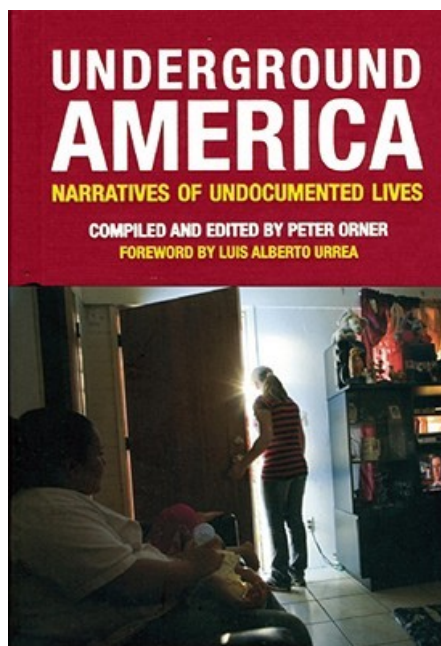




Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives

Peter Orner (Editor & Compiler) , Annie Holmes (Editor) , Tom Andes (Editor) , Jaykumar Menon (Editor) , Polly Bresnik (Editor) , Corinne Gorla (Editor) , Stephen Orner (Editor) , Luis Alberto Urrea (Foreword by) , more... Luis Alberto (Foreword by) ...less

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Underground America tells the stories of men and women who have come to the United States seeking a better life for their families, only to be subjected to dehumanizing working conditions. Supporting myriad industries, these workers form an essential part of our economy — often by working the least desirable jobs without the most basic legal protections. *Underground America* allows this largely ignored part of our country to finally share its experiences.

Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives Details

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From Reader Review Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives for online ebook

Greg says

Incredible and infuriating. It is what it says it is. What exactly the hell are we doing? To humans? What the hell, exactly, is it that we are doing?

Don't even talk to me about this - read it, but don't bring up the subject. What are we doing?

Zaskerpie says

I really liked this book. You basically read about the stories of undocumented people, edited in a way so it's like they're telling you first hand their life story. I was really angry reading about how some people were exploited and abused. It also made me sad to remember that these people would have extreme difficulty getting the documents to stay in the USA. Especially Lorena and Estrella...

I highly recommend this book. It humanizes the people you read about and reminds us that they are human. We are all human. For some people in the book, they talk about *feeling* American (having lived the majority of their lives there), it was just a lack of some pieces of paper that acknowledge that they are American.

Rhy says

Incredible stories which highlight the vulnerabilities experienced by and the contributions of undocumented immigrants. Told with dignity and grace from a wide variety of perspectives it rises above sound bytes and illustrates the complexity of immigration.

Ciara Rivera says

Truly powerfully moving stories that reinforce the notion that while undocumented immigrants provide an essential labour force in so many facets that are economic drivers in the USA, and while there are opportunities for many of the US borne children of these undocumented immigrants to thrive and be active citizens, there are still too many opportunities for undocumented immigrants to be taken advantage of. While there are stories of hope that make us proud of the opportunities that the US can afford for the fortunate few – this is juxtaposed by so many stories of how shameful we should all be of our society as well.

KT G says

If only the entire population of the United States could read this book...

Liz Murray says

Voice of Witness do an incredible job collecting and editing the interviews they carry out. I have read a few other books they've put out and I am deeply touched each time by the personal tales. The stories are not easy to read, especially as they show the worst of humanity in response to genuine crisis.

This book in particular puts me in mind of Óscar Martínez and his courageous work with Central American migrants, and Central American people living in near anarchy at home. The subtitle of *The Beast* is 'the migrants who don't count'. Martínez tells the stories of people living on the margins, people whose basic needs are not being met no matter how hard they try. He gives voice to the individuals whose stories may otherwise be left to dust.

This book tells the stories of people not only from Latin America but from China and South Africa, among others. The common thread is that they are living in the US without legal documentation. I have a sense that VOW interviews are left fairly open ended; there is much depth to the unique yet similar stories each person tells. It's not an easy book to read cover to cover but I feel that everyone in the United States must read the stories of at least three people in this collection. These are the people I/we see every day, working hard so I/we can live in relative luxury. These are the people we need to see and understand in all their complexity and shared humanity.

Allie says

This is a subject that I'm very conflicted on. This book helped me to see things differently, if not necessarily clearer. Definitely worth reading.

Harrison says

When Vica was picked up by Immigration and placed in detention, she was already visibly sick from HIV that had progressed to AIDS. She had been arrested for drinking and driving, and a background check exposed her lack of documents. She pleaded with the guards to let her see a doctor so that she could get back on her medications, but they refused. It wasn't until she was crippled by a high fever and diarrhea that they finally allowed her to go to a hospital, but by then it was too late. Her mother, Olga, heard what was happening to her daughter, the child born of rape for which she was exiled from her family in Mexico, yet was powerless to do anything. If she went to the hospital, she feared deportation or worse. After many phone calls, an advocate arranged for visitation papers, so that Olga could be by her daughter's side for the last painful hours of her life. And as she held her daughter's withered body in her arms, Olga saw that her little girl was chained to the bed like a dog.

In the midst of the debate over immigration reform and border security in our country, both democratic and republican politicians have a fair share of airtime to argue their opinions on the issue. However, the voice of American immigrants, the people whose lives are most affected by this legislation, have had no voice in this issue, no chance to offer up their own stories. The media portrayal of immigrant families is a bizarre caricature, focused entirely on their status, with no trace of humanity in the statistics. As a result, the most vehement voices in the debate actively dehumanize this segment of American society as either noble savages or dangerous criminals. Vica's story has no place in today's debate, for she is neither a saint nor a sinner, she

is simply a human being.

While Vica's voice has been permanently silenced, in *Underground America*, Olga and fifteen other men and women are given an opportunity to have a voice, to tell their story without fear of retribution. Their stories do not fit well into stereotypes or any simplistic narrative you'll hear on cable news. Rather, they contain the beautiful and compelling complexity that is inherent in every human life. This is a powerful book, not only for the emotional content of the stories, but for its great potential to re-humanize the debate on immigration reform in our country. To all those who hold strong opinions on immigration, this book is a must read.

Keith Mark says

When I was reading this book, I kept on thinking about how easy it is to take for granted that I am an American citizen while so many other people are desperately fighting to become one. I don't have to worry about immigration officials taking me away to a country I hardly know. I'm not saying that being an American citizen is superior to a citizen of another country, but sometimes we have to leave our homes to create a better life for ourselves. That's what many people from many Central and South American countries have done. They come to America for the opportunities, but too often immigrants are treated as less than human. If you don't have a social security number (other proper documentation), you essentially have no rights. While they did cross the border illegally, many immigrants did not come here in malice but simply to work hard for themselves and their families. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. Immigrants do the work most American citizens never do. After Hurricane Katrina, there's a few stories in *Underground America* talking about how many Hispanic immigrants cleaned up that awful mess. However, too often they were taken advantage of. Promises were made that never came through, but sometimes when your desperate for money you want to believe almost anything. This book opened my eyes in many ways, and it makes me look at undocumented immigrants in a different way now. We shouldn't group them together in one category. They have their own stories to tell and we should listen. America is a country of immigrants, and I think we should embrace people who come here with good intentions, of wanting to build a better life for themselves and their families.

Nicole Hardina says

This book does what all great books do: it challenges what you think you know, and teaches you to think more expansively. And like all great characters, the people whose oral histories are collected in this book erase stereotypes, even when they act stereotypically. Read this book to remind yourself how little you really know about anyone else's life experience, even those close to you, the ones you see every day. Read it to increase the complexity of your thinking about the issue of undocumented immigrants, and your awareness of and compassion for those for whom those words are a reality. Finally, pass it on. Share one of the narratives with your family, your students, your friends. Increase complexity and compassion all around you.

Sheehan says

If you keep up with my reviews you know I like real people telling their stories, and this whole book was a compilation of oral histories of various people from different backgrounds, ages, and interests living in the US without proper documentation.

Although I had expected the focus to be on the lack of resources at home and desire to come to the States for opportunity; this aspect was really just understood to be implicit and not focused on primarily. Much more prominent were the perils of living without documentation, and the perils that lie therein; which ultimately was more educational and personalized the stories.

It became very clear, very quickly that to always be living in fear of being deported, always working in the margins, takes a psychic toll; forces those who are clearly able-bodied and often professionally viable in struggling home nations to compromise here in America and suffer any number of structural hurdles to advancement. Although the immigration administration is not detailed, it becomes clear from almost everyone's stories how labyrinthine the citizenship/asylum process is; and further how many predatory charlatans lay about trying to take advantage of immigrants lack of knowledge and fear of approaching legitimate help from public organizations.

Everyone who has any opinion about immigration, would be well served to skip media reporting and just read the true experiences of immigrants directly from the sources; you will do just fine coming up with your own fine analysis!

Shana says

This past summer, Jack and I got in a semi-argument over an article about immigration that we found in our complimentary newspaper (which complimented our continental breakfast) at Holiday Inn in Erie, PA. (That in itself is a story, and a damn good one). Without going into the details of the argument, I can say that I came away from it wanting to educate myself more on the issue of immigration. Growing up in rural Vermont, it was an issue that I knew existed but didn't face every day. Heck, where I grew up I was one of the few non-white kids and all I did was immigrate from Jersey! But that's neither here nor there...

When I saw Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives, edited by Peter Orner, I knew I had to read it. Each chapter is the immigration story of an undocumented person. Nearly all of them made me shake my head in disbelief, because honestly, the conditions in which many of them work/live are deplorable. The basic human dignities that every human being deserves are denied to them. It's simply unfair. It's gross. And it's happening right in front of us each day.

While I know I can't solve all of the problems in the world, the next time an undocumented person walks into my clinic (which is pretty much every day), I will definitely have all that I read in mind. Not sure if we have good resources for our undocumented clients, but I think that's something that might be useful and that we definitely need to look into.

Jamie Leighton says

Amazing Book. I made my son, who studies Chinese, read the story about Mr. Lai who was smuggled into the U.S. from China. We are so lucky to be U.S. citizens. I don't appreciate it enough and neither do my children.

The book is a Voice of Witness book where twenty-four illegal immigrants told their stories to volunteers who then transcribed and translated hours of recordings. Then, the editors, with the guidance of the interviewees, turned the facts into first-person narratives. The stories are compelling, sad and disturbing. Certainly, the book puts the human face on immigration. This is a book that should be read by anyone who

has an opinion about immigration reform in this country.

Tamra says

Underground America is a series of first-person narratives from illegal aliens living in the United States. The stories are told by immigrants from all over the world and in all walks of life. Individually, there's nothing that stands out, but the weight of story after story after story is almost overwhelming. This is definitely a book that shows the human side of the immigration debate. The editors also added a set of very informative appendices and a glossary.

While the content was good, the layout of the book could have been better. It has one of those half-sized dust jackets that reminds me of the 'Sanitized for Your Protection' wrappers on a hotel toilet. The jacket isn't big enough to protect the book, it slides all over the place, and it rips pretty easily. Not the most important thing, but still a negative...

John says

This is an important book. If you care about human rights, if you want to know more about the immigration debate, if you work in a situation that you are in contact with a large number of immigrants, read this book. It is most often heartbreaking, and at times difficult to get through. The subjects of the book have such a drive to seek a better life through hard work and sacrifice; it is quintessential American dream stuff. You will find that it gives you a new insight to the interviewee's lives and will give you a new fire for making a change. As the editor says in the forward, "In listening lies wisdom." Highly recommended.
