

Spotlight on...

Human Trafficking

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Spotlight on ... Human

Trafficking is a publication of the Entertainment Industries Council, Inc. in partnership with the Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement.



In a recent episode of *Law & Order: SVU*, the gruesome murder of a young boy turns up more than a ring of pedophilia—it exposes a “travel agency” specializing in forced prostitution and human trafficking.

If you think slavery is dead, you're dead wrong. This special issue of **Spotlight on...** focuses on modern-day slavery and its alarming prevalence in the world today—including the United States and possibly even your backyard.

If you have a hard time believing it, read through the material in this publication to learn about the terrifying reality of modern-day slavery. You will be shocked to learn where it's happening (Los Angeles, New York, Boston)—maybe where you live; maybe where your characters live.

What is “human trafficking”?

...or forced labor? ...or domestics held captive? ...or the sex slave trade? Make no mistake about it; human trafficking is a fancy word for “slavery.” *Spotlight on... Human Trafficking* is a crash course in the shocking human rights violation of modern-day slavery, also known as “trafficking in persons.” Human trafficking is ranked as the third most prevalent international crime behind the trade in drugs and arms.¹ As of 2003, the official government estimate is that up to 20,000 people are trafficked annually into the United States.² Government and non-governmental experts estimate that 700,000 to four million women are trafficked globally each year.³

Definitions of Trafficking

Trafficking is all acts involved in the recruitment, abduction, transport, harboring, transfer, sale or receipt of persons; within national or across international borders; through force, coercion, fraud or deception; to place persons in situations of slavery or slavery-like conditions, forced labor or services, such as forced prostitution or sexual services, domestic servitude, bonded sweatshop labor or other debt bondage. — *According to the President's Interagency Council on Women*

Trafficking in persons means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons: by the threat or use of kidnapping, force, fraud, deception or coercion, or by the giving or receiving of unlawful payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor. — *UN “International Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children”*



“ There’s another humanitarian crisis spreading, yet hidden from view. Each year, an estimated 800,000 to 900,000 human beings are bought, sold or forced across the world’s borders. Among them are hundreds of thousands of teenage girls, and others as young as five, who fall victim to the sex trade. This commerce in human life generates billions of dollars each year — much of which is used to finance organized crime. ”

—U.S. President George W. Bush

Modern-Day Slavery

Slavery is a frightening fact of life for many persons living in the United States today. It may not be as visible as it once was, and it is certainly not lawful, but modern-day slavery occurs all over the country.

There are four main types of slavery in the United States today.

- **Sex slavery (forced prostitution)**
- **Domestic servitude**
- **Agricultural debt bondage slavery**
- **Forced marriage (aka mail order brides)**

We know about pre-Civil War slavery, but not about what’s happening today. Most Americans would be appalled to know about the 21st Century victims of bondage. The entertainment industry has the power to create dynamic, even shocking stories founded in truth and to inform audiences about what is going on in our own world, sometimes in our own communities, and perhaps even in our own back yards.



What IS Happening Today?

- The intelligence community estimates that the modern-day slave trade will outstrip the illicit trade in guns and narcotics within a decade.⁴
- Over the past decade, as many as 750,000 people have been trafficked into the United States.⁵ This is equivalent to as many as 208 people per day.
- The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) recognizes trafficking in persons as the “fastest growing source of profits for organized criminal enterprises worldwide.” Terrorist networks and even family members or acquaintances of trafficking victims have been known to lure or force victims into bondage.
- Five percent of those trafficked into the U.S. are children, with *thousands of additional* U.S. children trafficked within the U.S. for sexual exploitation.⁶
- Trafficking victims in the U.S. come from four main areas: Asia, Central and South America, Russia and the newly independent states, and Eastern Europe.⁷

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- Most sex slaves are from Asia, most domestic slaves are from Africa and the Middle East, and most enslaved field laborers are from Central and South America.⁸
- Women are trafficked to the U.S. primarily for the sex industry (prostitution, stripping, peep and touch shows, and massage parlors that offer a variety of sexual “services”), sweatshop labor, domestic servitude, and agricultural work.⁹
- The average age of the trafficking victim in the U.S. is roughly 20 years old.¹⁰
- The CIA estimates that trafficking to the U.S. is likely to increase due to high levels of poverty and unemployment in source countries.¹¹

What is “Debt Bondage”?

- Debt bondage is the most common form of slavery in the world. A person pledges him- or herself against a loan of money, but she or he never gets released from service. The length and nature of service remain undefined, and the labor does not reduce the original debt. Ownership may not be asserted, but there is complete physical control of the bonded laborer.

“Maria”¹²

“Maria,” a young woman from Veracruz, Mexico, testified [to the House Committee on International Relations] that an acquaintance in Mexico promised her there were restaurant jobs in the U.S. where she could earn money for her impoverished daughter and parents. Maria’s captors moved her around from week to week to avoid her being found.

“I was transported to Florida, and there one of the bosses told me I would be working at a brothel as a prostitute. I told him he was mistaken, and that I was going to be working at a restaurant, not a brothel. He said I owed him a smuggling debt and the sooner I paid it off, the sooner I could leave. I was 18 years old and I had never been far from home. I had no money or way to get back.

“I was constantly guarded and abused. If anyone refused to be with a customer, we were beaten. If we adamantly refused, the bosses would show us a lesson by raping us brutally. We worked six days a week, 12 hours a day. Our bodies were sore and swollen. If anyone became pregnant, we were forced to have abortions, and the cost of the abortion was added to the smuggling debt.”

How Can This Happen?

How can anyone keep slaves in the U.S.? Why don’t these victims of slavery tell authorities? These are common questions that people ask when they hear about modern-day slavery.

Sex trafficking and other forms of human trafficking are driven by demand, which includes the customers of brothels that are operated out of massage parlors, spas, and other locations for the commercial sex industry; buyers from mail-order bride agencies and sex tours; and even the inter-country adopters of children in some cases. Even members of military forces, international peacekeeping agencies and police groups keep traffickers in business. Demand makes trafficking in persons lucrative. Countries with vibrant sex tourism industries, like the Netherlands and Thailand, also attract sex slavery operations because of a strong demand from sex tourists.

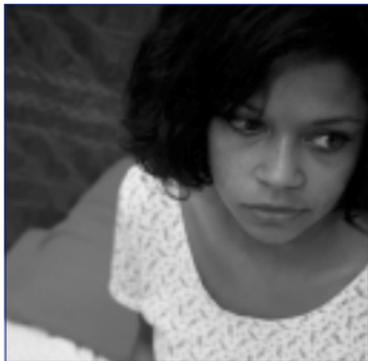
How do they get here?¹³

- Traffickers lure individuals with false promises of jobs as waitresses, nannies, maids, models, factory workers or exotic dancers. They often are recruited by unlicensed or unregulated employment, travel, model or matchmaking agencies. They also may promise parents that children will be educated, well fed, and completely provided for.
- Rising unemployment, disintegrating social networks, and the low status of women who are promised high wages and good working conditions all contribute to the increasing numbers of trafficking victims.

- Recruiters or agents front the money for travel documents, transportation, and supposed jobs.
- The majority of trafficking victims are brought into this country by one of three methods: 1) illegal use of “legitimate” travel documents; 2) imposter passports; or 3) smuggling/entry without inspection by border patrols.
- Sudden political change, economic collapse, civil unrest, internal armed conflict, and natural disasters greatly increase the likelihood that a country will become a source of trafficking victims, as displaced populations are highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. In these environments, the victims may be one of few resources of marketable wealth.... Organized criminal groups often fill the resultant power vacuums.¹⁴

Once in the U.S.¹⁵

- Once inside the U.S., many victims in debt bondage find themselves with severely curtailed freedoms as they are forced to work off smuggling debts or fees forced on them by traffickers for check-cashing, rent, food, work equipment, etc. Traffickers can re-sell victims’ debts to other traffickers or employers, so victims are often caught in a cycle of perpetual debt bondage. (See side bar for definition of debt bondage.)
- Their passports and travel documents are confiscated, their movements are restricted, and their wages are withheld until their smuggling debt is repaid.
- Victims are prevented from leaving in a variety of ways:
 - Armed guards
 - Violence
 - Threats of physical abuse against themselves and/or their families
 - Control through isolation from the outside world
 - Instilled fear of arrest and deportation
 - Extreme physical and mental abuse (rape, imprisonment, forced abortion, physical brutality)
 - Receiving or payment of benefits
 - Frequent movement
 - Deception
 - Language barriers



Vasantha Gedara¹⁶

In 1992, a slavery case in a Boston suburb made national news. A young Sri Lankan woman, Vasantha Gedara, was rescued by police from the home of a Kuwaiti couple in Quincy, MA. Like thousands of other Asian women, she had sought employment as a domestic worker in Kuwait. She agreed to travel to the U.S. with the son of her employer for \$250 per month plus room and board, but instead received a life of domestic slavery.

Talal Alzanki, a 30-year-old graduate student at Boston University, and his wife forbid Gedara to leave the house, gave her no days off from housekeeping, forced her to sleep on the floor, fed her scraps, and threatened to kill her if she left the apartment.

Private nurses caring for the Alzanki’s ill son became suspicious. After sneaking Gedara food for several weeks, they arranged for police to rescue her.

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Spotlight on Depiction of Human Trafficking

- 1. Remember that some modern-day slavery is “trafficking in humans.”** Similar to drug trafficking, human beings are illegally moved from place to place around the world, and those who traffic people are experienced and often experts at this criminal act. This could be addressed in an episode about law enforcement raiding a brothel and arresting women, only to find that they are victims of human trafficking and not willing prostitutes at all.
- 2. Much of modern-day slavery is sex slavery.** Some people even pay a nominal fee to be transported illegally into another country, only to be forced into prostitution when they get there. They soon find that there is no way out since they don't speak the language and are often confined to one area and threatened with violence. Consider showing how destitute living conditions unleash a desperate spiral where persons can be misled or coerced into committing their lives to prostitution with promises of a better life in a better place.
- 3. Consider showing how slavery is ingrained in our everyday lives in ways that we never think about.** For example, oranges or tomatoes from Florida, peaches from Georgia, sugar from the Dominican Republic, chocolate from the Ivory Coast, paper clips from China, and cigarettes from India often are produced by slave labor. The same goods from other sources may be more expensive, but freedom is priceless. Consider having one of your characters learn and be troubled by this and make an informed decision to buy only goods from companies that respect human rights and freedoms.
- 4. Down on the farm...** A lot of slavery occurs within the United States and in other countries in the agricultural industry. Because labor oversight is lax or unavailable, laborers are often illegal immigrants, and sometimes are being forced to work as farmhands without compensation. You might show grassroots problems in your production - or show how it affects society higher up, as when a major fast food chain was recently boycotted for allegedly using slave labor to grow its products.
- 5. Consider having your characters unexpectedly encounter forced slave labor—either abroad or in the United States.** According to www.iabolish.com, an anti-slavery website, slavery occurs in every continent in the world except Antarctica. In addition to the U.S., other “hotspots” include: Albania, Brazil, Burma, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, India, the Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Pakistan, Sudan, Thailand and United Arab Emirates. In the U.S., the CIA estimates that 20,000 people are trafficked into the country each year as sex slaves, domestics, garment and agricultural slaves.
- 6. You might develop a story about an underage refugee from South Asia seeking asylum in the United States.** The American Anti-Slavery Group states that girls from this area of the world are “forced into prostitution by their own husbands, fathers, and brothers to earn money for the men in the family to pay back local money-lenders. Others are lured by offers of good jobs and then beaten and forced to work in brothels.” Such a storyline would offer an opportunity to present the human rights side of immigration laws. Also, one may take a look at the life-threatening dangers sex slaves face with the realities of sexually transmitted disease. Or you could portray how lack of access to medical care can cause awful consequences for domestics and agricultural laborers.
- 7. “Based on a true story...”** Consider using some of the true stories included in this publication (see callout boxes) to inspire fictionalized accounts of slavery in your own production. More personal stories of modern-day slavery can be found at www.eiconline.org.



- 8. Slaves are people, and can tell their own stories better than anyone.** Consider telling the story of a trafficked person from his or her own point of view, rather than the view of the outsider. You might show how a person's life had changed from childhood to entrapment into slavery to freedom. Check out www.iabolish.com for personal stories from former slaves.

Who Would Do This?

Slaveholders come from all walks of life. People you would never expect, perhaps even people in your own community, may be holding other human beings captive. Here are some examples of slaveholders from victim testimonials:

- Boston University graduate student and his wife
- Child welfare counselor
- Math teacher in Denver
- Ivy League asylum lawyer
- Foreign diplomats in the U.S., including UN, World Bank and IMF officials
- Maryland pastor



Beatrice¹⁷

Beatrice was recruited at age 13 to live with an American family, help with the housework, and attend school. Her parents, hoping she would have a better standard of living and education, agreed.

Upon arrival in the U.S., however, she found herself enslaved: locked in a suburban home, working up to 20 hours a day, and denied education. Regularly, she was forced to hold her hands above her head and kneel for long periods of time while being beaten. In 1998, after she was beaten for over an hour, her screams alarmed the neighbors. The police were called, and she was discovered. She had been held captive in the U.S. for nine years.

Beatrice is from Nigeria and was enslaved in New York by a child welfare worker and her husband.

By logging onto www.eiconline.org, you can find dozens of victim testimonials, including those featured in this *Spotlight* on . . .

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