

*Anti-Sweatshop and Anti-Slavery*  
*The Moral Force of Capitalism*

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“Whatever nicety of distinction they may be betwixt going in person on expeditions to catch slaves, and buying those with a view to self-interest which others have taken, it is clear and plain to an upright mind that such distinction is in words, not in substance; for the parties are concerned in the same work and have a necessary connection with an d dependence on each other.”

- Anti-slavery protest leader John Woolman’s *Journal and Major Essays* quoted in Haskell, *Capitalism and Humanitarian Sensibility 2*, p. 159

“The rise of antislavery sentiment was, among other things, an upwelling of powerful feelings of sympathy, guilt, and anger, but these motions would not have emerged when they did, taken the form they did, or produced the same results if they had not been called into being by a prior change in the perception of causal relations.”

- Thomas L. Haskell, *Capitalism and Humanitarian Sensibility 1*, p. 112.



Possibly the world’s first culture jam occurred when abolitionist poet John Greenleaf Whittier changed the message of “S.S.” (slave stealer, a common admonishing label) to “Salvation to the Slave” in his poem “The Branded Hand.”



- Microcosm Publishing, 2005 online

“Our actions are conditioned by and contribute to institutions that affect distant others....Because our actions assume these others as condition for our own actions, ...we have made practical moral commitments to them by virtue of our actions. That is, even when we are not conscious of or actively deny a moral relationship to these other people,...we have obligations of justice in relation to them.”

- Iris Marion Young, “Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model” *Philosophy and Social Policy* 2006: 23 (1): 102-130. p. 106.

“Americans go to shopping centers on average once a week—more often than they go to church or synagogue...We have more shopping centers than high schools”

- Vicky Robins, “Sustainable lifestyles: Must we shop ‘till we all drop’?” *TOES/Americas* 8 (1991 Fall/Winter), 22,-23, at 22 as quoted in Robert E. Lane, *The loss of happiness in market democracies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

## Introduction

This paper introduces a bold argument. It posits that the anti-sweatshop movement of the new millennium is the moral equivalent of the antislavery movement that flourished centuries ago. Surprisingly scholars writing on the sweatshop movement have not yet made this connection (cf. Bender & Greenwald, 2003; Ross; 2004; Shaw, 1999, Ross, 1997).<sup>1</sup> This is interesting because many academics consider anti-sweatshop—like anti-slavery—to have a transformative air about it (e.g., Young, 2006; Bennett, 2003). Also without making the direct comparison, they show in their studies that the anti-sweatshop movement concerns the same deep humanitarian values as the anti-slavery movement. It even borrows its language. It uses spectacular vocabulary like chocolate slaves, fruit slaves, and slave labor in its condemnations of corporate policies and practices to get Western consumers to think twice about their preferences and choices.<sup>2</sup>

Two other reasons make this argument a compelling. First, historians show considerable scholarly reverence to the anti-slavery movement. They view it as forming an important part of “[a]n unprecedented wave of humanitarian reform sentiment [including women’s suffrage that] swept through the societies of Western Europe, England, and North America in the hundred years following 1750” (Haskell, 1992, 107). Their accolades are never-ending. It was an “unweary, unostentatious, and inglorious crusade” (Anstey, 1968, 307), “outstanding development of a general humanitarian movement” (Klingberg, 1926, vii), and a landmark and something new in history. Phrases like “against all odds” and “sea change of opinion” signify its uphill struggle in shifting mentality on slavery (Hochschild, 2004, 2005). Hundreds of years after the anti-slavery movement achieved its goals, plentiful anti-sweatshop groups and networks raise consciousness and mobilize support for sweat-free trade, the new millennium’s humanitarian sensibility. The paper’s argument is that the anti-sweatshop movement is having the same moral stature and plays the same value-changing role in the new millennium as the anti-slavery movement in centuries past.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Rosenwald (2003), Professor of English and Peace and Justice Studies at Wellesley College, associates the foremost anti-slavery activist John Woolman’s discussion about dyed cloth with the contemporary anti-sweatshop movement. However, he does not go further than this. Well-known author Adam Hochschild mentions clothing sweatshops in Indonesia and Latin American farm laborers in his first introductory chapter on the anti-slavery movement (2005).

<sup>2</sup> The spectacular terms, chocolate and fruit slaves, appear in reports from the Swedish corporate watchdog, Swedwatch, and in Simen Sætre’s highly publicized book, *Den lille stygge sjokoladeboka*. The web site for Anti-Slavery International, the world’s oldest international human rights organization, includes a clickable item entitled “Slavery and what we buy.” However, it does not include anti-sweatshop/no sweat as a rubric and does not give mention to the main anti-sweatshop players who also have, on occasion, spiced their rhetoric on substandard working conditions with the words “slave labor” in the global garment industry (see also McDonagh, 2002; PICA, 2005).

Second, historians agree that the rise of capitalism was instrumental for the anti-slavery movement. For them, capitalism is intriguing because it created humanitarian sensibility (cf. Haskell, 1992). Interestingly, many historians use the term “anti-slavery” rather than “anti-slavery movement” in their discussions of the humanitarian sensibility that emerged in the late 1700s. The choice of phrase is deliberate. As discussed below, “anti-slavery” fuses an actor-oriented (social movement) and structure-oriented (capitalist market) perspective to the development of humanitarian sensibility. The paper’s argument is that the rise of economic (corporate) globalization is a breeding ground for the new millennium’s anti-sweatshop humanitarian sensibility. The global market with its attractive consumer goods is steaming with notions of cosmopolitan citizenship. The conclusion is that, under certain circumstances, citizenship is embedded and bubbles up from the marketplace.

For obvious reasons, hindsight assessments equaling the rich scholarship on the anti-slavery are not available on anti-sweatshop. However, academic voices in one way or another acknowledge anti-sweatshop’s magnitude to shape morality. Actor-oriented approaches declare that the broad and diversified anti-sweatshop movement is the student movement of the new millennium (Featherstone 2000). As taught by social movement scholars, students are a courageous vanguard group for ideological struggles and value change for years to come (with the free speech, divest in South Africa anti-apartheid, anti-Vietnam war, anti-nuclear power, and Beijing student movements as good illustrations). The movement is also closely monitored by scholars amass because it helps them think about political responsibility (Young, 2004, 2006; Goodin, 2003) and characterize innovative and transnational political action (Stolle & Micheletti, forthcoming a, Micheletti, 2003a, ch. 1; Smith, 2002). The anti-sweatshop movement is even listed (along with the anti-slavery, civil rights’, labor, and women’s movements) in the *Encyclopedia of American Social Movements* as significant for contemporary American history (Ness, 2003), giving weight to the claim of its central value-shaping role in at least the U.S. setting. Structure-oriented approaches show how the rise of corporate globalization and the global consumer market point can steam with humanitarian sensibility. The global consumer market informs scholars about the pervasiveness and dangers of consumer thinking in Western democracies (2, 2001; Baudrillard, 2005; Lee, 2000).<sup>3</sup> As discussed below, scholars also point to embedded market-oriented vulnerabilities in corporate globalization and, thus, how a anti-sweatshop market characteristics influence global political

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<sup>3</sup> Reports of young people killing each other for a pair of Nike shoes led to a public outcry over the role of brand name consumer goods in our lives.

thought and action (e.g., Young 2004, 2006; Stolle & Micheletti, forthcoming a; van de Donk et al., 2003, part 3).

The paper's argument is made in three steps. First, the paper argues that the global market is a hotbed for anti-sweatshop humanitarian sensibility, that is, global social justice. Inputs for this argument come from three sources: research on the importance of the "new" capitalist marketplace three centuries ago for the development of anti-slavery humanitarian sensibility; the role of the anti-sweatshop movement in new philosophizing on political responsibility, and the importance of market mechanisms for institutional designs to end sweatshop practices in our global world. Paper sections two and three cover this first argument. In the second step, the paper argues that the anti-sweatshop movement has the same transformative air as the anti-slavery movement. This is argued in sections four and five, which discuss the two movements and put emphasis on their communication of values and use of market mechanisms as well as the marketplace as an arena of political action. Importantly, this section shows parallels between anti-slavery and anti-sweatshop on the social justice sensibility discourse. The fifth section sums up the three-step argument and offers some general thoughts on political consumerism. Finally, section six briefly reflects on the significance of consumption and the market as a shaper of citizenship and citizenship practice. It discusses why common consumer goods are important objects and an important arena for the inculcation of democratic cosmopolitan citizenship norms and values.

### **Rise of Capitalism as Hotbed of Humanitarianism**

Historians agree about the connection between capitalism and anti-slavery. They hotly debate about why this is the case. Some historians focus on the role of the burgeoning industrializing working class and impact of slavery on free labor to explain how morality hooks up with capitalism. For them, the rise of capitalism spurred on anti-slavery ideas and values through the medium of class interest (Davis, 1992; see Bender 1992, 4-5). Thus, actors and class relations are *the* pertinent aspect of capitalism triggering value change hostile to slavery (Ashworth, 1992, 274). Another view focuses on structure, the capitalist *market*, as the pertinent factor. This view finds that the structure and logic of market relations forced a new understanding of causation and responsibility on market actors and, in so doing, offers what historians consider a "provocative interpretation of the cultural meaning of the social practices inherent in commercial society or capitalism" (Bender 1992, 7). What the arguments have in common is their focus on capitalism's role as a trigger or hotbed for value change, value practice, and a new sense of political responsibility.

This paper uses both arguments because they point to market mechanisms (instruments and processes for doing or bringing something into being) and social actors inside capitalism that can turn the marketplace into a classroom, workplace, and hotbed for humanitarianism. The social actor or class relations perspective provides two important insights. First, the economic changes associated with the rise of capitalism “caused a shift in values which in turn made slavery appear much worse. The legitimation of wage labor encouraged a perception of the conscience and of the family as supporters of a new social order,” including a conviction that free labor is morally and economically superior to slave labor and that this belief should be a universal one (cf. Ashworth, 1992, 173, see also diagrams on 174). Second, its stress on economics shows how self-interested industrial workers and small Northern farmers in the United States feared slavery. Slavery was a system of cheap labor that threatened these market actors (workers and farmers) who could not keep up the competition without severe economic sacrifice (Infoplease, 2006, Bender, 1992). To use the contemporary anti-sweatshop vocabulary, slavery was their “race to the bottom.” The new social roles (free industrial workers, burgeoning urban middle class, the more educated class) and the new social order (class society) created in early industrial capitalism kindled thinking about the role of humans in the production apparatus (see also d’Anjou, 1996, ch.5). Self-interested private virtues, in this case wanting to survive economically, spilled over and became other-oriented or public virtue, in this case opposition to slavery (for a general discussion on this spillover effect from private to public virtues see Micheletti, 2003a, ch. 1).

Scholarship shows how the rise of capitalism led to a new social order (industrial society), new social roles, and new social thinking (value of free labor and property ownership). This paper argues that significant changes in the capitalistic market in the late 1900s play a similar transformative role. The global capitalism that matured in the late 1900s created a new social order—global consumer society—and new important social actors—the global consumer and consumer-oriented (buyer-driven) corporations (Lee, 2000; Schor & Holt, 2002; Gereffi, 2001). Moreover, by accenting the significance of workers’ interests in anti-slavery, this scholarship offers ideas for a deeper assessment of the importance of workers’ interests and collective action (in for instance trade unions) as a political force in the new millennium’s social justice humanitarian projects.

Other theoretical insights spring from scholarship on capitalism’s creation of a new social order. The growing importance of consumption today follows Hannah Arendt’s thoughts about labor and consumption being two stages of the same process (Arendt 1958, ch. 17; Baudrillard, 2005; Norris, 2004). It also ties in well with scholarship on post-materialism

and post-modernization, which stresses a shift in the focus of power and political thinking from the sphere of production (industrial capitalist society) to the sphere of consumption (global consumer society and the buyer-driven corporate global market) (Inglehart 1991; Scammel, 2000; Klein, 2002). Few scholars deny the contemporary importance of consumer society for cultural, social, and economic thinking, and many are now finding the consumer as a significant agent of political change (Stolle & Micheletti, forthcoming a; Micheletti, 2003a; Nava, 1991; Scammel, 2000). Following these leads, the paper argued that the new social orders of the global market and global consumer society as well as its new social actors (the global consumer and the buyer-driven corporation) are a precondition for anti-sweatshop as this millennium's humanitarian sensibility. However, to make the argument that the global market and corporations are important for the new millennium's humanitarian sensibility, the other scholarly camp on the importance of the capitalist market needs to be heard.

While acknowledging the birth of social orders and actors in industrialized capitalism and not denying their importance as a moral force against slavery, the market perspective argues that the important trigger for the anti-slavery humanitarian sensibility is what this camp of scholars call the cognitive style nurtured in capitalism. Their claim is that capitalism “has a subliminal curriculum” and that “one of the principal lessons one learns is perception: a ‘widening of causal horizons,’ a heightened awareness of the remote consequences of both one’s acts and (equally important in moral matters) one’s inactions” (Bender 1992, 7). In this view, capitalist market culture changed social and economic practices. These structurally induced changes socialized people and led to a new sense of potentialities, responsibilities, and connections, which paved the way for the rise of humanitarian sensibility. The new social actors and others (the Quakers) could then use this structural prerequisite and new thinking as the basis—the hotbed—for humanitarian political action. So, what norms are associated with the marketplace; what are these new potentialities, responsibilities, and connections, and how did they inculcate a humanitarian sensibility?

To answer the questions scholars begin by giving reasons for why slavery was dismantled “precisely at a time when capitalist ideas were in the ascendant, and large-scale production of all kinds of goods were beginning” (Temperely as quoted in Haskell 1992, 109). What toppled the backbone of a highly successful system of large-scale agriculture worldwide with over three-quarters of the world’s population in bondage, second largest enterprise in the American South (where slaves far outnumbered free people), and monopoly on cotton, sugar, and other tropical products? Their answer is that “the expansion of the market, the intensification of market discipline, and the penetration of that discipline into

spheres of life previously untouched by it” (Haskell, 1992, 111) led people inculcated with capitalist values to, so to speak, walk naturally out of a profitable, efficient but inhumane system of production into one touched by humanitarian sensibility. Humanitarian sensibility was carried by the anti-slavery movement (forerunner for other transformative movements as women’s suffrage and civil rights), and it was a natural step in capitalist development.

Part of this natural step involved using economic logic to change public views about public subsidies to West Indian planters spurred on by the changing economic and social order in Britain (Oldfield, 2001). Anti-slavery was also affected by cultural trends in Great Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> century—enlightenment philosophy, religious thinking, 18<sup>th</sup> century political thought, economic theory, world of print (d’Anjou, 1996)—and the effect of market thinking on mentality. To simplify the highly complex argument from the history of ideas, new cognitive structures that were the “crucible of market transactions” facilitated this walk to humanitarianism (Haskell, 1992, 111).

For market transactions to work, market actors—production owners, traders, shopkeepers, consumers, and others—had to learn forethought, calculation, and gratification denial. For without practicing these capitalist norms, they would not be able to use the opportunities provided by market capitalism to reap tangible rewards. An important part of this logic was ownership. Interestingly, Adam Smith, the 18<sup>th</sup> century’s important economic thinker, condemned slavery and the slave trade because it was unnatural economic practice: it went against his basic law of human motivation that you work to acquire property (d’Anjou, 1996; Temperley, 1977). The capitalist market required planning, forethought, and proper and planned use of property and, thus, created a framework of opportunity and affirmation that turned people into rational economic man. Rational economic people learned two important lessons: promise-keeping and attention to the remote consequences of their actions (Haskell, 1992b, p. 141). The inculcation of these norms spilled over into other spheres and, in so doing, shook up 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century American and British society. They enlarged the temporal and spatial sphere of thinking and acting, shifted the conventional boundaries of moral responsibility, and made (some) people feel the natural necessity to intervene in the course of events and shape the future:

Thus, what emerged in the century after 1750 was not, in the first instance at least, either a new configuration of class interests or a novel set of values geared to the hegemony of a rising class. Instead, the principal novelty was an expansion of the conventional limits of moral responsibility that prompted people whose values may have remained as traditional (and as unrelated to class) as the Golden Rule to behave in ways that were unprecedented and not necessarily well suited to their material interests. What happened was that the conventional limits of moral responsibility observed by an influential minority in society expanded to encompass evils that previously had fallen outside anyone’s operative sphere of



responsibility. The evils in questions are of course the miseries of the slave, which had always been recognized but which before the eighteenth century had possessed the same cognitive and moral status that the misery of the starving stranger in Ethiopia has for us today” (Haskell, 1992a, 133).

Importantly, these new ingrained norms and skills became the “recipe knowledge” (standard operating practices) of capitalist market transactions, and in so doing, they changed general habits and conventions. They spilled over into issue areas and settings.

“By its very nature the market encouraged the production of recipe knowledge. As the prime mover of a promise-keeping form of life, the market established a domain within which human behaviour was cut loose from the anchor of tradition and yet simultaneously rendered as stable and predictable as ‘long chains of will’ would make it. The combination of changeability and foreseeability created powerful incentives for the development of a manipulative, problem-solving sort of intelligence” (Haskell 1992b, 151).

Capitalism’s recipe knowledge is the theoretical root of rational choice theory in economics and political science, the economic theory of democracy, social exchange theory, and as discussed below is now used to formulate new theories of political responsibility.

Capitalism’s contribution to the freeing of slaves was the fertile mentality ground (logical precondition) it prepared for humanitarian political action. This fertile ground or hotbed was “a proliferation of recipe knowledge and consequent expansion of the conventional limits of causal perception and moral responsibility...compelled some exceptionally scrupulous individuals to attack slavery and prepared others to listen and comprehend. The precondition or mentality shift could have been satisfied by other means, but in this period no other force pressed outward on the limits of moral responsibility with the strength of the market” (Haskell, 1992b, 155-6). Under these circumstances and in this setting, Quakers and other devoted individuals pitched their humanitarian message about the evils of slavery to an ever-growing receptive audience. Their message made sense and resonated well in the capitalist market culture. In the vocabulary of political science, they raised people’s consciousness to the evil politics of slave goods (cotton and particularly sugar) and called on them to activate themselves politically in boycotts and to speak out and demonstrate for abolition and ending the slave trade. Thus, the capitalist market (its contractual foundation, rational choices, logic of exchange, and foundation in consumer goods) functioned as a social justice opportunity structure for innovative political activism that rocked the value system of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain and America.

## **The Global Market and Anti-Sweatshop Social Justice Humanitarianism**

Conclusions about the role of capitalism in anti-slavery offer insights into the role of capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These insights are the grounds for arguing that capitalism's preconditions and market mechanisms are once again paving the way the social justice humanitarian sensibility in the new millennium. The section offers a few parallels between the issues raised in anti-slavery and anti-sweatshop, argues that the rise of capitalism's recipe knowledge has spilled over into global capitalism, and shows how contemporary political philosophy and applied political science use market logic and mechanisms to turn the capitalist market and consumer society into a opportunity structure for social justice humanitarianism.

Global manufacturing practices violate the humanitarian sensibility hatched in the rise of capitalism, nurtured and refined in anti-slavery, and applied in industrial society. Multinational corporate outsourcing policy and practices go against capitalist promise-keeping and attention to the remote consequences of their actions in industrial relations (labor welfare) within national settings. Anti-sweatshop show how global garment corporations have been caught taking a big step back in time. There are striking parallels between the treatment of workers in outsourced manufacturing and the treatment of slaves in the 18 and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Similarities include the brutal reality facing slaves who harvested sugar cane and processed it into sugar and the treatment of laborers in global manufacturing who work in substandard factories and for non-living wages. Anti-sweatshop scandals parallel anti-slavery ones. They include factories burning down with employees locked inside, child labor, sexual harassment, long workdays, prohibitions against workers becoming pregnant, and denial of payment for services renders (Ross, 1997; Clean Clothes Campaign, 2006, USAS 2006. Global Unions, 2006). Another similarity is the reliance on cheap labor to provide Western consumers affordable goods. Slavery made cane sugar an affordable good, thus moving it from a luxury item to one purchased and consumed almost daily. Sweatshop labor in the global garment industry does the same by offering Western consumers a variety of styles and fashion at affordable prices (Wark, 1997; H & M, 2005). Transnational garment corporations also violate cherished values of industrial society. Employers and/or governments still tend to deny garment workers the civil right to sign market-based social contracts (union agreements) with their employers (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2006; USAS, 2006; Global Unions, 2006). These and others realities have reinstated the word sweatshop in the public vocabulary and show clear similarities between the slave trade and free trade.

Capitalist market actors use and tune the recipe knowledge found to be the precondition of humanitarian sensibility. Promise-keeping and responsibility have been fitted to the consumer market in the form of consumer rights and protection that prohibit unfair and deceptive corporate marketplace practices. For decades now, legislation in Western countries requires corporations to provide consumers with detailed information about their products (Howells & Weatherill, 2005). This information includes product ingredient lists, using and washing instructions, country of origin labels, and good housekeeping stamps of approval. Regulation also prohibits corporate false advertising. These structural aspects give activists and consumers the opportunity to get a foot up. Anti-sweatshop uses them to broaden the consumer and corporate causal horizon of responsibility for wrongdoings in global garment manufacturing. Activists accuse corporate giants of breaking promises to Western consumers about their progress in eradicating sweatshops, and in so doing, force corporations to take more causal responsibility. They find broken responsibility promises in corporate social responsibility reports, codes of conduct, and commercial advertisements (see *Kasky v. Nike*, 2003; information from Fair Trade Center, 2005; Clean Clothes Campaign, 2005).

Many social actors including unions and numerous humanitarian-oriented civil society groups take action to prevent global garment workers' wages, labor standards, and workers' rights from racing to the bottom. They are forcing garment corporations to keep their general promises to consumer society and specific anti-sweatshop promises. The rise of the global capitalist market makes garment corporations highly vulnerable to anti-sweatshop criticism. Market restructuring in the form of buyer-driven commodity chains and lean retailing (Gereffi 2001) means that they must survive in increasing competitive consumer settings and must respond rapidly to changing consumer demands for "fashion and quality at the best price" (H & M, 2005). To do this, they invest huge resources in their corporate identity (logotype, image, and culture) and thus put themselves into the hands of consumers (Knight & Greenberg, 2002; Klein, 2002; Smith, 1997; Edvardsson, Enquist & Johnston, 2004). This means that they must rapidly create and satisfy fluctuating and fickle consumer taste. Their promise to deliver fashion and quality at the best price forces them to rely on the sewing hands of individual garment workers rather than garment-making machinery. Multinational garment corporations are caught in a bind: "The catch is that the more successful corporations have become at branding our culture and creating a certain reputation for themselves, the more vulnerable they are to disruptions of that image through exposés linking their products to sweatshop conditions" (deWinter, 2003, 108).

Today's global capitalist market has put transnational garment corporations in a social justice corporate trap. Their promise-making to consumers and their consumer-dependence gives anti-sweatshop opportunities to use capitalism's and consumer society's recipe knowledge to infuse consumer choice with social justice humanitarian sensibility. The only way out of their corporate sweatshop woes is to concede to anti-sweatshop demands. Global clothing and shoe corporations—like slave-driven production centuries ago—have boxed themselves into a humanitarian sensibility corner. Anti-sweatshop is winning because it uses market logic to force social responsibility on market actors.

Scholarly efforts to end sweatshops also use market logic. Social justice workplace-related wrongdoings in the global garment industry trigger a rethinking of political responsibility, thus showing anti-sweatshop's importance as a transformative force in the world today. Some writers focus on the role of competitive incentives in transnational power and bargaining relations for taming globalization (Goodin, 2003; Krasner, 2003). Others like political philosopher Iris Marion Young ponder sweatshop woes and the anti-sweatshop movement to fuel her social connection model of global political responsibility. She stands on the shoulders of political philosophers (Arendt, Rawls, and others) and uses their thinking to formulate the connections between universalizing social justice and wrongdoings in corporate policy and practice. Her moral argument is that Western consumers and producers—democratic citizens—have obligations of justice because of the social processes and connections (the consumer goods and economic transactions) tying them together to distant others (the workers sewing our clothes, building our shoes, weaving our rugs, and picking our food) (Young 2004, 2006). Young states this connection best herself:

Our actions are conditioned by and contribute to institutions that affect distant others...Because our actions assume these others as condition for our own actions,...we have made practical moral commitments to them by virtue of our actions. That is, even when we are not conscious of or actively deny a moral relationship to these other people,...we have obligations of justice in relation to them. That is, even when we are not conscious of or when we actively deny a moral relationship to these other people, to the extent that our actions depend on the assumption that distant others are doing certain things, we have obligations of justice in relation to them

It is not possible to trace how each person's actions produce specific effects on others because there are too many mediating actions and events. Nevertheless, we have obligations to those who condition and enable our own actions, as they do to us (Young, 2006, 106).

The use of the global capitalist market to build the new millenniums' social justice humanitarian sensibility does not stop here. In applied political science, scholars take capitalist recipe knowledge, market logic, and market transactions as their explicit point of departure to suggest institutionalized ways to rid the world of sweatshops. Ratcheting Labor Standards (RLS) is one such idea. Its authors show "how open competition can save ethical

sourcing” (Sabel et al., no date). RLS has four basic principles reminiscent of capitalism’s recipe knowledge—transparency, competitive comparison, continuous improvement, and sanctions—but it is the principle of competition that is the linchpin here. RLS involves all market actors: corporations, retailers, and consumers as well as market stakeholders like labor unions, civil society activist groups, and economic journalists. It builds on ongoing corporate commitment to social responsibility and corporations’ promise-making to review their ethical practices in internal reports and external audits. It then asks them to take a natural step (a ratchet up) and commit themselves to implementation strategies and documentation of implementation practice (Sabel et al., no date, 2). These moves create a competitive market for anti-sweatshop: corporations strive for superior social practices; monitoring firms seek more offers by excelling in auditing skill and experience, and monitoring data informs consumers about the sweatshop politics of products. Continuous improvement is the natural (market logical) step from competitive comparison because market actors are, by nature, motivated to increase their market share and profitability. The logic of competitive survival also means that, if this fails, both socially responsible corporations and political consumers can use a variety of innovative sanctions (market-based labeling schemes, boycotts, and discursive political consumerism) to get other firms onboard.

### **Anti-Slavery Movement**

Anti-slavery scholarship reveals that capitalism promoted humanitarian sensibility. It also shows how humanitarian sensibility capitalized on the market (see below). The heterogeneous actors forming the anti-slavery movement—different Christian churches, former slaves, women suffragists, liberals, socialists, pacifists, workers’ movements, political parties, and others—used the market creatively in their struggle. However, they needed to change public opinion somewhat before they could effectively use boycotts, make profits on anti-slavery goods, and use capitalism as a hotbed for social justice politics. The reason is obvious. Anti-slavery “was the first time a large number of people became outraged, and stayed outraged for many years, over someone *else’s* rights. And most startling of all [for the times], the rights of people of another color, on another continent” (Hochschild, 2005, 5). Anti-slavery activists managed this sea change of public opinion by showing and convincing people that there were connections between the near and the distant.

Abolishing slavery was ““unthinkable until a tremendous task of altering people’s views of reality had been accomplished”, which depended ‘upon reaching the hearts and minds of vast number of people’” (Turner quoted in Snow, 2004, 392). They key was “moral

suasion” or, in today’s vocabulary, communicative political action in the form of consciousness-raising and opinion formation. Some movement actors, as the Quakers who started and sustained the crusade, were ingenious political communicative activists. As early as the 1600s, traveling abolitionist Quaker ministers stumped anti-slavery in their existing communications network, which previously generated both social and financial capital and, thereby, gave “its adherents the confident sense of being members of an extended family whose business and personal affairs were united in a seamless sphere” (Davis, 1992, 39). This fusion of the public and private was an ideal setting to ready Quakers for an anti-slavery political culture and lifestyle.

Today we would slot the anti-slavery movement as a humanitarian simplicity movement slash transnational advocacy network, which used life style politics, deliberation to change values, and a repertoire of methods to boomerang their political cause about human rights on governments and political institutions (cf. Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Anti-slavery activists distributed pamphlets, gave public lectures, published official declarations, collaborated with other abolitionists, petitioned and lobbied government, interrogated political candidates, engaged in civil disobedience, raids, and legal battles, and used the market as an arena for politics (Duqella et al., no date, Davis 1992; Oldfield, 2001). One highly innovative communicative action took place at Cambridge University, which held annual Latin essay-writing contest on the morality of slavery (Hochschild, 2004). Anti-slavery moral suasion reached a new chancellor of the university who played his part by initiating the writing contest, which transformed some participants into committed anti-slavery activists. The contest is interesting because it foreshadows do-it-yourself (DIY) activism—opinion formation and communicative activism—now common in anti-sweatshop (for a discussion see Micheletti, 2006; Stolle & Micheletti, forthcoming b).

Moral suasion also entailed confronting individuals directly with the immorality of slavery by bringing slave reality into everyday settings. From our horizon, this consciousness-raising and value change task seems insurmountable without the mass information technology of photographs, television, and the Internet. But they used the “world of print,” the information communication technology of their times. Movement activists were innovative in their use of moral logic and moral shocks “that triggered personal transformations and motivated bold collective action” (Young, 2001, 99). The moral logic was that slavery was a sin, and for religious people abolition was personal redemption. Moral shocks took the form of life stories, novels (e.g., *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*), and common consumer goods (primarily sugar and cotton) formed the lens for ordinary people to understand tangibly (see, feel, and

taste) how their daily lives were connected with and responsible for slavery. People who had experienced slavery directly told their life stories (in today's vocabulary testimonials) of fear, flogging, hunger, slave women raping, and Christian hypocrisy in autobiographies, speeches, and book tours. They gave slavery a human face: two examples are Olaudah Equiano (1789) and Frederick Douglass (1845). Other publicists, appealing to younger generations, wrote books that told the story of slave children separated from their parents and mistreated by their masters. Moral shocks created moral outrage and an urgency for the anti-slavery cause that mobilized hundreds of thousands of Anglophones (Young, 2001 Hochschild, 2005).

To confront ordinary people with slavery, activists even grafted anti-slavery onto popular culture, where it resonated well with the times. Popular tunes got anti-slavery lyrics; anti-slavery became popular verse and “startling and quotable language,” and anti-slavery was pictorial represented on handicraft goods and in newspapers and broadsides. Possibly the world's first culture jam<sup>4</sup> (see picture above) occurred in this struggle, when an abolitionist poet changed the message of “S.S.” (slave stealer, a common admonishing label) to “Salvation to the Slave” in his poem “The Branded Hand” (Whittier, ca. 1845). These examples of political communication are the forerunners of campaign buttons, slogans, political wear, social movement songs, and anti-sweatshop culture jamming. More confrontational movement actors spiced up abolition with spectacular events. The publicist William Lloyd Garrison is a good example. He publicly burned the American constitution and called on people in the northern slave-free states to boycott voting because the constitution was “a covenant with death and an agreement with hell” (Garrison as quoted in McKivigan, no date). Some violence also occurred; the best example is the numerous slave revolts in the southern part of the United States. Over time, it became difficult for people to avoid the slavery issue in their everyday activities. Simply put, anti-slavery was in their face.

Activists also asked people to “put their money where their mouth is.” They used the market mechanism of supply and demand to press for change. Some argued that the supply of slaves would diminish if buyers did not demand them (Benezet, 1760). Others called for boycotts of selected slave-grown consumer goods to give ordinary people the chance to take personal responsibility for humanity. As has been documented in more contemporary boycotts (see Micheletti, 2003a, ch. 2-3), dissatisfaction with government led to market-based political action. The British Parliament's rejection of an abolition bill in 1792 triggered the highly

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<sup>4</sup> Culture jamming is changes in the meaning of corporate advertising through artistic techniques that alter corporate logos visually and by giving marketing slogans new meaning.

successful boycott the same year that mobilized between 300,000 and 500,000 British consumers (Hochschild, 2004, 2005, 193). Anti-slavery shopkeepers even made a point of advertising that they sold no-slave sugar “produced by the labour of freemen,” and, thereby, encouraged consumers to “boycott” for social justice. A poet labeled tea “the blood-sweetened beverage.”

The private was fused with the public in new boycott calls, and as later repeated time again in history, women came out full-force (Micheletti, 2003a, ch. 2). A woman Quaker activist visited all grocers in a British city to convince them to take slave-grown goods off their shelves. With eloquence she explained the social connection between slave and consumer: ““The West Indian planter and the people of this country, stand in the same moral relation to each other, as the thief and the receiver of stolen goods....Why petition Parliament *at all*, to do that for us, which...we can do more speedily and more effectually for ourselves?”” (as quoted in Hochschild, 2005, 325-6). She inspired women’s societies who distributed boycott pamphlets, began compiling boycott pledges, and even refused to patronize bakers using slave-grown sugar and shopkeepers selling it. Some people swore off sugar until anti-slavery was in place. In this way, anti-slavery public morality became lifestyle politics that fused the public and private spheres of ordinary people’s lives.

Business entrepreneurial anti-slavery activists even found that could make money on anti-slavery. They manufactured and marketed anti-slavery consumer goods “at a time when social emulation and emulative spending already had a powerful hold over the lives of many middle-class men and women” (Oldfield, 1995, 156). Middle-class people with sentiments against slavery purchased the British Wedgwood medallion “Am I not a Man and Brother” grafted on the already fashionable cameo and a variety of anti-slavery tokens, medals, jugs, plates, dinner services, artifacts, satirical prints, paintings, and printed images. Anti-slavery businessmen commercially exploited the growing abolition sentiment in Britain. Their efforts fit well with the growing commercialization of politics that began in eighteenth century Britain (Oldfield, 1995, 179).

Anti-slavery was innovative politics for its—and even our—day. Scholars call the movement’s activities ingenious and sophisticated (Hochschild, 2005, Oldfield 1995). The movement changed the social meaning of slavery. Slavery proponents reacted viciously by orchestrating riots against the anti-slavery press and leaders in the Northern states. They also tried to bring the public more in line with self-interest by proclaiming that sugar abstinence was unhealthy. Paralleling corporate reaction to anti-sweatshop, they even reacted by adopting codes of conduct to show the unnecessary of government regulation (Beaver



Country, no date; Hochschild, 2005, 194-5). The British government officially abolished slavery in 1833 and the United States in 1865. Anti-slavery's moral and market suasion showed that it had teeth.

### **Anti-Sweatshop Movement**

Like anti-slavery, anti-sweatshop has its roots in other-oriented interest and self-interest. For the third world solidarity movement, the cause was fair trade that promoted Third World industry and actors. The alternative trade movement began in the 1950s with third world stores (now world shops) selling goods and now fair trade labeled goods produced in developing countries. For unions and particularly North American ones in the 1960s and 1970s, the problem was "race to the bottom" domestic unemployment caused by textile and shoe factory moves to low-wage third world countries. By the new millennium, old civic society's trade unions, international humanitarian groups, and religious communities had teamed up with new civil society's student, women's, environment, and global social justice groups and transnational networks in a moral stance against sweatshops in the global garment industry. This heterogeneous group protests the same kind of problems as anti-slavery: dangerous working conditions, non-living wages, forced overtime, child labor, sexual harassment, and corporate neglect. Their general goal is sweatshop abolition, which in contemporary vocabulary is the promotion of decent work, fair globalization, and trade justice that focuses on the global garment industry and, more recently, all productive areas that deny workers human rights and a living wage.<sup>5</sup>

All groups exert effort to make consumers, the global public, governments, and corporations aware of the sweatshop politics of clothes and shoes and now all kinds of sweat-made consumer goods. Like the anti-slavery movement centuries ago, they are multi-targeted in character. They ask consumers and the public to pressure governments and particularly transnational corporations and retail marketers to promote decent work, fair globalization, and just trade. Their focus on market mechanisms and use of moral logic and moral shocks in their

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<sup>5</sup> The terms "decent work" and "fair globalization" come from the International Labor Organization. They capture the essence of the anti-sweatshop movement. Decent work is an organizing concept that provides an overall framework for actions in economic and social development. It is the promotion of opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The ILO states that decent work is the converging focus of the four strategic objectives, namely rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue. Fair globalization is a process with a strong social dimension based on universally shared values, and respect for human rights and individual dignity. It is tied to sustainable development's mutually reinforcing pillars of economic development, social development and environmental protection at the local, national, regional, and global levels. See ILO 2004, 2006. Recently many global social justice network began to use the term "trade justice" as an ideological frame for their work (see TJM, 2006).

activities are reminiscent of the anti-slavery movement, whose struggle was also for human rights for distant others. Like anti-slavery, anti-sweatshop uses moral suasion and market thinking to change the social meaning of fashionable and affordable apparel. Like anti-slavery, it too turns to the market because government has not been able to provide a proper solution to sweatshop problems. However, unlike anti-slavery, it does not find the final solution to sweatshops in national governmental proclamations and regulatory tools. The reason is changes in the capitalist market, which now has a global focus and works on the logic of corporate globalization and the World Trade Organization's position that national government legislation to prohibit sweatshops is a barrier to free trade. As government does not have the necessary regulatory reach over the global capitalist market, anti-sweatshop focuses on the "cognitive style nurtured in capitalism" to remind corporations and consumers about responsibility of the near for distant others. Its early use of consumer boycotts and present use of new regulatory tools (market-based labeling schemes, codes of conduct, and monitoring institutions) shows how it uses market mechanisms and capitalist recipe knowledge to create social justice humanitarian sensibility. As with anti-slavery, anti-sweatshop began its crusade by morally persuading the public about the wrongness of sweatshops.

Anti-sweatshop's first task was public consciousness-raising and moral suasion. Activists from religious communities, universities, unions, international humanitarian groups, newly created anti-sweatshop consumer-oriented groups, corporate watchdogs, and an array of other civil society associations used and continue to use moral shocks to open the eyes of Western consumers, citizens, corporations, and governments to the evils of sweatshops and their responsibility to sweatshop workers. Its moral suasion efforts are numerous and vary in character. Different anti-sweatshop groups have scandalized transnational apparel corporations with reports of child labor, workers killed in factory fires, bad wages, unfair treatment, and multinational corporate neglect. Testimonials by sweatshop workers, fact-finding missions, slick publications, political cartooning, comic books, street theatre, spin doctored internet communication, and direct confrontations with celebrity owners of transnational apparel corporations have brought sweatshop problems closer to home. Culture resonating tactics—focus on well-know brand names, humor, new song lyrics for Christmas carols, celebrity endorsement, holiday campaigns (Santa's toy sweatshop, Fair Trade Valentine's Day Action Kit), culture jamming, anti-sweatshop personal political apparel ("T-shirt activism"), alternative fashion shows—to show how private consumer choice hooks up with universal social justice. In particular, anti-sweatshop uses the new information

communication technology of the Internet to communicate sweatshop problems, show the plight of garment workers in clickable videos, mobilize support for urgent sweatshop alerts, offer toolkits for DIY-actions, sell anti-sweatshop goods, and discuss sweatshop solutions. It puts anti-sweatshop in the face of ordinary people.

As in anti-slavery times, universities, students, higher education, and the urban consuming middle class play a role in this millennium's social justice crusade. Outraged students have held sit-ins, engaged in civil disobedience, demonstrated against university contracts with transnational garment corporations, and demanded that university officials add sweatshop-free clauses to their procurement policy and agreements. Students also write essays and do school projects on sweatshop issues. Religious groups (again including the Quakers) have disrupted shareholder meetings with anti-sweatshop resolutions. Soccer moms joined their high school daughters in noisy demonstrations outside retail stores (Benjamin, 2001, ix). Professional associations for safeguarding workers' and human rights learned how to put bite in their moral message by using cultural resonance in their anti-sweatshop messages (Bullert, 2000). Union members in the United States have mobilized against domestic and global sweatshops. Violence is another similarity between the two epochal movements. At times, anti-sweatshop students have clashed with the police (Featherstone & USAS, 2002). A parallel to slave revolts are the vicious reactions by corporations, factory owners and managers, and even governments to quell workers' attempts to claim their rights (see reports on e.g., Clean Clothes Campaign's, USAS, Global Exchange's, Global Union's, Oxfam's, and Amnesty Business' web sites). Anti-sweatshop groups quickly respond to these abridgments of universal rights in urgent e-mail alerts about worker harassment and call on all consumers to mobilize against sweatshop practices in e-mails to corporate leaders, questions to retailers, and other discursive political consumerist activities.

Like heterogeneous anti-slavery, which disagreed about whether ending the slave trade or abolition (ending slavery) was its main goal, the diversified groups forming anti-sweatshop have different remedies to rid the world of sweatshops. For some, global agreements and unionization of garment workers is the answer (Global Unions, 2006). For others, the solution is independently monitored corporate codes of conduct that follow universal guidelines formulated by the International Labor Organization (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2006). A third group competes with mainstream corporations by selling their own no-sweat shoes and apparel. They want to show that companies can make a profit on anti-sweatshop. Anti-sweatshop activists dropped the idea of a labeling scheme for no-sweat clothes as a solution because of the complexity in the global garment industry. At first, most

groups supported boycotts to force change on corporate executives, but today they generally view boycotts as doing more harm than good for garment workers (Clean Cloths Campaign, 2006; USAS, 2006). Now that all transnational garment corporations have codes of conduct, anti-sweatshop monitors their level of ambition and implementation like a hawk.

Today the dominant anti-sweatshop tactic is discursive political consumerism, a form of moral suasion. Discursive political consumerism gives preeminence to the importance of communication, opinion formation, dialogue, deliberation, negotiation, and culture jamming to convince corporations and consumers about their social connections to the distant others whose sweat lies behind our consumer goods. But just in case, the anti-sweatshop movement retains its repertoire of more contentious protest activities if it needs to push corporations on the road of sweatshop abolition. An example reminiscent of anti-slavery's spectacular U.S. constitution-burning event are threats to publicly set fire to newly released corporate social responsibility reports unless corporations live up to their codes of conduct and acquiesce to more movement demands (Activist information communicated to Micheletti, 2005). Recently the movement celebrated such a victory.

The efforts of the anti-sweatshop movement are changing the social meaning of fashionable and affordable clothes. Consumers are increasingly conscious about the hidden politics—the dubious treatment of global garment workers—behind clothing labels. Clean clothes groups worldwide use important global events like the Olympics to campaign for “fair play at the Olympics” to focus attention on “the real cost of the game” and garment workers’ need of a sporting chance to make a decent wage and live a decent life (Play Fair, no date). Today the word sweatshop is a well-known part of contemporary vocabulary and the global public sphere. It gets over 3 million hits in an early March 2006 google search. Garment corporations are forced to relate to it; politicians talk about it; social justice groups have it as their master frame; new companies (Black spot shoes, Shoes with Souls, No Sweat, American Apparel, etc.) use it to market worker-friendly apparel; pollsters put it in their surveys (e.g., MU, 1999; Treehugger, 2005), and cartoonists create comic strips around it (Trudeau, 1997). The word appears in the titles of numerous books (14 in a March 10, 2006 Amazon search) and articles (over 5 000 in a March 10, 2006 goggle scholar search).

Sweatshop also makes the news. In one year in the late 1990s, over 700 articles published in the New York Times included it (Stolle & Micheletti, forthcoming a). The word resonates well culturally. Jay Leno joked on the Tonight Show on a hot Southern Californian summer day in 1998: “It’s so hot out I’m sweating like a 10 year old Malaysian kid in a Nike Factory.” And, quite remarkably, MIT-media lab master’s student Jonah Peretti started his

celebrity career in contagious media when his 2001 culture jamming “Nike Email Exchange” traveled rapidly through email inboxes to an estimated 11-12 million people globally (Peretti with Micheletti, 2003a, 131; Stolle & Micheletti, forthcoming b). He used the innovative prize-winning Nike iD web site<sup>6</sup> to order a pair of customized shoes with the word sweatshop on them. When Nike repeatedly refused his request, he wrote back: “Your web site advertises that the NIKE iD program is ‘about freedom to choose and freedom to express who you are.’ I share Nike’s love of freedom and personal expression. ....My personal iD was offered as a small token of appreciation for the sweatshop workers poised to help me realize my vision. I hope that you will value my freedom of expression and reconsider your decision to reject my order.”

### **Anti-Slavery and Anti-Sweatshop Political Consumerism**

Anti-slavery and anti-sweatshop are waves of global humanitarian reform sentiment. Their boldness of vision shows the force of political consumerism to right social justice wrongdoings around the world and over centuries. Their communicative and market-based actions changed and are changing the social meaning of common consumer goods. In so doing, they shift mentality on the moral connection between the consumption and production of consumer goods. Anti-slavery’s and anti-sweatshop’s political consumerist actors are a diversified network of market-based, civil society, and political groups all crusading in transnational fashion for every market actor to see this moral connection and fuse self-interest with other-oriented interest. Both in historical and contemporary times, these reform sentiment movements have argued that market transactions put political (moral) obligations and responsibility on us to respect the workers providing us with consumer goods. In so doing, they have used the market as an arena for politics.

The focus on common consumer goods puts responsibility for injustices directly in consumers’ hands. Their focus on everyday goods purchased by ordinary people almost daily makes political responsibility-taking a real (tangible) part of consumer choice. By labeling tea a blood-sweetened beverage and selling shoes with souls, they have confronted ordinary people with the tensions between the material and ideational (political and moral) aspects of

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<sup>6</sup> Critical mass invented the new on-line communications for the Nike iD customer service. It received the highest accolade, the Grand Prix, for it. As it explains on its own web site: “The Cyber Lions has become the most coveted award in the digital media industry and recognizes the world’s best work in interactive and Internet communications and advertising. ‘We are thrilled with this latest award for Critical Mass and NIKE iD,” said Jerry Johnston, CEO, Critical Mass.’ The NIKE iD site is helping make NIKE iD the benchmark for online customization and personalization. Winning the Grand Prix is a global testament to our ability to provide breakthrough strategy, creative development and implementation of online marketing initiatives for our clients” (Critical Mass, 2001.)

consumer choice. Anti-slavery and anti-sweatshop compel people to consider both the material aspects of consumer goods (taste, quality, and price) and the hidden ideational aspects of injustice treatment of workers. As political consumerist movements, they campaign for people to use political or ethical concerns and values to guide their consumer choices. They are urging all consumers (but particularly the vulnerable more educated, urban, and deep-pocketed ones) to walk on the path that unites morality and markets. Their use of singing, poetry, and culture jamming makes social justice resonate culturally. Few observers would deny the epochal significance of the anti-slavery movement. Through movement comparisons, this paper argues that anti-sweatshop movement also is an agent of epochal social and political transformation.

However, more than movements are necessary to make social justice stick on market actors and structures. Credit for successes in moral suasion does not only fall on anti-slavery and anti-sweatshop actors. This paper employs historical scholarship to show that the structure and mechanisms following the rise capitalism were an important precondition for anti-slavery. Following social movement research on political opportunity structure (Kitschelt, 1986; Micheletti, 1995; Kriesi, 2004), these structure and mechanisms are part of the market opportunity structure within which movements work and flourish. This paper argues that major changes in this millennium's capitalism are having the same pre-conditional significance today. For anti-slavery and anti-sweatshop, the capitalist market is a breeding ground, an opportunity structure, for humanitarian sensibility.<sup>7</sup>

The anti-slavery movement could use market logic, market mechanisms, market actors, and market exchanges to make slavery the antithesis of capitalism. Slavery went against basic norms (laws) of capitalism on promise-keeping, forethought, and the profitable relationship between work and ownership. Even such proponents of capitalist free trade as Adam Smith found slavery repulsive (Tupy, 2003). Today the new social order of global consumer society and new social roles of sovereign (choosey and informed) consumers (Korthals, 2001) and vulnerable image-oriented, buyer-driven corporate brands that have risen out of economic (corporate) globalization are making sweatshops an antithesis of productive corporate global development. Anti-sweatshop follows the path of anti-slavery. Its actors apply the general and developing recipe knowledge of capitalism to steer competitive market actors on the path of consumer and corporate global responsibility. The use of recipe

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<sup>7</sup> The important general aspects of political opportunity structure are characteristics of electoral system, alliance structure of political actors, conflict structure of political actors, and legal structure (Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi, 2004; Micheletti, 1995). Research finds competition to be important for the success of protest movements.

knowledge and competition is broadening the global horizon of transnational corporations and consumers. The global market—just like the capitalistic market of centuries ago—is hatching a new wave of humanitarian sensibility, which currently goes under the captions of global social justice, trade justice, or, in the words of business ethics, triple bottom-lining and corporate social responsibility (Elkington, 1998; see also Zadek, 2004). The new social roles of global capitalism make corporations, shareholders, retailers, and consumers the agents of justice (O’Neill, 2001, 199-201).

Interestingly, this paper’s comparison between anti-slavery and anti-sweatshop reveals an important finding for political consumerism research: capitalism’s structural development plays a crucial role in political consumerism. On-going and previous research has focused on movement characteristics, citizens’ socio-economic status, corporation characteristics (market share, competitive market environment, export sensitivity), and the *political* context or opportunity structure of political consumerism. On occasion, scholars have mentioned the frontier quality of the market for politics (its unregulated political character) (Micheletti, 2003ab). On-going research shows that the political context aspects of importance for “buycotts” (environmental, organic, and fair trade labeling schemes) are a friendly policy environment, developed welfare state, high gross national product, supportive citizens’ political sentiments and mobilizing networks, and an alert and pro-active civil society (Micheletti, 2003a; Micheletti et al., 2003; Micheletti & Stolle, 2005; Tobiasen 2005; Stolle & Micheletti, forthcoming a). However, political consumerist research has not focused specifically on the capitalist market as a triggering agent. It has not really studied the importance of market thinking and capitalism’s recipe knowledge as a prerequisite, precondition, structure, and breeding ground for political consumerism. Therefore, research is lacking on the *capitalist market* opportunity structure for political consumerism. This finding challenges political consumerist research, which views the market as an arena for politics. This view implies that political actors (social movements, transnational networks, individual activists, and consumers) take their political issues to the marketplace and, therefore, disregards the fact that the market in its own right is, in certain circumstances, an opportunity structure—breeding ground, hotbed, and trigger—for global and universal humanitarianism.

### **Capitalist Consumption as Shaper of Cosmopolitan Citizenship**

For centuries, common consumer goods have played a vital role in struggles for group rights, civil rights, workers’ rights, and social justice. Consumer goods are, therefore, a tool of citizenship. Social movements have called on citizens to use their consumer power to boycott

tea, sugar, buses, grapes, shoes, wine, and numerous other common market products. They have also boycotted countries and states within the United States when their policies are found to go against group and general interests (see Friedman 1999 for a listing). Boycotts promote self-group interest and other-group interests. More recently, consumers have teamed up in networks with social movements, policy-makers, think tanks, corporations, scholars, and others to develop market-based regulatory tools (Cashore et al., 2004). Eco-labels, organic labels, fair trade labels, and joint efforts to create independent monitoring institutions for the global garment industry are examples of “boycott” regulatory efforts (Micheletti, 2003a, ch. 3). Citizens choose to create market-based regulatory policy when they find governmental efforts lacking, sluggish, or ineffective. Discursive political consumerism complements these two forms of responsibility-taking political consumerism by using brand names as a lens to communicate social justice political responsibility.

All three forms of political consumerism show how consumer goods are an important classroom and learning tool for the inculcation and practice of democratic cosmopolitan citizenship norms and values. Consumer goods are a good site for moral suasion because they are readily available and part of the general code of consumption. This code includes a process of signification and communication and a system of ideological values (Baudrillard, 2005, 60). As such, consumer goods breathe “new life into some basic *historical* problems” including the economic responsibility for the content of production (Baudrillard, 2005, 85) as well as the connections and responsibility for the near for the far. Teaching these connections is education in cosmopolitan citizenship because people in the new millennium need to see the connections between public and private interests, national traditions, communities as well as other and alternative lifestyles (cf. Held, 2000). To do this, they must engage in cross-border exchanges and dialogue. Consumer goods put the connections directly in the hands of citizens and, therefore, give them ground to expand their knowledge and causal horizons of their personal responsibility for others.

Consumer goods are also a microcosm of society. They represent individual dreams of personal satisfaction, reward, and enjoyment. Flaunting certain consumer brands signals social distinction and cultural-economic empowerment. Corporations spend considerable resources in cultivating consumer tastes and marketing their crafted brands as community, hope, and trust. They are part of the social fabric of the affluent world. Many scholars view consumer culture as “an irresistible form of cultural authority” generating a limited set of identities accessible through commodities. In this view, corporations are cultural engineers that specify “the identities and pleasures that can be accessed only through their brands”



(Holt, 2002, 72). Brands are also gathering places for consumer identities. H & M has a club to offer its customers more than fashion; Nike, the Gap, and others emphasize how they invest in community worldwide; and Nordstrom organizes its departments by lifestyle.<sup>8</sup> Pollsters and trend analysts now use brands along with socio-economic indicators to classify citizens and explain their ideological tendencies. This is not surprising; citizens and corporations have done this all along. We all know the differences between Wal-Mart, Nordstrom, and Saks Fifth Avenue. Encompassing department stores have also traditionally sorted people along with merchandise: merchandise for the working class was in the basement. Today the class markers are less sharp, but they are still there. Nordstrom has a department for affordable clothes for “working women” with the alluring name “Individualist” offering “career and casual fashions with contemporary appeal, designed to perform through day and night with style” (Nordstrom, 2006; See Hurz, 2004 for an interesting discussion of the social indicators used in the NK department store). Thus, brands are not only anchored in our lives, they anchor our lives and lay “hold of the whole life” (Ritzer on Baudillard, 2005, 15).

No wonder people venture to kill for a desirable pair of Nike shoes. And no wonder the book *No Logo* and the Nike Email Exchange still make a big splash on the global public scene. These texts show the other side of desirous consumption and make social justice politics resonate culturally. They use enticing branded consumer goods to show consumers the sweatshops of global capitalism and give them ideas about how they can harness their consumer power to change the (corporate) world (<http://www.nologo.org>; Stolle & Michelett, forthcoming a). They too create hope, trust, and community.

Brands are a universal language and a prime tool of capitalism (Clifton & Maughan, 2000; cf. Simmel, 1990). They are traded on the global market. Brands are a contract between the consumer and the corporation. In older consumer society times, this contract had a material orientation. It meant good quality and service—the “good housekeeping seal of approval.” It was a consumer protection and consumers’ rights contract. Today it includes ideational aspects and is a social (sustainability) contract. Nike’s Brand Presidents formulate the contract this way:

Corporate responsibility challenges us to take a good, hard look at our business model, and understand our impact on the world around us..... Some of what we see is thrilling. We continue to be amazed by the capacity of our athletes, partners and employees to inspire people around the world.....For our company as a whole, we’ve set three strategic goals: To effect positive, systemic change in working conditions within the footwear, apparel and equipment industries; To create innovative and sustainable products; and To use sport as a

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<sup>8</sup> BTW: I own (bought) two pairs of socks embroidered with “Nordstrom shopper girl” on them! She is slim, white with strawberry blond hair, and carries several nice shopping bags.

tool for positive social change and campaign to turn sport and physical activity into a fundamental right for every young person (Nikebiz, 2006).

This paper and the discussion in this final section show how consumer goods play a crucial role in the deep crises and contradictions in the political world. Working on problems associated with consumption practices is an important way to engage citizenship, that is, in individualized and collective efforts to manage and (hopefully) solve these global crises and contradictions. Thinking about consumer goods is thinking about citizenship responsibilities. Learning about capitalism's mechanisms and consumer goods has probably always been citizenship education. Today these lessons are just as crucial as in anti-slavery times. Consumer thinking and choice is individualized (reflexive) political responsibility-taking for the social connections created from our capitalist market transactions.

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