



The Big Rig: Trucking and the Decline of the American Dream

By Steve Viscelli

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Long-haul trucks have been described as sweatshops on wheels. The typical long-haul trucker works the equivalent of two full-time jobs, often for little more than minimum wage. But it wasn't always this way. Trucking used to be one of the best working-class jobs in the United States.

The Big Rig explains how this massive degradation in the quality of work has occurred, and how companies achieve a compliant and dedicated workforce despite it. Drawing on more than 100 in-depth interviews and years of extensive observation, including six months training and working as a long-haul trucker, Viscelli explains in detail how labor is recruited, trained, and used in the industry. He then shows how inexperienced workers are convinced to lease a truck and to work as independent contractors. He explains how deregulation and collective action by employers transformed trucking's labor markets--once dominated by the largest and most powerful union in US history--into an important example of the costs of contemporary labor markets for workers and the general public.

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

“Steve Viscelli’s *The Big Rig* is a remarkable book. It combines gripping fine-grained ethnographic accounts of the lived reality of long-haul truck driving in the United States today with a compelling analysis of the macro-structural conditions in which those lives are lived and an historical account of the political economic forces that generated those conditions. These intersecting analyses generate powerful insights into two of the most fundamental questions about the nature of inequality in the United States today: Where do so many bad jobs come from, and why do people put up with them?”—Erik Olin Wright, author of *Envisioning Real Utopias*

“This riveting account shows how truck drivers—seeking the American dream—end up being harmed by changes in government policy and business practices. The book is a vivid and readable ethnography. It is smart and well-informed. Excellent for a wide range of courses including “Introduction to Sociology.” Highly recommended!”—Annette Lareau, author of *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*

"Based on a terrific amount of research, including over one hundred interviews and a six-month stint of participant observation—personally logging thousands of miles crisscrossing the country in an 18-wheeler—Viscelli debunks popular stereotypes about truckers and effectively compels the reader to empathize with their plight."—Christine Williams, author of *Inside Toyland: Working, Shopping, and Social Inequality*

About the Author

Steve Viscelli is a economic sociologist and lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania. He is also a Senior Fellow at the Kleinman Center for Energy Policy and Fox Family Pavilion Scholar. In addition to his academic research, he works with a range of public and private stakeholders to make the trucking industry safer, more efficient, and a better place to work. To learn more, please visit: steveviscelli.com/.

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Pamela Prince:

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Craig Brown:

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Susan Rogers:

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