

Critique



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Critique of Lagon Article It is all too common a tendency that people think that the present is immune or bereft of sins, injustices, and/or evils which humanity faced in times past. This might be called the hubris of the present. It is imperative, however, to note and remember that beliefs and perceptions do not always coincide with on-the-ground realities. An excellent example of this disconnect can be found in the issue of slavery. Most Americans, whether they learned it in high school history class or just absorbed it from the popular culture, typically think of slavery as an ancient and abominable practice that was eradicated at the end of the Civil War. Perhaps it continued to exist in other places on the globe, but only in isolated pockets and less so with every passing year. In fact, slavery has continued with vigor since, only it has lost its former veneer of legitimacy and gone underground, where it has thrived. Mark Lagon's article in the Washington Times, "Modern-day Slavery," effectively makes that very point: slavery still exists; it involves children and women, can include horrific sexual violations and violence, and is a phenomenon which ought to be of great concern to the United States because it too is a country where it has reared its ugly head.

Lagon's strategy for making his case involves several references to real-life human cases so as to provide to the reading public an idea of what victims of human-trafficking face. He mentions the case of "two Indonesian women who were beaten, starved and never allowed out of the mansion where they worked as domestic servants" (Lagon 2008). This sort of picture is quite effective. The image of women being wronged and held against their will is sure to garner sympathy with the public. After mentioning some of the efforts of the United States government against human trafficking, he points to a case where those same efforts have been met with some success. He

writes of an Indian couple, “ Manesh and Jaya,” who were “ forced to work in a brick kiln in India, treated as less than human because they were born into the lowest caste of their society. They were freed from bonded labor and received restitution with help from International Justice Mission – which my office funds as a partner” (Lagon 2008). This provides a contrast with the other “ human” reference because it shows how American efforts have helped those in need.

Lagon also makes use of references to well-known governmental/political figures and leaders so as to give his piece a sense of legitimacy and authority. He mentions that former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice took part in the campaign against modern-day slavery when she “ released the eighth annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report assessing 170 countries, a report widely considered the most authoritative account of international efforts to end modern-day slavery” (Lagon 2008). This is part of Lagon’s desire to further demonstrate that the U. S. government maintains constant tracking data of global trends in human trafficking. He praises then President George Bush for his “ efforts to eradicate modern-day slavery.” He continues later by quoting Bush as saying ‘ We must show new energy in fighting back an old evil. The trade in human beings...must not be allowed to thrive in our time” (Lagon 2008). The fact that both President Bush and Secretary Rice gave attention and time to addressing human trafficking, according to Lagon, demonstrates the resolve of the U. S. government.

One weakness in Lagon’s claims and arguments center around the figures he uses. He several times cites the number of people the U. S. government has helped in recent years. He points out that for example the FBI has rescued some 400 children from prostitution. As well, he states that in 2003 the

Customs Department made “ over 300 convictions for human trafficking.” Lastly he references that some \$578 million has been allocated since 2001 to combat human slavery in its various forms (Lagon 2008). On the face of it these claims seem laudable. But they are not given against the backdrop of how many cases of human trafficking or prostitution there are in general so as to get an idea if the government’s efforts have been truly effective. The same can be said for the funds allocated. Though the stated amount is a lot, Lagon does not mention how it compares to past expenditures or how much would be truly needed to address the problem in general. These gaps are the one point of weakness in his article.

Overall Lagon’s article achieves its goal: to make the public aware that human trafficking is a very real phenomenon and that the United States government is taking measures to combat it. This is good given that awareness of the issue seems to be lacking given that many people think that slavery is something of the past. Hopefully over time its occurrence will be greatly stymied and the world will have less of one of its oldest injustices.

Works Cited

Lagon, Mark P. “ Lagon: Modern-day Slavery.” Washington Times 6 Oct. 2008. Online at <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/oct/06/modern-day-slavery/>.