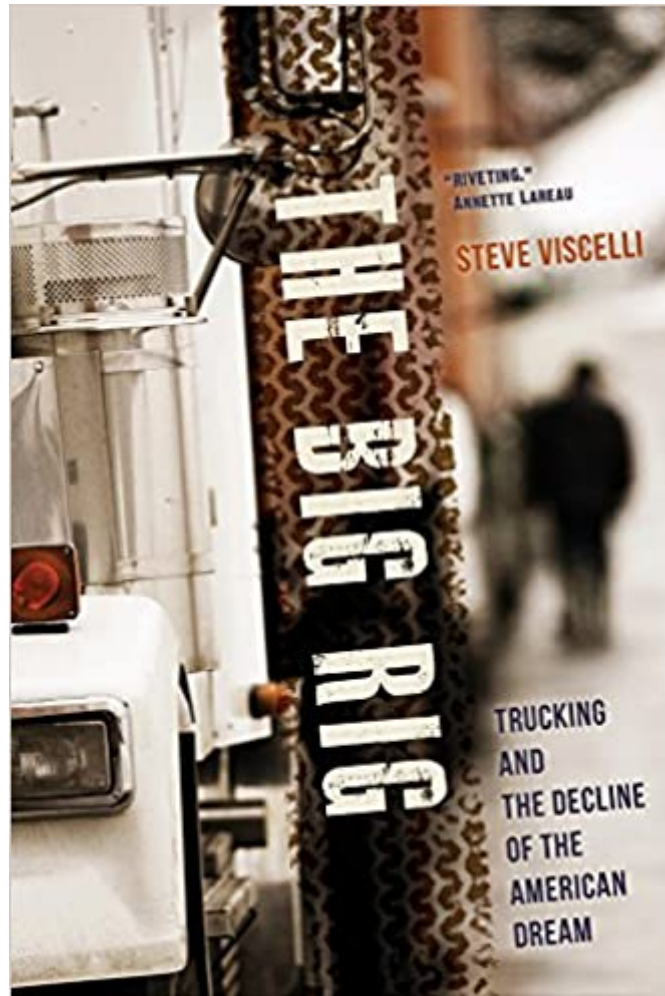




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# The Big Rig: Trucking And The Decline Of The American Dream



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"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*

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/](http://steveviscelli.com/).

Really enjoyed the book. Eye opening. One person's point of view and obviously two sides to every story. A must read for anyone considering becoming a truck driver. Most industries have their dirty little secrets and it seems this industry may be no different. The book provides a nice history of the trucking industry also. I did find parts of the book redundant and think it could have covered the topics in fewer pages. Not a book I will forget soon.

Amazing book this man really understands the trucking industry.

Fairly good writing of life as a driver

Anyone involved in the trucking industry should read this book from management to dispatch to drivers. It offers great insights into a profession that employees over 3M.

I highly recommend this book. I bought it out of general curiosity about the trucking industry, but o

learned a lot more than that.

Well written and very informative.

This is the most important, and in depth, study of American truckers in the past twenty-five years. Read this book before you, or anyone you love, gets a CDL or before you or anyone you love decides to leave a company driver's job to "invest" in themselves by leasing a big truck and becoming a contract driver. You may still decide to take the risk, and with luck, you may succeed. But having read this book you'll be better prepared because you'll know the rest of the story. This book could have easily been called the Road to Ruin. Almost daily, the mainstream media chronicles the motor carrier spin that there's a looming huge truck driver shortage and that this shortage is the gateway to the American Dream through independent ownership of a big truck. As a truck driver for eight years and an owner operator for six years, I can vouch for the rigged system that Steve Viscelli describes. This is an accurate portrayal. Steve Viscelli has a CDL. He pulled freight. He filled out a log book. He scrambled for parking. He experienced the indignities and dangers that truck drivers are forced to endure daily for, in many cases, less than minimum wage. His ten years of research pulls the curtain back on this exploitive industry, exposing the forces that have turned a good job into something worse than a terrible job • debt peonage. The carriers, and by extension the shippers of all the goods that Americans use, have transferred their costs and their risk onto drivers, ripping off the American taxpayer in the process. The motor carriers, trucking media, recruiters, owner operator service providers, Viscelli found, have in the past twenty years designed a complex system that preys on Americans desperate to hang onto or climb into the middle class with good wages and benefits. An "astonishingly vulnerable labor supply" has been created, he says, because the inexperienced driver does not understand the value of his work. Sixty years ago, abused workers joined unions. Today, company truck drivers, abused by a system where they must break the law to make a living, want to become contractors to secure better wages and more control over their working lives. Those ambitious company truck drivers, who it turns out are not the worst off truck drivers, are conditioned and swept onto the contractor track, where they become small business owners in the eyes of the IRS but have no control over that business. They invest 100% of the money, they take 100% of the risk and very few enjoy any gain. For tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of unprepared but hopeful truckers, becoming a contractor is a highway to a financial, psychological and emotional

disaster.

This book on trucking is what Barbara Ehrenrich was able to capture in her bestselling book "Nickel and Dimed" to uncover the working poor. In just the first few pages the author captures detention, wage disparity to inflation and truck parking issues, debt peonage in lease truck carriers, low standards in training, and moves into the history of trucking from the time large freight trucks were developed. I recommend this book highly to anyone wanting to understand how the current business model that exploits drivers was developed to manage the turnover rather than fix it.

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How to Start a Trucking Company: Your Step-by-Step Guide to Starting a Trucking Company  
Nora Roberts Dream Trilogy CD Collection: Daring to Dream, Holding the Dream, Finding the Dream (Dream Series)  
Dream Journal: Dream Interpretations, Dream Meanings & Dream Analysis You Can Do Each Day to Finally Understand Your Subconscious  
The Great Risk Shift: The New Economic Insecurity and the Decline of the American Dream  
Dream Journal Workbook: A Beginner's Guided Dream Diary for Lucid Dreaming and Dream Interpretation  
Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy (Politics and Society in Modern America)  
Braking the Special Interests: Trucking Deregulation and the Politics of Policy Reform  
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