

3 November 2022

Reading Response 6

In regards to the topics I mentioned on Reading Response 5, these final chapters of *The Slave Next Door* left me feeling much more conflicted. A major instance of this was throughout chapter 6, which focused on the products of slave labor from outside the United States being imported into it, where it often felt like topics closely intertwined with the nature of this slavery were being avoided. Although there were frequent mentions of the U.S. being much richer than the countries it imported no products, it was done with almost no mention of neocolonialism. Although it does mention the corporations from the U.S. and other wealthy countries, it seems to present them as just one more part of a complicated issue, as just another “link in the chain”, with in my opinion not enough emphasis on how much power that link holds in comparison to both the consumers it sells to and the “developing world” companies and governments that they source their products from. The other major thing that stood out for me is that modern U.S. prison labor was not mentioned at all; articles before *The Slave Next Door*’s 2009 publication have considered this to be a modern form of slave labor (Browne), so it seemed like something that would merit at least being mentioned, even if only to refute that claim. Instead, prison labor is only mentioned in the context of China’s prisons, which is described as being done within the country’s laws, but ultimately wrong due to being “without trial”(143). While this is in itself a criticism I agree with, it seems like a strange one to make of another country without a single mention of how the same criticism would apply to one’s own country, where the 13th Amendment that’s mentioned to have ended legal slavery in the U.S. explicitly saying “except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted”; it seems like an

oversight to assume that because this instance of prison labor is sanctioned by the U.S. legal system, it is more acceptable than foreign prison labor.

I don't think these issues tainted my overall view of the text. I was still convinced by the value of the author's work in combatting slavery. I still find value in the text's direct calls to action, in providing its audience with information that could help them notice slavery around them and do something about it, and giving them the names of organizations which would benefit from their donations. But despite all this, it's difficult to ignore the concern that there is a 'major piece' missing, one which could be essential for the effectiveness of an antislavery effort: Criticism of the United States government and its institutions. The text does indeed criticize both the U.S. government and U.S. corporations, but never beyond claiming that their attempts at combatting slavery are insufficient. There is no suggestion that something the government intends to happen, such as prison labor, could be considered slavery. It does not mention the possibility of companies being aware of and tolerating slavery as long as they are not legally responsible, but it does advocate for not "threatening companies for failing to clean up their supply chains" (160). This could be in part because some of the text's proposed solutions require government efforts, so despite its faults criticizing it would be counterproductive to antislavery efforts. Still, to me it seems like an essential part to combatting modern slavery would be to account for the United States' ability to intentionally support or turn a blind eye to what we might consider slavery. I'm not yet sure whether my proposed solutions will differ much from the ones proposed here; even if one considers the government to not have a beneficial intent, collaboration with it might still be important for ending slavery. I do however think it's important to consult other sources which are more willing to criticize the U.S. where this text avoided doing so, and see whether their proposed solutions differ on that basis.

Works Cited

- Bales, Kevin, and Ron Soodalter. *The Slave Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery in America Today*. 2nd ed., University of California Press, 2009. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppk0r>. Accessed 1 Nov. 2022.
- Browne, Jaron. "Rooted in Slavery: Prison Labor Exploitation." *Race, Poverty & the Environment*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2007, pp. 42–44. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41555136>. Accessed 3 Nov. 2022.