

A Film Guide to Discussing Faith and Immigration

MADE IN L.A.

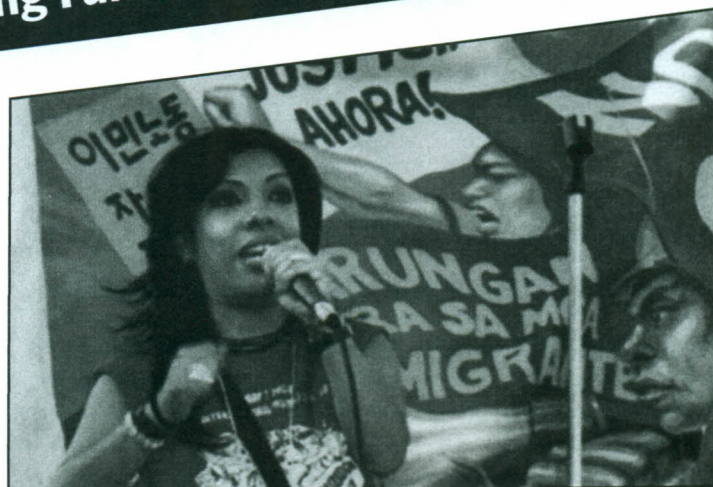
Genre: Documentary (unrated); 70 minutes

Issue: *Made in L.A.* presents the challenges faced by undocumented workers in the United States, including the obstacles to getting fair wages for the work they do, decent working hours, and humane working conditions.

Synopsis: This film depicts the stories of three Latina immigrants (Maria, Lupe, and Maura) working in garment sweatshops in Los Angeles. Most undocumented workers believe they do not have protection from the American legal system—leaving them vulnerable to unjust conditions like unsafe workplaces and illegal wages and work hours. However, in this film the women join a grassroots organizing movement, sue clothing retailer Forever 21 for basic labor protections, and win. The story sheds light on the contradiction of consumers who take an anti-immigration stance while at the same time welcoming and benefiting from products made with cheap labor.

Faith perspective: In an Old Testament teaching, God calls us to reckon with the ways we participate in the exploitation of workers: “You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt” (Deuteronomy 24:15).

As Christians, how do we reconcile a consumer mentality, which demands the lowest price, with the biblical command to pursue justice, such as fair wages for workers? Whose responsibility is it to protect undocumented workers from labor exploitation—the employer, the consumer, or the worker? How should we respond knowing that consumer demand often has unintended, but still



harmful consequences that are difficult for us to see? Will we be held to account for our complicity in unjust economic systems?

Guides: In addition to the theological reflection from Sojourners below, a discussion guide (www.madeinla.com/get/resources#toolkit_guides) on the *Made in L.A.* website offers a number of conversation starters on issues presented in the movie, including immigration, sweatshops, women’s empowerment, and labor and employment. Another discussion guide from the United Methodist Task Force on Immigration (<http://new.gbqm-umc.org/media/pdf/madeinlastudy.pdf>) includes sample screening flyers and tips for getting involved in the issue.

Website: www.madeinla.com (DVD available for purchase)

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Theological Reflection

1. Out of fears for their safety, Maura left her three children behind when she came to the United States to try to earn enough money to support them. How do you feel about her choice to leave her children behind? Do you think she should be able to bring her children to the U.S. now that she has worked here for more than 20 years?
2. During Lupe’s trip to New York, she visits mu-

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seums and takes a trip to Ellis Island, where she learns about Jewish and Polish immigrants who organized and fought for fair treatment in garment sweatshops. Throughout U.S. history, the most recently-arrived group of migrants has often been the target of racism, marginalization, and violence. Is racism a factor in the treatment of immigrants in our society today? Do you notice it in your community or church? How can Christians address the connection between racism and the treatment of immigrants?

3. *O God, who created all peoples in your image, we thank you for the wonderful diversity of races and cultures in this world. Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of fellowship and show us your presence in those who differ most from us, until our knowledge of your love is made perfect in our love for all your children; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.* —“Thanksgiving for the Diversity of Races and Cultures,” Book of Common Prayer, 1979

Unlike political nation-states, the church is a global community. As Christians, how do we reconcile an “us vs. them” mentality in the immigration debate with scripture’s teaching that we are all connected through Christ, and that we are called to love our brothers and sisters as ourselves? Should these scriptural tenets inform how we treat undocumented immigrants?

4. The global economic system requires a large population of laborers to produce products and services at low cost. What kinds of worker exploitation are portrayed in the film?

5. One of the main myths about immigrants in our society is that “they take” American jobs. Do you think immigrants pose an economic threat to native-born workers? If yes, articulate why and how you see this happening. If no, how would you explain your view to someone else?

6. Fairly-produced products are often more expensive because employers have to pay a livable wage, maintain safe working conditions, and consider

environmental impact in their operations. As a result, some people think that purchasing fairly made products is a privilege for the wealthy. What do you think? How could we address these concerns?

7. Lupe states that there are times where immigrants in the U.S. feel as if they do not exist because they do not speak the language; they live day to day trying to go about their lives and work under the radar. Do you think God would want people to live this way? How can we as Christians help undocumented immigrants live into all God has planned for their lives?

8. Most immigrants come to the United States to work and are able to find jobs in various sectors of the economy, with or without legal permission to do so. Many are paid below minimum wage and work long hours. Sometimes they do not get paid at all, which is known as wage theft. Is this system just? How can we ensure fair treatment and equal standards for all workers?

9. *Prayer of Reflection: Grant us humility in our use of the land and generosity in our enjoyment of the riches of the land.*

With the victory against Forever 21, the film stated that more and more companies are going overseas for production so they can continue to get cheap labor. Should all American-based companies be required to pay a “living wage,” no matter where the workers are located? If so, why? If not, why not?

10. The people featured in the movie were able to get Forever 21 to meet their demands because they spoke with a loud, unified voice. What role does grassroots organizing play in our ability to make effective change? What organizing skills, if any, did you learn from the movie? Name a time you have participated in an organizing group for a cause and how it turned out.