MODERN-DAY Slavery

Tens of millions of people around the world, including children, are forced to work as slaves. What can be done to help them? BY REBECCA ZISSOU

In Ghana, young boys enslaved in the fishing industry work on Lake Volta.
In many ways, Mabel is a typical teen. She goes to school, hangs out with her friends, and daydreams about her future. But for years, Mabel’s life was anything but ordinary.

When Mabel was a young girl, her mother died. She was sent to live with her grandparents in a poor village in the West African nation of Ghana. They couldn’t afford to take care of her. As a result, they sent her to work in the fishing industry on Lake Volta, one of the world’s largest man-made lakes.

There, Mabel was held captive as a slave. She was forced to work up to 17 hours straight with little food and no pay. Every day, she woke early to gather firewood and cook. Then she spent her days folding fishing nets on the lake. Strong winds constantly threatened to overturn the wooden boats and drown everyone onboard. At night, she had to make dinner for the other workers.

“I hardly slept at all,” Mabel told reporters years later. “Every evening, I hoped that there would be a storm so I wouldn’t have to go out on the lake.”

Since then, Mabel’s life has improved dramatically. When she was 15, aid workers raided the lake and brought her to safety. She was able to attend school for the first time and now dreams of becoming a nurse.

It may sound hard to believe, but Mabel’s story is like those of millions of people worldwide. According to the Global Slavery Index, more than 40 million people are trapped in modern-day slavery. It doesn’t always look like the slavery we read about in history books. It includes about 25 million people who are essentially forced to work without pay in a variety of circumstances. The other 15 million people are mostly girls and women trapped in forced marriages. They are basically treated like slaves by their husbands and their husbands’ families.

Like Mabel, many slaves today are from poor communities in Africa or Asia. Poverty, corruption, crime, and discrimination make people in these parts of the world vulnerable to human traffickers.

“People tend to think of slavery as a historical problem,” says Katharine Bryant of the Walk Free Foundation, an antislavery organization. “But millions of people are still being exploited.”

Now, new initiatives are calling attention to the crisis. The efforts involve pressuring lawmakers around the world to enforce antislavery laws, encouraging companies to ensure that their supply chains aren’t using forced laborers, and raising awareness about the issue.

“Modern slavery is a hidden crime,” says Bryant, “So it’s very important that we talk about it.”

**As Old as Civilization**

Slavery is as old as civilization itself. It existed in the earliest societies in Mesopotamia in 6800 B.C. During that time, slaves helped build the world’s first cities. In the Roman Empire, prisoners of war and people who couldn’t pay their debts were sold into slavery. Some of them were forced to fight to the death as gladiators in the Colosseum, starting in 80 A.D.

Beginning in 1525, more than 12 million Africans and their descendants were forced into slavery in the Americas. Many had been kidnapped. They were shipped across the Atlantic Ocean and sold at public auctions to the highest bidder. Generations of slaves worked...
on cotton plantations in the South. Many plantation slaves suffered regular beatings.

In December 1865, ratification of the 13th Amendment abolished slavery in the United States. At the time, about 4 million people were enslaved. They made up 13 percent of the country’s population.

Today, slavery is illegal in almost every country. Yet it continues to exist all over the world. Modern-day slaves aren’t captured, stacked like cattle on slave ships, and sold in chains at public auctions. They are men, women, and children lured by the promise of a job and a better life. And they are people forced to work with little or no pay, or coerced to sell their bodies.

**Slavery in the U.S.**

According to some estimates, there are currently 58,000 people enslaved in the U.S. Many of them are domestic workers, including housekeepers.

Human traffickers operate in the shadows. That makes it difficult to know the exact number of slaves in each country. But nearly 60 percent of the world’s slaves are thought to be in India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Uzbekistan. That means that the majority of slaves worldwide are in just five countries (see map, below).

In those nations, hundreds of millions of people live in poor communities without economic opportunities or access to proper schooling. That makes them easy prey for human traffickers, who promise them work and opportunities.

Sometimes, parents are tricked into selling their own kids. Traffickers often promise that the children will get an education and earn money to send back home. But once the kids have left their villages, they’re put to work in factories, mines, homes, fields, restaurants, hotels, and sometimes brothels. They aren’t allowed to go to school, see their families, or play outside.

Like child laborers, child slaves work in hazardous conditions for hours on end. But unlike other child laborers, says Bryant, slaves are “owned” by their captors and can’t return home.

In Southeast Asia, for example, kids as young as 7 are forced to weave rugs in dark rooms with no fresh air. In West Africa, they get up at 6 in the morning to harvest cocoa beans all day long in the scorching heat. In Latin
Where Slaves Are

The 10 countries with the most slaves are numbered.

America, they work on farms where they’re exposed to toxic chemicals, picking crops until their fingers bleed.

“We were confined in one room and made to work for a period of 12 hours,” says Ravi, a former child slave at a carpet factory in India. “I would think of running away. But the thought of running away would always be followed with the fear of getting caught.”

For girls, one of the most dangerous forms of modern-day slavery is sexual slavery. The Global Slavery Index estimates that almost 5 million women and girls worldwide are held as sexual slaves. Many of them are enslaved in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand.

Some of these girls are kidnapped from their villages. Others are sold into prostitution by their own families who are desperate for money. They’re often taken to cities where they’re held captive in brothels.

Wiping Out Child Slavery

Antislavery advocates say that ending forced labor will require a global effort. That’s because modern-day slavery is driven in part by a worldwide demand for cheap labor. This type of labor allows companies to produce inexpensive goods. That includes clothes, sneakers, and electronics. These products are then sold throughout the world, including in the U.S. (see “Slavery & You,” below).

But experts say that some progress has been made. In recent years, governments, humanitarian groups, and other organizations have increased funding to help end slavery worldwide. Many countries have also strengthened antislavery laws and increased penalties for human traffickers.

In addition, several companies have pledged to end the use of slave labor in the making of their products. Mars, Ferrero, and other chocolate manufacturers recently promised to eliminate slavery on farms that supply their cocoa by 2020. And in recent years, more than 250 retailers have agreed not to buy cotton harvested by child slaves in Uzbekistan. Gap, H&M, and American Eagle are among these retailers.

Kailash Satyarthi, a children’s rights activist, founded an organization that’s working to end abuses against children. He says it’s important that young people educate themselves about the problems facing kids around the world and spread the word.

“Building global awareness around how children are exploited is the single most effective way to prevent them from being exploited in the first place,” he says.

Bryant, too, says education is key. “As consumers, we have a responsibility to think about the products we’re buying and how they were made.”

Organizing Ideas

Tracking central ideas and key details can help you navigate the complexity of a nonfiction text. After reading "Modern-Day Slavery," fill in the blank sections below to provide a full picture of the information presented in the article.

Reasons people become involved with human traffickers:
1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 

Examples of slavery throughout history:
1. 
2. 
3. 

How people are working to end modern-day slavery:
1. 
2. 
3. 

ON YOUR OWN: The "Wiping Out Child Slavery" section of the "Modern-Day Slavery" article details several ways individuals and companies are trying to end childhood slavery. Choose one of the recommended strategies and argue for or against its use as a solution to this problem. Use the information provided in the article as well as your own outside research to support your claim.
Up Close

Modern-Day Slavery
Read the article closely, then answer each question below. Write three to five sentences for each response, using evidence from the text to support your answers. Use a separate sheet of paper if you need more space.

1. What is the author's main purpose in the first five paragraphs of the article?

2. According to the article, what parts of the world are most affected by modern-day slavery? Why?

3. What are the central ideas in the section "As Old as Civilization"?

4. In paragraph 2 of the section "Slavery in the U.S.", what do you think the author means when she writes that "human traffickers operate in the shadows"?

5. How does the author support the claim that some progress has been made in fighting modern-day slavery?

6. What is the purpose of the sidebar "Slavery & You" on page 12?
Short Response Questions on the Text

Directions: For the questions below, answer in complete sentences. Make sure you answer all parts of the question.

1. What is modern-day slavery and what kinds of people are most likely to be affected by it?

2. What are some industries and some parts of the world that are particularly affected by slave labor?

3. What kinds of everyday products may have been made with slave labor?

4. Do you believe consumers have a responsibility to think about where the products we're buying were made and by whom? What can be done to pressure companies to keep their supply chains free of slave labor? Support your answer using textual evidence.
Modern-Day Slavery

Choose the best answer for each of the following questions. For the analysis section, refer to the article as needed.

CHECK COMPREHENSION

1. According to the article, which was true of slavery in ancient Mesopotamia?
   a. People were often seized from their homes and sent to the Americas as slaves.
   b. Slaves were forced to build cities.
   c. Slaves were forced to fight to the death as gladiators.
   d. None of the above

2. Which constitutional amendment abolished slavery in the United States?
   a. the Seventh Amendment
   b. the Ninth Amendment
   c. the Thirteenth Amendment
   d. the Fourteenth Amendment

3. Which is true of slavery today?
   a. It is legal across large swaths of Asia and Africa.
   b. It affects about 200,000 people worldwide.
   c. It is driven in part by a demand for cheap labor and inexpensive products.
   d. All of the above

4. The majority of the world's slaves are thought to be in five countries. Which of these countries is among them?
   a. Russia
   b. Egypt
   c. the United States
   d. China

ANALYZE THE TEXT

5. In the first few paragraphs of the article, the author sets up a contrast between
   a. the slavery that existed hundreds of years ago and modern-day slavery.
   b. slavery and child labor.
   c. slavery in the U.S. and slavery in other parts of the world.
   d. a typical teenager's life and the life of a teen slave.

6. It is reasonable to infer from the article that
   a. it is common for modern-day slaves to be abused or mistreated by their captors.
   b. all child laborers are considered slaves because they can't make the legal decision to work.
   c. most slaves currently held in the U.S. work in farm fields and in textile factories.
   d. slavery is on the rise in developed nations.

7. Which phrase from the article provides the best evidence for the answer to question 6?
   a. "Sometimes, parents are tricked into selling their own kids."
   b. "...the thought of running away would always be followed with the fear of getting caught."
   c. "Now, new initiatives are calling attention to the crisis."
   d. "Many countries have also strengthened antislavery laws..."

8. On page 12, the word lured most nearly means
   a. attracted or drawn in.
   b. forced or coerced.
   c. left home.
   d. frightened.

IN-DEPTH QUESTIONS Please use the other side of this paper for your responses.

9. What are some of the types of modern-day slaves described in the article? What dangers and challenges do you think each type of slave faces?

10. Do you think people would be willing to pay more for clothing and food made without slave labor? Explain.
Quiz Questions #9 & #10 for “Modern Day Slavery”

Directions: For the questions below, answer in complete sentences. Make sure you answer all parts of the question(s). Your responses should be at least five sentences.

1. What are some of the types of modern-day slaves described in the article? What dangers and challenges do you think each type of slave faces?

2. Do you think people would be willing to pay more for clothing and food made without slave labor? Explain your answer using textual evidence and the PEEL method.