

ABSTRACT

An Assault on Unalienable Rights: Exposing the hidden realm of modern-day slavery

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Human trafficking is a multibillion-dollar enterprise that ranks as one of the world's top criminal industries. It is a vast, widespread business practiced in many forms in several countries around the globe, including the United States. Yet it remains a distant concept to much of the developed world. Mainstream media coverage of modern-day slavery distorts the reality of it, and its perpetrators are skilled in disguising and hiding the crime's horrific nature. Despite efforts to raise awareness of this assault on human rights, and though much progress has been made to hinder it, human trafficking has yet to be completely eradicated. To resist this crime, international governments and nonprofit organizations have been working to give people the resources and tools they need to be informed on the issue and encouraged to take a stand against it. Their invaluable contributions have equipped nations to fight back and given society the responsibility of being a voice of hope for the victims and survivors of slavery today. This injustice has been ignored long enough - no matter the capacity, we all have a role to play in abolishing human trafficking.

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AN ASSAULT ON UNALIENABLE RIGHTS:
EXPOSING THE HIDDEN REALM OF MODERN-DAY SLAVERY

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AN ASSAULT ON UNALIENABLE RIGHTS:
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A secret, colossal world

Slavery is no new concept. The buying and selling of human beings is deeply rooted in history, so much so that the number of people affected by it has long been beyond counting. The United States Declaration of Independence states, “All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (US 1776). Slavery inherently robs its victims of these human rights, no matter who they are or where they come from.

Over time, the world has gradually come to realize the degrading nature of the business and what little, if any, value it places on human life. What used to be a globally accepted norm has now been socially condemned as inhumane and immoral, especially in the developed world. It should be no surprise then to hear someone agree that bartering people is wrong, humans should never be viewed as property, and no one should be allowed to capitalize on another person’s life.

Yet it remains widely unknown just how much slavery continues to thrive. It is a vast, profitable world that has been allowed to seep into everyday life without many people noticing. Though it seems to be more frowned upon than accepted, human trafficking has not been eradicated. The need to adopt a more secretive nature hasn’t stopped perpetrators from exploiting victims for economic gain, nor has it decreased demand for such victims from an immense hidden market of consumers. The enormity of this business can

be overwhelming, so it's not uncommon for the average person to take the easy route and turn a blind eye. Traffickers count on this and know they are safe so long as most people believe there's nothing they can do. And why shouldn't they think so? The problem seems too big and too hopeless to deal with.

At the same time, it is helpful to remember how far human civilization has come. Slavery wasn't always considered unethical—in fact, history shows that any effort to abolish it is almost always met with resistance. Fortunately, many of those struggles ultimately proved successful, and in light of this, humanity is challenged to ask itself the pivotal question: what then must we do today? Though the fight against human trafficking persists, the road to abolition is paved with the knowledge that change for the better is possible.

A multi-faceted, multibillion-dollar industry

Human trafficking is a booming enterprise, generating about \$150.2 billion per year and positioning itself as one of the world's top illegal industries (HTC 2020). It's a naturally complex crime because it takes many forms, yet it is concealed so well that it's difficult to determine precise estimates and statistics that illustrate its magnitude. Human trafficking is also challenging to define, though in 2003, the United Nations' Palermo Protocol provided a detailed explanation of the trade as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation

shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or service, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs (Holzer, 2011, p. 65).

Each form of human trafficking is inherently a variation of modern-day slavery and a violation of human rights as the buying and selling of another person reduces his or her value to that of property (World Association for Christian Communication Staff, 2017). The U.S. Department of State has identified the following as the leading categories of the trade: sex trafficking, forced labor, bonded labor, domestic servitude, and child soldiers (Lamanna, 2018).

Sex trafficking occurs when an adult or minor is a slave to the commercial sex industry. Traffickers and pimps make their victims partake in pornography and/or prostitute them to local clients or international travelers participating in sex tourism (Holzer, 2011, p. 85-86).

Merchants of **forced labor** exploit their victims' susceptibilities (i.e. cultural acceptance of the crime, discrimination, poverty, unemployment) to impose harsh work with little to no pay on their laborers (Holzer, 2011, p. 84).

Debt bondage often goes hand-in-hand with forced labor—similar to, or in addition to, vulnerabilities, perpetrators use a victim's debt to them as a means of control. They often promise the worker's freedom once the debt is repaid, yet it becomes impossible to do so when the debt continues to accumulate and the wages are slim to nothing. Illegal immigrants are more liable to become trapped in bonded labor since their immigration status can be used against them (Holzer, 2011, p. 84).

Domestic servitude is another form of forced labor. Victims' work is purposely in more secluded locations such as homes and hotels in order to further entrap laborers and prevent them from alerting anyone to their situation (Holzer, 2011, p. 84).

Child soldiers are young victims who are illegally procured to engage in labor, militant, or sexual activity, depending on the wills of the traffickers (Holzer, 2011, p. 84).

These categories may vary independently, but they all have at least one thing in common: the perpetrators of each acquire their victims through the use of force, fraud, or coercion, which the U.S. Congress deemed essential elements of human trafficking in the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 (Austin and Farrell, 2017, p. 2). All but the latter types of the crime oppress both adults and minors. That is the nature of human trafficking: there is no discrimination in who can be victimized. If a person appears to suit the business needs of a trafficker, that person may be bartered regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or any other factor.

Given its steady existence throughout history and rapid economic growth, human trafficking is certainly not a new phenomenon, nor is it unpopular. As demand for what the trade can offer (i.e. cheap labor, harvested organs, sex) grows, so does supply. In fact, the U.S. Department of State recently reported that the number of victims trafficked annually across foreign borders ranges between 600,000 and 800,000 people, 80 percent of whom are female (Noelle, 2019). In 2012, the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that there were 1.5 million trafficked victims in Canada, western Europe, and the U.S. alone (Austin and Farrell, 2017, p. 2), and the State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons Report in 2019 estimated that there are 24.9 million victims of human

trafficking worldwide (Pompeo, 2019). However, these numbers are, in their simplest form, educated guesses.

“There is little consensus about the true magnitude of human trafficking in the United States,” Professor Rachel Austin and research assistant Amy Farrell write in their publication *Human Trafficking and the Media in the United States*. “Human trafficking is widely accepted to be under-identified and underreported by officials such as the police.” (Austin and Farrell, 2017, p. 2).

Awareness of the crime has increased substantially over the years, but so long as it remains underrepresented in policy- and lawmaking and in everyday conversations, it will continue to thrive underground, and much of the developed world will remain uneducated about its true extent and significance.

Terminology such as “debt bondage” and “domestic minor sex trafficking” may be unfamiliar to the average person living in a developed country. He or she is also unlikely to correlate the words “child soldiers” with the concept of human trafficking. In developed nations, the trade has come to be almost solely thought of as young women and children being bought and sold, primarily for sex, in impoverished countries. Many residents of the developed world find the mere idea of such an inhumane business occurring near their homes, let alone existing, unthinkable. While human trafficking has indeed devastated developing countries like Africa and southeast Asia, it’s certainly not exclusive to these nations. The reality is that this crime is a sickness that has spread throughout the world, and it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find a region that has not experienced some degree of infection. In recognizing this, the question must be asked: what can

be done to stop this evil that is so globally prominent, wealthy, and destroys millions of people's lives and freedom every day?

Recent history shows that when effective measures are taken, we can expect to see some progress. Congress's passage of the TVPA not only provided an official definition of human trafficking, it also established a governmental response to the crime by enforcing measures of protection, prosecution, and prevention through law enforcement (Snajdr, 2013, p. 232). Before the United Nations established the Palermo Protocol in 2003, any exposure the developed world society had to human trafficking was limited and mostly addressed the sex trade. Though sex trafficking is prevalent and efforts to abolish it must continue, the Palermo Protocol shed some much-needed light on the various types of human trafficking.

“‘Trafficking in persons’ in the UN Protocol marks a significant departure from previous definitions of human trafficking that exclusively focused on prostitution, and makes the important recognition that trafficking in persons affects migrants in all sectors,” Professor Sealing Cheng says in her article “The Paradox of Vernacularization: Women’s Human Rights and the Gendering of Nationhood.” “It includes ‘forced labor’ and ‘slavery,’ and makes these applicable to all forms of labor.” (Cheng, 2011, p. 482).

The steps international governments have been taking to amend this egregious error in mankind's past and present are commendable and will continue to make the world a safer place. To better enforce their efforts, however, it's imperative that the public be informed on these steps, what led them to be taken in the first place and why we must never backtrack.

A media sensation

“Because trafficking is illegal, it is hidden from view,” Terry FitzPatrick says in his article “How to... use the media to help combat human trafficking.” “It has taken more than a decade of media relations work to convince the public that slavery really still exists” (FitzPatrick, 2013).

After the TVPA was passed, American media’s interest in human trafficking grew, and it gradually became a popular topic to be covered in entertainment, mass news and print media. Talk shows began running segments on the issue, and celebrities like Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore soon became known for their efforts to raise awareness. Investigative journalism focused more on reporting cases of human trafficking, and soon the crime was included in storylines for movies and television series (i.e. *Law and Order*). The public came to realize that the buying and selling of human beings doesn’t exclusively happen in developing countries. And yet, as more and more people became aware of human trafficking, something was still amiss (Austin and Farrell, 2017, p. 1-3).

When the media become enthusiastic about a topic, they tend to give that topic extensive publicity. Everyone wants to write about it, and given the media outlets’ competitive nature, journalists try to outdo each other and work to attract more audiences. Thus begins the process of the topic becoming sensationalized by the media’s captivating framework. This is a common trend in mainstream communication, and since the early 2000s, human trafficking has been no exception to this process.

“Human trafficking continues to be represented more as a crime issue than as a human rights, policy, public health, or activist awareness issue,” Austin and Farrell write. “Crime frames are even dominant among international laws and international media outlets” (Austin and Farrell, 2017, p. 4).

The thrill of a good crime story is certain to peak the curiosity of readers and viewers, and this framing of human trafficking has proven to be more than capable of enticing audiences. We all remember Liam Neeson’s epic performance in the movie *Taken* in which father Bryan Mills (who happens to be a highly skilled ex-CIA agent) goes on an adrenaline-rushing quest to find his teenage daughter Kim after she and her best friend abducted by sex traffickers. The film depicts Bryan fighting and killing everyone who dares to stand in his way, and it all ends with him successfully rescuing Kim and bringing her home.

What *Taken* doesn’t show, however, is what happens to the other trafficked women Kim was with who were left behind. It doesn’t show what Kim herself went through in the time her father was looking for her, nor what trauma she may have retained from the experience. The film ultimately is of the action genre, and the crime that fuels the plot is generally in the background. In other words, human trafficking just happens to be the illegal business the story’s antagonists are involved in rather than bartering drugs or weapons. Thus, it’s highly unlikely that people will remember *Taken* as a movie that deals with human trafficking.

Taken also feeds into the stereotype of the “ideal victim” of trafficking that has been mainly constructed by the media—the young, beautiful, innocent, Caucasian, mid-

dle-class woman or girl who can't defend herself against the big, strong, menacing perpetrators. While this stereotype has been shown to garner more sympathy from the public, it can be deceiving and inadvertently lead policy- and lawmakers to make legal decisions based on a fiction. As Austin and Farrell point out:

The media often misrepresent human trafficking or focus exclusively on certain aspects of the problem. Research on human trafficking frames in print media revealed that portrayals of human trafficking were for the most part oversimplified and inaccurate in terms of human trafficking being portrayed as innocent white female victims needing to be rescued from nefarious traffickers. Depictions of human trafficking in movies, documentaries, and television episodes in the United States have followed a rescue narrative, where innocent victims are saved from harmful predators... Incorrect framing of human trafficking in the popular media may lead policy makers and legislators to adopt less helpful antitrafficking responses, particularly responses focused on criminal justice system solutions (Austin and Farrell, 2017, p. 1).

This depiction reduces the complexity of human trafficking, indicating that there is a preference of victims and someone will always come to save them from their captors. If audiences accept this idea that the nature of the crime is so simple, they may conclude that the solution to ending it will be simple as well (another false assumption).

There are many political factors that contribute to the success or hindrance of human trafficking in each country. It's not merely a problem of national security—it's a matter of human and gender rights, immigration, poverty and equal economic opportunity, and other circumstances that shape society as a whole. Human trafficking is not as individualized as the media make it out to be—when a victim falls prey to the trafficker's deceit, and when a trafficker turns to this business for financial gain, it is often because there are larger forces at play that make them feel as if they have no other choice. However, these facts reveal the true multi-layered nature of the trade, which the media deem

too complicated to resonate with the general public. Thus, in order to keep audiences engaged, they persist in the idea that bartering humans is a much simpler crime than it really is (Austin and Farrell, 2017, p. 4-5).

Human trafficking has been able to continue because traffickers know how to use victims' vulnerabilities against them. These vulnerabilities may be poverty, homelessness, immigration status, mental illness, unemployment, unfavorable living conditions, discrimination (i.e. gender bias), identifying with the LGBTQ community, and the like, none of which have a simple one-size-fits-all solution, nor do many of them apply to the media's stereotypical young white middle-class female victim.

The dominant images white women victims are incorrect because most trafficking victims are not white. The same is true for both domestic and foreign victims in America... human trafficking in America largely resembles the exploitation of the vulnerable populations in the nation, that is, the lower class, minorities, the LGBTQ population, and immigrants. However, these populations have historically not been represented as victims in American media (Austin and Farrell, 2017, p. 8).

In addition to creating a victim stereotype, the media have also reinforced the belief that human trafficking mainly refers to sex trafficking by reporting more on that category than any other. Despite political efforts to discourage this, people continue to only think of sex workers when the words "human trafficking" are uttered, if not more so than thinking of child soldiers or people forced into bonded labor. This also is due to the media's efforts to appeal to the ticket-buying public by fitting their ideal victim into a storyline that, though complex in reality, can be simplified. It's often easier in a sex trafficking narrative to tell who the "bad guys" are and say that nothing they do to the victim is the victim's fault than in a labor trafficking narrative where people may find room to justify

the crime. (“Well, they’re illegal immigrants, they should’ve tried entering the country the right way.” “Why didn’t he or she call the police or try some other way to escape that abusive home?” “Why couldn’t they just get real jobs?” “They should’ve known what they were getting themselves into.”) Because of this, types of human trafficking outside the commercial sex industry are often imperceptible to the public because of their underrepresentation in mainstream communication (Austin and Farrell, 2017, p. 4).

Trafficking Incidents Reports found that from 2001 to 2012, more human trafficking reports in the media covered stories of the sex trade than any other manifestation of the crime. The reports also showed that the U.S. is not the only country guilty of doing this—it was found to be true of international media as well. (Austin and Farrell, 2017, p. 4). Even in nations where other kinds of human trafficking are culturally and socially prevalent, victims and the trade are misrepresented by media that choose to circulate the familiar sex trafficking story and enforce the stereotypes. One such report by journalist Avinash Giri criticizes Indian law enforcement for not doing more to limit human trafficking in his country, yet the stories and statistics he shares in his piece only concern young women and underage girls involved in the sex trade. Giri mentions male victims and the forced labor trade one time each at the end, but he writes nothing else about any other variety of survivor or trafficking (Giri, 2019).

The media plays a pivotal role in swaying public opinion and relaying information about current events to the public (WACC, 2017). People don’t often consult websites dedicated to human rights issues like trafficking (FitzPatrick, 2013), so it’s up to the mainstream news media and entertainment industry to convey this information accurately

and honestly, engage audiences without over-sensationalizing the topic, and call society to action to do its part in abolishing modern day slavery.

“Journalistic responsibility lies in effective communication of relevant news stories,” Dr. Sarah Macharia said. “Considerations include the reporting angle, sensitivity to language that victimizes subjects and the extent to which the crime is exposed or camouflaged” (WACC, 2017).

Media misguidance of the public’s perception of human trafficking will likely in turn misguide those in political power who have governmental authority to make a difference. If they continue to receive primarily selective information about the crime, their legislative decisions will be made without all the facts, posing a considerable threat to countless trafficked victims.

“Investigative journalism has become a dominant mode of knowledge production both in popular understanding of human trafficking and in policymaking,” Cheng says. “Public-interest stories in journalism have traveled beyond the confines of the nation-state to global issues, and human trafficking in particular has seized much media attention in the last decade” (Cheng, 2008, p. 7).

Terry FitzPatrick, communications director for the non-governmental organization (or NGO) Free the Slaves discusses in his article “How to... use the media to help combat human trafficking” how the group goes about ethically and properly educating the public about human trafficking. “Our strategy,” he says, “includes professionally photographing and interviewing slavery and slavery survivors, and then sharing those images and stories with journalists who could never afford to visit international slavery hotspots

themselves. It includes prepping survivors who are willing to speak, so they can do so in a media-friendly way. It also includes training journalists about how to cover slavery in a sophisticated way” (FitzPatrick, 2013).

Once we see a shift in the media from their popular yet often inaccurate depiction of human trafficking, the crime’s true nature will no longer be hidden, and more people will be better equipped to fight it. “Visibility,” FitzPatrick says. “It’s impossible to solve a human rights challenge without it” (FitzPatrick, 2013).

A fight for freedom

Numerous NGOs around the world are currently working to abolish all manners of modern day slavery. Some work with the international governments who are willing to cooperate and participate in their efforts. Some are based in their founders’ spiritual faith, which serves as the driving force in their work. Many are still growing in their operations, gradually progressing from a local to a national to a global degree. Whatever the motivation or level of influence and, outreach, the endeavors and achievements of these nonprofit organizations have proven crucial to aiding those affected by human trafficking and bringing down its perpetrators.

The A21 Campaign

Benjamin Grasmeyer is a Care Team leader for The A21 Campaign, a global NGO that fights to abolish all forms of human trafficking, be it the commercial sex industry, any type of forced labor, and the use of child soldiers. Founded in Australia by Nick and Christine Caine, A21 has been addressing the vast crime since 2008, coordinating with

government agencies worldwide to launch several campaigns to raise awareness and empower the public to take action. Since it's an international organization, a lot of work goes into planning and executing these campaigns. Grasmeyer sheds some light on the process:

We use all sorts of different mediums. We use Facebook, we use Instagram, we use email, we use physical marketing. We have billboards for one of our campaigns called *Can You See Me?* In that campaign, it's all about how the general public can identify victims of human trafficking and then know who to call. Currently we have billboards all over Dallas, Texas... because we've been able to have a great relationship with their government—same in Thailand. Those would be the main mediums that we use, like most organizations, but when it comes down to the campaigns specifically, there's always a specific strategy for how that's actually going to be worked and marketed to the public (Grasmeyer, personal communication, March 5, 2020).

The *Can You See Me?* campaign specifically has been introduced in Mexico, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the U.S. and Mexico. A21 has partnered with the governments of each of these countries and agencies such as the U.S. Departments of Justice and Transportation to spread awareness of human trafficking. *Can You See Me?* teaches the people in a country how to identify victims by determining several common trafficking scenarios that occur specifically within that country and creating one-minute videos that discuss each of those scenarios. People can also print posters, designed with those scenarios in mind, from A21's website and hang them in airports, hotels, restrooms, and other public places (Grasmeyer, 2020).

“We empower them [the people] with the resources to actually spread the word,” Grasmeyer said. “The goal of that [campaign] is to be in as many countries as possible.”

A21 has also developed a curriculum called *Bodies Not Commodities*, which is designed to be taught in students' classrooms by their teachers to educate high schoolers

on the dangers of human trafficking. It's an accredited program within the U.S. and at the end of 2019, it became mandatory for *Bodies Not Commodities* to be taught in school in Dallas, Texas (Grasmeyer, 2020). An initial study of the curriculum's influence on one group of high schoolers saw a considerable improvement in the students' understanding of human trafficking's numerous concepts and facets (Meeker, 2018).

“We also have a human trafficking awareness program that anyone can do, so it's not specific to just schools,” Grasmeyer said. “You can download it for free on our website, get a group of people, and go through it together. It educates you on human trafficking and gives you action steps. We're constantly working on creating more and more resources for people because that's the number one question we get asked, is ‘What can I do year-round?’”

The organization is certainly making strides to encourage the public to take action against human trafficking in their communities. *Walk For Freedom*, A21's largest awareness fundraising event, takes place one day each year and invites the world to walk with others to draw attention to human trafficking. Volunteers apply online to host a walk in a location of their choosing, and participants walk silently in a single-file line on the designated route while handing out flyers and holding signs with facts about the crime (Grasmeyer, 2020).

“Last year, we had over 400 walks in 50 countries,” Grasmeyer said. “For that event, there's tons of marketing that goes into it. We've used bus stop signs, we've used the side of buses, we've used all of our social media platforms, email blasts to different people, and then with our volunteers and our team here, we'll make calls to people in lo-

cal areas, letting them know that there's a walk in their area and we'd love for them to join it... *Walk For Freedom* is a huge event where we empower the public to actually go and be a part of what A21 is doing.”

The process of developing these campaigns is careful and considerate of the public and victims of human trafficking. Grasmeyer said that A21 is very aware of the power of storytelling, so stories often serve as the foundation of their programs. However, they know to be cautious when sharing the narratives of survivors in their care—for example, if a trafficker is not in custody, the A21 staff is aware of the possibility of that trafficker seeing the pictures and stories the organization posts online and being able to track down a survivor with that information. Rather than risk the survivors' safety, A21 shares their experiences in a way that allows them to remain anonymous if they wish.

“It's their story to tell, first and foremost—it's not our story to tell,” he said. “We only share what they've given us permission to share with the public. We never use their actual name, and we never use their actual photo, simply to protect their identity. Obviously, there are some more dangerous cases than others where maybe the trafficker is still out there.”

In addition, the A21 staff is receptive to feedback from former and present victims of human trafficking who are concerned with how the crime and its prey are presented to the public. Grasmeyer offered an example of how this feedback has changed A21's approach to educating the public:

[Those exploited by human trafficking] are a victim when they're still being trafficked—they're a survivor once they've actually come out of being trafficked and they're in our care. Now, that does not mean that they're whole and that everything's

good to go. It just means that we don't call them victims anymore because they don't want to be called victims... For the general public, it's a good way to describe those that have been trafficked not to use the word 'victim.' We use the word 'survivor' because they are, and usually the word 'survivor' is more empowering. Most of the time they escaped their trafficker, we didn't rescue them—they're brave enough to run away and find help, so we want to make sure that we're never talking about them as if they're weak or did nothing (Grasmeyer, 2020).

Grasmeyer also noted that the moment a survivor is no longer comfortable with his or her story being made public, it is immediately removed, be it from a campaign, website, social media, etc. "The survivor is always first," Grasmeyer said.

A21 has come to use more positive language in its marketing and campaigns. Its website has been redesigned—the black-and-white photos of women in chains have been replaced with more colorful imagery to inspire hope and a sense of welcoming to people wanting to partake in the cause. The reason for this, Grasmeyer said, is that fighting human trafficking can easily wear a person out due to the dark nature and emotional gravity of the crime.

"People get fatigued by this kind of stuff, and we want people to stay in this long-term," he said, "so we do our best to bring balance to the reality of it but also the hope and the restoration and the faith that we have in this... We don't deny the realities, but we're always looking to the future that it can actually get better."

On paper, A21 is not a Christian organization, but Grasmeyer explained that faith is at the root of everything the group does. There are staff prayer meetings, office worship sessions, and internal prayer gatherings. Though the spiritual conviction is internal, it feeds into A21's work and moves its staff and volunteers to reach as many people as possible to stop human trafficking.

“[Our faith] affects everything we do as far as our values as an organization,” Grasmeyer said, “but we’re so holistic in the area of what we believe that if we’re going to actually end human trafficking, we need every single kind of person on board to do it. It really doesn’t matter who you are or what you do—anyone can be a part of it.”

Unbound (Waco)

Born out of Antioch Community Church in Waco, Texas, Unbound is another NGO that works to abolish modern day slavery in communities around the world. Since 2012, it has opened offices all over Texas, in Arizona and California, and in Cambodia, Indonesia, Mongolia, and South Africa. The group addresses all forms of human trafficking, recently focusing on achieving increased federal recognition of the lesser-known categories, such as labor trafficking and male sex trafficking. Unbound Waco works closely with the Heart of Texas Human Trafficking Coalition (HTHTC) to educate as many people as possible in the local community on how to fight human trafficking.

“Everyone has a role in fighting human trafficking,” Allison Denman said. She is the operations director who oversees the daily activities of Unbound Waco, from setting up computer stations in the office to managing and facilitating the organization’s programs as well as those of HTHTC.

“Within Unbound, we have prevention awareness professional training,” she said. “We’ll train anyone: bus drivers, trash truck drivers, lawyers and law enforcement, FBI... We are just always continuing to develop and find new opportunities to raise awareness.”

Unbound works with survivors in their care to shape its efforts, asking the survivors where they might have been able to see information about human trafficking and

how to get help. This has led to the organization using the public transportation system to raise awareness. Information about the trade and how to seek help has been displayed on billboards along I-35, bus stops, public restrooms, and the back wrap of buses. Denman explained that outreach has been particularly focused on rural communities in Central Texas because trafficking is easier to hide in those areas due to lack of resources and education on the dangers of the crime (Denman, personal communication, March 4, 2020).

“We also do an annual outreach called *Not My City*, which engages six counties in the Coalition,” Denman said. “We invite all different types of community members—kids to adults, professionals to stay-at-home moms, anyone and everyone—to come learn about human trafficking, and then we give them awareness materials to go out into the community and post them in those key spots... We try to be informed of the most recent research topics and whatever reports that the state or the nation puts out. Whatever research is going on, we read that and take that as the new foundation of our work.”

The Waco Police Department also works closely with Unbound—officers inform the group where they typically find trafficked victims, and the Unbound staff uses their research on the crime to help the police respond best to those situations. For example, prostitutes are often found at hotels, so UnBound pushed to have a hotel/motel crime-free class taught through the Waco PD.

“[The class] invites hotel owners to come and get a certification saying that their hotel or motel is a crime-free place,” Denman said. “They know how to report [crimes], and they’re in partnership with the Waco PD to make it a safe location.”

The goal of Unbound is to encourage victims to identify themselves so they may seek help, bring awareness to all (especially under-identified) forms of human trafficking and susceptible populations (i.e. homeless, youth), and empower the public to take action. Denman explained that a community member's concerned call to the National Human Trafficking Hotline could be the third report of a suspicious situation and the one that prompts the authorities to go investigate. However, if that community member is unaware of the signs of a trafficking situation or has any hesitation about reporting, that crucial call may never be placed.

"We are committed to sharing honest truths about what's happening," Denman said. "We are not in the business of fear-mongering—I'm not here to make you scared for your life or make you buy extra locks on your doors, but what I am here to do is explain to you what could be happening two houses down from you. Not in a fearful way, but in a way that ignites responsibility to protect your neighbors and your community members."

Denman explained that the content included in awareness training programs for adults is fairly candid about the horrors of human trafficking. Unbound has also created curricula to be taught in Central Texas schools to students in the sixth to twelfth grades. While these programs are geared toward younger age groups, they are still straightforward and truthful in the information shared about the crime.

"They are vulnerable if they don't know," Denman said. "To us, knowledge is power, so giving those kids a context of what is happening gives them a better chance of identifying it and not becoming a victim of it."

Like A21, Unbound is familiar with the power of stories and how they can move others, especially when put into personal context. Denman recalled a training in which a trafficking survivor shared her story of how her mother sold her for sex as a child when they lived in the small, rural community of Marlin, Texas. After her story, a trainee mentioned that while she didn't live in Marlin, she knew the streets the speaker mentioned, as she drove down them frequently and her children played in that area. Stories are often more impactful when they become personally relevant and are more likely to push others to take action. "When people have a more empathetic perspective, they do have more responsibility," Denman said.

Unbound is also a nonprofit founded on Christian values and motivated by the task set forth by Christ to his followers to share God's love and mercy with the world. Denman asserted that Unbound staff members don't proselytize to survivors in their care or to people they work with, but they do allow their faith to guide them in their efforts, help them learn and grow as an organization, and keep them service-oriented and centered on their mission.

"One of UnBound's goals is to not only give you information, but to give you a call to action," Denman said. "Now that you know this, you can't just ignore it—this isn't just for your own knowledge, this is for you to keep someone safe and give you that responsibility for the person next to you. We all agree we want to keep our communities safe, and we can do that by watching out for one another, keeping an eye on each other."

A hope growing louder

On March 22, 2017, Theresa Flores came to Chapel at Baylor University and shared her experience in the commercial sex industry. She had been blackmailed as a freshman in high school after a boy she liked at her school drugged and raped her, took pictures of the encounter, and threatened to show them to her parents, pastor, and post them all over the school. He told her she could “earn them back” by providing “services” every night of the week, and for two years, that’s what she did. She coerced into sneaking out of her house in the middle of the night, letting this boy drive her to various neighborhoods, and allowing as many as 20 men per night do what they wanted to her. She never told her parents, friends, the police, anyone what was happening because “the stakes were too high,” and she was so afraid of what would happen if she spoke up.

Unfortunately, Flores’ experiences aren’t uncommon. People who are pulled into the world of human trafficking often find themselves trapped with no perceivable means of escape. For instance, according to Flores, the average woman who becomes a victim of sex trafficking will be violated by 10-15 men every night of the week, conceive and either be forced to have abortions or have her children taken away and placed in the foster care system, and will likely be arrested. Her life expectancy is 40 years of age, and her chance of death is 40 percent higher than the average person, most likely from suicide, overdosing, or being killed by her traffickers. In addition, 77 percent of children who get involved in the sex trade at a young age grow up to become adult prostitutes (Flores, speech, 2017).

Statistics like these are the reason why international governments and nonprofits like The A21 Campaign and Unbound work ceaselessly to turn the tide against human

trafficking. Millions of victims remain trapped in hopeless, torturous situations, sometimes in plain sight, and numerous organizations have called on society to do its part to abolish human trafficking. Laws regarding the crime have evolved for the better, and NGOs have created the necessary tools for anyone to take action and fight justly. Their influence has changed public perception and made dangerous social issues like smoking and distracted driving socially unacceptable—now, we must do the same for the buying and selling of fellow human beings.

Flores' story ends almost surprisingly, as it was not initially law enforcement that saved her. She found rescue in the form of a waitress in a diner who likely didn't know the signs of human trafficking but still was able to recognize a person in need. Flores concluded her address to the Baylor students with a challenge to learn how God might be calling them to help end human trafficking. The resources to take the first steps are available to us—now it is our responsibility to look beyond the mainstream media, know and understand the signs of the trade around us, and do our part to communicate awareness to others. When we find the courage to stop ignoring the problem and act, we take the chance to become the voice that is needed to help even one more person reclaim freedom.

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