

# Preface.

**O**n June 12, 2003, a delegation of America's working poor gathered for a congressional briefing in Washington, D.C. Convened by the Congressional Progressive Caucus and Food First, a progressive think tank, the briefing was a rare chance for working poor people to speak collectively to members of Congress and the American public about the impact of free trade on their lives. *Shafted: Free Trade and America's Working Poor* is based on that briefing.

The women and men whose stories are woven into this book come from incredibly diverse ethnic backgrounds, geographic locations, and vocations. But all have experienced a variation on the destructive power of the free trade policies of the last decade. Communities and families are broken; wages wither and jobs evaporate forever; farms, houses, and livelihoods—and even lives—are lost.

When Food First began the task of identifying a delegation to testify, we weren't looking for mere victims of free trade—we wanted to bring forward communities who resisted and fought back. The people whose stories you will read are the conscience among us, the ones who spoke up and started organizing when they and their fellow workers were fired as the factory shut down and moved overseas. They are the ones

who refused to believe that trade policies that forced family farms into foreclosure was progress, or inevitable. They are the ones who refused to be treated as second-class citizens without fundamental human rights. They are the champions of true American values and the leaders to whom we owe a debt for their courage in fighting to make this world more just and fair for everyone.

This book comes at a very critical juncture in history. The theory of free trade, which says that these punishing economic policies are part of a natural, fair, and self-correcting mechanism over which we have no control, is collapsing under the weight of real world experience. Yet the U.S. is pushing for more trade liberalization through the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). This without a national review of how NAFTA and other existing trade polices have affected the domestic economy. This book is an integral part of the global justice movement that is making the connection most of our policymakers won't: if free trade hasn't worked for America's poor—and it doesn't—it certainly won't work for the poor in developing countries.

Shafted chronicles the voices of family farmers, farmworkers, and industrial workers from across the United States and their struggle to survive under the assault of free trade. Each story in this book cites articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related covenants to help us understand how the rights and freedoms for corporations and capital dictated by free trade agreements fundamentally works against human rights. Analysts from activist, academic, labor,

and state government supplement the picture with hard-hitting facts about how the U.S. has actually failed to realize the promises of free trade.

But it will take more than our becoming educated about free trade policies to counter the corporate interests that dictate our collective future. It will take action. That is why we have included an education-for-action resource section at the back of the book—to help each and every one of us mobilize to change the current system, which says that people without money have no voice and those who do don't have to care. Contact the organizations listed there to find out what they are currently working on and how you can join in the fight. Let's take back our democracy and our future. We owe it to our ancestors, who fought for our basic civil, human, and ecological rights; to those who are living without hopes and dreams; and to future generations who will preserve this great earth and all its living beings.

I'd like to thank my colleagues at Food First who made this book possible. I'd like to give special thanks to Anuradha Mittal for her tireless vision, Clancy Drake for being the most impeccable managing editor and go-to woman, Steve Hasset for generously offering his artistic talent in designing the book, and Nick Parker and Michael Manoocheri, whose immense skill and craftsmanship made the congressional briefing such a global success. This book was made possible by my dedicated interns, especially Sarah Marxer and Jen Clarke.

The congressional briefing would not have been possible,

especially in these strange political times, without the leadership of Rep. Dennis Kucinich and his chief of staff, Jaron Bourke, and the Congressional Progressive Caucus. And neither the briefing nor the book would be available to students, activists, educators, and policymakers were it not for the people who courageously testified, believing in the importance of coming together and presenting their case against free trade to members of Congress and to the American public.

I must thank my family: my mother, who bore thirteen children, raised ten, and lived through Japanese colonial occupation, the Korean War, and working-class immigrant life in America; and my sisters and brother who invested in keeping all of us housed, clothed, and fed. We must never forget where we come from and the people who have touched our lives.

—Christine Ahn