In 2015, I watched an episode of John Oliver’s *Last Week Tonight* on HBO in which he focuses on “Fashion.” In it, Oliver pillories a number of companies—such as H&M, Forever 21, Gap Inc., Walmart, and The Children’s Place—for continuing to source their production from suppliers with sweatshop conditions.

As I watched, I was struck by the fact that these companies have, for many years, had in place *private regulation programs* for their far-flung global supply chains designed to *solve* the sweatshop problem. These programs typically articulate standards for suppliers, state that the supplier will be audited or monitored to ensure their compliance, and include a pledge from the buyer companies to help suppliers remediate violations, rewarding those that do with continued business and axing those that do not.

Oliver lays bare several problems in private regulation, most notably the lack of progress. After nearly twenty-five years of these private regulation programs, we still have major disasters like Rana Plaza: in 2013, a structurally unsound eight-story garment factory in Bangladesh collapsed, killing 1,134 workers.

That realization sparked the idea of writing a book about private regulation. My first step was to create the New Conversations Project (NCP) at Cornell University’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations (the ILR School), where I teach. Its “tagline” is “sustainable labor practices in global supply chains.” Bruce Raynor, a Cornell trustee, played a key role in obtaining funding, and we assembled an advisory board, headed by Anna Burger, to advise us regarding how to tackle the question of private regulation. The diverse board includes individuals from global brands, unions, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and multi-stakeholder institutions (MSIs) active in private regulation, and design and communications companies, as well as some Cornell students.

From the board’s early discussions, we came to realize that what we needed was evidence and new research to understand the lack of progress. Doing research is easy for an academic, to be sure, but getting data from companies and other actors in the supply chain ecosystem proved to be a major challenge. It took us two years of consistent effort before we finally convinced companies, suppliers, auditing firms, and MSIs to share any data. But they did, and this book uses those data to provide the first comprehensive picture of private regulation in action.

I wrote this book not solely as a scholarly exercise. I want it to be *used* by all the actors in the private regulation ecosystem: global companies; suppliers; global
and national trade unions; the many NGOs active in this space; the variety of MSIs, such as the Fair Labor Association, the Ethical Trading Initiative, and the Fair Wear Foundation; socially responsible investing companies; and, of course, my students. But most of all, I hope the publication of this book will stimulate improvements in private regulation in ways that will help the myriad workers in global supply chains.