Child Labor: An Omnipresent Reality

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Abstract
Child labor has been a problem historically and continues to be one during contemporary times. The United Nations, the International Labor Organization, and other agencies have tried to create and implement legislation, but have failed to effectively eliminate child labor. In this paper I argue that there are three steps that need to be taken to insure that the safety and welfare of children worldwide. The first step is to increase awareness of the problem. The second step is to increase investment in education. The third step is to follow through with total implementation. I believe these steps will ensure that child labor comes to a halt.

Document Type
Thesis

Degree Name
M.S. in International Studies

Department
International Studies
St. John Fisher College

Child Labor: An Omnipresent Reality

A Master’s Thesis Submitted to

The Faculty of the Master of Science in International Studies Program

In Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Science in International Studies

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December 2005
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ABSTRACT

Child labor has been a problem historically and continues to be one during contemporary times. The United Nations, the International Labor Organization, and other agencies have tried to create and implement legislation, but have failed to effectively eliminate child labor. In this paper I argue that there are three steps that need to be taken to insure that the safety and welfare of children worldwide. The first step is to increase awareness of the problem. The second step is to increase investment in education. The third step is to follow through with total implementation. I believe these steps will ensure that child labor comes to a halt.
INTRODUCTION

"Child labor is a complex social phenomenon connected to poverty, social values, and cultural circumstances which can only be eradicated through wide partnerships throughout society."

Child labor has been and continues to be a major global problem today. Over the years, the United Nations, and other international organizations have created legislation to help combat, even attempt to cease child labor in its entirety worldwide. These programs have proven to be lacking in depth and enforcement and have received little support from the international community. Immediate changes need to be initiated without delay in order to help save the children of tomorrow.

There are four current approaches to the child labor issue. The first, which is practiced by the World Bank, claims that child labor is an expression of poverty and recommends eliminating poverty rather than addressing child labor at face value. The second approach emphasizes strategies to get more children in school, including expanding locations of schools, along with incentives for parents to send their children to school. The third is the UNICEF view, which declares that child labor is inevitable, at least in the short run. UNICEF stresses measures to regulate child labor, preventing abuses and providing support services for working children. The fourth approach is the International Labor Organizations’ (ILO) flat out ban on child labor.

The purpose of researching this volatile issue is important due to the mere fact that these are the future generations being hurt. It is of utmost importance to understand this issue, and then the global community will be better equipped to cope with this issue.

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What has been accomplished in the past is minute compared to where it should be. The lack of organization and follow through is ridiculous and needs immediate revision. I will not deny that organizations have tried to change the fate of the world's children, but much more needs to be accomplished and instituted on a global, state, local, and cultural level. Child labor is a serious matter and in my view needs to be put on the agendas of all governments and world organizations.

This paper is organized in a manner which addresses the issue at hand, then continues on to look at the contemporary issue, continuing with a look at some examples from across the globe. The historical past of child labor is then addressed, looking at the problem from the past allows for full examination and realization that child labor has a long and detailed past. The paper then switches to looking at why child labor continues to be a problem in the twenty-first century, encompassing human rights issues and the cultural barrier. After examination of these issues, the issue at hand here is scrutinized, what has been done by the United Nations, the International Labor Organization on paper, and then analyzes it with what actually has resulted from these laws and treatise. In the conclusion, my analysis and my three-step proposal for the elimination of child labor on the global front is addressed and discussed.

Child labor has been a problem historically and continues to be one during contemporary times. The United Nations, the International Labor Organization, and other agencies have tried to create and implement legislation, but have failed to effectively eliminate child labor. In this paper I argue that there are three steps that need to be taken to insure that the safety and welfare of children worldwide. The first step is to increase awareness of the problem. The second step is to increase investment in
education. The third step is to follow through with total implementation. I believe these steps will ensure that child labor comes to a halt.

THE NUMBERS

"Governments must also uphold children's basic right to education. Without widely established primary schools, children will have no alternative but to return to the work force, where they will resume positions of subordination and exploitation."³

The picture today of what is going on in the world with regard to child labor is hard to imagine and discern. In many areas of the developing world where child labor exists, it is simply overlooked, while in the developed world, people simply are negligent and do not realize it exists in their country too. Currently, there are more than 246 million children worldwide that are child laborers. Seventy-three million of these children are less than ten years of age. Most people believe that these instances are from the developing world, not the developed world. Yet the numbers show that there are at least 2.5 million working children in the developed the United States, and about 2.5 million in the Eastern European countries alone. Every year there are 22,000 reported children's deaths due to work related incidents. The largest population of working children (127 million) lies in the Asian-Pacific region. The largest proportion of working children is in Sub-Sahara Africa, with more than one-third of children fourteen and under (48 million) currently in the work force.⁴ These numbers are huge and almost unbelievable, but these numbers are only the known cases. It is assumed and known that

the actual numbers can not truly be found out, due to the lack of information and the secrecy surrounding the issue of child labor.

The majority of children work in the informal sector, where laws and regulations are non-existent or overlooked by the population. The breakdowns of where children work are as follows: 70% in agriculture (commercial hunting, fishing, or forestry), 8% in manufacturing, 8% in wholesale (restaurants, hotels, and trade), and 7% in domestic work. An un-disclosed number of children are working on the streets. 8.4 million children alone are trapped in slavery, trafficking, debt bondage, prostitution, pornography, and other illicit activities. Many of these numbers from the ILO, UN, UNICEF, and other NGO’S are uncertain due to the fact that each organization accounts for child labor differently, companies do not wish to disclose that type of information, and governments like to keep hush on the child labor problems.

The issue of child labor is not going any place any too fast. It is placed on the back burner in many instances. There are economic interests at stake in today’s modern society. Many of the developing countries, businesses and families depend on this labor as a source of production and income. However, the well being and safety of children should be one of the important things when considering the use of child labor.

In many cases, the working conditions are horrific, children working long days, making little or no money. Often times the children become indebted for life to help repay a family debt. These children need to be in school, where they can learn, have fun and find out who they really are, through lessons and experimentation. Child labor has both long term and short term effects on the child, the family, and the society. Long term

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5 Ibid.
effects include little or no educational achievement, and physical and mental delay. Some of the short term effects include school attendance, and harmful to health and physical development. The basic fear is that the earlier a child starts working, the less educated they become, no matter what their ambition levels are or what their goals maybe.  

Despite the negative impact on the welfare of children, the politics of addressing the issue of child labor can be a slippery slope. A governmental organization or non-governmental organization can not simply go into a country and clear out the child laborers. The idea of an international police force enforcing international laws is hard to fathom. In a perfect world there would be no child laborers, but the reality is that nations, people, and governments have their own cultures, values and needs. These differences are what make the world interesting, but they also make things difficult when approaching human rights issues such as child labor.

REGIONAL ISSUES

"We start work at 5:30 in the morning and we work at least until 4:00. Adults and children work the same hours. There is no overtime pay, except for work on Sunday. When children start out working with their families, they work under a parent’s number. But by 12 or 13, they usually have their own number and get paid separately."

–Gema Lopez, Child Laborer→Mexico

Child labor is an interesting and highly complex issue to deal with. There are numerous views, from legislation to cultural values, to family needs and to the atmosphere where the children are reared. Whatever part of this vast and diverse world

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one travels to, they are bound to see and find notions of child labor. From the western
countries such as Europe and the United States; to Mexico, India, China, and Africa: the
problem exists. The level, harm, and the acceptance vary according to the region,
politics, and the state of the nation. All are factors in the equation which allows for child
labor to exist in both the private and public sectors of the labor marketplace.

The failures outweigh the successes, as the numbers of children working has
grown in the recent years, as they are a pliant, cheap labor source that can be taken for
granted. Education is the first step to ending the poverty cycle, which means that
enforced school attendance could lead to a lower labor force participation rate for child
laborers, but in countries such as Mexico child labor is growing, despite a so-called
education policy.

The cases and types of child labor vary immensely around the globe, from the
United States, Europe, India, the Pacific, Latin America, and into most other countries
around the world. The number of child workers is growing in developing countries. In
some African countries, 20% of all children are forced to work. In Nigeria alone, there
are currently over twelve million children working. In Spain, there is an estimated
100,000 child laborers. While children often work very hard, the earning power of the
children is very low. For example, children working in an Indonesian light bulb
factories, work eight hour days, six days a week and make the equivalent of $3 U.S.
dollars a week. Zimbabwe coffee pickers earn about the same for ten-hour days, 6-days a
week, and children in Nepal carpet factories earn a dollar or less each day. Children are
hired because they have little or no bargaining power and are willing to work for less. In
India, for example, fifteen percent of the workers in the match and firewood industries
are under the age of fifteen, employers complain that replacing the cheaper children with adults would cost them in excess of $1.5 million per year.\textsuperscript{7}

Even in the mighty United States, there is and has always been an issue with child laborers. Migrant workers on the east coast appear every summer and stay through harvest time to help with the farm work. Meanwhile there is a more apparent workforce in the west coast, where the growing season more or less lasts year round. Children are part of the workforce, being taken advantage of just like in developing countries. “The maltreatment of children on American farms is part of globalization, in the sense that first world countries no longer rely solely on the third world for cheap labor. Rather, large segments of society within the U.S. are subjected to working conditions not unlike those in the developing countries.”\textsuperscript{8} The stories and situations taken from working children in the U.S. compared with those of developing countries do not show much difference. The hours, pay, conditions, health, and treatment are horrific and below standards.

Child workers in the U.S. often earn less than $2 an hour, working with dangerous pesticides, suffering from rashes, headaches, nausea, and vomiting, with long term consequences ranging from cancer, to brain damage to memory problems. One girl, began working in the lettuce and broccoli fields when she was thirteen and continued until she was eighteen years old. During the peak seasons she would work fourteen hours a day, with only two fifteen minute breaks and a half hour for lunch. She would often work 85 or 90 hours a week, suffering from nosebleeds for months, her blood pressure would drop, and she would nearly pass out due to the pesticide drift, becoming ill, yet she

\textsuperscript{8} Neve Gordon, “Children exposed, exploited on U.S. farms,” National Catholic Reporter 37, no. 16 (Feb 16, 2001).
kept working. The United States, believed to be one of the most developed countries, has major problems in the arena of child labor.

Mexico is an interesting case, due to the fact that it encompasses many of the trends in child labor today. In Mexico, children perform farm work, work in factories, numerous street children are involved in various forms of sales, prostitution, and peddling. Recent estimates reveal that there are a total of 3.4 million children in Mexico who are working with or without being paid, representing fifteen percent of the total number of children in Mexico. At least one-quarter of working children leave school for work. In excess of 1.6 million do not attend school, which is becoming a burgeoning issue for Mexico at this time. The occupations range dramatically from household laborers to fishing to vending. In over forty-three percent of these children (1.5 million) contribute to their household’s income at a young age.10

The numbers are staggering. The constitution upholds that child labor is wrong and illegal without going through the proper means, but there are ways to get around the law. The main issue is the lack of enforcement, but the sad reality is that children oftentimes have to work to either help support their families or to survive on their own. These children are forced to grow up instantly, thrown into the workforce, without a childhood. The reason why children go into the work force in Mexico and many other regions of the world is due to poverty and the lack of resources for families. Schools and towns are left abandoned because families move looking for work—both parents and children. One teacher said, “The people went away, looking for work, and the school was

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9 Ibid.
left without children....We realize that what drives the children into the fields is that the wages their parents receive isn’t enough to support the family."

Child labor in Mexico extends into the sex industry. Every month one hundred more children fall into the sex industry in Mexico. For example in La Merced, the old part of Mexico City, there is a ten block area where 3000 girls work the streets twenty-four hours a day, just to make a dollar or two. Prostitution girls are told that it is the only way that they can make money; they are given makeup and skirts by the organizers, who send them on their way to make “easy money. Mexico also has a problem with runaways and children who are living on their own. Eighty percent of these children rely on drugs to dull hunger and to reduce the pain and humiliation of living on the streets. One-third of street children are young girls, who become easy targets for exploitation through rape and prostitution."

There are over 115,000 children working on the streets, in markets, in tourist areas and other parts of the 108 cities in Mexico; seventy percent of these are boys, 30 percent are girls. Sixty percent of these children are found in only twenty of the largest cities. Mexico City’s central market employs about 11,000 minors between the ages of seven and eighteen, who work as cart pushers, kitchen help, and vendors. In Latin America alone, UNICEF has reported that over forty million children live on the street. But since they are distributed throughout the region, few take notice. One girl was quoted as saying it’s like “living like a dog.”

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12 Len Morris: Stolen Childhoods, 2 hours, Galen Films, 2003, DVD.
13 Ibid.
Besides the basic child labor problems in Mexico in the factories, farms, and vending, there is another huge problem, that of the street, which appears to be having effects on all sectors of society. Many times, children resort to the street after realizing that they can not make enough money in the factories or farms. The legislation is in place in Mexico, with regulations and procedures for child workers, but in reality the majority of the population is oblivious to the laws. Survival is fundamental to parents and children; they do what they need to do to survive. It is up to the local, federal, and even international governments to implement changes and ensure that they are carried through with. Maria Estela Rios Gonzalez, the President of the Mexican National Association of Democratic Lawyers, stated:

Instead of saying that we should recognize that child labor exists, and therefore regulate it; I believe it should be eliminated. We cannot substitute the labor of countless children for the inadequate income of their parents. For all the history of humanity, adults have been the protectors and nurturers of children. Now we have children nurturing and protecting the adults. We are robbing them of their own future.  

Mexico is not alone with these problems. They are widespread, from the United States Cities, to Europe, to Asia, Latin America, and all ends of the world. The cases do not cease to exist and neither do the stories as told by children who have endured this kind of life.

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14 Bacon, “Child Labor.”
HISTORY

"One in every four children works in the developing world, yet these estimates do not capture the full breadth of child labor. Conventional statistics fail to account for children in hidden industries such as domestic work and in illegitimate industries such as drug trafficking."\(^{15}\)

In order to understand the problems of and solutions to child labor, it will be helpful to consider the history of child labor. Where to begin in this long history is a challenge, as we know that children helped to create the great pyramids of Egypt and Central America, the Mosques in the Middle East, and the Cathedrals in Europe. Child labor has existed throughout history, but the modern history of child labor began with industrialization in Western Europe and the United States.

The eighteenth and nineteenth century onslaught of capitalism in Western Europe opened up a social rift between the wealthy and the working class. Rural people were fleeing the countryside, entering into cities. In order for the poor to make ends meet and for the capitalists to make profit, children were sent to work. "Sending their miserable children down into coal mines or to the mill was not just good business; it was an act of charity. Child labor spread."\(^{16}\) In the 1820's British reports claim that children were working between 12.5 and 16 hours everyday. Even more troublesome, between 1840 and 1846, twenty percent of the German workforce consisted of children under the age of fourteen. In Sweden alone, up until 1837, children at age five or six could still be employed.\(^{17}\)

In the United States, child labor was widespread in the early nineteenth century. In the 1820s, half the textile mill workers were under sixteen. During these times in a

\(^{15}\) Narayan, "Stolen childhoods," 70.
\(^{17}\) Ha Joon Chang, Kicking Away the Ladder (London: Anthem Press, 2002): 105.
developing America, it was common for factories to hire entire families. For example, a New York paper advertised in 1813, “that a few sober and industrious families of at least five children, each over the age of eight years are wanted at the cotton factory.” Even as late as 1900, the number of children under sixteen working full time was 1.7 million, which actually exceeded the number of memberships in the country’s largest trade union, the American Federation of Labor.\(^{18}\)

Concerns about child labor began to develop in the early nineteenth century. In Britain, the first legislative steps to end child labor came in 1819 with the Cotton Factories Regulation Act, it met strong opposition. This act restricted the hours of working children under age nine. Early laws, 1802, 1819, 1825, 1831 were mainly ineffective, due to the fact that the parliament would not commit money for their implementation. The 1819 act for example only had two convictions by 1825. The first serious act was the 1833 Factory Act, which covered only the cotton, wool, flax, and silk industries. It banned the employment of children under the age of nine. It also limited the working day for those between nine and thirteen to eight hours per day, and limited the working day for those between thirteen and eighteen years of age to twelve hours per day. The act also stated that children were not allowed to work at night. In 1844 another Factory Act was passed, reducing the working hours for those between six and a half and thirteen years old and making mealtime breaks compulsory. This act was followed with a lowering of the minimum working age from nine to eight years. Within Britain over the next couple of decades, other acts were created and implemented; the exact effects are hard to see.\(^{19}\)

\(^{18}\) Ibid.
\(^{19}\) Chang, *Kicking Away*, 105-106.
Other countries within Europe were also beginning to deal with the child labor issues. Germany and Prussia introduced the first laws on child labor in 1839. This prohibited regular employment of children under nine and of illiterate children under sixteen in factories and mines. In Saxony for example, child labor under ten was outlawed in 1861, and four years later, the minimum working age was raised to twelve.\textsuperscript{20} France, Austria, Sweden, and Denmark also got on the band wagon of beginning to implement child labor laws, all following similar time lines, changing the rules and regulations as each society sought the needed changes. Norway, Spain, Holland, Belgium, and Portugal followed the other European countries toward the later part of the nineteenth century, as the twentieth was approaching, they saw needed changes.

The United States had its own problems, thus creating its own regulations. Like other areas of the world, it was wary and slow to react. Some of the states introduced legislation fairly early. For example Massachusetts was the first to pass child labor legislation in 1842, with New Hampshire, Maine and Pennsylvania following shortly after. By the time of World War I, almost every state had laws forbidding labor for younger children and limiting hours worked by older children. The National Child Labor Committee is credited with getting the legislation on the table, but within the U.S., child labor laws were often overlooked and not enforced. In 1916, Congress passed a federal child labor law, but two years later, it was deemed unconstitutional. Other attempts were made, but were shot down; it was the 1938 Fair Labor Standard Act that allowed for federal legislation banning child labor to move forward.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 107.
In general, the 1800s was the time in history when human rights were beginning to be looked at and questions began to be asked. It was not until the later half of the nineteenth century that successes began to be seen on the child labor front. In actuality the really important changes were not seen until the twentieth century began and more contemporary programs and ideals began to spread like wildfire throughout the developed world. The following chart shows the time frames of where and when the first regulations were concocted.

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Country} & \text{First Attempt} & \text{Serious Regulation} & \text{Well Enforced} \\
\hline
\text{Austria} & 1787 & 1842 & \\
\text{UK} & 1802 & 1833 & 1878 \\
\text{Prussia} & 1839 & 1853 & 1878 \\
\text{France} & 1841 & & \\
\text{USA (MASS)} & 1842 & 1904 & 1938 \\
\text{Sweden} & 1846 & 1881 & 1900 \\
\text{Saxony} & 1861 & & \\
\text{Denmark} & 1873 & 1925 & \\
\text{Spain} & 1873 & 1900 & \\
\text{Holland} & 1874 & & \\
\text{Switzerland} & 1877 & & \\
\text{Belgium} & 1878 & 1909 & 1914 \\
\text{Norway} & 1892 & & \\
\text{Italy} & 1902 & & \\
\text{Portugal} & 1913 & & \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

Once the twentieth century arrived, things began changing in all aspects of life, around the world. Industrialization, new technology, social trends, along with more awareness created daily concerns for people, the environment, and other problems that

\[22 \text{Ibid., 108.}\]
previously had been left alone. For example in the United States, the concept of the
adolescent came into being. It is defined as a time period between childhood and
adulthood, when the adolescent needs time to grow and to develop. This concept brought
into play more legislation on the prohibition of child labor and led to the improvement of
education, including mandatory attendance of school.

In 1919, the International Labor Organization (ILO) was created and it took
actions toward limited child labor worldwide. Today, it is a tripartite organization
consisting of government, business, and union representatives for its 174 member states.
The ILO has adopted 177 labor conventions. It is thus known as being the world’s most
comprehensive body of international labor standards. The basic function is to address the
issues of forced labor, freedom of association, the right of collective bargaining, equal
pay for males and females, discrimination, and minimum age for employment. The ILO
also works on banning the most intolerable types of child labor such as slavery,
prostitution, mining, deep sea fishing, and certain types of manufacturing. The ILO has
made changes, improvements, and most importantly awareness, but there is only so much
it can do, after all it has limited powers of enforcement.²³

The ILO has attempted to make clear distinctions between children working for
personally useful reasons (pocket money, household chores, helping in the family
business during school holidays) and the children who are working in conditions of
squalor and in need of regulation. “Working children at risk, according to ILO are:
children who are prematurely leading adult lives and working long hours for low wages,

under conditions which are damaging to their health and to their physical or mental development."24

The United Nations conception originated with the former United States President Woodrow Wilson. His creation was the League of Nations after World War I; the world simply was not ready for this type of organization. The term, "United Nations" was first used by former U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in 1942 amidst World War II. Twenty-six nations pledged their allegiance to help one another to keep fighting against the axis power. In 1945, representatives from fifty countries met in San Francisco to write the United Nations charter.25

The United Nations has since grown to encounter more arenas in today’s interconnected world. There are many organizations working to help enforce human rights, such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). This organization strives to improve the lives of children around the world, through education, health care, immunizations, and to provide protection for children through the promotion of gender equality and safe working and living conditions.26 The United Nations provides an excellent breadth of services and professionals dedicated to trying to make the world a better place. The UN has influenced countries around the world to make child labor laws and to enforce them; some consider this the best form of an international police force.

WORLD AT LARGE: A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE

"You must create a movement for change, a movement against child labor that would involve governments, but also the media, communities and nongovernmental organizations involved in human rights, women's issues, and child issues."
—Michel Hansenne, ILO Director General

Consider the following two thoughts: human rights and child labor. Child labor involves the violation of the human rights of children. This is a tricky and a sensitive area, due to the mere fact that all across the world there are different beliefs, ideals, and cultural norms. However, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was created in 1948 to protect the basic rights of humans around the world.

In principle, human rights are the values, goals, and practices relating to the treatment of human beings that the international community accepts as guaranteed to all. Article one of the Universal Declaration of Human rights states, “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” The Universal Declaration goes on, stating the rights through the various articles, thirty in totality.

We are mostly concerned with articles four, five, and twenty-six. Article four states that, “no one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.” This article concerns us because thousands of children everyday are held in to slave-like conditions, producing goods for little compensation. Article number five states, “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” This article concerns us because children suffer physically, socially, and mentally from cruel and unjust treatment. Every child on this planet should be protected against this inhumane practice. The last article up for discussion is number twenty-six, which deals with the importance of education and for
the future of a child and for the society in which he/she resides. “Everyone has the right to an education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory…” Education is one of the most important rights that any one can receive.

The world as we know it today is a place of turmoil and discontent. The issue of child labor may seem miniscule in comparison to other issues in today’s complex society. But child labor endangers the future generations of this world. Children are and always will be the future leaders and are the most important factor in keeping a society moving forward. Children are what make or break the bank, countries, even the entire world, if nukes are reintroduced into warfare tactics. Education, solidarity, and a conscious development is what is necessary for the children in this already crumbling world we live in today. Education, knowledge, and an understanding of the differences among nations and cultures are the keys to a good lasting society.

It is important that we understand that the world and its inhabitants do not all live the same way. We should appreciate the differences amongst the peoples of the world, as it only enhances our knowledge and breadth of vision. Attempts to eliminate may disturb the cultural landscape of a society. Cultural landscape describes the social, religious, familial and infrastructure of a region. It is sometimes said that a region’s cultural landscape should not be altered by outside influences, such as the west in colonialism and so forth. Child labor, some argue, should be considered a cultural factor and should for this reason, be left alone.

However, I do not believe that this policy of cultural laissez-faire is acceptable, when it endangers the welfare and safety of a child. The brutalization, subordination, and
enslavement of women has begun to cease, after organizations went into the countries where the atrocities were taking place, to educate, enforce, and offer safe havens to the abused women. Now, decades later, women are slowly taking back their lives. Child labor, let alone any unsafe conditions, should not be allowed, as children deserve to have a childhood, to explore who they are and what they want to become. “Following the lead of the International Labor Organization (1998), we can safely conclude that there is never any justification, regardless of the level of national income, for forced or compulsory labor, the exploitation of child labor, infringements of the right to form independent unions to bargain collectively, and employment discrimination.”

No matter the circumstances, children should not be slaves, working for measly pennies, while not knowing if they will return home that evening.

Even so, a number of real questions remain. Who is in charge of this global issue? Is child labor up to the individual countries? What needs to be enforced for the greater good of society as we see it in the future? These questions and problems are all intertwined. Is there a global police force and if so what should its role be? The reality is that there is not an official police force in the international realm. There are a wide variety of issues and problems that are seen as the norm in one place, yet not tolerated in other sectors of the world. These range from women’s rights, to child labor, to basic freedoms. The Universal Human Rights Declaration was designed to help implement these vital rights to all of society, but it is simply hard to do, without upsetting the cultural structure that has been implemented over centuries. The debate over what is accepted and is not accepted crosses boundaries that make many disgruntled, as it alters the homeostasis of all areas.

Child labor is one of the issues as has been noted throughout this paper, it brings up important regional, ethical, and cultural practices and rites throughout time, up to contemporary times. The institutions that have brought together heads of state to write regulations for child labor have persevered to the computers, but have thus lacked in the implementation of the print. The United Nations and countries that have set up the policies to enforce need to see where there failures are and fix them, because without implementation, there will be no end in sight to the abuses of the children.

WHAT’S BEEN DONE (ON PAPER)

In 1989, the largest world wide collaboration came together and created the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). The United Nations General Assembly agreed upon and enacted the convention, due to the spread of child labor in all arenas of the world.\textsuperscript{28} This pact brought together countries from all around the globe, 192 to be exact. The United States and Somalia are the only countries thus far that have not ratified the CRC. The United Nations claims that this convention is the most universally accepted human rights agreement in history, which is a big deal. Through the ratification process, national governments committed themselves to protecting and ensuring children’s rights, holding themselves to this commitment made to the international community. The basic approach of this convention was to agree upon certain standards and obligations that needed to be insured to every child, without any type of discrimination. All children have the right to survival, to develop to their fullest, to be protected from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation, and to full participation in

family, social, and cultural life. Every right is spelled out in the convention, making it appear clear that the convention protects children by setting standards that must be followed.\textsuperscript{29} The United Nations and almost all the countries in the world can agree upon the need to rid the world of child labor in order to preserve a sense of moral norms. However, without anyone to watch over and enforce the legislations and norms, the effort maybe fruitless, because it is only with the support and perseverance of the global community that the problem will be brought to a halt.

This agreement, one of a kind, looks great on paper, just like many other agreements, but the reality is that it is based on western assumptions, which are not practiced in other parts of the world. This asserts that “every child has the right to a name, a family, health and education, and it aims to limit and regulate child labor.”\textsuperscript{30} Due to the lack of understanding about the western values, the United Nations has not made as much progress as it hoped. By looking through the documents on the UNICEF webpage concerning this matter, one can see that they recognize what they have not been able to accomplish and change in the sixteen years that this program has been in place.

The CRC is supposed to be one of the most accepted documents in the history of the world, as its signers account for more than 96% of the world children. This should mean that the United States and Somalia are the only countries which permit and allow for child labor to exist. But despite the record numbers of states who participated in the signing of the convention, still there are only a minority of the world’s children who truly reap the benefits of the convention. Article thirty-two of the CRC states that the convention compels countries to protect children from “economic exploitation and from

\textsuperscript{29} See \url{http://unicef.org}. Accessed on 15 September 2005.
\textsuperscript{30} Porter “Anthropological,” 46.
performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development. The reality is in that children all across the world deal with assuming adult jobs, while working in hazardous conditions, without a thought or hope for the schooling and childhood that they are entitled to.

In 1973, the minimum age convention of the ILO defined child labor as an “economic activity performed by a person under the age of fifteen and prohibited it for being hazardous to the physical, mental, and moral well-being of the child as well as for preventing effective schooling.” This convention was not that successful in gaining support, only receiving ratification from 103 states, due to its complexity and difficulty of implementation. A new convention was thus created, “Worst Forms of Child Labor,” in 1999 in order to gain some ground on this issue. This convention prioritized the struggle against the worst forms of child labor and called for their elimination for all persons under the age of eighteen.

This convention has more hope of being implemented and enacted with flying colors. It was designed to define the worst forms of child labor, including all forms of slavery such as trafficking children, debt bondage, serfdom, and forced slavery. Also the use of children in armed conflict, prostitution, and pornography was noted. Harming the health, safety, or morals of children worldwide was to be deemed illegal. The convention covers all people under the age of eighteen, requiring states to take steps to help children

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32 Ibid., 177.
33 Ibid., 178.
to be removed from the worst forms of child labor and ensuring access to a free education.\textsuperscript{34}

The ILO was adamant concerning getting this convention off the ground; due to the fact that it needed to keep up with the UN and because the minimum age convention was a flop. Juan Somavia, the Director-General of the of ILO stated that, “while there has been significant progress towards the effective abolition of child labor, the international community still faces a major uphill struggle against this stubbornly pervasive form of work that takes a tragic toll on millions of children around the world.”\textsuperscript{35} This convention resulted in obtaining more support, but still not the numbers that the UN was able to gain with the CRC. Both of these organizations have tried repeatedly to introduce conventions, resulting in laws to be followed by its adherents, yet here we are in 2005 and few, if any of the countries follow the ordinances.

\section*{WHAT'S BEEN DONE (REALITY)}

Child labor is not a confined to one portion of the world; it is an omnipresent issue that can be found in both the developed and developing countries. Charles Dickens raised the issue of child labor in two of his works, \textit{Oliver} and \textit{Great Expectations}. He was one of the first authors of his time to bring to expose the human injustices in the industrial world. More recently, the 2001 movie, \textit{Zoolander} deals with using Malaysian children to make designer clothing for the western world. \textit{Zoolander} brings the realization to the forefront that there is a problem in the fashion world with children


working in textile mills for little money and in harsh conditions. It seems that little has changed since Dickens' time.

The sad reality is that child labor is found across the globe today, from the United States to Latin America, to Europe, to Asia. The issue of child labor is a complex one. It needs to be addressed to see why it exists and appears to be on the rise once again in the twenty-first century. The intricacy of child labor is due to the fact that it involves factors such as economics, family concerns, educational importance, laws, enforcement of the laws, penalties, and the need for labor to produce goods.

When it comes down to the issue, child labor is a violation of human rights and the freedoms that are supposed to be granted to all living in this world. Children should not be required to work at such young ages, where they are susceptible to harming their future. Children at all ages have the right to grow into their own person, making their own decisions and life choices, when they have been educated to what is available in this place we call planet earth. Slaving over looms, in dark dirty factories, serving in the sex industry, doing who knows what, conducting backbreaking work, working long days peddling goods on the streets, or working ridiculous hours in a field or at home: these are things that children should not have to deal with.

Childhood is the time of life to learn, grow, explore, and to find out what one wants to become in the future. Children especially those under the age of fourteen need to be looked after, cared for and loved, so that they do not get into too much mischief and can decide what is important to them. They also need to be in school; an education is essential for removing people, families, states, and countries from the poverty stricken cycle. Education, care, responsibility, and understanding are the recipe for success for
the future lives and livelihood of a country. The future depends on ridding the world of the injustices of child labor, through the closure of the drawn-out abuse of children across the world.

Governments, states, and international organizations need to work with the NGO’s, communities, and grassroots organizations. They play an important role in the elimination of child labor, exposing the gaps where child labor persists. Through the portrayal of the glum situation for children worldwide, more individuals are drawn into the cause, creating more help in the implementation and creation of ways to end child labor practices. Through the advent of technology, NGO’s are now more capable of exposing governments and industries which exploit children on a daily basis. The Rugmark campaign shows how NGO’s can make a difference, in this case creating public pressure against the employment of child workers in the rug and carpet industry across India. In 1989, many grassroots NGO’s rallied together to fight against the employment of 420,000 children working on the looms in the Indian rug and carpet industry. UNICEF and the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS) joined the Rugmark Campaign. The campaign was designed to eliminate child labor by licensing companies who submit to surprise inspections. A growing number have dropped their child employment practices just to obtain the reputable Rugmark license.  

This is one of many cases where NGO’s have been successful at reducing child labor numbers.

In recent years, international organizations have pressured states to clean up their acts. Trade sanctions are one of the many solutions that have been tried to combat child labor. Through the imposition of taxes or ending trading outright with a particular country, officials believe sanctions will turn the tide of child labor. Trade is extremely

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important in most parts of the world and if a country is cut off from certain importers or exporters, their country may be doomed, if they do not have another country willing to trade with them. There is a debate concerning the effectiveness of trade sanctions. Some governments and organizations that believe that trade sanctions are a good way to force governments and regimes to do what the rest of the world wants them to do. Other see sanctions as being harmful to the people and children of the country in question and argue that they should be used in limited instances due to their dramatic, immediate effects.

One of the most intriguing suggestions for a solution is the proposal to reduce child labor by imposing trade sanctions through the WTO on countries that choose to violate ‘international labor standards,’ especially the rules regarding child labor.\textsuperscript{37} To use sanctions as the answer is a tough call for the child labor issue. It may come down on to the peoples’ backs, including the child laborers, hurting them even more financially.

In reality some sanctions truly create more harm than good. The Harkin Bill for example was introduced by the United States Congress in 1992 in order to prohibit imports of products made by children under fifteen. This was meant mainly for Bangladesh’s garment industry. Even before the bill made the books, the industry began dismissing the child workers from the factories. The displaced girls, without any education, were forced into more hazardous jobs in unsafe workshops or into prostitution.\textsuperscript{38} The lesson that should be learned from the Harkin bill is that there is no easy way to deal with the problem of child labor, through trade sanctions.

\textsuperscript{37} Chang, \textit{Kicking}, 104-105.
\textsuperscript{38} Narayan, “Stolen Childhoods,” 70.
CONCLUSIONS:

"Some countries with very low per capita incomes have managed to establish credible school systems that both prepare their citizens for the future and discourage child labor, while on the other hand, some of the poorest countries, even in Africa, devote to the education of its children only a fraction of what it spends on weapons."

~Michel Hansenne, ILO Director General

After sifting through the past and contemporary times, it is easy to see that something is wrong with the picture. The truth is that child labor has come out of hiding, but little progress has been made. Important legislation has been passed and great headway has been made on paper, but the real world proves not much has been altered since the United Nations and the International Labor Organization have become involved. Some believe that there have been great improvements, but even the UN knows that it has not done enough. When there are millions of children risking their lives every day for mere pennies and not going to school, there is something really wrong. The examples given above are only a small snap-shot of the larger global problem which needs tending to immediately.

In order for the child laborers to grow up and become successful we need to start with the realization that there is a severe problem. I have created a three step solution that I see fit to dealing with this problem. The first step is to implement social and cultural norms for child labor across the world. This issue is important enough to forge the cultural barrier, leaving the uncertainties of imperialism behind and cleaning up the dangers in the world instead. The efforts of United Nations, UNICEF, and NGO’s, and grassroots organizations will be essential in order to increase awareness and spread the humanitarian effort to all points on the globe.
The second step is for governments and international organizations to increase investments in education future economic development. Educational programs need to institute requirements for school attendance, and to track students more effectively along with their progress in school. The system should also involve helping out the parents and/or guardians, because they depend on the children’s meager income to help the family survive. Subsidies to the parents, provision of meals for children (i.e. breakfast, lunch, and a snack) at school would help immensely and would be a benefit parents may see as a reason they should send their children to school. Governments should be the ones who enforce this at the state and local level. A more educated populous will generate a stronger economy and greater political welfare within the country.

The third step is for government to increase regulations and enforcement at all levels: from legislation, to the overseeing of factories and business, to the school districts. Even the best plans can be the worst plans, because without the follow-through and enforcement, they are not effective. Effort, commitment, and perseverance are what are going to enable this plan to spread worldwide, creating an outcry to free the children.

The safety, health, and education of children worldwide is at stake. This is a serious issue that needs to be taken off the back burner and attended to with the utmost urgency. The ultimate solution here is the power of education; with education anything is possible. Changes need to be made and education has proven itself over the years as being the key to keeping kids off the streets both as children and adults. Education can be considered the single most important factor in eliminating poverty worldwide. Keeping schools open and children in them should not be questionable; it is an essential need for children of all ages.
Hong Kong has made some changes in their system, writing laws and following through with the implications. What has been accomplished in Hong Kong is amazing, and shows exactly what can be achieved through strong legislation, a well staffed directorate and rigorous enforcement. The fine for illegal employment of children is $1,300 and inspections are conducted on a regular basis by a staff of 244 people. These efforts and determination have proven to be effective: during 1986, more than 250,000 inspections in 19,274 establishments, revealed only 123 cases of illegal child labor. As can be seen in Hong Kong, changes are possible through determination and strong enforcement, showing that it’s the law, children are not to work, and they are supposed to be reaping the increased knowledge from an education.\(^{39}\)

In general, in order to eliminate child labor, society must change and accept that it is better for the whole. ILO director, Michael Hansenne says, “you must create a movement for change, a movement against child labor that would involve governments, but also the media, communities, and non-government organizations involved in human rights, women’s issues, and child issues.”\(^{40}\) Now is the time to make the changes once and for all, freeing children of their burdens, allowing them to explore education and all that the world has to offer them. Cooperation, universal understanding, and follow-through will be the keys to unlocking the doors for working children everywhere.

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\(^{40}\) Anonymous, “Danger: Children at work,” 43.
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