

Human Trafficking & Modern-Day Slavery Project

The Schuster Institute
for Investigative Journalism
at Brandeis University

There are more slaves today than at any point in history.

Seeing a need for high-quality, unbiased, deeply reported coverage of this persistent human rights violation, the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism launched its Human Trafficking & Modern-Day Slavery Reporting Project in June 2010. Its mission is to report accurately and thoroughly on the contemporary realities, practices, and perceptions of human trafficking and modern-day slavery. Given the complex and hidden nature of this crime—as well as the barriers to accurate knowledge about it—quality investigative journalism is absolutely key to its abolition. Without new, verified information gathered with the highest journalistic standards, those in power can—and do—make decisions based on outdated, ideology-driven, or otherwise problematic information.

Schuster Institute Senior Fellow E. Benjamin Skinner, author of *A Crime So Monstrous: Face to Face with Modern-Day Slavery*, is helping the Institute develop this project. Recognized by the World Economic Forum as a 2011 Young Global Leader, Skinner's work exposing slavery has brought him to five different continents to document and expose slavery where it exists.

What is the Schuster Institute doing to expose this human rights abuse?

In the Press: Reporters at the Institute have published articles and editorials in *Time*, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, *Foreign Policy*, and *The Huffington Post*. Our reporting provides concrete information about trafficking and modern-day slavery and efforts to combat it in Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, and in the United States. In addition to deep reporting and analysis important to policy makers, we aim to tell the personal stories of slaves and survivors of trafficking—putting a human face on this often incomprehensible practice. Skinner has discussed the issues of modern-day slavery on Anderson Cooper's AC360, Larry King Live, and other television programs, reaching millions of viewers and providing on-the-ground and historical perspective on this issue.

At the United Nations: In June 2010, The Schuster Institute, in concert with the United States Mission to the UN and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, sponsored an expert panel discussion at the United Nations in New York City. "Hidden in Plain Sight: The news media's role in exposing human trafficking" brought together journalists and international policy makers to discuss how the news media have helped expose and explain human trafficking—and how they can do better. Luis CdeBaca, the U.S. State Department's Ambassador at Large for the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, gave the panel's keynote address.



Nur, rescued from domestic slavery by Tenaganita, an NGO in Malaysia that serves women and migrant workers.
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E. Benjamin Skinner, Schuster Institute Senior Fellow. His book *A Crime So Monstrous* won the 2009 Dayton Literary Peace Prize.



UN-Schuster Institute sponsored event about human trafficking and the news media, June 16, 2010.

“Slavery is legal nowhere, yet it is practiced everywhere.” — Free the Slaves

The U.S. federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), first enacted in 2000, provides the legal framework to protect victims, prosecute traffickers, and prevent slavery. A number of states have passed their own state laws to supplement the federal one and to allocate funding for different anti-trafficking initiatives. However, the laws have their critics. Some say they don't do enough to protect victims, don't sufficiently target perpetrators, or don't adequately supply funds for law enforcement training and other activities.

Who is a slave?

The TVPA defines a slave as a person who is compelled into service by another. Under U.S. law, the term slave is synonymous with a trafficked person or trafficking victim. A slave may be trafficked within or across state or international borders. A slave can work in a factory, agricultural fields, mines, a single-family home, a brothel, on the streets, or elsewhere. A slave can be born, sold, tricked, coerced, or beaten into his or her position. What all forms of slavery share is this: A slave is someone who is forced to work, threatened with violence if he or she tries to leave, and is not given any compensation beyond the food and clothes they need to survive and continue to work.

How many slaves?

- Slaves today number in the millions. Because slavery usually involves secrecy, violence and often criminal networks, accurate estimates are difficult. Estimates from organizations dedicated to eradicating slavery range from 20 to 27 million slaves in the world today.
- That's more than at any other point in history—but according to Kevin Bales of Free the Slaves, the situation is not as hopeless as those numbers would indicate because slaves make up a smaller percentage of the world's population than ever before.
- Unfortunately, however, Bales says it's a lot cheaper to buy a slave today—\$90—than it was during the 1850s in the American South, when the price of an average slave was the equivalent of \$10,000 in today's U.S. currency.
- According to the International Labour Office (2009), slavery produces an estimated \$21 billion in profits annually, second only to drug trafficking among global criminal enterprises. This estimate excludes commercial sexual exploitation; other more inclusive estimates range as high as \$91.2 billion in extorted profits (Siddharth Kara). The majority of slaves are held in debt bondage in India and in African countries.

What do slaves do?

Increasingly, consumers are learning that slavery exists in the products they buy—and this realization often comes as a result of dogged investigative reporting that makes the connections clear. Slaves work in a variety of industries: from the sex industry to mining minerals for smartphones and other electronics; from domestic service to harvesting shrimp and cotton; from fishing to sewing garments.

Why can't they leave?

Slaves struggle to escape from bondage for a number of reasons. Traffickers may assert psychological control and dependence through fear, may confiscate identification or travel documents, may cut off a victim's contact with family and friends, or may subdue them with threats of deportation or other acts of violence.

Burmese laborers in Thailand are prey to traffickers who, for a fee, sell them to ship captains and exploiters. © Kay Chernush for the U.S. Department of State.

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Sources: Alliance to Stop Slavery and End Trafficking (ASSET); Free the Slaves; Kevin Bales, *Modern Slavery: The Secret World of 27 Million People*, 2009; Polaris Project, U.S. Department of State Office to Monitor Trafficking, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 2010; International Labour Office, "The Cost of Coercion," 2009.