

Made in U.S.A.; Buying American is a shopping challenge.

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Body

The production of this paragraph was not outsourced to the Philippines or Mexico. It was written, punctuated, and fact-checked in the **U.S.A.** It was, however, composed on a laptop computer that was manufactured by Lenovo, a company in which the Chinese government owns a twenty-seven-per-cent share (Lenovo.com; Model X301, starting at \$1,999). The writer is **American**, but also Russian and Romanian. Her ideas derive partially from Adam Smith, the Scottish moral philosopher and political economist. A coffeemaker made by the German company Braun was tangentially involved (Amazon.com; ten-cup coffeemaker, \$39.99).

Don't our fellow-citizens create anything? Well, McDonald's hamburgers are ground from **American** cattle (except when they are supplemented by Australian and New Zealand beef), most of the Hummers on our roads are assembled at plants in Indiana and Louisiana, and the bulk of unwanted bulk e-mail originates right here. Permit me, then, to rephrase the question: Are there any domestically produced goods that we might be proud to call our own?

What does the label "Made in the **U.S.A.**" mean, anyway? According to the Federal Trade Commission, it designates that "all or virtually all" of the product and its components were made in the fifty states, the District of Columbia, or any **American** territory or possession. This is one of the reasons you have never seen a "Made in Johnston Atoll" label.

Where else to begin the search for indigenous stuff but at Lord & Taylor, the first major emporium to spring up on Fifth Avenue, the first to have an elevator, and the first to turn its windows into a Christmastime spectacle? Each morning as business begins, an orchestral recording of "The Star-Spangled Banner" can be heard resounding through the ten-story Italian Renaissance Revival building, a ritual that started in 1979, during the Iranian hostage crisis.

"If they're serving mimosas, I'll have one," joked the woman sitting next to me on one of the folding chairs hospitably set out just inside the entrance for customers who arrive early. One saleswoman told me, "I'm **American-born**, so I really like the tradition. I stop what I'm doing, but the others keep counting their registers, which **makes** me cringe." She was standing in front of a rack on which an appealing and patriotic-looking Michael Kors linen jacket (\$159.50) hung. But its broad stripes of red, white, and blue gave proof, under the fluorescent light, that our rags are not being made here. Hint: the jacket hails from a land that has a red flag and rhymes with "angina." From where else does the merchandise arrive? Sri Lanka (Joseph Abboud lavender checked men's shirt; \$98), Tunisia (Hugo Boss men's

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belt; \$85), India (Cole Haan tan saddle-leather belt with white stitching; \$59), Indonesia (Kenneth Cole men's slim-fit stretch shirt; \$59.50), Peru (Ike Behar New York blue tattersall shirt; \$165), Finland (Ben Kahn red sheared-mink coat; reduced to \$2,445), Honduras and El Salvador (Jockey classic boxer briefs, three for \$27; Jockey T-shirts, three for \$24), Israel (Iris Braunstein hand-painted bracelets decorated with crystals, sparkles, and gloss; \$85). If you hunt, you can even find a thing or two from the United States—for instance, a smart black nylon quilted A-line jacket from the Malaysian-born designer Yeohlee (\$750, reduced to \$149.99).

The retailarchy Bloomingdale's has yet to go multinational, although a Dubai venture is in the works. Don't be fooled by the Juicy Couture shopping-themed Monopoly game that comes in a box proclaiming "Born in the Glamorous U.S.A." (\$58). (The dice were born in China.) "Sure, we have lots of things made here in the States," a woman in housewares told me. "I don't know specifically what, but, gee, there must be something." After looking high and low, we came across some lattice-weave placemats made in New York, by a company called Chilewich (variety of colors; \$15-\$18).

Aha! Up on the fourth floor, take a look at the ladies' apparel by St. John, all of it manufactured in California. St. John Knits, if you are not familiar with the line, look as if they were made in an era when women wore clothes that were made in the U.S.A. But doesn't that putting-green-colored suit jacket (\$1,795), perfect for a country-club luncheon, look lonely without a crocodile clutch? Let's see if there is anything in the handbag department stitched in the United States. "Nothing, nothing, nothing," a saleswoman in the Marc Jacobs section said, noting that the high-end bags are from Italy and the cheaper ones are from you-know-where. "Obama should give tax breaks to companies that employ people here," she said. "And we should subject our products to the same poisonous dyes used by foreign companies, if that's what it takes to compete."

Just when you thought you were getting ready to go shopping, here comes the economy. Should we be in favor of free trade or protectionism? Proponents of the former argue that frictionless commerce makes for cheaper stuff—and plenty of it. Protectionists, who support tariffs, quotas, and subsidies, say that, without government guardianship, American firms don't have a chance against foreign counterparts that can pay lower wages and save money by ignoring human rights and environmental concerns.

"Oh, yeah? What about the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act?" free-traders like to retort, referring to the 1930 legislation that many believe exacerbated the Great Depression. Then they point out that globalization is here to stay.

In practice, the stance of most politicians is somewhere in between. "We have a right to sell you our stuff without any restrictions, and if you're nice or lend us a bunch of money maybe we'll let you sell us *your* stuff" is the way former Senator Bob Kerrey summarized the position to me, noting that purists from either camp belong only at conferences and on talk shows. Members of Congress initially pushed for a Buy America provision in the economic-stimulus package, but it was watered down, at the President's urging. Most economists, by the way, favor free trade. But George W. Bush leaned that way, and you know how we felt about him.

What could be more American than Early American furniture? Shakers who can't afford Shaker can acquire dovetailed pieces for their meetinghouses at Thos. Moser Cabinetmakers (699 Madison Avenue, at 62nd Street, second floor), although the walnut chaise may be just slightly more curvaceous than a Believer in Christ's Second Appearing can tolerate (authentic Shaker dresser, \$48,000; chaise, \$4,350). Mr. Moser, a former professor of speech, got into the home-furnishings game thirty-seven years ago, and today is joined in the business by three of his sons. Their chairs, tables, stools, desks, and credenzas are informed not only by Shaker design but by the Arts and Crafts movement, the Bauhaus School, and traditional Japanese joinery. The pieces are constructed in Maine from Pennsylvania cherry trees, although, on request, the Mosers will use another species if they deem the choice aesthetically and ecologically appropriate.

Simon Pearce's eponymous emporium (500 Park Avenue, at 59th Street) has for decades specialized in glassware, ceramics, and sundry other breakables, most of them handmade in the company's workshops in Vermont and Maryland. A New York galley kitchen may not be able to accommodate the XXL glass cake plate (\$395), but surely the less grown-up stand for a single cupcake (\$65) would fit. Do customers care that the goods are made by the home team? According to the store manager, "The 'Is it made in America?' question comes up, especially from

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people who are travelling overseas and want to bring their hosts a locally produced gift. But it's not the top question." And that question would be? How to spell Quechee (home of the flagship store, in Vermont).

At the Times Square branch of the French-owned cosmetics chain Sephora posters advertise "Star-Spangled Skin Care Values" and declare, "We the pretty, in order to form a more gorgeous complexion for all, do solemnly swear to faithfully preserve, protect, and defend the constitution of your skin." Take that, Chief Justice Roberts-not to mention Thomas Jefferson, who wrote, "I have come to a resolution myself as I hope every good citizen will, never again to purchase any article of foreign manufacture which can be had of American make, be the difference of price what it may." (Don't tell anyone, by the way, that Jefferson, despite his buy-American rhetoric, went on such a Continental shopping spree while he was minister to France that he returned to the States with eighty-six shipping crates of souvenirs.)

Do cosmetics consumers care that Stila, Too Faced, Bare Escentuals, DuWop, Cosmedicine, and Tarte manufacture on our shores? "I am a twenty-year-old on a budget," said a twenty-year-old on a budget, who was trying on some Bare Escentuals "soft black" eyeshadow (\$13). "I don't have the means to take into consideration where the money is going." "Once, I had a customer ask if something was made in the U.S., but I can't remember if she wanted it to be American or not," a saleswoman told me as she smeared a Tarte cheek stain on my hand to show me the color of this fine American water-based rouge (\$28), which is packaged like a fat pushup ChapStick. Incidentally, ChapStick was invented in the eighteen-eighties by a pharmacist in Virginia, and it is still made there (Walgreens; \$1.99).

Do you remember when foreign stuff was still exotic? It used to be exciting to buy things that weren't made in America-Pier 1 Imports was like Shangri-La. How thrilled we were when Julia Child found France and brought back coq au vin! Nowadays it's homegrown goods that feel special. Take the Fender guitar. Models from the firm's plant in Mexico start at five hundred dollars, whereas the varieties made in Corona, California-hand-built of superior materials-start at a thousand (Guitar Center, 25 West 14th Street). Cannondale's most elite bike, the SuperSix, ridden by the Italian racing champion Ivan Basso, is handmade in Bedford, Pennsylvania, whereas some of the company's cheaper models are manufactured in Taiwan and Vietnam.

Ask someone in another country to name his favorite American goods and chances are the answer will not be semiconductors, aircraft, or automobile engines, even though these are among our top exports. So which American products make the shopping lists of foreigners? Here's a sampling of responses I received: Canadians like Red Wing shoes, Trish McEvoy makeup, Smucker's peanut butter and jelly in the same jar, Cherry Coke Zero, Milky Ways, and pickles. The English go for M&M's, Tootsie Rolls, Oreos, Krispy Kreme doughnuts, Craisins (of course), Ziploc bags, Tiffany & Co. jewelry, and the American version of the British TV program "The Office." The Chinese like Colgate toothpaste, Pringles, Aunt Jemima pancake and waffle mix, any Procter & Gamble shampoo, Rubbermaid products, wooden bowls, "Sex and the City," Hillary Clinton, and vitamins. A Frenchman told me that he loved American cigarettes, and a Mexican fellow said that he was partial to Dodge pickup trucks.

A Yankee Doodle Dandy would be right at home at Kaufman's Army & Navy (319 West 42nd Street), where military personnel get fifteen per cent off their purchases, the fitting rooms are called "bunkers," a genuine American-made Army tank is available for rent (cost varies by location), and the polypropylene underwear is no different from a soldier's (tops and drawers; \$22). Established in 1938, Kaufman's purports to be the oldest retail operation on West Forty-second Street and one of the oldest military-surplus stores in the country. Civilians, I think you'd look swell in a handsome peacoat (\$150-\$250; made in Boston), sturdy government-supplied oxfords (\$120 for regulars, \$60 for irregulars; made in Big Rapids, Michigan), and a pair of Massachusetts-made sunglasses practically identical to those issued to fighter-pilots (\$55). But good luck digging through the mounds of olive and khaki in this higgledy-piggledy hole-in-the-wall. Even finding the exit might require one of those hundred-dollar glow-in-the-dark compasses illuminated by tubes of phosphorus and tritium (a radioactive isotope of hydrogen, but you knew that).

The American apparel at American Apparel-T-shirts and T-shirt dresses, underwear, and exercise gear-is geographically correct (181 Eighth Avenue, at 19th Street, and lots of other locations). Their cotton is grown largely in South Carolina, and the sewing is done not in some sweatshop abroad but in a Los Angeles factory, as we are constantly reminded by the company's ads. What they fail to explain is that American cotton growers receive big

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government subsidies, about six times as much as dairy farmers, eleven times as much as barley planters, and a hundred and fifteen times as much as wool producers. American Apparel has plain T-shirts in every color under the sun, including the color of the sun (\$17-\$36), a cute gray turtleneck dress (\$32), men's briefs and boxer briefs (\$12 and \$14), and a giant polyester sack called an Emergency Bag (\$30), but I think you could use it when times are good, too. And this could be the day: according to a sign on the door of the Eighth Avenue branch, they're hiring.

An American Craftsman showcases the handiwork of U.S. citizens who are decorative artists, with a preponderance of intricate wooden widgets from the boxologist Richard Rothbard, who just happens to own the gallery (branches at 60 West 50th Street and 790 Seventh Avenue, at 51st Street). The puzzle boxes, which are riddled with drawers within drawers, come in a variety of shapes and sizes and woods, ranging from abstract maple burls and animal-shaped thingamajigs to music boxes in the form of mini-pianos and receptacles that tell the story of Alice in Wonderland in mahogany (\$42 and way up).

If you like craft fairs but you also like sitting down while you shop, go to Etsy.com, a Brooklyn-based Web site where you can buy and sell anything handmade. There's a lot that's terrific, there's a lot that's terrible, but mainly there's just a lot-tens of thousands of sellers-and most of it is welded, crocheted, painted, sculpted, beaded, canned, glued, nailed, inlaid, or enamelled in these fifty states. For example, a printed plastic "Plump Joe Joe" brooch of a Victorian-seeming obese gentleman (seller, Mamaslittlebabies; \$20), a signed and dated clothbound copy of D. H. Lawrence's "Women in Love" onto which a web of brass wire is secured by nails (seller, TillyBloom; \$47), a mock beard to keep your face warm (seller, imadeyouabeard; brown yarn for men, pink felt for women, \$40), and two bronze sculptures of human ears, unfinished because the artist no longer has the required tools (seller, goncarova; \$185).

What is it that looks like an American, dresses like an American, has lived through the American Revolution, and yet is a native of China? Felicity, one of the twelve historical-character dolls representing bygone eras in United States history, for sale at American Girl Place (609 Fifth Avenue, at 49th Street; dolls, \$95; accessories, \$6-\$350). "At first, I thought it was weird that they weren't made here," a saleswoman said. "But then I thought, That's just the way it is." Another saleswoman chimed in: "What are you wearing that's not made in China? As long as we Americans have what we want, what does it matter?"

In 1950, nearly a third of employed Americans worked in factories. Today, it's about ten per cent. But, according to David Huether, the chief economist for the National Association of Manufacturers, we lead the world in productivity, in terms of output per worker. Throughout much of its history, New York was preëminent in the production of articles intended for the adornment of the human form. The city became rich in the rag trade by making schmattes for slaves working on Southern plantations. The need for ready-made military uniforms during the Civil War was a further boon to business. By 1910, seventy per cent of women's clothing and forty per cent of men's clothing in the United States was made in New York. In recent years, clothing manufacturing has unravelled like a snagged sweater. More than three hundred thousand New Yorkers worked in the garment industry in 1950, and today the number is about twenty thousand. "What could go to Asia went to Asia," said Adam Friedman, the executive director of the New York Industrial Retention Network, a nonprofit agency that promotes manufacturing in the city. Currently, eighty-six per cent of American wardrobe dollars is spent on clothing made abroad.

Several big-league designers who still manufacture a substantial portion of their apparel in the city are Anna Sui, Nicole Miller, Vera Wang, and Oscar de la Renta. Alex Bolen, the C.E.O. of de la Renta, told me that the company's American operations are responsible for about half its output-the haute half. Evening wear, he said, "requires talented, artistic hands. Our customers are extremely knowledgeable-we can't fob off poor-quality goods on them just because they have our label." There are approximately a hundred hands working for Oscar, if you figure two hands per person. All employees are union members, many are of Italian descent, and some have been with the company for as long as twenty-five years.

Anna Sui, a Michigan-born designer known for her exuberant dresses, lush with lace, embroidery, and prints, has been producing her line in New York since 1981. "The garment center is something I'm passionate about," she said. To prop up local merchants, she works with neighborhood venders whenever possible-small owner-operated companies that apply rhinestones and studs to garments, make snaps, pleat fabric, and sell trimmings. "We use

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embroiderers from a factory in New Jersey," she said, adding, "All the embroiderers are in New Jersey." This is not an attempt at New Jersey humor. (Ever see the sign as you exit the Lincoln Tunnel: "Welcome to North New Jersey-Embroidery Capital of the World Since 1872"?) She went on, "The hat industry has virtually disappeared. And there is only one place left-it's on Thirty-eighth Street-that still sells feathers, flowers, and buckram."

Many of the designers who make clothes in the city are independent entrepreneurial types. Shin Yee Man came to this country from China when she was nine, and at Lingo, her boutique in Chelsea (257 West 19th Street), you can find her label, Fresh Meat, as well as the clothing, accessories, and jewelry of other designers who are up and coming or who arrived five minutes ago. I particularly liked a smart smoky-brown shirtdress, by a line called naturevsfuture (made in Manhattan), that is architectural but wearable (on sale for \$178). Prairie Underground's black below-the-knee-length zip-up dress/jacket with pronounced seams (\$198), made in Seattle, is a stylish take on a sweatshirt. Of note, too, are the one-of-a-kind cuffs made from raw leather decorated with gewgaws such as a miniature resin cast of a bull's head, silver liquor-bottle tags, and tiny playing cards (\$150-\$200). "This has the vibe of a Brooklyn store," one customer observed, intending it as a compliment.

If you can't be a rock star, you can at least wear one on your chest. A Swiss-born New Yorker named Idil Vice designs cotton-jersey clothing silk-screened with large images of pop icons. They are cool, but do you dare to have David Bowie staring out from the front of your strapless dress? Or Elvis on your high-waisted skirt, with tulle and petticoat attached? Or Billie Holiday posed on your goth bell-bottoms? (Idilvicefashionrocks.com; \$98.95, \$400, and \$269.)

A locavore (the New Oxford American Dictionary's word of the year in 2007) is somebody who goes out of his way to eat foods produced nearby. What sorts of thing could a hunter-gatherer find in our neck of the pavement? New York City exports more than two hundred million dollars' worth of chocolate, largely the handcrafted, fancy-packaged variety. In addition to Jacques Torres (66 Water Street), Li-Lac (40 Eighth Avenue, at Jane Street), and Kee's (80 Thompson Street), there's Ver, which bills itself as salutary and socially responsible, and proves it by adding something nutritious called a prebiotic to its Rainforest Alliance Certified line, turning out a confection that is suspiciously unsweet. Among the treats "good for the body and good for the soul" are purist caramels (\$8), pink-peppercorn wafers (\$7.50), and almond clusters (\$8.50). Ver bars are available at City Bakery (3 West 18th Street). The first vintage of Brooklyn Buzz mead, fermented from New York State honey, has arrived in shops. It is light and crisp and has a bouquet that is reminiscent of, well, a bouquet (Astor Wines & Spirits, 399 Lafayette Street; \$13).

Actually, almost everything would be made in a shop around the corner if it weren't for the existence of the shipping container. Like the wheel, the shipping container is an invention I could easily have thought of, but Malcolm McLean beat me to it, in 1956. Transporting things inside a standardized metal box, rather than via miscellaneous crates, barrels, and bags, made it possible to load and unload cargo using cranes (consequently reducing the need for longshoremen). How else, as Marc Levinson points out in his book "The Box," could it make economic sense for the American toy company Mattel to assemble a Barbie in China from Taiwanese plastic, Japanese synthetic hair, and American dye, and then ship the dolls, by the thousand, off to girls around the world? (Bob Mackie "Lady of the Unicorns" Barbie, at F. A. O. Schwarz, 767 Fifth Avenue, at 58th Street; \$210.)

The Container Store (629 Sixth Avenue, at 19th Street, and other locations) is an American phenomenon, but most of what it contains is not-that is, until you reach the gift-wrap aisle, where for some reason there is a plethora of U.S.-made merchandise, such as Mrs. Grossman's stickers (made in Petaluma, California; \$2.89) and Party Partners Fun Fringe (made in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania; \$5.99).

Our countrymen did not coin the word "jeans" (they were named after the trousers worn by Italian sailors from Genoa) or the word "denim" (*merci à les français*), but bluejeans are to the U.S. what lederhosen are to Bavaria. A hundred and twenty-six years ago, in San Francisco, the Bavarian-born American Levi Strauss, after receiving a patent to put copper rivets on pocket seams, founded the first company to produce dungarees. However, at Dave's New York (581 Sixth Avenue, at 16th Street)-a depot of reasonably priced indigo twill-a pair of Levi's boot-cuts hails from Cambodia (\$32) and a pair of Carhartt jeans was assembled in Mexico "with U.S. components" (\$38). "It's annoying, and insulting to this country," a Dave's salesman who came to this country from West Africa said. He was

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referring to the arrangement whereby Mexican factories, usually American-owned, import duty-free materials from the U.S., piece them together, and then send the final product back, free of tariff. "It's a disgrace. If we start something here, we should finish it here," the salesman said. By the way, the ruggedly handsome Red Wing work boots that the store sells are, according to the company slogan, "built to fit, built to last," in Minnesota (\$110-\$250).

Did you know that Minnesota enacted a law last year requiring all American flags sold there to originate in the land of the free and the home of the sewing machine? Certain flag-wavers, it seems, were not happy that we import five million or so dollars' worth of Old Glory from China every year. Wait till they find out that at NYC, a run-of-the-mill souvenir shop in Times Square (261 West 42nd Street), the "I New York" mugs are from Thailand (\$12.99), the F.D.N.Y. playing cards are from Taiwan (\$5.99), and the miniature Statues of Liberty are from China (\$22). The very cheesiest ones are, it turns out, made right here, in the biggest cheese-producing country of them all. If you're looking for a piece of economic news to be thankful for, try this: the United States presses one quarter of all the pressed curd eaten around the globe.

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