REVISED EDITION | WITH A NEW PREFACE

DISPOSABLE PEOPLE

NEW SLAVERY IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

"A well-researched, scholarly and deeply disturbing exposé of modern day slavery with well-thought-out strategies for what to do to combat this scourge." —DESMOND TUTU

Kevin Bales

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PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

"I spoke of these people as captives. I talked about the harsh conditions they found in New York. They were malnourished, diseased. Infant mortality was high."

Dr. Michael Blakey heads up the African Burial Ground Project[1] in New York City. More than four hundred slaves are buried in Lower Manhattan, and Blakey, a physical anthropologist, is drawing out the stories their bones tell. Blakey described how the remains of one young man show that he was probably trafficked from Africa to the United States:

> *He has evidence of treponemal disease, probably yaws. So he's been exposed to a tropical disease. He has evidence of hard work and some healed fractures in his spine. He also has the most subtle and elegantly filed teeth.*

This man's bones bear witness to the destructive nature of slavery: he was no more than thirty-five when he died. There are also a very large number of small children buried in the cemetery. The impact of slavery on these families was enormous: *"When children die in large numbers,"* Blakey notes *"people feel a significant sense of loss."*

Blakey's work ties us to slavery in the past. It shows us the reality of slavery's pernicious and ugly damage to human life. The slaves buried in Manhattan also help us to understand something very important:

slavery has been, is, and will be part of our lives until we make it stop.

The slaves of Lower Manhattan and the slaves of today share many forms of suffering, among them the abuse and death of their children, the damage to their bodies through trauma and untreated disease, the theft of their lives and work, the destruction of their dignity, and the fat profits others make from their sweat. Slavery still exists in New York and around the world. Today it is often hard to see, but it is there. And like the slaves of the African Burial Ground in New York, the slaves all around us today have waited a long time for us and our governments to come awake to their existence.

When *Disposable People* was first published in 1999, many found its story shocking and unbelievable. Like the African Burial Ground Project, the research needed for the book was difficult to finance. But as the book's message about slavery began to sink in, it opened up new areas of study and action. As the first work in decades to show the extent of slavery around the world, *Disposable People* became a lightning rod, drawing both the energy of activists and the anger of governments trying to conceal slavery within their borders. I was amazed and humbled by the hundreds of people who after reading the book declared themselves new abolitionists and dedicated themselves to work against modern slavery. As the book was translated into more and more languages (nine, so far, in addition to English), the expanding knowledge of new slavery triggered off more and more reactions in individuals, groups, churches, schools, and governments. When I was writing *Disposable People* I had dreams of how it might stir people to action, but my dreams were too small. The reality has been great and rapid change in the last five years, change that seems to be growing in its momentum and reach.

Underlying this momentous growth is the decision made in thousands of minds that slavery must end. The outcomes of this decision have been as various as imagination can make them. A film based in part on *Disposable People* opened up new areas of slavery to the public view and won two Emmys and a Peabody award. As awareness of mod-

ern slavery expanded, other films, books, scripts, poems, articles, law reviews, photo essays, theses and dissertations, songs, even a dance program, expressed people's deeply felt desire to end slavery. For me, the growth in interest led to hundreds of interviews on television and radio, and in magazines and newspapers. The explosion of concern is being felt at the local, national, and international levels.

In the United States an important new law affecting slavery was passed at the end of 2000. Known as the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, it increased the penalties for human traffickers, brought new protections to victims, and ordered government departments to take action. This law has led to many initiatives and increased support for groups helping people who have been trafficked into the United States. Also in late 2000, the United Nations set out an agreement to fight trafficking in persons as part of a new Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. This protocol became international law on Christmas Day 2003, but has not yet been ratified by the United States. It will help bring national laws into agreement, which, since human trafficking is a crime that crosses borders, is crucial for successful prosecutions. Other countries too have written new laws. Now, as is the case for almost all laws against slavery around the world, the problem is getting those laws enforced.

One of the most exciting outcomes of this period followed the film that exposed slavery on cocoa farms in West Africa. The idea that the chocolate we feed our children, the chocolate we enjoy so much, could be tainted by slavery was disturbing. To their credit, chocolate companies in the United States and Europe moved quickly to address slavery in their product chain. Joining together, they made an agreement with anti-slavery groups, child labor organizations, and labor unions to take slavery and child labor out of cocoa for good. Now a well-funded new foundation has workers building programs in West Africa, and a system for inspecting and certifying cocoa is under construction. While some of the work has been held back by civil unrest in West Africa, the commitment and resources are there. For the first time since anti-

slavery groups called for it 150 years ago, an industry is taking full responsibility for its product chain. It is a historic breakthrough, one that is serving as a model for other industries.

But what of the countries that made up the key stories of *Disposable People?* Here there is news, but much of it is not good. In Thailand, girls are still sold into brothels. Today these teenagers are more likely to come from neighboring countries like Burma, Laos or Cambodia, but their enslavement and destruction are the same. Since I first traveled to Thailand, the government there has made remarkable progress with a campaign against HIV infection, but since the program relies on condom use, and since enslaved teenage prostitutes have no choice in that matter, they still are very likely to die of AIDS. The UN and other organizations have given the Thai government help in designing programs to fight slavery, but there is little will and fewer resources. Police and government officials are still involved and profiting directly from slavery. In the understated words of the U.S. State Department,[2] "Official complicity in trafficking remains an area of concern."

Mauritania remains enigmatic. The government there has never allowed free access to any researcher or monitor. Local anti-slavery groups are still hounded and persecuted, their leaders arrested and locked up to prevent them from talking to journalists. False-fronted government agencies assure any listeners that slavery is all but gone. Meanwhile, slaves continue to escape. One of these ex-slaves, who escaped in the late 1990s, told me some of her story:

> *I was born a slave. I was born in Mauritania in 1956. My mother and father were slaves for one family, and their parents were slaves of the same family. Ever since I was old enough to walk, I was forced to work for this family all day, every day. We never had days off. We hardly knew that it was Saturday or Sunday, because we had to work every day. Even if we were sick, we had to work. . . . In Mauritania, I didn't dare go to the government, because they wouldn't listen. Because for them, slavery is normal. It doesn't matter what the laws say there, because there they don't apply the laws. Maybe it's written that there is no slavery, but it's not*

true. Even in front of the president of Mauritania I can say in full voice that there is slavery in Mauritania, because now I'm as free as he is.

This woman had to escape and then bring her children out of bondage. Her courage is staggering. Today she lives in the United States and is building a new life, but behind her in Mauritania are thousands upon thousands of slaves.

Without a doubt the best news comes from Brazil. A new government under President da Silva (popularly known as "Lula") has dramatically increased the number of police officers assigned to slavery cases and given them more money and equipment. After his inauguration, Lula came out strongly against the slavery that destroys the lives of many Brazilians and is also a key element in the destruction of the country's natural environment. There is a long way to go in Brazil—thugs and slaveholders still control much of Amazonia and the west—but with a government that is facing up to the problem there is room for optimism.

Pakistan has been rocked by revolution and the American invasion of Afghanistan. Hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees have poured across the border, creating the confusion and disorder that generate enslavement and trafficking. Recent observers report hundreds of enslaved children in camps near the Afghan border, working in quarries and crushing stone by hand. The current leader of Pakistan has called for stronger enforcement of anti-slavery laws, but he is hampered by a myriad of other problems. In the flurry of anti-terrorist campaigns, the hunt for Osama bin Laden, assassination attempts, threats of war with India, and a teetering economy, the bonded laborers of Pakistan are easy to forget.

India continues to be a mixed bag. With one of the best anti-slavery laws in the world, it still has more slaves than any other country. Millions of people throughout the country live in debt bondage. Some are trapped in the traditional forms of slavery that enslave generation after generation, others in new types of bondage emerging as India's economy modernizes and globalizes. But though they may only be drops in

the ocean, I have seen amazing moments of liberation in India. In Northern India, groups like Sankalp and the Bal Vikas Ashram[3] have brought hundreds out of slavery and helped them to build new lives. They have done this on the slimmest of shoestrings, helping families achieve freedom and a safe and productive life for around thirty-five dollars. They do this not by buying them out of slavery, but by helping them learn their rights and standing by them when they fight for those rights. These groups show us how slavery will come to an end.

Around the world we still face the terrible frozen face of ignorance. The awareness that there are twenty-seven million slaves in the world has not yet fully penetrated the public mind, but the sparks and fires of committed people are beginning to melt that icy apathy. Traveling the world and speaking about slavery, I see how awareness leads quickly to action. This action can have enormous results. No one wants to live in a world with slavery, and today we are, in many ways, closer to its final eradication than ever. This could be the generation that brings slavery, after five thousand years, to an end. To do so we have to join together. Slavery is too big a problem to solve as individuals.

I've saved the best news for last. Of all the outcomes of the publication of *Disposable People*, the most exciting is the establishment of Free the Slaves, the first broad-based anti-slavery organization in modern America. Set up in late 2000, Free the Slaves is based in Washington, D.C. and has been joined by thousands of Americans who want to end slavery. In its very short life Free the Slaves has achieved breakthrough after breakthrough, from the agreement with the chocolate companies, to supporting the liberation of child slaves in India and West Africa, to educating the public, and bringing together clubs, churches, schools, universities, and individuals to fight slavery. Free the Slaves works against human trafficking and slavery in the United States and across the globe. Sometimes it does so by advising governments, but its most important work is backing up those grassroots groups that are literally kicking in doors and bringing slaves to freedom. Imagine my joy when I get an email like this one from India:

We had a rescue operation and rescued seven children from a carpet loom in Allahabad. All seven children are aged between ten and twelve years. Two of them are very sick, suffering from jaundice, and the others look malnourished. . . . after medical check ups they will be sent to Bal Vikas Ashram for rehabilitation. Their parents have been contacted.

Slave children in the carpet looms are often kidnapped at the age of seven or eight; these desperate parents won't have seen their children for years. Americans helped bring these children out of slavery by joining and supporting Free the Slaves, which in turn helps fund rescue and rehabilitation for slaves in India and other countries. As a father and a son, when I think about how these lost children are found and returned to their families, I have to admit I can't help but cry.

I hope that this new revised edition of *Disposable People* speaks to you. I've tried to update it where needed without changing the story it has to tell. I've been helped by the thousands of people who have read this book and talked to me about it. There are still likely to be errors, and these are all mine.

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Oxford, Mississippi

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1. "Return to the African Burial Ground: An interview with physical anthropologist Michael L. Blakey," *Archeology Magazine*, online edition, January 2004, www.archeology.org.

2. U.S. State Dept. *Trafficking in Persons Report 2003*, pg. 149.

3. To learn more about these groups visit www.freetheslaves.net.

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THE NEW SLAVERY

THE FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE IN SUMMER lives up to its reputation. As we sit outdoors in a little village about one hundred miles from Paris, the breeze brings us the scent of apples from the orchard next door. I have come here to meet Seba, a newly freed slave. She is a handsome and animated young woman of twenty-two, but as she tells me her story she draws into herself, smoking furiously, trembling, and then the tears come.

I was raised by my grandmother in Mali, and when I was still a little girl a woman my family knew came and asked her if she could take me to Paris to care for her children. She told my grandmother that she would put me in school and that I would learn French. But when I came to Paris I was not sent to school, I had to work every day. In their house I did all the work; I cleaned the house, cooked the meals, cared for the children, and washed and fed the baby. Every day I started work before 7 A.M. and finished about 11 P.M.; I never had a day off. My mistress did nothing; she slept late and then watched television or went out.

One day I told her that I wanted to go to school. She replied that she had not brought me to France to go to school but to take care of her children. I was so tired and run-down. I had problems with my teeth; sometimes my cheek would swell and the pain would be terrible. Sometimes

I had stomachaches, but when I was ill I still had to work. Sometimes when I was in pain I would cry, but my mistress would shout at me.

I slept on the floor in one of the children's bedrooms; my food was their leftovers. I was not allowed to take food from the refrigerator like the children. If I took food she would beat me. She often beat me. She would slap me all the time. She beat me with the broom, with kitchen tools, or whipped me with electric cable. Sometimes I would bleed; I still have marks on my body.

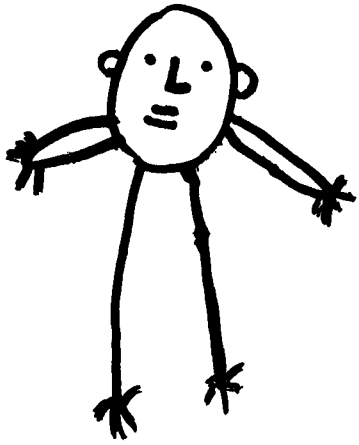
Once in 1992 I was late going to get the children from school; my mistress and her husband were furious with me and beat and then threw me out on the street. I had nowhere to go; I didn't understand anything, and I wandered on the streets. After some time her husband found me and took me back to their house. There they stripped me naked, tied my hands behind my back, and began to whip me with a wire attached to a broomstick. Both of them were beating me at the same time. I was bleeding a lot and screaming, but they continued to beat me. Then she rubbed chili pepper into my wounds and stuck it in my vagina. I lost consciousness.

Sometime later one of the children came and untied me. I lay on the floor where they had left me for several days. The pain was terrible but no one treated my wounds. When I was able to stand I had to start work again, but after this I was always locked in the apartment. They continued to beat me.

Seba was finally freed when a neighbor, after hearing the sounds of abuse and beating, managed to talk to her. Seeing her scars and wounds, the neighbor called the police and the French Committee against Modern Slavery (CCEM), who brought a case and took Seba into their care. Medical examinations confirmed that she had been tortured.

Today Seba is well cared for, living with a volunteer family. She is receiving counseling and is learning to read and write. Recovery will take years, but she is a remarkably strong young woman. What amazed me was how far Seba still needs to go. As we talked I realized that though she was twenty-two and intelligent, her understanding of the world was

less developed than the average five-year-old's. For example, until she was freed she had little understanding of time—no knowledge of weeks, months, or years. For Seba there was only the endless round of work and sleep. She knew that there were hot days and cold days, but never learned that the seasons follow a pattern. If she ever knew her birthday she had forgotten it, and she did not know her age. She is baffled by the idea of "choice." Her volunteer family tries to help her make choices, but she still can't grasp it. I asked Seba to draw the best picture of a person that she could. She told me it was the first time she had ever tried to draw a person. This was the result:



If Seba's case were unique it would be shocking enough, but Seba is one of perhaps 3,000 household slaves in Paris. Nor is such slavery unique to that city. In London, New York, Zurich, Los Angeles, and across the world, children are brutalized as household slaves. And they are just one small group of the world's slaves.

Slavery is not a horror safely consigned to the past; it continues to exist throughout the world, even in developed countries like France and the United States. Across the world slaves work and sweat and build and suffer. Slaves in Pakistan may have made the shoes you are wearing and the carpet you stand on. Slaves in the Caribbean may have

put sugar in your kitchen and toys in the hands of your children. In India they may have sewn the shirt on your back and polished the ring on your finger. They are paid nothing.

Slaves touch your life indirectly as well. They made the bricks for the factory that made the TV you watch. In Brazil slaves made the charcoal that tempered the steel that made the springs in your car and the blade on your lawnmower. Slaves grew the rice that fed the woman that wove the lovely cloth you've put up as curtains. Your investment portfolio and your mutual fund pension own stock in companies using slave labor in the developing world. Slaves keep your costs low and returns on your investments high.

Slavery is a booming business and the number of slaves is increasing. People get rich by using slaves. And when they've finished with their slaves, they just throw these people away. This is the new slavery, which focuses on big profits and cheap lives. It is not about owning people in the traditional sense of the old slavery, but about controlling them completely. People become completely disposable tools for making money.

> *On more than ten occasions I woke early in the morning to find the corpse of a young girl floating in the water by the barge. Nobody bothered to bury the girls. They just threw their bodies in the river to be eaten by the fish.*[1]

This was the fate of young girls enslaved as prostitutes in the gold mining towns of the Amazon, explained Antonia Pinto, who worked there as a cook and a procurer. While the developed world bemoans the destruction of the rain forests, few people realize that slave labor is used to destroy them. Men are lured to the region by promises of riches in gold dust, and girls as young as eleven are offered jobs in the offices and restaurants that serve the mines. When they arrive in the remote mining areas, the men are locked up and forced to work in the mines; the girls are beaten, raped, and put to work as prostitutes. Their "recruitment agents" are paid a small amount for each body,

perhaps $150. The "recruits" have become slaves—not through legal ownership, but through the final authority of violence. The local police act as enforcers to control the slaves. As one young woman explained, "Here the brothel owners send the police to beat us . . . if we flee they go after us, if they find us they kill us, or if they don't kill us they beat us all the way back to the brothel."[2]

The brothels are incredibly lucrative. The girl who "cost" $150 can be sold for sex up to ten times a night and bring in $10,000 per month. The only expenses are payments to the police and a pittance for food. If a girl is a troublemaker, runs away, or gets sick, she is easy to get rid of and replace. Antonia Pinto described what happened to an eleven-year-old girl when she refused to have sex with a miner: "After decapitating her with his machete, the miner drove around in his speedboat, showing off her head to the other miners, who clapped and shouted their approval."[3]

As the story of these girls shows, slavery has not, as most of us have been led to believe, ended. To be sure, the word *slavery* continues to be used to mean all sorts of things,[4] and all too often it has been applied as an easy metaphor. Having just enough money to get by, receiving wages that barely keep you alive, may be called wage slavery, but it is not slavery. Sharecroppers have a hard life, but they are not slaves. Child labor is terrible, but it is not necessarily slavery.

We might think slavery is a matter of ownership, but that depends on what we mean by *ownership*. In the past, slavery entailed one person legally owning another person, but modern slavery is different. Today slavery is illegal everywhere, and there is no more *legal* ownership of human beings. When people buy slaves today they don't ask for a receipt or ownership papers, but they do gain *control*—and they use violence to maintain this control. Slaveholders have all of the benefits of ownership without the legalities. Indeed, for the slaveholders, not having legal ownership is an improvement because they get total control without any responsibility for what they own. For that reason I tend to use the term slave*holder* instead of slave*owner*.