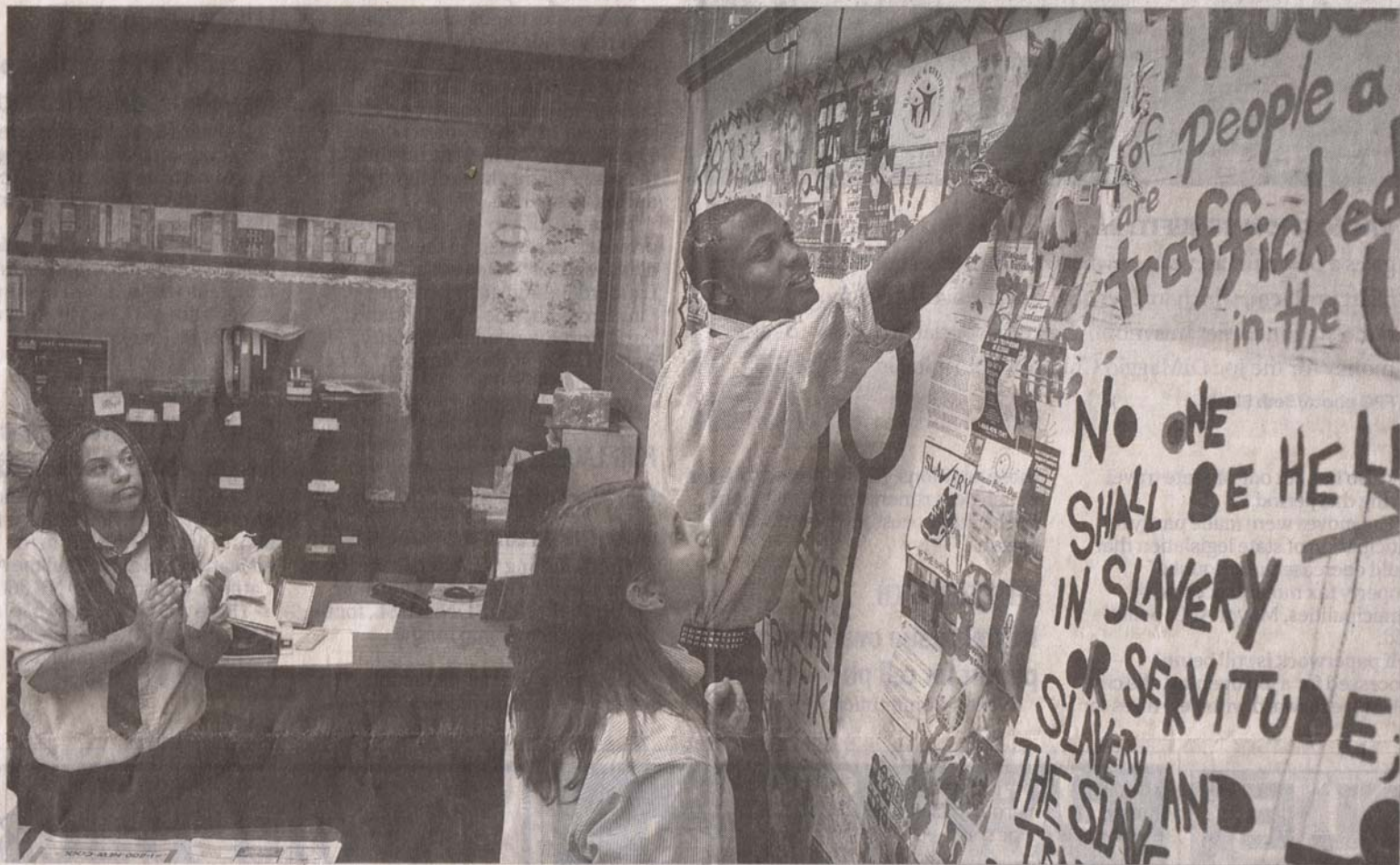


# FIGHTING THE NEW SLAVERY



**BUILDING AWARENESS:** Travis Murdock makes a handprint on a mural that will be unveiled today. Watching are Noura Drouin, left, and Alessandra Dzuba. The Fort Lauderdale Preparatory School students are involved in a project to stop human trafficking. **Staff photo/Michael Laughlin**

BY AKILAH JOHNSON  
STAFF WRITER

FORT LAUDERDALE • Students at a small independent school demanded answers last year from a man they viewed as a segregationist. This year, they are advocating the abolishment of modern-day slavery.

"We call human trafficking the slavery of today," said 14-year-old Noura Drouin, as she and her Fort Lauderdale Preparatory School classmates worked on a mural to be unveiled today at a school assembly aimed at stopping human trafficking.

Speakers from the Florida Coalition Against Human Trafficking and the office of U.S. Rep. Ron Klein, D-Boca Raton, will speak about the issue during the assembly.

"Trafficking is when I get you over here, and I don't give you back your papers," said Ashley Wilson, the coalition's outreach and victim services coordinator. "Think about some girl in the Ukraine who sees something on a Web site that says models need-

ed. She goes and gets a tourist visa, comes here and never goes home."

Pictures of chains frame the mural. In the four corners are facts from the U.S. State Department: 80 percent of those trafficked are women and children; up to 800,000 people are trafficked globally each year, thousands annually in the U.S.; only 1,076 people have been rescued since 2000.

California is the No. 1 destination state, followed by Florida, said Wilson.

The students' activist spirit motivated them last April to call a Nebraska senator who wanted to divide Omaha schools into three districts based on race. That same spirit spurred them in February to take up the cause of human trafficking while studying slavery in America.

They wanted to know: How could people, in 2007, be forced, defrauded or coerced into labor or sexual exploitation? How could people not know it was happening?

"We need to bring awareness to

## "We call human trafficking the slavery of today."

Noura Drouin, 14  
Fort Lauderdale Preparatory student

the issue and let people know what's going on, especially in Florida," said Alessandra Dzuba, 16, as she painted classmates' hands red so they could add handprints to the mural.

"This is something that touches everyone, especially with the children that are being sold as sex slaves," classmate Jerome Brooks, 17, explained.

Brooks researched human trafficking after his teacher and school headmaster Larry Berkowitz showed a 30-second video in class last month. A day later, the senior called the U.S. State Department, got information and made a class presentation.

Berkowitz suggested students at the 20-year-old campus that serves pre-kindergarten through 12th grade do a mural, which snowballed into a school-wide campaign. The big kids did research. The little ones donated tiny handprints.

Wilson said the coalition was thrilled when the students called wanting to get involved.

"It's really hard for us to go into the schools and talk about it because it's really a sensitive issue," she said.

Berkowitz said he teaches students "if you see something wrong, go for it and change it." Which is why last year he called Nebraska Sen. Ernie Chambers, who agreed to be interviewed on the telephone by the students and explain his bill. Chambers, who said it was about equalized education, won over the students.

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