PART I

SLAVES IN THE LAND OF THE FREE

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1

THE OLD SLAVERY AND THE NEW

> 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.
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> Frederick Douglass, *The New National Era,* August 17, 1871, recalling the Atlantic slave trade

Certain things we know to be true. We know that slavery is a bad thing, perpetrated by bad people. We also know that slavery not only exists throughout the world today but flourishes. With approximately twenty-seven million people in bondage, it is thought to be the third most profitable criminal enterprise of our time, following only drugs and guns. In fact, more than twice as many people are in bondage in the world today than were taken from Africa during the entire 350 years of the Atlantic slave trade. And we know that slavery is alive and more than well in the United States, thriving in the dark, and practiced in many forms in places where you'd least expect it.

Meet Sandra Bearden. Sandra was a twenty-seven-year-old homemaker in a comfortable suburb of Laredo, Texas—a neighborhood of solid brick homes and manicured lawns. Married, the mother of a four-year-old son, she lived a perfectly normal middle-class existence. By all accounts, Sandra was a pleasant woman, the sort you'd chat with at the mall or the supermarket . . . the sort who might live next door. Yet she is currently serving a life sentence, convicted of multiple offenses, including human trafficking and slavery.

It started innocently enough. At first, all Sandra wanted was a maid—someone to do the housework and help with her small son—but she didn't want to pay a lot. So she drove across the border to a small, dirt-poor village near Vera Cruz, Mexico, where she was introduced to Maria and her parents. Maria was only twelve when she met Sandra Bearden. She had very little schooling and dreamed of getting an education—a dream that her parents encouraged but could do nothing to achieve. Over coffee in their small kitchen, Bearden offered Maria a job, as well as the chance to attend school, learn English, and taste the rich life of "el Norte." The work, as Bearden described it, was much like what

Maria was already doing at home, and, with the promise of education and opportunity, Sandra's offer made a very enticing package. The fact that Sandra herself was Mexican born helped Maria's parents feel they could trust her, and they gave their permission. Sandra smuggled Maria across the border in her expensive car and drove her to her home in Laredo.

On arrival, Maria was dragged into hell. Sandra Bearden used violence and terror to squeeze work and obedience from the child. From early morning till midafternoon, Maria cooked, cleaned, scrubbed, and polished. If Maria dozed off from exhaustion, or when Sandra decided she wasn't working fast enough, Sandra would blast pepper spray into Maria's eyes. A broom was broken over the girl's back and a few days later, a bottle against her head. At one point, Bearden tortured the twelve-year-old by jamming a garden tool up her vagina. That was Maria's workday; her "time off" was worse.

When Maria wasn't working, Sandra would chain her to a pole in the backyard without food or water. An eight-foot concrete fence kept her hidden from neighbors. After chaining her, Sandra would sometimes force Maria to eat dog feces. Then Maria would be left alone, her arms chained behind her with a padlock, her legs chained and locked together till the next morning, when the work and torture would begin again. Through the long afternoon and night Maria would fade in and out of consciousness from dehydration, and in her hunger she would sometimes scoop dirt into her mouth. Like most slaves in America, Maria was in shock, disoriented, isolated, and dependent. To maintain control, Bearden kept Maria hungry and in pain.

About one-third of the handful of slaves freed in the United States each year come to liberty because an average person sees something he or she just can't ignore. Luckily, one of the Beardens' neighbors had to do some work on his roof, and that probably saved Maria's life. Looking down over the high concrete wall into the Bearden's backyard, the neighbor saw a small girl chained up and whimpering; he called 911.

The police found Maria chained hand and foot, covered in cuts and bruises, and suffering from dehydration and exposure. She was too weak to walk and had to be carried to freedom on a stretcher. Her skin was badly burned from days in the sun. (In Laredo, Texas, the *average* summer temperature is ninety-eight degrees.) Photos taken at the time show one of her eyes bloodied and infected and thick welts and scars on her skin where the chains had cut into her. She had not eaten in four days. The district attorney said, "This is the worst case I've ever seen,

worse than any murder. It's tragic all the way around." Later, at Bearden's trial, the policeman who found Maria wept. "She was shaking and crying and had a scared look in her eyes. She was in severe pain," Officer Jay Reece testified. He explained that he had tried to remove the chains from Maria's arms with bolt cutters but couldn't. As he tried to move her arm to cut the chains, she twisted and whimpered because she was in so much pain. "I've never seen anything like it before," Reese said, and sitting in the witness box, this policeman began to cry.

It is hard to imagine, but Maria was one of the lucky slaves. In America, most slaves spend four to five years in bondage; Maria's enslavement lasted only seven months. Sandra Bearden was arrested, and the Mexican government brought Maria's parents up from Vera Cruz. Her father blamed himself for what had happened. "We made a decision that we thought would be good for our child, and look what happened. I made a mistake, truly, and this is all my fault," he said.[1] Unlike most slaveholders in America, Bearden was caught and convicted. Like most slaves, Maria got nothing, except the fare for the twelve-hour bus ride home. She had just turned thirteen.[2]

We all ask, "How could someone so abuse a child—to stake her in the sun, feed her excrement, beat her bloody. . . . Surely, only a monster could do this." Yet Sandra Bearden's treatment of Maria is not unusual. How a seemingly normal person can descend into a spiral of violent control and abuse of another is one of the mysteries of slaveholding—a mystery we have set out to solve in this book.

The simple truth is, humans keep slaves; we always have. To understand this, we must come to know what it is in the human heart that makes slavery possible. For this book we set out to uncover slavery in modern America. Our search for answers took us to slaves and slave masters, to experts, counselors, and doctors, as well as to leaders of government, law enforcement, and groups whose sole mission is to rescue and support victims. Some of these stories broke our hearts, sometimes the excuses and rationalizations made us boil with anger, and sometimes we met real unsung heroes who gave us hope that America can put an end to slavery once and for all.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY SLAVERY

Most Americans' idea of slavery comes right out of *Roots*—the chains, the whip in the overseer's hand, the crack of the auctioneer's gavel. That was one form of bondage. The slavery plaguing America today takes a

different form, but make no mistake, it is real slavery. Where the law sanctioned slavery in the 1800s, today it's illegal. Where antebellum masters took pride in the ownership of slaves as a sign of status, today's human traffickers and slaveholders keep slaves hidden, making it all the more difficult to locate victims and punish offenders. Where the slaves in America were once primarily African and African American, today we have "equal opportunity" slavery; modern-day slaves come in all races, all types, and all ethnicities. We are, if anything, totally democratic when it comes to owning and abusing our fellow human beings. All that's required is the chance of a profit and a person weak enough and vulnerable enough to enslave.

This is capitalism at its worst, and it is supported by a dramatic alteration in the basic economic equation of slavery. Where an average slave in 1850 would have cost the equivalent of $40,000 in modern money, today's slave can be bought for a few hundred dollars. This cheapness makes the modern slave easily affordable, but it also makes him or her a disposable commodity. For the slaveholder it's often cheaper to let a slave die than it is to buy medicine to keep the slave alive. There is no form of slavery, past or present, that isn't horrific; however, today's slavery is one of the most diabolical strains to emerge in the thousands of years in which humans have been enslaving their fellows.

SO HOW MANY SLAVES ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

According to a U.S. State Department study, some 14,500 to 17,500 people are trafficked into the United States from overseas and enslaved *each year.*[3] They come from Africa, Asia, India, China, Latin America, and the former Soviet states. Nor are native-born Americans immune from slavers; many are stolen from the streets of their own cities and towns. Some sources, including the federal government, have put out extremely high estimates of the number of U.S. citizens—primarily children—caught in slavery. The fact is, the precise number of slaves in the United States, whether trafficked in from other countries or enslaved from our own population, is simply not known. Given the hidden nature of the crime, the best numbers on offer are rough estimates. We do know that slaves in America are found—or rather, *not* found—in nearly all fifty states, working as commercial sex slaves, fruit pickers, construction workers, gardeners, and domestics. They work in restaurants, factories, laundries, and sweatshops. Each year human trafficking and slavery in America generate millions upon millions of dollars for criminals who

prey on the most vulnerable: the desperate, the uneducated, and the impoverished immigrant seeking a better life. Brutalized and held in slavery for years, those who survive face indifference, official confusion, stigma, and shame as they struggle to regain control over their stolen and deeply damaged lives.

While no one knows for sure how many people are enslaved in America, a conservative estimate would be around fifty thousand and growing. Even for those who have worked in this area for years, these numbers are staggering. More astounding is the fact that this is a crime that, as a rule, goes unpunished. This lack of punishment is reflected in a remarkable parallel in American crime rates. If we accept the government's estimates, about seventeen thousand people are trafficked into slavery in the United States in any given year; coincidentally about seventeen thousand people are murdered in the United States each year. Obviously, murder is the ultimate crime, but slavery comes a close second, especially considering the other crimes associated with it, such as rape and torture. Note that the national success rate in solving murder cases is about 70 percent; around eleven thousand murders are "cleared" each year. But according to the U.S. government's own numbers, the annual percentage of trafficking and slavery cases solved is less than 1 percent. If 14,500 to 17,500 people were newly enslaved in America in 2006, the fact is that in the same year the Department of Justice brought charges against only 111 people for human trafficking and slavery; 98 of them were convicted.[4] And those figures apply only to people trafficked from other countries; no measures exist for domestic slavery victims.

In July 2004 then-President Bush talked about the rate of arrests and convictions for human trafficking in the United States: "Since 2001, we've charged 110 traffickers. That's triple the number charged in the previous three years. We're beginning to make good, substantial progress. The message is getting out: We're serious. And when we catch you, you'll find out we're serious. We're staying on the hunt." Strong words, but the unvarnished truth is, with less than 1 percent of the offenders apprehended and less than 1 percent of the victims freed, the flow of human "product" into America continues practically unchecked.

AN UNBROKEN LEGACY OF BONDAGE

This book is about slavery in America today. Yet there has always been bondage in this country. That fact bears repetition—there has never been a single day in our America, from its discovery and birth right up to the moment you are reading this sentence, without slavery.

It began when the Spaniards landed. In 1493, on his second voyage across the Atlantic, and before even establishing a colony, Christopher Columbus enslaved hundreds of Taino Indians and shipped them home to Spain. The wave of armed and armored conquistadores following Columbus brought a plague of butchery and enslavement upon the Indians, destroying entire cultures. With the age-old rationale that any foreign society is inferior, the Spaniards used the "God-told-me-to-do-it" argument to justify a policy of rape, slaughter, and enslavement in their quest for riches.

When the Spaniards found that the Indians, not surprisingly, were dying in droves from brutality and European diseases, they began to sail to Africa for slaves—*bozales,* as they were called. In 1518, King Charles of Spain gave royal consent to begin what would become the 350-year trans-Atlantic slave trade. Ultimately, every European power claiming land in the New World followed Spain's example. French, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, and English settlers from the Canadian North to the bottom tip of South America owned slaves. There was a heavy concentration not only in the southern colonies of Virginia and Georgia but also on the farms and docks of the northern settlements of Massachusetts and New York. Slave labor in America became an accepted social and economic reality. Once again, the "heathen" state of the victims, along with the difference in their skin color, made for an easy—if false—moral distinction in the minds of the slavers.

Most of us are not aware that following the American Revolution Congress passed a series of increasingly stringent laws banning the international slave trade (while leaving the *institution* of slavery untouched), culminating in a law that made trafficking in slaves a hanging offense.[5] Congress, however, did little to enforce these laws, and both slavery and the slave trade flourished until the Civil War and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. It's a safe bet that a vast majority of Americans believes that slavery ended in 1865; nothing could be further from the truth. It continued more quietly and on a smaller scale, but without pause.

While legal emancipation might have come with the Thirteenth Amendment, that didn't stop the southern planters from re-enslaving countless thousands of African Americans. Crops in the South still needed planting, cultivating, and harvesting, and there was a vast population of unemployed former slaves. Planters instituted a system that was as close to the old slavery as possible, but with some new wrinkles. With the blessing of President Andrew Johnson, each southern state

passed what were referred to as Black Codes. These laws were nothing more than legalized racial repression, dictating every aspect of the lives of the former slaves. The laws of each state varied, but in general, segregation was made mandatory, and African Americans were forbidden to vote, sit on juries, carry weapons in public, testify against whites, or hold certain jobs. Violations were punishable by fines and imprisonment.

This time, instead of the old-fashioned antebellum slavery, the rule was "peonage," a simple form of debt bondage slavery that took two forms. In the most blatant form of peonage slavery, local authorities were allowed to "bind out" to local farmers any violators convicted of a crime, often a misdemeanor, and unable to pay their fines. With the law on the side of the white farmers, court-imposed fixed terms of labor became the norm. The number of "violations" increased dramatically as the work called for it. At harvest time, sheriff's deputies were sent into African American neighborhoods and drinking spots to arrest a fixed number of the strongest men. Charged with being "drunk and disorderly," they would be ordered to "work off" a large fine for several months with local white farmers. Cotton production consumed a large part of the people enslaved through peonage, but local governments also worked this scam to serve other interests. This type of forced labor was used to build railroads, roads, and bridges, to clear forests, and to manufacture turpentine. It wasn't the long-term ownership of the antebellum South, but these slaves weren't expensive, and it still meant complete and violent control, no pay, and economic exploitation, the defining hallmarks of slavery. From the 1870s, white-controlled local governments all across the Deep South were essentially slave brokers, enslaving and then selling the labor of African Americans.

In the second form of peonage, African Americans were duped or coerced into signing contracts as field workers or sharecroppers. Farm owners would hold their pay, and the sharecroppers were obligated to make all their purchases from the "company store," using tickets or orders rather than money. When their annual contracts expired, they found that the crops they raised never paid the debts they owed. Although it was often apparent that these "debts" were fraudulent or impossibly inflated, the penalty for nonpayment was jail. The only alternative was to stay on the land and try to work off the debt, which never seemed to lessen or disappear. Worse, the debt passed from parent to child, binding families to the land with no hope of advancement or escape. Each year became a frustrating, spirit-crushing effort to break even. Historian Jacqueline Jones has said that "perhaps as many as one-third of

all sharecropping farmers in Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia were being held against their will in 1900."[6] Peonage was practiced across the South and upheld for decades by local and federal government. A full federal ban on peonage-based slavery was not passed until 1948, and it persisted across much of the South well into the 1960s.

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME

While both the federal government and the American people generally ignored peonage, another form of slavery was very much on the minds of Americans in the first decades of the twentieth century. Large numbers of foreign-born women immigrants were being exploited in many areas of the workforce, and some of them were being forced into prostitution. On the West Coast, young, Asian, immigrant females (some younger than the age of ten) were smuggled into the United States, thereby circumventing immigration laws that excluded them. Asian women were bought and sold as property in a system that became known as the "yellow slave trade." Bogus "contracts" were created to enforce this system of slavery in which Asian women became domestics or prostitutes. The contracts offered these women a chance to work to buy their freedom, but in ways that were impossible to achieve. In San Francisco alone the number of Asian immigrant women who died in enslaved conditions was in the thousands.

At this same time prostitution was rapidly expanding along with the cities and was controlled by the same criminal gangs who often ran corrupt local governments. Operating from the premise that white women—both immigrant and native born—were being either lured or abducted, sold, and forced into prostitution, reformers and religious groups mounted a nationwide campaign. Using the term *white slavery* to describe the systematic sexual coercion of unwilling young women, religious leaders and journalists waged war against pimps and procurers. The campaign captured the imagination of middle-class white America. The first attacks and exposés were highly anti-Semitic, portraying Russian Jews as the gravest offenders. The Jews, claimed the authors, were selling their own sisters and daughters to educate and advance their sons. The charges were preposterous and vicious, and they set an anti-immigrant tone that permeated the movement for years. But the biggest target of the reformers was the "urban machine," for it was in the cities that the evils of rape, seduction, and forced prostitution were most rampant.

Within a short time, the white slavery issue became a plank in Progressive election platforms, and candidates trumpeted their concern for the innocent young victims of the "vice combines." The whole question of "white slavery," however, became entangled (as it has today) with questions of race, ethnicity, and immigration. Inevitably, legislation for the safeguarding of endangered womanhood was introduced. The first of two laws, the 1907 Immigration Act, allowed the government to deport any immigrant engaging in any form of prostitution within three years of his or her admission to the country (thus deporting the victims of "white slavery"). The second law was the brainchild of Chicago congressman James R. Mann. In 1910, he introduced the White Slave Traffic Act, more commonly known as the Mann Act. Its provisions were simple: the federal government could prosecute anyone who transported young women and forced them into prostitution (or "any other immoral purpose"). The bill was signed into law with little resistance.

Sadly, these laws were also used as an excuse for racist oppression and the wholesale deportation of recent immigrants. Police systematically searched ghettos and other ethnic neighborhoods and raided brothels in several major cities across the United States, arresting recent immigrant clients and prostitutes for "moral turpitude" and deporting them. At the same time, many male immigrants were being caught up in forced labor in agriculture, mining, and construction, and American-born and immigrant women were still being enslaved in prostitution, but their existence or fate was rarely noted.

To this day, the debate continues as to how much "white slavery" actually existed. At the time, most Americans believed it was rampant, but there was no effective way to count victims. Ironically, the very situation that sparked fear and action one hundred years ago may have become a reality today. Thousands of foreign and native-born women and children are being enslaved in the United States by foreign and native-born human traffickers. Forced prostitution is, according to the federal government, the largest market for slave labor in America. This time there is no moral panic; most Americans are simply clueless.

Slavery in America probably hit its lowest ebb in the 1940s and 1950s. True, some states were still enslaving African Americans through trumped-up legal charges, and in remote areas Mexican and Chinese workers were locked away, abused and unpaid. Still, by the sixties, especially with the civil rights movement and farm mechanization undermining Southern sharecropping systems, slavery seemed all but dead. But beginning in the 1980s, and then exploding in the 1990s, slavery

came back with a vengeance. With the end of the Cold War and the tripling of the global population, borders collapsed around the world and the traffic in people expanded exponentially. America, once again, became a prime destination for slave traders.

SLAVERY COMES IN MANY GUISES

The government, when it addresses the subject of human trafficking at all, focuses primarily on the area of forced prostitution, possibly because it makes the biggest splash. More visible than most other forms of slavery, it is thought to account for about half the trafficking victims in the country. These women and children are subjected to serial rape, physical injury, psychological damage, and constant exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

But what about all the other forms of slavery thriving right under our noses? If you don't see them, you're in good company; neither do many of our public officials. The plight of enslaved domestics, such as Maria, accounts for about one-fourth of all slaves in America. Agriculture is another major area of human trafficking. An unknown number of victims of forced labor are tending and picking our fruit and vegetables. They come here looking for a decent wage. Instead, they are enslaved by crime syndicates and families—and sometimes through our government's own unwieldy "guest worker" program—in such states as Florida, North and South Carolina, and Georgia.

What happened to seventeen-year-old Alejandro, an orphaned street kid from Guatemala, is typical. A trafficker, in the guise of a sympathetic neighbor, "loaned" Alejandro the money to come to America, promising good pay and the chance to get an education. When he arrived in the Southwest, he was immediately thrown into a barracks with twenty other trafficked workers, kept under guard by thugs with automatic weapons. Here he was told he had to work to pay off his "debt," which had suddenly doubled, with an interest rate of 75 percent. Of course the debt was never meant to be paid off; the money he earned went straight to his traffickers. Beaten, bound, and blindfolded, trucked from field to field, and threatened with torture and death should he run away, the disoriented and desperate boy finally managed to elude his keepers and found his way to a homeless shelter. Here the scars on his body were noticed, and he told his story. A "Good Samaritan" contacted a local refugee resettlement agency, and various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) became involved. Finally, Alejandro was

placed in a licensed foster home and worked with the Department of Justice to prosecute his traffickers. As with Maria, his story is unusual only in that he escaped his slavery; most do not.[7]

It turns out that slaves are all around us, hidden in plain sight—the dishwasher in the kitchen of the restaurant where you and your family dined last night; the kids on the corner of Forty-first Street, selling cheap trinkets for a dollar; the man in gray overalls, sweeping the floor of the big-name department store where you buy your Christmas presents. What they share in common is that their lives are not their own, and they deserve better. But without our help, their world will change only by getting worse.

Almost impossible to detect, slavery exists in our fields, in our towns, and, sometimes, in the house next door. And even if we did suspect a person of being a slaveholder, many of us would say it is none of our business. Be honest, nobody's listening; if you suspected that *your* next-door neighbor, your golfing buddy, or one of the women in your book club seemed to be keeping a "domestic" against her will, what, if anything, would you do? It's a tough question, not least because most Americans are not even sure what defines a slave.

BECOMING SLAVES

Slavery has been defined in various ways, but there are three essential criteria for knowing if someone is a slave. The first is the complete control of one person by another, through the use of violence—both physical and psychological. The second—hard labor for little or no pay—clearly applies as well. Slaves receive nothing beyond subsistence. The third criterion is economic exploitation—making a profit for the slaveholder. No one enslaves another simply out of meanness, at least not at first; slavery is about money. All three of these conditions are vital to the definition, but the most crucial is violent control and the resultant loss of free will. When we aren't sure if someone is, in fact, a slave, we can ask one basic question: "Can this person walk away?" In America, more and more frequently the answer is "no."[8]

That's why, ironically, most slaves in America are volunteers at first. Today the slave takers rarely have to coerce or kidnap their victims. All the criminals have to do is open a door to "opportunity" and the slaves walk in. Slave recruiters all over the world appear friendly and full of news about good jobs with good pay. There may even be a little money for the rest of the family as an "advance" on the big wages to be earned.

This helps ease the victims out of their homes and into the pipeline that will deliver them into slavery.

Once they are in the pipeline, their documents are taken away "for safekeeping." The transit house where they stay at night is locked up "to keep everyone safe." They are fed little, and the "boss" purposely keeps them awake most of the night. Within a few days, sleep deprivation, hunger, and isolation take their toll, and confusion and dependence set in. Disoriented, they are constantly reminded that soon they'll be working regular jobs in America.

They have no idea that they are, in fact, slaves, as they walk, ride, fly, or float further into bondage. Once inside the United States, far from family, without any proof of identity, unable to speak the language, hungry, confused, and now threatened, they become aware of their situation. If they resist or try to leave, they are punished. It is a story that is played out all over the world. There are variations on the theme; sometimes the recruiter is a friend of the family, sometimes the violence begins before the border is crossed. Some victims are brought into the country via major airports and harbors holding real or spurious documents, while others huddle in the backs of vans or wade across the Rio Grande. But ultimately, the result is the same.

A MELTING POT OF SLAVES

In 2004 the antislavery organization Free the Slaves teamed up with the Human Rights Center at the University of California, Berkeley to carry out the first large-scale study of slavery in America. They found people trafficked from at least thirty-five countries working against their will in the United States. Currently, the largest group of victims seems to be Chinese, followed by Mexicans and Vietnamese; but this can change, depending on shifts in global economics and politics.[9] Between 1999 and 2004, documented slavery cases were reported in at least ninety U.S. cities. These tended to be larger cities in states with sizable immigrant communities, such as California, Florida, New York, and Texas—all of which are on the transit routes for international travelers.

Most slaves in America, like Maria and Alejandro, come here hoping to start new and better lives. This is the terrible irony about American slavery. People are turned into slaves for doing what any one of us would do—in fact, what many of our own parents, or their parents, did. When many families today face the same circumstances they also pick up and move, inspired by desperation, courage, and determination. Some will

succeed. But for many others, the land of opportunity includes a one-way ticket into bondage.

HOMEGROWN SLAVES

Not all slavery in America involves undocumented immigrants. Some victims are born and raised in the United States and find themselves pressed into slavery by deception or sheer violence. In January 2003, a terrified seventeen-year-old girl ran into a store in a suburban mall in Detroit and grabbed a security guard. She pleaded with him for help, as a group of men and women burst into the store pursuing her. Seeing that the girl was shaking and bruised, the guard stood up to the thugs and threw them out of the store. Once he had her safe, he called the police, and the girl told her story.

The teenager explained to authorities that a man and a woman had abducted her months before while she was waiting at a bus stop in downtown Cleveland, Ohio. Her captors drove her to Detroit, where she was held in a house with other female captives and forced to have sex with male visitors. The captives were never left alone, but were escorted around the house, even to the bathroom. An older woman kept the younger ones in line by threatening and sometimes beating them. Each day the girls were given a new assignment. Some would go to malls in the metro Detroit area to sell jewelry and trinkets; others would be forced to dance and strip for private parties and to perform sex acts.

The girls' captors "did that punishment-reward thing," a police investigator said. "They would get their nails and hair done. If they stepped out of line, they got beat down. Some of the senior women acted as enforcers."

One day, on a trip to the mall with several others, the girl managed to escape. After the security guard called the police, the young girl directed them to the house where she had been enslaved. The resulting bust led to the exposure of a multistate ring of forced prostitution involving midwestern women and girls, some as young as thirteen. Police discovered that the traffickers had been operating a forced prostitution ring since as early as 1995 by kidnapping teenage girls and transporting them to cities throughout the Midwest.

Not surprisingly, the victims are still experiencing severe emotional problems. "The devastation [this] has brought on these young women is just immeasurable," the prosecutor said.[10]

The young girl enslaved from the bus stop was a native-born American, with native-born parents and a life little different from that of most American children. When she left home that day, the last thing she expected was to be abducted and forced into prostitution. The parasitic traffickers are students of opportunity, seducing or stealing their victims where they can, all over America. One government official has asserted that about half the trafficking victims in this country are children.[11] And while studies point to runaway or throwaway children as the likeliest victims, no one is exempt.

Over and over, the story of enslavement plays itself out across our country. Every day our newspapers carry stories of human trafficking, yet we remain oblivious. Through our ignorance and worse yet, our lack of interest, we enable slavery. Unless we heed the wake-up call, slavery will continue to spread. Our children are also endangered by a different, subtler threat—apathy. Kids learn from their parents, and if noninvolvement is what we teach, by word or example, then that is exactly what they will learn and how they will live.

FREEDOM AND THE FUTURE

Federal law classifies tens of thousands of people in the United States as slaves, yet most Americans can't see them. If we are going to free slaves, ensure that they get to build new lives, and help our government enforce its own antislavery laws, we must understand what slavery is today and where it is going. We cannot solve a problem we don't understand. In writing this book, we have had to face up to some basic questions: How can any American, who began nearly every day of his or her young life with the phrase, "with liberty and justice for all," possibly enslave another? What is wrong with our country that it allows slave masters to live—and flourish—untroubled among us? What more can we as citizens do to fix this problem? And what will it take for our government, which serves at the will and for the good of its people, to dedicate the needed resources, both money and personnel, to destroying this evil?

On our journey we looked hard into the many faces of slavery. Now we can introduce you to the traffickers—from the single *coyote* to the crime syndicate. Victims of slavery will speak in this book, as well those who are struggling against terrific odds to find and free the slaves. We also want to share what we have learned about recognizing slavery in your own town or neighborhood. The more we learned, the more we've had to admit our own complicity. We discovered that the simplest daily

purchases Americans make can contribute to keeping people in bondage. It turns out that all of us are responsible for perpetuating slavery by buying, wearing, eating, and using the products of slave labor, from cell phones and laptops, to the fruit and vegetables on our tables, to the clothes we wear.

Slavery is in our homes, neighborhoods, and cities, and little is being done about it. Together, we can change that. In these pages, you'll meet police officers on the street, high-ranking government officials, and Good Samaritans—everyday people, fighting to make an impact. Tough questions will be asked of government agencies whose roles include—or should include—the discovery, liberation, and support of slaves and the arrest and prosecution of their traffickers. While the problem is huge, our journey has taught us that it is within our power to end slavery in America; and we will offer ideas on how to achieve a final emancipation.

America was born with the congenital disease of slavery, and, legal or illegal, it has never left us. Today, we are still conflicted about our slaveholding past and its ugly aftermath. We study it, lament it, and argue it as a haunting presence from our darker history. Yet while we were looking the other way, slavery in America evolved into a whole new beast that lives in darkness among us and feeds on ignorance and misery. Only through our awareness, our concern, and our commitment can it be driven out. The aim of *The Slave Next Door* is to provide the awareness and hopefully inspire the concern and the commitment. It's both challenging and exhilarating to know that we really can be the generation to end this nation-long affliction.