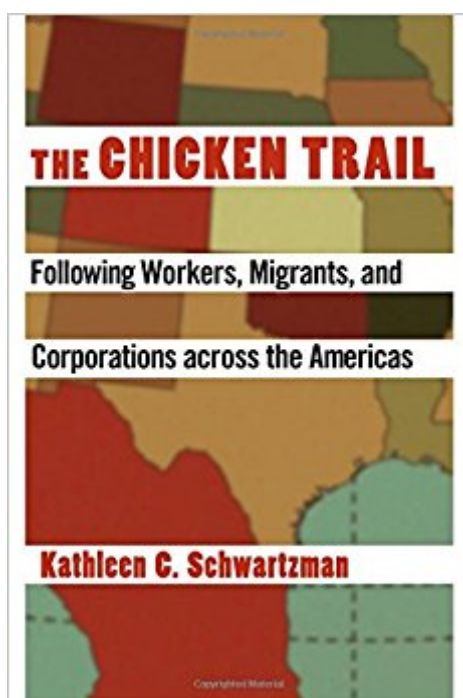


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# The Chicken Trail: Following Workers, Migrants, And Corporations Across The Americas



## Synopsis

In *The Chicken Trail*, Kathleen C. Schwartzman examines the impact of globalization and of NAFTA in particular on the North American poultry industry, focusing on the displacement of African American workers in the southeast United States and workers in Mexico. Schwartzman documents how the transformation of U.S. poultry production in the 1980s increased its export capacity and changed the nature and consequences of labor conflict. She documents how globalization and NAFTA in particular forced Mexico to open its commodity and capital markets, and eliminate state support of corporations and rural smallholders. As a consequence, many Mexicans were forced to abandon their no longer sustainable small farms, with some seeking work in industrialized poultry factories north of the border. By following this chicken trail, Schwartzman breaks through the deadlocked immigration debate, highlighting the broader economic and political contexts of immigration flows. The narrative that undocumented worker take jobs that Americans don't want to do is too simplistic. Schwartzman argues instead that illegal immigration is better understood as a labor story in which the hiring of undocumented workers is part of a management response to the crises of profit making and labor-management conflict. By placing the poultry industry at the center of a constellation of competing individual, corporate, and national interests and such factors as national debt, free trade, economic development, industrial restructuring, and African American unemployment, *The Chicken Trail* makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the implications of globalization for labor and how the externalities of free trade and neoliberalism become the social problems of nations and the tragedies of individuals.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The book is packed with information and insights. For once, the tables are an integral and important complement to the text, a rigorous support for the author's arguments. In the panoramic and at the same time meticulously detailed vision of the globalisation of capital and the myriad plagues it is inflicting on our world, it is a triumph - compelling, clear and irrefutable." [— Frances Webber, Race & Class \(April 2014\)](#) "Kathleen Schwartzman's lean and intelligent book, *The Chicken Trail*, is essentially about movement and about linking together seemingly unconnected sites, people and developments.... Schwartzman has written a tight, readable, and persuasive book, one that clearly captures and illustrates the push and pull of globalization on labor markets, workers, and business flows. Anyone interested in globalization, trade, labor, and food chains will benefit from understanding the trail or loop that chicken has taken in the last twenty years." [— Bryant Simon, Comparative Labor Law and Policy Journal \(Fall 2013\)](#) "...This book represents a brilliant example of militant or public anthropology. Its powerful descriptions of the harsh everyday lives of the migrant workers, with a style at the same time elegant and detailed..." [— Joon K. Kim, Labour/Le Travail \(Spring 2014\)](#) "Scholars interested in a more nuanced view of the dynamics of more recent historical immigration between the United States and Mexico should add *The Chicken Trail* to their reading list." [— Joseph C. Balzer, ILR Review \(April 2014\)](#) "The *Chicken Trail* is a fascinating account of the serious negative impacts of globalization on workers on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border. Kathleen C. Schwartzman shows how globalization, particularly NAFTA, and changes in the poultry industry have caused the displacement of rural subsistence farmers from Mexico, who in turn migrate to the United States, where they have displaced African American workers. Schwartzman argues that for corporations, hiring undocumented workers was a union-busting strategy and a solution to the profit crisis." [— Carolina Bank Muñoz, Brooklyn College, author of Transnational Tortillas: Race, Gender, and Shop-Floor Politics in Mexico and the United States](#) "When Americans gather to devour a meal of scrumptious chicken, they are unaware of the geographical and social journey along which that chicken traveled before landing on the dinner table. In her new book *The Chicken Trail*, Kathleen C. Schwartzman does a masterful job of illuminating the important role played by the chicken industry in shaping America's labor market, patterns of immigration, race relations, international trade, and globalization. Schwartzman uses sophisticated social theory and multiple

methodologies to construct a riveting narrative that sheds new light on how the processing of a single commodity—the chicken—can explain complex social processes. By dissecting the processing of chickens from birth to human consumption, Schwartzman helps us to rethink important issues of our time including immigration, high black unemployment, labor strife, corporate behavior, and international relations between rich and poor countries." Aldon D. Morris, Northwestern University, author of *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* "The Chicken Trail: Following Workers, Migrants, and Corporations across the Americas examines the history of poultry production in the United States and Mexico, describing how this industry has been affected by neo-liberalism and NAFTA . . . This book focuses on the intertwined predicament of a 'push' of emigration from developing nations and the pull of U.S. jobs. Tracing a single commodity chain, Schwartzman applies a nuanced qualitative and quantitative analysis to contest the validity of the commonsense neoliberal economic model that generated such a dilemma." Gerardo Otero, Simon Fraser University, *American Journal of Sociology* (January 2014)

Kathleen C. Schwartzman is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Arizona. She is the author of *The Social Origins of Democratic Collapse: The First Portuguese Republic in the Global Economy*.

description made it seem more accessible and interesting than it actually was.. A bit heavy on minutiae --could have been a better read

Good purchase

The Chicken Trail Following Workers, Migrants and Corporations across the Americas By Kathleen C. Schwartzman I offer my complements for an outstanding overview of these most complex issues. She did a great deal of research, included many sources and made personal trips to processing plants in the USA as well as Mexico. She talked with Mexican farmers, illegal immigrants and union organizers. She chose the radical changes in production of Chicken as a perfect example of the effect it had on labor in this country and loss of the family farm in Mexico which led inexorably in the increase of illegal immigrants to America. She is very careful in not wanting her book to become political. She tries to state the facts and let them speak for themselves. I, on the other hand enjoy jumping in and calling a spade a spade so I am going to write this review from what I gleaned after

reading. Chicken processing advanced rapidly in the 90's impelled by innovation and technology. The largest plants are located in N.C., Alabama, Georgia, Arkansas and Mississippi. The workers were black for the most part. Chicken processing as well as manufacturing in general made great strides in the South due to the anti-union sentiment. The States were all right to work States. As the processes sped up there were increased injuries and fatigue resulting in the attempt to establish unions. The companies exhibited ingenuity in finding ways to avoid including going bankrupt and re-opening with a new name and firing all employees. The Company officers decided to replace with immigrants from Mexico and other countries. They advertised, paid bonuses, provided false papers, etc. No executive was ever found guilty of these most obvious offenses. In the meantime the black unemployment rate doubled. The new undocumented employees didn't complain about wages, working conditions, nor did they report injuries, all out of fear of being deported. I refer to this as the South discovering a new group of people to exploit as they did with the blacks as slaves many years ago. While this was going on NAFTA made its mark in Mexico. By 2008 all tariffs were removed. Millions of farm families, who had subsisted, albeit poorly, were no longer able to support themselves. Not only Chicken but corn and grains in general. The highly subsidized agriculture in America was too great for them to compete and so the great migration sped up in the 90's continuing today. Many would have stayed in their own country if they could have. We must add that the Mexican government leaders allowed this to happen impoverishing the countryside without concern. They should be held to account for allowing this to happen. Exporting young men relieved the need to provide employment, with the added benefit of Billions returned each year in support of families left behind. Jack B. Walters June 13, 2013

Excellent, well-composed evaluation of the industry during this period and of the policies during the era. Schwartzman takes the time to analyze and discuss the many factors contributing to the events described in the book instead simplifying the causes; this analysis gives a greater depth and understanding of her subject. Well-written and easy to read. I was also amused by the titles of each section in the book.

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