NOT for Sale

The Return of the Global Slave Trade—and How We Can Fight It

David Batstone

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In order to protect the identity and ensure the safety of former slaves, and to prevent disruption of current legal proceedings, pseudonyms are used throughout this book, and locations are sometimes obscured.

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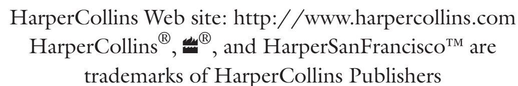

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To Wendy, Rusty, Ruth, Jade, Linda, and Loie
Your love surrounds me and your actions inspire me

"A little more matriarchy is what the world needs,
and I know it. Period. Paragraph."
—Dorothy Thompson

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Introduction

Finding Slavery in My Own Backyard

Defeating human trafficking is a
great moral calling of our time.

Condoleezza Rice,
U.S. Secretary of State

Twenty-seven million slaves exist in our world today.[1] Girls and boys, women and men of all ages are forced to toil in the rug loom sheds of Nepal, sell their bodies in the brothels of Rome, break rocks in the quarries of Pakistan, and fight wars in the jungles of Africa.

Go behind the facade in any major town or city in the world today and you are likely to find a thriving commerce in human beings. You may even find slavery in your own backyard.

For several years, my wife and I dined regularly at an Indian restaurant near our home in the San Francisco Bay Area. Unbeknownst to us, the staff at Pasand Madras Indian Cuisine who cooked our curries, delivered them to our table, and washed our dishes were slaves.

It took a tragic accident to expose the slave-trafficking ring. A young woman found her roommates, seventeen-year-old Chanti Prattipati and her fifteen-year-old sister Lalitha, unconscious in a

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Berkeley apartment. Carbon monoxide emitted from a blocked heating vent had poisoned them. The roommate called their landlord, Lakireddy Reddy, the owner of the Pasand restaurant where the girls worked. Reddy owned several restaurants and more than a thousand apartment units in northern California.

When Reddy arrived at the girls' apartment, he declined to take them to a hospital. Instead, he and a few friends carried the girls out of the apartment in a rolled up carpet and put them into a waiting van. When Reddy and his cronies tried to force the roommate into the van as well, she put up a fierce fight.

A local resident, Marcia Poole, happened to be passing by in her car at that moment and witnessed a bizarre scene: several men toting a sagging roll of carpet, with a human leg hanging out the side. She slowed down her car to take a closer look and was horrified to watch the men attempt to force a young girl into their van. Poole jumped out of her car and did everything in her power to stop the men. Unable to do so, she stopped another passing motorist and implored him to dial 911 and report a kidnapping in progress. The police arrived in time to arrest the abductors.

Chanti Prattipata never regained consciousness; she was pronounced dead at a local hospital. A subsequent investigation revealed that Reddy and several members of his family had used fake visas and false identities to traffic perhaps hundreds of adults and children into the United States from India. In many cases Reddy secured visas under the guise that the applicants were highly skilled technology professionals who would be placed in a software company. In fact, they ended up working as waiters, cooks, and dishwashers at the Pasand restaurant or at other businesses that Reddy owned. He forced the laborers to work long hours for minimal wages, money that they returned to him as rent to live in one of his apartments. Reddy threatened to turn them in to the authorities as illegal aliens if they tried to escape.

The Reddy case is not an anomaly. Nearly two hundred thousand people live enslaved at this moment in the United States, and an additional 17,500 new victims are trafficked across our borders each year.[2] Over thirty thousand more slaves are transported through the United States on their way to other international destinations. Attorneys from the U.S. Department of Justice have prosecuted slave-trade activity in ninety-one cities across the United States and in nearly every state of the nation.[3]

Like the slaves who came to America's shores two hundred years ago, today's slaves are not free to pursue their own destinies. They are coerced to perform work for the personal gain of those who subjugate them. If they try to escape the clutches of their masters, modern slaves risk personal violence or reprisals to their families.

Just how prominent a global crisis the slave trade has become was apparent when President George W. Bush took the podium before the United Nations General Assembly in September 2003. As expected, the president first addressed international concerns over the U.S. intervention in Iraq. As he neared the end of his speech, Bush shifted his attention to "another humanitarian crisis" of global proportions. "Each year 800,000 to 900,000 human beings are bought, sold, or forced across the world's borders," he said. "The trade in human beings for any purpose must not be allowed to thrive in our time." Bush went on to underscore how the slave trade targets vulnerable women and children and fuels a thriving organized crime syndicate that threatens global security.[4]

President Bush did not exaggerate the crisis. The commerce in human beings today rivals drug trafficking and the illegal arms trade for the top criminal activity on the planet. The slave trade sits at number three on the list but is closing the gap. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) projects that the slave trade generates $9.5 billion in revenue each year.[5] The International

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Labour Office (ILO) estimates that figure to be closer to a whopping $32 billion annually.[6] Whichever figure is closer to the mark, no one doubts that slave commerce is booming. "In terms of profits, it's on a path to overtake drugs and arms trafficking," says Barry Tang, an Immigration and Enforcement attaché with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.[7]

In recognition of the fact that human trafficking was spinning out of control, the U.S. Congress created a high-level position at the State Department specifically to combat the slave industry. President Bush appointed former congressman John Miller to the post in March 2003 and promptly lifted his position to the ambassador level.

The primary mission of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons is to motivate and support governments to address their own participation in the global slave trade. To that end, one of its most potent tools is a report card called the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, published annually since 2001 as mandated by the U.S. Congress.

No nation wants to be known as a haven for slaveholders and traffickers. Nonetheless, the 2006 TIP Report documents that over 150 countries around the globe function as a source, a destination, or a transit country for the slave trade; some countries serve as a base for all three activities.[8] The exhaustive research that the State Department conducts makes it clear that modern-day slavery plagues every country, including the United States. "This is one of the great moral struggles of our day," says Ambassador Miller. "We need to bring the same passion and commitment to this struggle that the abolitionists of this country brought to the struggle against slavery based upon color 160 years ago."[9]

Many people bristle to hear the word *slave* used to describe the modern practice of exploitation. Deeply engrained in the collective psyche of western culture is the notion that slavery ended in

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the nineteenth century. It is not unusual to read a newspaper account of "slavelike conditions" in a copper mine in, say, Bolivia. The laborers were kidnapped, coerced to work without pay, and prohibited from leaving the mine. So why would the writer refer to the laborers' condition as "slavelike"? Because the writer buys into the cultural myth that "real slavery" was vanquished long ago.

It certainly was a momentous day in 1833 when the British Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act, which gave freedom to all slaves held captive in the British Empire. Likewise, the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, passed in 1865 at the conclusion of the Civil War, left no ambiguity about the legal standing of slavery in America: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude … shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

The establishment of laws that criminalized the slave trade meant a major advancement in the cause for human freedom. Though slavery persisted for decades thereafter, legislation gave abolitionists an effective tool to hold slaveholders accountable for their inhumane activity. Abolition laws eventually spread to nearly every nation in the world.

In our own day, however, a thriving black market in human beings has emerged once again. It is a criminal enterprise involving both local scoundrels and sophisticated international syndicates. Corruption among law enforcement agents and government officials plays a key role in its success. And it's not limited to one specific region of the world—it respects no borders. Hence, modern slavery cannot be eliminated with a single stroke of the pen like Abraham Lincoln achieved when he signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

The European Union (EU), for example, cannot figure out how to stop the flood of 120,000 women and children trafficked each year into its member states. Most of these slaves are abducted

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in Africa or the beleaguered former republics of the Soviet Union and transported through porous borders. Ninety percent end up coerced into Europe's proliferating sex industry.[10]

As late as 2002, the UN human rights chief (and former president of Ireland) Mary Robinson admitted to "a tendency in Europe to consider trafficking as illegal immigration and penalize the women involved." Robinson lamented that the destination countries "tend to get off lightly on the matter of [sex] trafficking because it has been a sort of subterranean, invisible, criminal dominated … form of modern slavery."[11]

The European Ministers got serious about the slave trade in 2002 when they required all member states to implement the Palermo Protocol, a strong UN initiative that aims to nurture effective antitrafficking measures across borders. Most western European countries subsequently created ambitious community-education campaigns and poured resources into law enforcement aimed at traffickers. All the same, traffickers somehow managed to maintain a steady flow of new sex slaves into the region. As Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the "secretary of state" for the EU, admitted in March 2006, "Despite efforts to tackle this trade, the uncomfortable truth is that trafficking people is sometimes an even more profitable business than trafficking weapons."[12]

Indeed, more slaves are in bondage today than were bartered in four centuries of the transatlantic slave trade. Nowhere has its impact been felt more brutally than on children in the underdeveloped nations. Slaveholders prey on the defenseless, and children so easily become vulnerable.

Ten Million Children Exploited for Domestic Labor—this title for a 2004 UN study on the exploitation of children internationally hardly needs explaining. The UN's surveys found 700,000 children forced into domestic labor in Indonesia alone, with staggering numbers as well in Brazil (559,000), Pakistan

(264,000), Haiti (250,000), and Kenya (200,000). The UN report indicates that children remain in servitude for long stretches of time because no one identifies their enslavement: "These youngsters are usually 'invisible' to their communities, toiling for long hours with little or no pay and regularly deprived of the chance to play or go to school."[13]

That "invisible" tag often gets attached to descriptions of modern slavery. Just as I never suspected that my favorite restaurant had become a hub for a trafficking ring, slavery likely crosses our path on a regular basis without our awareness. We may pass a construction site and never think twice whether the laborers work of their own volition. Or we might drive along city streets at night, see young girls on a street corner peddling their bodies, and wonder how they could ever "choose" such a life.

That's the paradox: slavery is in reality not invisible. Except in rare circumstances, slaves toil in the public eye. The truth is we do not expect to find it in "respectable" settings. To learn that slaveholders press children into forced labor in the cacao plantations of the Ivory Coast may not surprise us. But we regard it as unthinkable that an otherwise upstanding citizen might be a slaveholder.

Kim Meston wishes that she had not been so invisible to her New England community. In a rural town near Worcester, Massachusetts, the minister of the local church used her as his domestic sex slave for five years without raising the slightest suspicion in the community.

Kim's parents were Tibetan exiles living in a refugee camp in southern India. When Kim was in her teens, her sister's husband introduced the family to a church minister visiting from the United States. The reverend offered to bring Kim to America where he would provide a formal education and opportunities for a better life. "He told my parents that he would treat me as his own daughter," Kim recounts.[14]

Her brother-in-law lobbied the family persuasively to let Kim go. He even offered to accompany her to Delhi, where he could help her secure a visa to travel to the United States. In the ultimate betrayal, the brother-in-law made his own financial arrangement with the minister to traffic Kim.

At the age of sixteen, Kim began a double life in America. Everything would have appeared normal to the casual observer—she attended the local high school, ran on the track team, and attended church on Sundays. The minister even had a wife and a stepdaughter living in his home. But behind closed doors, she became the household servant, doing nearly all the cooking, housecleaning, ironing, and even tending the church grounds. Moreover, the minister sexually abused Kim frequently over a five-year period.

The minister threatened to have Kim's Tibetan family back in India thrown into jail if Kim told her school friends a word about her treatment. So she suffered in silence, and no one in the community thought to ask how she might be faring. They simply assumed the best intentions of the minister and his family. "His deception was well constructed," notes Kim. "The minister was a pillar in the community, and I was viewed as the poor child from the third world who was the lucky beneficiary of his generosity."

Finally, at the age of twenty-one, Kim escaped her tormentor. She initially planned to run away and never turn back. Yet she received news from her family in India that the minister had trafficked two of her cousins into the United States to take her place inside his home. Kim mustered the courage to take her case to the local police. The minister was arrested, convicted, and sent to jail. Today Kim owns a retail store in the Boston area and volunteers her time to prevent more vulnerable women from falling into sexual exploitation and enslavement.

Elements of Kim's experience are disturbingly common in the modern slave trade. She was a young girl in a transient environ-

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ment (a refugee camp). A trafficker (the minister) conspired with someone close to the family (her sister's husband) to extract her from the community and take control of her life. She was trafficked to another country where she did not understand the culture or the laws, and her family would be harmed if she did not fully cooperate. The slaveholder used her sexually and exploited her labor. Once she escaped, the slaveholder went out and quickly found two more girls to replace her.

To write this book, I conducted hundreds of interviews with young girls from Cambodia, Thailand, Peru, India, Uganda, South Africa, and eastern Europe. I encountered this essential story line time and time again. Of those individuals extracted out of impoverished countries and trafficked across international borders, 80 percent are female and 50 percent are children.[15] They are taken to unfamiliar destinations where, in the absence of legal protections and family networks, they can be kept in slavery. The consistency of the story line in fact suggests overarching mechanisms of a global industry.

Like any other commercial market, the slave trade is driven by the dynamics of supply and demand. Criminal agents make handsome profits off unpaid labor: it is cheaper to produce goods or, in the case of sex slavery or domestic servitude, to offer valued human services. Due to these financial advantages, slaveholders can compete successfully in almost any market. The profit margins will rise as high as the demand will bear.

We may not even realize how each one of us drives the demand during the course of a normal day. Kevin Bales, a pioneer in the fight against modern slavery, expresses well those commercial connections: "Slaves in Pakistan may have made the shoes you are wearing and the carpet you stand on. Slaves in the Caribbean may have put sugar in your kitchen and toys in the hands of your children. In India they may have sewn the shirt on your back and polished the ring on your finger."[16]

To ensure a steady stream of recruits, slaveholders will rely on slave traders to fulfill their supply. The slave trader may be a recruiter or a trafficker; often individuals will play both roles. Their capacity to meet the demand for slaves only becomes a problem if one of two conditions comes into effect: there is a scarcity of new recruits, or engaging in illicit activity becomes a real risk. In most of the world today, neither condition presents itself as an obstacle. To the contrary, there exists a glut of potential recruits and a negligible threat of prosecution. Hence the slave trade grows at a rapid pace.

Widespread poverty and social inequality ensure a pool of recruits as deep as the ocean. Parents in desperate straits may sell their children or at least be susceptible to scams that will allow the slave trader to take control over the lives of their sons and daughters. Young women in vulnerable communities are more likely to take a risk on a job offer in a faraway location. The poor are apt to accept a loan that the slave trader can later manipulate to steal their freedom. All of these paths carry unsuspecting recruits into the supply chains of slavery.

"The supply side of the equation is particularly bleak," says Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas. "While there are one hundred thousand places in the developed world for refugee resettlement per year, 50 million refugees and displaced persons exist worldwide today. This ready reservoir of the stateless presents an opportunity rife for exploitation by human traffickers."[17]

During the era of the American plantation economy, the slaveholder considered slave ownership an investment. The supply of new recruits was limited. The cost of extracting and transporting slaves and ensuring that they would be serviceable by the time they reached their destination was considerable. Though the slave owner usually treated the slave like a beast, it would be equal to the treatment of a prized bull. The slave owner aimed to extract

the value of his investment over the course of the slave's lifetime. Proof of legal ownership therefore served an important purpose.

In the modern slave trade, the glut of slaves and the capacity to move them great distances in a relatively short period of time drastically alters the economics of slave ownership. As relative costs plummet, slaves cease to be a long-term investment. The fact that slave ownership is almost universally illegal today is of little consequence. The owner need not be too concerned about maintaining the health of the slave. Kevin Bales's description of modern slaves as "disposable people" profoundly fits: just like used batteries, once the slave exhausts his or her usefulness, another can be procured at no great expense.[18]

Notwithstanding these emerging trends in global markets, traditional modes of slavery also persist. Bonded labor has existed for centuries and continues to be the most common form of slavery in the world today. In a typical scenario, an individual falls under the control of a wealthy patron after taking a small loan. The patron adds egregious rates of interest and inflated expenses to the original principle so that the laborer finds it impossible to repay. Debt slaves may spend their entire life in service to a single slaveholder, and their "obligation" may be passed on to their children. Of the 27 million people worldwide held captive and exploited for profit today, the Free the Slaves organization estimates that at least 15 million are bonded slaves in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal.[19]

The tale of Bonda, a slave I met during my travels in South Asia, graphically illustrates the plight of a bonded laborer. The owner of a rice mill used small loans to enslave Bonda's entire village. The villagers labored eighteen hours daily and were banned from passing beyond the walls of the rice mill without supervision. After years of relentless oppression, Bonda's wife broke down one day and killed herself. Disconsolate over his

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loss, Bonda threw caution to the wind. He found a gate in the rice mill left open one day, and he bolted.

The owner did not treat insubordination lightly. He sent bounty hunters after Bonda and they captured him without much trouble. Once they brought Bonda back to the rice mill, the owner gathered all the slaves into an assembly in the center of the compound. For their edification, he used a cane to beat Bonda within an inch of his life. The owner then chained the unconscious man to a wall in the slaves' living quarters. And that became his bed for the rest of his days at the rice mill. He did his daily chores and then was ushered back to his chains.

Bonda's tale, I am pleased to report, ends on a happy note. An abolitionist agency called International Justice Mission (IJM) instigated a raid on the rice mill and emancipated Bonda along with his entire village. Local police arrested the owner and put him on trial for his crimes. In this book I detail how IJM's fearless team of criminal investigators and lawyers works with local law enforcement agencies to rescue slaves from dire situations around the world. Their relentless pursuit of justice on behalf of the innocent, despite considerable personal risk and sacrifice, inspired me beyond words.

That, in fact, was the unexpected surprise of my journey to monitor the rise of modern global slavery. I had steeled myself emotionally to end up in the depths of depression and despair. To be honest, I made some unpleasant stops in my journey. The day I went undercover to investigate a brothel in Phnom Pehn, for instance, broke my heart. A brothel owner invited me to take my pick of any one of the thirteen-year-old girls that crowded the sofas in front of me. A few extra bucks and I could have two of them for the night, he offered. I could not bear to think of these little girls passing through this ritual a dozen times each night.

But my journey did not end at the station of despair. The prime reason: I met a heroic ensemble of abolitionists who

simply refuse to relent. I felt like I had gone back in time and had the great privilege of sharing a meal with a Harriet Tubman or a William Wilberforce or a Frederick Douglass. Like the abolitionists of old, these modern heroes do not expend their energy handicapping the odds stacked against the antislavery movement. They simply refuse to accept a world where one individual can be held as the property of another.

Kru Nam is one of those abolitionists who operates on the front lines in the fight against sex slavery. A painter with a university degree in art, she decided to use her natural gifts to bring healing. She launched a project to reach street kids in Chiang Mai, the second largest town in northern Thailand. Once she turned the kids loose with paintbrushes, they created a series of disturbing images that added up to a horror story.

Kru Nam soon realized that most of the kids did not come from Thailand. Most came from Burma, with a sprinkling of Laotians, Vietnamese, and Cambodians tossed in the mix. Through their painting they could tell her how they had arrived on the streets of Chiang Mai.

The Burmese boys spoke of a well-dressed Thai gentleman who had visited their village in the south of Burma. Accompanying him was a fourteen-year-old Burmese boy who wore fine-tailored clothes and spoke Thai fluently. The man explained to parents that he was offering scholarships for young boys to attend school back in Thailand. He would pay their school fees and cover their living expenses. "Look how well this child from your region is doing," he said, pointing to his young companion. "If you let me take your son back to Chiang Mai, I will do the same for him."

Though the tribal people of Burma are reluctant to part with young girls, they give more license for sons to travel afar in search of a livelihood. Many families therefore agreed to let their sons go with the Thai man. Once they reached Chiang Mai, the

Thai man immediately sold them to owners of sex bars and brothels.

The boys living on the streets were the lucky ones; they had escaped. They told Kru Nam that many more boys remained captive in the sex bars. Her blood boiled. She could not stand by and do nothing.

Kru Nam did not exactly have a plan when she marched into the sex bar for her first raid. Only her mission was clear: rescue as many of the young boys as she could find. The street kids had informed her that the owner held captive a dozen boys between the ages of ten and thirteen. He forced the boys to have sex with paying clients.

Kru Nam did not even attempt to negotiate with the owner; she knew better than to waste her time. But to her disappointment, only six boys sat at tables entertaining the male customers. The other boys were out on "dates" with the johns.

She had no need for histrionics. One by one she approached a table where a boy sat and calmly said, "Let's go. I'm taking you out of here." Several moments later, she was leading six little boys out the door and to her safe house in Chiang Mai.

Though Kru Nam made several more impromptu raids on sex bars, she eventually had to tread with more caution. Owners put the word out that they would kill her if she walked into their bars.

Deploying a fresh strategy, she organized street teams to scourge the night market of Chiang Mai and connect with young children who just got off the bus from the northern Thai-Burmese border. Recruiters for the sex bars also trolled the streets on the hunt for vulnerable kids. It became a life-and-death contest to find them first.

One day it struck Kru Nam that if she moved upstream before the kids hit Chiang Mai she would have an edge over the recruiters. So she moved about forty miles north to the border town of

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Mae Sai, a major thoroughfare for foot traffic between Burma and Thailand.

In Mae Sai she set up a shelter to take in kids on the run. Nearly sixty boys and girls today find safe refuge each night in Kru Nam's shelter. She has had to move her safe house several times. Neighbors on each occasion have forced her out; they do not want "these dirty kids" living on their block. So Kru Nam purchased a block of land some fifteen miles outside of Mae Sai in the region of the Golden Triangle where the borders of Laos, Burma, and Thailand intersect. She does not have the money she needs to build a proper residence, so for the time being Kru Nam and the children will live on the land in temporary shelters.

Kru Nam is irrepressible. She does not have a large organization standing behind her; a skeletal staff of three assists her, and she receives modest funding from a tiny nongovernmental agency based in Thailand. What she does have is a burning passion to rescue young boys and girls so that they do not fall into the treacherous control of slaveholders.

Kru Nam does not know Lucy Borja, who rescues girls and boys forced into the brothels of Lima, Peru, nor has she met Padre Cesare Lo Deserto, who steals trafficked girls away from the mafiosi of eastern Europe. But she shares a special calling with these characters whose stories are featured in this book. Not one of them went out looking for slavery. Each simply reached out a compassionate hand to a refugee in need or a homeless street child, and it exposed him or her to the ugly undercurrent of human trafficking. Their passage from a single act of kindness to fighting for justice on a grander scale is the quintessential story of the abolitionist.

This book aims to be a handbook for the modern-day abolitionist. As such, it does not pretend to be an exhaustive study of global slavery in the twenty-first century. Rather, it follows the trail of a select group of extraordinary abolitionists into their

respective settings. We get a feel for the people around them who have fallen into captivity. We delve into the historical antecedents and social forces that frame their time and place. We learn how the slave traders they resist use power and violence to exploit the weak. And we gain an insight into the specific strategies these abolitionists deploy to bring about emancipation for the captives.

These stories make it clear that modern-day abolitionists are not cut from the same mold. The women who embrace the child soldiers of Uganda move in a different universe from those abolitionists in Los Angeles who confront forced labor in garment factories. A Swiss-born entrepreneur launches business enterprises for ex-sex slaves in Cambodia, while an American-born lawyer uses the public justice system to free entire villages in South Asia. Some abolitionists rely on their faith in God, while a dedication to love and justice inspires others.

Despite their unique bearings, these abolitionists do share a common sense of their moment in history. They recognize that human freedom stands poised at a crucial crossroads in our time. Powerful forces aim to turn human beings into commodities that can be bought and sold like any other piece of property. To declare "not for sale" affirms that every individual has the inalienable right to be free, to pursue a God-given destiny.

To inspire others to join their movement is my overriding purpose for writing this book. The abolitionists featured herein are truly extraordinary, but they cannot win the fight alone. They are overwhelmed and beleaguered. Although Kru Nam is brave and resourceful, she cannot single-handedly stop sex trafficking in Thailand. The size and scope of her project is about the norm for abolitionist organizations. They sorely need reinforcements, a new wave of abolitionists, to join them in the struggle.

My students at the University of San Francisco often remark that they feel as if they were born in the wrong era, after all the

important issues of history have been decided. It's as if they were born in 1975 in Liverpool with a burning desire for pop music. They have a real passion for a craft, but it's already been done.

They could not be more wrong. We have arrived at a momentous stage in the struggle for human freedom. The curtain has gone up, and the future waits for what unfolds.

All of us wonder how we would have acted in the epic struggles of human history. Would we have stood up and been counted among the courageous and the just?

How would we have responded in 1942 when Nazi soldiers came to our door in pursuit of our Jewish neighbors? Would we have been the collaborator who reveals to the soldiers where the Jews on our block might be found? Or would we have played the role of the spectator who pleads ignorance, minding our own business and watching the drama unfold from our front room window? Or might we have dared to act as an advocate, giving our neighbors shelter in our attic or helping them escape across the border? Would we have stood up and been counted among the just?

Imagine we lived in rural Tennessee in 1855 and Harriet Tubman came to our door. "We are smuggling fugitive slaves across an underground railroad, and we need safe houses where they can receive shelter, food, and rest," she might have said, bringing us to our moment of truth. "Contacts in the network say that you might be willing to open your home as a way station. Will you help us?" If Harriet Tubman had come calling, would we have stood up and been counted among the just?

Or what if we were in the company of Jesuits who established a mission in the New World in 1624? The Spanish slave traders warn us to dismantle our mission where the natives work and keep their tribal structure intact. "We control this territory," they would have said, "and you are undermining our lucrative trade in natives. End the missions now, or we will shut them down our

own way." Would we have stood up and been counted among the just?

There are times to read history, and there are times to make history. We live right now at one of those epic moments in the fight for human freedom. We no longer have to wonder how we might respond to our moment of truth. It is we who are on the stage, and we can change the winds of history with our actions. Future generations will look back and judge our choices and be inspired or disappointed.

A bit overdramatic, you might think. I do not know any other way to express the urgency of rescuing 1 million children whom UNICEF estimates are forced today to sell their bodies to sexual exploiters. In a single country, Uganda, nearly forty thousand children have been kidnapped and violently turned into child soldiers or sex slaves. In South Asia each day, millions of children are forced to crush rocks in a quarry or roll cigarettes in a factory. The destinies of children around the globe hang in the balance, and they are powerless to break free.

As Edmund Burke presented the challenge so eloquently two centuries ago, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men [and women] do nothing."