

Human Trafficking: Lives Bought and Sold

by Darcia Helle

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Most Americans assume that slavery ended in the 1800s with the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment. Sadly, that is not the case. By most estimates, we have more slaves worldwide today than at any other point in history.

In 1861, when slavery was a booming and legal business, we had 3.8 million slaves in the U.S. This number exceeded the total slaves in all other countries combined. As horrible as that total sounds, it pales in comparison to current statistics. According to research done by Free The Slaves, a conservative estimate of 27 million slaves are being held captive throughout the world today.

An estimated 800,000 people are trafficked across borders each year and forced into slavery.

An estimated one million children are exploited in the sex trade each year.

According to the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, 161 countries are known to be affected by human trafficking.

The human trafficking industry generates \$32 billion per year in profits. Of that, \$15.5 billion comes from industrialized countries. This is not just a Third World issue.

Slaves are cheap to maintain. Food and shelter given are minimal. When one dies, there is always another to take its place.

The average price of a slave today is \$90. That's it. A mere \$90 and you own a person. Compare that to the American South in 1850, when the average slave cost \$40,000. That was – and still is – a lot of money. Consequently, the slaves' masters had strong incentive to keep them alive. Today's slaves cost less than some people spend on a pair of jeans. They are the disposable humans.

Today's slaves are poor, young Thai women brought to the U.S. under the pretense of a better life. They expect to work as housekeepers. Once here, they are forced to be servants and/or sex slaves to their masters for 18-20 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. They are unpaid, terrified, and alone.

Our slaves are also young women from Mexico, who come to the U.S. with the promise of a waitressing job but instead are forced into prostitution.

Chinese men and women, boys and girls, are smuggled here and used in restaurant businesses and the sex industry.

American children are taken from the streets, then hidden in an underground network or transported to other countries. They become servants, sex slaves, and stars in child pornography films.

Modern slaves are from all over the world. They exist almost everywhere. They are kept under lock and key; beaten, threatened, and exploited. Human trafficking rivals drug trafficking as the most profitable black market industry. However, unlike drugs, we don't talk about our slaves.

Slave owners appear as ordinary people; middle class, upper class. Maybe your next-door neighbor. Their slaves are kept in garages and basements, never let outdoors, never allowed within view of company. The family pets have a far better existence.

According to research done by Free The Slaves and the University of California, Berkeley, slavery and human trafficking has been documented in 90 cities across the U.S. And these are only the cases that have been discovered.

I'm confident that most of us don't believe that it's okay to buy a life for \$90. No one should have his or her free will stripped away, regardless of the price tag.

What if it was your child?

Get involved. <http://www.freetheslaves.net/>