

# BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT

## LIFE AND DEATH OF THE AMERICAN WORKER

ALICE DRIVER

LIFE AND DEATH OF



THE AMERICAN WORKER



THE IMMIGRANTS TAKING ON AMERICA'S



LARGEST MEATPACKING COMPANY



ALICE DRIVER

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BOOK PRIZE FINALIST

**Bklyn**  
Public Library

## BOOK SYNOPSIS

Winner of the J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award, and a *New Yorker* Best Book of 2024, a “startling glimpse into the meatpacking industry’s abuse of undocumented and incarcerated workers” (*The New York Times Book Review*) and those who had the courage to fight back.

On June 27, 2011, a deadly chemical accident took place inside the Tyson Foods chicken processing plant in Springdale, Arkansas, where the company is headquartered. The company urged everyone to return to work, although the spill left their employees injured, sick, and terrified. Over the years, Arkansas-based reporter Alice Driver was able to gain the trust of the immigrant workers who survived the accident. They rewarded her persistence by giving her total access to their lives.

During the course of Alice’s reporting, the COVID-19 pandemic struck the community, and the workers were forced to continue production in unsafe conditions, watching their colleagues get sick and die one by one. These essential workers, many of whom only speak Spanish and some of whom are illiterate—all of whom suffer the health consequences of Tyson’s negligence—somehow found the strength and courage to organize and fight back, culminating in a lawsuit against Tyson Foods, the largest meatpacking company in America.

A richly detailed, fiercely honest, and deeply reported “tour de force” (*Publishers Weekly*, starred review), *Life and Death of the American Worker* will forever change the way we think about the people who prepare our food.

## AUTHOR BIO: ALICE DRIVER

Alice Driver is a J. Anthony Lukas and James Beard Award-winning writer from the Ozark Mountains in Arkansas. Driver is the author of *Life and Death of the American Worker*, *More or Less Dead*, and the forthcoming *Artists All Around*, a memoir about her family's relationship with Maurice Sendak, the author of *Where the Wild Things Are*. She is also the translator of *Abecedario de Juárez*. She lives in the Ozark Mountains.



Photo: © Alan Carranza



### LEARN MORE ABOUT DRIVER IN THESE SELECT MEDIA INTERVIEWS:

- **[Literary Hub – American Nightmare: Alice Driver on the Immigrants Who Risked Their Lives at a Meatpacking Plant During Covid](#)**
- **[C-SPAN / Book TV – Life and Death of the American Worker](#)**
- **[Chris Voss Show – Life and Death of the American Worker](#)**
- **[WAMC Radio / The Roundtable – Alice Driver’s “Life and Death of the American Worker: The Immigrants Taking on America’s Largest Meatpacking Company”](#)**

# BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WARNING: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDE SPOILERS!

- ① How does the reliance on immigrant labor, both documented and undocumented, expose contradictions in the U.S. political and economic systems, particularly around immigration and food production?**
- ② Author Alice Driver highlights how language barriers and lack of education hinder workers' rights. How might companies and policymakers address these challenges in a meaningful way?**
- ③ What was your emotional reaction to the stories of workers like Plácido, Angelina, and Martín? Did any particular story or moment stay with you after reading?**
- ④ How did this book shift your understanding of where your food comes from and who is responsible for producing it? Did it change how you think about the meat industry or your grocery shopping habits?**
- ⑤ How did you feel reading about Tyson's lobbying efforts during the pandemic?**

THESE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WERE CREATED BY THE PUBLISHER ATRIA / ONE SIGNAL PUBLISHERS AND ARE NOT AFFILIATED WITH BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY.

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- 6** The author believes in the power of grassroots, worker-led movements like *Venceremos*. Do you share her optimism? What examples from the book gave you hope—or concern—about the possibility of change?
- 7** In what ways does this book connect with other stories you've read about labor, immigration, or corporate power? Can you draw parallels to current events or other books?
- 8** Alice Driver's writing invites readers to empathize with workers by sharing intimate details of their lives. How important is emotional connection in journalism or nonfiction?
- 9** After reading *Life and Death of the American Worker*, do you feel inspired to take any action—big or small? What could meaningful change look like at the individual, community, or national level?
- 10** Do you believe companies like Tyson should be held criminally liable for worker deaths or unsafe conditions? Why or why not?

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# BONUS CONTENT

Learn more about the immigrant experience in New York through Brooklyn Public Library:

- **POTW: The Migration of Mexican Cuisine**
- **Love Letters from David C. Hurd, a Jamaican Immigrant in Brooklyn**
- **POTW: A Mother's Immigration Story**
- **Refugees: In Their Own Words**
- **POTW: Odessa in Brooklyn**
- **POTW: Tony Velez Photographs**



***[BJHP\\_0173](#)**, 1947; Brooklyn Jewish History Project, Brooklyn Public Library, Center for Brooklyn History*



*1875, V1974.7.12; Adrian Vanderveer Martense collection; Brooklyn Historical Society.*

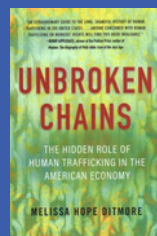
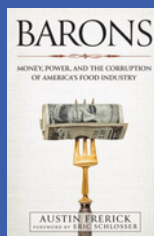
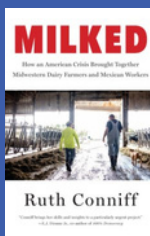
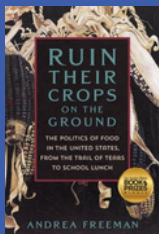
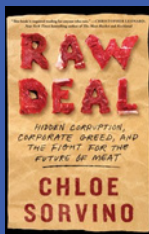
**And check out pieces about Brooklyn's culinary history:**

- [The Borough of Homes and...Oysters?](#)
- [That's Using Your Noodle](#)
- [POTW: Horse-Drawn Cart](#)
- [Brooklyn Menus](#)

# BKLYN BOOKMATCH READALIKES

Did you enjoy *Life and Death of the American Worker: The Immigrants Taking on America's Largest Meatpacking Company*? Want to read something similar? Check out these readalike titles below.

- *Raw Deal: Hidden Corruption, Corporate Greed, and the Fight for the Future of Meat* by Chloe Sorvino
- *Ruin Their Crops on the Ground: The Politics of Food in the United States from the Trail of Tears to School Lunch* by Andrea Freeman
- *Milked: How an American Crisis Brought Together Midwestern Dairy Farmers and Mexican Workers* by Ruth Conniff
- *Barons: Money, Power, and the Corruption of America's Food Industry* by Austin Frerick
- *Unbroken Chains: The Hidden Role of Human Trafficking in the American Economy* by Melissa Hope Ditmore



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