

Wear No Evil

You walk into Forever21 and see the cute clothes neatly laid out and the mannequins dressed to the nines, but you probably don't even think about those who made the clothes. These pieces of clothing are not only made by workers who are underpaid and poorly treated but they also negatively affect the environment. Fast fashion industries are contributing to the increasing rate of global warming, and this harmful production of clothing needs to end.

Fast Fashion is an industry that uses people and manufacturing techniques to rapidly produce new clothes and goods so that they may be quickly shipped out to retailers where they are cheaply sold.

The existence of fast fashion sweatshops can be explained by our societal standards that demand that we have an abundance of clothing. *The Economist* believes that this is caused by standards set by models and designers. The idea that we must have a new outfit for every season and every occasion has become a very widespread belief.

Buying from high-end retail stores is considered the best way to avoid purchasing fast fashion. However, not everyone can afford to do this, so they switch to lower priced options in order to keep up with the fashion trends. Manufacturing companies that produce these clothes will release new items multiple times each week to keep up with what is going in and out of style. Due to this, Americans have exponentially increased the amount of clothes that they buy each year.

In order to sell the clothes as cheaply as possible, they are made with cheaper materials that are harmful to the environment. *The Economist* explains that large amounts of cotton found in the oceans are depleting water sources and contaminating our surroundings with pesticides. The chemicals emitted from the clothes have ruined Asian rivers. By 2050, it is projected that the fashion industry will be responsible for around 25% of the world's carbon emissions. Industries that produce fast fashion and other sweatshop products are also to blame for a large amount of plastics in the ocean. Materials like polyester, nylon, and acrylic are made with tiny pieces of plastic that are eventually washed back into the earth's water supply.

The International Organization believes that the fast fashion industry is fully to blame for the burning down of the Rana Plaza factory. This is a building where workers produced fast fashion items to sell to stores. The 2013 catastrophe resulted in the deaths of 1,134 workers, and casualties of about 2,500 people total. The clothing factory was built very poorly and without permits. The building was closed for a number of days because of cracks that were considered a fire hazard. Despite the safety risks, pressure was placed on the workers by larger retail stores to return to work.

Sweatshop workers in Bangladesh are going on strike to bring light to the conditions they work in. Many of them have signs that say, "No one should die for fashion."

There are plenty of ways to lessen the impact of fast fashion world wide. *The Economist* suggests a new idea of renting clothes. That way, people can keep up with new styles but also reduce their carbon footprint. You can also recycle your clothes to businesses that reuse the polyester woven in the garments.

Owner of the new renaissance store "Monkees," Suzanne Ketchings, explained her views on fast fashion. Even though "Monkees" is a high-end chain store, Ketchings takes the time to personally meet and learn about the designers that she invests in.

“As the owner, I have complete control over what brands are sold in the store.” Ketchings said. “I do all the buying. We get to know all of the designers when we go to market. I can say that I know the quality of all of the things I sell here.”

Ketchings goes on to address the topic of fast fashion. “Forever 21 makes cute things but they don’t make it to last,” said Ketchings. “It’s made to wear a couple times then you put it through the wash, and it’s not going to look the same....It’s not the best use of your money or your time. If you are able to just spend a little more you will be able to get something that lasts. Eventually, you would spend just as much going back and buying more things versus just making the investment upfront.”

St. Andrews Senior Lauren Brown explained her thoughts about the products she bought from fast fashion stores including, Zara, H&M and Topshop.

“I’ve bought a couple of shirts from Zara and H&M before and I remember them not being the best quality, and they were made with super thin material,” Brown said. “It is obviously expected because the prices are so low. I also had a pair of jeans from Forever 21 that I had for a good amount of time before they almost completely ripped in half.”

Even today, fast fashion industries still continue to grow, despite the negative impacts on the environment. Consumers still continue to buy these products even though many are educated about the practices occurring at these factories. As a nation, we cannot afford to keep ignoring these issues. We are the people fueling this epidemic, and we are the ones that have the power to stop it.