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## Amidst Ongoing Slavery in the South, One Group's Efforts to Enforce the 13th Amendment

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### Amidst Ongoing Slavery in the South, One Group's Efforts to Enforce the 13th Amendment

By Zannie Carlson

One of the more frustrating myths I recall from my public school days was the idea that our social consciences have evolved with the times: European and Anglo-saxon civilizations started off on the wrong foot with Native American genocide and African enslavement (and genocide), but (white) Americans are so much better these days for having emancipated Africans, having recognized that white males should not be the only people allowed to vote, and can tolerate a black man as President. Let's pat ourselves on the back for all of our *progress*.

While I now look at this framework with particular skepticism, I am still startled to learn of the number of incidents in America, particularly Florida, where Latino immigrants are funneled into forced farm labor. Between 2005 and 2007, César and Giovanni Navarrete imprisoned 12 farmworkers on the farmland where they were forced to work; one of the workers who resisted was beaten and chained to a [pole](#). In these forced labor sites, [beatings, shootings, and pistol-whippings](#) are also not uncommon. In these modern episodes of slavery,

*[S]everal of the recently convicted slavers [have] armed guards watching over the workers' camp, which is typically far from town so that escapees have nowhere to go even if they find a way out. In the worst cases, the workers' whole existence depended on supervisors or contractors, who were masters at keeping workers in both physical and economic bondage, deducting money for food and garden-hose showers (\$5 each) from paychecks. . . One boss took away workers' shoes at night so they wouldn't run. [-Labor Notes](#)*

The CIW, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), is responsible for the prosecution of Florida landowners engaged in forced labor and indentured servitude of workers. In this year alone there has been the bust of two forced labor rings, and the CIW has won [seven cases](#), resulting in the release of over 1,000 forced laborers. Interestingly, Congress had to boost slaveholding sentences from the petty post-bellum sentence of three years' incarceration to a heftier twelve years' jail-time to reflect modern understandings of the severity of the crime. Perhaps there is *some* evolution, after all.

The CIW is also involved in advocacy for farmworkers' rights to a higher wage, as the work load has doubled in the midst of a thirty-year wage stagnation, with salaries hovering around the [poverty line](#). The probability that many of the workers are not legal residents of the United States makes their advocacy especially dangerous. The CIW offers several opportunities for involvement in their causes. Having made gains with fast food giants including McDonalds, Burger King, Taco Bell, and Subway, the group has set its sights on supermarket industry behemoths like Kroger and Giant.

Online, one may petition to raise tomato prices by a penny, raising daily wages from approximately \$50 to [\\$85](#). While the differences in wages are profound, it is also pathetic that

corporations have so much power over humans that a penny per pound price increase could be an issue of contention. When workers work within the constraints of the law and rely on corporate collaboration, radical change will necessarily be limited.

Nonetheless, these seemingly small achievements ultimately benefit workers' day-to-day routines. CIW's work is a compelling example of human rights advocacy that has succeeded on a variety of fronts.

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