



## Life Interrupted: Trafficking into Forced Labor in the United States, by Denise Brennan

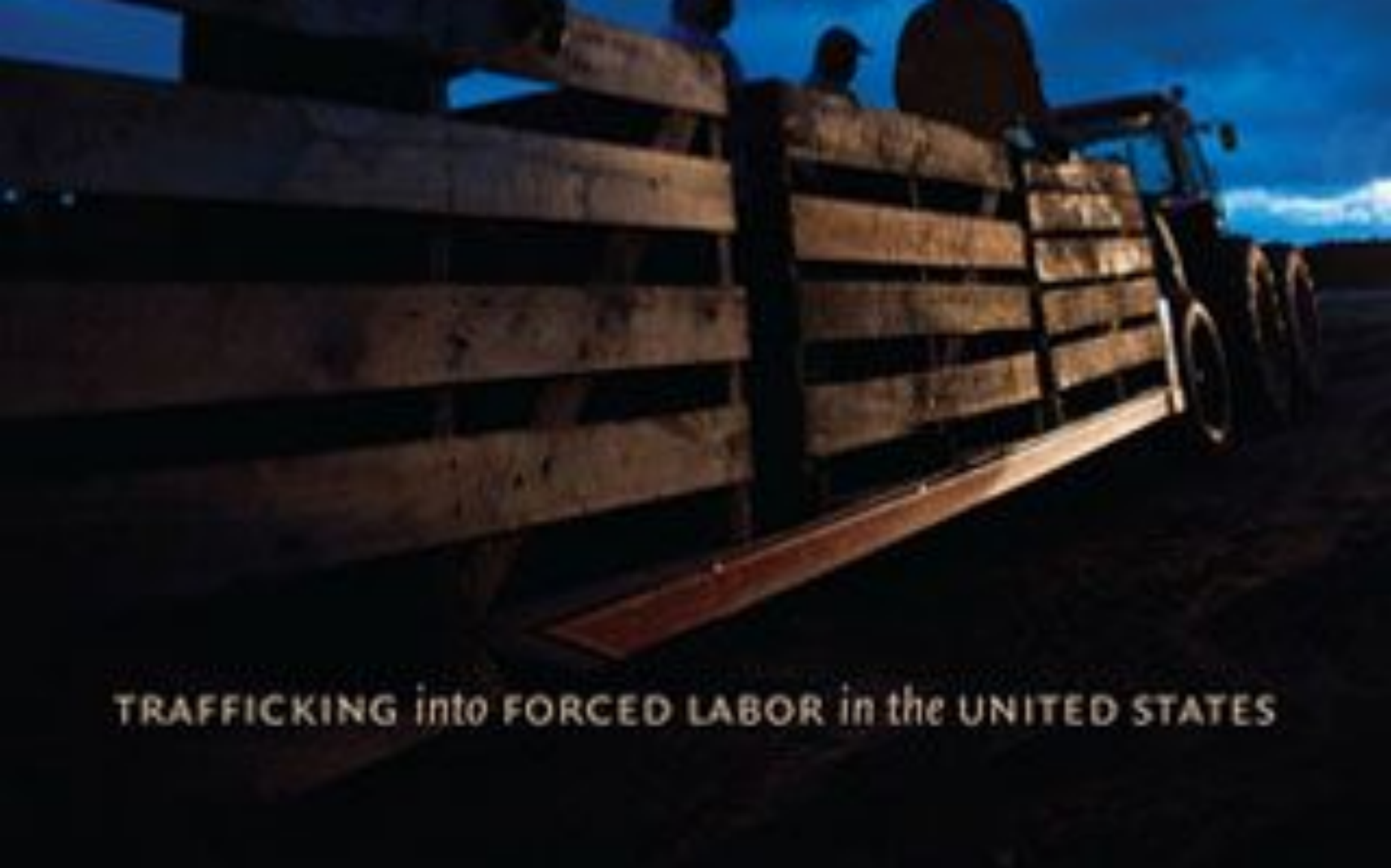
Lee Maril on how immigration policies prolong the misery of the exploited

February 27, 2014



Denise Brennan

Life Interrupted



Given the vast number of scholarly studies of immigration, a reasonable person might believe that there is little left to learn about those who legally or illegally cross national borders to find better work. But as Denise Brennan shows here, there is not only much more to learn, but also much that needs changing.

The author, chair of the department of anthropology at Georgetown University (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/georgetown-university>), listens with great care to those like Tatiana who offer first-hand accounts of their exploitation. “I was full of dreams about coming to America. So many dreams... I thought I would be independent and that I would build my own life. I thought I would get an education and do certain things in my life that I’ve wanted to do.” But after paying smugglers in Russia to bring her to the US by way of Mexico, Tatiana had her pay cheque routinely gouged by her new employers, leaving her barely able to survive from one day to the next.

One might also assume that a country reliant on both legal and illegal immigration might also generate thoughtful public policy. But the scholarly horde has largely failed to acknowledge the lives of immigrant women such as Tatiana, Maria, Flo, Carmen, Eva and many others interviewed here, in favour of constructing rigid academic theories fortified by dicey measurement. In contrast, Brennan demonstrates that immigration is less a single event than a complex process revolving around the quality of life sustained

*after* a new destination is reached. She shows us how one must, like Nanci, come to some kind of terms with a horrendous experience of coercion and fear; she details Suzanne's efforts to build a new home in a new land; and she documents Maria's prolonged struggles to gain respect in her workplace.

One commonality is always present: human suffering. Whether it be Mexican agricultural workers risking their lives by crossing a desert to find work, or the Egyptians and Pakistanis crossing the Mediterranean in fragile boats whose lives depend on rescue at sea by the Italian navy, suffering is omnipresent.

Time and again Brennan takes on the sacred cows of immigration. Central to her overall argument is a consideration of the plight of those lucky enough to be awarded T Nonimmigrant Status (known as T-visas) for having been trafficked into forced labour. The US awards fewer than 5,000 such permits a year. But in spite of favoured legal status, at best these immigrants and their families still face years of hardship. One activist quoted here concludes: "There is bad pay or no pay all the time. If you complain about the safety conditions...you get fired." "Women endure sexual harassment. When a few women on one farm spoke out about sexual assault, they were fired."

And what about those millions who do not receive T-visas? Vulnerable to exploitation, they are subject to daily mistreatment by employers. For all immigrants, the American dream can easily become an American nightmare.

Brennan questions many reflexive assumptions about what constitutes fair public policy, even daring to turn over some weighty rocks to identify the creepy-crawlies beneath. One stunning example of political dysfunction and unintended consequences was George W. Bush's decision in 2004 to launch, in the name of ending human trafficking, a war on sex work. In this sleight of hand, efforts to address the physical and mental abuses suffered by the vast majority of legal and illegal sex workers were forfeited in favour of sensationalisation by the media, soon followed by Hollywood celebrities, at the "rescue" of apparently trafficked sex workers, some of whom complained vehemently about being saved. The CIA first estimated that there were 50,000 such cases a year, but then, when its credibility was questioned, reduced the number by 90 per cent. Bush's magic trick gained the support of Tea Party ideologues and some national feminist groups, both of which inappropriately adopted the language of US abolitionists to reframe all sex work as human slavery.

Minor quibbles in methodology aside, *Life Interrupted* is a must-read for those seeking to understand why immigration policies, US and otherwise, can prolong human misery. Bluntly confronting the risks and dangers all immigrants face when they must leave their

homes in search of better lives, this admirable book is a major contribution to productive ways to rethink global immigration.

## Life Interrupted: Trafficking into Forced Labor in the United States

By Denise Brennan

Duke University Press, 304pp, £57.00 and £15.99

ISBN 9780822356240 and 56332

Published 1 April 2014



**UNRESTRICTED  
ACCESS TO THE**

GET ALL THE LATEST BOOK  
REVIEWS AND MUCH MORE WITH A

**30-DAY FREE TRIAL** ▶

([http://www.tslshop.co.uk/thed-tsl/THEDO76/?](http://www.tslshop.co.uk/thed-tsl/THEDO76/?utm_source=THE&utm_medium=Books&utm_content=THEDO76&utm_campaign=freetrial)

[utm\\_source=THE&utm\\_medium=Books&utm\\_content=THEDO76&utm\\_campaign=freetrial](http://www.tslshop.co.uk/thed-tsl/THEDO76/?utm_source=THE&utm_medium=Books&utm_content=THEDO76&utm_campaign=freetrial))

### HAVE YOUR SAY

**Comment \***

Please make sure that your comment does not contravene our terms and conditions (</terms-and-conditions/>).

Update your username to use in public-facing parts of the site, such as commenting on articles here (</user/>).

Submit comment

---

**SPONSORED**

# Creating for social good

PolyU has long been making creative use of knowledge for the betterment of society through design innovation. With this in mind, the Jockey Club Design Institute for Social...

Promoted by Hong Kong Polytechnic University



ZHEJIANG UNIVERSITY (ZJU)  
IS ONE OF CHINA'S  
LEADING HIGHER  
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

## **University of Helsinki**

The University of Helsinki is an international academic community with more than 40,000 students and members of staff. It operates on four campuses in Helsinki. Find out more here.

Promoted by University of Helsinki

## FEATURED JOBS

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)/Vice-President  
(//www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/listing/63477/?  
trackid=10)

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY (UTS)



Research Assistant/Research Fellow in Modelling Root Traits  
to Bio-engineer Soil  
(//www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/listing/63502/?  
trackid=10)

CRANFIELD UNIVERSITY



Lecturer in Data Science - Data Sciences with Analytics  
(//www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/listing/63506/?  
trackid=10)

UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH



Digital Marketing and Recruitment Executive  
(//www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/listing/63511/?  
trackid=10)

LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS & POLITICAL SCIENCE LSE



Science Education Technician  
(//www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/listing/63515/?  
trackid=10)

UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON



[See all jobs \(//www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/listings/\)](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/listings/)

## MOST VIEWED



**Publishers seek removal of millions of papers from ResearchGate (/news/publishers-see-removal-millions-papers-researchgate) 🔒**

October 5, 2017

(/news/publishers-see-removal-millions-papers-



researchgate)



## Best universities for law degrees (/student/best-universities/best-universities-law-degrees)

October 4, 2017

(/student/best-universities/best-universities-law-degrees)



## World University Rankings 2018 by subject: four results out now (/news/world-university-rankings-2018-subject-four-results-out-now) 🔒

October 4, 2017

(/news/world-university-rankings-2018-subject-four-results-out-now)



## Best universities in the UK (/student/best-universities/best-universities-uk)

September 5, 2017

(/student/best-universities/best-universities-uk)



## Best universities in Canada (/student/best-universities/best-universities-canada)

September 5, 2017

(/student/best-universities/best-universities-canada)

# Looking for the next step in your career?

Job title, keywords or company name

Location

Search Jobs

## MOST COMMENTED



**The moral panic over student cheating must end (/opinion/moral-panic-over-student-cheating-must-end) 🔒**

We need to call off the witch-hunt and trust in the capacity of our students to learn, says Bruce Macfarlane

(/opinion/moral-panic-over-student-cheating-must-end)



**V-c pay: Are vice-chancellors worth their salaries? (/features/v-c-pay-are-vice-chancellors-worth-their-salaries) 🔒**

Last week, the UK's universities minister threatened to fine institutions that pay their v-cs more than the prime minister without a strong justification. We present three perspectives o...

(/features/v-c-pay-are-vice-chancellors-worth-their-salaries)



**Survey results confirm UK university staff's deep... (/news/survey-results-confirm-uk-university-staffs-deep-dissatisfaction) 🔒**

Extended senior management survey finds that employees are extremely unhappy with the people running universities

(/news/survey-results-confirm-uk-university-

staffs-deep-  
dissatisfaction)



## Should conscientious academics ignore their email? (/opinion/should-conscientious-academics-ignore- their-email) 🔒

However you handle them, emails are a source of stress. But there are ways to minimise it, says Emma Russell

(/opinion/should-  
conscientious-academics-  
ignore-their-email)



## UK urged to set 70 per cent higher education... (/news/uk-urged-set-70-cent-higher-education- participation-target) 🔒

Nick Hillman makes call in book that aims to influence Conservative policy

(/news/uk-urged-set-70-  
cent-higher-education-  
participation-target)



**TimesHigherEducation** @timeshighered



“Every seasoned teacher worth their salt learns to read signs of deep hurt in the eyes of students”

[bit.ly/2yHWAb3](https://bit.ly/2yHWAb3)



**When you're in the eye of the storm, academics look away**

A hurricane strike last year brought home to Zachary Michael Jack the academy's failure to live up to its compassionate values

[timeshighereducation.com](https://timeshighereducation.com)



1m



**TimesHigherEducation** @timeshighered



“If money buys only a small amount of happiness, think carefully before

[Embed](#)

[View on Twitter](#)

Here to help  
you prosper

Find out more

Santander UK plc.  
Santander is a registered trademark.

**WORK**



**UNSW**  
A U S T R A L I A

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE



## Interview with Shamit Saggar (/people/interview-shamit-saggar-university-of-essex) 🔒

October 5, 2017

(/people/interview-shamit-saggar-university-of-essex)



## University of Amsterdam creates Europe's first 'body farm' (/news/university-amsterdam-creates-europes-first-body-farm) 🔒

October 4, 2017

(/news/university-amsterdam-creates-europes-first-body-farm)



## Let's create a nation of social scientists (/opinion/lets-create-nation-social-scientists) 🔒

September 29, 2017

(/opinion/lets-create-nation-social-scientists)



## Snobbery against regional accents is hurting university teaching (/opinion/snobbery-against-regional-accents-hurting-university-teaching) 🔒

September 28, 2017

(/opinion/snobbery-against-regional-accents-hurting-university-teaching)



[Contact Us \(/contact-us\)](#)

[About Us \(/about-us\)](#)

[Write for the THE \(/news/writing-for-times-higher-education/418274.article\)](#)

[Terms & Conditions \(/terms-and-conditions\)](#)

[Cookie Policy \(/cookie-policy\)](#)

## Subscribe

If you like what you're reading online, why not take advantage of our subscription and get unlimited access to all of *Times Higher Education's* content?

You'll get full access to our website, print and digital editions, and the *Times Higher Education* app for iOS, Android and Kindle Fire devices.

[Subscribe \(https://shop.timeshighereducation.co.uk/footer3\)](https://shop.timeshighereducation.co.uk/footer3)

