

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Kevin Bales. *New Slavery: A Reference Handbook*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004. xviii + 273 pp. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-85109-815-6.

Reviewed by Andrew Clark (Department of History, University of North Carolina Wilmington)

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Slavery around the World Today

This book should prove particularly useful for the reference sections of high school and college libraries and of considerable interest to anyone investigating modern slavery around the world. While primarily a reference work, with an extensive list of relevant organizations, websites, audiovisual materials, and print resources, the author also examines the definition, history, and the various types of contemporary slavery, primarily in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East but also in the United States.

Why should a work on slavery interest genocide scholars and other readers of H-Net Genocide? Bales makes several points that link contemporary slavery and genocide. The author emphasizes that violence is an essential ingredient of slavery, either during enslavement or afterwards. The constant threat and fear of violence prevents people from escaping or attempting to flee their bondage. In addition, slaves have no choices and no control over their lives or, often, their death, as they are disposable people, as are victims of genocide. Slavery means the total subjugation, exploitation, and ultimate annihilation of a person or a people in a manner similar to that experienced under genocidal conditions. Both slavery and genocide have occurred and continue to affect millions of human beings globally, regardless of ethnicity, nation, or region, under various types of political, economic, social, and cultural systems. Slavery, like genocide, has been carefully debated, defined, and condemned by the United Nations; numerous international laws and conventions have been passed to eliminate and prevent both slavery and genocide. Yet, in both cases, despite univer-

sal condemnation and abhorrence, the practices continue unabated into the twenty-first century.

According to Bales, over twenty-seven million people, mostly girls and women, can be considered slaves today. Most come from so-called Third World or developing countries and while many remain in their regions of origin, many are smuggled into the developed world. The enslaved include children in the carpet trade in Asia, young girls and women forced into prostitution in Asia and Western countries, and immigrant workers in the Middle East and the United States tricked into domestic service and agricultural production that, under any definition, constitute servitude and slavery.

Chapter 1 discusses the background and history of slavery, which has existed in virtually every pre-industrial society in world history, while chapter 2 focuses on forms and examples of contemporary slavery around the globe. Chapter 3 examines in detail slavery and human trafficking in the United States. Slavery is most prevalent in five sectors of the U.S. economy: prostitution and sex services, domestic service, agriculture, sweatshop/factory work, and restaurant/hotel work. Victims of slavery in America come from numerous ethnic and racial groups, and are enslaved primarily through force, fraud, or coercion. They tend to be young, poorly educated, and economically deprived. The threat of violence and the lack of choices and alternatives keep people enslaved. The author proposes several steps that can be taken to end slavery, including education, more

secure borders and immigration controls, enhanced sensitivity in and training of law enforcement agents, increased media attention, and more public awareness. The chapter includes a host of organizations, agencies and associations involved in ending human trafficking, both in the United States and globally, and how to contact them and participate in the struggle against forced labor.

Chapter 4 consists of a chronology of enslavement and slavery, with particular emphasis on the last century, whereas chapter 5 consists of a series of biographical sketches that should prove useful to any student or reader interested in individuals who were either enslaved themselves or engaged in abolition movements. This includes Americans such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman as well as numerous African, Asian, and British abolitionists.

Chapter 6 contains arguably the most interesting material in the book. It reprints the texts of several key international laws and conventions on slavery and coerced labor, including those of the League of Nations, the United Nations, and the U.S. government. Then Bales

quotes from individual testimonies about different types of slavery. These personal accounts, from India, Mauritania, the Sudan, Brazil, Ghana, the United States, and other countries make for disturbing but powerful reading. They present the book's best argument against slavery and human trafficking.

Chapters 7 and 8 include a list of non-governmental organizations and agencies involved in the antislavery movement and an annotated bibliography of print and non-print resources dealing with the subjects of slavery and abolition. The bibliography is by no means exhaustive, but it will lead interested readers to other, more scholarly works on specific topics. Particularly useful for students are the numerous websites provided for further information and resources.

This book is a valuable and necessary reference work on the practices of slavery, a topic that has been traditionally considered part of a distant past rather than what it actually constitutes—a contemporary global reality and tragedy.

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