

= Slavery by Another Name =

Slavery by Another Name : The Real Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II is a book by American writer Douglas A. Blackmon , published by Anchor Books in 2008 . It explores the forced labor of imprisoned black men and women , through the convict lease system used by states , local governments , white farmers , and corporations after the American Civil War until World War II in the southern United States . Blackmon argues slavery in the United States did not end with the Civil War , but instead persisted well into the 20th century . It depicts the subjugation of Convict Leasing , Sharecropping and Peonage and tells the fate of the former but not of the latter two .

Slavery by Another Name began as an article Blackmon wrote for The Wall Street Journal detailing the use of black forced labor by U.S. Steel Corporation . Seeing the popular response to the article , he began research for a more comprehensive look at the topic . The resulting book was well received by critics and became a New York Times Best Seller . In 2009 , it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction , and in 2012 , was adapted into a documentary film for PBS also titled Slavery by Another Name .

= Background =

Douglas Blackmon , the book 's author , is a Wall Street Journal reporter . He grew up in Washington County , Mississippi , where as a seventh grader he was encouraged by his teacher and his mother to research a local racist incident , despite the opposition of some citizens . The experience began a lifelong interest in the history of American race relations .

In 2003 , Blackmon wrote a story on the use of black convict labor in the coal mines of U.S. Steel . The story generated a large response , and was later anthologized in Best Business Stories . Blackmon began to research the subject more widely , visiting various county courthouses to obtain records on arrest , conviction , and sentences .

He later stated :

" ... as I began to research , even I , as someone who had been paying attention to some of these sorts of things for a long time and was open to alternative explanations , even I was fairly astonished when I put it together , basically by going county by county and finding the criminal arrest records and the jail records in county after county after county from this period of time and seeing that if there had been crime waves , there had to have been records of crimes and people being arrested for crimes . And in reality , it 's just not there .

" There 's no evidence that that ever happened . In fact , it 's the opposite . The crime waves that occurred by and large were the aftermath of the war and whites coming back from fighting in the Civil War and settling scores with people and all sorts of renegade activity that didn 't involve black people at all , but they were blamed for it , and that was then used as a kind of ruse for why these incredibly brutal new legal measures then began to be put in place . "

The resulting book , Slavery by Another Name , was published by Anchor Books in 2008 .

= Contents =

In the introduction to Slavery by Another Name , Blackmon describes his experience as a reporter for the Wall Street Journal " asking a provocative question : What would be revealed if American corporations were examined through the same sharp lens of historical confrontation as the one then being trained on German corporations that relied on Jewish slave labor during World War II and the Swiss banks that robbed victims of the Holocaust of their fortunes ? " His story describing corporate use of black forced labor in the post-Civil War South generated more response than any other piece he had written , and inspired him to pursue a book-length study of the subject (see Reconstruction Era) .

Blackmon structures his narrative around a young African American man named Green Cottenham ; though the records of Cottenham 's life are incomplete , Blackmon states that " the absence of his

voice rests at the center of this book . " Cottenham , who was born in the 1880s to two former slaves , was arrested in 1908 for vagrancy , a common pretext to detain blacks without a white patron . The state of Alabama rented him to a coal mine owned by U.S. Steel Corporation , where he died .

As context for Cottenham 's story , *Slavery by Another Name* also details the beginnings of " industrial slavery " , in which convict laborers were put to work in factories or mines rather than cotton fields . Though slaves were formally emancipated by the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution following the Civil War , Southern states subsequently passed Black Codes , " an array of interlocking laws essentially intended to criminalize black life " , to restrict the economic independence of blacks and provide pretexts for jail terms . These convicts were then rented to plantations , lumber camps , and mines to be used for forced labor . Though federal prosecutors such as Eugene Reese attempted to prosecute responsible parties in the early 20th century under federal laws against debt peonage , the efforts received little support locally or nationally . The system finally comes to an end only with the advent of World War II , which focuses renewed attention on racial issues and the need for national unity .

In the book 's epilogue , Blackmon argues for the importance of acknowledging this history of forced labor :

the evidence moldering in county courthouses and the National Archives compels us to confront this extinguished past , to recognize the terrible contours of the record , to teach our children the truth of a terror that pervaded much of American life , to celebrate its end , to lift any shame on those who could not evade it . This book is not a call for financial reparations . Instead , I hope it is a formidable plea for a resurrection and fundamental reinterpretation of a tortured chapter in the collective American past .

= = Reception = =

The book was a New York Times Best Seller and met a positive reception from critics . Janet Maslin of The New York Times wrote that it " eviscerates a basic assumption : that slavery in America ended with the Civil War . " She praised the book 's evidence as " relentless and fascinating " , though she stated that the conceit of reconstructing Cottenham 's life gives the book " a shaky start " . Leonard Pitts , a columnist for the Miami Herald , wrote that " *Slavery by Another Name* is an astonishing book . It will challenge and change your understanding of what we were as Americans - and of what we are . I cannot recommend it to you highly enough . " W. Fitzhugh Brundage wrote in The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education that " Blackmon deserves high praise for this deeply moving and troubling history . He especially deserves praise for teasing out the largest implications of his research . He aptly , and carefully , draws parallels between the corporate responsibility of companies that exploited slave labor in Nazi Germany and that of southerners who bought convict labor . " In the Sunday Gazette @-@ Mail , Chris Vognar called the book " chilling , doggedly reported and researched " . A review in the Rocky Mountain News stated of the book , " Displaying meticulous research , and personalizing the larger story through individual experiences , Blackmon 's book opens the eyes and wrenches the gut . "

African American Studies scholar James Smethurst was more critical , writing in The Boston Globe that " this catalogue of the nadir is one of the book 's weaknesses , since it sometimes departs from its account of peonage without much transition . Paying more attention to the considerable presence of involuntary servitude in African- American literature and intellectual history , reaching back to Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar , would have helped " . However , he concludes that " the book vividly and engagingly recalls the horror and sheer magnitude of such neo @-@ slavery and reminds us how long after emancipation such practices persisted . "

Slavery by Another Name was awarded the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for General Non @-@ Fiction . The award committee called it " a precise and eloquent work that examines a deliberate system of racial suppression and that rescues a multitude of atrocities from virtual obscurity . "

In 2011 , Mark Melvin , an inmate at the Kilby Correctional Facility , was banned from reading the book by Alabama Department of Corrections officials who deemed it " an attempt to incite violence based on race , religion , sex , creed or nationality " . Melvin filed a lawsuit stating that his First

Amendment rights had been violated . Blackmon stated of the officials ' actions that " The idea that a book like mine is somehow incendiary or a call to violence is so absurd " .

= = Film = =

Slavery by Another Name was adapted into a 90 @-@ minute documentary film , which premiered on PBS in February 2012 . The film was executive produced by Catherine Allan of Twin Cities Public Television , co @-@ executive produced by Blackmon , directed by Sam Pollard , written by Sheila Curran Bernard , and narrated by Laurence Fishburne . Slavery by Another Name premiered in competition at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2012 .

Neil Genzliger of The New York Times wrote of the film that " by filling in an overlooked part of black history , this sobering film enhances our understanding of why race issues have proved so intractable . " Daniel Fienberg of Hitfix , viewing the film at Sundance , wrote that " Slavery By Another Name is sturdy and well @-@ researched stuff and it will play well when it airs on PBS next month and it should play well in the future in classrooms , but as a film festival entry , it isn 't nearly confident enough in its artistry . There 's no harm in a dry history lesson , but Pollard may have hoped to achieve more than that . "