

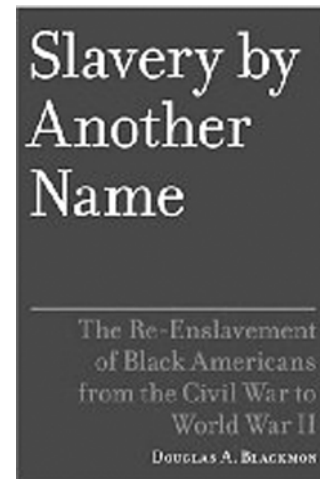
*Slavery by Another Name* by Douglas A. Blackmon

Reviewed by Gregory Brock

Biography: Greg Brock, PhD (WEB: [personal.georgiasouthern.edu/~gbrock](http://personal.georgiasouthern.edu/~gbrock)), is an associate professor of economics in Georgia Southern University's College of Business Administration. He teaches principles of economics in the School of Economic Development. Dr. Brock may be reached by email at [gbrock@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:gbrock@georgiasouthern.edu).



This book is a nice companion read to Loewen's (2005) *Sundown Towns* (<http://www.uvm.edu/~jloewen/sundowntowns.php>) as it describes the ongoing racism and enslavement of Black Americans in the deep South during the Nadir period (1890-1940) of race relations in the United States. While Loewen's book focuses on the Great Migration and Great Retreat happening outside the South, Blackmon ([www.slaverybyanothername.com](http://www.slaverybyanothername.com)) describes the enslavement of those Black Americans who remained. Both books cause one to wonder why many a middle school and high school history class don't even mention the abuse and mistreatment of the Black American labor force needed to develop states such as Georgia before WWII. By documenting the existence of slavery until 1941, Blackmon helps defeat the argument that slavery was something that happened long ago that has been overcome. Why the current life chances of imprisonment are 447% higher for Black Americans than White Americans plus death by homicide 521% higher is partly explained by cooperation of local law enforcement in maintaining slavery until 1941. The undermining of Black Americans seeking to build wealth through land and housing ownership before 1941 helps explain the current net worth gap of \$150,000 between Black American and White American households today.



The book begins by describing a typical family immediately after the Civil War and the first fruits of freedom. Throughout the book, we follow the life of one Green Cottenham as he tries to raise a family in the Deep South circa 1900. We witness the arbitrary use of ill defined "vagrancy" charges by local government and law enforcement to lock up and enslave blacks through a web of fines and penalties that they can never untangle themselves from. We visit the horrifying Pratt mines among others where long hours and frightening working conditions lead to the early death of many Black Americans forced to work there for no other reason than vagrancy. The book's 17 chapters take us through the

system of enslavement right up to the meaningless death of Mr. Cottenham and his unmarked grave.

The wealth created by this system is with us today as some of the great cities of the South such as Atlanta were developed by the wealth generated then. As the Wall Street Journal's Atlanta Bureau Chief, Blackmon is well positioned to describe (ch. 16) the use of mostly black prisoners to link Atlanta to the mines in Alabama. The mines' wealth was then used by "visionary" Atlanta developers such as Joel Hurt to create the first subdivisions and open a large bank (Trust Company Bank). Hurt was perhaps aptly named, as both he and his son George openly violated labor protection laws such as arguing that prisoners could be worked long after sundown if they were underground since it was hard to tell when the sun set down there. Hurt installed his brother-in-law Ernest Woodruff to run his streetcar company in 1893. That company evolved to today's Georgia Power Company. In 1919, Hurt ceded chairmanship of Trust Company Bank to Woodruff who, in turn, purchased Coca-Cola for \$25 million. Trust Company is today's Suntrust Bank which continues to hold much Coca-Cola stock. Woodruff's son Robert ran Coca-Cola from 1923-1954.

Blackmon discusses how some churches and even briefly the federal government 100 years ago might have dismantled the slave system, but failed in the end. By confronting Hurt with his behavior in 1908, they at least created a written record of someone who believed his slaves could never be whipped enough. Though the technological progress essential for economic growth eliminated many of the manual labor jobs that required slavery by the end of the 1930s in some industries, only the advent of WWII created the crisis atmosphere that pushed the federal government to intervene in state governments and finally end the practice. To his dismay, the author found that descendants of Hurt and others like him currently have no plans to include this history in their local museum honoring early developers of Atlanta. He wonders why today's companies are held responsible for toxic waste problems inherited through mergers and acquisitions while simultaneously are absolved of any inherited race matters. He notes that when companies such as Wachovia did acknowledge and discuss inherited race matters from "long ago" the impact on Black American employees was "profound" and "cathartic."

### The Cover Story

Title and author: *Slavery by Another Name* by Douglas A. Blackmon

Number of pages: 468

Area of Business: Economics, Ethics

Readability: Medium

Time needed to read: 3 weeks

Why should I read this book? Please use one complete sentence. (Note: "Because it teaches whatever" is not a complete sentence.)

This book describes how the economic development of Georgia and the rest of the Deep South were shaped by the use of slaves both before and after the Civil War with slavery in Georgia not really ending until 1941.

Overall Rating: 4 bulbs