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The Slave Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery in America Today

Carnegie New Leaders Program (CNL)

Kevin Bales, **Ron Soodalter**, **Devin T. Stewart**

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The Slave Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery in America Today by Kevin Bales and Ron Soodalter

Introduction

DEVIN STEWART: I'm Devin Stewart from the Carnegie Council. Many of you know me. Welcome to the Carnegie New Leaders Program. It's great to have you all here on this wet summer day. It's like New York City has become a rainforest. I guess that's because of climate change. I'm not sure. But it's an interesting climate these days.

Related Resources:
The Slave Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery in America Today (Audio)

Today we are talking about *The Slave Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery in America Today*.

I want to talk just briefly about *The Slave Next Door* and turn it over to the two authors, Kevin Bales and Ron Soodalter.

This book resembles a horror movie, except it's real. I don't want to get too choked up about it, but it's just incredible. Twenty-seven million people are in bondage globally. Between 14,000 and 17,500 people a year are trafficked into the United States, and only 1 percent of these cases are solved, at best.

From your morning orange juice to your cell phone call to your evening at the restaurant, all these things can be tainted by slavery. Ever since I read this book, I have looked at everything in the global economy differently. Everything can be tainted.

I'm going to turn it over to the authors. Kevin Bales is president of Free the Slaves. Ron Soodalter is a writer and respected historian—and a folklorist, I believe, one of the more colorful elements of your biography.

I don't think they are going to go too much into the tear-jerking aspect of this. But they might. Ron said he is going to try to get into the big picture. I don't want to plug this too much, but it's hard to plug it enough. It really is written in a narrative, flowing, captivating way, where you start to read it and you get sucked into this world. It's a world that is, as I said, like a horror movie, except it's happening right next door. That's the whole point. It's the scariest and most terrifying and horrible type of horror movie, in the sense that it's real and it's right next door.

The very first stories, on the level of detail and then bringing it into the policy, the business, the global trends, and the law enforcement aspects—it's just incredibly well done.

Thank you so much, Ron and Kevin, for being here. We have been looking forward to this talk for a long time. I'm going to just turn it over to you.

Remarks

RON SOODALTER: Thank you all for coming. It's a rotten day to have to do it,

but we are delighted you did.
Last month, a man was arrested for both labor and sex trafficking. He had allegedly kept two young women in his house under threat of violence, forcing them to work for free and to perform sexual acts. He had advertised on a Web site for au pairs, although he has no children, and he hired these two women, one from Hungary and one from Brazil, under false pretenses. He promised them an honest job at fair pay.

It turns out it wasn't the first time he had done this. Local police suspect that he had been sexually enslaving and abusing foreign-born women for a good seven years.

This man is not a pimp or a trafficker from a dicey urban neighborhood. He's a 65-year-old published author who lives in the very affluent small northern Westchester community of Pound Ridge. The neighbors were stunned. One of them said, "I can't believe he has done anything wrong."

Another, who described him as very rich, said, "This blows my mind, because he has a really beautiful young wife."

American humorist Will Rogers once said, "It ain't that we're so dumb; it's just that what we know ain't so."

We as Americans know that the South kept slaves and the North fought a righteous war of liberation. We know that the Emancipation Proclamation freed all the slaves. We know that there was no legal slave trade up until the Civil War. We know that America has been slavery-free since 1865. These things we know. None of it is true.

On the other hand, most Americans do not know that slavery not only exists in the world today, it flourishes. As Devin said just a few minutes ago, there are some 27 million people estimated to be in slavery in the world today, which is twice the number that were taken in chains during the entire 350 years of the Atlantic slave trade—more than twice the number. Slavery is a high-income criminal enterprise. It's right up there with drugs and with guns. It's responsible for billions and billions of dollars in revenues worldwide every year.

You will say, "Well, it's all those emerging nations," what we used to call Third World countries. You would be partially right. But it's also civilized nations, such as England, Scotland, Ireland, Greece, Italy, France, Spain, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Israel, Japan, China, and the United States. Most Americans do not know that slavery is alive and more than well, thriving right here, in the dark, and practiced in forms and in places we would least expect.

The simple truth of it is, guys, that Americans have kept slaves, Europeans have kept slaves, humans have kept slaves as long as we were able. We as Americans see ourselves as the world's foremost messengers and practitioners of personal freedom, whereas in point of fact there has never been one single day on this continent since its European discovery where slavery has not existed. That's from the day in 1493, when Columbus enslaved hundreds of Taino Indians, right up to the present moment, there has been slavery on the American continent.

Slavery in America may have hit its lowest ebb in the 1960s, due largely to the civil rights movement. But starting in the 1980s and then burgeoning in the 1990s, slavery exploded and came back with a vengeance. This was largely due to the fact that at the end of the Cold War the global population more than tripled, from 2 billion to over 6 billion people. As borders collapsed around the world and people found themselves disenfranchised and struggling for survival, they became easy targets for human traffickers. And once again, America became a prime destination.

Most Americans' concept of slavery comes right out of the pages of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—the whip in the overseer's hand, the chains, the crack of the auctioneer's gavel. That was one form of slavery. The forms of slavery that afflict America today take different iterations. But please be assured, it is slavery, for sure. It's the real deal.

There are differences. Back in the 1800s slavery was legal; today it is not. In

the antebellum South, slave owners were proud of their property, of their human property, as a sign of status and prestige. Today slaves are hidden, which makes it all the harder to locate the victims and to punish the traffickers. At one point in our history, slaves were African or African-American. Today slaves come in all ethnicities, all races, all types. We are, if anything, totally democratic in the ways in which we enslave our fellow man.

This is, for want of a better term, capitalism at its absolute worst. Before the Civil War, buying a slave was an expensive proposition. It could cost as much as $1,200, which in today's currency is somewhere around $40,000 to $50,000.

When you buy property of such worth, you keep it, for longevity and productivity purposes, as well and healthy as you can. We're not talking humanitarianism or kindness; we're talking simple, basic economics here. You would no more damage property of such worth than you would cripple a good plow horse or neuter a seed bull.

Nowadays, you can buy a slave for as little as $100. This makes the victim not only affordable, but also disposable. Should a slave become ill or injured, it's often cheaper and also less likely to arouse suspicion for the slave owner to simply jettison his human property rather than pay the money for services or health care.

All forms of slavery are terrible. This, I think, nobody will argue with. However, today's slavery has taken forms that are so much more insidious than many forms over the thousands of years in which man has been enslaving his fellows, especially when you consider that modern-day slavery does not exist without what we call a bundle of other crimes, which include document fraud, assault, rape, torture, and sometimes homicide, to name just a handful.

So how many slaves are we actually talking about? As Devin said, the State Department estimates that somewhere around 17,000 foreign nationals are trafficked into this country, from at least 35 other countries, every year and enslaved here.

Some victims are smuggled across the Mexican or Canadian borders. Others are trafficked through our major airports daily, carrying either real or forged papers. They almost overwhelmingly come in the hope of a better life, of opportunity here. This is, after all, America.

They come in the hope of making a decent living, perhaps of supporting or sending for their families. They fork over their life savings, and they go into debt to people who make them promises which they have absolutely no intention of keeping. So when they arrive here, rather than opportunity, they find slavery.

These people can be found—or, more accurately, not found—in all 50 states, working as farmhands, laborers, sweatshop and factory workers, construction workers, gardeners, restaurant laborers, victims of sexual exploitation. They do not represent a class of poorly paid employees working at a job they might not enjoy. These people exist solely to work. They are unable to leave. They are kept under the threat and the reality of both physical and psychological violence. By definition, they are slaves. Today we might refer to "human trafficking," but make no mistake, it is the slave trade.

Nor are native-born Americans immune from traffickers. Many are sold or enticed from the streets of their own cities and towns.

Our own government estimates in the hundreds of thousands the number of U.S. citizens, primarily children and adolescents, who are at risk of being caught in slavery on a yearly basis, primarily in sexual coercion.

The U.S. government, when it actually addresses the subject of human trafficking, tends to focus primarily, if not exclusively, on the area of sexual exploitation. More sensational than the other forms of slavery, its victims are subjected to serial rape, physical injuries, psychological damage, and constant exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. But terrible as forced prostitution is, there are many other forms of slavery thriving right under our noses. And if you don't recognize them, you are not alone; neither do most of

our law officers nor our public officials.

The plight of enslaved domestics factors large in the number of people enslaved in America. You may recall the case last year of a wealthy couple on Long Island that had enslaved two Indonesian women for a period of five years. It's almost unquestionable that these women would still be living in slavery had one of them not been found wandering around wrapped in a cloth.

Agricultural slavery is another major area of trafficking in the United States. There are an unknown number of victims of forced labor growing and harvesting our fruit and our vegetables. They come here looking for a decent wage and, instead, find themselves enslaved by crime families or syndicates and sometimes, inadvertently, by our own government.

When Kevin and I were researching this book, we were, I think "stunned" would be the appropriate word, to find the many and varied ways in which traffickers practice their trade and make their living. This is an innovative group of people. They will take their opportunities where they can.

The three basic areas of trafficking—the big ones—are agricultural slavery, domestic servitude, and sexual coercion. No question. But there are cases of slavery in the United States that would absolutely boggle your mind. Within the past few years, there was a case of 12 Chinese acrobats enslaved in Las Vegas. There was a case of an African boys' choir enslaved in Texas by a minister of the church. There was a case of dozens of deaf or hearing-impaired Mexicans enslaved and forced to sell trinkets, 100 a day at $1 apiece, on the street corners and in the subways of New York City and Chicago.

We do not yet know how the current administration is going to be addressing the human trafficking issue. They are saying all the right things. I think Kevin and I can both agree that we are more hopeful at this point in time than we have been for the last—just pulling a number out of the air—eight years.

We can say, however, that the response under the Bush Administration was inadequate on any number of levels. In giving a speech on trafficking, former President Bush stated, "We're beginning to make good, substantial progress. The message is getting out: We're serious. When we catch you, you'll find out we're serious. We're staying on the hunt." Strong words. (At least he didn't say, "Mission accomplished.")

But the unvarnished truth is, the government's performance and their success rate in freeing slaves and punishing traffickers is dismal. The year in which Bush gave this speech saw somewhere in the neighborhood of 100 convictions for human trafficking and slavery nationwide. Meanwhile, the flow of human product into America continues practically unchecked.

Captain Bales?

KEVIN BALES: I think one thing that Ron didn't necessarily make absolutely clear, though everything else was perfect, was the definition. You touched on the areas, but I saw a couple of people thinking—I could almost read your minds—how are they defining this?

It's actually very simple. Slavery, we define, as well as a lot of other people define, is when one person completely controls another person. They use violence to maintain that control. They use that control for economic exploitation. That's the fundamental core.

In fact, if you look across all of human history and you strip away the packaging that comes with different cultures or legal systems or religious systems or whatever and you say, "What is the absolute heart of the relationship between a slave and a slave holder, a master?"—again, taking away whatever the packaging and rationalization might be, which might be racialist or ethnic or religious or whatever—you take away that packaging and you discover that it's one person that is under the complete control of another person. They use violence to maintain the control, and they use that control for economic exploitation.

It's important to analyze that relationship and to look at it at its center. Otherwise, it can be very distracting. It's certainly the case in the United

States that most Americans—and I appreciate that not everybody here is American—have this very fixed notion in their minds of antebellum slavery, and they think that's what our story is about.

But, of course, slavery has existed since the very first beginnings of human history. In fact, the very first records of history, the cuneiform clay tablets of ancient Sumer, the very first records of human beings, include records of slavery—in fact, fairly extensive records of slavery. So we know that slavery is, in fact, prehistoric, in the sense that it's right there when history begins, and, in fact, it's fairly elaborated when history begins. It's also pre-monetary. It existed before the invention of money.

It's also pre-legal. It existed before any written statutes were recorded. You can also see this so easily in the Code of Hammurabi, that first written statute, because something like 20 percent of the Code of Hammurabi, that first written statute, concerns a fairly elaborated and sophisticated slave code about what people can do with their slaves and what people can do to slaves.

So pre-legal, pre-monetary, and prehistoric. It has been with us ever such a long time. And in that time, within every culture and society in which it has manifested itself, it has taken different kinds of shapes, different kinds of packaging, but the core has been about that complete violent control and exploitation.

So that's how we are defining slavery. If you go to federal law, you will have one that leans in the direction of sexual exploitation because of the way the law was written in 2000. If you go to UN codes and conventions, you get another slight alteration of that definition. There are more than 300 treaties that have been written since the late 18th century that define slavery, each in a slightly different way.

So we decided—and I certainly thought—that you can't just rely on a particular convention or law when, in fact, you are trying to describe the relationship between two people, once you get right to the heart of it.

So that's what the definition is about. Certainly what we are describing is not sweatshop work. It's not people with lousy jobs or bad marriages or people who can't stop eating chocolate or whatever it is. They are people who meet that definition of complete violent control. One of the rules of thumb that you use when you confront people in that situation is to say: Can this person walk away? Can this person walk away even into a worse situation? Can they choose to walk away and starve in the gutter?

While we don't necessarily relish this in our own thinking about our own lives, we don't sit around and say, "Isn't it fantastic that in our freedom and our free will we can screw our lives up completely?" But, in fact, that's the difference. One of the key differences between us and a person in slavery is that we can actually choose to make our lives worse. The person in slavery can't choose to make their life better or worse. They can't make any choices about it.

I want to develop a little bit more something that Ron touched on about slavery and the products we buy. People in the rich North often define themselves as consumers. We often think that we have this role in our lives as consumers.

There are a couple of interesting paradoxes, a couple of interesting challenges about the way the economics of slavery works today. I'm going to touch on a different one, besides the products. But the thing that is interesting about the products is that today there are no large-scale economic vested interests in slavery.

Even when you talk about the criminal organizations that are involved in sexual exploitation of children, when you compare those to, say, the cotton industry of the 19th century, the sugar industry of the 18th century, it's not the same at all.

In fact, economic historians, of which I'm one, have said that if you look back to the slave industry of the late 18th century, we are talking about an industry that, in both its product and also just the buying and selling of slaves, was the equivalent of the global automotive industry of today. So when the original

abolitionists took on the slave industry, they were taking on something that was as if I said to us, "All right, we're all sitting around the same table. Let's begin to plot the end of the global automotive industry tonight." You would think I was nuts to say that.

RON SOODALTER: Fortunately, you didn't have to.

KEVIN BALES: Right, they are doing it themselves. They are committing suicide.

But I guess I'm thinking of that, because the original antislavery movement began in—last month was the 223rd anniversary, when 12 people sat around a table like this, in a room not unlike this—it was in a bookstore in London—and began to plot the end of that global industry. That was the beginning of the organization that became Anti-Slavery International, which is also Free the Slaves in the United States and so forth.

It's kind of exciting to me to think about the fact that recent college graduates were in that group, and here we are, young professionals, sitting around a table and thinking about slavery.

But let me go back. I digressed immediately. That was good. I gave you one sentence of where I was going and I immediately digressed. But I want to talk about the economics of the products.

The interesting challenge is the fact that that economic enormous vested interest doesn't exist. If we were able to end slavery instantaneously, tomorrow, no industry, no economy would fail. There would be criminals who would be extremely discomfited, but no national economy and no industry would collapse.

Leaving aside the commercial exploitation of people, in the sense of sexual exploitation, in terms of the products that we use, there are very few of the steel, coltan in our cell phones and laptops, the sugar, coffee, cocoa in our chocolate, the cotton that we are wearing, the gold on our fingers and in our necklaces—there's a very long list of these products that are touched by slavery. But "touched" is the right word. It's hard to find any of these that have more than 2 or 3 percent slave input.

That's also one of the reasons why many of the groups who discover the idea that there is, in fact, slavery in their chocolate or slavery in their cotton and so forth do what you might do—and certainly what I did when I first confronted the issue, in the first ten minutes—and think, we have to mount a boycott; the right way to go forward on this is to mount a boycott. But, of course, the facts are that when only 10 percent or 2 percent of a commodity is, in fact, represented by slave labor, boycotts tend to clobber the honest, legal farmers more than the criminals. They also threaten national economies.

There is a boycott campaign growing at the moment against Uzbek cotton, where the government of Uzbekistan is using its high-schoolers basically as a population of forced laborers to bring in their cotton crop by hand without pay. There is no choice in this. It's forced labor, according to the ILO [International Labour Organization] definition of forced labor.

But the fact is that a boycott of Uzbek cotton, which is their key and almost sole export, would leave children hungry, almost certainly, and possibly to the point of extreme deprivation.

So we have to be very careful about how we think that through and how we think through the fact that while there has certainly been a desire to somehow find a moral watershed along the product chain—and normally that moral watershed in this country tends to exist just at the point at which the consumer reaches the shop.

In other words, the person who uses slavery to grow cocoa is guilty and the shippers are guilty and the processors are guilty and the wholesalers are guilty and the chocolate company is guilty and even the retailer is probably guilty, but, son of a gun, as soon as I pick up that Snickers bar, it becomes pure as the driven snow, because I'm not guilty, because I'm righteous. I don't want slavery in my chocolate.

I personally, strongly believe that there is no moral watershed along that product chain, except the one that separates the guilty slave holder from everyone else. I think there is a culpability there, and after that watershed, there is responsibility, but not guilt, and that responsibility falls on everybody along the product chain, whether they are a shipper or a grower or a wholesaler or a commodities dealer or a retailer or a processor or us, as the ultimate last link in that product chain.

It's an interesting one in the United States, because it really does permeate our economy. It's almost everywhere. It can be things like the rug right down on the floor here. I don't actually think that's slave-made, but I couldn't be certain. I would have to look at the back of it and count the knots and that kind of thing. But it's all up and down our economy.

The other thing that I want to open up for just a moment is in the policy direction, and that is to help illustrate this with an example of the kind of bizarre policy contrast that occurs with this crime compared to the other major crimes in the United States—and remembering that we have had laws against slavery in the Constitution since 1865 and so forth. But there were even laws before that in the United States about the slave trade and, in some states, about slavery.

Whatever the case, it's worth drawing a parallel between this kind of interesting statistical coincidence that is occurring at the moment, which is that, as Ron said—and, Devin, I think you said it as well—about 17,000 people, according to State Department and CIA research, are trafficked into the United States each year. If those numbers are correct—and there are some reasons to think that they might be sort of correct, sort of, maybe—think of it like this: 17,000 new slaves arriving in the country each year, to put it another way, means 17,000 enslavement crimes occurring each year.

The interesting coincidence is that—I don't know if you know—the murder rate in the United States is about 17,000 murders per year. So we have almost exactly the same number of newly enslaved people each year as we do being murdered each year.

RON SOODALTER: Foreign nationals.

KEVIN BALES: Foreign nationals, yes, coming in from the outside. If you take those two crimes and you hold them up next to each other, the difference becomes pretty telling.

We have about 20,000 police departments in the United States. Every police department in the United States has a homicide specialist. In fact, some of the police departments have entire departments or squads devoted to homicide. They have to, because otherwise they wouldn't have television programs in the evening, since they are all about homicide detectives and so forth.

The point is that if you add up all the homicide specialists in the United States just at the local police department level, you get to something like 60,000 to 70,000 people—60,000 to 70,000 highly trained homicide specialists for the 17,000 murders.

The federal government, through its law enforcement education authority and acts and so forth, pumps training into those specialists, pumps training into individual low-level police officers on how to react when they reach a homicide, how to collect the evidence, how the procedure is run, and so forth. It's a very well-researched, studied, and trained crime.

Not surprisingly, the clear-up rate, which means resolution to the crime—it doesn't mean prosecution leading to a conviction; it just means some kind of resolution—is over 70 percent for homicides. Of course, this is also a crime where perpetrators try very hard to avoid detection. But it's still up over 70 percent. Of course, in some parts of the country it's much higher: it reaches 85 or 90 percent.

Federal and local monies—state monies as well—you roll them together for what the spending is on homicide, and it comes to something like $4.5 billion or $5 billion per annum.

Now we have this crime called slavery. It's not murder. It can often lead to murder. It includes rape and torture and a whole lot of other serious crimes. It's a bundle of crimes. But I don't think anybody is going to say this one is down there with jaywalking. This is slavery. This is very serious.

How many specialists do we have in the United States at local law enforcement? Do you have an idea?

PARTICIPANT: Zero.

KEVIN BALES: We're above zero. The good news is, we are above zero now.

The man who has just been appointed to be the head of the trafficking office in the State Department, when I asked him this question about five years ago, said, "Well, Kev, I know, and it's my job to know"—because he was the head of trafficking in the Justice Department at that time—"I know five." Now we think it's over 40, and it might even be up to 100.

But whether it's five or 40 or 100, the idea that 17,000 new slave victims a year are being addressed by 40 or 100 specialists is nuts.

RON SOODALTER: And that's not even counting the American victims.

KEVIN BALES: And that's not even counting the American victims. Then you look at the comparison of how much is spent, and if you are very generous and roll everything together about what has been spent in the United States, it doesn't come to more than about $150 million per year, as opposed to the billions that go to homicide.

RON SOODALTER: Two years ago, the government allocated $300,000 for fighting trafficking in the United States. That same year, Texas alone spent $1.5 billion on its prison system. That gives you an idea of perspective there.

KEVIN BALES: One of the things that leads me to is the absurdity of my job, the absolute absurdity of my job, in many ways. If you were at home—I guess this doesn't happen in Manhattan; people don't knock on your door to collect money for a charity—out in suburban America, people will knock on the door and say, "We're collecting for the United Way," or the Red Cross or something like that, and people say, "Sure." But if someone came to the door and said, "We're collecting against murder," people would say, "What are you talking about? That's what the police do. That's what the government does."

Yet part of my job is literally standing on people's doorsteps and saying, "We're collecting for slavery." The absurdity of that, in a country that's supposed to be enforcing its own laws—it's just nuts.

I go through that lengthy explanation, because otherwise we kind of lose sight of how sharp that contrast is. The clear-up rate for murder, I said, is over 70 percent.

The clear-up rate, as best we can calculate it, for slavery in this country is less than 1 percent, and I would put it at about four-tenths to one-half of 1 percent.

Again, flip that and imagine what would happen if you picked up *Newsweek* magazine or *Time* magazine and the cover story said, "Amazing News: The Clear-up Rate for Murder Has Reached 1 Percent." We would assume it's anarchy out there, that they couldn't even solve 1 percent of murders. But that's precisely the situation that we are in now.

The last thing I want to say is this. There is actually some good news on this. The good news is that while we have that absurd set of contradictions within the situation in the United States, if we step back and take the global view, yes, 27 million people in slavery is a lot of people and the $40 billion to $50 billion that they generate into the global economy is a lot of money.

But the 27 million in slavery today is, in fact, the smallest fraction of the global population to ever be in slavery, by a very significant margin, and the $40 billion to $50 billion that they generate into the global economy is by far the smallest percentage of the global economy to ever be represented by slave output. We are talking about tiny, tiny fractions. Not even a drop in the global ocean of the economy does it really represent.

The fact is that globally—and, really, in the United States, in many ways—the reality of this thing called slavery, while growing in the last 50 years, has also been pushed to a very marginal position on the criminal fringes of the societies that we live in. It's no longer legitimate, supported by churches, by governments, or anything. It is actually pushed right up to the edge of oppressiveness, of its own extinction, if we choose to devote the resources to giving it the boot and pushing it over the edge.

In our organization, we spend a lot of time working very carefully to determine what it would cost, what it would take to actually take us to that stage, not where we are just trying to help victims, but where the crime itself can be absolutely eradicated, where we can treat slavery like smallpox, not least because it is that marginalized within the global population.

We have discovered that one of the seeming paradoxes of this is that the collapse in the price of human beings, which in large part is due to a vast oversupply of potentially "enslavable" people—the glut on the market—has also created a situation in which the work necessary to bring people out of slavery has reached very low levels of cost.

Globally, but not in the United States, the cost of bringing someone out of slavery and helping them through a process of rehabilitation and reintegration averages around $400 to $500. That's primarily because most of the people in slavery are not in the United States or in Europe; they are in those countries where the costs are much lower, in South Asia in particular.

But the result is that when we calculated the cost of bringing people out of slavery globally—everybody who is in slavery—the estimate runs about $11 billion. I used to think that was a lot of money, until banks started receiving checks of that size monthly from the federal government as part of the bailout. I'm joking, but if you know anything about global economics, you know that $11 billion isn't much of anything. And, of course, that's not just for this country to pay or any single country to pay.

It's for the globe to pay. It's for the world economy to pay. It doesn't have to be paid this year. Actually, that's what the cost would be over, say, a 10-, 20-, 30-year period.

So on that level, we suddenly find ourselves back in a hopeful situation. It may be a shock to discover the horrors of slavery in our backyard, but it's also kind of good news when we discover that there is a possibility for a very dramatic shift.

I say that especially to you. You are in this room because you're smart, you're globally aware, you're connecting as best you can, and you are exactly the group of people who are going to be able to take, if you choose, this planet to a point where people look back to slavery in the way they look back to smallpox now and say, "We used to have that, but we don't have that anymore." We have had that since the beginning of history, but we don't have to have that anymore. That could be your gift, from your generation, to human history.

I'll stop there.

Questions and Answers

DEVIN STEWART: You talk about all kinds of issues in the slavery universe here, and you do so in this very lovely narrative way, where you are reading through and then you all of a sudden realize that you are in this horror movie that I described, which is actually happening.
I want to see if you might elaborate or expand on just a couple of issues that you touched on during your talk.

One of them that I was asking myself—and, thankfully, you actually did answer the question; you read my mind, when I was reading your book—was the psychology behind the slaver and the slave. Very interesting. You present it as almost this intractable, intransient, insolvable fundamental trait of humankind. I'm not saying that's your argument. When you read it, you kind of get this feeling that it was there before civilization and it's a large number today. You talk a bit about, for example, when slaves come into a broken

family, and anger is transmitted to the slaves. They become a victim of something that is already happening there.

So one question is, what is the psychological dynamic? Is it something that you can break or not? That's one question.

The other question is kind of a cultural thing. Obviously, you can't fundraise for police policing murders, but you have to fundraise to combat slavery. Clearly, slaves are not a vested interest that has a lobby on Capitol Hill.

KEVIN BALES: They do have a lobby, but they don't get to tell us how to lobby.

DEVIN STEWART: It's probably not the slaves who make huge, vast donations to senators' campaigns and so forth.

There is a sense of changing the perception of who these people are. You mentioned the cop shows, talking about murder. Is it possible to address this in a cultural way, where it is on TV and it is in the pop culture and it is in the psyche of the public?

Those are my two related questions.

RON SOODALTER: I think there's a distinction that has to be made when we are talking about murders and we are talking about slavery. We have been combating murder ever since murders were first committed. We do it out of a sense of self-protectiveness. If we punish murderers, then we do not run the risk of being murdered.

This is just a natural rule of society. In this country we have been fighting murders since the country began and since before it was a nation.

You can honestly say that the modern-day fight against slavery in America officially begin in the year 2000, with the passage of the Trafficking Act, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, TVPA, and with the reauthorization subsequent to that every two or three years.

So the war against modern-day slavery in America—and, I would say, in the world, but the book focuses primarily on what's going on in this country, and, as I said earlier to Christine and Evie, we hold up a mirror to Americans—is a new fight. This is a newly engaged war we are fighting here. So for all the fact that so many things are not what we need them to be, that the money is not there, that the awareness—and this is so crucial—among the American public is not there, that the government is not as committed as we would like it to be—is it bad news? Yes. But it is one hell of a good opportunity to jump in at this point.

If you want to start a campaign, if you want to join a campaign and bring it to where people say murder must be stopped, people say slavery must be stopped, this is a heck of a good time to do it. Get in at the get-go. This is it. What you are hearing today, hopefully, nine years from now will be common knowledge to Americans, and the campaign to end this in this country will have progressed eons beyond where we are now.

That's the good news, along with the bad news. Make sense?

DEVIN STEWART: Yes.

KEVIN BALES: And to answer your question about the cultural side, yes, of course we can make that cultural change. We know we can do that, because the last abolitionist movement also had to go through a similar cultural change of humanizing people who were seen as subhuman, bringing their stories forward. Particularly when the doors were pretty much pushed open by ex-slaves, who had to speak for themselves, it began to especially create that space.

Long after that abolitionist movement began—it took a long time before people like Frederick Douglass and others could begin to speak on behalf of ex-slaves themselves. There was the newspaper that was finally published in the early 1850s only by ex-slaves, as opposed to all the people who had never been involved in slavery who had been publishing abolitionist tracts. In the first

issue of that, the masthead said, "Too long have others spoken for us. We wish to plead our own cause."

It's interesting. One of the offshoots of our organization has been to establish a group of ex-slaves in the United States, who will speak independently about how they feel slavery should come to an end. So it can go that way.

DEVIN STEWART: How about the psychological dynamic?

KEVIN BALES: On the psychological dynamic, I have to say, I wrote that chapter—Ron and I worked together, but we sort of split the chapters up—I wrote that chapter because it has been driving me nuts. I think all of us face questions of evil, not necessarily spiritual evil, but the idea that you confront how people can do things which are unimaginable.

I don't know the answers to those questions, but I tried to speak to psychologists and people who had some indication of that. I discovered that there are very interesting similarities between the classic Zimbardo experiments at Stanford, where people were given great power over each other and they began to abuse that power horrifically—I looked at research on how police officers in Brazil are trained to be torturers. How do you create a torturer out of a person who normally would be a good person?

You then roll that up with that Lord Acton quote about absolute power corrupting absolutely, and it begins to help you open and explore this idea that, particularly in this case, often, a housewife in the United States who herself has been pressed down and frustrated, sometimes abused, finds she has within her power someone who can bring abuse to bear on that person and can act out power that she never dreamed of. And that power can become intoxicating. That intoxication can lead to a madness, and that madness can lead to extreme violence.

Do we really understand that? No, we don't.

I have to tell you, there is a tiny bit to the answer to your question that was really touching to me. I call it the best review we will never see published of this book.

Someone I have known and worked with for a long time, who was very seriously abused as a child, wrote to me after she read the book and said, "I read that chapter about how slaves are abused by housewives, how they are forced to be in family pictures, how they are forced to smile so that they look good." She said, "It brought it all back to me, how my abusers would clamp my arm with their fingernails until I smiled for the family pictures, so that I would always look like a happy child in the period of my own physical and sexual abuse."

It was somehow very liberating for her to read that chapter. It changed her feelings about her own past some. Obviously, it doesn't wipe it away, but she said she has now been sharing it with lots of other women who have been in the same situation. That that abuse could be understood and maybe even analyzed meant a lot to her.

I have to say, when you get an email like that, you say, "Well, I can die tomorrow, because I've done at least one decent thing in my life."

We need to hear other questions.

RON SOODALTER: Before you do that, let me just tag on something here. I think when you are talking about the motivation, you get into the psychological motivation. I think enslavement of domestics is unusual, in the sense that it's about control. Practically every other kind of slavery is about money. It's about profit. It's about greed. It goes back forever.

We started the book with a quote: "The great thought of captains, owners, consignees, and others was to make the most money they could in the shortest possible time. Human nature is the same now as then." That was written in the *New National Era* in 1871, as Frederick Douglass described the Atlantic slave trade—1871.

We don't change. We don't change.

KEVIN BALES: This is where we might disagree. I think change is possible.

RON SOODALTER: I think human nature is what it is.

Questions?

QUESTION: I think a lot of us here are activists or writers who are interested in this cause. You don't have to preach to us. But I come across this a lot, this idea that—and it's the same with the argument about prostitution—people say slavery has existed since the beginning of time, and so has prostitution. It's the oldest profession. This is a strong counterargument. I have a hard time coming up against it and saying, "Okay, you're right, but"—people think it's tragic, but it's inevitable.

Even though we can say all of these things—and I have—and you can address it from an economic perspective or from a human rights perspective, people will still tend to believe that there are awful things happening everywhere, and we are overwhelmed by it.

How do we try to change the public perception? I'm not talking about individual perception—we can do that one by one.

RON SOODALTER: Just to clarify, when I say we don't change, I mean that there will always be people motivated by greed. The question is, how do we respond to that?

KEVIN BALES: I completely disagree with that. How you can make an assertion about all human beings for all human history, stretching thousands of years into the future—I don't get that.

RON SOODALTER: Well, if humans stretch thousands of years into the future, I'll be amazed.

I think what counts is how we respond to the given situation. I think to attribute things to human nature and to say, "Well, it's just the way it is," and walk away is tantamount to saying, "There's nothing we can do, we're powerless, we're ineffectual, and it's always going to be the way it is. Slavery will always exist."

We were asked yesterday in an interview, "Do you think we can actually end slavery?" My response to that was, "If we don't think that, we might as well just walk out the door right now, because that means there's no point in even trying."

QUESTIONER: I want to be able to answer people a little bit more concretely. In *Ending Slavery* you take that on. You can go through it point by point. But in a five-minute conversation with people, I have a hard time—

PARTICIPANT: Can I just interject something, if you don't mind? When I get that question, I have read that there are societies in which prostitution did not exist the way we know it today, and I suspect there are societies where slavery did not exist, that are just organized completely differently from the way we are organized.

But it's not out beyond the realm of human beings that we can live in a way that doesn't do that. That's my answer.

QUESTIONER: What was the society, was it Iceland?

PARTICIPANT: I don't know. There's an ILO book about the sex industry from several years ago that actually traced societies that did not have prostitution. I can't remember the name of it.

KEVIN BALES: This is good, though. We skipped straight out of the policy stuff into the philosophical meanings of existence.

RON SOODALTER: This is the first time Kevin and I have disagreed since we started to write the book.

QUESTION: Somehow I think we are talking about two different things. We are talking about the slave trade, which is part of organized crime, trafficking people into the country to work on plantations, work in fields, and the people

that are enslaved in the domestic sphere. My question would be, what about the psychology of those individuals? This 65-year-old man who has two girls in his house and abuses them and enslaves them, basically—that is something different than a cartel that traffics people into the country.

RON SOODALTER: Right, or even a single person who traffics somebody in for forced labor.

QUESTIONER: Yes, but if you put an ad online that you want an au pair, that is an individual taking such a step.

In percentages—you speak about 20,000 or 17,000 people coming into the country—how many are part of an organized trafficking ring and how many are just one plus one plus one coming in because an individual puts it online, et cetera?

KEVIN BALES: The majority of people who are enslaved around the world are enslaved in little mom-and-pop operations, very small operations. The trafficking into agriculture may be a handful of people at a time, with a single person who is bringing them in and so forth.

But it's always organized. You have to be slightly organized to get people over borders and so forth. But it's also true that the researchers who do the best work on this at the moment say it's more about networking as opposed to organized criminal syndicates. A lot of crime around the world is broken into networking as opposed to vertical integration by crime families.

But to answer your question, the majority are not part of large-scale criminal syndicates. It's a smaller operation.

But you are exactly right as well that we are operating on an enormous continuum of phenomena that manifest the way people enslave each other. We only have some of the types of slavery that exist around the world. If you go to West Africa, you have religious-based trokosi slavery, where women are handed over to a temple and become enslaved to the priests there. The largest proportion of slaves in the world are in something that has a long name. It's called hereditary collateral debt bondage slavery. It's hereditary, and it's all about the fiction of a collateralization.

QUESTION: I worked for an organization in Ghana that dealt with the trokosi issue. It was very interesting, because the trokosi practitioners, both the communities and the shrine priests, as they called them, claimed that it was part of their culture. (There were some groups in the United States that actually also defended them, but that's another issue.) They claimed it was part of their culture. But there were researchers that attempted to document that 100 years ago, for the same sort of payment of debt for somebody's "sins," it was cattle or it was crops; it was not a young girl.

So I think we all have to be very careful about what's culture, what's innate, what's not, what's immutable, what can change.

I have also worked a lot on violence-against-women issues in general. Many countries' laws won't have laws against rape in marriage, because they say marriage is a man having control over a woman. It's a similar concept. I'm not equating the two, but it's a similar concept.

DEVIN STEWART: What do you guys say to the cultural imperialism argument, which I have actually heard as a critique of antislavery movements?

KEVIN BALES: I say, get over yourself. I have certainly stood in all kinds of fora and had the debate over and over again. But I'm really tired of the debate. Either we all have human rights as human beings or let's just give up on this idea of human rights.

QUESTIONER: One of our strategies for the group that I worked with in Ghana was to do outreach to the police so they could actually know what this is. "Oh, that still goes on?" or "Oh, I've heard of that, but I didn't know it was really going on," was the reaction of a lot of them that we did trainings with. It was one of many strategies.

In the United States, has there been sort of outreach or training to American cops, these 60,000 homicide officers?

RON SOODALTER: That's a very interesting question. There was a study done by Northeastern University two years ago in which the researchers sought to have discourse with every local and state law enforcement agency in the United States—interviewed them, sent them surveys, sent them follow-up surveys—to find out what the response was to the issue of human trafficking. The results are pretty frightening.

Although there are, as Kevin says, a limited number of police agencies that have received training in sensitivity, in awareness, in proper action when you do discover a slavery situation, to know what to do with the victim and know how to address that person's needs, most, by far, of the police departments in this country are totally clueless. Many of them refuse to acknowledge that there is any such thing as labor trafficking at all. Unless there is aggressive physical action, assault, they tend to feel that it's simply a labor issue and is better addressed by the DOL, by the Department of Labor, than by the police.

For example, according to federal law, a minor in prostitution is de facto a victim of human trafficking. There's no proof needed. If that person is a minor in prostitution, he or she is a victim of trafficking.

So here's a policeman on the beat who sees a 14-year-old girl on a street corner quite frequently. Carol, I think, can back me up on this. It never occurs to that police officer that this child may be working under coercion. So he arrests her as a prostitute. This child is victimized for the third time—first by the trafficker, then again by the johns, and finally by the system that should be trained and sensitized to rescue and service her needs but instead ensures that the cycle just goes on and on and on.

That's the tip of the iceberg.

So, yes, the police in this country are in desperate need of training. In addition to that, when you do train the police, you will find that they tend to look for human trafficking and slavery in the areas in which they are most familiar. For example, a vice cop is going to be looking for what kind of slavery? Sex slavery, sure. As one of the researchers said to me, Give a man a hammer; he'll find a nail.

So, yes, there is a lot of work that needs to be done with our police.

QUESTION: I know it's a very broad issue, but I would love you to relate this trafficking issue more to immigration. We talk about a lot of things, but I think immigration is, on the one hand, the reason, one of the important factors, and also can be the solution.

How would you relate the immigration situation to this human trafficking?

DEVIN STEWART: We're going to take a cluster here. These will be the last two questions.

QUESTION: I guess I have more of an international relations question about protection for trafficking. I know there are protections against torture. In terms of the international relations setting, what kind of monitoring mechanisms and law mechanisms are there on the international level for preventing trafficking and protecting trafficking victims? Obviously, it's sort of a transnational network going on here. We are crossing borders here. What kinds of protections are there for those who have suffered?

RON SOODALTER: I think immigration is a big issue, when you discover that the government itself often provides conditions that allow people to be trafficked into slavery—for example, what we call the guest worker program. I don't know if you are familiar with that. In 1943, the government formalized its decades-old policy of importing workers when we need them and throwing them out when we don't. We call it the guest worker program. It started in 1943 and immediately became a catch-place for workers to come in and be subjected to abuse at best and slavery at worst, under certain contractor conditions.

In the southern part of Florida, there are only two government inspectors, labor inspectors, for the entire section, which allows contractors to bring in workers by filling out the forms promising good conditions, promising housing, fair pay, good treatment for these workers, whom the government is allowing them to bring in.

QUESTIONER: And where are all these workers coming from?

RON SOODALTER: They are coming from all different places. They come from Asia. They come from Latin America. Not only do they come here, but they pay a lot of money to get here.

All over the world, there are people who see this country as a place of opportunity and salvation. Most people who are enslaved, as far as we can determine, come from Latin America and from Asia. So it gives you an idea.

There was a trafficking case in Carolina last year of several people from Thailand who had been enslaved in an agricultural situation.

But the fact that the government itself has been so lax in supervising its own program, by allowing contractors who bring these people in to go to men who would abuse them and not allow these people to leave to seek employment elsewhere—if these people complain, they can be put on a grower's or a producer's blacklist and not be asked back again. When you find that the government allows for that kind of laxity, there is not a whole lot of immigrant worker protection going on.

In terms of domestics, the last reauthorization of the Trafficking Act, which occurred in December—it happens every two or three years—the government actually provided better safeguards for domestics coming into this country, by tighter controls on the visas of diplomats, for example, in bringing in domestics or nannies from their own countries.

KEVIN BALES: I'll just talk about international relations-type protections. There are some. They are rudimentary and they are just really beginning to be instituted. The United Nations protocol on human trafficking, which is part of the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, set out a whole series of ideas about what should be included between national governments in terms of how they would work together.

I was working for the United Nations for a while and provided, for example, based on that protocol and that convention, a whole system of regulations that were then adopted by the ECOWAS countries, the Economic Community of West African States.

But, of course, having those things at the UN level, at the ILO level, and then even at the national government level—it takes a long time for that to filter through. When the richest country barely puts pennies to it, you can imagine what happens in a country that has an even smaller budget, and possibly less will.

OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] has regulations. The European Union has just completed a pan-European anti-trafficking convention—I can't remember what it was called. So they are growing. But we are really at a very early stage.

DEVIN STEWART: Ron and Kevin, thank you so much for coming.

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