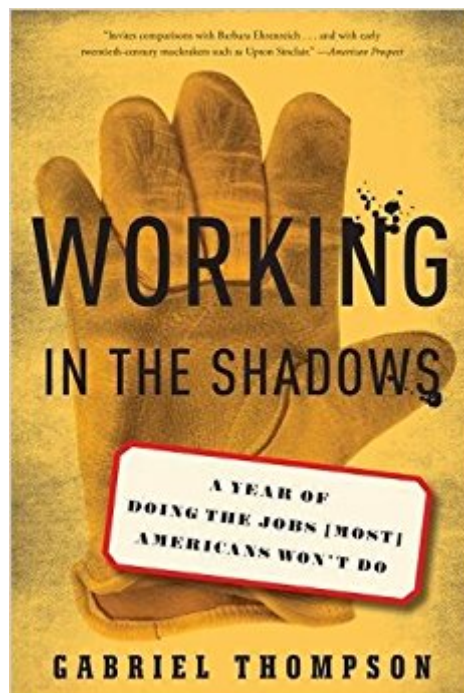




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Working In The Shadows: A Year Of Doing The Jobs (Most) Americans Won't Do



Synopsis

What is it like to do the back-breaking work of immigrants? To find out, Gabriel Thompson spent a year working alongside Latino immigrants, who initially thought he was either crazy or an undercover immigration agent. He stooped over lettuce fields in Arizona, and worked the graveyard shift at a chicken slaughterhouse in rural Alabama. He dodged taxis; not always successfully; as a bicycle delivery boy for an upscale Manhattan restaurant, and was fired from a flower shop by a boss who, he quickly realized, was nuts. As one coworker explained, "These jobs make you old quick." Back spasms occasionally keep Thompson in bed, where he suffers recurring nightmares involving iceberg lettuce and chicken carcasses. Combining personal narrative with investigative reporting, Thompson shines a bright light on the underside of the American economy, exposing harsh working conditions, union busting, and lax government enforcement; while telling the stories of workers, undocumented immigrants, and desperate US citizens alike, forced to live with chronic pain in the pursuit of 8 an hour.

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Customer Reviews

Thompson (*There's No JosÃ© Here*) details working alongside undocumented workers in this stirring look at the bottom rung of America's economic ladder. Thompson's project feels initially like a gimmick; that this middle-class white American can go undercover in the lettuce fields of Arizona or the poultry plants of Alabama seems more stunt (or rehash of Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*) than sound journalism. But the warmth with which he describes his co-workers and the

heartbreaking descriptions of the demanding, degrading, and low-paying jobs quickly pull the reader in. Gimmick or no, the author pushes his body and his patience to the limits, all the while deferring attention to the true heroes: his co-workers, whose dignity, perseverance, physical endurance, and manual skill are no less admirable for being born of sheer necessity. What emerges are not tales of downtrodden migrants but of clever hands and clever minds forced into repetitive and dangerous labor without legal protections. Thompson excels at putting a human face on individuals and situations alternately ignored and vilified. (Feb.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In a yearlong investigation, journalist Thompson lived among and worked side by side with undocumented workers in the hardest, lowest-paying jobs offered by the U.S. economy. He went west to pick lettuce, south to work in a chicken-processing factory, and back home to New York to work in a restaurant kitchen. Along the way, he shared the low wages, backbreaking work, ill treatment, and camaraderie of people who work in the shadows. In Arizona, he recalls desperately trying to make the five-day rule: if you can survive the first five days as a farmworker, you will be fine, meaning you will get used to swollen hands and all-over aches and pains for \$8 an hour. In Alabama, he finds the local white supremacists have updated their targets to Hispanic workers and documented workers beginning to challenge exploitive labor practices. In New York, he chronicles workers with so few prospects that they work multiple jobs with no benefits. This is great immersion journalism that debunks myths about immigrants taking American jobs and living off American largesse. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

One of the best books I've read in a long time. I read it originally as an e book, but ordered a paper copy to share with friends. It is an inside look at the lives of the people in country who faithfully perform the tasks that most people don't want to do and that we take for granted.

This helped made me to appreciate the work I don't have to do. It was a very interesting look at a day laborer's life - very hard work, often dangerous, with very little pay. I'm glad I read it. However, the problem I have is that the first 95% of the book was honest and unbiased. The last 5% was a political bashing. The author went completely off course and dedicated his final chapter to putting 100% of the blame on "Wall Street" for the last recession and "corporate greed" for all the hardship day laborers face. He then suggests that unions are the answer to the troubles the working man

faces. Unfortunately, life isn't that simple, and there are a myriad of reasons why capitalism isn't a perfect economic system and why unions aren't always our savior. There are constructive ways we could improve the poor working guy's life - bashing corporations and "Wall Street" doesn't help.

This is intended to be the shortest review on record. The description tells you what the book is about and you're either interested or your not. What you also need to know is whether Gabriel Thompson is a good and engaging writer. Put simply, he is. He combines the economics about the business, his own life and the lives of the people he meets into a really engaging book. You come away with the feeling that Thompson would be a nice guy to meet as long as it wasn't in the middle of a lettuce field.

I just finished this book and found it an interesting read. I live in an agricultural area, so we have many Hispanic workers both documented, and undocumented. Much of it is back breaking field work, but we also have a vibrant community that provides manufacturing jobs at or above minimum wage. I own two businesses, and except for entry level, I pay above minimum, offer advancement, and health benefits. Tough to do in this economy, but I feel it is good business to take care of my associate family. It also yields a more satisfied and loyal workforce. The weakest parts of the book are some of his conclusions. Unionizing is going to be tough, and may actually hurt in some ways. The author is spot on, however, in stating that we need comprehensive immigration reform. Our economy needs these workers, and they add much to our communities. As he points out in Alabama, they are often an unseen part of the community, and contribute to the overall economy. Overall, I recommend this book. I think you will find it interesting.

Thompson writes of his experiences working three different blue collar jobs that are largely done by immigrant workers. You can watch an interview with Thompson at [...]. I found the descriptions of his experiences engaging and thought provoking. This is a very complex issue to resolve, but his writing has shone a light in a dark corner of it for me.

Gabriel writes about the plight of the migrant worker better than anyone out there. I'm partial because I'm in this particular book but it is insightful. The stories are drawn from his own personal experience.

Very informative and eye opening. A little slow in places. My child has to read it for summer reading

for school and I'm a little worried the slow parts may make her want to stop reading. Getting past these areas was fine for me and I feel this was an important book for me to read and get more informed. I'm very glad I read it and will definitely suggest it to friends and family to read.

But as I progressed through this book, I realized I was really having my eyes opened. Thompson brought me into the lives of laborers, most of them immigrants, who struggled through what I would consider unbearable working conditions with a persistence I can't imagine having. I'm impressed and moved by what I read.

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