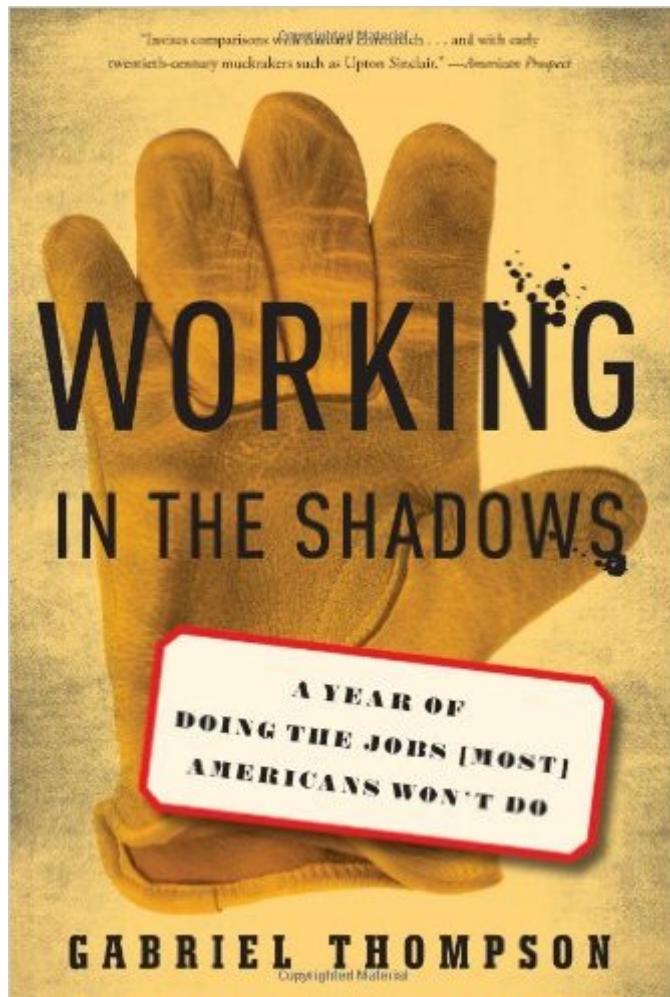


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# Working In The Shadows: A Year Of Doing The Jobs (Most) Americans Won't Do



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In *Working in the Shadows*, Gabriel Thompson goes undercover to find out what conditions are really like for those at the lowest levels of the American workforce. It's not easy, for several reasons. One is that, as a gringo, he doesn't look like most of the other workers cutting lettuce in the fields. It's hard to be undercover when you don't exactly blend in. Aside from that, the work is hard, physically harder than anything Thompson has done before, and he's no slouch. It's hard to improve

on Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*, but Thompson adds another dimension by investigating migrant labor, whereas the jobs Ehrenreich took were "above the table" jobs: waiting tables, clerking at Wal-Mart, being a rent-a-maid. Thompson worked in the fields, in a chicken processing plant, and behind the scenes at a restaurant. As odd as it was for an Anglo to show up for a job in the fields, no one bothered him much about why he was there. They assumed he couldn't get a job legitimately, perhaps because he was a criminal or an alcoholic. Mainly, the other workers minded their own business and didn't ask him questions. They did offer to share their food with him though, when they saw he brought only a few power bars with him for a long day's work. Thompson intended to take notes surreptitiously through the day and after work, but found that he was just too tired and sore after work. He couldn't imagine how the others kept at it for months, let alone years, and managed to raise families and have any kind of life at all. But they did. The book starts with Thompson working in the lettuce fields in Yuma, then he moves on to a chicken processing plant in small town Alabama.

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