

**Houston Philosophical Society
666th Members Meeting Minutes
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"Human Trafficking: Up Close and Personal"

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Linda Geffin is a Senior Assistant County Attorney and former Chief of the Harris County Attorney's Special Prosecution Unit. Over a 10 year period of work with Harris County District Attorney's office she has had a variety of endeavors. Her present focus is human trafficking. In 2011, she was targeted and assaulted by the criminal element whose businesses she had impacted. Linda has drawn national attention to her work through an appearance on NBC's Today Show, MSNBC's documentary Sex Slaves in Texas, as well as numerous other speeches and articles on the subject. Linda received her JD from South Texas College of Law after graduating with honors from the University of Pittsburgh.

Speaking from the vantage point of the commercial sex slave trade, Linda Geffin discussed what human trafficking is, led us through a few locations where it has thrived in Houston and encouraged us to engage in the conversation about how to abolish and eradicate slavery, once and for all.

Slavery was abolished in 1865 but it was never eradicated. There are more slaves now than there were at the height of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and Houston, Texas is a global hub of human and labor trafficking. The structure is the same: the promise of a better life. The victims' passports are taken when they cross the border. They are not paid, or are scantily paid, and are not free to come and go. Cotton, sugar, coffee, brand name clothes and consumer goods are all brought to our shores on the backs of slaves, including children who are taken out of the sociology-economic scene and deprived of an education. The slave trade has now been taken over by huge corporations. Fair trade requires an agreement that there will be no slavery, yet big producers still import goods produced of the backs of children. The Harvin-Echols protocol was designed as an agreement not to profit from slave labor but has not been a success.

Human trafficking is the recruitment, harboring transporting and providing or obtaining any person for labor or services involving forced labor, slavery, or servitude. Houston is a perfect storm with two major highways, an international airport, the ship channel, a port at Galveston, and a porous harbor. The drug cartels are raking over human trafficking. It is hard to detect and not self-reporting, but Houston does have a hotline to report suspected trafficking.

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Today there are 10-30 million slaves in the world--more slaves than when the slave trade was legal--because in today's dollars it costs only \$30 to \$60 to buy slave labor, whereas the cost of a slave at that time was \$30,000-\$40,000 in today's dollars. Today 17,500 to 20,000 or more slaves are imported into the United States each year. Human trafficking brings in \$32,000,000,000 annually, more than Walmart or the GNP of Iran. Nothing is changing. The slave trade is fueled by demand. There are many groups focusing on this problem, but we are motivated to have more and cheaper goods and services, including labor and sex, which keeps the slave trade alive.

These places are hidden in non-descript cantinas with large fences around them. Some of our state representatives are writing the most forward-thinking laws in the country, but they are not being enforced. Raising awareness is very important and must be continually done. For example, a series including "Sex Slaves: Texas", focusing on cantinas along the ship channel, was aired on MSNBC. Geffin, herself, as a member of the special prosecutions task force, was the victim of a contract beating in which she was left unconscious and almost killed. The task force was disbanded, but she feels her responsibility to give back and speak out.

To effect change: 3 levels:

1 - Be aware; understand the root causes and the consequences of your actions.

2 - Beyond self: spread the word; support anti-human trafficking networks; volunteer, donate, and raise funds; know the signs and report.

3- System: advocate and lead change; identify systemic problems and provide solutions.

The two main barriers to eradication are public awareness and resources. Become aware. Governments should be leading the way because they said they would, but having and enforcing a law are different things.

The free2work app tells the supply side of the story. The Fairtrade USA mark guarantees a better deal for third world producers.

Game changers include Abraham Lincoln, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King. We should never fail to protest.