

## The Invisible Hand of Diplomacy

*Chinese Textiles and U.S. Manufacturing in the 1970s*

---

**ABSTRACT** In December 1977, a tiny group of U.S. glove makers—most of whom were African American and Latina women—launched a petition before the U.S. International Trade Commission calling for protection from rising imports. Their target was China. Represented by the Work Glove Manufacturers Association, their petition called for quotas on a particular kind of glove entering the United States from China: cotton work gloves. This was a watershed moment. For the first time since the Communist Party came to power in 1949, U.S. workers singled out Chinese goods in pursuit of import relief. Because they were such a small group taking on a country as large as China, their supporters championed the cause as one of David versus Goliath. Yet the case has been forgotten, partly because the glove workers lost. Here I uncover their story, bringing the history of 1970s deindustrialization in the United States into conversation with U.S.-China rapprochement, one of the most significant political transformations of the Cold War. The case, and indeed the loss itself, reveals the tensions between the interests of U.S. workers, corporations, and diplomats. Yet the case does not provide a simple narrative of U.S. workers' interests being suppressed by diplomats and policymakers nurturing globalized trade ties. Instead, it also underscored the conflicting interests within the U.S. labor movement at a time when manufacturing companies were moving their production jobs to East Asia. **KEYWORDS** Textile industry, U.S.-China trade, U.S.-China relations, deindustrialization, diplomacy, Work Glove Manufacturers Association, International Trade Commission

---

'Bout everybody but Newark Maid fled to wherever in the Far East the labor force was abundant and cheap, to the Philippines first, then Korea and Taiwan, and now to China.<sup>1</sup>

—Philip Roth, *American Pastoral*

Philip Roth's fictional reimagining of glove manufacturing in the United States during the late 1960s and 1970s painted a world of industrial decline and eroded community. Newark Maid, the glove company inherited by the

---

1. Philip Roth, *American Pastoral* (London: Vintage Books, 1998), 26.

novel's anti-hero, the Swede, moved its production abroad in the early 1970s. Yet, readers were told, the company had remained in town longer than most. Compelled by a patrician "duty to long-standing employees," the Swede had kept his doors open "for some six years after the '67 riots." Rather than closing down, he cut his workers' hours instead. But as the new decade unfolded, "industry-wide economic realities" meant that he too shifted his manufacturing to Puerto Rico. By the 1980s, the Swede was considering moving once more, this time to Asia where labor was "abundant and cheap."<sup>2</sup>

Roth's depiction of the disintegration of Newark's glove industry spoke of a broader tale of deindustrialization in the United States. The 1970s was a period of economic upheaval triggered by the end of the gold standard, oil crises, and skyrocketing inflation and unemployment. It was marred by corporate quests to decrease labor costs—the Swede's "economic realities"—and the corresponding closure of factories.

The pursuit of cheaper production and movement of capital to low-wage labor markets was not a new phenomenon. In the first half of the twentieth century, U.S. textile manufacturers shifted their locations within the United States itself, searching for non-labor towns in New England and the Midwest, and eventually the South. By the 1970s, however, the effects of these capital moves were felt nationally as well as locally, as textile manufacturing increasingly relocated abroad. The textile industry was not alone. This was a period of declining manufacturing employment in the United States as a whole, a structural shift from factories to finance.<sup>3</sup>

Amidst these changes, U.S. workers in industries ranging from auto, mining, and construction to textiles and apparel sustained some of the largest workplace organizing efforts since the 1930s. They expanded their fight to

2. Ibid, 24–26. For more on the Newark rebellion and its impact on local commerce, see: Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 374–78.

3. Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the 1970s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). On the economic flux of the 1970s, see: Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History From Civil Rights To Economic Inequality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Greta R. Krippner, *Capitalizing on Crisis: The Political Origins of the Rise of Finance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). On the movement of capital to low-wage, often non-union, communities within the United States in earlier periods, see: Beth English, *A Common Thread: Labor, Politics, and Capital Mobility in the Textile Industry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006); Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

protect jobs that were becoming increasingly precarious due in large part to rapidly rising imports. School teachers, retail workers and shipbuilders similarly fought, in this decade, for better working conditions. The 1970s was also, then, a period of immense strike waves, unionization efforts, and resistance by workers throughout the nation.<sup>4</sup>

In late 1977, a small group of workers from glove factories based largely in the Midwest and South launched one such fight. Roth's fiction may have presented a picture of the inevitability of factory closures, but these workers saw things differently. Represented by the Work Glove Manufacturers Association (WGMA), they petitioned the U.S. International Trade Commission (ITC) to impose quotas on cotton work gloves entering the United States from China in an attempt to halt the job losses they were facing. Theirs was a tiny industry. Only about 8,000 people, the vast majority of whom were women of color, manufactured cotton work gloves. Because they were such a small group taking on a country as large as China, their supporters—including long-time labor journalist Victor Riesel—championed the case as one of David versus Goliath.<sup>5</sup>

It was also a watershed moment. For the first time since the Communist Party came to power in 1949, U.S. workers directly targeted Chinese goods in their pursuit of import relief. Despite this distinction, the case has received little scholarly attention. This is perhaps in part because the WGMA lost. On first inspection, the case provides little more than an example of the first time section 406 of the 1974 Trade Act was invoked, an import restraint that applied specifically to communist countries.<sup>6</sup> The case may have also been

4. Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); John Shelton, *Teacher Strike!: Public Education and the Making of a New American Political Order* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017); Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, Cal Winslow, eds., *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s* (New York: Verso, 2010); Timothy J. Minchin, *Empty Mills: The Fight against Imports and the Decline of the U.S. Textile Industry* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013); Timothy J. Minchin, "Don't Sleep with Stevens!: The J. P. Stevens Boycott and Social Activism in the 1970s," *Journal of American Studies* 39, no. 3 (2005): 511–43; Jefferson Cowie, *Staying' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2012); Thomas W. Zeiler, "Requiem for the Common Man: Class, the Nixon Economic Shock, and the Perils of Globalization," *Diplomatic History* 37, no. 1 (January 2013): 1–23.

5. Victor Riesel, "Red Sales in U.S." syndicated article, dispatched Dec. 19, 1977, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department Records #5619/016, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, N.Y.

6. Scholars who have explored the case have done so from the perspective of international law. However, they do not go much further than to note this as the first case under section 406 of the 1974 Trade Act. Martin F. Klingenberg and Joseph E. Pattison, "Joint Ventures in the People's

overlooked because the histories of U.S.-China relations in the 1970s typically begin with and are dominated by President Richard Nixon and Chairman Mao Zedong, both as actors and symbols of elite policymaking.<sup>7</sup>

By exploring the glove workers' story, this article draws the gaze of twentieth-century international history and histories of U.S. capitalism both downward and outward. It broadens the international historian's realm of ideas and elites to include methodologies of social history that center the experiences of ordinary people as they navigated global transformations.<sup>8</sup> And it internationalizes the lens often used by historians of twentieth-century U.S. capitalism that focuses on domestic politics.<sup>9</sup>

---

Republic of China: The New Legal Environment," *Virginia Journal of International Law* 19 (1979): 825; Joseph A. Calabrese, "Market Disruption Caused by Imports from Communist Countries: Analysis of Section 406 of the Trade Act of 1974," *Cornell International Law Journal* 14 (1981): 121; John P. Erlick, "Relief from Imports from Communist Countries: The Trials and Tribulations of Section 406," *Law and Policy in International Business* 13 (1981): 621; John J. Sullivan, "US Trade Laws Hinder the Development of US-PRC Trade," *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law* 22 (1983): 137; Susan W. Liebler, "Import Relief on Imports from the People's Republic of China," *Loyola of Los Angeles International and Comparative Law Journal* 12 (1989): 18.

7. Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Yafeng Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy: US-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-1972* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2012); David Shambaugh, *Tangled Titans: The United States and China* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013); Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2007); William C. Kirby, Robert S. Ross, and Gong Li, eds., *Normalization of US-China Relations: An International History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Mahmud Ali, *US-China Cold War Collaboration, 1971-1989* (London: Routledge, 2005); Rosemary Foot, *The Practice Of Power: US Relations with China since 1949* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

8. This article builds on examples from historians such as Moon-Ho Jung, Penny Von Eschen, and Jana Lipman who centre labor in their histories of the United States in the world. Moon-Ho Jung, *The Rising Tide of Color: Race, State Violence, and Radical Movements across the Pacific* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014); Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Penny Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Jana Lipman, *Guantanamo: A Working-Class History between Empire and Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). See also: Julie Green, "The Labor of Empire: Recent Scholarship on US History and Imperialism," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 1, no. 2 (2004), 113-29.

9. Twentieth-century histories of U.S. capitalism have tended to remain within the domestic sphere. This is all the more surprising given this is precisely the moment in which the United States' global role expanded. Four recent collected volumes illustrate the domestic focus: Sven Beckert and Christine Desan, eds., *American Capitalism: New Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Louis Hyman and Edward E. Baptist, eds., *American Capitalism: A Reader* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014); Kim Phillips-Fein and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *What's Good for Business:*

A new group of scholars are beginning to explore the U.S.-China trade relationship of the 1970s. Often, however, they either retain an emphasis on elite politics by examining economic policymaking or they take a causal approach, focusing on how non-state economic actors affected the developing diplomatic ties.<sup>10</sup> In this article I approach bilateral trade from a different angle, exploring the repercussions of its development for workers in the United States. I do so by bringing the deindustrialization of the 1970s U.S. economy into conversation with U.S.-China rapprochement: one of the most significant diplomatic shifts of the Cold War.<sup>11</sup>

It is precisely because the WGMA lost that its case is important. The loss reveals the tensions between U.S. domestic interests and diplomatic concerns. This was a time of heightened uncertainty in U.S.-China relations. In January 1972, Nixon and Mao ended what had seemed an intractable Cold War isolation, but bilateral diplomacy remained in limbo. Leaders in both countries negotiated the terms of full diplomatic normalization for an

---

*Business and American Politics since World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Nelson Lichtenstein, ed., *American Capitalism: Social Thought and Political Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). For an appraisal of the relationships between the history of U.S. capitalism and the histories of the United States in the world, see Paul A. Kramer, "Embedding Capital: Political-Economic History, the United States, and the World," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 15 (2016): 331–62.

10. For the former, see, for example: Shu Guang Zhang, *Beijing's Economic Statecraft during the Cold War, 1949–1991* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); Min Song, "A Dissonance in Mao's Revolution: Chinese Agricultural Imports from the United States, 1972–1978," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (2014): 409–30; Kazushi Minami, "Re-Examining the End of Mao's Revolution: China's Changing Statecraft and Sino-American Relations, 1973–1978," *Cold War History* 16, no. 4 (2016): 359–75; Willam Burr, "'Casting a Shadow' over Trade: The Problem of Private Claims and Blocked Assets in U.S.-China Relations," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 2 (2009): 315–49; For the latter, see: Christian Talley, *Forgotten Vanguard: Informal Diplomacy and the Rise of United States–China Trade, 1972–1980* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018); Mao Lin, "More than a Tacit Alliance: Trade, Soft Power, and U.S.-Chinese Rapprochement Reconsidered," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 24 (2017): 41–77; Kazushi Minami, "Oil for the Lamps of America? Sino-American Oil Diplomacy, 1973–1979," *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 5 (2017): 959–84.

11. The experiences of textile workers in China producing the gloves are an important avenue for further research, but my focus here is upon workers in the United States. During the 1970s, in the waning years of the Cultural Revolution, workers in factories across China resisted the oppressive power of the recently reinstated old cadres. Some workers used the factory equipment to wash their clothing. Other workers took factory goods to give to family and friends or barter on the black market. Still others played poker when their supervisors' backs were turned. See, for example, Frank Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962–1976* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 259. On the labor politics of Chinese textiles in the first half of the twentieth century, see: Elizabeth Perry, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1993), 167–215.

unexpectedly prolonged period of seven years, until December 1978. Within this context of rapprochement, the new trade ties unfolded erratically.

Policymakers from the top echelons of U.S. power held heightened concerns about the WGMA's case because of the politically volatile environment. They feared it would harm the movement toward normalization: Chinese leaders might see the case as carrying U.S. governmental endorsement and retaliate by slowing down the diplomatic negotiations. With these concerns in mind, officials from the State Department fought against the efforts to impose quotas. In a number of instances, they attempted to stop the workers from launching their case. Other policymakers directly intervened with Chinese trade officials to encourage a temporary halt in cotton glove sales to the United States to make it seem as though quotas were unnecessary, efforts that did eventually play a role in the outcome of the case. Operating through quiet diplomatic channels, theirs was an invisible hand of diplomacy: interfering in the situation and protecting political interests at all costs.

Nonetheless, this is not a simple narrative of U.S. workers' interests being impeded by diplomatic expressions of power. It was complicated by a number of structural changes occurring in the U.S. economy at the time. Some workers had an interest in encouraging rather than limiting the imports of cotton work gloves. Cotton growers, for example, saw China's emerging manufacturing capacity as a potential boon. They hoped that as China developed the ability to make more and more textiles—including work gloves—its demand for U.S. cotton might correspondingly increase. China had already made significant cotton purchases earlier in the decade, and U.S. farmers were eager to see these purchases continue.

The WGMA case was additionally complicated by the nature of the gloves themselves. The main users of cotton work gloves were workers in other manufacturing sectors.<sup>12</sup> Representatives from large industrial corporations in the steel and auto industries purchased the gloves and distributed them to their workers, the majority of whom were men. These workers wore cotton gloves to protect their hands, sometimes underneath larger heavy-duty gloves. Workers in these industries were themselves contending with threats from

12. There were two classes of consumers of the gloves: (1) those purchasing the gloves at retail for use at work or around the home, (2) industrial users purchasing the gloves in volume and distributing them to their workers. The latter industrial users represented the vast majority of consumers. See: "Certain Gloves from the People's Republic of China: Report to the President," USITC Publication 867, March 1978, p. A-14.

overseas imports and facing job insecurity.<sup>13</sup> As their own industries fought to remain viable, managers cut production costs by purchasing the cheapest cotton gloves, which usually meant imports.<sup>14</sup> They understood their interests to lie in increasing the supply of low-cost cotton work gloves, of which China was fast becoming a source.

These other trades employed considerably more workers compared to the cotton work glove industry. The size of their industry combined with intersecting racialized and gendered notions about whose voices were newsworthy meant that the plight of the predominantly Latina and African American women producing the cotton work gloves received little media publicity, despite the fact a former communist foe was their target. Pockets of coverage did appear in local newspapers and fleetingly in the *Wall Street Journal*, but the workers themselves were not interviewed. Race and gender operated in other ways too. As with leadership positions in other textile organizations—such as the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union or the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union—the people speaking on behalf of the cotton glove workers at the International Trade Commission were white men.<sup>15</sup> None of the women who made the cotton work gloves were invited to testify.

Finally, the case was complicated by the fact that around 60 percent of all cotton work gloves imported from China were purchased by companies that also manufactured them.<sup>16</sup> In other words, some U.S. corporations were simultaneously producers and importers of cotton work gloves. As they struggled to keep their factories open, managers began to decrease their production of the gloves. By replacing their own lines of cotton gloves with foreign imports, the factories hoped to save on costs and keep their doors open—at least temporarily.

The place of U.S. cotton work glove workers within these webs of shifting corporate and diplomatic interests reveals an economy and society in flux. Their case is part of a much bigger story of a new phase of globalized manufacturing. It unfolded in a moment when the global economy was

13. On the steel industry in this era see, for example: Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

14. In 1976, the average value per dozen pair of cotton gloves without fourchettes or sidewalls imported from China was \$3.28. The average value for the same year from other foreign sources was \$4.30. The average value of cotton gloves sold by U.S. producers was \$7.40. See: "Certain Gloves," p. A-23.

15. Timothy J. Minchin, *Empty Mills*, 73.

16. "Certain Gloves," p. 7.

becoming more integrated, international politics were entering a new period of détente, and rising numbers of multinational corporations began to move their manufacturing offshore.<sup>17</sup> U.S.-China relations encapsulated the changing diplomatic and economic dynamics of this decade, as the two nations went from ideological foes to amicable trade partners. Forty years earlier, U.S. businesspeople had seen in China the tantalizing promise of “400 million customers.”<sup>18</sup> In the 1970s, this perception began to change. As U.S. manufacturers increasingly shifted their production overseas, China offered them a new promise: 800 million workers.

### THE GLOVE CAPITAL OF AMERICA

In the 1970s, the “glove capital of America” could be found in Chillicothe, a small Missouri town just over an hour’s drive from Kansas City.<sup>19</sup> With three glove factories in its bounds, Chillicothe attracted workers from across the region. Boss Manufacturing, with headquarters in Illinois, was the country’s oldest and largest company that made work gloves. It had been in Chillicothe since 1943. Lambert Manufacturing arrived a year later when brothers Joe and James Lambert established first one and later a second factory. In September 1962, a third company came to Chillicothe, the Mid West Glove Corporation.

By the early 1970s the three companies employed just over 1,000 people.<sup>20</sup> With a population of around 9,000 people, gloves lay at the center of

17. On the 1970s as marking the movement away from Cold War antagonism toward more integrated globalized politics, see: Barbara Zanchetta, *The Transformation of American International Power in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Alfred E. Eckes Jr. and Thomas W. Zeiler, *Globalization and the American Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). On the increasingly numbers of manufacturing-based multinational corporations, see: Mira Wilkins, *The Maturing of Multinational Enterprise: American Business Abroad from 1914 to 1970* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); Geoffrey Jones, “Multinationals from the 1930s to the 1980s,” in *Leviathans: Multinational Corporations and the New Global History*, ed. Alfred D. Chandler Jr. and Bruce Mazlish (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 81–103.

18. Carl Crow, *Four Hundred Million Customers: The Experiences—Some Happy, Some Sad of an American in China and What They Taught Him* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937). See also: Elizabeth Ingleson, “Four Hundred Million Customers’: Carl Crow and the Legacy of 1930s Sino-American Trade,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 35, no. 1 (July 2016): 103–24.

19. A title for the city discussed in: “Lambert Firms Now Employ 680, Sales Are \$11 Million,” *Chillicothe Constitution-Tribune*, December 17, 1973.

20. In 1973, Lambert Company had five plants that employed 680 people, Boss Company employed 170 people, and Mid-West Company employed 250 people. Figures compiled from: “Boss



Chillicothe's economic life. The vital local importance of this one industry was typical for workers at gloves factories across the country. Located in largely rural areas, they were usually the major source of employment in their communities. The Indianapolis Glove Company at Houlika, Mississippi, for example, employed 180 people from a population of 646. Nearby, in the tiny village of Slate Springs, more than half the population of only 105 people worked at the Kaul Glove Company.<sup>21</sup> Chillicothe had the largest concentration of factories, but the majority of cotton gloves were produced in Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Iowa, North Carolina, and Tennessee.<sup>22</sup>

When the WGMA launched its case in 1977, employment in the U.S. glove industry was decreasing rapidly. The 1973 recession and skyrocketing inflation had made an already precarious industry more vulnerable. Between 1974 and 1977, U.S. employment in the cotton glove industry dropped by 16 percent.<sup>23</sup> Chillicothe's Mid West Glove Corporation laid off 68 percent of the workforce in this three-year period.<sup>24</sup> Those who remained at one of Chillicothe's companies worked a diminished schedule of only three days a week. Similar to the Swede's efforts to delay his company's movements overseas in *American Pastoral*, management at the Chillicothe factories had limited their workers' hours in preference to forcing redundancies. The typical employee was female: women comprised between 80 to 85 percent of workers in the cotton glove industry. She was likely to be African-American or recently immigrated to the United States from Latin America. On average, she would have been older than workers in other manufacturing industries.<sup>25</sup>

One generation earlier, textile and apparel workers in the United States were mostly young and unmarried white women.<sup>26</sup> In the 1960s, civil rights

---

Glove Plant Marks 30th Year in Chillicothe," *Chillicothe Constitution-Tribune*, November 26, 1973; "Lambert Firms Now Employ 680, Sales Are \$11 Million," *The Chillicothe Constitution-Tribune*, December 17, 1973; "Mid West Glove Corporation—It's Young and Still Growing," *Chillicothe Constitution-Tribune*, February 19, 1974.

21. Testimony of David R. Bowen before the ITC, February 7, 1978, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

22. "Certain gloves," p. 2.

23. Paul G. Schulz, Statement National Press Club News Conference, December 15, 1977, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

24. Statement of E. Thomas Coleman before the ITC, February 7, 1978, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

25. Testimony of John C. Danforth before the ITC, February 7, 1978, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

26. On this demographic shift, see: Ellen Israel Rosen, *Making Sweatshops: The Globalization of the U.S. Apparel Industry* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2002), 115.

activists had fought to end the textile industry's refusal to employ women of color in manufacturing positions. Once an exclusively white industry, textiles were transformed during the civil rights era, changing the lives of many African American and Latina women.<sup>27</sup> Now, these workers' place within the industry was threatened by accelerating levels of imports.

As with the majority of her co-workers, the cotton glove worker's job was likely to be the sole source of income for her family. Probably, she worried that her factory would follow those in the neighboring towns of Spickard and Brunswick, which by 1976 had closed their doors. She knew that the prospects for alternative employment in Chillicothe were slim, and chances were that either her age or family responsibilities made leaving the community in search of a new job extremely difficult. In the larger scheme of things, cotton work glove manufacturing was a small industry. But for those living and working in these rural areas, the industry was, as a local reporter said of Chillicothe, "the backbone of this town for many years."<sup>28</sup>

The WGMA case dealt with a particular type of cotton work glove: those without fourchettes or sidewalls, thin strips of material linking the front and back fingers of the glove. These gloves required less sewing in the production process and were therefore less labor-intensive. Hong Kong was the single largest supplier of such gloves for U.S. importers throughout most of the 1970s. But as the United States and China reestablished trade ties, China quickly became one of the top suppliers. In 1976, Chinese gloves reached a high of just under 20 percent of all U.S. imports of such goods, second only to Hong Kong (fig. 1).

Yet these numbers masked the fact that many U.S. textile imports from Hong Kong were increasingly likely to have originated in China. In the 1970s, close to the entirety of China-Hong Kong trade moved in one direction: from the mainland to the colony. This system provided China with much-needed foreign exchange to pay for its own imports and allowed Hong Kong to use the goods for re-export and transshipment. Hong Kong

27. Nancy MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 79; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 114–16. On the racially charged limitations to these changes in the textile industry, see especially: Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

28. Doug Pearson, "Strictly Personal," *Chillicothe Constitution-Tribune*, February 8, 1978, 4.

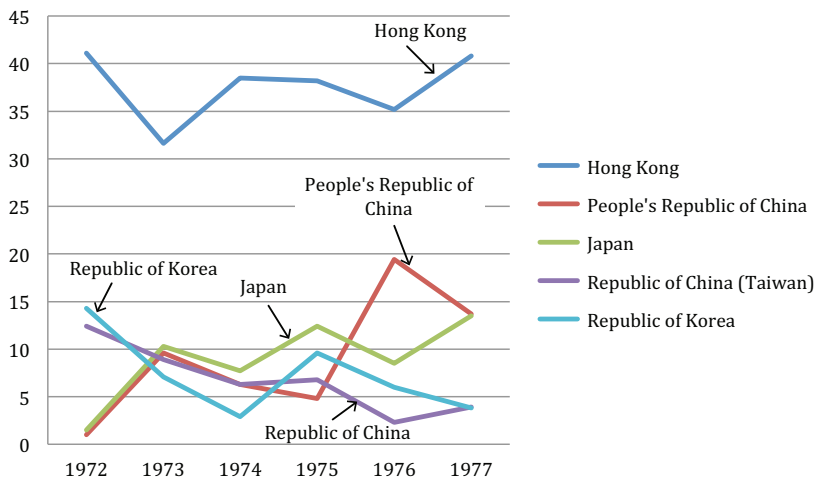


FIGURE 1. U.S. imports of cotton work gloves without fourchettes or sidewalls, percentage share of imports by country, 1972–1977. *Source:* Data retrieved from “Certain gloves from the People’s Republic of China: Report to the President,” USITC Publication 867, March 1978, p. A-9.

reshipped around one-third of its imported Chinese goods to foreign nations.<sup>29</sup> As China slowly integrated itself into the global capitalist trade system, it used its proximity to Hong Kong to do so.<sup>30</sup>

The dual problems of increasing imports and decreasing employment facing U.S. cotton glove workers reflected the wider challenges in the textile industry. In the years following World War II, when most U.S. manufacturing industries expanded, textile manufacturers already began to face heightened pressures from rising imports. They became one of the earliest and most vocal groups calling on Congress to strengthen protectionist measures.<sup>31</sup>

29. A. Doak Barnett, *China’s Economy in Global Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1981), 165.

30. As opposed to erstwhile hopes of building a global socialist trade system that had shaped the early years of the PRC. See: William C. Kirby, “China’s Internationalization in the Early People’s Republic: Dreams of a Socialist World Economy,” *The China Quarterly* 188 (December 2006): 870–90.

31. Nitsan Chorev, *Remaking U.S. Trade Policy: From Protectionism to Globalization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 63; Robert Baldwin, “The Changing Nature of U.S. Trade Policy since World War II,” in *The Structure and Evolution of Recent U.S. Trade Policy*, ed. Robert Baldwin and Anne O. Krueger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 12–13.

Nonetheless, in just two years between 1958 and 1960, the number of cotton goods imported into the United States increased by almost 150 percent.<sup>32</sup> This trend continued and deepened in the years that followed. By 1978, imports had climbed so high that the U.S. textile industry was in a \$6 billion deficit.<sup>33</sup> The textile industry, along with the steel and auto industries, became one of the key battlegrounds in the 1970s for organized labor's broader struggle against factory closures and imports.

By the time the WGMA launched its case, U.S. textile unions were deep into campaigns for protection against imports from Japan, Korea, the Republic of China (Taiwan), Hong Kong, and elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> The union movement had launched a series of "Buy American" campaigns encouraging consumers to purchase goods manufactured within the United States. Leaders linked the buying of U.S.-made products with the protection of jobs—although the link was more tenuous than the campaign suggested.<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere, union leaders led highly publicized nationwide boycotts against the giant textile firm J. P. Stevens, which had worked for years to undercut its workers' efforts to form unions in the South.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout the decade, the U.S. textile industry was also focused on the sixth round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations that had begun in 1973 and were to continue until 1979. The industry lobbied for textile and apparel exports from all countries to be excluded from the GATT discussions. They wanted to ensure that the tariffs entering the United States remained at their current level.<sup>37</sup>

By 1977, textile workers across the country staged protest marches and sit-downs pushing the Jimmy Carter administration to renew and strengthen another agreement: the Multi Fiber Arrangement (MFA). First implemented in 1974, the MFA provided a cap on the quantity of textile and apparel

32. Chorev, *Remaking U.S. Trade Policy*, 64.

33. A. Doak Barnett, *China's Economy in Global Perspective* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1981), 528.

34. Nitsan Chorev, "Making and Remaking State Institutional Arrangements: The Case of U.S. Trade Policy in the 1970s," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 18, no. 1–2 (June 2005): 12.

35. Dana Frank, *Buy American: The Untold Story of Economic Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 146.

36. Timothy J. Minchin, "'Don't Sleep with Stevens!,'" 512. See also: Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door*, 105–127; Lawrence Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), 303–4.

37. Vinod K. Aggarwal, *Liberal Protectionism: The International Politics of Organized Textile Trade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 160–61.

imports coming from the so-called developing world into the developed world.<sup>38</sup> Due to lobbying efforts of the AFL-CIO, American Textile Manufacturers Institute (ATMI), and members of Congress, President Carter did renew the MFA in December 1977, providing a further three years of restraints on textile and clothing imports. But because of the absence of full diplomatic relations, the MFA did not extend to goods imported from China.

U.S.-China trade ties were re-established amidst contestation between textile imports and production. China was only a recent trading partner and yet its potential textile clout was already becoming apparent, especially in certain areas of the industry. In 1976, for example, China sold more white cotton shirts to the United States than any other item, around \$13.5 million worth of shirts. In 1977, this figure decreased to only \$8 million, but the shirts still comprised some of the single highest value items China sold to the United States.<sup>39</sup>

Yet China's overall textile sales still paled in comparison to the United States' other major trading partners. By contrast, in 1978 the United States imported cotton goods from Hong Kong worth \$667.8 million.<sup>40</sup> Hong Kong's sales of cotton goods alone were nearly double China's *total* sales to the United States in the same year, which stood at \$324 million.<sup>41</sup> While in certain items, such as cotton work gloves, Hong Kong's trade figures included sizeable numbers of Chinese re-exports as well, only a small proportion of Hong Kong's total cotton goods originated in China.

Nonetheless, the speed with which China was able to become a major player in some sectors so soon after reopening trade with the United States confirmed fears the U.S. textile industry had harbored for a while. In January 1968—just a few weeks before President Nixon's inauguration when economic ties between the United States and China were still years away from developing—A. Lee Parsons, director of foreign operations for American Textile Manufacturers Institute (ATMI), travelled to Asia and noted the potential threat Chinese textiles posed to the U.S. industry. The high quality of Chinese textiles was extolled “all through the orient,” Parsons reported to

38. Steve Dryden, *Trade Warriors: USTR and the American Crusade for Free Trade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 190.

39. “Top Ten Imports from China, 1976,” *China Business Review*, September 1977, 2; “Top Fifteen U.S. imports from China, 1977,” *China Business Review*, March 1978, 42.

40. “The multifiber arrangement from 1973 to 1980,” USITC publication 1131, March 1981, p. 48.

41. Barnett, *China's Economy in Global Perspective*, 507.

the ATMI leadership back home.<sup>42</sup> This was an industry that might soon cause concern for the United States, he warned.

A few years later, in response to organized labor's campaigns against rising imports, Congress considered two major pieces of legislation designed to protect U.S. industries: the Mills bill (1970) and the Burke-Hartke bill (1972). These laws would have made foreign direct investment considerably harder for U.S. corporations, placing significant limitations on their efforts to move manufacturing overseas.<sup>43</sup> But the bills failed to pass, due in large measure to the lobbying efforts of U.S. business leaders.<sup>44</sup> Their defeat was followed soon after by the 1974 Trade Act, which encouraged foreign imports and cleared the path for more U.S. corporations to become multinational manufacturers.<sup>45</sup> Thrown into this volatile mix was the newly unfolding U.S.-China relationship. By 1977, a decade after Parsons visited Asia, his fears about China started to be realized.

#### **"EVERY INDUSTRY IN AMERICA IS ULTIMATELY VULNERABLE": THE WGMA LAUNCHES ITS CASE**

In early 1977 Libertyville, Illinois—a town with its own history of textile manufacturing—became the headquarters for the WGMA's battle against Chinese imports. Leaders saw Libertyville's name itself as a symbol of resistance against the communist nation. Earl Rau, president of Indianapolis Glove Company, had just recently become head of the organization and he worked with executive director Paul Schulz to spearhead the efforts for protection from Chinese imports.

The industry had been contending with the impact of imports for years. In 1972 the United States imported around \$1.5 million worth of cotton work gloves. By 1977 this had ballooned to over \$12.7 million.<sup>46</sup> Demand for cotton work gloves was relatively inelastic and pegged closely to employment in the steel and auto industries. This meant that the increasing imports of

42. Cited in: Minchin, *Empty Mills*, 68–69.

43. Judith Stein, "Conflict, Change and Economic Policy in the Long 1970s," in *Rebel Rank and File*, ed. Aaron Brennet et al (2010), 90.

44. Stein, *Pivotal Decade*, 32–39. See also Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal*, (New York: Norton, 2009), 150–84.

45. Among other measures, the 1974 Trade Act included the Generalized Special Preferences (GSP), which provided preferential trade conditions for non-communist developing nations. The long-term effect of the GSP was to encourage U.S. corporations to outsource their labor abroad.

46. "Certain gloves," p. A-9.

cotton work gloves entering the United States crowded out domestic producers. In 1977 imports held over 20 percent of the market share, up from just 5 percent in 1972.<sup>47</sup> China was the only major source of gloves that did not face any import restrictions.

By the middle of 1977, Rauen and Schulz were ready to petition the ITC for quotas. But they were approached by members of the State Department who demanded they suspend their efforts until diplomatic relations were more stable.<sup>48</sup> State Department officials told them that it would undermine the newly elected President Carter's efforts to achieve progress in the normalization process. In August Secretary of State Cyrus Vance would visit China, where he hoped to move ahead on normalization negotiations, particularly disagreements regarding Taiwan.<sup>49</sup> The WGMA did halt its efforts, but Vance's trip was not the success the Carter administration had hoped for. Indeed, in September Deng Xiaoping, who had just recently reentered the Chinese Politburo Standing Committee, commented to U.S. journalists that the visit had represented a step backward in bilateral relations.<sup>50</sup>

After seeing the failure of Vance's trip, the WGMA leadership met again in November, this time in Atlanta. During this meeting, which Victor Riesel described with dramatic flourish as "sort of a war council," the WGMA decided to file its case.<sup>51</sup> A few days later, Rauen and Schulz received a phone call from the Department of Commerce. The official speaking at the other end of the line insisted that the WGMA postpone the petition once more and asked them to come immediately to Washington.

Rauen and Schulz flew to the capital soon thereafter where they met with policymakers including William Barraclough, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs. Barraclough urged them to delay their petition because the Carter administration was still concerned about the impact it would have on bilateral relations, especially

47. Ibid, p. A-13.

48. NCUSCT internal memorandum, "Chinese work gloves," 12 February, 1978, folder: textiles, box 39, United States-China Business Council Records, 1973-78, Gerald R. Ford Library, Grand Rapids, Mich.

49. Enrico Fardella, "The Sino-American Normalization: A Reassessment," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 4 (September 2009): 551-52.

50. Harry Harding, *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China Since 1972* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1992), 74.

51. Victor Riesel, "Red Sales in U.S.," syndicated article, dispatched December 19, 1977, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

in light of Deng's public rebukes. Achieving normalized diplomatic relations with China remained a first-term priority for the Carter administration, even if by the end of the year momentum was somewhat diminished.<sup>52</sup>

Behind the scenes, Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and U.S. diplomats in China had also become involved. In October—over a month before Rau and Schulz flew to Washington—Brzezinski contacted Leonard Woodcock at the U.S. Liaison Office in Beijing about the unfolding case. Woodcock was the former head of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union. Between 1970 and 1977, he had led the UAW's fight against foreign imports in the automobile industry, including a sixty-seven-day strike against management at General Motors in 1970. Now, as the most senior U.S. diplomat in China, Woodcock found himself on the other side of the debate about imports. Washington contacted him and asked his office to warn China's Ministry of Foreign Trade about the possibility that the case would be launched. Woodcock and his team obliged.

Under Woodcock's leadership, the Liaison Office encouraged Chinese trade officials to temporarily decrease their shipments of cotton work gloves. They warned PRC officials that if their shipments of work gloves were "sustained at their current high level," then they could "trigger substantial industry and Congressional pressures for U.S. [Government] action to limit the imports."<sup>53</sup> If the number of Chinese gloves was lower than the previous year, it might appear that Chinese imports were no longer posing a threat, they suggested. Chinese traders had already been closely following the WGMA's efforts. Upon the Liaison Office's advice, they continued to hold off on the number of gloves sent to U.S. markets in 1977 and redirected their gloves to Hong Kong.

Ignoring the protestations from the State and Commerce Departments, the WGMA filed its case with the ITC on December 15, 1977. Speaking at the National Press Club afterward, Schulz noted that in its seventy-five years of association, the WGMA had "never . . . been confronted with a situation so serious as the one we face now." Its members were unable to compete with the "rapid rise of under-priced products from a country which can totally ignore all cost factors in order to capture a significant segment of our market."

52. Breck Walker, "Friends but Not Allies: Cyrus Vance and the Normalization of Relations with China," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 4 (September 2009): 582–83.

53. Brzezinski staff evening report, October 1977, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Remote Archives Capture system, NLC-10-5-4-10-0.



Schulz framed the WGMA's efforts as setting an important precedent for other U.S. industries. "If a long established industry like ours can be driven to the wall within a few years by a sudden surge of imports from a nation like communist China, I submit that virtually every industry in America is ultimately vulnerable to predatory import invasions."<sup>54</sup> Yet Schultz's warning of the wider impact of trade with China did not gain wide traction. Given that the major users of the Chinese cotton work gloves were U.S. workers in large industrial sectors, this was not their clarion call to action against Chinese imports.

Despite the press conference, the case received little national media attention. For the women and their families in the glove industry, the case held immediate and very real implications. But for most Americans, the first attempt to impose quotas on Chinese goods passed by unnoticed. Victor Riesel was one of the few journalists outside Chillicothe who reported on it. Musing on the limited coverage the case drew, he argued, "since work gloves aren't steel, shoes, textiles and autos, the little industry . . . fell between the headlines."<sup>55</sup> Their eventual loss ensured their story would be forgotten altogether.

There was one group, however, watching the developments very closely. The National Council for U.S.-China Trade, established by the Nixon administration in 1973 but privately run, knew, like Schultz, that the case would set a precedent for other U.S. industries.<sup>56</sup> The National Council was the main U.S. organization responsible for aiding the unfolding trade relationship with China. Its members ranged from small individual importers to titans of industrial capitalism, such as Westinghouse and Boeing.

The National Council's leadership was concerned that if the WGMA won, larger U.S. industries would be encouraged to also pursue limitations on other Chinese goods. "Already there is talk of knitted gloves," an internal memorandum worried. "And this will broaden to include garments, other textiles and other industries." The National Council wrote directly to its members soliciting financial support for the defendants. One of its members led the defense, Richard Rivkin, president of the Latex Glove Company. Other members, such as Bob Boulange from J.C. Penney and Veronica Yhap

54. Paul G. Schulz, Statement National Press Club News Conference, December 15, 1977, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

55. Victor Riesel, "Red Sales in U.S.," syndicated article, dispatched December 19, 1977, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

56. For more on the National Council for U.S.-China Trade see Tally, *Forgotten Vanguard*.

from Dragon Lady Traders, worked closely with him.<sup>57</sup> As far as the National Council and its members were concerned, the case held the potential to unleash even bigger industry efforts for worker protection, a problem not only for diplomacy but also for its members' expanding economic roles in China.

#### THE ITC HEARING: PURSUING MARKET ORDER

The ITC began its two-day hearing into the case in early February 1978. Section 406 of the Trade Act required the WGMA to prove that the imports were "increasing rapidly, either absolutely or relatively, so as to be a significant cause of material injury, or threat thereof, to such domestic industry."<sup>58</sup> The WGMA focused on three main issues in its submission. First, China was not privy to the MFA restrictions faced by the United States' other trading partners. Second, because it was a communist country China's government could intervene to increase, decrease, or stop its trade at will, thereby disrupting the U.S. market and making it an unpredictable trading partner. Finally, the WGMA argued that wages in China bore so little resemblance to production costs that it was impossible for U.S. manufacturers to compete without resorting to similar conditions. Two Republican congressmen from Missouri testified in support of the glove workers, Representative Thomas Coleman and Senator John Danforth. Joining them was Democratic Representative David Bowen, from Mississippi.

Of all the major countries that sold cotton work gloves to the United States, China was the only partner that was not a signatory to the recently renewed MFA. This meant that, unlike the United States' other trading partners, China did not face a cap on the number of gloves it sold. "The sky is the ceiling for Chinese exports of cotton work gloves," declared Jacob Sheinkman, Secretary-Treasurer of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU), who spoke in support of the WGMA.<sup>59</sup> Sheinkman and the WGMA emphasised the order and stability that quotas

57. Internal memorandum, "Chinese Work Gloves," February 12, 1978, folder NCUSCT-Textiles, box 39, USCBC, Ford Library. On the National Council's financial support and role played by Rivkin, see: Memorandum from Bob Boulogne and Veronica Yhap to Members of the National Council Textiles Committee, February 2, 1978, folder: textiles, box 39, USCBC, Ford Library.

58. For more on section 406, see: Erlick, "Relief from Imports from Communist Countries: The Trials and Tribulations of Section 406," 621.

59. Testimony of Jacob Sheinkman, February 7, 1978, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

would provide to the domestic industry. Just as the MFA agreement provided some semblance of order to the imports coming from other countries, they argued that quotas on Chinese gloves would provide similar limitations.

The WGMA's concerns were compounded by the knowledge that some Chinese gloves were, in fact, levied with other restrictions. Because the United States and China did not have full diplomatic relations, China was not subject to Most-Favored Nation (MFN) trading status, exposing the knitted variety of cotton work gloves to higher import taxes. (In an indication of the complications of the trade restrictions, only gloves made using *knitted* cloth faced tariffs, while those made with woven cotton cloth were not affected by the lack of MFN trade status.) If China could become an important player in the market even with higher tariffs on its knitted gloves, then it represented a "threat for more profound disruption in the future" once the United States did eventually grant MFN status and therefore removed the tariffs on knitted gloves.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, given that cost bore little relation to the number of gloves China produced and sold, quotas rather than tariffs were the necessary form of trade restriction, the WGMA argued. Without such restrictions the United States was vulnerable to a potentially unlimited onslaught from a non-market economy. At the center of these arguments, the WGMA emphasized the need for so-called market order, framing its position as not seeking to halt Chinese imports altogether but as assisting U.S. producers to operate with more predictable forecasts.

Underlying the WGMA's arguments about market order and quotas lay a tension in the shifting interests of even its own members. Many U.S. companies were not only producers but also importers of cotton work gloves. Indeed, four of the five major U.S. *importers* of cotton work gloves from China were members of the WGMA.<sup>61</sup> These manufacturers of cotton work gloves were seeking relief from Chinese imports despite the fact they themselves purchased around 60 percent of all Chinese cotton work gloves imported into the United States.<sup>62</sup>

Because the cotton work glove market in the United States was so inelastic, as managers at these factories increased imports, domestic production

60. Brief by Work Glove Manufacturers Association, March 1, 1978, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

61. Internal memorandum, "Chinese Work Gloves," February 12, 1978, folder NCUSCT-Textiles, box 39, USCBC, Ford Library.

62. "Certain Gloves," p. 7.

correspondingly decreased. Women at the four WGMA factories still produced cotton work gloves, but they did so at diminishing rates. The WGMA's case did not aim to stop the shift to using overseas labor but rather assist companies make an orderly transition abroad.

These decisions to partially move manufacturing abroad revealed the limitations of an industry led by white men who accepted the premise that cheap labor was a necessary component of textile manufacturing.<sup>63</sup> The WGMA's struggle for market order was based on the same idea underpinning management's fight against unionization.<sup>64</sup> It relied on a premise that the only way to remain viable against imports was to keep the wages of their workers, mostly women of color, as low as possible.

#### THE ITC HEARING: FIGHTING "RED CHINA"

In addition to its focus on market order, the WGMA argued that China's communist system was a major reason to impose quotas. Its government was able to directly intervene in the market in ways that could have a sudden impact. Indeed, the decline in Chinese exports to the United States in 1977 proved this point. The decrease had only occurred after Chinese exporters had learned that the case was about to be launched against them—only after, therefore, the Liaison Office had intervened. Missouri Congressman Thomas Coleman implored the commissioners not to be “lulled into a false sense of security” by the “recent aberration in what is a patently clear long term trend of increasing imports.” It was diplomatic interests that had led to the decline, he argued. And the impact could be felt so suddenly because of the communist regime's control of the market.<sup>65</sup>

In the WGMA's eyes, the State Department's role in assisting China's interventions in 1977 was evidence of the willingness of U.S. diplomats to “sacrifice” U.S. workers for foreign policy considerations. They viewed foreign policy as “more important than the economic interest of United States firms and workers.” The WGMA argued that the State Department assumed that “our relationship with the People's Republic of China is so delicate that

63. On this assumption and its gendered basis, see, for example: Teri L. Caraway, *Assembling Women: The Feminization of Global Manufacturing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Joan M. Jensen and Sue Davidson (eds.), *A Needle, a Bobbin, a Strike: Women Needleworkers in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press: 1984).

64. Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door*, 105–127.

65. Statement by Thomas Coleman before the International Trade Commission, February 7, 1978, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

nothing should be done to disrupt it in its early days even if this means sacrificing the domestic cotton work glove industry—an industry of ‘relative insignificance.’” Inverting this argument, it suggested that the very fact that it was such a small industry meant that, “in the larger context of the relationship,” the Chinese placed little importance on it. Given China’s emphasis instead on the strategic and diplomatic aspects of the bilateral relationship, this was one more reason to protect U.S. workers, the WGMA suggested.<sup>66</sup>

None of the women working in the factories were invited to testify. But Representative Coleman did bring the voice of one male Missouri worker before the ITC. He read aloud excerpts from a letter one of his constituents had mailed to President Carter. Coleman did not explain whether or not the constituent worked at one of the glove factories, but they were certainly a concerned member of the Chillicothe community. “What if they should start importing peanuts from Red China at approximately 50 percent of your cost of production,” the constituent asked. The question was a reference to the president’s past life as a peanut farmer. It was also a reminder that China was still the predatory “Red China” in the eyes of many Americans. “We are sure,” the constituent continued, “that you would feel that there should be some type of restrictions placed on imported peanuts.” When an industry was “so affected by imports, whether gloves or peanuts, it starts a chain reaction which affects many other industries.”<sup>67</sup>

The Missourian writing to Carter was hardly alone in his feelings of neglect. As columnist Doug Peterson reflected in Chillicothe’s local newspaper, “your neighbors and mine; friends who pay taxes locally, buy locally, and contribute to the well being of this area are in danger of losing their jobs in the future because of a communist country.” Reflecting on the imports from “Red China,” he cried, “I get the feeling sometimes that we elect men to represent the interests of all the rest of the people in the world as opposed to us.”<sup>68</sup>

It was not simply glove manufacturers who were being sacrificed to foreign policy objectives, the petitioners argued. Local industries were also affected by declining production and factory closures. Morris Byran, president of Jefferson Mills in Georgia, spoke on his own experiences of the rippling damage caused by the decrease in cotton glove manufacturing. In his testimony, he noted that

66. Brief on behalf of the WGMA, March 1, 1978, p. 50, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

67. Cited in: Statement by Thomas Coleman before the ITC, February 7, 1978, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

68. Pearson, “Strictly Personal.”

his flannel supply business had been “seriously disrupted” by the plummeting sales in the local cotton glove industry. With glove makers demanding less cloth, the Georgian mill had fewer customers for its own goods.<sup>69</sup>

The WGMA argued this was a similar situation for raw cotton too. In testimony to the ITC, Missouri Senator John Danforth argued that “as the glove production goes down, so does demand for its principal raw material, cotton.” Missouri was one of the largest producers of cotton in the United States and Danforth argued that decreasing production, increasing unemployment, and plant closures had far-reaching effects. “So often,” Danforth concluded, “these communities are simply lost in the shuffle as a massive and distant federal bureaucracy addresses itself to the ‘larger’ issues.”<sup>70</sup> Coleman reiterated his fellow Missourian’s point, arguing “we are also speaking of the textile mills, the paper industry, the chemical industry, the tool and die industry, transportation, the corrugated box industry, and many, many others, and yes, possibly the farmers.”<sup>71</sup>

On a local level, the decreasing production of gloves might have affected demand for U.S. cotton. In the aggregate, however, many linked China’s increasing ability to export textiles to a heightened demand for U.S. cotton. A cyclical trade system was emerging in which China imported U.S. cotton, used it to manufacture goods such as cotton work gloves, and in turn sold them to American suppliers.<sup>72</sup> Diplomat John Holdridge recognized the early signs of this cycle in January 1975, only a few years after the trade relationship had been re-established. “To help sustain growing textile exports, the PRC has been a large cotton importer,” Holdridge cabled the State Department from his posting in Beijing. “Over the longer term, the U.S. . . . should continue to be in a good position as far as cotton sales to China are concerned,” he concluded.<sup>73</sup>

69. Brief by WGMA, March 1, 1978, p. 30, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department Records, Kheel Center.

70. Testimony of John C. Danforth before the ITC, February 7, 1978, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

71. Thomas Coleman testimony before the ITC, February 7, 1978, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

72. Pietra Rivoli explored these patterns that developed by the twenty-first century, tracing cotton grown in Texas to clothing manufactured in China and other developing countries. See Pietra Rivoli, *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy: An Economist Examines the Markets, Powers and Politics of World Trade*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

73. Telegram from U.S. Liaison Office to State Department, January 1975, “Problems and prospects in Sino-U.S. trade,” Folder: PRC-Trade-General (1), box 10, Collection: National Security Advisor NSC East Asian and Pacific Affairs Staff: Country Files (1969) 1973–1976, Ford Library.

Like total trade more broadly, however, U.S. cotton sales to China fluctuated throughout the decade. In 1973 and 1974, China purchased \$287 million of cotton from the United States.<sup>74</sup> Sales declined sharply in 1975 and 1976, as Mao's health rapidly deteriorated and radicals gained control of China's foreign economic policies. Agricultural purchases from the United States seemed to contravene the principle of self-reliance.<sup>75</sup> Nonetheless, the contours of integrated trade ties—in which the United States supplied raw materials and China produced textile products—were beginning to appear possible. In 1977, China's purchases of U.S. cotton increased once more to around \$17 million and in 1978 they rose even further to \$157 million.<sup>76</sup> By 1980, after diplomatic normalization, China purchased nearly one-quarter of all U.S. cotton exports. The United States was one of China's leading foreign suppliers in that year, providing 62 percent of all China's cotton purchases.<sup>77</sup>

Danforth acknowledged the high levels of China's cotton purchases but argued that its fluctuations meant these benefits to U.S. farmers were less certain than they first appeared. "Red China does import substantial quantities of U.S. cotton," he noted, "but apparently on a capricious and uncertain basis."<sup>78</sup> Thomas Coleman reiterated Danforth's point. A member of the House Agricultural Committee, Coleman had prior dealings with China's see-sawing grain purchases. Testifying to the ITC, he declared, "the PRC refuses to buy grain from American farmers . . . yet it has no qualms about dumping work gloves in this country to the detriment of American jobs." Trade was not, he argued, "a one-way avenue." Instead, "we need to send a clarion signal to the PRC" that they could trade "only according to the rules of fair trade."<sup>79</sup>

A further reason the WGMA petitioners deemed China's trade unfair were the prices at which it sold the gloves. In 1976 the volume of China's cotton work glove exports to the United States had increased eight-fold from

74. Figures compiled from "Ten Leading Exports and Imports, 1973," *U.S.-China Business Review* March 1974, 11; "Leading Exports and Imports in Sino-U.S. Trade, 1974," *U.S.-China Business Review* April 1975, 19.

75. Song, "A Dissonance in Mao's Revolution," 412.

76. "Top U.S. Imports from China, 1977," *The China Business Review*, April 1978, 42; "Top 12 U.S. Exports to the PRC, 1978," *The China Business Review*, March 1979, 37.

77. "Building Bridges to China," *Farmlife*, December 1980, 5.

78. Testimony of John C. Danforth before the ITC, February 7, 1978, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

79. Statement by Thomas Coleman before the ITC, February 7, 1978, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

the year before, but the market price at which it sold them had decreased. In 1975, Chinese gloves retailed around \$4.25 compared to U.S. gloves that averaged around \$6.25.<sup>80</sup>

Not only were the Chinese gloves cheaper, they were also high quality. John Cole, an importer from Schenectady, New York, testified before the ITC that Chinese gloves were of the “finest quality.” There was little or no scope for product differentiation on aesthetic grounds, he claimed, because the gloves were used in work environments rather than as fashion items. Other than price, it was difficult to distinguish between imported and domestically produced products. As far as Cole was concerned, the lower prices of Chinese and imported gloves was what mattered in his purchasing decisions.<sup>81</sup>

As Rauen described, China had “captured a substantial portion of our market solely on the basis of price.” And these prices bore “little or no relationship to costs.”<sup>82</sup> In its briefing to the ITC, the WGMA went further, arguing that China’s lower prices were the consequence of its “slave labor” conditions. With significantly lower labor costs, China could bear the high tariffs from lack of MFN status and still undercut the prices U.S. manufacturers charged.<sup>83</sup> Jacob Sheinkman explained why this made China different from the United States’ other trading partners:

It is one thing for a domestic industry to contend with imports from developing countries with low wage and low cost structures . . . but it is quite another thing for that industry to be confronted with sudden shipment surges from a communist country in which a vast captive and exploited labor force toils ceaselessly to produce goods that may be marketed abroad at a fraction of their real production costs.<sup>84</sup>

China’s “vast” labor force and huge population—one-quarter of humanity as the WGMA repeatedly reminded the ITC—created a fear of a potential deluge of gloves. The sheer scale of its workforce was compounded by the fact

80. Richard Wightman, “Work Glove Makers Demand Rollback of Chinese Imports,” *Daily News Record*, December 16, 1977, folder 12, box 74, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

81. Brief on behalf of the WGMA, March 1, 1978, p. 19–20, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

82. “US Asked to Probe Cotton Work Glove Imports, Set Quotas,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 16, 1977, 6.

83. Brief on behalf of the WGMA, March 1, 1978, folder 16, box 9, ACTWU Research Department, Kheel Center.

84. Testimony of Jacob Sheinkman, February 7, 1978, folder 19, box 1, ACTWU International Affairs Department Records #5619/032, Kheel Center.



that Chinese workers were being treated as little more than “indentured labor,” Sheinkman argued. “How can U.S. workers compete with the labor costs that characterize production in the People’s Republic of China?” he cried. With their increasing U.S. sales, China’s leaders were “exporting their unemployment” to the United States, Sheinkman continued. China was gaining jobs at the expense of U.S. workers through their “predatory pricing” and “beggar-be-thy-neighbor trade policies.”<sup>85</sup>

Sheinkman contrasted the vast Chinese workforce working for much lower wages with the U.S. textile industry, which paid minimum wage, was largely un-unionized, and composed predominantly of women and minorities, conditions that the Academy Award-winning film, *Norma Rae* depicted a few years later in 1979. The film portrayed the debilitating respiratory condition known as “brown lung,” which was widespread amongst U.S. textile workers, a result of repeatedly inhaling tiny fabric fibers.<sup>86</sup> Short of diminishing already-low wages to a comparable level, U.S. workers could not compete with Chinese imports on the basis of price, Sheinkman argued. He and the WGMA did not focus on the wellbeing of Chinese workers—they did not suggest improving Chinese wages or working conditions—but instead on the implications of low wages in China for U.S. workers.<sup>87</sup>

Their arguments moreover revealed the limitations within the textile industry that so pursued cheaper, non-union labor that it relocated again and again across the United States. In the 1970s, as textile and apparel industry leaders and managers fought alongside workers and unions for protection from imports, they simultaneously suppressed union campaigns throughout the South, many of which were led by women and people of color. *Norma Rae*, based on a true story of a white woman in the industry and starring Sally Field, revealed the tenacity of unionizing textile workers in the face of management repression. But as Lane Windham has argued, as companies fought against unionization they “weakened their own partner” in the bigger battle they faced: against U.S. retailers and multinational executives whose imports were rising as rapidly as their clout in Washington.<sup>88</sup>

85. Testimony of Jacob Sheinkman, February 7, 1978, folder 19, box 1, ACTWU International Affairs, Kheel Center.

86. Minchin, “Don’t Sleep with Stevens!,” 523.

87. On labor internationalism see, Marcell van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays Toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden, Brill: 2008), 259–83. On the gendered nature of international labor organizing, see Eileen Boris, *Making the Woman Worker: Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards, 1919–2019* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

88. Windham, *Knocking on Labor’s Door*, 108.

## “OPEC-LIKE APPAREL PRICES”: THE ITC DECISION AND ITS AFTERMATH

By a margin of 4–2, the ITC commissioners ruled against placing any limits on imports from China. The majority commissioners found that the number of Chinese cotton work gloves entering the United States and the rate at which they did so were not a cause of material injury to domestic manufacturers. Their decision hinged upon their assessment of section 406 of the Trade Act, which Congress had just recently passed in December 1974. Section 406 applied to U.S. trade with communist nations only.

The Act explicitly laid out Congress’s intentions: it wanted section 406 to provide an easier mechanism for domestic protection compared with other anti-dumping legislation, such as section 201, which could be applied to all countries. As the Trade Act explained, the criteria for section 406 were “intended to be more easily met than the market disruption tests in section 201.” Claimants, for example, only needed to prove that imports from communist nations were a “significant cause” of injury or threat thereof, rather than the more difficult benchmark of “substantial cause” that section 201 required.<sup>89</sup>

The gloves case was the first time that the ITC considered a petition under section 406 of the Trade Act. Despite a number of easier benchmarks, one of the requirements of section 406 soon proved harder to meet than section 201. According to the Trade Act, market disruption existed if imports “from any communist country are increasing rapidly so as to be a significant cause of material injury, or the threat thereof, to the domestic industry.” The present tense language of “increasing rapidly” soon became a problem for the WGMA. Section 201 simply required a plaintiff to prove “increased quantities” of imports were entering the United States. For the WGMA, then, the burden of proof was to show that the increase was occurring at the time of petition. The figures the ITC commissioners relied upon therefore became a key factor in the outcome of the case—so too did the interference by U.S. policymakers and China’s Ministry of Foreign Trade.

In their assessment of section 406 of the Trade Act, the ITC commissioners took the question of whether imports were “increasing rapidly” as a threshold issue. This meant that other issues—such as proving industry injury—would be dealt with only if the threshold question was first

89. U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Finance, *Trade Reform Act of 1974*, Report No. 93–1298 (to accompany H.R. 10710), 93d Congress, 2d Session, 1974, p. 212.

determined in the affirmative.<sup>90</sup> Joseph Parker, vice-chairman of the Commission, analyzed the imports data on a year-by-year basis. While he acknowledged that Chinese glove imports were high in 1976, he noted that they had declined in 1977 compared to increases from other countries such as Hong Kong or Japan. Taking such an approach, he determined that the imports were not *presently* increasing and for this reason quotas should not be recommended.<sup>91</sup>

By contrast, the two dissenting commissioners, chairman Daniel Minchew and commissioner Italo Ablondi, split the data in two groups: 1973–1975 and 1976–1977. Comparing the level of imports in this way, Minchew determined that imports “increased extremely rapidly” in the 1976–1977 period. Chinese cotton work glove imports increased nearly 550 percent from the earlier period.<sup>92</sup> Ablondi took the same approach, arguing that Chinese imports “skyrocketed” in 1976 and 1977, reaching nearly 20 percent of total U.S. imports.<sup>93</sup> Given the deliberate decrease in Chinese sales in 1977, these conclusions indicate just how high the 1976 figures were compared to the previous three years.

Commissioner George Moore also agreed that cotton work glove imports were presently increasing rapidly. Even so, he went on to determine there was no evidence of a causal link between Chinese imports and material injury to the U.S. industry. The two other commissioners, Catherine Bedell and Bill Alberger, came to “no specific conclusion” on the issue of whether Chinese imports were increasing rapidly. They did, however, join with Moore in arguing there was no evidence that it was Chinese gloves in particular that were causing the disruption. Even if the U.S. industry was experiencing injury, they pointed to much higher levels of imports from other countries, especially Hong Kong.<sup>94</sup> The commissioners made no mention of the entwined relationship between Chinese and Hong Kong trade, which was, of course, a major reason for the increase in Hong Kong sales. Together with Parker, they formed a majority against imposing quotas.

Immediately after the ITC case, Chinese work glove exports increased once more. In just the first three months of 1978, U.S. importers purchased

90. Calabrese, “Market Disruption Caused by Imports from Communist Countries: Analysis of Section 406 of the Trade Act of 1974,” 121–22.

91. View of Vice Chairman Joseph O. Parker, “Certain Gloves,” p. 12.

92. View of Chairman Daniel Minchew, “Certain Gloves,” p. 21.

93. Views of Commissioner Italo H. Ablondi, “Certain Gloves,” p. 27.

94. Views of George Moore, Catherine Bedell, and Bill Alberger, “Certain Gloves,” p. 5.

Chinese cotton work gloves at such an increased rate that they were equivalent to 67 percent of *total* Chinese imports in 1977. This was not only evidence of just how quickly China could affect the U.S. market but, as the WGMA had testified, how misleading the temporary decrease in 1977 had been.<sup>95</sup> By the end of 1978, 24 percent of all U.S. cotton work glove imports came from China. These numbers continued to increase, reaching 32 percent of total U.S. purchases the following year. By the end of 1979, China had overtaken Hong Kong to become the United States' largest supplier not just of cotton work gloves, but all varieties of gloves.<sup>96</sup>

Despite the failure of the case, the textile industry continued to raise concerns about Chinese imports. In June 1978, just a few months after the ITC's ruling, key textile leaders from business and labor increased their efforts to have textiles exempt from the unfolding GATT negotiations. George Meany president of the AFL-CIO, Irving Shapiro chairman of the Business Roundtable, and Robert Small from the ATMI held a joint labor-management press conference in Washington where they outlined the issues at stake.<sup>97</sup> Only a week earlier these leaders had been fighting over revisions to labor laws, yet they came together in this instance to protest what they described as a "stunning increase" in textile imports across the board.<sup>98</sup> The problem, they argued, was that in spite of the renewal of the MFA, imports of textiles and apparel were 33 percent higher in the first four months of 1978 than they were in 1977.<sup>99</sup> They feared what would happen if GATT tariff reductions were to come on top of this.

During this campaign, Chinese textiles were singled out as an area of heightened concern. Small warned that China was "a new textile power . . . rising in the Far East."<sup>100</sup> The ATMI noted that Chinese imports were increasing so rapidly that China had become the United States' sixth largest textile partner, despite the tariffs it faced as a consequence of not having

95. Special Task force on operation of the Multi Fiber Arrangement (MFA) statement of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, May 5, 1978, folder 5, box 6, ACTWU International Affairs Department, Kheel Center.

96. "The multifiber arrangement from 1973 to 1980," USITC publication 1131, March 1981, 47, 84.

97. Helen Dewar, "Business, Labor Seek to Limit Textile Imports," *The Washington Post*, June 30, 1978.

98. Press release from ACTWU and ATMI, June 29, 1978, folder 31, box 1, ACTWU International Affairs, Kheel Center.

99. Dewar, "Business, Labor Seek to Limit Textile Imports."

100. Press conference remarks of Robert S. Small, June 29, 1978, folder 31, box 1, ACTWU International Affairs, Kheel Center.

MFN trading status.<sup>101</sup> Drawing a parallel with the OPEC countries that had been colluding to set the price of oil, Small described an emerging “Far East textile cartel” led by Japan and including Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan, and now China. “The American consumer,” he exclaimed, “does not need OPEC-like apparel prices!”

In a period of extreme inflation, Small argued that not only were these imports the “primary cause” of the inflation, but lessening tariffs during the GATT negotiations would only increase such destabilizing pressures.<sup>102</sup> This argument formed a deliberate rebuke to many proponents of free trade who had been arguing that cheaper imports had a deflationary effect.

At Senate hearings into textile imports in August, William Duchessi, vice-president of the ACTWU singled out China again, noting that its market was “just opening up.” But, he continued, “if there’s one thing that Red China has got, it’s people—unskilled people—and they will learn to sew pretty fast and they will learn to make textile fabrics pretty fast. And once that floodgate opens, I do not know what is going to happen to our industry.”<sup>103</sup> When the United States and China finally normalized economic and diplomatic ties in January 1979, the AFL-CIO warned that China was fast becoming the “Asian sunbelt.” Whereas once corporations turned to the U.S. South, now businesspeople looked to China and saw “huge profits won at the expense of defenceless workers.”<sup>104</sup>

It was not until June 1979 that President Carter placed quotas on selected Chinese textiles entering the United States, including cotton work gloves. He imposed them only after diplomatic normalization had been resolved and only after bilateral negotiations to achieve voluntary restrictions had failed. Diplomacy was still the first priority. But by this stage the shifts in the U.S. economy had continued to sharpen as a consequence of political and corporate decision-making, including tax incentives for multinational corporations

101. Background paper issued jointly by industry and labor concerning imports of fiber, textiles, and apparel, June 29, 1978, folder 31, box 1, ACTWU International Affairs, Kheel Center.

102. Press conference remarks of Robert S. Small, June 29, 1978, folder 31, box 1, ACTWU International Affairs, Kheel Center.

103. Statement of William Duchessi, Executive Vice President, Amalgamated Clothing and textile Workers Union, Hearing before the Subcommittee on International trade of the Committee on finance U.S. Senate, 95<sup>th</sup> congress, Second Session on S. 2920 “A bill to amend the Trade Act of 1974,” August 15, 1978.

104. Bayard Rustin, “Will China Serve U.S. Industry as New Low-Wage ‘Sunbelt’?,” *AFL-CIO News*, January 13, 1979, p. 5.



FIGURE 2. MidWest Quality Gloves, Chillicothe, Missouri, October 2018. *Source:* Author photo.

to send their manufacturing processes offshore.<sup>105</sup> As the decade drew to a close, U.S. imports of manufactured goods had increased so substantially that their value as a percentage of domestic production reached 40 percent. In 1970, the figure had been 14 percent.<sup>106</sup> The U.S. textile industry was one of the hardest hit by these changes. Between 1973 and 1996, it lost 39 percent of its workforce—considerably higher than U.S. manufacturing as a whole, which saw 8 percent of all workers lose their jobs in the same period.<sup>107</sup>

By December 1981, four years after the WGMA filed its case, Boss Manufacturing closed its glove factory in Chillicothe. It was unable to compete with increasing imports of low-priced gloves. In its final years, Boss produced only a small number of gloves and had shifted to importing most of its lines of gloves. Its manager, Lansing Demarest, told local reporters that imports were so cheap it had become 256 percent more expensive for the company to produce the gloves than to buy them from foreign suppliers.<sup>108</sup> Now, it was leaving Chillicothe altogether. Two years later, the Mid West Glove Corporation also filed for bankruptcy. This time, however, a businessman from Kansas named Michael Palmer purchased the company and

105. Stein, *Pivotal Decade*, 176–204.

106. Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 140–41.

107. Minchin, *Empty Mills*, 5–8.

108. “Boss Plant Closes after 40 Years of Glovemaking,” *Chillicothe-Constitution Tribune*, December 2, 1981, p. 1.

renamed it MidWest Quality Gloves.<sup>109</sup> In 1985, Chillicothe's third glove company, Lambert Manufacturing, celebrated its fiftieth year of business.<sup>110</sup> But soon after, Palmer purchased Lambert too, merging it with his newly acquired MidWest Quality Gloves. By the end of the twentieth century, Chillicothe—once a hub of glove manufacturing—had only one factory left.

## CONCLUSION

The first case for U.S. trade restrictions on China highlights the tensions between U.S. workers and the quiet yet powerful political interests that prioritized diplomatic relations over domestic economic interests. But it is not a straightforward story. It also illustrates the impact of shifting and deepening networks of global economic integration. Some U.S. workers, particularly those who were not women of color, benefitted from cheaper cotton gloves. In the cotton industry, farmers were starting to see the early signs of forming global supply chain networks. For them, the cotton gloves trade with China offered a potential financial windfall. For others, such as workers in the auto and steel industries, the cheaper cotton imports were a way for their own beleaguered sectors to keep production costs down. And for the majority of U.S.-based glove companies, outsourcing cotton glove production was becoming a key component of their own viability. For the managers at these factories, Chinese imports relieved pressures on the other lines of gloves their workers produced. And all the while, unionization of the textile industry, rather than understood as a core protectant for workers, was seen by factory managers as just as much a problem as imports. The case is therefore a window into the intersecting economic and political interests within a changing global economy and the impact this had on a small group of U.S. workers.

In 2021, MidWest Quality Gloves still made gloves in its Chillicothe factory. Positioning itself as a champion of U.S. manufacturing, the company declared on its website it was “proud to proclaim itself the largest producer of Made in the USA leather work gloves.”<sup>111</sup> The company's marketing boast bespoke the rarity of U.S.-made textile goods by the early twenty-first century.

109. Ed Crawford, “Palmer's Plan Includes Growth at Midwest Quality Gloves, Inc.,” *Chillicothe-Constitution Tribune*, October 3, 1984, p. 1.

110. Jenny Wood, “Lambert Manufacturing to celebrate 50<sup>th</sup> year,” *The Chillicothe-Constitution Tribune*, December 19, 1985, p. 8.

111. MidWest Quality Gloves website, available at: <<https://midwestglove.com/history/>> accessed: June 7, 2021.

It also reflected a persistent emotional pull that came from pronouncements of support for U.S. manufacturing.

The website made no mention, however, as to whether its cotton lines were similarly manufactured in the United States. But it is unlikely. The company probably operated through a combination of locally made leather gloves and imported lines of other kinds of gloves. The full inventory of MidWest Quality Gloves reveals the complexity of global manufacturing by the twenty-first century: a system reliant on networks that now flowed within and beyond national boundaries.<sup>112</sup> Yet as their advertisement reveals, the social and political *idea* of manufacturing and trade remained bound up with the nation state. The mechanics of trade had changed since the 1970s but the political rhetoric had not. Goods carrying the label “Made in the USA” continued to be pitted against those declaring “Made in China.”

---

ELIZABETH O'BRIEN INGLESON is a Henry Chauncey Jr. '57 postdoctoral associate at Yale University.

#### NOTE

I would like to extend my gratitude to the many people who provided feedback on versions of this article, especially Thomas Adams, Frances Clarke, Jonathan Levy, Erez Manela, Timothy Minchin, Michael McDonnell, Brendon O'Connor, Penny Russell, Rebecca Sheehan, Shane White, and particularly Anne O'Brien and John Ingleson. Thanks also to the anonymous reviewers for their extremely thoughtful and helpful comments.

112. Geoffrey Jones describes how the production systems of the twenty-first century meant that “labels such as ‘made in America’ were becoming meaningless because products to be sold were assembled from parts actually produced in other countries.” Geoffrey Jones, “Multinationals from the 1930s to the 1980s,” in *Leviathans: Multinational Corporations and the New Global History*, ed. Alfred D. Chandler Jr. and Bruce Mazlish (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 102.