

Slacktivism

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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I sat down next to the guy with glasses and he started with the airplane small talk. I'm pretty sure someone hands out a script for this sort of situation, because it's always the exact same questions:

Where are you flying to?

Is it a personal or business trip?

Oh! What do you do?

What kind of books do you write?

You're a pastor? *Really?*

When I asked him what kind of work he did, he said that he was the VP of a multi-national chocolate company. Then I asked,

When are you going to quit using slave labor?

Because I'm terrible at following the script.

He answered with a detailed plan and hopeful projections. As a wannabe activist, I asked him what pressured the company to come up with a plan. He answered that the company monitors Facebook and Twitter closely. When they saw all the outrage about their labor practices, they knew they had to do something about it. "It was going to be too damaging for our bottom line to let it go."

We know that [workers are suffering](#). In this article, *Harvard Business Review* reminds us that ["It's not okay if your workers cannot afford to eat"](#) and talks about how the weakening Unions have moved us to this situation.

As the gap between the rich and the poor widens, it feels overwhelming. But after talking with my new VP friend, I do wonder if [slacktivism](#) can help when it's coupled with on-the-ground grass-roots organizing.

I have got to admit. I feel overwhelmed by Megyn Kelly's white Jesus (I entered the fray at [Religion Dispatches](#)). This week it's Duck Dynasty's [Phil Robertson](#) extolling the virtues of the vagina and defining sin: "Start with homosexual behavior and just morph out from there. Bestiality, sleeping around with this woman and that woman and that woman and those men...." Later on in the article, we read his memories of pre-Jim Crow Louisiana, how he never saw the mistreatment of any black person. Before entitlements and welfare, the African Americans he knew were godly, happy, and no one was singing the blues.

So, even though I don't have cable television, and even though I would have never recognized the names Megyn Kelly or Phil Robertson, I have been slipping into the national dialogue, at least a little.

Why? Is it because I think we can have a reasoned debate about race, homophobia, and free speech in 140 characters? Do I think that it's good to get my anxiety and blood pressure bursting from the comment sections? Not really.

But, if I want to listen to voices of people who have long been silenced, I have that ability. Plus, here's a bonus--if I want to walk away from Twitter, Facebook, and the blogs, I can. I can fold up my laptop and forget my cellphone. I can go for a walk, read a book, and love my family.

In all of it, because I'm an eternal optimist, I'm rooting for the slacktivists. I hope that the outrage can be loud and long enough so that the people in power will bend to the tidal wave of voices who cry out in longing for [workers to be paid](#), racism to be confronted, and every person to be treated with dignity.