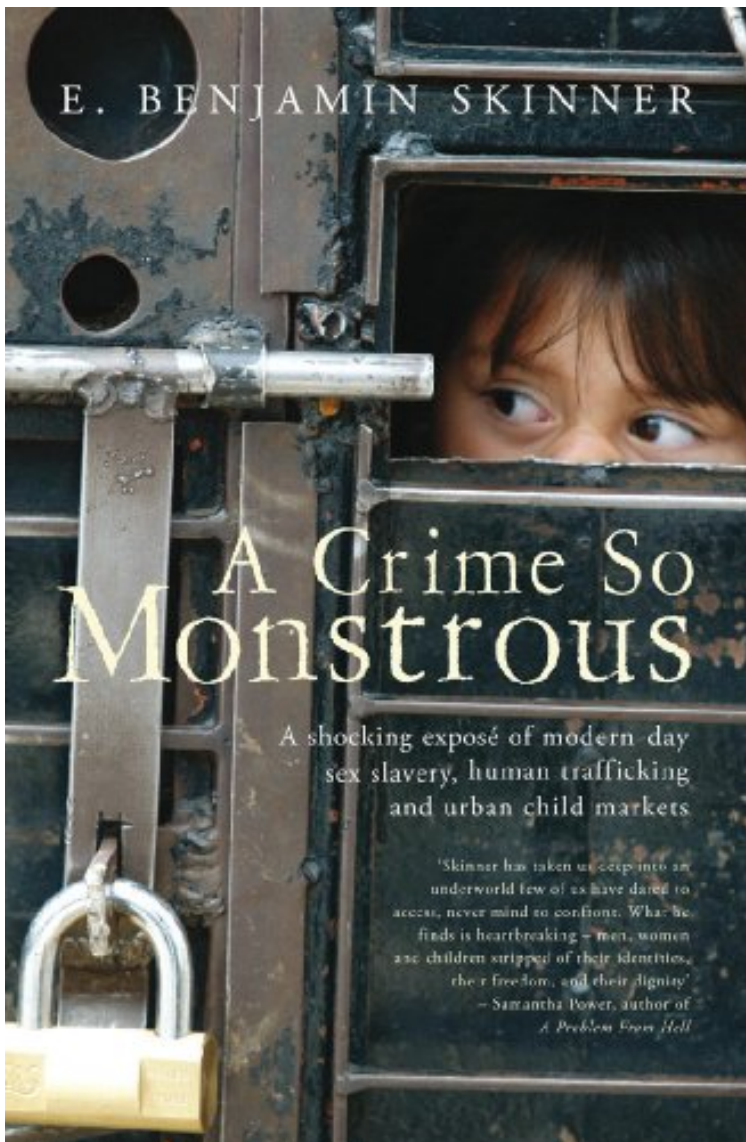


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A Crime So Monstrous: A Shocking Expos of Modern-Day Sex Slavery, Human Trafficking and Urban Child Markets



Par E. Benjamin Skinner
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurTwo hundred years after Parliament passed the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, over 27 million people worldwide languish in slavery, forced to work, under threat of violence, for no pay. In Africa, hundreds of thousands are considered chattel, while on the Indian subcontinent millions languish in generational debt bondage. Across the globe, women and children, sold for sex and labour, are already the

second most lucrative commodity for organised crime. Through eviscerating narrative, *A Crime So Monstrous* paints a stark picture of modern slavery. Skinner infiltrates trafficking networks and slave sales on four continents, exposing a flesh trade never before portrayed with such vivid detail. From mega-harems in Khartoum to illicit brothels in Bucharest, from slave quarries in India to urban child markets in Haiti, he lays bare a parallel universe where lives are bought, sold, used and discarded. The personal stories related here are heartbreaking but in the midst of tragedy Skinner also discovered a quiet dignity that leads some to resist and aspire to freedom. He bears witness for them and for the millions that are held in the shadows - all victims of what is the greatest human-rights challenge facing our generation.

Extrait *A Crime So Monstrous*
The Riches of the Poor For our purposes, lets say that the center of the moral universe is in Room S-3800 of the UN Secretariat, Manhattan. From here, you are some five hours from being able to negotiate the sale, in broad daylight, of a healthy boy or girl. Your slave will come in any color you like, as Henry Ford said, as long as its black. Maximum age: fifteen. He or she can be used for anything. Sex or domestic labor are the most frequent uses, but its up to you. Before you go, lets be clear on what you are buying. A slave is a human being who is forced to work through fraud or threat of violence for no pay beyond subsistence. Agreed? Good. You may have thought you missed your chance to own a slave. Maybe you imagined that slavery died along with the 360,000 Union soldiers whose blood fertilized the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment. Perhaps you assumed that there was meaning behind the dozen international conventions banning the slave trade, or that the deaths of 30 million people in world wars had spread freedom across the globe. But youre in luck. By our mere definition, you are living at a time when there are more slaves than at any point in history. If youre going to buy one in five hours, however, youve really got to stop navel-gazing over things like law and the moral advance of humanity. Get a move on. First, hail a taxi to JFK International Airport. If you choose the Queensboro Bridge to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, the drive should take under an hour. With no baggage, youll speed through security in time to make a direct flight to Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Flying time: three hours. The final hour is the strangest. After disembarking, you will cross the tarmac to the terminal where drummers in vodou getup and a dancing midget greet you with song. Based on Transportation Security Administration warnings posted in the departure terminal at JFK, you might expect abject chaos at Toussaint LOuverture Airport. Instead, you find orderly lines leading to the visa stamp, no bribes asked, a short wait for your bag, then a breeze through customs. Outside the airport, the cabbies and porters will be aggressive, but not threatening. Assuming you speak no Creole, find an English-speaking porter and offer him \$20 to translate for the day. Ask your translator to hail the most common form of transport, a tap-tap, a flatbed pickup retrofitted with benches and a brightly colored canopy. You will have to take a couple of these, but they only cost 10 gourdes (25 cents) each. Usually handpainted with signs in broken English or Creole, tap-taps often include the words MY GOD or JESUS. MY GOD ITS MY LIFE reads one; another announces WELCOME TO JESUS. Many are ornate, featuring windshields covered in frill, doodads, and homages to such figures as Che Guevara, Ronaldinho, or reggae legend Gregory Isaacs. The drivers navigation is based on memory, instinct. There will be no air conditioning. Earplugs are useful, as the sound system, which cost more than the rig itself, will make your chest vibrate with the beats of Haitian pop and American hip-hop. Up to twenty people may accompany you: five square inches on a wooden bench will miraculously accommodate a woman with a posterior the size of a tractor tire. Prepare your spine. Youll want to head up Route de Delmas toward the suburb of Ptionville, where many of the countrys wealthiest thirty families who control the nations economy maintain a pied--terre. As you drive southeast away from the sea, the smells change from rotting fish to rotting vegetables. Exhaust fumes fill the air. Youll pass a billboard featuring a smiling girl in pigtails and the words: Give me your hand. Give me tomorrow. Down with Child Servitude. Chances are, like the majority of Haitians, you cant read French or Creole. Like them, you ignore the sign. Heading out of the airport, youll pass two UN peacekeepers, one with a Brazilian patch, the other with an Argentine flag. As you pass the blue helmets, smile, wave, and receive dumbfounded stares in return. The United Nations also has Jordanians and Peruvians here, parked in APVs fifteen minutes northwest, along the edge of the hyperviolent Cit Soleil slum, the poorest and most densely populated six square miles in the poorest and most densely populated country in the hemisphere. The peacekeepers dont go in much, neither do the national police. If they do, the gangsters that run the place start shooting. Best to steer clear, although youd get a cheap price on children there. You might even get offered a child gratis. Youll notice the streets of the Haitian capital are, like the tap-taps, overstuffed, banged up, yet colorful. The road surfaces range from bad to terrible, and grind even the toughest SUVs down to the chassis. Parts of Delmas are so steep that the truck may sputter and die under

the exertion. Port-au-Prince was built to accommodate about 150,000 people, and hasn't seen too many centrally planned upgrades since 1804. Over the last fifty years, some 2 million people, a quarter of the nation's population, have arrived from the countryside. They've brought their animals. Chickens scratch on side streets, and boys lead prizefighting cocks on string leashes. Monstrously fat black pigs root in sooty, putrid garbage piled eight feet high on street corners or even higher in enormous pits that drop off sidewalks and wind behind houses. A crowd swells out of a Catholic church broadcasting a fervent mass. Most Haitians are Catholic. Despite the efforts of Catholic priests, most also practice voodoo. In the countryside, voodoo is often all they practice. You may see a white jeep or van with a siren, a red cross, and the word AMBULANCE handpainted on it. You might assume this is an ambulance. It is not. These private vehicles only carry dead people. Public health is spotty at best. The annual budget for the health care of the UN peacekeepers in Haiti is greater than the annual budget for the country's Health Ministry. It's a bad idea to get sick here, as I was to find out. At night, those with homes pack into tin-roofed, plywood, or cinderblock dwellings, on dirt roads bisected by gullies of raw sewage. Most people loot electricity from street wires to enjoy a light or two until rolling blackouts enshroud the city and end the sounds of dancehall reggae and hip-hop. Then total darkness reigns, and total silence, save for the spasmodic barking of dogs, and the nightly gunfire that can be heard from Cit Soleil to Ptionville. Only the generator-driven lights of the fortified UN compounds illuminate the haze over the city. But now, in the daytime, many Haitians, particularly the 70 percent with no formal employment, will be on the sweaty, steamy, dusty streets. When either gender needs to urinate, they simply find a quiet pole or a ditch. No point going home for relief since few have indoor plumbing. Haitians take great pride in their appearance, but as more than three quarters live on less than two dollars per day, they don't have many pieces in their wardrobe. Some beg, like the thirtysomething woman sitting in the middle of Delmas, one horribly infected breast, glistening with pus, hanging out of her shirt. Some hustle. There are more than 10,000 street kids, mostly boys as young as six, some selling unprotected sex for \$1.75. Haiti has the highest prevalence of HIV infection outside of sub-Saharan Africa, and Haitians who believe sex with virgins protects against, or even cures, AIDS have driven up the price of such intercourse to \$5.00. Haiti has also become a magnet for sex tourists and pedophiles. One left a review of the children in an online chatroom: The younger ones are even more kinkier [sic] than the older women. Park on the street and tell them to go at it!!!!!!! If anyone sees you they just ignore you. No police but the multinational military force is still here. Locals say that the main contribution of the peacekeepers to Haiti's economy comes via the brothels. Opposite a UN camp on an otherwise desolate road outside of Port-au-Prince, Le Perfection nightclub does booming business. Most city dwellers who work do so on an ad hoc basis. A doubled-over, shirtless man strains under a donkey cart laden with the burnt-out carcass of a car. An elderly woman balances a hundred eggs in five tiers on her head and nimbly navigates a pulverized side road. A young man pushes up the bustling sidewalk with two queen-sized mattresses on his head. The tinkling of shoeshine bells is constant. An old man probably no more than fifty-seven, the average life span for a Haitian, pushes a wheelbarrow filled with empty bottles. He catches you smiling at his threadbare, oversized T-shirt bearing an image of Snoopy, Woodstock, and the words **WORLDS MOST HUGGABLE GRANDMA**. Bubbling with good humor, he shoots back a toothless grin. Many peddle trinkets, bouillon cubes, single-shot plastic bags of water, plantain chips, Megawatt energy soda, or vegetables in various states of decay. A man hawks cell phone chargers with which he swats stray dogs as they slink by. Another man on Delmas sells cowhiderigwaz whips and leather martinetes. Those are for beating a different kind of creature. Timoun se ti bet, a Haitian saying relates: Children are little animals. Ti neg se baton ki fe I mache, goes another: It is the whip which makes the little guy walk. You are now about halfway up Delmas, and slaves are everywhere. Assuming that this is your first trip to Haiti, you won't be able to identify them. But to a lower-middle-class Haitian, their status is written in blood. Some are as young as three or four years old. But they'll always be the small ones, even if they're older. The average fifteen-year-old child slave is 1.5 inches shorter and 40 pounds lighter than the average free fifteen-year-old. They may have burns from cooking for their overseers' family over an open fire; or scars from beatings, sometimes in public, with the martinet, electrical cables, or wood switches. They wear faded, outsized castoffs, and walk barefoot, in sandals or, if they are lucky, oversized shoes. If you arrive in the afternoon, you may see their tiny necks and delicate skulls straining as they tote five-gallon buckets of water on their heads while navigating broken glass and shattered roads. Or you might see them picking up their overseers' smartly dressed children from school. These are the restavks, the stay-withs, as they are euphemistically known in Creole. Forced, unpaid, they work from before dawn until deep night. The violence in their lives is unyielding. These are the

children who won't look you in the eyes. At Delmas 69, yell merci, hop out, pay the driver, and turn left onto the relatively well-kept side street with overhanging but not overgrown trees. Any time of day, you will find here a group of four or five men, standing in front of Le Réseau (The Network) barbershop. As you approach, one man steps forward. Are you looking to get a person? he asks. Meet Benavil Leblond. Hail-fellow, he smiles easily, and is an easy man to do business with, if not an easy man to trust. Benavil, thirty-eight, has a trim mustache and wears a multicolored striped polo shirt, a gold rope suspending a coin and a cross, and Doc Martens knock-offs. His colleagues approach. One extends his hand, offers his card, and introduces himself as a businessman. Benavil is what is known in Haiti as a courtier, a broker. He holds an official real estate license and calls himself an employment agent. But most employees he places are atypical job seekers. Two thirds of his sales are child slaves. Like most Haitians, Benavil is from the countryside, but he moved to Port-au-Prince twenty-five years ago. He started in construction, but in 1989 he switched to real estate sales and founded a company called SOPNIBEL. Soon he discovered a more lucrative commodity: human beings. The biggest year for child selling was 1995, shortly after President Jean-Bertrand Aristide returned to power, and UN sanctions were lifted. In the cities, people had a bit more money, and could afford small luxuries again. Benavil sold twenty to thirty kids in a good week then, and made upward of \$200 per month.

Nationwide the number of restavks ballooned from 109,000 in 1992 to 300,000, or one in ten Haitian children, in 1998, to 400,000 in 2002. Originally from a hamlet called La Vallée in the underdeveloped and forbidding southern highlands of La Selle, Benavil sired two children there although he never married. It is from those fertile mountains that he and his fellow courtiers harvest their best-selling crops. Benavil's business works like this: A client approaches him about acquiring a restavk. Normally, this client is lower middle class. A UNICEF study found the average income for a slaveowning household in Haiti was under \$30 per month. After per capita GDPs were torpedoed by the economic chaos that followed two coups, sanctions, and colossal government mismanagement even in peacetime, the monthly incomes sank further. Lower-class urbanites also acquire restavks, but, unable to afford a middleman like Benavil, a friend or relative performs his service free of charge. A child's price is negotiable, but Benavil is bound by agreements which he won't detail for you with the capitals other courtiers, whom he estimates number at least 3,000. We do have a formula, he says. Clients then place their order. Some want boys; most want girls. Some want specific skills. They'll ask for someone who knows how to bake, says Benavil; sometimes they'll ask for a boy who knows how to work an oven. Most want children from the countryside. No one wants children from urban blights like Cité Soleil. Although their parents would give them away, clients know street-smart kids would escape at the earliest opportunity. Older kids, too, are out of favor as even rural ones will be willful, independent. Most children Benavil sells are around age twelve. The youngest slaves he brokers, he claims, are seven. After a client has ordered, Benavil's colleague in La Vallée begins working to convince an impoverished rural family to give up its child. Normally, all it takes is the promise that the child will be well nourished and educated. Urban Haitians are poor; rural families are dirt-poor. Out of every 1,000 urban children, 112 will die before age five; in the countryside, the figure is 149. By comparison, in the neighboring Dominican Republic, it's 35; in war-torn Congo, 108. Rarely are the parents paid. They yield their children because courtiers dangle the promise of school like a diamond necklace. More than 80 percent of Haitian schools are private, and urban high schools cost \$385 per year; this sum is beyond the annual income of the typical Haitian, and particularly out of reach for rural parents, most of whose income goes toward food. The average Haitian boy receives 2 years of schooling; the average girl, 1.3. In the countryside, where only a handful of schools exist, most children never attend school at all. But the dangled diamond necklace is a fake, as 80 percent of restavks do not go to school. Those who do must fight to go, are only allowed to attend when they finish their labor, and have to find the tuition money on their own. The slave's role in the master's house is to work, not to learn. Occasionally, when parents agree to give up their child, Benavil treks to the countryside to ensure that he is providing a quality product to his clients. Sometimes I go out to make sure it's a healthy child I'm giving them, he says. Then he makes his delivery. Sometimes the customer isn't satisfied. They say, Oh, that's not the person I want, he sniffs. Benavil tells them: You can't say, I don't want this one, because you didn't have any to begin with, so how do you know you don't want this one? Some refuse to pay. Some of his clients take their slaves with them to the north. Some to the States, some to Canada. They continue to work for the person. And sometimes, once the person brings them over there, they'll let them figure out how to live. They'll give them their freedom. Sometimes. But not always. Restavks live as slaves to this day in Haitian communities across the United States. Most don't make headlines. One little girl in Miami was an exception. On September 28, 1999, police rescued a twelve-year-old from the

suburban Miami home of Willy and Marie Pompee. The Pompees acquired the girl in their native Haiti, and took her to the United States, where they forced her to keep their \$351,000 home spotless, eat garbage, and sleep on the floor. Like many female restavks, she was also considered a la-pou-sa-a or a there-for-that. In other words, she was a sex toy. When police, acting on a tip, rescued her that day in September, she was suffering from acute abdominal pain and a venereal disease: since age nine, the couples twenty-year-old son,

Willy Junior, had regularly raped her. Like many human traffickers, Benavil describes his work in euphemistic, even humanitarian terms. He claims that what he does helps the children. Because the child cant eat while theyre in the countryside; because there are people of good faith that will help them. He claims to tell clients, Life is something spiritual, its not something in a store you can buy. I dont sell children, he says without prompting, although it would seem like it. He places them. But, Benavil admits, you have people that mistreat the children he doesnt sell. When he drops children off, he notes they often will be forced to sleep on the floor with any other domestic animals the client has. Its time to buy a slave.

Your negotiation might sound a bit like the following exchange. How quickly do you think it would be possible to bring a child in? Somebody who could clean and cook? you ask. You dont want to stay in Haiti too long. I dont have a very big place; I have a small apartment. But Im wondering how much that would cost? And how quickly? Three days, Benavil says. And you could bring the child here? Or are there children here already? I dont have any here in Port-au-Prince right now, says Benavil, his eyes widening at the thought of a foreign client. I would go out to the countryside. Would I have to pay for transportation? Bon, says Benavil. Would you come out as well? Yeah, perhaps. Yes, I would if its possible. A hundred U.S. And thats just for transportation? you ask, smelling a rip-off. Transportation would be about a hundred Haitian, says Benavil, or around \$13, because youd have to get out there. Plus food on the trip. Five hundred gourdes.

Youll be traveling some distance, to La Valle. A private car, Benavil explains, would be faster but pricier.

Youll have to pay for gas, and that will cost as much as \$40. Plus hotel and food. Okay, five hundred Haitian, you say. Now the big question: And what would your fee be? You just asked the price of the child. This is the moment of truth, and Benavils eyes narrow as he determines how much he can milk from you. A hundred. American. A hundred U.S.! you shout. Emote here a sense of outrage, but with a smile so as not to kill the deal. Eight hundred Haitian. That seems like a lot, you say. How much would you charge a Haitian? A Haitian? A Haitian? Benavil asks, his voice rising with feigned indignation to match your own. A hundred dollars. This is a major effort. Could you bring down your fee to fifty U.S.? you ask. Benavil pauses. But only for effecthe knows hes got you for way more than a Haitian would pay for a child. Oui, he finally says with a smile. The deal isnt done. Let me talk it over. Its a lot of money, but I understand that youre the best, you say. Oui! He gives you his number, and, as hes left his business cards at the office, writes down his name for you as well. Benavil leans in close and whispers: This is a rather delicate question. Is this someone you want as just a worker? Or also someone who will be a partner. You understand what I mean? Or is it someone you just really want to work? Briefed as you are on the la-pou-sa-a phenomenon, you dont blink at being asked if you want the child for sex as well as housework. I mean, is it possible to have someone that could be both? you ask. Oui! Benavil responds enthusiastically. I think probably a girl would be better. Just one? Benavil asks, hopefully. Just one. When do you need it by? he asks. I cant say that right now, but you say you could have one ready in three days? Um-hmm. He nods. Im not actually sure whether a girl or boy would work better, you, the doubting consumer, say. A slave is a serious purchase. Best to acquire the right one the first time. Ill decide that later. Do you want to ask me any other questions about what I want? What age? Benavil asks. Younger better, you say. Probably somewhere between nine and eleven. What kind of salary would you offer? Unlike the sex question, this surprises you. But you figure its just Benavil doing his humanitarian shtick again. I could give food and I could give a place to stay, and I might be able to pay for school. But in terms of salary, even though Im American, Im a poor writer. But perhaps school and food. Perhaps when you leave the country, would you take the person with you? I think I could probably do that. It depends on visa issues, but I think I could probably work it out. Any more questions? Benavil tells you that he can arrange the papers to make it look as if youve adopted the child. That will make it easier to take your purchase home. He offers you a thirteen-year-old girl. Thats a little bit old, you say. I know of another girl whos twelve. Then ones that are ten, eleven, and twelve, he responds. You say youd like to see whats on offer in the countryside. But then you tell him not to make any moves without further word from you. Here, 600 miles from the United States, and five hours from the desk of the UN Secretary-General, you have successfully bargained a human being down to the price of the cab fare to JFK. I didnt make up these descriptions and conversations, though they read like a perverted travel tale. They were recorded in October

2005 in Haiti, and like slavery itself, they can only be absorbed if you think of them at a distance. But in Haiti as elsewhere, a slave is no metaphor. And conjured literary irony cannot compare to the cruel irony of Haitis history. The French colony of Saint-Domingue was once the pearl of the Antilles, the richest colony in the hemisphere, with a GDP greater than that of the United States. Today, Haiti is the poorest nation in the Americas. Haitian blacks, who then comprised over 90 percent of the colonys population, forged the regions second free republic by staging, in 1791, the modern worlds first, and only, successful slave revolt. Now Haiti has more slaves than any nation outside of Asia, and more than toiled on the entire island of Hispaniola (including Haiti and the Dominican Republic) when the revolution began. In 1685, the king of France laid the groundwork for a system of child slavery that mutated but continued for 330 years. One hundred and seventy years after black slaves first were taken to the island, Louis XIV, the absolutist Sun King, declared black children in Saint-Domingue to be property of their mothers master. Masters were free to sell the offspring or give them to other family members. From age eight, the slaves minded the masters children. At age twelve, they joined their parents in the field. A century later, in the midst of Haitis bloody and protracted revolution, revolt leader Toussaint LOuverture drafted a new constitution abolishing slavery. His new nation became the first in the western hemisphere, and second in the world, to make abolition the law of the land.

But LOuverture worried that a rising trend would allow slavery to survive. Rural parents, he noted with concern, were sending their boys and girls to the city on the pretext of gaining the education which they will never attain in the cities. Already, the restavk phenomenon was simmering. Article 68 of the 1801

Constitution called for schools throughout the countryside. LOuvertures successors failed his vision, betrayed the new constitution, and realized his fears. The first leaders of Haiti created only a handful of schools, restricted to those whose parents rendered high services to the country. The president himself had the final say on whose children got in. School became the exclusive domain of the elite. The January 1, 1804, declaration of independence brought economic chaos. The revolution destroyed the plantations, which the new leaders tried to revive by forcing citizens back into slavery. But, as Haitians say, when a chicken lays an egg, you cannot put it back. Haitians resisted violently. Haitis leaders continued to try, through such blunt tools as the Rural Code of 1864, which introducedcorve labor on the rural population to force them to work on large plantations. Despite these efforts, Haiti became a nation of subsistence farmers, pauperized by a 150-million-franc debt to France to compensate for colonial losses. Haitis rural children, as they always had done and always would, felt that chaos and debt most dearly. On October 9, 1779,750 freed black

Haitians fought for the Continental Army against the redcoats at the Siege of Savannah. But for most Americans, Haitians were no brothers in arms, and Haiti represented danger, chaos, a Satanic evil reflected in its dominant religion of Vodou, and its new name, nearly homonymic with Hades. The prospect of the state formed of its slave revolt menaced America, and what scared Americans most was the idea that a similarly violent uprising might happen in the United States. In Uncle Toms Cabin , the most influential novel of the nineteenth century, Harriet Beecher Stowe captured U.S. sentiment toward Haiti before the Civil War with the commentary of her self-satisfied slaveholder, Alfred St. Clare. Alfred clashes with his brother, Augustine, who abhors slavery but continues to hold slaves. One day, after witnessing the beating of a slave, Augustine uses the insurrection in Haiti as a cautionary tale. O, come, Augustine! snapped Alfred. As if we hadnt had enough of that abominable, contemptible Hayti! Seeking, in President Thomas Jeffersons words, to confine the pest to the island, the U.S. government embargoed Haiti for sixty years. But when legal American slavery entered its final spasmodic throes, the United States ran out of excuses for isolating Haiti. If any good reason exists why we should persevere longer in withholding our recognition of the independence and sovereignty of Hayti and Liberia, Abraham Lincoln said in 1861, I am unable to discern it.

A year later, after the U.S. Congress recognized Haiti, Lincoln enunciated a use for the black republic: a dumping ground for freed American slaves. He encouraged blacks to migrate to Haiti and Liberia to seek the freedom and independence he thought they would never fully realize in the United States. Lincoln sent Frederick Douglass as counselor minister to Haiti to lead the way. But other freedmen did not follow. The public recognition of Haiti as an independent republic, of course, did not mean that Americans privately recognized Haitians as equals, worthy of the same human rights as whites. In the fall of 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt eyed Haiti from his leisure cruise aboard the USS Louisiana . He remarked to his son Kermit that a century after the slave revolt, the nation had successfully transformed itself into a land of savage negroes, who have reverted to vodouism and cannibalism. Universal suffrage in Hayti, he later wrote, has not made the Haytians able to govern themselves in any true sense. Woodrow Wilson agreed, and in 1915, he did something about it. After one of Haitis seasonal coups, Wilson, warning of potential German

infiltration through the island, sent 330 Marines to take charge. The Americans stayed for nineteen years. As many Haitians actively resisted the occupation, the Marines had to reach into Haiti's past to get laborers to build roads. They revived the *corvee* system, tying Haitians together in chain gangs, and executing resisters.

After shooting the insurgent leader, Charlemagne Pralme, Marines in blackface strung up his corpse in a public square on All Saints Day. While reinstating adult slavery, the occupiers highlighted child slavery as a reason for being there in the first place. In 1921, an American aristocrat named John Dryden Kuser who had married seventeen-year-old Brooke Russell (later known as Brooke Astor), the daughter of Haiti's high commissioner, Brigadier General John H. Russell wrote a book called *Haiti: Its Dawn of Progress After Years in a Night of Revolution*. The work, in addition to being a hagiography of Kuser's father-in-law, justified the U.S. occupation in part because of the preexisting system of child slavery on the island. Four years later, at a meeting of the League of Nations Temporary Slavery Commission, the commission's most outspoken and independent member cited Kuser to criticize Haiti for the *restavk* system. Haiti's former minister of agriculture, Louis Dante Bellegarde, responded indignantly that peasants were simply arranging for wealthier Haitians to pay for their children's education in exchange for light labor. The issue was not raised again in an international forum for over half a century. The martyr Pralme's bust is today engraved on Haiti's fifty-cent piece, and in the Haitian national memory, the end of the American occupation in 1934 was a great moment. For the child slaves, however, the worst was still to come. Over the next seventy years the *restavks*, hitherto degraded, became crushed. Before independence, some had status as *au pairs* and maids in upper-class households. As wealthy Haitians became able to pay adult domestic workers, *restavks* became the slaves of the urban lower middle classes. The national governments' gross economic mismanagement and urban-oriented educational policies compounded natural disasters to bury rural populations. A decade after independence, the supply of *restavks* exceeded demand. While *restavk* abuse occasionally offended bourgeois sensibilities, the government never enforced the half-dozen laws that it passed in order to curtail such exploitation. Starting in 1957, the dictatorships of François Papa Doc Duvalier and his son Baby Doc rendered Haiti a thug state. With his *Tontons Macoutes* death squads, the father institutionalized terror. Under the son, tens of thousands of Haitians were sold as slaves, some tricked at recruiting centers, others simply dragooned to sugar consortiums in the neighboring Dominican Republic. It is the destiny of the people of Haiti to suffer, Baby Doc once explained. Five years to the day after rural Haitians overthrew Baby Doc in a bloody coup, they carried a populist named Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power. Haiti's first democratically elected president looked like the champion of the *restavk*. A Roman Catholic slum priest who ran an orphanage, Aristide invited hundreds of destitute children to his inauguration: Children of Haiti, he told them, this year you have a little friend who is president. But Aristide was president for less than a year. The remnants of the *Tontons Macoutes* overthrew the little friend in an orgiastically violent coup, in which they publicly displayed several Aristide supporters with their severed genitals in their mouths. Aristide fled into exile, where he denounced the plotters and tried to position himself once again as a defender of the poor. In so doing, he addressed the *restavk* issue, calling it a by-product of underdevelopment and Western greed. U.S. officials in Port-au-Prince were unimpressed: The Haitian left, including President Aristide and his supporters in Washington and here, the embassy cabled Washington, consistently manipulate or even fabricate human rights abuses as a propaganda tool. Still, no one in Clinton's administration liked the new junta. Nancy Ely-Raphel, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, said, They're slowly turning Haiti into hell. On September 19, 1994, a U.S.-led multinational force secured the ground for Aristide's return. A week before the intended restoration, Representative Phil Crane, a conservative Republican from Illinois, rose on the House floor to blast the plan: Haiti is not worth one American life, he said, echoing Bob Dole's earlier statement in the Senate. Let us go to China, the greatest slave state in history. Instead of bestowing Most Favored Nation [status] on them, let us teach them about democracy. But the Republicans had been out of power in Congress for forty years, and his words fell on deaf ears in the Clinton administration. The egg is back! The egg is back! Aristide's supporters shouted upon his return to the presidential palace. The proverb had been disproved and the chicken had indeed taken back the egg; but the egg turned out to be rotten. The Aristide restored by the multinational force was not the same Aristide elected by the people. Cowed by the demands of international financial institutions, he abandoned his programs for the poor. Terrified by the prospect of another paroxysmal coup, he employed the thug tactics of the Duvaliers. Aristide proved adept at paying lip service to the *restavks*. Two months after the restoration, he ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and he later acknowledged that the *restavk* system is one of the cancers on our social body in Haiti that keep democracy from growing. But in practice, Aristide

did little to free the slaves, save for proposing more meetings, and unveiling, with great pomp, a hot line to report restavk abuses. The hot line was normally unmanned, and currently boasts a perpetual busy signal. At the time, the United States was undergoing a seismic political shift of its own. A week after Cranes comment in the fall of 1994, Newt Gingrichs GOP colleagues won control of Congress and consolidated their power over the next five elections. In the second Bush administration, modern slavery mattered, and Aristide was the thug who perpetuated it in Haiti. Shortly before George W. Bush took office, a soft-spoken man named Jean-Robert Cadet stirred American consciences about Haitian slavery. Cadet turned what had been a biographical letter to his newborn son into an elegant and painful book chronicling his years as a restavk. He revealed in detail the torture and sexual abuse that he endured from his earliest memories until his mistress took him to the United States. On September 28, 2000, Cadet offered graphic testimony before Jesse Helms and the Senate Foreign Relations Committees hearing on modern slavery: I believe it is the moral obligation of this great nation to help Haiti solve the restavk problem, he concluded. Since the first Bush administration, the State Department had included reports of child slavery in its yearly assessment of the human rights situation in Haiti. Now, State took a harder look. In 2003, his first year at the helm of the American antislavery office, John Miller dropped Aristides government to Tier Three of the Trafficking in Persons Report a ranking that could trigger sanctions. In an eleventh-hour move, the Haitian Senate proposed an amendment to the constitution to outlaw the restavk system. Embassy officials in Port-au-Prince enlisted Roger Noriega, the new Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, to convince Secretary of State Colin Powell to upgrade Haiti. The embassy argued that if the United States imposed sanctions on Haiti, a country dependent on aid for all public works, the nation would veer sharply toward becoming a full-on failed state. Swayed by these arguments and the importance of Haitian cooperation in stemming the flow of immigrants and narcotics, Secretary Powell recommended upgrading Haiti to Tier Two, where it would not face sanctions. Shortly after Bill Nathan was born in 1984, his father died of malaria. To honor him, Bills mother, Teanna, gave the baby an American-sounding name. His father was Haitian, but had worked for an American cargo company based in coastal Cap Haitien. Widowed at forty, Teanna became, like 60 percent of Haitian mothers, the sole supporter of her children. With Bill and his three-year-old sister Shayla, she headed south in search of work, settling in Hinche, a town in the central plateau of the country. There she met Sister Caroline, an American nun who helped her find a small home. Teanna earned money by doing laundry and cooking food for wealthier neighbors. She didnt make much, but it was enough to feed her children rice, beans, and, when she could, chicken. Teanna had never been to college, but she dreamed of giving her children that chance, and with Sister Carolines help, Bill was able to start kindergarten at age three. His mother worked hard; still, she made sure that her children enjoyed their childhood. When she got home from work, no matter how exhausted she was, she always warmed water to shower them. If the children misbehaved, she would ground them, but never hit them. Sundays, after church, my mom would cook different foods like fish, bananas, some salad, Bill recalled. She would make something special for us to make us feel happy and comfortable, showing us the way she cared about us. And she would take us out and go to the public park to play with other kids. She was a good lady. Shortly after Teanna moved the family to Hinche, her brother followed. Young Bill never completely understood why, but sharp tension existed between his mother and uncle. Bill and Shayla once went over to their uncles house, and he grabbed them angrily. What are you doing here? he asked. Where is your mother? When Teanna heard the story, she decided that if anything happened to her, her brother would be an unreliable caretaker for her children. She expressed her concerns to the two neighborhood families that employed her. One sweltering July evening in 1991, Teanna fed the children, and tucked them in bed. Bill, who was seven at the time and just learning to read, fell sound asleep. In the middle of the night, his mother began to wail. Bill! Shayla! I love you, my babies, she told her children. I dont know whats wrong with me. I feel like Im dying. It was the last thing she said. The day after she died, Sister Caroline came to their house to offer her condolences. The two neighbors Teanna had worked for bickered over who would take the children. They compromised by splitting up the siblings. Immediately after the funeral, Bill, still in shock, moved in with the Gils. Wilton and Sealon Gil owned a restaurant and had two boys and two girls of their own. They were a lower-middle-class family, with no car but enough to eat. Although his sister moved in with a nearby family, Bill rarely saw her. Everyone assumed that the children would be well cared for, as the two families had seemed compassionate when Teanna was alive. And for the first two months, perhaps out of sympathy, the Gils treated Bill decently, letting him attend school and giving him a comfortable bed, which he shared with the other two boys. All of the kids had chores, but there was a paid servant in the household who cooked and cleaned.

After the first month, Sealon began treating Bill less like a family member and more like a slave. Day by day, there were certain things like carrying water that they made me do, he said. Still, Wilton was a gentler soul, and tempered a simmering rage in his wife. Politics, as so often in Haiti, intervened to make things more miserable. On September 30, 1991, Aristide fell, and the purges of his supporters began. Wilton, a member of Aristides Lavalas (Avalanche) political party, knew Aristide personally. One night, paramilitaries came to the Gils, demanded to see Wilton, fired shots into the house, and broke down the door. Wilton surrendered. He was hog-tied, imprisoned, and tortured. After a month he escaped via Port-au-Prince to the United States, where he soon took up with an American woman. With his sole protector now gone, Bills life changed drastically. In the disastrous post-coup economy, the restaurant sank. Sealon could no longer afford the servant, so she made Bill do her work, and more. Starting at five every morning, he mopped the floors, swept the yard, boiled the water. Then, even in torrential rains, he worked outside for several hours, feeding and watering the pig and tending to the vegetables. He was no longer allowed time or water to bathe, and could not sit at the table with the others to eat. Sometimes Sealon gave him leftovers. He became dangerously malnourished. His new bed was a pile of rags on the floor in Sealons mothers house. When his clothes grew threadbare, Sealon gave him the other childrens castoffs. On some days, Bill was allowed to attend school for a few hours, as Sister Caroline still paid his tuition. Seeing that he was underfed, the school director funded his school lunches as well. Sealon permitted him to go only if he finished his other tasks, and did not allow him any time to study at home. He fell far behind. But school provided something more important for Bill. There, no one teased him about being a restavk. There, for a few moments each week, he was a boy, not an animal. Petit paw lave yon Bo, Kite yon bo, goes a Haitian proverb: Your child is not my child, and I dont have to do anything for him because hes not mine. While Sealons children were at school, Bill had to negotiate with vendors at the market and work at the restaurant. When they came home, they called him slave and beat him with switches or their fists for the slightest infraction or none at all. As they were bigger than he was, Bill could not fight back. Sealon routinely yelled at him, even in public. One time at the market, he lost her money to buy groceries. I know you, Bill. You ate the money! Sealon shouted when he came home. She reached for the leather martinet. During the beating, one of many, he did not scream. Afterwards, his chin quivering, the eight-year-old was defiant. Mon Dieu bon, he told her. God is good, and one day I wont be a restavk anymore. Do you think youve got somewhere else to go? Sealon laughed. Youre never going to be anything in your life. Never. You will still be a restavk, going in the street and cleaning cars. At best youll be a thief. Bill longed to escape, but couldnt. As a child, his world was too small. Months later, Sealon decided to teach the boy to work faster. She gave him 20 Haitian dollars and told him to get rice, beans, and other foodstuffs from the market. Then she spit on the floor. By the time that spit dries, she told him, youd better be back here. He ran so fast that his lungs burned by the time he reached the market. Overstimulated from the long sprint, and seeing no line for the vendors, he got distracted from his task. A young mans hands whirled over three wooden shells, one of which concealed a picture. Other kids stood around gaping at the man and his shell game. Hey, little man, the huckster said to Bill, if you put down four dollars and see the wood with the picture beneath it, just touch it, and youll get eight dollars back. The other kids egged him on: Play! Play! Youll have more money to buy things anyway. The man stopped, and all eyes were on Bill. In a flash he put \$4 in front of the left shell. He lost. A pang of pure fear melted his stomach. Nauseous, he immediately realized that he could not afford all of Sealons shopping list because of the \$4 HA (about 50 U.S. cents) that he had lost. Shame piled on shame when he approached the vendors, who saw Bill regularly but didnt know him. Through welling tears, he revealed more than he cared to about his life. He lived with people who werent his family, he said, and they had sent him. This was a polite way of confessing that he was a restavk. He begged them to give him the items, explaining that his granmoun , his grown-up, would kill him. They refused. Bill curled up under a mango tree, his mind white with fear, desperately trying to think of lies that would spare him the beating he knew was in his future. Unbeknownst to him, word had already reached Sealon of his peccadillo. When he got home, the spit was dry. You bet the money! Sealon screamed. And you know we dont have any money in the house! Bill tried to speak but choked on tears instead. She kicked him to his knees. Then she handed him two rocks, one in either hand, and told him to hold his arms extended, and not to drop the rocks or she would kill him. The martinet first fell on his back. He held his tongue, and held on to the rocks. Then she beat him harder. As Bill screamed, she whipped him everywherehis head, even his eyes. The other children watched in horror. After twenty minutes, Bills blood lay in pools on the cement floor. The rocks were still in his hands. On January 1, 2004, Aristide told a small crowd assembled in front of the gleaming white presidential palace that Haiti was

the mother of liberty in the world. But the world had seen enough of Aristides brand of liberty. Dozens of national leaders were invited to mark Haitis bicentennial: only the prime minister of the Bahamas and South Africas president, Thabo Mbeki, showed up. Haiti, too, had seen enough of Aristide. It was coup season again. Reminiscent of Baby Docs last days, mass protests spread from the countryside as rebels seized Cap Haitien, where the original slave revolt had begun against the French. They mauled Aristide supporters, and shot at Mbekis helicopter. Rebel leader Louis-Jodel Chamblain explained that he intended to liberate Haiti, and compared Aristide to Napoleons brother-in-law, who had failed to quell the slave revolt. On February 29, a U.S. aircraft once again ushered Aristide into exile. Over the next ten months, foreign donors recalled millions of dollars in pledged aid. Haitis GDP shrank nearly 4 percent while its population grew by 2.3 percent. Parts of Haiti fell out of government control entirely. The coup, combined with the Iraq War, pulled American attention away from the restavks. Rural children once again slipped into the shadows, entering bondage in greater numbers than ever before. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funded awareness campaigns to discourage child slavery, but the bulk of the money went toward billboards for a population that could not read, and television and radio jingles for a population without electricity. Three State Department officials monitored human trafficking part time, but department regulations curtailed their ability to find enslaved children and families. For its 2004 report, the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) office begged off placing Haiti into its tier system, citing the lack of an organized government. The following year, TIPs evaluation was a confused and contradictory rehash of previous statements: The Interim Government of Haiti does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. Haiti is placed on Tier 2 Watch List for its failure to show evidence of increasing efforts to combat trafficking in persons over the past year. UN organizations approached the issue of Haitian slavery as they handled modern slavery in many other countries. Without drama, without creativity, without effectiveness. The UN Human Rights Commission continued, as it had for fifteen years, to express concern. From its air-conditioned and heavily fortified headquarters in Port-au-Prince, UNICEF issued lengthy studies on the problem of children in domesticity, dancing around the issue of slavery, but explicitly refusing to employ the term. Renel Costum, muscular and clean-cut, wore a trim mustache and several gold rings. He looked several sizes too large for his airless office in a police precinct next to the national airport. Costum, as head of the twenty-three-man Brigade for the Protection of Minors (BPM), led the national effort to combat the restavk system. A 1995 graduate of Haitis national police academy, Costum soon learned why the UNICEF-funded BPM was a joke among his fellow officers. As we spoke, he reached past his nonfunctional computer and fiddled mindlessly with my tape recorder, looking down and answering in low tones. At one point in the conversation, the electricity died, and we continued in darkness without even a fan to cut through the sweltering heat. A dumpy office was the least of Costums problems. In theory, BPM was the first-response agency, fielding restavk abuse reports, and galloping to the rescue. But the agencys landline was out of order, and its cell phone was out of scratch card minutes. Even if, theoretically, a message got through, BPM had one car, and anywhere beyond the capital was beyond its reach. Were an officer to investigate, unless he found the most egregiously abusive bondage, he couldnt do much. Like the United States, Haiti pursued drug traffickers with much more zeal than slave traders. Human trafficking was still legal, as was forced, unpaid labor for children between the ages of twelve and fifteen. A law requiring the registration of unpaid domestic servants was never enforced. Under Aristide, when the BPM had a bit more money and actually could conduct investigations, its officers still had no authority to arrest masters, and could only scold them for mistreating their slaves. On occasion, a child ran away and a good soul would take her to the BPM. Brigade offices then would put her into an adult detention facility. When I told him about Benavil Lebhom and his child-selling business, Costum was phlegmatic. If its a pact between two families, we dont have to intervene, he said. Look, we know the domesticity phenomenon is illegal, using the euphemism preferred by the Haitian government and the UN, but its not in our capacity to end it by ourselves. Stuningly, he even acknowledged that he had restavk children living with him. But I dont rape them. The morning after meeting Benavil, I set out for the mountains of La Selle, from where he would acquire the girl to sell to me. I went on my own, with the goal not of buying a girl but of exploring why parents would give theirs away to a stranger. Now, in the life cycle of every bad idea, there comes a point where it reveals itself as such. Unfortunately, this is rarely at the birth of the idea. If I believed in omens, the enormous tarantula that leisurely crept across my path as I set out at five in the morning might have provided that epiphany. But for me, the revelation never occurred until nine and a half hours later, at the peak of the arc as I flew between my motorcycle and the jagged mountain rocks below. That morning,

my translator, Serge, and I boarded a tap-tap before sunrise. Downtown Port-au-Prince was already humming. A woman in a dress and an updo strode past, preaching apocalyptic gospel to no one in particular. Pressed against the tap-tap windows, vendors hawked all manner of goods balanced in huge baskets on their headstiers of plantain chips, crates of eggs, baskets of apples. One enterprising boy peddled medicines with a bullhorn. Hands reached through an open window behind me to tug at my arm, with pleas of Blanc! Blanc!

Children scurried past. Some wore uniforms and backpacks, heading for school. Others, the restavks, escorted them or carried water. The tap-tap was larger than normal, but that didn't make us any more comfortable. The plastic school bus seats were crammed together, allowing no leg room, and less than a foot to pass down the center aisle. People squeezed six to a seat, along with screaming babies, terrified chickens in plastic bags, and unwieldy sacks of grain. The collector packed in more passengers so he could make more money. Then everyone began to yell. Gargantuan speakers broadcast a chill gospel song by Losharimi, a Haitian pastor, which calmed passengers, until the collector demanded in voice stentorian to see one old woman's ticket. Her chin quivered. The monkey handed me a ticket, she said, and now the monkey wants to see it. As soon as the collector filled the last square inch, two corpulent women at the back of the tap-tap squeezed their way between the seats, descended, and urinated by the tire well. On top of an adjacent tap-tap, a goat stood like a hood ornament. Our roof was piled several feet high with luggage, barrels, and people. Inside, everything was covered with ugly, 1970s green plaid wallpaper. The side windows bore American flags, and the rear window the place of honor on tap-taps an elaborate handpainted portrayal of

Moses parting the Red Sea with his staff, leading his people to freedom. A few enterprising vendors managed to invade the bus. In a rare moment of thematic unity in an otherwise random scene, a buxom young woman in a low-cut V-neck T-shirt hawked long French baguettes, which she called Moses sticks. The collector tucked a few gourdes between the hawkers' breasts but, unimpressed, she quickly threw them back at him. A man outside the bus bellowed at her for monopolizing the lucrative indoor spot. As dawn crept over the mountains, the area around the bus seemed to explode, as the sea of humanity around us became illuminated. The music switched from melodious gospel to ear-splitting hip-hop, and the bass tube beneath our seat crackled. The driver started the engine, and we pushed through the crowd toward the swirling slums of Carrefour. Another onboard hawker held aloft such drugstore items as ginseng and aspirin, and extolled their virtues at the top of his lungs, introducing each with a deadpan *Mes amis*. After an hour, the air cooled as we drove up into the winding, lush mountains, past small terraced farms, the tap-tap careering dangerously close to 90-foot drop-offs. Modernity seemed to evaporate in the mountain air as naked children buzzed around shacks unconnected to any road, removed from any farmland. Descending, the driver pumped the wheezing brakes as we hurtled toward the sea. The air became sticky as we arrived in Jacmel, a sleepy, fading tourist town on the ocean. Parts of Jacmel were charming like Old Havana or antediluvian New Orleans. Over the last decade, narco-traffickers from Colombia had begun to launder their money through property here, providing sorely needed, if morally questionable, investment. But most of the town, like Port-au-Prince, was crumbling. After a quick lunch of gamey pigeon, we filled our water bottles, and took scooters three miles to tiny Dumez, where we rented much more powerful motorized dirt bikes for the next leg of the journey. There were no helmets available and the forthcoming road better described as an extended gash of mud and jagged rocks designed for nothing like wheels. A few hundred meters along, a raging brown river consumed the road entirely. Serge and I along with three locals who had joined us raised our feet and plowed through, blindly hoping that it was no more than one or two feet deep. At one point, our bikes became stuck next to an already stalled tap-tap, precariously close to a ten-foot waterfall. Using the larger vehicle as a fulcrum, we pulled ourselves past. As we passed the first small town, the road disintegrated into slush. Climbing higher, the views became spectacular, though difficult to enjoy as we bounced dangerously close to the cliffs' edges. The shocks on the bikes were long dead, and my stomach, already savaged by giardia, felt as if it were being repeatedly uppercut into my throat. We ascended into the fog, which lent everything a soft, mystical quality. Mostly though, it made it impossible to see more than fifteen feet ahead.

We slowed to 25 miles per hour, squeezing the brakes on the downhills and revving the throttle on the uphills. Fortunately, the accident happened during the latter process, so I wasn't going fast. Serge had sped ahead, and in an attempt to catch up, I hit an inconveniently placed rock, toppled diagonally, and landed ungracefully on my side. My left foot broke the bike's fall, but my left hand was a bloody mess. Locals who saw the crash took immediate interest, but were more fascinated with a *blanc* all the way out here than with my health. No broken bones, so I kicked the front fender back into place, tucked the smashed rearview mirror in my pack, and rejoined Serge, who had stopped to relieve himself. We rode on past increasingly

rural and far-spread outposts, which looked like spaghetti western sets in decline. Everywhere we rumbled past men, agape at my presence, with machetes; and gawking women with loads on their heads, a whip in their hands, and a donkey leading the way. After three hours, we reached a two-building outpost called Baint. There we left the bikes and met Trajean LaGuerre, who had been waiting for us all morning. Tall, graceful, wearing well-worn dress shoes and a white shirt, Trajean would be our guide on the three-hour walk to Brsillienne, the tiny town which he led. We descended into La Selle, over white broken rocks that soon turned to treacherous, slushy red mud. We passed a few more men of all ages walking effortlessly over the terrain that was causing me to wobble like a nonagenarian. At spots the pleasant scent of moist earth was punctured by the familiar smell of donkey manure, or dried by woodsmoke from nearby cooking fires. The red mud turned dark brown. The inclines along the edge of the path quickly became more severe, and at a few places, the track disappeared entirely, sliding off into precipices below. The surrounding green was fiercely vibrant. As we came around a long turn, we breached the fog and could see over the jagged hills to the sea. Half an hour into the trek, a light rain turned into a downpour. My foot, swelling from the crash, gave way and I went down in the ankle-deep mud, covering myself from head to toe. We turned off the road, down a nine-foot steep slickrock, stumbling into a different world. We came into a tin-roofed shack and asked the farmer for shelter. The farmer had a scruffy beard, gentle eyes; he was missing all of his front teeth. He sat on the floor with his neighbor, separating corn kernels from their cobs. They both wore straw hats, filthy shirts, and overalls. The place smelled heavily of kerosene from the only light source lamp in the next room. Save for a couple of plastic water jugs and a girl's jelly sandals, nothing would have been out of place in mid-nineteenth-century rural America. We sat in silence as the rain poured down and the farmer's wife, mostly cloistered in the other room, filled up buckets of water from several leaks in the rusted tin roof. The farmer gave us the only chairs in the house, handmade out of straw and unfinished wood. At one point, he wordlessly ordered me to turn around, unsheathed a sickle, and cut mud from the back of my pant leg. The farmer's young son sat in the corner, wearing a threadbare tunic. A dog stood near the opposite hut, its eyes shut, willing itself to be dry. Finally, the rain eased up, I thanked the farmer with 25 gourdes, and we headed on. I was ratted on the outside from rain, and inside from sweat. Exhausted, we climbed the last several hundred meters to Brsillienne's town hall—a simple reed and log church, with a dirt floor and floating, hand-carved pews. We were at the highest point of the surrounding hills. From this elliptical plateau, we looked out to the ocean and 360 degrees of the fog-shrouded, rugged green hills. Christopher Columbus described this land but saw it only from the sea. The view temporarily made me forget the poverty all around. Trajean reminded me with a coconut, which he opened with a machete and handed to me. He did so because, like 77 percent of rural Haiti, Brsillienne has no access to safe water. As a comparison, in Burundi, the poorest country in the world, 31 percent have no clean water. People here live much as they would have in L'Ouverture's day. Everyone farms, but only occasionally sell their yucca and potatoes in Baint. The worst harvest in local memory was in 2003, but 2004 and 2005 were also terrible. One crop, however, never faltered. *Timoun se richs malere*, say Haitians: Children are the riches of the poor. Nationwide, the average woman has 4.8 children. Every family in Brsillienne has at least two children under the age of fifteen; one household produced eighteen children in a single generation. Men won't use condoms here, and women avoid the pill, claiming it makes them sick and takes away their appetites. But the real reason families have so many children lies in the two-in-five childhood mortality rate, and an understanding that, as long as the crops come up, extra hands mean extra food. Trajean blew a conch from the edge of the plateau to draw everyone close, and soon locals of all ages filed into the church. They said I was the third blanc in modern history to visit. (Two French doctors made the trek four years earlier.) Only one Haitian aid group, *Limy Lavi* (Light of Life), which did remarkable work with scant funds, had visited them recently. Without that visit, the families would be mostly ignorant of the dangers posed by courtiers, for whom their young riches have a far more pecuniary definition. The heads of each of Brsillienne's thirty-two families were present. The elders sat on the pews which they pulled around us on all sides; the younger men and women stood at the back. Trajean led a brief prayer, all heads bowed. Then we talked, town hall style. Fear, shame, and regret poured out of the parents, all of whom save one had allowed a total stranger to walk away with one of their children. Most of the interlopers claimed some connection with the families. But why had these men and women given their children to people whose faces they had never seen before and would never see again? Many just looked down when I asked the question. We are not capable of helping our children, exclaimed one man, and this man came and we thought he was going to treat the child well! The children who were sent away were often the brightest ones who held the greatest promise. Their parents felt they would take

best advantage of the blessing of education. Now, most mothers had no contact with their kids. Four children had run back home after horrendous ordeals. Those children were taciturn, ashamed to tell their parents the extent of their abuse. How can you say to your mother or father that you were raped? a Limy Lavi organizer had explained earlier. The villagers dispersed, but one mother named Litanne Saint-Louis stayed. Her face was wan, her legs scarred from years of hard labor. Born in Brsillienne, she was unsure of her exact age, guessed she was in her fifties, but looked older. In her youth, she saw other children get sent away as restavks, but none from her family. Litanne had eight children. She recalled the birth of the first two, Eva and Camsease Exille, as being difficult: Oh, they hurt! But the girls themselves were anything but a pain. Camsease cried, but no more than the other children. Children in the countryside are stronger than children in the cities, said Litanne. At seven months, Camsease was walking. In her early years, she was strikingly affectionate. Whenever she was given food, regardless of who gave it to her, Camsease would run up to her and say: Thank you, Mommy, thank you! As Camsease entered adolescence, the market for her familys crops evaporated. Litanne and her husband worried that soon they would be unable to feed their children at all. Still, they managed to scrape together school tuition for Eva and Camsease. Camsease squeezed in playtime with classmates in the small hours of the morning before class began; but one by one, those classmates disappeared. Camsease was scared. In early 2003, when Camsease was eleven and Eva twelve, a man and his sister came from the city. Obese, in jeans, they looked to Litanne like the quintessence of well-fed modernity. And their words rang like a blessing. The woman, Alette, held Litanne's hand: Ill help your child, mami. Ill put her in school. Alette explained that her husband had just left for the Dominican Republic and she was looking for someone to live with her. Camsease, then in third grade, was terrified. But Litanne overrode her daughters objections, hearing in Alette's words a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Id like one for my sister, and one for me, the woman said. Litanne sent off Eva and Camsease. Tearfully, Litanne and her husband embraced the two children, not knowing when or if they would see them again. A few months later, Eva came back. Looking several years older, she explained that her mistress had never allowed her to go to school, instead making her work in the house sixteen hours every day. She and the husband beat her with a martinet, and the beatings got worse when they discovered that she wanted to leave. During the beatings, Evas mistress would remind the girl how lucky she was to have been brought to the city, telling her that she didnt deserve it and could always be replaced. Youre worthless, the woman would say. Horrified, Litanne envisioned Camsease enslaved in some other urban lair. She had no idea where Camsease was, but early in 2005 an old acquaintance showed up. He explained that Camsease had seen him on the streets of Port-au-Prince; his was the first face she recognized since her bondage began, and she asked him to take a message to her mother: Camsease wanted to come home. Lacking details, Litanne knew her daughter was enduring abuse, and was out of school. As Litanne and I spoke, clouds threatened more torrents. Night fell, and Serge and I felt our way over the rocks to Trajeans house, some 600 feet away. His wifes sister sat on the dirt floor of a side shack, preparing food over an open flame. Pigs rooted outside, and chickens pecked at the edges: Trajean, like most of the people in his town, farmed for subsistence. Trajeans house was tiny, rustic, but spotless. The floor was cement; as was true everywhere else in Brsillienne, there was no heat, no gas, no electricity, no running water. Trajean lit a couple of kerosene lamps; he offered us mushy tea, and we talked. He said affordable school would keep parents from sending their children away. At the only nearby school, the five teachers were paid \$72 each per month. Each childs tuition was \$5 per month. There were one hundred pupils, so if all paid, they would have a \$140 annual surplus for administrative costs and materials. But few families could pay fully, and many tried to pay in yams or other noncash goods. The teachers never received full salaries. The 1987 Haitian Constitution guaranteed free, universal schooling. If that were available, the percentage of families sending a child into slavery would drop from 95 to 60, Trajean said, the remainder seeing bondage as the only means to save their child from withering food insecurity. Knowing full well the horrors that might await in Port-au-Prince, one Brsillienne family nonetheless had allowed courtiers to take their daughter just a month earlier. During the conversation, we ate startlingly large plates of lightly cooked yams topped with chunks of gristly pork. Less than a third of Brsilliennes families ate meat weekly, and none ate it daily, so this was a treat; but dehydration robbed me of my appetite. We settled in for the night. Serge was on the cement floor next to the table where we ate; Trajean insisted repeatedly that I take his foam mattress in the bedroom. His wife spooned her three children on the floor for warmth. Eventually, Trajean joined them. After he blew out the final candle, the darkness was absolute, and I fell sound asleep. At 5 a.m., I woke to find that Litanne had been waiting for an hour by the embers of the fire outside. She was desperate to get her daughter back, and she thought she knew where she was. Ive heard

she lives somewhere around Delmas, she said, but I don't know where exactly she lives, what the number is.

Delmas is a long street, I warned her, and parts are dangerous. Camsease had relayed her approximate location through the messenger. I offered to pay for Litannes trip to the city in one week's time. Though I doubted that we'd be able to find one little girl in a teeming mass of humanity, Litanne was confident. Despite the omen of the tarantula, I left Brsillienne thinking that maybe making the trek here was not such a bad idea after all. The symptoms of malaria would not appear for another week, but Port-au-Prince was sweltering, and I felt febrile. My conversation with Benavil left me with a predicament. I told him not to talk to any family without me. But still I felt as if someone had handed me the delicate life of a child. I had to decide whether to hand that life to fate, or to save a child I had never met. As I sweated in the back of the tap-taps, I looked at little girls on the street and imagined the face of the one at the top of Benavil's list. She was somewhere in the mountains of La Selle, but soon she would belong to someone in the city. Perhaps her overseer would be a gentle soul who, though poor, would scrape together enough money to send her to school. The odds were against this. Haiti has the highest rate of corporal punishment for children in the hemisphere, and the slaves are the whipping girls of the whipping boys. Studies showed that nearly every restavak is beaten daily. Most girls are sexually abused by their male masters. Many of the capitals prostitutes are former child slaves, expelled from their masters households after becoming pregnant or simply turning fifteen when, legally, they would have to be paid. The girl, whoever she was, would be owned entirely by someone, and that person could rape her, kill her, chop her into pieces, feed her to the pigs. Or that person could set her free. I thought about all of the arguments for and against buying the child's freedom. There were practical considerations. Behind his smile, I knew that Benavil could be dangerous. After the February 2004 coup, thirtieth in the nation's history, Haiti averaged six to twelve kidnappings per day for ransom. Gangsters seized foreigners and demanded as much as a half million dollars. The family of Haitian journalist Jacques

Roche, who had earlier reported on child slave labor, could not pay his ransom of \$250,000 in a timely fashion. His kidnappers cut out his tongue, tortured him, and left him dead in his underwear in the middle of the street. Aware of this ahead of my month in Haiti, I took out a kidnap and ransom insurance policy from

Lloyds of London. Still, men have guns here, and I knew from personal experience in Africa that slave traders are bestially cruel, as theirs is the most volatile commodity. These are not men to play games with. I

thought I could solve this problem by having Benavil hand over the child I would buy at the Montana, a secure hotel, where UN officials stayed and where I had some acquaintances in the private military business who could bring greater force to bear if it came to that. But I wondered what would happen to the girl after I

set her free. When the New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof returned to visit a sex slave whose freedom he had bought for \$203 a year earlier, he found that she had returned to the brothel, a slave also to her methamphetamine addiction. But drug addiction is not endemic to the Haitian countryside, and I could pay for at least one year in a good orphanage for the girl. The potential for fraud was enormous. Assuming for a moment that Benavil smelled my humanitarian bluff, who is to say he would provide me with a girl genuinely poised to enter slavery? Perhaps he would give me the child of a friend of the family who was poor but not in danger, as a way for ablanc to pay for school. I thought of two journalists from the Baltimore

Sun who in 1996 had bought what later were rumored to be false slaves, sold as a fund-raising scam for Sudanese rebels. One of the journalists, Gregory Kane, was sanguine about the possibility: Do I have any regrets about being conned and handing over \$1,000 of The Sun's money to the Sudanese Peoples Liberation

Army, the southern group that has been fighting the government of Sudan forces for 19 years? Yes, I have several regrets. I regret we weren't able to give more money to a group that, with adequate funding, might

have taken out O-Slimy bin Laden and the Islamic fundamentalist regime in Khartoum. Were Benavil to scam me, I would have no such justification except that I was helping a disadvantaged child, even if she were more fortunate than a restavak. The case weakened. As the evening rolled in, the air cooled, and so did

my thinking. Journalists are not supposed to be activists; they are supposed to be objective and aloof. My grandfather, the editor of a small-town Connecticut newspaper for three decades, would have been appalled

at the thought of a reporter becoming so intimately involved with a subject. But I also thought of Eddie Adams, who won the Pulitzer Prize for his 1968 photograph of the summary execution of a bound Vietcong prisoner. Would he have been wrong to remind the South Vietnamese general of the Geneva Conventions?

When the blackout came, I was getting to the heart of the issue. I couldn't overcome my instinct that no matter how just the cause, a human life should not be bought even if it means that someone else may buy it instead. I established a principle for the rest of my work: I would give no money to slave traders; I would give no money to slavemasters. But I could not avoid getting involved with the lives of the slaves that I met.

In the case of Litannes daughter, I was already involved with the life of a slave I had never met. A week after traveling to Brsillienne, I waited with Serge for Litanne on the corner of Delmas 91. It was Sunday, and the large church across the street next to the bullet-ridden Radio Haitivibrated with an ecstatic gospel choir, drums, and organ. Litanne arrived, escorted by Trajean. She had pulled back her hair with a black ribbon, and wore a yellow Sunday dress. We set out quickly to look for Camsease. Anxious, she walked with determination down Delmas until we hopped into a slow-rolling tap-tap. After fifty blocks, we stepped out of the tap-tap. Litanne asked several times where we were, and I began to worry that she would never find her daughter. Then she got the scent, and we marched down Delmas 34. Young thugs crowded in, one aggressively asking for money. Like most side streets off Delmas, it was a moonscape of rocks, debris, garbage, and feces. Rusty car carcasses lined the roadside. At the end, Litanne turned off toward a one-room cement house with a flat roof and rusty rebars jutting out at random angles. She knocked. Around the corner came Alette, an ursine, barefoot woman wearing a stretched green tunic much different from when she had shown up in Brsillienne, Litanne said. Her unkempt hair shot off at improbable angles. Her face betrayed shock and immediate dismay to see us, and some fear. She recognized that three grown men represented force majeure and, as she had never paid for Camsease, she could not claim her as property. She managed a nervous smile. The inside of the house looked like a prison cell, with water-stained cement walls, glassless windows, and a bare concrete floor. A shard of a mirror lodged in a crack was the only decoration. Alette offered the only chair to me, but I insisted that Litanne take it. I sat on the one bed, along with Trajean and Serge. Alette indicated a corner of the cement floor where Camsease slept; then she called to her.

Camsease appeared from behind a sheet hanging at the back of the house. She looked younger than her thirteen years. Expressionless, she glided over to her mother. Are you coming to pick me up? she asked in a soft voice. Her mother nodded, smiling, her eyes wet, and embraced her daughter for the first time in nearly three years. Shes beautiful, Serge whispered to me. I didnt know you were coming, Alette said, flustered. Wash up, Litanne told Camsease. Were going. Camsease went back behind the sheet to change, and Alette rattled off a litany of excuses. Things have been very hard for me over the last couple of years, she said. My husband went to the Dominican Republic to find work and was killed. Alette, forty-five, was originally from Jacmel but had been living in the capital for the last twenty years. She was an insurance regulator in the Aristide regime but had been out of work since the coup. Litanne was silent, but Alette continued. Look, I cant afford to send my own children to school, she said. Things were better for me when I picked up Camsease. Litanne sat silently, her fists clenched, but her face impassive. I dressed her, Alette said, I gave her food. Camsease emerged, wearing different clothes but empty-handed. Slaves, of course, own nothing. We left quickly. At the end of Delmas 34, Trajean bought Camsease some crackers, which she devoured. Litanne held her daughters hand with a death grip. Alette and her three children had controlled Camseases every move. She was first awake in the house, an hour before dawn, and never went to school. Alette had lied about her inability to send her own children to school: dressed in their uniforms, they had gone every day. Camsease did all the work around the house. In the morning, she had tojete pipi , to clean out her mistresss chamberpot. Sometimes, she had to scrub Alettes feet. She was allowed to leave the house once a week, on Wednesdays, to run errands at the market. Although Alettes children were younger, they would beat her and call her timoun bond , slave child. Camsease wolfed down lunch as I drew out details of her bondage. Litanne never took her eyes off of her daughter, as if to do so would mean losing her for another three years. After lunch, I asked Camsease what she wanted to be when she grew up. I want to learn how to read, she said, simply. I pushed her for a bolder goal. I want to be a doctor, she said, cracking a smile for the first time. Shes going to eat a lot of yams tonight, said Serge. Bill Nathans tenth birthday came and went, and Bill himself did not notice. In 1994, he entered his eleventh year of life, and his third year of what slavery scholar Orlando Patterson terms social death. Haitians have another term for restavks who have absorbed their slave status: zombifier, zombified. Like the undead of the vodou tradition, the restavks are assumed to have no will of their own, controlled entirely by those who granted them a second life. Teanna, who had left no savings to her children when she died, had left them with important reserves of courage. But as Bills memory of liberty faded, so too did his will to escape. One day, Bill heard a knock at the Gils gate. When he opened it, two men grabbed him. Sealons elderly mother saw the abduction but could do nothing to stop it. As the two men led Bill away, they calmed his fears by saying that Sister Caroline had sent them. The men took Bill to Carolines convent, where she fed him, bathed him, and gave him sandals. Caroline explained that neighbors had told her about the beatings. If your mother were alive, she told Bill, she never would have accepted that. That afternoon, she sent Bill in a private car to St. Josephs Home for Boys, a remarkable

orphanage in Port-au-Prince run by an Iowan named Michael Geilenfeld. It was Bills first night in a big city, but he was not scared. I was happy, he said. I felt like my mother was in that house. Geilenfeld soon discovered Bill had a talent for drumming. He found funds for the boy to study the art in Gambia. In order to go, Bill needed a passport. In order to get a passport, Bill needed his birth certificate. For that, he would have to confront Sealon one last time. Four years after his rescue, Bill returned to the place of his enslavement. Hinche looked strange, and Bill got lost. But one of Sealons children spotted him, and took Bill and his companions to the Gils house. Oh! Look at you, you got big! Sealon exclaimed with saccharine insincerity. Bill saw that a new little boy had taken his place, and that Sealon had forced the boy into the same spirit-crushing servitude she had imposed on him. Bill called the boy over. This is the same way I used to live in this place, he said. Have hope: God is good. Sealon treated the visitors like honored guests, offering them her childrens bed, and ordering the restavk to fetch them water. She asked Bill for money, and Bill gave her all he had. For myself, when someone did something bad to me, I dont keep it, Bill later explained. I dont do evil for evil. You do me bad, I do you good. As he left, Bill stepped back when Sealon tried to embrace him. I am no thief, he said simply, before turning to return to his new life. During my lastweek in Port-au-Prince, the Haitian National Police received a shipment of new uniforms. The hats were too big. Some officers were embarrassed and took them off; others stayed in uniform but tried not to move too much. The rims came down past their ears, and their eyes were barely visible. Haiti was making baby steps toward stability. But the presidential elections that were scheduled for the following week had been canceled due to the persistent violence. The government was essentially nonexistent. I saw Benavil again. He took me to his companys office, which sits a few blocks from where I had met him on the street, past Donald Duck Kindergarten, in the campaign headquarters of Haitian presidential candidate Dr. Emmanuel Justima. Benavil, who moonlights as Justimas head of security, proudly showed me off to the smartly dressed candidate, who introduced himself as one of the most well educated Haitians in the world, and said that one of his campaign pledges was greater rights for restavks. The problem of child slavery in Haiti has deep roots in society. And the problem has spread well beyond Haitis borders. The day after my trip to Brsillienne, I took another motorcycle with a Belgian aid worker across the border to the Dominican Republic, where I visited four of the over three hundred sugar plantations. Although Haitian officials no longer offer their citizens at bulk rates to the sugar consortiumsas the dictator Baby Doc didthousands of children are still trafficked to the Dominican Republic for plantation work, forced prostitution, and, of course, domestic servitude. Unlike Sudanese chattel slaves or European sex-trafficking victims, Haitis restavks have no advocates with ready access to Washington. Historically, American response to Haitian slavery at worst has been encouragement, at best opportunistic condemnation. Most of the time, America averts its eyes. And in lieu of an enforced prohibition of the restavk system, prosecutions for slave traffickers, and targeted aid for the source families, Haitis slaves will do what they did for 400 years: survive, adjust, struggle. And, occasionally, transcend. In 2002, Bill Nathan performed at a concert in Toronto in front of a crowd of five thousand, including Pope John Paul II. He went on to perform for Brazils President Lula, and to enthusiastic crowds at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Harlems Apollo Theater, and the Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati. He never saw his sister after his rescue. He heard she had moved on from the family she used to stay with, and was now living in the Dominican Republic. It saddened him to think of her. On first meeting Bill, I was immediately struck by his calmness amid the abject chaos of Port-au-Prince. Where he got his strength to move on and to keep moving was beyond me. He would say it was Gods will. Perhaps he had the same peculiarities that led Frederick Douglass or Harriet Tubman to defy great odds, seek their freedom, then help others. Bill was tough and street-smart enough to guide me past fifteen-year-olds toting M-1 rifles in Cit Soleil, but caring enough to nurse me back to health when malaria knocked me out for a week. He encouraged me to eat and rest. And he prayed for me. You need your strength, dear friend, he said. Your journey is just beginning. *Revue de presse* "A heartbreakingly important work" (The Scotsman)