

Hi! My name is Arianna Haven, and I am a freshman at Science Leadership Academy (SLA). I am researching the topic of child slavery in the chocolate industry for my **You and the World** project for English Class. This project has many parts; including three blog posts and a “agent of change” service project related to our subject. What you are reading right now, however, is my first blog post. So, sit back, relax, and start thinking about how you can change the world.

I first became interested in this topic when I watched a documentary called “The Dark Side of Chocolate,” created by a [\(Click here to watch it\)](#). Romano chocolate production process, so subject. He soon found out that skeptical, and was eager to public eye. When I saw this film, to research even more on the that the chocolate industry isn’t here today to tell you why.



*The cover picture for Romano's documentary*

man named Roberto Romano was skeptical about the he looked further into the there were many reasons to be reveal the injustices to the I became intrigued, and began topic. Many people don't know just fun and games, and I am

Hundreds of years ago, cocoa trees mainly grew in South America. Today the U.S. mainly gets our cocoa from Africa. We get it in Africa because it is cheaper. However, not many people wonder *why* it is cheaper. It is because there are thousands of workers who are not getting paid. More specifically, there are child slaves that are forced to work long days in

the chocolate industry.

These injustices occur on the chocolate plantations in Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) in Africa; and in the cocoa processing factories in Abidjan. Because of the poverty in these areas, people will do almost anything to make money for their families.



A map of Africa and Cote D'Ivoire for your reference.

Children as young as

myself are persuaded to work on the cocoa plantations. Can you imagine *me* using a machete

to cut down cocoa pods all day? I can't. About 10,000 children

are victims of child slave labor in the cocoa/chocolate

industry. This number continues to grow because about 135

children are taken to the plantations every year. This

smuggling of children over borders illegally is called

human trafficking. The "traffickers" shuffle the kids

into buses, and take them to a border city, Zegoua, between Mali and the Ivory Coast. After a

long travel, the children arrive at the plantations. On the plantations, they mostly harvest the

cocoa pods from the trees. The children use machetes and big knives to cut the cocoa pods

from the tree. They work long, hard, back breaking hours without any breaks. Those that do

take a break are beaten very badly.



*A child cutting down cocoa pods with machete.*

Many people don't know about this monstrosity. But, some that do, are trying to fix it.

In 2001 a treaty, named the [Harkin-Engel Protocol](#), was signed by major candy companies such as: Nestle, Hershey's, and Mars. This protocol states, "child labor and the trafficking of children are prohibited in the cocoa industry after 2008." However, Romano's documentary proves that child labor still exists on the plantations today. So now it is our job to convince all the major chocolate companies to stop using child slaves. Right now, we can sign petitions ([click here to sign](#)) to convince them to stop using child slave labor. However, I continue to ask how we as students at SLA can help in other ways. I would like to close this blog post with a quote that inspired me by Shawn Zevit,

"For thousands of children on this planet, slavery is not a historical event, but a current reality. *We can* make a difference."

Stay tuned for more updates! Thanks!

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