Fair Trade:** Cradle to Cradle ([c2ccertified.org](http://c2ccertified.org)) recently began its Fashion Positive ([fashionpositive.org](http://fashionpositive.org)) initiative which certifies companies that have environmentally responsible production, while also putting in place systems to recapture garments at the end of their life cycle.
- 3. Reward brands that match your values:** People Tree ([peopletree.co.uk](http://peopletree.co.uk)) is doing amazing work in Fair Trade around the world and Reformation ([thereformation.com](http://thereformation.com)) is making trendy, chic clothing from waste material while also putting recycling programs ([thereformation.com/blog](http://thereformation.com/blog)) in place for your used or dated outfits.
- 4. Shop second hand:** It’s one of the best ways to save clothes from a landfill while offering a solution to rampant consumerism ([theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2014/nov/28/buying-secondhand-an-alternative-to-rampant-consumerism-of-black-friday](http://theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2014/nov/28/buying-secondhand-an-alternative-to-rampant-consumerism-of-black-friday)).
- 5. Wash less often:** As Joan Crawford said, “Care for your clothes, like the good friends they are.” Washing is hard on your garments. Save and savor those outfits as you grow into them and they become a part of your ‘chosen skin’ ([ecouterre.com/eco-fashion-predictions-for-2015/2015-orsola-de-castro](http://ecouterre.com/eco-fashion-predictions-for-2015/2015-orsola-de-castro)).
- 6. Activate your inner policy wonk:** Ask your local, state and federal government ([cleanclothes.org/livingwage](http://cleanclothes.org/livingwage)) to enact policy changes that require the same safe, healthy, well-paying working conditions for international productions that we demand domestically. Currently, there are no legally binding standards for production overseas.

See <http://remake.world/videos/true-cost-a-post-screening-guide-to-action/> for more information.

# resources

handout

## **Films**

**The Secret Life of Your Clothes** is revealing documentary film about what happens to the mountain of clothes – castoffs in today’s world of fast fashion – that are donated to charity. Few make it to your local charity thrift store.

## **Organizations**

**Anti-Slavery International**, founded in 1839, is the world’s oldest international human rights organization and works to eliminate all forms of slavery around the world.

**BRAC** is a development organization dedicated to alleviating poverty by empowering the poor. BRAC programs support services in the areas of human rights and social empowerment, education and health, economic empowerment and enterprise development, livelihood training, environmental sustainability and disaster preparedness. Gender equality, respect for the environment and inclusivity are themes crosscutting all BRAC activities.

**Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC)** is a coalition of organizations, including trade unions and NGOs focused on women’s rights, consumer advocacy and poverty reduction, which is dedicated to improving working conditions and supporting the empowerment of workers in the global garment and sportswear industries. CCC works to help ensure that the fundamental rights of workers are respected. CCC educates and mobilizes consumers, lobbies companies and governments, and offers direct solidarity support to workers as they fight for their rights and demand better working conditions.

**CorpWatch** works to promote environmental, social and human rights at the local, national and global levels by holding multinational corporations accountable for their actions. Corpwatch employs investigative research and journalism to provide critical information on corporate malfeasance and profiteering around the world to foster a more informed public and an effective democracy.

**Ethical Fashion Forum** aims to develop a collaborative movement which will transform social and environmental standards in the fashion industry within a decade.

**Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF)** is a UK-based non-profit organization working internationally to protect the environment and defend human rights.

**Fairtrade International** works to connect disadvantaged producers and consumers, promote fairer trading conditions and empower producers to combat poverty, strengthen their position and take more control over their lives.

**Fashion Revolution** is a global coalition of designers, academics, writers, business leaders and parliamentarians calling for systemic reform of the fashion supply chain.



**Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS)** was developed through collaboration by leading standard setters with the aim of defining requirements that are recognized world-wide and that ensure the organic status of textiles from harvesting of the raw materials through environmentally and socially responsible manufacturing all the way to labeling in order to provide credible assurance to the consumer.

**Greenpeace** is an independent global campaigning organization that acts to change attitudes and behavior, to protect and conserve the environment and to promote peace. Through the Detox campaign, Greenpeace challenges clothing brands to eliminate all releases of hazardous chemicals.

**IndustriALL** is global trade union for workers, including garment and textile workers.

**Labour Behind the Label** is a UK-based campaigning organization that works to improve conditions and empower workers in the global garment industry.

**Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA)** works to replace the use of hazardous pesticides with ecologically sound and socially just alternatives. As one of five PAN Regional Centers worldwide, PANNA links local and international consumer, labor, health, environment and agriculture groups into an international citizens' action network. This network challenges the global proliferation of pesticides, defends basic rights to health and environmental quality, and works to ensure the transition to a just and viable society.

**Rainforest Action Network (RAN)** campaigns for the forests, their inhabitants and the natural systems that sustain life by transforming the global marketplace through education, grassroots organizing and non-violent direct action. RAN has launched the Out of Fashion campaign to demand the fashion industry commit to forest friendly fabric.

**Stop the Traffik** works to disrupt and prevent human trafficking and its harm and abuse to human beings. It seeks to prevent trafficking through: community transformation; global campaigning; and gathering and sharing knowledge on how and where human trafficking is taking place. Stop the Traffik works to end the trafficking of young women and girls in India, and to eliminate human trafficking from across the whole cotton supply chain, through the Make Fashion Traffik-Free campaign.

**TRAID** is a charity working to stop unwanted clothes from being thrown away, while raising funds to stop the exploitation of people and the environment across the textile production and supply chain. War on Want fights against the root causes of poverty and human rights violation, as part of the worldwide movement for global justice.

**World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO)** aims to improve the livelihoods of marginalized producers and workers, especially in the South. WFTO strives to change unfair structures of international trade, mainly by means of Fair Trade, to improve and coordinate the co-operation of our member organizations and to promote the interests of and provide services to our member organizations and individuals.