

The Broad Street Journal

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Subway Confessionals

By Ryan Billings

I was riding the subway one day last week, just as I do many other days. However, on this particular trip back to MCPC, I noticed a little boy sitting next to me. He could not have been more than five years old. In his hand he was clutching a slimy, gooey, glazed donut. He was gnawing at it carelessly while his pregnant mother was texting away on her cell phone. By the time we hit Spring Garden, the boy had scarfed down the entire sticky baked good. As I smiled to myself, waiting for Susquehanna, he suddenly looked up at me with his big brown eyes. They slowly began to water, and it became apparent he had just realized the act of holding a glazed donut in one's bare hands was probably not the wisest of ideas. With mom obviously not paying attention to him, I suppose that I, the strange blond man, was the only one who seemed to care about sticky hands. I looked down at him, then at his slimy fingers and then back at him. Finally his tears began to flow, shortly followed by my laughter.

Little kids always make the subway ride worth it. They are free entertainment (well, technically the entertainment costs \$1.30... \$2.60 round trip). I remember one time when I watched

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the activism edition

CONSUMER CONSCIOUSNESS

By Dawn Tobin

Unless you wear your birthday suit or make your own clothes, you are probably a consumer of this important item in human life: Clothing. The colors, textures, style of our apparel have defined our identities ever since middle school, to some extent. But what if the clothes you buy define you as a consumer of sweat shop labor?

It's definitely a sobering thought. Unfortunately, it is more than a thought because the existence of sweatshop labor is a reality in many parts of the world, including the United States. A sweatshop is a workplace that violates the law and subjects its employees to severe exploitation (like poverty wages and long hours), poor working conditions (health and safety hazards), and arbitrary discipline. Most importantly, the workers are denied the right to voice their frustrations or unionize.

This semester is the first time I have ever really considered how my consumer choices support unfair labor practices. The thought process began this summer as I was talking to a friend about my "yes" in life (that is, my destined vocation). I said I wanted to be intentional about my lifestyle choices and be aware about how they affect others. After all, God's dream is that the earth will be full of justice, not underpaid and exploited workers. He responded with, "Wow, that takes a lot of homework!" I told him it was worth it, but then realized that I don't really put those words into practice. So researching sweatshops and the alternatives has been a step in that direction for me. My information is from Sweatshop Watch at www.sweatshopwatch.org.

I've found that sweatshops exist in China, Mexico, Kenya, Turkey, Bangladesh and the US, to name a few. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 67% of garment factories in Los Angeles fail to pay their workers minimum wage and overtime. Just like all the other social problems, sweatshops exist because of a range of interrelated causes. One major reason is that large retail corporations and brand-name companies ignore sweatshop conditions, feigning detachment and innocence from the contractor's labor practices. But in actuality, the large companies control the prices of the work from afar, and therefore the working conditions of the laborers. Other reasons are that free trade tramples the rights of workers to get at profit, labor laws are not well enforced and workers are fearful of uniting.

What logical steps can we take individually and as a group to change this situation? A first is obvious: think about what you buy. Does it have a union label? Unions help employees reach agreements with the factory management. Is it a product from a worker-owned cooperative (co-op) where workers have direct say in the labor conditions? Was it processed through a fair trade organization? These organizations work alongside co-ops to bring benefits to the workers and their community. I am excited that our t-shirts this semester are supporting organizations like this. Hopefully the momentum can flow into coming semesters and impact our personal choices as well.

See Additional Resources on Page 3



COMMUNITY

(Subway Confessionals Continued)

another circa-five-year-old boy mistake a random man for 50 Cent, the rapper that's been shot like eight times. I won't lie; the man kind of did resemble 50 Cent. The boy said to his grandmother, "Hey grandma, that guy look like 50 Cent!" All grandma could say was "How you know who 50 Cent is?!" Once again, I looked at the MTV-loving boy and laughed. When I got off the train, I could not help but wonder/hope that he mistook me for a rapper, too.

Not all of the entertainment on the subway is as enjoyable as these two instances. I would try to count the number of times I have witnessed drunken old men rambling and preaching to themselves, but that would probably take an incredibly long time. Take, for example, one time when my mom came to visit. She had never been to Philly before, so I figured what better a true Philadelphia experience than riding the Broad Street Line? After a day of visiting historical landmarks and restaurant-hopping in Old City, we boarded the subway. This would probably be considered a mistake when trying to convince your mother that you are completely safe in the city of "Brotherly Shove." Directly across from us sat an old man. Now, I don't know this man's whole life story. However, I do know at least half of it, because he was yelling and screaming about it the whole ride. He was also bashing anyone that came to his mind, not to mention every social, political, and religious institution in existence. After a pretty awkward ride, my mom turned to me and said, "You don't ride that late at night, do you?" "Of course not," I said, lying to her face.

I know I probably shouldn't have lied, and I understand my mom's concerns. But the truth is—the Broad Street Line is kind of like my therapist. In America today, it seems as if everyone needs therapy. However, not everyone can afford it, and not all of us have friends willing to sell us their Ritalin. So, for those of us on a cheap budget, there is the subway.

I was first informed of this affordable therapy when I told a co-worker from my summer internship in Baltimore that I



Ryan Billings taking public transportation

was going to school in Philly. She then proceeded to give me the advice that I will never forget. As a Philadelphia native herself, my co-worker told me to always take advantage of SEPTA after a really bad day. Not understanding what she meant, I looked at her puzzled. I mean, I had ridden subways in DC and New York, and to be honest, it never really helped a bad day. She then looked back at me and said, "Sometimes it's just nice to know that someone is crazier than you are." I emailed her about a week into this semester to let her know that I finally understood what she meant.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to take advantage of the inhabitants of a city that has a really bad reputation in regards to mental health. I am just saying that it doesn't hurt to laugh a little bit. We all connect with people in our subway cars; just admit it. We stare at them, we eavesdrop, and most importantly we find humor in stranger's lives, even if it is just for a few minutes. I mean, when you are stuck in a dirty orange box with an eclectic bunch of faces and personalities, something is bound to be more interesting than horribly-designed advertisement along the walls. Sometimes it's a kid eating a donut, and sometimes it's a crazy old man. Whoever they are, and whatever their stories may entail, they serve as my therapists. Now if only SEPTA would invest in some couches...

Going Cold Turkey on Fuel? No, But its Close...

By Erin Schubert

Student + living in the city = no car on campus. If that is your equation, what is your solution? Chances are you most likely rely on SEPTA for all your traveling needs. If you need to go anywhere outside of SEPTA's limits... well, too bad? Think again. Philadelphia has a very "green" alternative to owning a car in the city. It's called PhillyCarShare. You may have seen their name plastered on the side of a Prius, Mini Cooper, BMW, Element or pickup truck with a driver that looks incredibly environmentally conscientious and strikingly intelligent behind the wheel. This non-profit car-sharing program was started in 2002 and has shown incredible results in the region of Philadelphia.

- 2,100 cars off Philadelphia's streets
- 10 million fewer miles driven annually
- 50% more use of public transit, walking, and biking among members
- 95% reduced auto emissions, from driving hybrids, driving less, owning fewer cars, and making fewer cold starts
- 440,000 gallons of gas saved
- 80% of members preferring residential locations near PhillyCarShare pods, thus strengthening the city

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COMMUNITY



Not Your Grandma's Activism

By Erin Schubert

I've always hated newspapers around Election Day. They pick and choose political candidates to endorse like kids picking teams on a playground. Only now, instead of a kickball as the weapon of choice, it's ratings and funding. One newspaper leans right, the other left. Then in your mind, one is more morally centered, one is more progressive. Therefore, one is right and one is wrong.

So I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to tell you who the candidates are or why you should vote for one over the other on November 7th. I'm not going to use the overused and ineffective cliché of "your vote counts." I'm not even going to tell you that you live in a state constantly considered a political battleground. No, you've heard all those things and MTV has already banged the idea of "rocking the vote" into your heads.

What I am going to tell you is that cynicism and apathy towards politics is getting you nowhere. Yes, we are the Jon Stewart generation. We question and typically reject traditional "politics." A study by the Harvard University Institute of Politics says that "presidential trust among college students is at an all-time low and trust of the federal government is not much higher. Nearly three-fourths of students (70%) believe that elected officials seem to be motivated by selfish reasons, and sixty-nine percent (69%) do not believe that negative campaigning is an acceptable part of politics." We see national leaders mess up and cover up and can't help but wonder if this particular arena should be left in the hands of our parents.

However, activism and engagement in government is transforming itself and college students across the nation are personalizing their politi-

cal involvement. Our age group has put some technological twists on the idea of activism. For example, the t-shirt is the new yard sign. Political, social and religious views can be seen on the chests of college students across the country. Along those same lines, wearing wristbands with messages or boycotting a specific product because you disagree with the social or political values also counts as political involvement. Taking this participation even further, many young people are using venues such as concerts, community service and even church as outlets for political activism.

Our parents may have marched, listened to political music, and participated in sit-ins. And our participation may not be joining a union or even joining a political party. But hopefully we can make our generation's contribution to the world of politics be considered different, not dead.



(PhillyCarShare Continued)

\$4,000 saved annually by each former car owner

The simple process includes signing up for a FREE student membership, reserving a hybrid car online and picking the car up at your local "pod." The rate is \$5.90 an hour and that covers gas, premium insurance, reserved parking spaces throughout the city and 24-hour roadside assistance. In addition, if you're more of a night owl, the program offers insomniac discounts. You only pay for 2 hours from midnight to 8am. So check out www.phillycarshare.org if you're interested!

Resources for further research and action: Sweatshop-free industries:

Justice Clothing
No Sweat Apparel

Helpful Websites:

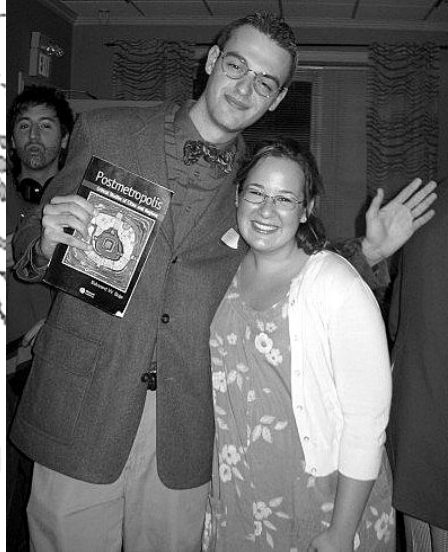
SweatFree Communities
(www.sweatfree.org)
Sweatshop Watch
(www.sweatshopwatch.org)
United Students Against Sweatshops (<http://studentsagainstsweatshops.org>)
Behind the Label
(www.behindthelabel.org).

Comments or suggestions for the BSJ?

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EVENTS

scenes from
harvest
party
2006



Clockwise from top left:
Justin Feinberg and Carly Allen;
Lisa White, Lindsey Bingaman, Al-
lison Stanley, Megan Leaman, Laura
Hayes, Lindsay Hench, Meghan Hoo-
ver; Amanda Johnson, Krista Sori-
ano; Prasana William, Megan East-
man, Lauryn Houser, Virginia Hei-
del; Molly Brieghner, Laura Hayes;
Eric Fix, David Lambertson, Molly
Briegner, Ciana Hardwick, Maria
Karlya; Edward Poff, Meghan Hoo-
ver; Prasana William, Megan East-
man.

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