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Collection/Record Group: Clinton Presidential Records
Subgroup/Office of Origin: Public Liaison
Series/Staff Member: Maria Echaveste
Subseries:

OA/ID Number: 11658
FolderID:

Folder Title:
American History Museum Sweatshop Exhibition

Stack:	Row:	Section:	Shelf:	Position:
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NATIONAL MUSEUM *of* AMERICAN HISTORY

*...inspiring a broader understanding of our nation
and its many peoples.*

December 12, 1997

Maria Echaveste
Director Office of Public Liaison
The White House
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Ms. Echaveste:

Development of the Smithsonian exhibition *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A History of American Sweatshops, 1820 - Present* is moving along rapidly. Despite criticism from a few individuals in the business community the project has received supportive stories in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and other newspapers around the country. The exhibition script has been finished and the cases and panels are now in production. Arrangements for the traveling portion of the exhibition and accompanying public programs are currently being made.

The completion of the National Leader's section, in which you are a participant, has been delayed because Tracy Mullin of the National Retail Federation and Larry Martin of the American Apparel Manufacturers Association decided to withdraw from the exhibition. We apologize for the departure from the planned schedule and hope that the delay will not cause you any inconvenience. The exhibit team is pleased to announce that Robert Haas, CEO Levi Strauss, and Floyd Hall, CEO Kmart, will participate as national leaders from the manufacturing and retailing communities respectively. They join Jay Mazur (president of UNITE,) Julie Su (Asian Pacific American Legal Center,) Kathie Lee Gifford, and yourself in making up the group of six national leaders. Mr. Haas and Mr. Hall have been asked to submit their draft statements by January 5, 1998. Upon receipt, all six statements will be distributed amongst the group as originally planned. Final statements will be due by January 29, 1998.

U.S. Department of Labor

Employment Standards Administration
Wage and Hour Division
Washington, D.C. 20210



FAX COVER SHEET

OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR
WAGE AND HOUR DIVISION

FAX NUMBER (202) 219-4753
COMMERCIAL (202) 219-8305

TO: Main Echaveste / Mark Hunter DATE: 9/11

FAX NUMBER: 456-2983

PAGES: 4
(include cover sheet)

LOCATION: _____

FROM Kathy

If you do not receive all of the pages please call:

NAME: _____

NUMBER: _____

COMMENTS/INSTRUCTIONS:



News

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Site Index

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EL MONTE RECREATION CENTER

HOLLYWOOD

Thursday, September 11, 1997

Plan for Sweatshop Exhibition Draws Fire

■ Museums: Apparel industry says Smithsonian re-creation of El Monte facility would be unfair.

By GEORGE WHITE, Times Staff Writer

At the heart of the controversy is an exhibition dubbed "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Dialogue on American Sweatshops, 1820-Present." The show is scheduled to open April 15 at the National Museum of American History, part of the Smithsonian's complex of museums on the Mall in Washington.

The \$285,000 program's centerpiece will be a re-creation of portions of an El Monte apartment complex sweatshop where about 70 illegal Thai immigrants were discovered in 1995 working in peonage to sew garments for brand-name apparel makers and retailers. The display will include two work stations and numerous artifacts from the notorious sweatshop, as well as a videotaped narrative by former Labor Secretary Robert B. Reich.

The planned exhibit will also delve into such broader issues as the historic relationship between immigration and sweatshops and how the pressure of low-priced imports leads some domestic contractors to underpay workers to stay competitive.

Liebhold said in an interview that he tried to avoid controversy over the program by inviting retail and apparel trade groups to contribute videos and other displays on "good industry practices" to remind visitors that many garments in the marketplace are not produced in sweatshops.

But one leading trade group, the Washington-based American Apparel Manufacturers Assn., turned down the invitation because "anything centered on El Monte will only reinforce negative images of the industry," in the words of Allison Wolf, a spokeswoman for the group.

Another trade group, the Washington-based National Retail Federation, said it feared the graphic immediacy of the El Monte display would overwhelm any positive material the industry could provide.

"They wanted a videotaped statement from a retail representative giving our position," said National Retail Federation spokeswoman Pamela Rucker. "You would have memorabilia and human suffering on one hand, and a talking head on the other. That's not balanced."

Industry officials also contended that the plan for the exhibition largely reflected the viewpoint of apparel labor unions, which they feared would use the display to further their organizing efforts.

"Why should we put ourselves in the position to be manipulated by the unions?" said Wolf.

Liebhold denied that the unions exercised "an undue influence" over the program.

"I've sought support and involvement from all areas--foundations, corporations and unions," he said. "I suspect the trade groups are not excited about the topic."

Liebhold said he would continue to seek involvement by retailers and apparel manufacturers--many of which are leaders in the effort to eradicate sweatshops--despite the opposition of trade groups. He said the project already has enough funding--mostly from the U.S. Department of Labor and the apparel labor union UNITE--to mount the exhibit at the Smithsonian, but that an additional \$150,000 will have to be raised to send it on tour to museums in four to six U.S. cities.

"I'd like to highlight the constructive contributions of the industry," he said. "It makes it more difficult when they walk away."

Union officials say the opposition of the trade groups suggests that the industry is not serious about addressing the sweatshop issue.

"It seems the trade groups don't want to be on same stage as the union--and that's part of the problem," said Jo Ann Mort, a UNITE spokeswoman. "El Monte happened because of the terrible conditions in Southern California's apparel industry. Southern California is more plagued by sweatshops than any other apparel manufacturing center."

For his part, the Smithsonian's Liebhold said he hopes the controversy can be defused before it becomes as politicized as the fight over the Enola Gay exhibit.

"We're dealing with a piece of history that has a current-day component," he said. "As long as we presume that sweatshops are an issue we should examine, we're doing a good job. If this is an issue we don't want to talk about, perhaps [the trade groups] have a point."

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PREV STORY

NEXT STORY

In an echo of the politically charged uproar that killed the Smithsonian Institution's planned 1995 exhibit on the dropping of the atom bomb, several apparel and retailing industry groups are protesting a new plan by the national museum for an exhibition displaying the slave-like conditions at the notorious El Monte apparel sweatshop.

The California Fashion Assn., which represents major clothing manufacturers in the Southland, on Wednesday condemned the exhibition as negative and unbalanced and claimed that it is unduly influenced by labor unions.

The group said it would try to block the Smithsonian's plan to unveil the display in Washington early next year and send it on tour around the country.

"The Smithsonian is taking a political position" by focusing on sweatshop conditions rather than the apparel industry's broader contributions to American life and commerce, said Ilse Metchek, executive director of the apparel trade group.

"We cannot stand idly by," she said, threatening to bring her complaints before Congress. "We want to turn this exhibit plan into another Enola Gay."

Metchek was referring to the controversy that erupted over a planned exhibit at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum commemorating the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan by the B-29 nicknamed the Enola Gay.

The exhibit was canceled after veterans groups and some members of Congress complained that the project focused too much on Japanese suffering and an antinuclear message and not enough on Japan's war atrocities and the United States' strategic rationale.

The new show's co-curator called his program on the sweatshops "tremendously balanced."

"We wanted it to be as full a story as possible," said Peter Liebhold, a museum specialist at the Smithsonian. "[But] I knew from the start it would be difficult."

Among those voicing support for the program were such groups as the Los Angeles-based Thai Community Development Center, which helped the El Monte workers find new jobs, and Common Threads, a Southland activist group.

California Labor Commissioner Jose Millan, who oversees regulation of the state's apparel industry, also backed the exhibition.

"A lot of manufacturers don't want to see El Monte in an exhibit, but it's part of history," he said. "The lessons of the past should not be ignored. The industry should be taking steps to make sure an El Monte incident doesn't happen again and they can help ensure that by actively supporting this exhibit."

9/11/97

3:24:22 PM

PLANE

facsimile
TRANSMITTAL

to: Mark Hunker
fax #: 456-7067
re: Smithsonian Exhibition
date: August 8, 1997
pages: 6, including this cover sheet.

Attached is a copy of the material we delivered to Maria Echaveste's office in July. Thanks for your help with this. If you have any questions or concerns please give me a call.

From the desk of...

Harry Rubenstein
Division of Social History
National Museum of American History
MRC 613
Washington, D.C. 20560

202-357-2008
Fax 202-633-8929



NATIONAL MUSEUM *of* AMERICAN HISTORY

July 7, 1997

*...inspiring a broader understanding of our nation
and its many peoples.*

Maria Echaveste, Director
Office of Public Liaison
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington D.C. 20502

Dear Ms Echaveste:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Smithsonian Institution's exhibition *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Dialogue on American Sweatshops, 1820 - Present*. After extensive consultation we have selected a group of six national leaders to express their views on the subject of sweatshop production in the United States. Listed below are the names of participants, the terms for participation and the steps to complete this section of the exhibition.

During the exhibition process respondents will be kept informed on major developments in the progress of the exhibition. All participants including respondents and Smithsonian officials agree to keep all drafts confidential.

Each respondent will be asked to address the following question in a short statement: **From your perspective what should Americans know about sweatshop production in the garment industry in the United States?**

List of participants:

- Maria Echaveste, assistant to the President and director, Office of Public Liaison
- Jay Mazur, president, UNITE
- Larry Martin, president, American Apparel Manufacturers Association
- Kathie Lee Gifford, celebrity endorser
- Julie Su, Asian Pacific American Legal Center
- Tracy Mullin, president, National Retail Federation

Sincerely,

Harry Rubenstein
Division of Social History

Peter Liebhold
History of Technology

cc: Suzanne Seiden

***Between a Rock and a Hard Place:
A Dialogue on American Sweatshops, 1820 - Present***

Project Schedule

July 9, 1997 each respondent receives:

- latest exhibition description
- conceptual floor plan of entire exhibition and preliminary design treatment for national leader's response section
- suggestions and limits on the type of additional objects and documents to be included

August 6, 1997, each respondent submits:

- color portrait photograph and biographical information to be used in the exhibition. No longer than 30 words.
- draft 200 word statement addressing the question: From your perspective what should Americans know about sweatshop production in the garment industry in the United States?
- artifacts to accompany statement. It is suggested that respondents select 4-8 items and work with exhibition curators to make final selection.

August 18, 1997, following completion of draft submissions each respondent will receive:

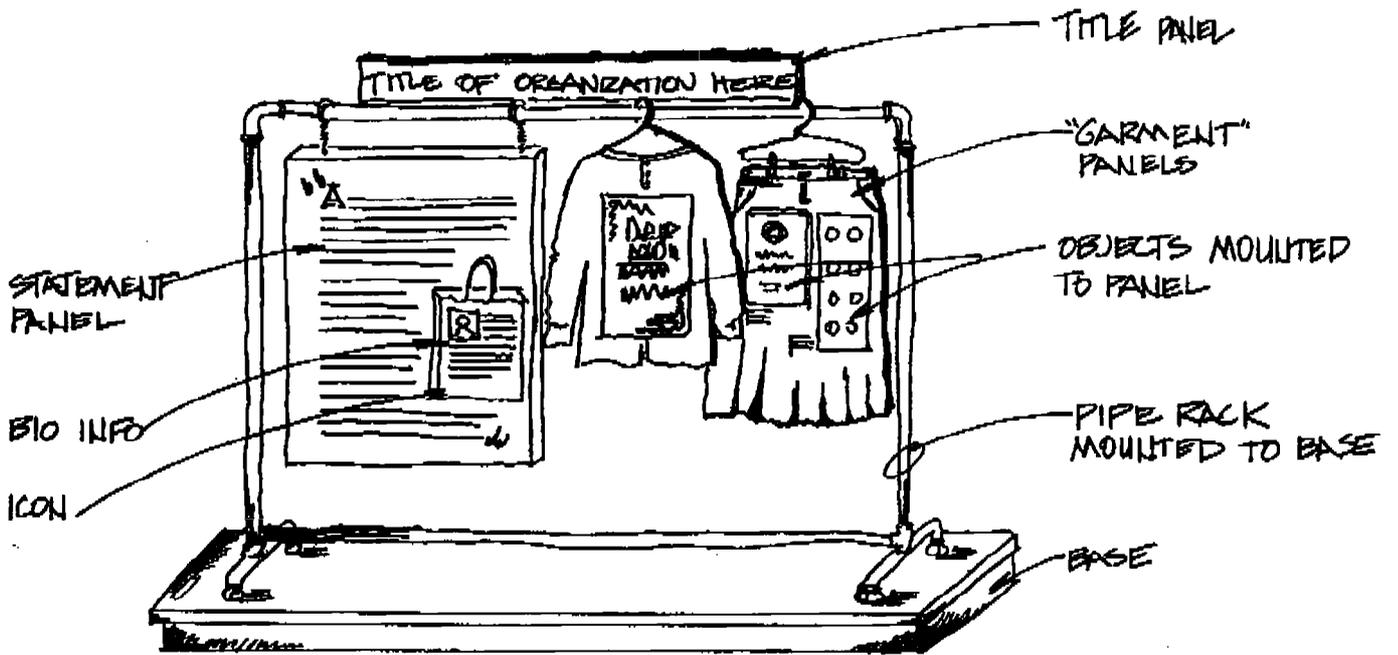
- copies of all respondents submissions for their own information.

September 1, 1997 each respondent submits:

- Final biography
- Final statement
- Any additional accompanying items

It is assumed that one pass will be sufficient. If, however, someone makes substantial changes to their own material we might distribute the text a second time and let everyone review and edit their own submissions accordingly. Although we do not expect to edit anyone's submissions, the Smithsonian Institution reserves the right to have final say on all text that will appear in its exhibitions. The museum will not make changes to the text without first notifying and obtaining the author's acceptance.

We will be contacting you shortly to discuss the process and answer any questions. Please let us know if the schedule proves to be a problem. We hope these steps are acceptable and will encourage frank and open discussions of the issue. If you have any questions, or suggestions for making this process work better, please do not hesitate to contact either Harry Rubenstein (202) 357-2008 or Peter Liebhold (202) 357-2228. Again, thank you for your participation in this important and timely exhibition.



ELEVATION-DIALOG UNIT
 SCALE: 1"=1'



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List of participants:

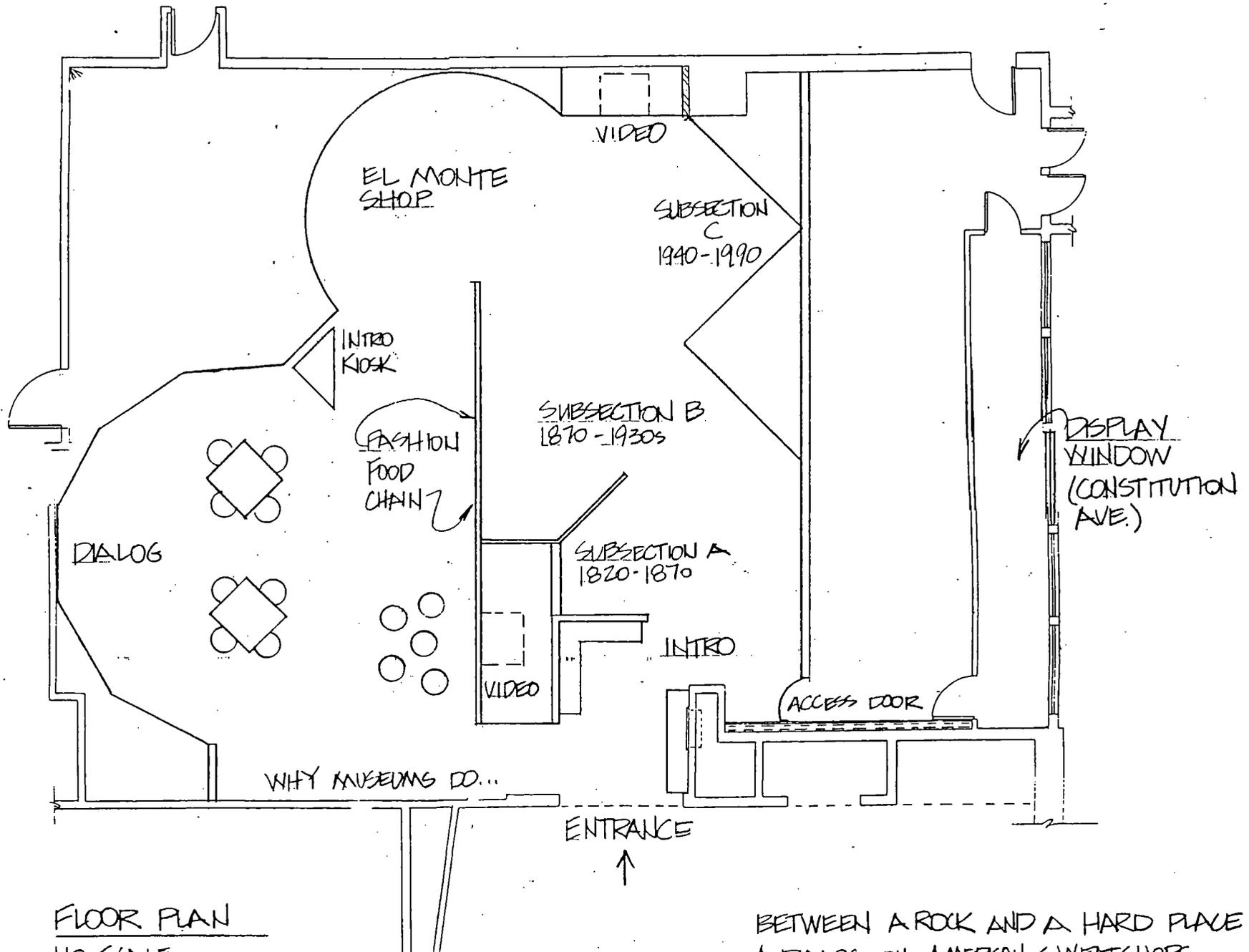
- Maria Echaveste, assistant to the President and director, Office of Public Liaison
- Jay Mazur, president, UNITE
- Larry Martin, president, American Apparel Manufacturers Association
- Kathie Lee Gifford, celebrity endorser
- Julie Su, Asian Pacific American Legal Center
- Tracy Mullin, president, National Retail Federation

Sincerely,

Harry Rubenstein
Division of Social History

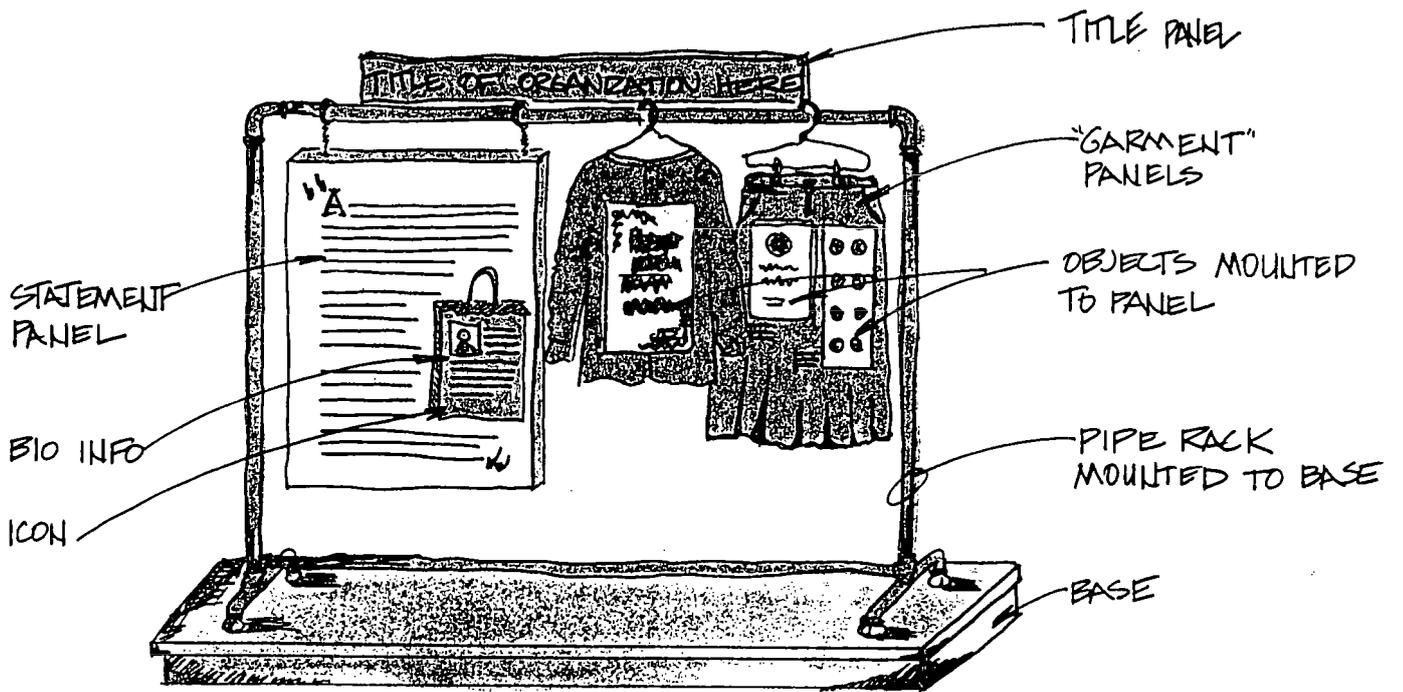
Peter Liebhold
History of Technology

cc: Suzanne Seiden

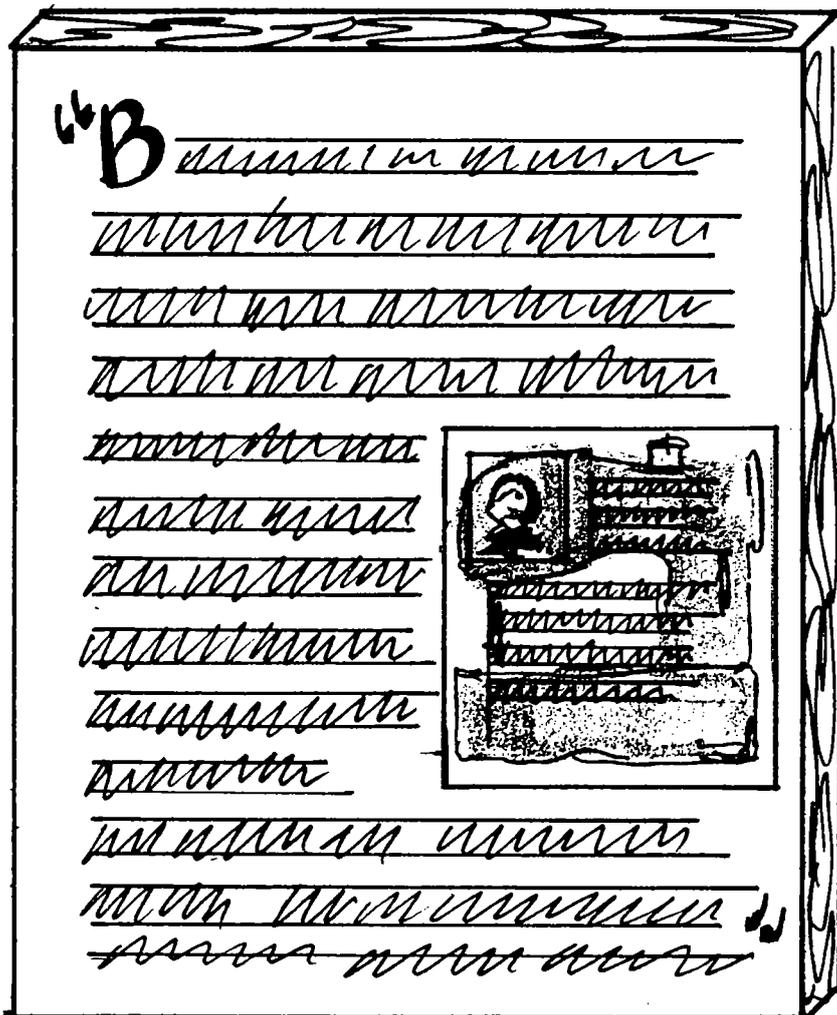


FLOOR PLAN
NO SCALE

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE
A DIALOG ON AMERICAN SWEATSHOPS
1820-PRESENT



ELEVATION-DIALOG UNIT
SCALE: 1" = 1'



DIALOG PANEL
NOT TO SCALE



NATIONAL MUSEUM *of* AMERICAN HISTORY

*...inspiring a broader understanding of our nation
and its many peoples.*

Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Dialogue on American Sweatshops, 1820-Present

Exhibition Theme and Goals

Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Dialogue on American Sweatshops, 1820 - Present examines the history of sweatshop production in the United States. This topic will be introduced primarily through an examination of the apparel industry. The sweatshop exhibition will be an historical presentation on a portion of American work life that is seldom explored in museums. Following the El Monte sweatshop raid in 1995 considerable public attention has been focused on sweatshop production in America. While the issue has obtained media attention, rarely has historical material been presented to help explain the complexity of the issues or the concerns and pressures of those in the garment industry.

The exhibition will be strong in historical scholarship, but equally, it will be sensitive to participants voice. By presenting a rich and compelling display of objects and graphics, with a strong design and video, the exhibition will achieve two principal goals. First, to help visitors understand the historical context of an issue that is being discussed on a regular basis in the news media. Second, to bring a range of perspectives on the subject before the public that include those of manufacturers, retailers, contractors, workers, unions, government agencies, and community leaders.

Intended Audience

The National Museum of American History is located on the Mall in Washington, D. C. The mission of the museum is to inspire a broader understanding of the United States and its many people through exhibitions, research, publications and educational programs. The museum averages 5.5 million visitors annually. Additionally, the Smithsonian Institution's World Wide Web site receives 6 million hits monthly.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Dialogue on American Sweatshops, 1820 - Present will be directed toward the museum's general audience of adults, school groups and families. Our goal is to present material that will be relevant to all visitors who can identify with the subject of sweatshops in

America as consumers, workers, managers, and citizens. The exhibition will be of special interest to those involved in the garment industry; individuals and groups that are concerned with immigrant history and labor-management relations; and those actively engaged in public policy issues regarding industry and work.

To reach beyond the Washington, D.C. area we intend to travel the exhibition to four to six other locations, including Los Angeles, San Francisco Bay area, and New York. Several other cities have been suggested and we will decide on the other sites with our sponsors input. We expect that the exhibition will attract considerable national news coverage. This will extend the impact of the exhibition to people who cannot attend the exhibition or its public programs. There will be a catalog and possibly World Wide Web pages on the Smithsonian Institution's web site.

While the exhibition will be aimed at the widest possible audiences, public programming will be created for targeted audiences. Each museum that hosts the exhibition will have an opportunity to focus on their own constituencies. Programming will be created for school groups, adults, and for individuals involved in industry and government. Programming could include films, performances, lectures, and panel discussions.

Methodology

In planning sessions with outside advisors it became obvious that to provide balance the exhibition needed to incorporate many different voices and views. We are proposing an experimental approach that combines historical overview with current statements from participants and national leaders.

The occurrence of sweatshops is a complex issue that all too often has been simplified into stories of good against evil, and oppressors versus victims. We wish to go beyond this deficiency by displaying a complex array of trends in the industry and the larger society that encouraged sweatshops to exist in certain sectors of the garment industry. Some of the trends we will be looking at are the development of the ready-to-wear industry, changing clothing manufacturing technology, just-in-time production, and different forms of retailing. We will also include an examination of the impact of immigration, political and social reform, government actions, and union and consumer movements.

In the exhibition's third section we are inviting individuals representing different interests and perspectives to share their views. This will be a balanced discussion that demonstrates the range of opinions, clarify some misunderstandings, and suggest some steps that might be taken. There will also be an opportunity for visitors to join in the discussion by writing their comments in notebooks that will be kept in the exhibition gallery for others to read.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place
Exhibition Outline

Introduction

This section will be comprised of three components, the exhibition main text, a definition of sweatshops, and a label explaining why history museums present stories like this one and preserve these types of artifacts.

Section I - History of Sweatshops

This section of the exhibition will place sweatshops into an historical context. Divided into three major time periods it will explore themes of competition, immigration, subcontracting, entrepreneurship, political reform and government regulation in the garment industry. It will consider the people who worked in and owned sweatshops, the types of industries that used this form of production, and the reform movements that grew in response.

The first period, 1820 - 1870, will cover the origins of sweatshops through the development of the ready-to-wear industry, the introduction of new technology, the creation of a contracting system of production utilizing a division of labor, and the impact of urbanization. The next period, 1880-1940, will detail the maturing of the industry, changes in retailing and consumption patterns, the effect of new waves of immigrants, as workers and as owners, and the development of reform and labor movements. The last period will cover 1950 to the present. It will examine international competition, technological innovation, new styles of retailing, and a changing workforce.

Section I will be illustrated through text, photographs, graphics, and artifacts including: sewing machines, clothing, immigration memorabilia, reform movement leaflets and posters, labor union broadsides, ribbons, and other objects.

Section II - El Monte case study

This section will combine a recreation of an El Monte sewing room, with a video tape presentation. The room recreation will contain artifacts collected from El Monte including: two sewing machine workstations, bundles of cut fabric, partially completed garments, finished garments, company labels, and the razor wire that surrounded the compound. The project will produce a video narrated by former Secretary of Labor Robert B. Reich that will include the story of the El Monte sweatshop told through the voices of the workers, the owners (if available), and the law enforcement agents who worked this case. Included in this section of the exhibition will also be material discussing how subcontracting shops, like the El Monte operation, fit into the structure of the apparel industry.

Section III - National reactions to contemporary sweatshops

In this section our goal is to provide an opportunity for national leaders to voice their opinion on the significance of the current proliferation of sweatshops. We are asking these individuals to prepare a short statement and provide exhibitable material such as codes of conduct, posters, advertisements, etc. Participants will include: Larry Martin, president of The American Apparel Manufacturers Association; Jay Mazur president of UNITE; Julie Su, Asian Pacific American Legal Center, Maria Echaveste, former Administrator Wage and Hour Division, US Department of Labor, currently Assistant to the President and Director Office of Public Liaison; Tracy Mullin, president of the National Retail Federation; and Kathie Lee Gifford, celebrity endorser.

Section IV - Non Sweatshop Production

The goal of this section is to remind visitors that the vast majority of garments available in stores today are not produced in sweatshops. This section of the exhibition will show how affordable garments are being made in the US and abroad in non sweatshop conditions. The topic will be presented in a video (if budget allows) or through photographs of current facilities.

Background Information

What is a Sweatshop?

Concern over unsafe working conditions and the rights of workers began at the dawn of the industrial revolution. Some of the most egregious of these conditions occurred in what became known as sweatshops. There is no clear single definition of what is a sweatshop. For most, however, the term sweatshop suggests a small shop that operates long hours, frequently in unhealthy environments, pays far below acceptable wages, and is abusive to its workers. Typically these were small subcontractors employing large numbers of women, children, and recent immigrants to American cities. In the 19th century the types of items commonly associated with these shops included clothing, shoes, cigars, jewelry, and paper flowers.

While sweatshop conditions exist in many industries today, one of the most publicized areas of concern is in the manufacturing of clothing. Small subcontracting firms give the apparel industry great flexibility to meet seasonal demand, but the competition between the shops is fierce. The feast or famine style of production, endemic in the garment industry, has recently been exacerbated by the new trends of faster style changes and retailers reducing the size on their inventories. It is in these small shops that abuses are sometimes found. As in the sweatshops of the 19th century these operations require their employees to work long hours for sub-normal wages in unsafe conditions, often in violation of a host of safety and wage laws.

The El Monte Sweatshop

On August 2, 1995 police officers in a coordinated multi-agency raid burst into the fenced compound of seven townhouses in El Monte, California. They arrested the operators of a clandestine garment sweatshop and freed 71 illegal immigrants who were being held in debt peonage and forced to sew. The workforce at El Monte, recruited in Thailand, were predominately women who came from impoverished backgrounds and had little education. The workers were tricked into accepting employment by recruiters who induced prospective workers to take on debt to cover the cost of illegal papers and transportation to the United States. Subsequently the debt was used as a lever, along with physical intimidation and a guard force to keep the workers from escaping.

The workers regularly put in 18-hour days, with their meager earnings going to pay off the debts incurred for their emigration to the United States. The workers were not allowed to leave the compound and had to "buy" their food and personal supplies from the company store located in the garage of one of the apartments. Using standard industrial sewing machines the workers assembled a variety of garments.

The El Monte sweatshop was part of a family-run business known variously as SK Fashion, S&P Fashion, Pat Fashion, Alex, and D&R Fashion. This business started off as a legal subcontracting shop and over time violated more and more laws. The sweatshop was run by Suni Manasurangkul, a Sino-Thai woman known to her workers as Auntie. A small legitimate manufacturing operation in the Los Angeles garment district, employing 29 Latino workers, fronted for the El Monte sweatshop. This small shop's workforce provided the theoretical source for the production of garments when representatives of the manufacturers (who contracted with SK Fashion) came to inspect merchandise or facilities.

The operators of the El Monte shop, seven Thai nationals, were convicted in Federal court in 1996 and are now serving prison sentences. Arrest warrants for two additional suspects, believed to be in hiding in Thailand, are still outstanding. The workers have been allowed to file for US citizenship. Most of the workers continue to live in Los Angeles and are employed in legal garment shops.

While your statement is articulate and well written it exceeds the agreed upon 200 word count and needs to be shortened. Marge Tarmey thought it would be helpful if we made an initial pass at shortening your statement. Attached is a draft, make any changes you wish, but please keep the length under 225 words. To get back on schedule we need your revised statement by January 5, 1998.

We also need your biography, not to exceed 30 words, and the objects that you would like included in your section. We have made some suggestion of objects that support your statement which fit into the allotted space. If you wish we can work with Suzanne Seiden on obtaining the artifacts. A photograph of the White House Apparel Partnership has been impossible for us to obtain, perhaps you can help.

Since we last met with you the size of the exhibition has grown slightly. *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* will cover 3,500 square feet and will include over two hundred historic objects and graphics. Support for the exhibition has been received from UNITE, Kmart, Levi Strauss, A&H Sportswear, Malden Mills, Calvin Klein, New York Coat and Suit Association, Atlantic Apparel Contractors Association, Maria Rose Fashion, and the US Department of Labor. Despite this broad base of support fundraising for the exhibition continues. Additional contributions will enable us to host a full range of public programming, build crates for shipping the exhibition, produce the good industry practices video, print a catalog, and develop a web version of the exhibition.

Enclosed for your interest is a floor plan and sample elevations for the exhibition. If you would like any additional information or have any questions or comments feel free to call Peter Liebhold at (202) 357-2228 or me at (202) 357-2008. Thank you for your continued interest and involvement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Rubenstein', followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Harry Rubenstein
Division of Social History

cc. Suzanne Seiden

Maria Echaveste's Draft Statement for Smithsonian Exhibition

Garment workers are frequently the most exploited workers in the country. For too long Americans, while abhorring sweatshop conditions, have nonetheless accepted it in the garment industry. For too long, American consumers have either ignored or felt powerless to change these conditions.

Government enforcement can do only so much. The U.S. Department of Labor has taken meaningful--and innovative--steps to bring long term solutions to the problem of sweatshops. These steps include a multi-faceted strategy of aggressive enforcement of the laws, consumer and industry education, public recognition of good practices, and collaborations like the White House Apparel Partnership, that brings together industry, unions, consumers, and human rights groups to develop real solutions to eradicate sweatshops once and for all.

We also must get consumers to care. American shoppers can and should ask retailers questions about where and how the garments are made. They can ask retailers whether they independently monitor garment manufacturers to avoid buying from sweatshops.

Sweatshops are an ugly stain on American Fashion. It is up to all of us to remove it. Working together, consumers, manufacturers, retailers, unions, and government can ensure that dignity and decent wages for garment workers is a fashion that never goes out of style.

Word count: 202

Potential object list

DOL badge
material from compliance workshop
photo of White House Apparel Industry Partnership
Ugly Stain ad
Web site photo
material from education packet

DRAFT STATEMENT FOR SMITHSONIAN EXHIBIT

What should Americans know about sweatshop production in the garment industry in the United States?

Garment workers are frequently the most exploited workers in the country -- unskilled, immigrants, women, non-English speaking workers who work long hours under often unsafe conditions for substandard wages. They work for contractors who suddenly close their shops, remove their machines, and disappear, owing weeks of wages.

Government enforcement of the garment industry can do only so much. The Department of Labor over the past several years has taken meaningful-- and innovative -- steps to develop and implement strategies to bring long term solutions to the problems of sweatshops in the garment industry. These steps have included a multi-faceted strategy of **enforcement, education, partnerships, and recognition**. All of these steps have been focused on **working with leaders in the industry** who actively working to effectuate real change, while continuing to **enforce aggressively the laws** against those who are willing to run afoul of the laws. And creating partnerships, like the **Apparel Industry Partnership**, that bring together industry, unions, consumers and human rights groups to develop real solutions that will eradicate sweatshops once and for all.

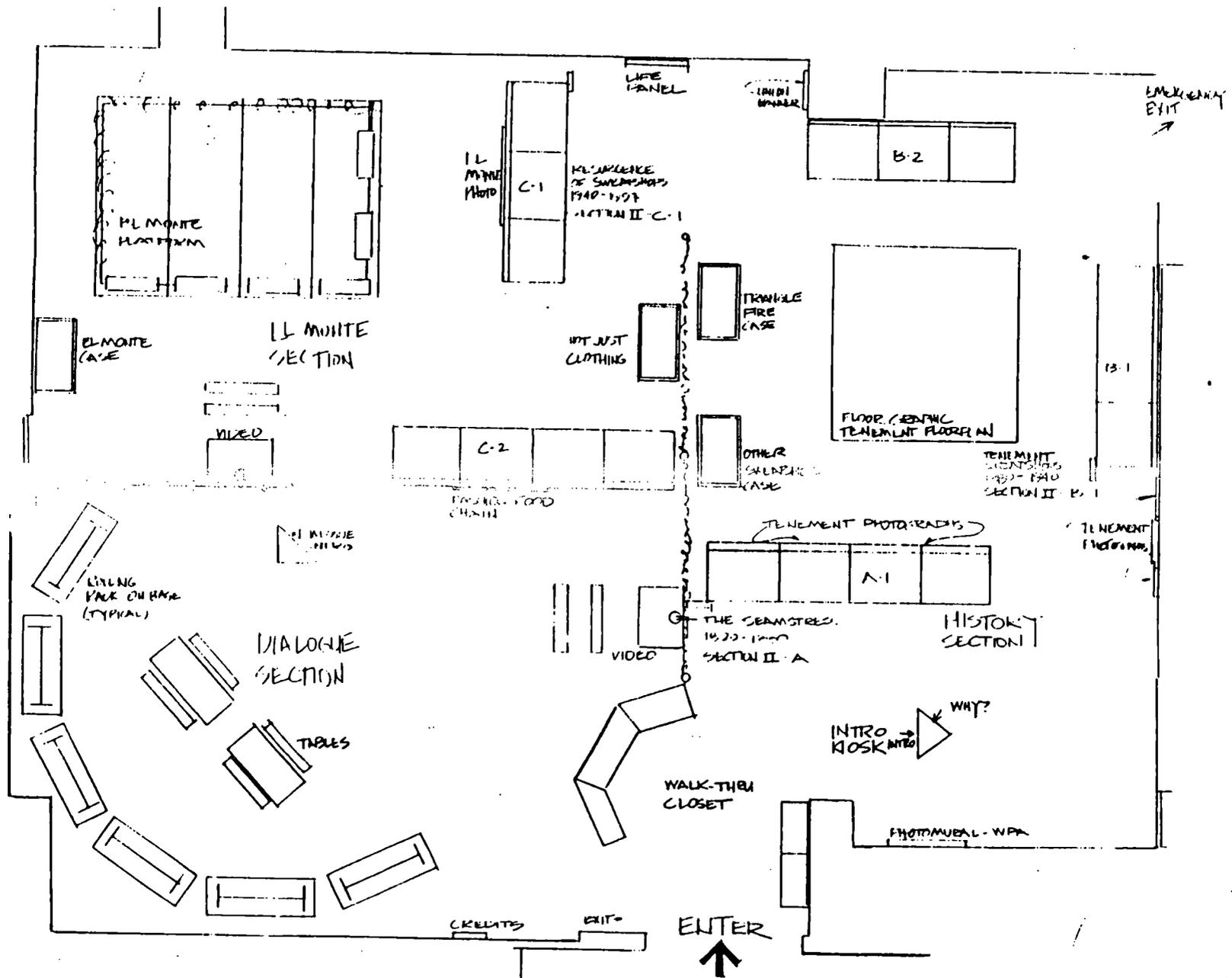
But, for too long in our history, Americans, while abhorring sweatshop conditions, have nonetheless accepted in the garment industry.

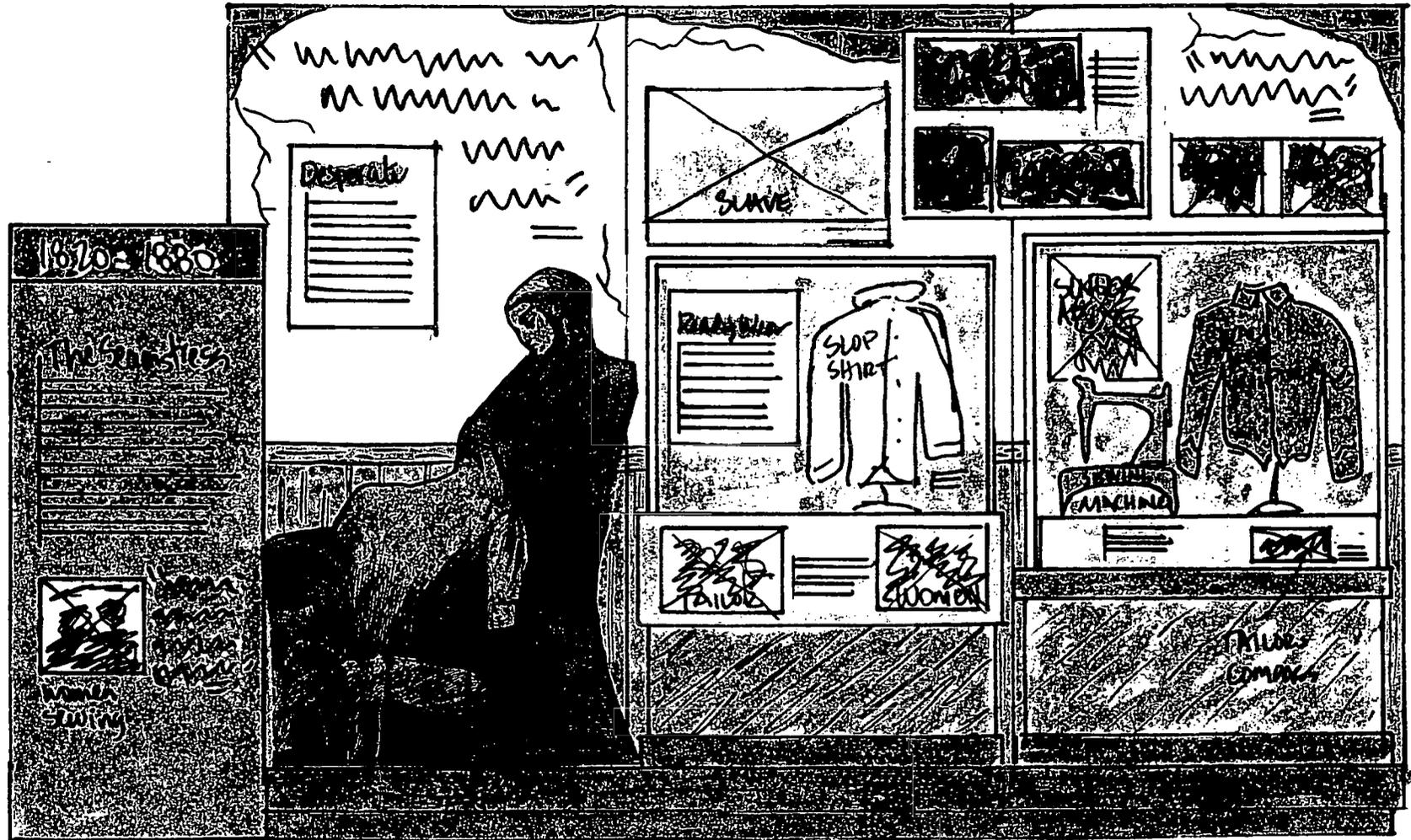
For too long, American consumers have either ignored or felt powerless to change these conditions.

During my time as head of the Wage and Hour Division [responsible for enforcing the laws that were enacted to prevent worker abuse in any industry] I learned an important lesson. **If we could get American consumers to care, they will realize they have the power to these conditions.** They can make it clear to manufacturers and retailers that they will not buy their clothes unless they can be assured that the goods are not made under sweatshop conditions.

American consumers can and should ask retailers questions about **where and how the garments are made**. *Garment workers are required to be paid at least the minimum wage and overtime.* They can ask retailers whether they **independently monitor garment manufacturers** to avoid buying from sweatshops. *Many retailers have voluntarily agreed to conduct site visits of suppliers to monitor working conditions.* Consumers can ask retailers **whether they support NO SWEAT clothing**. *Commitments from retailers to avoid buying sweatshop made clothing can go a long way toward eradicating sweatshops in America.*

Sweatshops are an ugly stain on American fashion. It is up to all of us to remove it. Working together, American consumers, manufacturers, retailers, labor unions, and government can ensure that dignity and decent wages for garment workers is a fashion that never goes out of style.





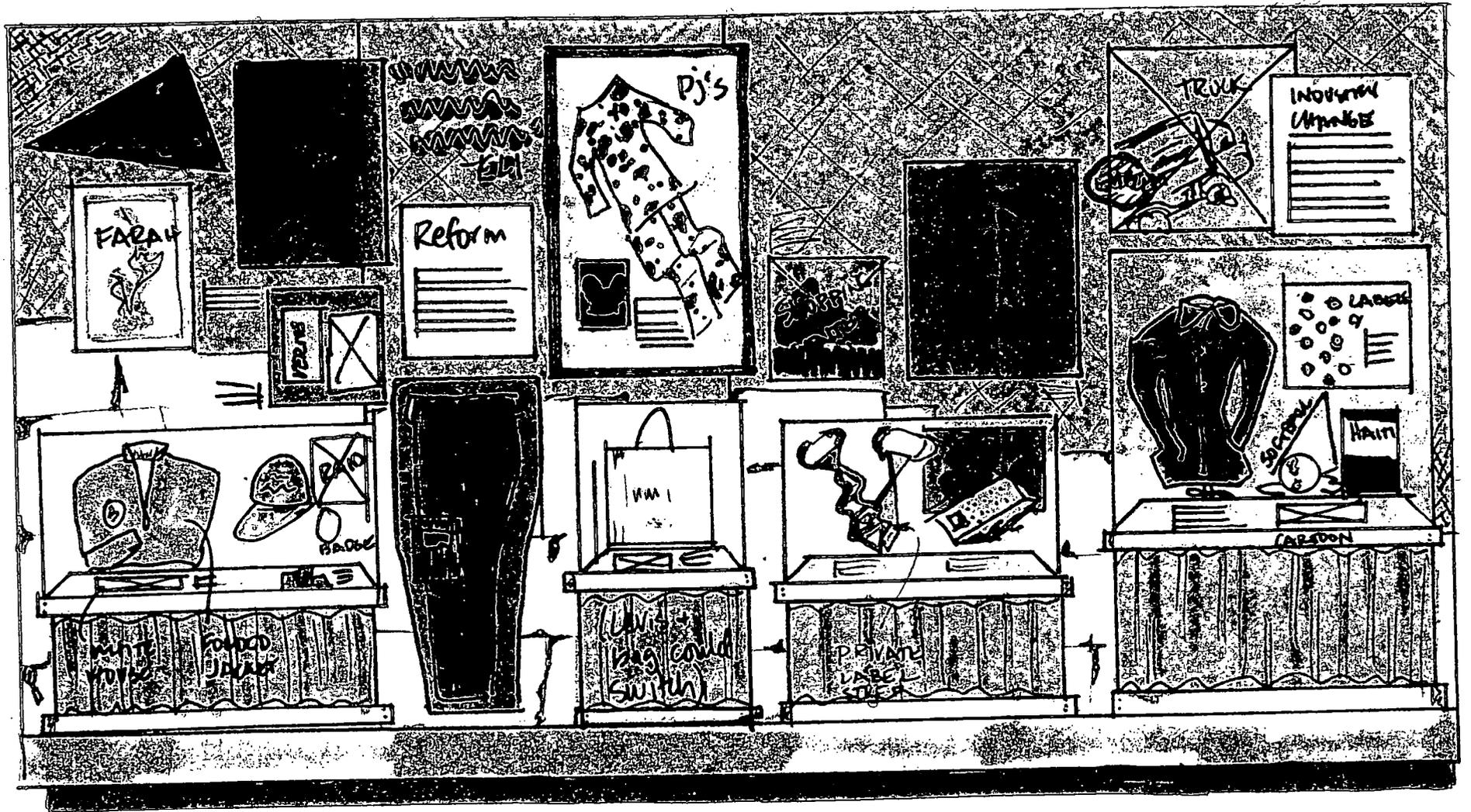
SECTION 1 - SEAMSTRESS

S.1:20



SIDE 2B

5:20



SECTION 3, SIDE B

There is no information
here about whom to
Contact, no telephone #
no dates.

What is needed is a
written statement (to be
displayed in museum exhibit)
and any documents that
could also be displayed.



NATIONAL MUSEUM of AMERICAN HISTORY

July 7, 1997

...inspiring a broader understanding of our nation and its many peoples.

Maria Echaveste, Director
Office of Public Liaison
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington D.C. 20502

Dear Ms Echaveste:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Smithsonian Institution's exhibition Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Dialogue on American Sweatshops, 1820 - Present. After extensive consultation we have selected a group of six national leaders to express their views on the subject of sweatshop production in the United States. Listed below are the names of participants, the terms for participation and the steps to complete this section of the exhibition.

During the exhibition process respondents will be kept informed on major developments in the progress of the exhibition. All participants including respondents and Smithsonian officials agree to keep all drafts confidential.

See Section III & description in "Methodology"

Each respondent will be asked to address the following question in a short statement: From your perspective what should Americans know about sweatshop production in the garment industry in the United States?

List of participants:

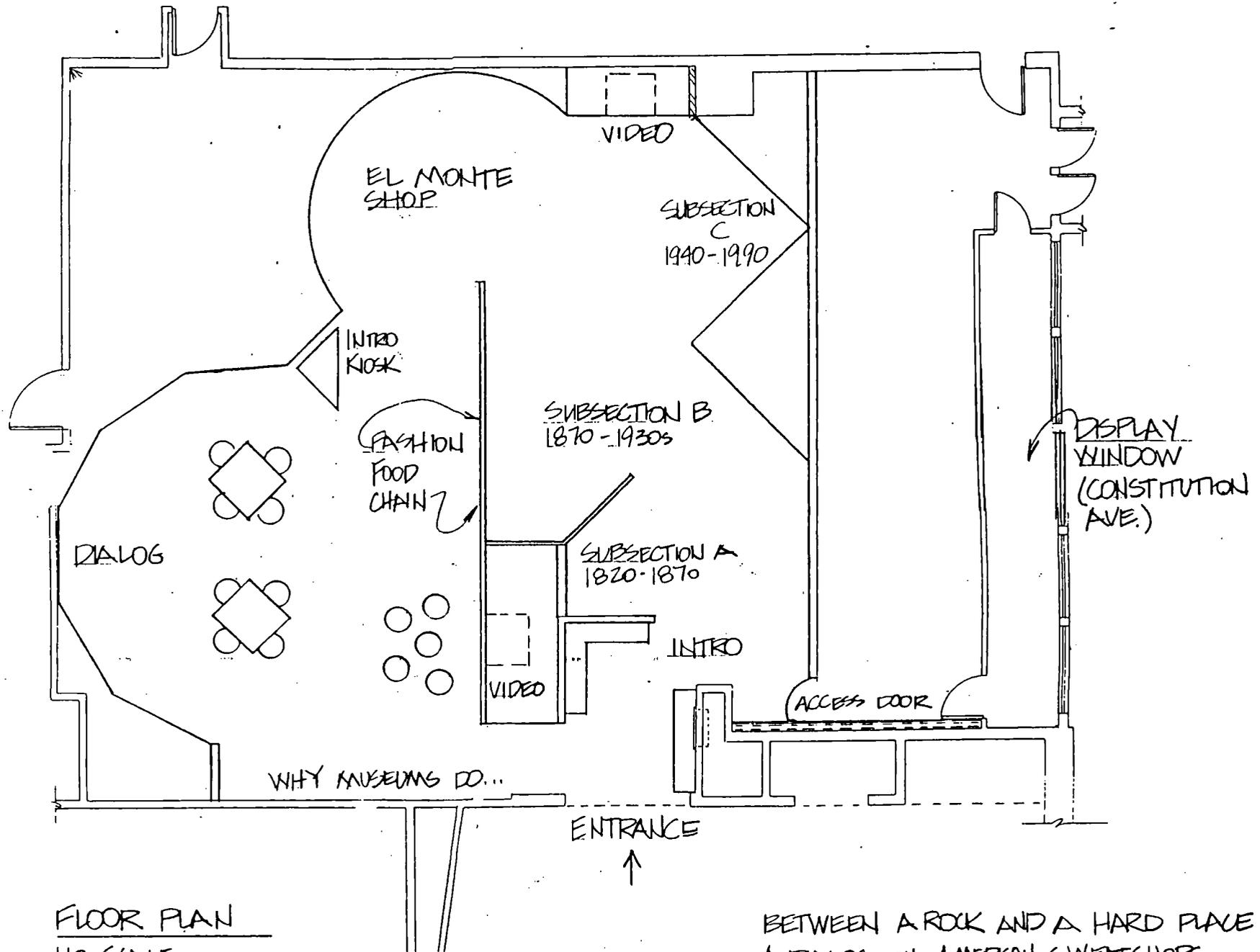
- Maria Echaveste, assistant to the President and director, Office of Public Liaison
Jay Mazur, president, UNITE
Larry Martin, president, American Apparel Manufacturers Association
Kathie Lee Gifford, celebrity endorser
Julie Su, Asian Pacific American Legal Center
Tracy Mullin, president, National Retail Federation

Sincerely,

Harry Rubenstein
Division of Social History

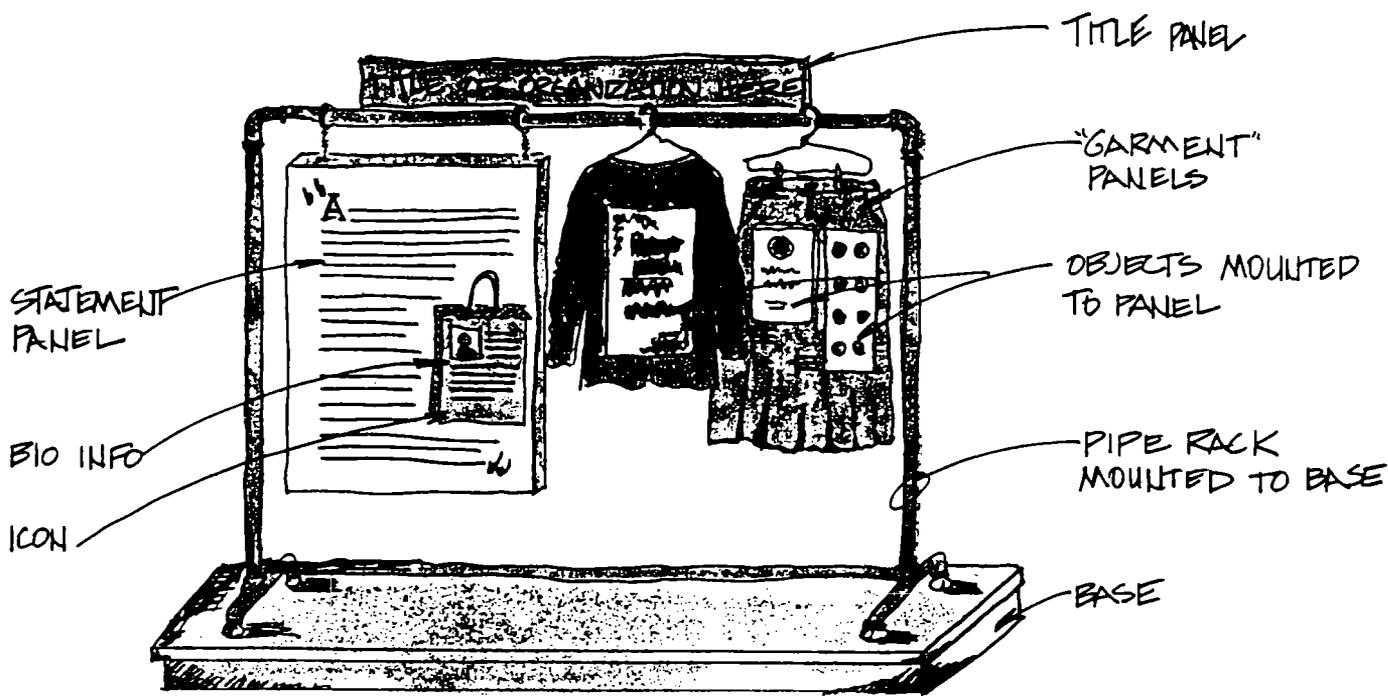
Peter Liebhold
History of Technology

cc: Suzanne Seiden

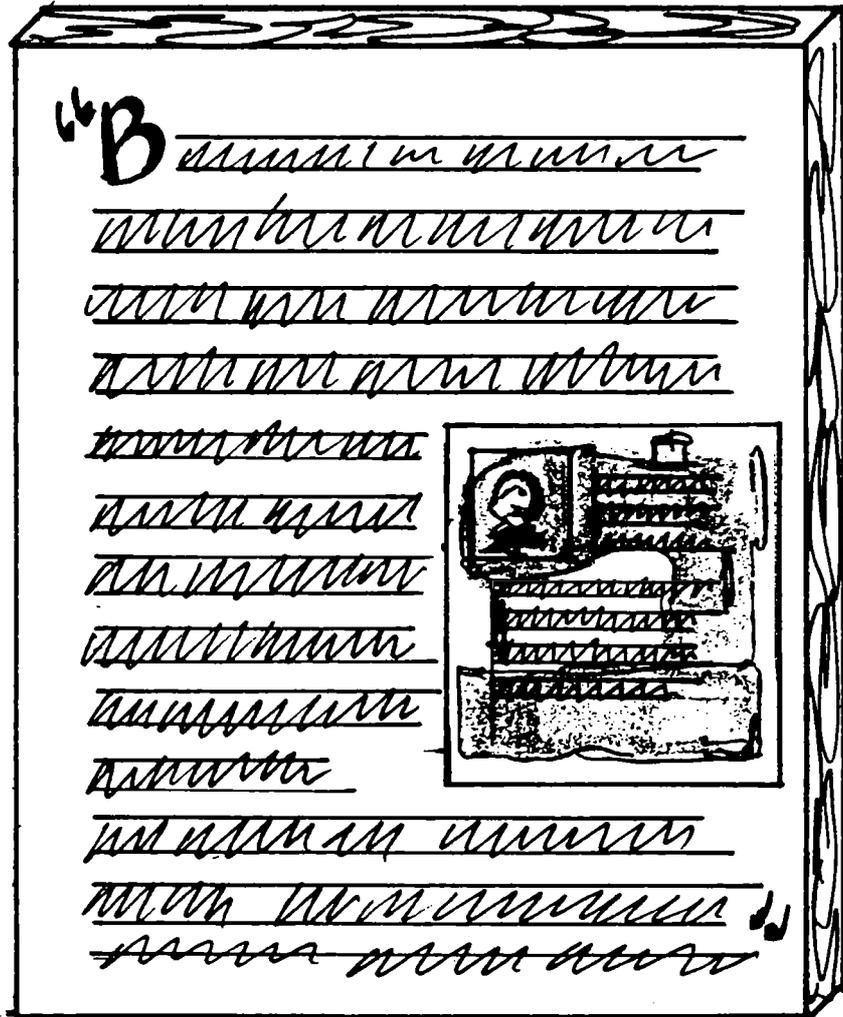


FLOOR PLAN
NO SCALE

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE
A DIALOG ON AMERICAN SWEETSHOPS
1820-PRESENT



ELEVATION-DIALOG UNIT
 SCALE: 1"=1'



DIALOG PANEL
NOT TO SCALE



NATIONAL MUSEUM *of* AMERICAN HISTORY

*...inspiring a broader understanding of our nation
and its many peoples.*

Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Dialogue on American Sweatshops, 1820-Present

Exhibition Theme and Goals

Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Dialogue on American Sweatshops, 1820 - Present examines the history of sweatshop production in the United States. This topic will be introduced primarily through an examination of the apparel industry. The sweatshop exhibition will be an historical presentation on a portion of American work life that is seldom explored in museums. Following the El Monte sweatshop raid in 1995 considerable public attention has been focused on sweatshop production in America. While the issue has obtained media attention, rarely has historical material been presented to help explain the complexity of the issues or the concerns and pressures of those in the garment industry.

The exhibition will be strong in historical scholarship, but equally, it will be sensitive to participants voice. By presenting a rich and compelling display of objects and graphics, with a strong design and video, the exhibition will achieve two principal goals. First, to help visitors understand the historical context of an issue that is being discussed on a regular basis in the news media. Second, to bring a range of perspectives on the subject before the public that include those of manufacturers, retailers, contractors, workers, unions, government agencies, and community leaders.

Can we assume HE represents Gov.?

Intended Audience

The National Museum of American History is located on the Mall in Washington, D. C. The mission of the museum is to inspire a broader understanding of the United States and its many people through exhibitions, research, publications and educational programs. The museum averages 5.5 million visitors annually. Additionally, the Smithsonian Institution's World Wide Web site receives 6 million hits monthly.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Dialogue on American Sweatshops, 1820 - Present will be directed toward the museum's general audience of adults, school groups and families. Our goal is to present material that will be relevant to all visitors who can identify with the subject of sweatshops in

America as consumers, workers, managers, and citizens. The exhibition will be of special interest to those involved in the garment industry; individuals and groups that are concerned with immigrant history and labor-management relations; and those actively engaged in public policy issues regarding industry and work.

To reach beyond the Washington, D.C. area we intend to travel the exhibition to four to six other locations, including Los Angeles, San Francisco Bay area, and New York. Several other cities have been suggested and we will decide on the other sites with our sponsors input. We expect that the exhibition will attract considerable national news coverage. This will extend the impact of the exhibition to people who cannot attend the exhibition or its public programs. There will be a catalog and possibly World Wide Web pages on the Smithsonian Institution's web site.

While the exhibition will be aimed at the widest possible audiences, public programming will be created for targeted audiences. Each museum that hosts the exhibition will have an opportunity to focus on their own constituencies. Programming will be created for school groups, adults, and for individuals involved in industry and government. Programming could include films, performances, lectures, and panel discussions.

Methodology

In planning sessions with outside advisors it became obvious that to provide balance the exhibition needed to incorporate many different voices and views. We are proposing an experimental approach that combines historical overview with current statements from participants and national leaders.

The occurrence of sweatshops is a complex issue that all too often has been simplified into stories of good against evil, and oppressors versus victims. We wish to go beyond this deficiency by displaying a complex array of trends in the industry and the larger society that encouraged sweatshops to exist in certain sectors of the garment industry. Some of the trends we will be looking at are the development of the ready-to-wear industry, changing clothing manufacturing technology, just-in-time production, and different forms of retailing. We will also include an examination of the impact of immigration, political and social reform, government actions, and union and consumer movements.

In the exhibition's third section we are inviting individuals representing different interests and perspectives to share their views. This will be a balanced discussion that demonstrates the range of opinions, clarify some misunderstandings, and suggest some steps that might be taken. There will also be an opportunity for visitors to join in the discussion by writing their comments in notebooks that will be kept in the exhibition gallery for others to read.

*what position
does the
represent?
as if "assigned"
by museum?*

Between a Rock and a Hard Place
Exhibition Outline

Introduction

This section will be comprised of three components, the exhibition main text, a definition of sweatshops, and a label explaining why history museums present stories like this one and preserve these types of artifacts.

Section I - History of Sweatshops

This section of the exhibition will place sweatshops into an historical context. Divided into three major time periods it will explore themes of competition, immigration, subcontracting, entrepreneurship, political reform and government regulation in the garment industry. It will consider the people who worked in and owned sweatshops, the types of industries that used this form of production, and the reform movements that grew in response.

The first period, 1820 - 1870, will cover the origins of sweatshops through the development of the ready-to-wear industry, the introduction of new technology, the creation of a contracting system of production utilizing a division of labor, and the impact of urbanization. The next period, 1880-1940, will detail the maturing of the industry, changes in retailing and consumption patterns, the effect of new waves of immigrants, as workers and as owners, and the development of reform and labor movements. The last period will cover 1950 to the present. It will examine international competition, technological innovation, new styles of retailing, and a changing workforce.

Section I will be illustrated through text, photographs, graphics, and artifacts including: sewing machines, clothing, immigration memorabilia, reform movement leaflets and posters, labor union broadsides, ribbons, and other objects.

Section II - El Monte case study

This section will combine a recreation of an El Monte sewing room, with a video tape presentation. The room recreation will contain artifacts collected from El Monte including: two sewing machine workstations, bundles of cut fabric, partially completed garments, finished garments, company labels, and the razor wire that surrounded the compound. The project will produce a video narrated by former Secretary of Labor Robert B. Reich that will include the story of the El Monte sweatshop told through the voices of the workers, the owners (if available), and the law enforcement agents who worked this case. Included in this section of the exhibition will also be material discussing how subcontracting shops, like the El Monte operation, fit into the structure of the apparel industry.

Section III - National reactions to contemporary sweatshops

In this section our goal is to provide an opportunity for national leaders to voice their opinion on the significance of the current proliferation of sweatshops. We are asking these individuals to prepare a short statement and provide exhibitable material such as codes of conduct, posters, advertisements, etc. Participants will include: Larry Martin, president of The American Apparel Manufacturers Association; Jay Mazur president of UNITE; Julie Su, Asian Pacific American Legal Center, Maria Echaveste, former Administrator Wage and Hour Division, US Department of Labor, currently Assitant to the President and Director Office of Public Liasion; Tracy Mullin, president of the National Retail Federation; and Kathie Lee Gifford, celebrity endorser.

Section IV - Non Sweatshop Production

The goal of this section is to remind visitors that the vast majority of garments available in stores today are not produced in sweatshops. This section of the exhibition will show how affordable garments are being made in the US and abroad in non sweatshop conditions. The topic will be presented in a video (if budget allows) or through photographs of current facilities.

Background Information

What is a Sweatshop?

Concern over unsafe working conditions and the rights of workers began at the dawn of the industrial revolution. Some of the most egregious of these conditions occurred in what became known as sweatshops. There is no clear single definition of what is a sweatshop. For most, however, the term sweatshop suggests a small shop that operates long hours, frequently in unhealthy environments, pays far below acceptable wages, and is abusive to its workers. Typically these were small subcontractors employing large numbers of women, children, and recent immigrants to American cities. In the 19th century the types of items commonly associated with these shops included clothing, shoes, cigars, jewelry, and paper flowers.

While sweatshop conditions exist in many industries today, one of the most publicized areas of concern is in the manufacturing of clothing. Small subcontracting firms give the apparel industry great flexibility to meet seasonal demand, but the competition between the shops is fierce. The feast or famine style of production, endemic in the garment industry, has recently been exacerbated by the new trends of faster style changes and retailers reducing the size on their inventories. It is in these small shops that abuses are sometimes found. As in the sweatshops of the 19th century these operations require their employees to work long hours for sub-normal wages in unsafe conditions, often in violation of a host of safety and wage laws.

The El Monte Sweatshop

On August 2, 1995 police officers in a coordinated multi-agency raid burst into the fenced compound of seven townhouses in El Monte, California. They arrested the operators of a clandestine garment sweatshop and freed 71 illegal immigrants who were being held in debt peonage and forced to sew. The workforce at El Monte, recruited in Thailand, were predominately women who came from impoverished backgrounds and had little education. The workers were tricked into accepting employment by recruiters who induced prospective workers to take on debt to cover the cost of illegal papers and transportation to the United States. Subsequently the debt was used as a lever, along with physical intimidation and a guard force to keep the workers from escaping.

The workers regularly put in 18-hour days, with their meager earnings going to pay off the debts incurred for their emigration to the United States. The workers were not allowed to leave the compound and had to "buy" their food and personal supplies from the company store located in the garage of one of the apartments. Using standard industrial sewing machines the workers assembled a variety of garments.

The El Monte sweatshop was part of a family-run business known variously as SK Fashion, S&P Fashion, Pat Fashion, Alex, and D&R Fashion. This business started off as a legal subcontracting shop and over time violated more and more laws. The sweatshop was run by Suni Manasurangkul, a Sino-Thai woman known to her workers as Auntie. A small legitimate manufacturing operation in the Los Angeles garment district, employing 29 Latino workers, fronted for the El Monte sweatshop. This small shop's workforce provided the theoretical source for the production of garments when representatives of the manufacturers (who contracted with SK Fashion) came to inspect merchandise or facilities.

The operators of the El Monte shop, seven Thai nationals, were convicted in Federal court in 1996 and are now serving prison sentences. Arrest warrants for two additional suspects, believed to be in hiding in Thailand, are still outstanding. The workers have been allowed to file for US citizenship. Most of the workers continue to live in Los Angeles and are employed in legal garment shops.