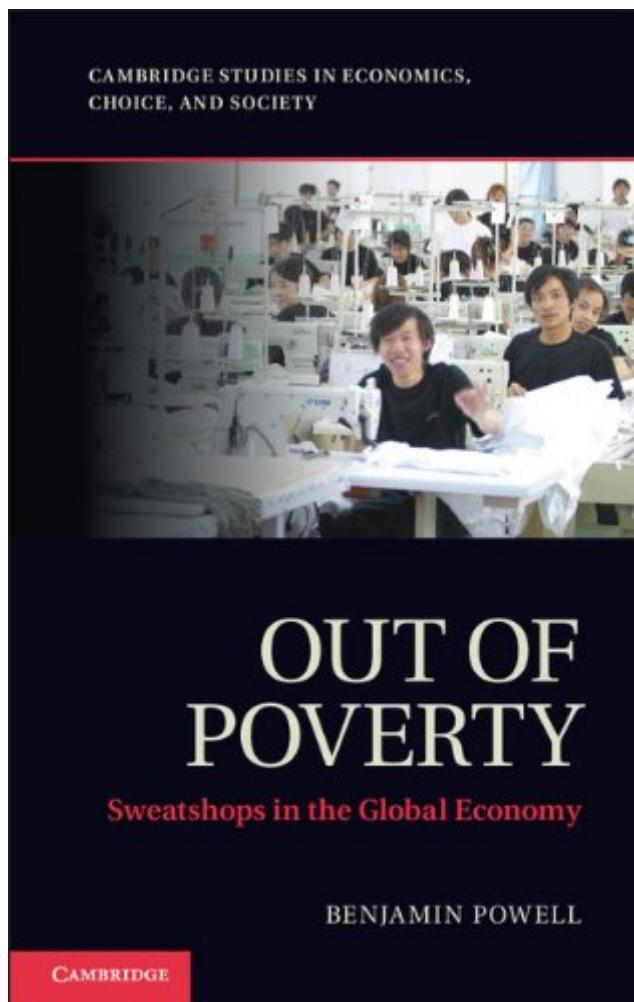


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Out Of Poverty: Sweatshops In The Global Economy (Cambridge Studies In Economics, Choice, And Society)



Synopsis

This book provides a comprehensive defense of third-world sweatshops. It explains how these sweatshops provide the best available opportunity to workers and how they play an important role in the process of development that eventually leads to better wages and working conditions. Using economic theory, the author argues that much of what the anti-sweatshop movement has agitated for would actually harm the very workers they intend to help by creating less desirable alternatives and undermining the process of development. Nowhere does this book put 'profits' or 'economic efficiency' above people. Improving the welfare of poorer citizens of third world countries is the goal, and the book explores which methods best achieve that goal. Out of Poverty will help readers understand how activists and policy makers can help third world workers.

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Customer Reviews

Dr. Powell's book is grounded in sound, economic reasoning that challenges the propensity of first

world thinkers to believe that third world workers face similar alternatives to those of our own, i.e. if they weren't working in a sweatshop, they'd be working for ten times as much and in an air conditioned building. This, as Dr. Powell points out, should be puzzling. Given the choice between a sweatshop with low wages and an air conditioned building with high wages, why on earth would anyone choose the former? The answer, as he cogently points out, is that third world workers do not have the same opportunities as we do in the first world. Recognizing this, he then sets out to demonstrate the enormous, positive impact that sweatshop labor has had on local communities, especially when we consider that these peoples' relevant alternatives are much, much worse. Wrapping up, Dr. Powell provides hope for the future of these people. As he explains, the developed world has already done the "hard work" of developing new technologies that greatly improve the lives of the people who can take advantage of them. Therefore, the shift from abject poverty to a life more similar to that of our own can (and has) happened much more rapidly, provided that we do not put our misguided concern for the well-being of others in the way of their actual achievement of that well-being.

Elizabeth Gaskell's "North and South" (both book and BBC miniseries) brings to life the challenges and opportunities of England's 19th century sweatshops. Ben Powell's *Out of Poverty* examines today's textile factories in the developing world and their role as a pathway out of poverty. Migrants from rural villages only gradually acquire skills valuable in modern factories. But as poor people learn how to work with textile and other light industry machinery, their earning power and wages rise. Critics of sweatshops wish there was a better, faster way, wish wages and working conditions could be better faster. Ben Powell is a critic of sweatshop critics, and he examines the many claimed shortcuts to prosperity that wishful thinkers say should be adopted (and mandated if not adopted voluntarily). These alleged shortcuts turn out to cause long delays. Ideally, the unskilled of the developing world could migrate to better-paying jobs. And ideally machinery and infrastructure could more quickly "migrate" to developing countries. Sweatshops are a compromise in today's imperfect world that lacks the freedom of movement and investment taken for granted in the decades before World War I.

Dr. Powell's book provides a concise, yet thorough, understanding of the role sweatshops play in alleviating poverty in the developing world. Grounded in basic economic theory, Powell analyzes how sweatshops provide the best available alternative for the poorest of the developing world. Although economics is the basis of analysis, Powell's defense of sweatshops is not justified not by

economic efficiency or corporate profits. If the goal of economic growth is to alleviate the poverty of the poorest individuals in the world, sweatshops must be considered as one of the methods by which to achieve that goal. Attempts by individuals in developed countries to protest sweatshops, which are part of a broader process of economic development, has unintended consequences that harm the poorest people. Dr. Powell's masterful exposition of sweatshops as a means by which to improve the economic welfare of the Third World appeals not only to professional economists, sociologists, philosophers, and political scientists, but also to the interested layman as well!

This is an excellent book for people that are serious about helping those in 3rd world nations, and not merely feeling better about themselves. This seems harsh, but as someone that has worked with a non-profit this seems to be how many people make charity donation decisions. If economics is the dismal science this book gets to the heart of it: the limitation of natural and unnatural scarcity by conditions outside of our direct control. Empirical research into these areas exposes us to the rampant poverty they many are very conformable not knowing about. But realism is necessary to those that wish to make improvements to the world. The economic analysis is sharp and nuanced, it is not generalized. It does not overstate and say what can not be said without complete accuracy. This book is short and concise and could be beneficial to both to critics and advocates of free markets. It is careful to explain why and how things work even to the point of getting into the intrinsic ways markets work and coordinate.

This book is a well argued and accessible critique of anti-sweatshop activists. It is devastating to the arguments of the economically ignorant calls to close sweatshops, but it isn't just cold economic reasoning. Nor does it require the reader to have training in economics to follow the arguments. The author is empathetic and holds his readers to high moral standards by anyone's reckoning. This book takes seriously the intelligence and drive of the world's poor, rather than imposing an ugly and ineffective paternalism. It counters efforts to assuage western guilt (a normal good if there ever was one) with a call to common sense for the good of the world's poorest.

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