

= The True Cost =

The True Cost is a 2015 documentary film directed by Andrew Morgan that focuses on fast fashion . It discusses several aspects of the garment industry from production ? mainly exploring the life of low @-@ wage workers in developing countries ? to its after @-@ effects such as river and soil pollution , pesticide contamination , disease and death . Using an approach that looks at environmental , social and psychological aspects , it also examines consumerism and mass media , ultimately linking them to global capitalism . The documentary is a collage of several interviews with environmentalists , garment workers , factory owners , and people organizing fair trade companies or promoting sustainable clothing production .

Morgan 's attention was drawn to the topic after the 2013 Savar building collapse , when a commercial building in Bangladesh named Rana Plaza toppled and killed over a thousand workers . Starting the project in October of that year , he traveled to thirteen countries to collect information and conduct interviews . The film was funded by Kickstarter and premiered at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival in early May 2015 before its release in select American and British theaters later that month . Critics have been both positive and dismissive , with reviews ranging from " vitally important documentary " to " vague liberal agitprop " .

= = Content = =

In The True Cost , Morgan examines the garment industry ? specifically the fast fashion business ? and links it to consumerism , globalization , capitalism , structural poverty , and oppression . In the film , it is stated that in the 1960s , the American fashion industry produced 95 % of the clothes its people wore , while now only 3 % percent are produced in the United States , with the rest produced in developing countries . Operating in countries such as Bangladesh , India , Cambodia , and China , major brand manufacturers minimize costs and maximize profits by having companies in those countries competing against each other . The international brands pressure the factory owners , threatening to close and move production to another country if the clothes are not cheap enough ; the owners in turn pressure their workers and , as one owner says , " They 're hampering me , I 'm hampering my workers " .

According to Morgan , despite garment manufacturing being a three @-@ trillion @-@ dollar industry , the working conditions in those countries are poor . In addition to having to work in those conditions and live on low salaries , these workers have a difficult time demanding their rights ; Bangladeshi workers in Dhaka may be beaten by their employers while Cambodians are shot by police . In Dhaka , workers must work in hot and chemical @-@ ridden environments and structurally unsound buildings . The film shows the events of the 2013 Savar building collapse when an eight @-@ story commercial building named Rana Plaza collapsed . Just prior to that , workers had been forced into the factory even though a crack was seen in the walls .

The film shows how the demand for cotton in India has led to the planting of genetically modified (GM) cotton , and how the monopoly inherent in its use by seed companies causes an increase in the price of cotton , leading to suicides among farmers who lose their land to these companies because they cannot pay the higher seed prices . GM crops need more pesticides , causing environmental damage , birth defects leading to mental and physical disabilities among the Punjab people , and an increased rate of cancer . The film claims that sometimes the companies that produce the pesticides are the same ones that produce the needed medications . A similar scenario occurs in contaminated cotton fields in Texas , where pesticides are causing brain tumors . The garment industry is the second @-@ most @-@ polluting industry the world , according to the film , which is illustrated by leather tanneries pouring chromium into the Ganges River in Kanpur , India .

In the film , the focus returns to America , where it looks at how media affects the desire of people ? especially teenagers ? to buy and create an identity focused on consumption . This is borne out by a 500 % worldwide increase in clothing consumption compared to the 1990s . However , clothes are quickly disposed of ; an average American wastes 82 lb (37 kg) of textiles a year . Only 10 % percent of donated clothes go to thrift shops ; the rest go to landfills , such as those in Port @-@ au

@-@ Prince , Haiti . Aside from weakening local industries by this constant disposal of clothes , land and water are polluted because most apparel is made from non @-@ biodegradable materials .

Throughout the film , Morgan shows people who defend the low @-@ cost prices such as Benjamin Powell of the Free Market Institute at Texas Tech University and Kate Ball @-@ Young , former sourcing manager of Joe Fresh . Ball @-@ Young says that , in comparison to more precarious alternative work , the fashion industry is a good choice for workers . Powell argues sweatshops are " part of the very process that raises living standards and leads to better working conditions over time " . In contrast , the film shows a Texas organic cotton farmer , eco fashion activist Livia Firth and her sustainability @-@ focused consulting firm , and people who manage fair trade clothing companies , such as animal @-@ rights activist Stella McCartney , People Tree 's Safia Minney , Redress 's Christina Dean , and Patagonia 's Vincent Stanley .

Other individuals interviewed and appearing in the film include : television personalities Stephen Colbert and John Oliver , economist Richard D. Wolff , John Hilary of the charity War on Want , professor of media studies Mark Crispin Miller , psychologist Tim Kasser , physician Pritpal Singh , and environmentalists Rick Ridgeway and Vandana Shiva .

= = Production = =

The documentary 's budget of US \$ 500 @,@ 000 was obtained through individual investors and Kickstarter , with Kickstarter crowd funders contributing US \$ 76 @,@ 546 . Morgan refused to accept money from companies , non @-@ governmental organizations , and foundations to keep the project " autonomous " . During a two @-@ year period beginning in October 2013 , Morgan traveled to twenty @-@ five cities in thirteen countries , where he collected information and conducted interviews . Some of the interviews were made possible through the efforts of executive producer Livia Firth , who introduced Morgan to eco fashion . Morgan had planned to interview Firth , but when she learned about the project she became interested in it and recommended people for him to talk to . Firth became heavily involved with the project , and after completing several interviews with her , Morgan showed Firth the final cut and made her an executive producer for the film . He had also planned to conduct interviews with 25 " major " brands , but none of them agreed to appear in the film .

With no knowledge of the fashion industry , Morgan decided to make a film on the topic after being shocked by the news of the collapse of Rana Plaza . After spending several days getting information , and discovering the industry 's human rights violations and " staggering environmental impacts " , he was sure he had to make the film . He had also previously had an appreciation for the genre , saying he was " actually fascinated by those [fashion] films that follow one person " . Like Morgan a non @-@ connoisseur of fashion , executive producer and eco activist Lucy Siegle said that she does not like such films as they are usually limited to exploring the aesthetic aspects of the industry . It is The True Cost differential in her opinion ; it " goes there and then some ? ? ? it unravels the grim , gritty , global supply chain of fast fashion " . Nevertheless , the film purposely does not give viewers a clear answer on how to solve the problems as there are " no straightforward answers " . Morgan commented , " I 'm probably most proud that we avoided easy answers and instead chose to trust people to both feel and think deeply about the issues raised . "

Regarding the ultimate objectives behind the making of the film , Morgan said he was not trying to blame just a single company nor the fast fashion industry as " it did not invent a very irresponsible way of manufacturing , it did not invent overmarketing the consumption of things . " The director said the film was intended to be a caution on the " incessant consumption of mediocre stuff " and an incentive to view shopping as something more than a hobby , adding that buying is " a moral act and there is a chain reaction of consequences " . He commented he was not trying to be " anti @-@ business or anti @-@ market " but was just reaffirming basic human rights and showing the limits of natural resources .

Morgan said his main hope for the film was that it would spark a debate on the topic and make people " more mindful and choose things that support life and not take it away . " Morgan thought he had included a good number of counter @-@ examples of how people can make a difference , so

the film does not simply show " the destructive ways this industry operates but also the opportunity to reinvent it " through " small choices [that] actually impact those [big problems] . " Ultimately , he considered his film an introduction to the topic that was able to connect several elements , any one of which would be worth being covered in a film .

= = Release and response = =

To coincide with Fashion Revolution Day , which seeks transparency in clothes production , the trailer of *The True Cost* was released on April 24 , 2015 . It premiered at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival on May 15 , when film producer Harvey Weinstein said , " This movie 's going to shock the fashion world " . A week before the official release , the crowd funders received personal links to allow them watch the film . It was released on May 29 through iTunes , video on demand services , DVD , Blu @-@ Ray , and in select theaters in Los Angeles , New York , and London , and has since been translated into 19 languages . After its release , companies that were subjects of the film , including H & M and Zara , defended themselves in a CNBC article . The film has been subject to dissonant reviews that ranged from extremely positive to very dismissive . Aggregator site Rotten Tomatoes says there were five positive reviews and three negative reviews ? ? ? which indicates that 63 % of critics were favorable ? ? ? and that it received an average score of 6 @.@ 3 . Based on one positive , two mixed , and one negative review , Metacritic assigns an average score of 46 out of 100 . It also received an Environmental Media Awards nomination for Best Documentary Film .

The New York Times reviewer Jeannette Catsoulis praised it for avoiding the dichotomy of " corporate greed versus environmental well @-@ being " , adding that instead of being an exposé , " Under the gentle , humane investigations of its director , what emerges most strongly is a portrait of exploitation that ought to make us more nauseated than elated over those \$ 20 jeans " . Tamsin Blanchard of the Daily Telegraph called it a work that will " do for the fast fashion business what Food Inc did for fast food " . The Hollywood Reporter 's Frank Scheck commended it for approaching an issue often " untouched by major news organizations " . He said the film was " more despair @-@ inducing than instructive " , but was optimistic about its possible impact on the fashion culture , citing the effect that films such as *Super Size Me* and *Fast Food Nation* had on the fast food industry . Carson Quiros of Paste also compared it to the former film . David Noh of Film Journal International called it a " vitally important documentary " that contains scenes that " are enough to make you never want to go shopping again " . Gabrielle Wilson of MTV stated it is " hard to swallow but never feels preach @-@ y or like a barrage of depressive factoids " and will empower viewers to change their shopping habits . Casey Jarman said she was disappointed by " the only solution offered : eliminating global capitalism " ; however , ultimately , she wrote for Willamette Week that it is a " compelling film , which is , above all else , a badly needed conversation @-@ starter " .

Alan Scherstuhl wrote a very critical piece for The Village Voice ; he called the film predictable and repetitive , and said it contained several facts that have been clearly " common knowledge for years " . Scherstuhl said it is scattershot , " a litany of Things We Can All Agree Are Bad " , but ultimately jumps between several topics ? ? ? without sufficient detail , in his opinion ? ? ? but comes to no conclusion or alternative . Scherstuhl said not even common people would have their beliefs challenged and that they would " dismiss it as the vague liberal agitprop that it is " . Similarly , while saying the film discusses important issues , both Genevieve Koski of The Dissolve and Jennie Kermode of Eye for Film said it deals with several themes quickly but does not expand upon any of them . Koski said , " The True Cost is methodical to a fault " , while Kermode said it is " a good starting point " on the topic . Fashion critic Vanessa Friedman said it has an " easy @-@ to @-@ swallow accessibility " but that it " oversimplifies " some aspects of the industry . In addition to commenting on the lack of attribution for " lots of eye @-@ popping statements " , she said , " trying to do everything , he skirted a lot of things " . The Los Angeles Times 's Martin Tsai criticized Morgan for interviewing his own executive producers , saying " the effects of fertilizers ... don 't appear quite as tangible " , and faulted Morgan for not exploring " retailer markups that could have

gone toward improving sweatshop conditions instead of profit margins " , but appreciated that he had interviewed people with both pro and con views . Lizzie Crocker of The Daily Beast said Morgan had socialist views and that the film implies he wants to go back to the 1960s . She also criticized some interviewees , such as Miller , whom she called a " conspiracy theorist " , and Wolff , whom she called a " Marxist idealist " . Crocker was dismissive of the film , saying , " the film loses focus and credibility , criticizing not just the fashion industry but the global capitalist system that supports it " .