



## Cultural and Moral Threat of Wal-Mart

- Wal-Mart jobs offer low pay, inadequate and unaffordable healthcare, and “off the clock” work.
- Having a job at Wal-Mart means relying on family, the community, or the government to pay the bills and provide healthcare.
- Wal-Mart’s disregard for its workers encourages other employers to do the same. The company pressures its extensive network of vendors to cut labor costs and lower prices every year. The demands force clothing, toy, plumbing, and grocery suppliers to layoff workers, lower wages and benefits, and take their factories overseas or move from one low cost country to another.
- Workers in China stitch Kathie Lee purses for Wal-Mart in 14-hour shifts, working seven days a week. Average wages are three cents an hour.
- Wal-Mart is the largest importer of Chinese goods. Clothing sewn in China is usually done by young women, 17 to 25 years old, forced to work seven days a week and often past midnight with no benefits. Women are housed in crowded, dirty dormitories, 15 to a room, and fed a thick rice gruel. The workers are kept under 24-hour surveillance and can be fired for even discussing factory conditions. New employees are forced to take a mandatory pregnancy test.
- The trade practices fostered by Wal-Mart and others have led to a resurgence of child labor and forced labor. In October 2002, the National Organization for Women (NOW) reported that the Maine Department of Labor ordered Wal-Mart to pay the largest fine in state history for violating child labor laws. They discovered 1,436 child labor law infractions at 20 Wal-Mart chains in the state.
- KLD & Co., which provides social research for institutional investors, said Wal-Mart hasn’t done enough to ensure that its vendors meet “adequate labor and human rights standards” and removed Wal-Mart from its Domini 400 Social Index citing “sweatshop conditions.”

At the heart of this fight is a question of values—the values of the hard-working, middle class American worker or the underlying greed of the largest company in the world. Every person working hard for a living earns the right to a decent wage, affordable healthcare, and a voice on the job. But Wal-Mart’s greed provides other companies a license to chip away at the rights of working America, influencing everything from wages to working conditions. Wal-Mart is transforming America from a secure middle class country to one of extremes: those struggling to survive at the bottom and the rich getting richer at the top.