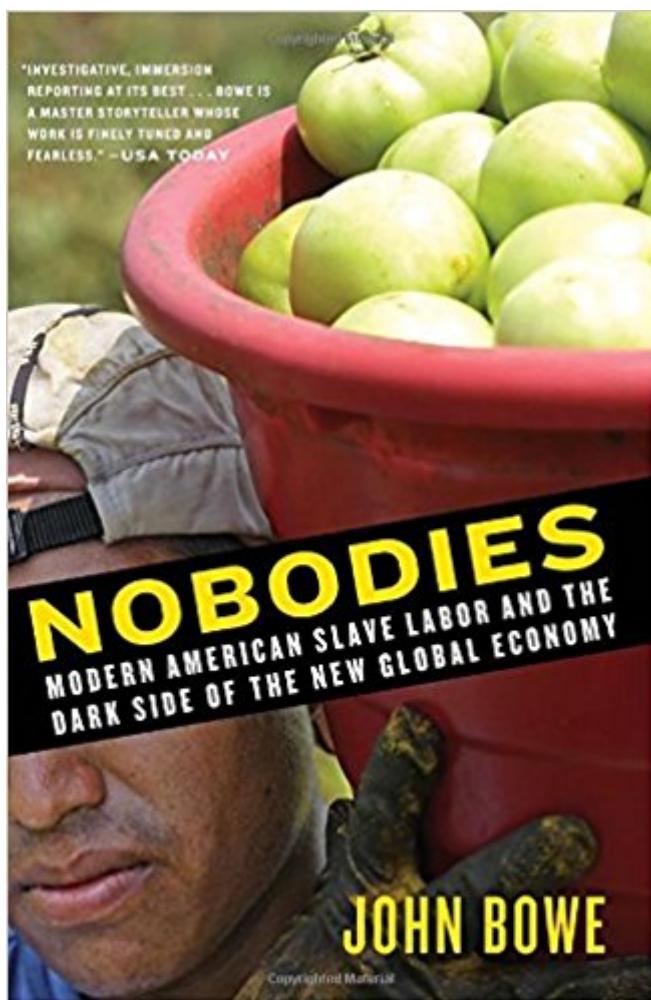


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# Nobodies: Modern American Slave Labor And The Dark Side Of The New Global Economy



## Synopsis

Most Americans are shocked to discover that slavery still exists in the United States. Yet 145 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the CIA estimates that 14,500 to 17,000 foreigners are "trafficked" annually into the United States, threatened with violence, and forced to work against their will. Modern people unanimously agree that slavery is abhorrent. How, then, can it be making a reappearance on American soil? Award-winning journalist John Bowe examines how outsourcing, subcontracting, immigration fraud, and the relentless pursuit of "everyday low prices" have created an opportunity for modern slavery to regain a toehold in the American economy. Bowe uses thorough and often dangerous research, exclusive interviews, eyewitness accounts, and rigorous economic analysis to examine three illegal workplaces where employees are literally or virtually enslaved. From rural Florida to Tulsa, Oklahoma, to the U.S. commonwealth of Saipan in the Western Pacific, he documents coercive and forced labor situations that benefit us all, as consumers and stockholders, fattening the profits of dozens of American food and clothing chains, including Wal-Mart, Kroger, McDonald's, Burger King, PepsiCo, Del Monte, Gap, Target, JCPenney, J. Crew, Polo Ralph Lauren, and others. In this eye-opening book, set against the everyday American landscape of shopping malls, outlet stores, and Happy Meals, Bowe reveals how humankind's darker urges remain alive and well, lingering in the background of every transaction and what we can do to overcome them. Praise for *Nobodies*:

"Investigative, immersion reporting at its best . . . Bowe is a master storyteller whose work is finely tuned and fearless." —USA Today

"A brilliant and readable tour of the modern heart of darkness, *Nobodies* takes a long, hard look at what our democracy is becoming." —Thomas Frank, author of *What the Matter with Kansas?*

"Bowe dramatizes in gripping detail these stolen lives." —O: The Oprah Magazine

"The vividness of Bowe's local stories might make you think twice before reaching for that cheap fruit or pair of discount socks." —Condé Nast Portfolio

**NAMED ONE OF THE TWENTY BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY THE VILLAGE VOICE**

## Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks; Reprint edition (August 12, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0812971841

ISBN-13: 978-0812971842

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 30 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #106,109 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #8 in Books > Business & Money > Economics > Interest #82 in Books > Business & Money > Economics > Labor & Industrial Relations #84 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Labor & Industrial Relations

## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In this eye-opening look at the contemporary American scourge of labor abuse and outright slavery, journalist and author Bowe (Gig: Americans Talk About their Jobs) visits locations in Florida, Oklahoma and the U.S.-owned Pacific island of Saipan, where slavery cases have been brought to light as recently as 2006. There, he talks to affected workers, providing many moving and appalling first-hand accounts. In Immokalee, Florida, migrant Latino tomato and orange pickers are barely paid, kept in decrepit conditions and intimidated, violently, to keep quiet about it. A welding factory in Tulsa, Oklahoma imported workers from India who were forced to pay exorbitant "recruiting fees" and live in squalid barracks with tightly controlled access to the outside world. Considering the tiny island capital of Saipan, Bowe explores how its culture, isolation and American ties made it so favorable an environment for exploitative garment manufacturers and corrupt politicos; alongside the factories sprouted karaoke bars, strip joints and hotels where politicians were entertained by now-imprisoned lobbyist Jack Abramoff. The detailed chapter gives readers a lasting image of the island, touted a "miracle of economic development," as a vulnerable, truly suffering community, where poverty rates have climbed as high as 35 percent. Bowe's deeply researched, well-written treatise on the very real problem of modern American slavery deserves the attention of anyone living, working and consuming in America. 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.

The very human impulse to get ahead in life even at the expense of others' suffering encourages and tolerates the slave labor that provides more products at lower prices, argues Bowe. Traveling from Florida to Saipan, Bowe chronicles the connection between American consumerism and modern global slave labor. Instead of chains, modern slavery uses coercion in the form of threats of

deportation, beatings, harm to families back home, or even death. Bowe focuses on three cases: a labor contractor named El Diablo, who held Mexican illegals in involuntary servitude, working in Florida orange groves, while ruling with terror and murder; a Tulsa, Oklahoma, man, owner of a steel-cutting plant, who contracted with an Indian-born American to recruit Indian laborers, who were overworked, underpaid, housed in squalor, and threatened with deportation if they resisted; and the U.S. commonwealth of Saipan, which recruits foreign workers, who are abused and exploited while working in sweatshops for U.S. clothing manufacturers. Bowe concludes with a scathing look at the desire for creature comforts and the American notion of freedom. Bush, Vanessa --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The author makes this an easy and interesting book to read. It is a short read, and is fairly compelling and riveting in the typical NY journalistic documentary/suspense style. What makes it so great is that these are true stories! The lives of these people and the conditions they endure are thoroughly documented. It is a rare candid glimpse into the lives of migrant workers, and compromised illegal immigrants. One thing that is obvious is that reporting on these topics is fairly dangerous, and the reader wonders if an independent author might have enjoyed the success of this exposé if they didn't have the backing of a large institution like the NY Times, (and all of the "risk management" they would provide a writer.) We are treated once again to the publishers generosity, and prowess in sizing up their quarry. Most of the players come out a (teeny, tiny) little better in the end, well marginally better anyway, and it doesn't feel fake or fuzzy. More like relief that everyone involved didn't end up missing. I like reading documentaries like this because it proves that consumer programs designed to improve others lives can make a positive difference. If we try to make the lives of our poorer neighbors better, we can succeed to some degree. Conversely try to pinch pennies often times pinches (or worse) real people and their families, and in the end we often ended up hurting ourselves. Thanks John and Co.!

Great insight into modern day labor issues that you don't usually think about. Surprising that it happens in the U.S. Also a great reminder of our purchasing power as consumers and how we vote with the products we buy, and how the "power" of companies or individuals needs to be regulated or audited.

This is a spectacular piece of work with many gifted turns of phrase. The author has done his homework, and melds economic facts and philosophical reflections in a worthy manner. The author

opens with a challenge: how should a free people respond to slavery, i.e. should they knowingly buy products and services that are rooted in slavery? I ordered this book on the strength of the author's appearance on CSPAN BookTV, and this is one of those instances where I think that listening to him talk about the book first is hugely beneficial to appreciating the book. The author, in person (on CSPAN), is funny, intelligent, informative, a really excellent presenter of facts in a coherent manner. Supreme Court Justice Brandeis is cited in this book: "You can have great concentration of wealth in the hands of a few or you can have democracy. You can't have both." While the author documents slavery, at least 27 million world-wide (not counting the prison-slave population) with 800 million not enslaved but utterly poor going hungry each day, 33 million of them in the USA, his book is a socio-economic ideo-cultural treatise on "whither globalization." His bottom line is clear: if we allow slave labor and sweatshop conditions to undercut each of our homeland industries, we are toast. The author does something quite special with this book. I am deeply impressed. Since the 1970's I have understood the conflict between multinational corporations and governments, the trade-offs between profits and social value, but it is only recently that my reading has brought forth the sharp battle that will define the 21st Century: the battle between Collective Intelligence (one for all, all for one) and Corruption at all levels of government and business. The meme "true cost" is the ideological battle line. Also known as the triple bottom line (economic, social, and environmental), it is my view that the ability of my generation to promulgate True Cost information in the next ten years is going to determine what kind of future our children have. The author provides numbers, and I am gripped by the 40 cents paid to the slave laborer for a bucket of tomatoes, versus the \$12.00 plus paid to the farmer or "organizer/enforcer." The author is eloquent in describing how slave wages have not risen in thirty years, while all else has.... This book is deep, richly textured, a tremendously informative and socially-valuable offering. Here are a few highlights that stayed with me: 1) US Census statistics are so "delusional and deceptive" that Wall Street investors no longer use them--they commission their own studies. 2) The conditions of slavery and poverty and abuse are so deeply entrenched, and imposed on individual held in isolation from society and the rule of law--when the law is willing to be enforced--that they might as well be on another planet, a slave planet. 3) FBI Special Agents get very high marks for being able to master law enforcement in an illegal immigration environment, but the author speaks of "institutional malfeasance" in how often the FBI transfers people. I have long felt that we need to turn government inside out--we need to mass Latin American specialists across government, military, law enforcement, etc, and we need to start putting people into 10 year tours. 4) It is clear we need a "white hat" side of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), I envision something in which all information they might collect in

investigating human rights and other labor violations is firewalled from illegal immigrant status.<sup>5</sup> 911 operators are virtually helpless in responding to foreign language calls. I have been saying for years that we need to have an international implementation using [Telelanguage.com](http://Telelanguage.com).<sup>6</sup> The author surprises me with his optimism, his expectation that we can achieve a profound change in attitude across our population, completely boycotting all products and services whose "true cost" include slave labor. I want to end this laudatory review by pointing readers toward the World Index of Social and Environmental Responsibility, the Interra Project, the World Cafe, and the Earth Intelligence Network. Below I list a few other books that support this one. The first book documented the commoditization of human labor as the beginning of commercialized evil. The rest are increasingly positive about all of us coming together to overcome power and information asymmetries. "Put enough eyes on it, no bug is invisible. That's us: intelligence officers to the poor and the disenfranchised, who in being lifted from slavery, will create infinite revolutionary wealth. We can do this.

[The Manufacture Of Evil: Ethics, Evolution, and the Industrial System](#)  
[The Working Poor: Invisible in America](#)  
[Nickel and Dimed On \(Not\) Getting By in America](#)  
[The Case Against Wal-Mart](#)  
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[The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom](#)  
[Collective Intelligence: Creating a Prosperous World at Peace](#)

Excellent book at an even more excellent buy! Will give a more detailed review of it later after I've finished reading it!

This book should be read by everyone on this earth! What we do to the people who bring food to our tables is appalling! This book was a great eye-opener and we've passed it on to a Study Group - to make us aware of how we treat each other on this earth. This book has helped me to be a bit more patient with and understanding of the people who help me to survive. Thank you, John Bowe! You are a true Saint!

At first I wanted to rent the book, but because the price was so low, I ended up buying it. I have no complaints.

An outstanding book that ALL people should read to begin to understand the reality of life today and

the workplace that has exploited so many around the world and across America.

Good study of how free markets and free trade have essentially opened up markets of exploitation for giant corporations. Exploitation that takes place in America.

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