

“The Slave Next Door – Human trafficking and slavery in America today” by Kevin Bales and Ron Soodalter

This book exposes the disturbing phenomenon of human trafficking and slavery that exists now in the United States.

Slaves are all around us, hidden in plain sight: the dishwasher in the kitchen of the neighbourhood restaurant, the kids on the corner selling cheap trinkets, the man sweeping the floor of the local department store. In these pages we also meet some unexpected slaveholders, such as a 27-year old middle-class Texas housewife who is currently serving a life sentence for offences including slavery. Weaving together a wealth of voices—from slaves, slaveholders, and traffickers as well as from experts, counsellors, law enforcement officers, rescue and support groups, and others—this book is also a call to action, telling what we, as private citizens, can do to finally bring an end to this horrific crime.

Excerpt from Chapter 6: Eating, wearing, walking and talking slavery

“Slavery probably crept into your life several times today, some before you even got to work. Rolling off your bed, standing on that pretty hand-woven rug, maybe you threw on a cotton t-shirt. In the kitchen did you make a cup of coffee, spoon in a little sugar, and then kick back with a chocolate croissant and your laptop to check the headlines? After a shower, maybe you drove to the station. Waiting for the train, perhaps you made a couple of calls on your cell phone.

All in all a normal day, but slavery was involved in almost every step. Hundreds of thousands of rugs are hand-woven by slaves in the “carpet belt” of India, Pakistan, and Nepal. Cotton is grown with slave labor in India, West Africa, and Uzbekistan, the world's second largest producer. Coffee cultivation also encompasses slave labor, mainly in Africa. Enslaved Haitian workers harvest the sugar in the Dominican Republic, the largest exporter of sugar to the U.S. The chocolate in that croissant can also be the product of slavery, from the cocoa farms of the Ivory Coast. Even the steel and iron in your car can be polluted by slavery. From a quarter to a half of all U.S. imports of raw iron in different forms come from Brazil. (1) In that country slaves burn the forests to make charcoal, which in turn is used to smelt ore into pig iron and iron into steel. In America, the single largest consumer of Brazilian iron and steel is the automotive industry, though the construction industry also uses a large amount. Pressed against your ear, that cell phone keeps you connected to friends and family, but also to slavery. Cell phones (and laptops and other electronics) just don't work very well without a mineral called tantalum. In the Democratic Republic of Congo poor farmers are rounded up by armed gangs and enslaved to dig tantalum out of the ground. Every one of us, every day, touches, wears, and eats products tainted with slavery. Slave-made goods and commodities are everywhere in our lives, but, paradoxically, in small proportions. The volume is unacceptable, but rarely critical to our national economy or quality of life. And slavery in our lives is not restricted to cotton, coffee, cocoa, steel, rugs, and cell phones. The list goes on and on, with new commodities and products turning up all the time. Some of them, such as shrimp, might surprise you.”

(1) See: Michael Smith and David Voreacos, “The Secret World of Modern Slavery,” Bloomberg Markets, December 2006