

Know your Credit Score? See it in 2 easy steps.					
FREE SCORE.COM	Excellent	750 - 840	Fair	620 - 659	I Don't Know ????
	Good	660 - 749	Poor	340 - 619	<a href="#">See Score FAST!</a>

<http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/asection/la-ed-slavery8-2009jan08,0,4561305.story>

From the Los Angeles Times

## Editorial

### Modern-day slavery

The story of an Egyptian girl once enslaved in Orange County and the marking of Human Trafficking Awareness Day are reminders that the awful trade in human life has again surfaced.

January 8, 2009

*Note: This editorial has been corrected. See below for the correction.*

The story of Shyima Hall, who was brought to this country as a slave at age 10 and forced to work from dawn to midnight in the home of a wealthy Egyptian family living in Irvine, has been told around the world. According to news reports, the child ironed clothes, mopped floors, made beds and groomed the family's hair. She slept in the garage. She did not attend school or have any days off.

Now 19, Shyima had been leased to Amal and Nasser Ibrahim by her mother when they lived in Egypt. She was to work for \$45 a week, for 10 years. Her enslavement ended in April 2002 after an anonymous call to Orange County's Department of Child Support Services prompted an investigation. But Shyima's story and its unusual setting -- a gated community in Irvine, far from the plantations once associated with slavery in this country -- has refocused attention on a subject long believed to have been relegated to the dustbin of history.

The business of buying and selling and indenturing human beings has, of course, been updated. Now it's done with phony documents and computer records and false identities. But it's still the slave trade. The Department of Justice estimates that 14,000 to 17,000 people are brought into the United States as slaves each year, mostly to metropolitan and border regions, including Southern California. Locally, victims most often are brought from Mexico, El Salvador or South Korea. The sex trade remains the driving force of international human trafficking, but slave labor is a significant component.

A sad event takes place Sunday; Jan. 11 is the second annual Human Trafficking Awareness Day, established in 2007 by the U.S. Senate. Even more depressing is the fact that this issue is reemerging two centuries after the United States formally ended its participation in the slave trade.

In 1808, the U.S. followed in the footsteps of the British, who had taken the same action a year earlier. Britain's rejection of human smuggling was, initially, far more genuine than that of the United States. Britain committed its Royal Navy to the extermination of the odious trade and launched a 52-year war on those who engaged in it. The slavers, deemed pirates by the British and therefore subject to execution, did what smugglers do: They fought back and adapted, turning to faster ships, including American-built clippers.

For its part, the United States did almost no enforcement. The president who signed the legislation outlawing America's slave trade, Thomas Jefferson, personified the country's deeply conflicted feelings toward "the peculiar institution," abhorring the traffic in human beings and yet building wealth from their forced labor. Eventually the United States sent its Navy to help the British, but it would remain torn on the larger subject of slavery until President Lincoln, during the Civil War, first ended it in the rebellious states and then abolished it altogether.

Today, we are once again confronted with its inhumanity on our shores. Thankfully, no discord exists about whether to strike at the practice today. The U.S. government is making a serious effort to combat the slave trade, particularly the sexual exploitation of children; last year, then-Atty. Gen. Alberto R. Gonzales opened a human trafficking prosecution unit within the Department of Justice to assist investigations and prosecutions across the country. That is welcome, but not enough.

We know what to do because we did it 200 years ago: We must focus our attention on interdiction and halt trafficking at our borders. Unlike those of bygone days, modern victims often enter the country under false pretenses, passed off as the children or relatives of the adults who in reality have purchased them. This is no longer a race between the fastest ships and canniest crews but a challenge at our embassies, consulates and customs areas. We also must remember that fighting slavery internationally is in our best interest -- because the world eventually comes to the U.S., bringing its practices with it.

**FOR THE RECORD:** A previous version of this editorial incorrectly said Jan. 11 is a Monday.

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at [latimes.com/archives](http://latimes.com/archives).

TMSReprints

Article licensing and reprint options

partners:  