


12-17-2014

No Longer Can We Keep Our Eyes Closed to Human Trafficking All Around Us

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STARS Citation

Lapchick, Richard (2014). No longer can we keep our eyes closed to human trafficking all around us. UCF Today, 2014-12-17. Retrieved from <https://today.ucf.edu/cant-keep-eyes-closed-human-trafficking-around-us/>

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No Longer Can We Keep Our Eyes Closed to Human Trafficking All Around Us

By Richard Lapchick
UCF Forum columnist

Wednesday, December 17, 2014

You may have read in early December that [61 people were arrested](#) across Florida in a four-day human-trafficking sting operation. If you haven't followed the dramatic increase in stories about human trafficking in the United States, this news may have caught you by surprise.

We need to understand that human trafficking exists in all 50 states and in almost every nook and cranny in each state. Recently, significant attention was paid to the issue at UCF with a week of activities in November during the [Shut Out Trafficking](#) campaign led by the National Consortium for Academics and Sports and the U.S. Fund for UNICEF. More than 2,000 students, faculty, student-athletes and coaches were engaged using the sports platform to spread awareness about human trafficking.

A week later, UCF fraternities hosted a Greek flag-football tournament in conjunction with [Florida Abolitionist](#), an Orlando nonprofit organization opposing human trafficking, to raise money and awareness about human trafficking. The event involved 15 teams participating on the UCF intramural fields.

In the week before I wrote this column, there were human-trafficking cases reported in Tampa; Green Bay, Wis.; Colorado Springs, Col.; Tulsa, Okla.; Garden City, Idaho; Victorville and San Rafael, Calif.; and Lowell, Mass.

But the veil of secrecy about human trafficking has been pulled and in the same week there were community-awareness activities in Boston; Las Vegas; Nashville and Knoxville, Tenn.; Austin, Texas; Point Loma and Long Beach, Calif.; Pineville, La.; Duluth, Minn.; Jackson, Miss.; Missoula, Mont.; Toledo and Fremont, Ohio; and Bedford, Maine.

In the cases of trafficking incidents and community-awareness events these are mostly taking place in communities that one would hardly be thought of as being associated with the trafficking issue.

The global magnitude of human trafficking is staggering. In the Atlantic slave trade between 1650 and the end of the Civil War, 10.5 million enslaved Africans arrived in the Americas. It is estimated that more than that number died being captured and/or shipped to the Americas. Six million more were involved in the Asian slave trade and 8 million in the African slave trade during that era. In other words, over the course of nearly 200 years, about 24.5 million people lived as slaves. Today, at this moment in history, it is estimated there are between 27 million and 30 million slaves globally. More than half of those are women and more than a third are children.

There are slaves working as domestic servants, child soldiers, factory workers and in other areas.

But it is the sex trade, of course, that gets the most attention. The average age that a girl is brought into the sex trade worldwide, including the United States, is 12. They are often forced to have sex up to five times a day every day, so by the time they reach the age of 16 they are raped about 7,000 times.

Most of us know someone who has been sexually assaulted. We know that the scars of that assault never leave the psyche of those individuals. Imagine being 16 years old and having been raped 7,000 times.

Trafficking was already a huge \$32 billion-a-year industry in 2009 run by organized crime, gangs, small families and businesses. It is estimated that the global take today is \$150 billion. If you take an average pimp that has one girl who has sex five times a day for \$200 each time, that pimp makes \$365,000 a year just from one girl. This is why this is such a difficult area to contain because it is so lucrative for the perpetrators.

Our daughter, Emily Pasnak-Lapchick, has inspired me to get involved in the issue and together we helped create the Shut Out Trafficking campaign funded by the Fetzer Institute. Emily is the program officer for the End Trafficking Program at the U.S. Fund for UNICEF. We have spent a week at each of UCF, St. John's University in New York, La Salle University in Philadelphia, Tulane University in New Orleans, and Brown University in Providence, R.I. Collectively, more than 5,000 campus individuals have

been engaged. In the spring we will have programs at the University of Denver, UCLA, Nebraska, Alabama and Chicago State.

Our purpose is to call on everyone to do their part in combating this enormous evil plaguing our society. You can do something small like buying only fair-trade chocolate. Fair-trade chocolate is produced without the hands of any child slaves, whereas most of the chocolate being produced and sold in United States comes from the fields in the [Ivory Coast](#) where child slave labor picks the cacao beans.

Or you can get involved with local organizations like Florida Abolitionist, which mounts daily campaigns against human trafficking.

But get involved because human trafficking is all around us where we live. We cannot keep our eyes closed anymore. Our children's safety is at risk.

Richard E. Lapchick is chair of UCF's DeVos Sports Business Management Program and director of The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, which annually publishes racial and gender report cards on MLB, the NBA, WNBA, NFL, MLS, college sports, and Associated Press sports editors. He is the author of 16 books that primarily focus on racial and gender issues and ethics in college sport. He can be followed on Twitter [@richardlapchick](#) and on [facebook.com/richard.lapchick](#). He can be reached at rlapchick@ucf.edu.