



The Book Corner

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Fraser Institute researcher-recommended books on free market policies and economics

INVISIBLE CHAINS

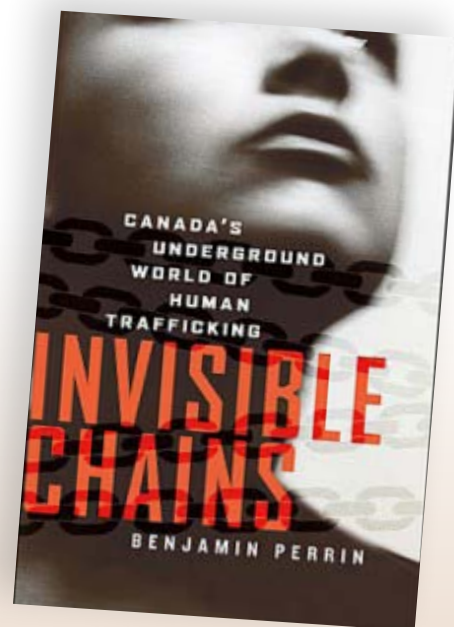
Benjamin Perrin

Benjamin Perrin, Associate Professor of Law at the University of British Columbia, assumed—like most of us—that human trafficking was something that happened far away from Canada. He had travelled to Cambodia to help victims of the sex trade there, and, as you would expect, was extremely moved by the tragedy that he witnessed. But when he heard of a case of commercial sex trafficking in his hometown of Calgary, not far from the burger joints he visited as a child, he could not ignore the exploitation occurring in his own country.


Invisible Chains is a review of his recent years of research and activism on this subject. Perrin filed over 40 Access-to-Information requests to reveal illuminating police and

government reports. Through the police and court files, and in-depth interviews with people on the front lines—police officers, social workers, and the victims themselves—he describes the shocking and distressing trafficking situation in Canada. He reveals the stories of a 14-year-old just outside Toronto who was auctioned on the internet for men to purchase by the hour, and young women taken by slave traders from an African war zone and trafficked to brothels and massage parlours in Edmonton.

Using graphic case studies, his book also examines the many reasons that can push women into the sex trade, the psychological ploys and physical violence the traffickers use to keep them there, and the motivation behind the traffickers (the people who exploit these women pull in enormous profits with less risk of capture or serious jail time than other illegal activities, such as the drug trade). He cites a report from Canada's Criminal Intelligence Service that estimates domestic sex traffickers earn an average of \$280,000 annually from every victim under their control.



Perrin also looks at the current Canadian legislation prohibiting human trafficking, and explains how vulnerable women and children are paying the price for what he terms Canada's "disgraceful" response to trafficking, especially compared with other Western countries. For example: Belgium has reported more than 1,200 human-trafficking cases since 2007 and secured more than 200 convictions; it also has several thousand police specialists trained to handle the crime. In the U.S., there are tough federal laws on the books, co-ordinated anti-trafficking



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task forces, and a special FBI squad that goes after pimps and has rescued more than 1,000 prostituted children. But in Canada, human trafficking was not even a criminal offence until 2005.

Perrin details how the United Nations recently asked Canada for statistics on arrests and convictions for human trafficking, and no one in Ottawa knew where to start looking. So he himself located the numbers, by canvassing police and justice officials across the country—and the results were alarming. From April 2007 to April 2009, only about 30 people were charged with human trafficking in Canada, and just five have been convicted to date. Their sentences amount to what Perrin calls little more than “a joke.” One man from Ontario who earned more than \$400,000 from marketing one girl for sex received three years in jail—which was harsh by Canadian standards. And in 2008, a Montreal man got a week in jail after his pretrial custody time was factored in.



Marc Falardeau, Bigstock, le Calmar

Invisible Chains ends with a passionate plea to build “a new underground railroad” so Canada becomes a haven for the victims, not the exploiters, of trafficking. The global problem of human trafficking is only now being recognized in Canada, and Perrin wants us to open our eyes to the modern-day slavery around us.

Invisible Chains was named one of the top books of the year by *The Globe and Mail* and has led to changes in Canada’s policies on human trafficking.



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Benjamin Perrin is a frequent speaker at Fraser Institute post-secondary student seminars.