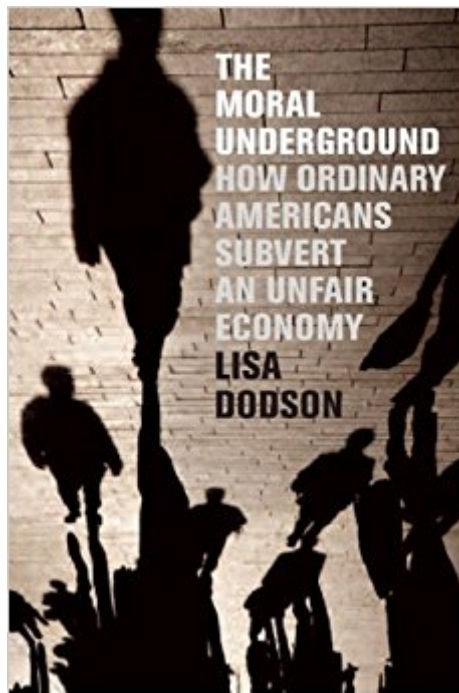




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The Moral Underground: How Ordinary Americans Subvert An Unfair Economy



Synopsis

Called a "fascinating exploration of economic civil disobedience" by Publishers Weekly, Lisa Dodson's stunning book *The Moral Underground* features stories of middle-class managers and professionals who refuse to be complicit in an economy that puts a decent life beyond the reach of the working poor. Whether it's a nurse choosing to treat an uninsured child, a supervisor padding a paycheck, or a restaurant manager sneaking food to a worker's children, these unsung heroes reach across the economic fault line to restore a sense of justice to the working world. This vivid account of working-class America is based on Dodson's eight years of research and conversations with hundreds of Americans about the need to create ethical alternatives to rules that ignore the humanity of working parents and put their children at risk.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this fascinating exploration of economic civil disobedience, Dodson (*Don't Call Us Out by Name*) introduces readers to teachers, supervisors, health-care professionals and managers who bend the rules and even break the law to support those in need. Dodson shares stories of individuals like Linda, a health-care supervisor who has, against hospital policy, driven an employee to court on work time and allows her low-wage employees to manipulate the schedule so they can attend to child-care needs. The author interviews Cora, a restaurant manager, who came up with a double talk system, in which she keeps two sets of time sheets so that workers can attend to family

issues and who says, helping women meet their kids or do what they have to do is more important than her chain restaurant's rules. Dodson's study is gripping and her argument is persuasive: we should not have to put compassionate Americans in a position where they have to choose between following rules and helping those who are trying to help themselves. (Jan.) 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.

Sociologist Dodson considers the impact of America's economic woes on the struggling middle class in this anecdote-heavy investigation of hourly-wage workers. She takes an unusual approach by speaking with employers who consciously subvert company policies to assist their employees, especially working parents (and particularly single mothers) who often find themselves torn between family and job. Via interviews, Dodson explores the trials and tribulations of such conflicts and reveals how statistics hide the actual impact of a system focused on the bottom line at the expense of employee home life. Her subjects prove, however, that profits can be attained without high labor turnover and worker lives can be enhanced without incurring insurmountable corporate costs. It isn't easy to fit morality into a standard business discussion, and Dodson's thesis that breaking company rules is a form of civil disobedience is a form of civil disobedience. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a well written glimpse into the everyday interactions between low income workers and the higher income professionals that partially make up their world (teachers, bosses, healthcare workers in particular). It spreads tremendous light on the pervasive narrative of American opportunity and illustrates how structural forces conspire to create and preserve poverty. I hope every politician at all levels will read this book. Our social programs often seemed designed to make poverty hard (as if it isn't excruciating already) with an expectation that the poor will then be motivated to not be poor any more. This book illustrates the incredible restrictions and limitations that low wage workers face and thus demonstrates why that is such a preposterous idea. It offers hope in the everyday kindness of the teachers, managers and health care workers who recognize the plight of the low wage earners with whom they interact but also offers a dooming caution in the personas of some uncaring managers who are content to pay wages below the level of subsistence only because they can't find a way to pay less. Dodson shows how the very American notion of an honest day's pay for an honest day's work is under threat yielding to a level of exploitation that most would condemn if only they were aware of it. Due to Dodson's efforts, perhaps now we will be.

All businesses continually try to externalize risk. The ever-widening gap between the haves and the have-nots is irrefutable. Ms. Dodson shows examples of how the moral quandry some mid-level employers and managers have when continually faced with employees who make substandard pay; otherwise know as the working poor. There have been other books such as William Ryan's 1971 book, "Blaming the Victim," that shown how middle-class Americans rationalize putting all the blame on the poor for their horrible situation. Ms. Dodson's brings the scenario into the present day. Much of the blame is now tailored as the working poor having bad work habits and bad reproductive habits. Business and managers without empathy don't care one lick if an employee is struggling to make ends meet because of crappy wages and an ungodly work schedule. The companies don't care or ignore that the working poor's kids are alone and failing in school because of no parental involvement the businesses have caused. The companies don't care or ignore that the employees have no health care. Many of the examples in the author's book are about these exhausted people who are working two jobs and, justifiably, constantly living in fear. Many managers and executives take an Ann Rand approach, shrug their shoulders and continue to exploit their hapless quasi-slaves. Ms. Dodson believes the "moral underground" is a disorganized rebellion against corporate malfeasance. The book is basically many disjointed examples of people down on their luck. It also explains the logic of people in power for exploiting other human beings in such manners and, trust me, these suits sleep just fine at night. If you have any empathy, you will find it a difficult read. I found most of the author's remedies to be unrealistic and incomplete. However, any time an author shines a light on the ugly underbelly of capitalism, they should be commended. In our country's current zeitgeist, the pursuit of profit and the acquisition of things as well as power and status has been at the expense of our humanity. It's well worth reading.

An excellent book on the difficulty of the managers and others who have to see their employees live on low-wages, unable to make ends meet. It questions the economic and political system of the USA, which authorized the exploitation of people. This makes them face a "moral dilemma", ignore the sufferings of their employees for the defense of a corruptive system based on profit, or became at different levels outlaws, to help these parents, single-mother, often persons from minority groups, and feel anew like human beings and not machines, simple tools of the economy.

The author does a great job of introducing the reader to a very harsh reality.

An eye opening and very important read. I could not put it down

The Moral Underground addresses a very important subject and is a jarring wake-up call about the ways our economy has changed over the last generation. "Welfare reform" has "succeeded" in that we've removed the safety net; now the working poor get paid less than it costs to live, and this has terrible effects on children and on other workers up and down the economic scale. That's all true, and Dodson says so, but I wish she would have gone a little deeper in her analysis of this subject. This seemed more like a metabook in that much of it was about how the book was written. It's a bad sign when a 200 page book begins referring to itself in the past tense 20 pages from the end. She keeps introducing the subject and describing what she's about to tell us, and then she refers back to the introduction during the telling. I kept wondering when we were going to get to the meat.

You will not hear an argument from me about the pressing need for change in some of America's institutions in regards to labor, families and health insurance. But frankly, this book takes the idea that there needs to be change and slaughters it. There is no active thesis that binds the book together. The chapters and parts of the book move haphazardly along in a disjointed and unorganized way. The interviews are all basically the same story, there is not much insight revealed after the first couple in a part of the book and the analysis that follows adds nothing constructive to the discussion of the issue, not to mention it is intensely biased in favor of one side. I see really no point in this book that promotes itself as a reason to read this book-I gave it two stars because I like the issue, not the book itself. At the end of every book, the reader has the right to ask "so, what?" There was no answer to that question in this book-no call to action, no unique insight. Just repeating the work of others and monotonous interviews.

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