

James  
ENGL 100: Tragedy of the Commons

## Are My Hands Clean?

Lyrics and music by Bernice Johnson Reagon. Songtalk Publishing Co. 1985  
Performed by Sweet Honey in the Rock. *Sweet Honey in the Rock, Live at Carnegie Hall*

I wear garments touched by hands from all over the world  
35% cotton, 65% polyester, the journey begins in Central America  
In the cotton fields of El Salvador  
In a province soaked in blood,  
Pesticide-sprayed workers toil in a broiling sun  
Pulling cotton for two dollars a day.

Then we move on up to another rung – Cargill  
A top-forty trading conglomerate, takes the cotton through the Panama Canal  
Up the Eastern seaboard, coming to the US of A for the first time  
In South Carolina  
At the Burlington mills  
Joins a shipment of polyester filament courtesy of the New Jersey petro-chemical mills of  
Dupont

Dupont strands of filament begin in the South American country of Venezuela Where oil  
riggers bring up oil from the earth for six dollars a day  
Then Exxon, largest oil company in the world,  
Upgrades the product in the country of Trinidad and Tobago  
Then back into the Caribbean and Atlantic Seas  
To the factories of Dupont  
On the way to the Burlington mills  
In South Carolina  
To meet the cotton from the blood-soaked fields of El Salvador

In South Carolina  
Burlington factories hum with the business of weaving oil and cotton into miles of fabric  
for Sears  
Who takes this bounty back into the Caribbean Sea  
Headed for Haiti this time – May she be one day soon free –  
Far from the Port-au-Prince palace  
Third world women toil doing piece work to Sears specifications  
For three dollars a day my sisters make my blouse

It leaves the third world for the last time  
Coming back into the sea to be sealed in plastic for me  
This third world sister  
And I go to the Sears department store where I buy my blouse  
On sale for 20% discount

Are my hands clean?