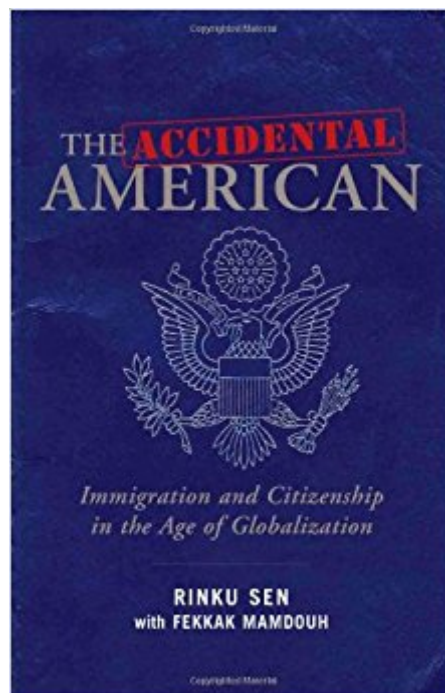




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# The Accidental American: Immigration And Citizenship In The Age Of Globalization



## Synopsis

The Accidental American vividly illustrates the challenges and contradictions of U. S. immigration policy, and argues that, just as there is a free flow of capital in the world economy, there should be a free flow of labor. Author Rinku Sen alternates chapters telling the story of one "accidental American"--coauthor Fekkak Mamdouh, a Moroccan-born waiter at a restaurant in the World Trade Center whose life was thrown into turmoil on 9/11--with a thorough critique of current immigration policy. Sen and Mamdouh describe how members of the largely immigrant food industry workforce managed to overcome divisions in the aftermath of 9/11 and form the Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York (ROC-NY) to fight for jobs and more equitable treatment. This extraordinary story serves to illuminate the racial, cultural, and economic conflicts embedded in the current immigration debate and helps frame the argument for a more humane immigration and global labor system.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 248 pages

Publisher: Berrett-Koehler Publishers; 1 edition (September 1, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1576754383

ISBN-13: 978-1576754382

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 0.9 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 12 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #267,423 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #59 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > Cultural Policy](#) #366 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > Social Policy](#) #462 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Emigration & Immigration](#)

## Customer Reviews

Praise for The Accidental American "The Accidental American gives us the context, story and analysis we need for a just immigration policy. It is a must-read."--Danny Glover, actor and activist "If you have ever had to struggle as an outsider or a newcomer (and all of us have), this book will touch your heart. It is a poignant story that points the way forward for us all." --Van Jones, President and Founder, Green for All, and author of The Green Collar Economy "Windows on the World was the name of the World Trade Center restaurant that was destroyed on 9/11, and in The Accidental

American it provides a window with a striking view. Sen and Mamdouh show how, in a few weeks in 2001, the restaurant's immigrant workers went from being victims of terrorism to being targets of American anti-immigrant fervor. There's a bright side, though, because this book vividly highlights a seldom-mentioned side of recent immigrants' experience: their willingness to struggle for better working conditions for workers of all ethnicities in their adopted nation." --Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *Nickel and Dimed*, *Bait and Switch*, and *Dancing in the Streets* "By focusing on the concrete experiences of particular people, Sen and Mamdouh show us an overlooked aspect of the global changes that have set contemporary immigration in motion. And because they also show us the resilient efforts of these ordinary people to act together to control the forces that are shaping all our lives, they tell a story that is essentially hopeful and, indeed, the only story that in the end matters." --Frances Fox Piven, Distinguished Professor, The Graduate Center, City University of New York, and author of *Challenging Authority: How Ordinary People Change America* "Rinku Sen and Fekkak Mamdouh have brilliantly depicted the new stage in America's immigrant saga. They explore the shadowy corners of our modern global economy, the courageous battle for survival of low-wage migrant laborers, and the furious rise of anti-immigrant feeling here and in Europe. By organizing to improve their working conditions, they remind us, those immigrants are changing our nation for the better." --Juan Gonzalez, New York Daily News columnist, author of *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, and cohost of *Democracy Now!*

The *Accidental American* calls for a bold new approach to immigration: a free international flow of labor to match globalization's free flow of capital. After all, corporations are encouraged to move anywhere in the world they can maximize their earnings. People shouldn't have to risk exploitation, abuse, and even imprisonment when they try to do the same. Activist, journalist, and immigration expert Rinku Sen and organizer Fekkak Mamdouh examine the consequences of this injustice through Mamdouh's own story. Born in Morocco, he was a waiter and union leader at *Windows on the World*, a restaurant in the World Trade Center. In the aftermath of September 11th, facing a rising tide of anti-immigrant bias, Mamdouh and others formed the Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York (ROC-NY) to help their colleagues fight for decent jobs and fair treatment. ROC-NY was able to unite native-born and immigrant workers, helping each group realize they were involved in a common struggle for better working conditions. The organization is now expanding nationwide. Since 9/11, immigrants have increasingly been treated as presumptive criminals. As a counterpoint to these regressive, fundamentally un-American practices, the authors forcefully advocate more humane policies that would ease rather than restrict people's movements, coupled with proposals

for reforming globalization so that both sending and receiving countries can more equitably benefit from a more mobile international labor force. Immigrants enthusiastically contribute much more to our country than their labor. They ought to be welcomed, not marginalized. Citizenship should ultimately be determined by how willing people are to become a part of the social, civic, and political fabric of the country they live in, not by an accident of birth.

The book ultimately concludes that all people should be able to freely immigrate to every country and promoted a global currency. The opinions presented failed to critically analyze the potential impact that these could create and only saw one side. If you want to read something that critically analyzes both sides of an issue this is not an appropriate book.

I recommend everyone to read this book, especially business owners.

fast and nice

Great deal, book in excellent condition, brand new! and super quick delivery. Thanks!

It is a Good read, it really opened my mind to new different view points. I would recommend it anyone.

To say that this book was a pleasant surprise is like saying that water in a desert oasis is an unnecessary extravagance. Since biographies and pure mind-candy fare take up most of my leisure reading, I was ready for a jargon filled sleeper. Instead Sen's *The Accidental American* took me on a gripping journey through our nation's often-tragic labor and immigration woes. All of this and more is wrapped in Mamdouh's own unexpected, some would say accidental, American experience. Sen connects the dots between the real life experiences of people surviving wars abroad and discrimination in the US, to the rules of game as they are dictated by Beltway politics and societal stereotypes. In this book, the context of our nation's struggles is more complicated than the pre and post 911 analysis given on talking-head shows. We are shown a rare well-intended DC lobbyist, who is forced to deal with the in-your-face racism of mainstream operatives. New York City's restaurant culture of backroom exploitation and front of the house indulgence is skillfully set in the realm of historical labor struggles and dehumanizing immigration policy. And not to be content with just laying bare our nation's problems, Sen does something that too many so-called progressives

miss entirely. She offers tangible, sensible solutions. Tackling race, politics, policy and the lives of real people in a way that is compelling and intelligent is quite a feat. Sen does this and more. The Accidental American is indeed worth the read.

I've read a lot of books on immigration policy and history and finally - someone is explaining what should be out there front and center, the thing that shows that Lou Dobbs is as ignorant as he is hateful - it's the global story of migration. Rinku Sen and Fekkak Mamdouh use story and history, memories and data to explain the conditions that drive migration and the U.S.'s role in creating them. Migrants are whole people in this book, with dreams and pasts and personalities, not just a source of cheap labor that the u.s. born must "tolerate" if we want our cable installed or victims whose plight is to be lamented. And for anyone who wants to learn about the racial hierarchy of the restaurant industry, or lessons in organizing strategies and the challenges of creating cooperatives, a centerpiece of the book the evolution of ROC (Restaurant Opportunities Center) in the aftermath of 9/11. Not since Mai Ngai's Impossible Subjects has there been such an important book for anyone who wants to get real about why the question of immigration will never be understood until the u.s. deals with its structural racism and quest for empire. And Sen's background as an organizer and journalist make this a work that has the potential for mass readership. It's time to flip the script, and the Accidental American does it.

Sen and Mamdouh have successfully utilized this extremely personal story to illustrate the larger plight of the modern day immigrant. In a country where we are all either immigrants or decedents of immigrants - (unless of course you happen to be 100% Native American) where we point to the Statue of Liberty and proudly recite the Lazarus poem - "Give me your tired, your hungry your huddled masses yearning to be free" - we seem to have lost our way. The newspapers, the hate mongers and the politicians often play to individual insecurities when they cry out about our need to secure our borders and to protect our country from foreigners. The statistics are always thrown at us 6 million, 10 million, 20 million illegal immigrants - we have to do something - they rant. Sen and Mamdouh put a face on these numbers, they tell a touching story of the reality of the effect of our immigration policy or non policy and what it has done to our American spirit. Extremely moving and well written. Bravo - a must read for all.

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