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Book Review – From Human Trafficking to Human Rights: Reframing Contemporary Slavery

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***From Human Trafficking to Human Rights: Reframing Contemporary Slavery.* Edited by Alison Brysk and Austin Choi-Fitzpatrick. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. 280 pp., \$29.95 (paperback).**

When you think human trafficking do you instantly think of prostitution? Women who gratuitously sell their bodies for pleasure or for money? If you do, you may be a part of the problem. Human trafficking involves so much more than engaging in sexual activity for money, and until the world understands the true meaning of human trafficking, it can never really be prevented. This is what the authors of *“From Human Trafficking to Human Rights: Reframing Contemporary Slavery”* strive for us to understand. If we as a society cannot understand what the issue truly is, then how can we prevent it from occurring and protect the victims?

Alison Brysk is an American Political Scientist and the Mellichamp Professor of Global Governance at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she currently serves as chair of the Department of Global Studies. She has edited and written a total of 12 books concerning international human rights, and has been a scholar, lecturer, and Fulbright Fellowship recipient all across the world. She teaches courses covering a variety of topics such as Latin American politics, human rights, and gender issues, and has received several recognitions including two Distinguished Scholar Awards in Human Right. Her latest work is a journal in Political Science titled *“Speaking Rights to Power”* published by Cambridge University Press.

Austin Choi-Fitzpatrick is a writer and Assistant Professor in the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies at the University of San Diego, where he lectures on concepts such as human rights, social movements, and globalization. His latest book is titled *“What Slaveholders Think: How Contemporary Perpetrators Rationalize What They Do”* and explains how understanding slaveholders can better the efforts of human rights and anti-trafficking movements of today.

Brysk and Choi-Fitzpatrick serve as editors to this volume that bring several experts together to provide much needed commentary on a host of social structural issues related to human rights. The overall aim is to change the discourse and perspective on human trafficking to what they believe will lead to a more successful fight against human trafficking.

The volume is broken into three parts, categorized by suggestions of changes in the human trafficking perspectives. Part 1 justifies the shift from defining human trafficking as sex crimes to slavery. Part 2 emphasizes why these victims should be given power through human rights, such as where victims are treated equally and with protections

instead of punishment when coming forward or being found out. This is in response to our current political approach which punishes victims for their involvement of illegal activities if they do not meet certain requirements for protection. Lastly, part 3 explains why the act of rescue should be flooded with yet again, human rights. But, not just the human rights that apply to only a certain population; the authors makes the argument that human rights need to be universal, and apply to everyone, no matter what. The people who do not have access to basic human rights are the ones most likely to be exposed to contemporary slavery.

The writers explain the current approaches against human trafficking, providing the reader with evidence as to how these methods are not properly effective as responding to, treating, and preventing victims of human trafficking. For instance, the nation's current political view is focused on immigration and keeping danger from entering our country, overlooking domestic issues and neglecting certain victim populations. Whereas the proposed approach of ensuring a general blanket of human rights would treat all victims as equals, providing them with the resources and rights to protect themselves the authors follow up with information on how their suggested approaches would be more successful. Thus, identifying a problem and providing a solution.

Part 1 is crucial because it identifies and explains the issue of human trafficking. In addition to identifying and discussing policy mistakes and providing some history, they perform a media coverage experiment for further proof of the limitations in modern viewpoints. The experiment consisted of reviewing newspaper articles written about human trafficking. A total of 837 articles from six official newspapers of the United States, Canada and Great Britain between the years 2000 and 2005, were evaluated to determine how human trafficking is framed in the media. This experiment substantiates the concern that many news outlets view trafficking as only sex related crimes, leaving out those who are coerced into other forms of violent labor. This limited perspective influences the larger public perception and potentially shapes formal policy response.

The entire volume strives to change our understanding of human trafficking because the current perception provided by the media, the public, and policymakers is entirely limited, and subsequently leads to the neglect of hundreds of thousands of victims. The media experiment showed us that too often trafficking is not viewed as what it truly is, coercing humans into acts against their will for economic exploitation. This includes more than just sex and prostitution, but child labor, and labor for little or no pay.

The research in this book is a great source of education on human trafficking. It details how awareness and policies concerning contemporary slavery have evolved, how some policies contradict each other, and how ensuring human rights can diminish human trafficking. The fight against human trafficking has gotten stronger over the decades, however it still has work to do. This book provides you with policies implemented both in the United States and internationally, and how they work together or sometimes clash with each other. Anyone who wants to educate themselves more on the subject and where the world stands with the international concern of human trafficking should consider this source. I believe this book could be beneficial to others in the field because a change in perspective does seem to be a possible solution to diminishing human trafficking.

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