

## Taking a Stand: Fakes

Many years ago, I would pick up a fake Louis Vuitton bag on the streets of NYC for \$50 or less. I thought it was a harmless way of owning a designer label without paying the hefty price tag.



Now, I cringe every time I see a designer knockoff. Why? What was once believed to be a "victimless" crime is, in reality, a crime of many.

So who exactly are the victims of this so-called "victimless" crime? Many of these victims can be found in the factories in which the fakes are made. The truth is that most counterfeiters rely on child labor to produce their goods, many of whom face deplorable conditions. Of course, this is to be expected, because producing fake goods is illegal. According to an article in *Harper's Bazaar* (Jan. '07), children as young as eight are "worked ragged in barely tolerable

conditions, turning out everything from faux-luxury-brand handbags, wallets, and belts to cell phones." The author of this article, Dana Thomas, goes on to say that the children live in these factories with little to no adult supervision.

For some people, the thought of exhausted little children piecing together fake designer handbags halfway around the world is no big deal. Out of sight, out of mind. But what about the victims that can be found here in our own backyards? According to another article written by Dana Thomas for *Harper's Bazaar* (Jan. '08), "counterfeiting costs American businesses \$200 billion to \$250 billion annually and is directly responsible for the loss of more than 750,000 jobs in the United States." The truth of the matter is, we are all victims of counterfeiting because it has such a devastating effect on our economy.

It gets worse. According to Canada's *The Providence*, terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and Hamas derive a large portion of their funding from the sales of counterfeit merchandise in North America. And according to an article written by Scott Malone for *WWD*, officials have evidence that the 1993 truck bombing at the World Trade Center was funded by a counterfeit t-shirt ring. Knowing this, it's disturbing to think what a "harmless" fake designer handbag bought off the street could have helped finance.

Rather than forking \$20 for a cheap knockoff, why not join BagBorroworSteal.com, which loans out designer handbags for a monthly service fee? Sample sales and Target's regular rotation of big-name designers (Botkier, Devi Kroell, Thakoon, etc.) are also fantastic sources for real-deal luxury labels for less.