

Book Review by Jerry Kinard

Title: "The Disposable American: Layoffs and their Consequences"

Author: Louis Uchitelle

Publisher: Alfred A. Knopf

Copyright date: 2006

Length: 226 pages

Reading time: 8-10 hours

Reading difficulty: 8 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Price: \$25.95

Overall rating: 1 (1 = average; 4 = excellent)

"The Disposable American" is a chilling account of employee layoffs in America and their devastating impact on individuals at all income levels. Louis Uchitelle, a writer for the *New York Times*, explains how layoffs became an initial response to foreign competition in the 1970s, and then quickly turned into routine corporate practice, destroying the concept of job security and dignity of work for millions of employees in the U.S.

This book is a compelling narrative that traces the rise of job security to the 1960s, followed by its demise soon thereafter. The author describes the impact of job loss on both executives and workers, including three chief-executive officers who managed the Stanley Works, airline mechanics who worked for United Airlines, a human resource manager at Citigroup, and a banker in Connecticut.

The author's objectives in writing "The Disposable American" are threefold: (1) to demonstrate the failure of current public policy which focuses on retraining workers for non-existent jobs, (2) to pinpoint the emotional trauma that layoffs inflict, and (3) to urge the adoption of new policies that will minimize layoffs and improve business conditions in America.

Throughout the book, the author succinctly explains how layoffs are typically counterproductive, and how they lead to outsourcing, the shifting of manufacturing jobs overseas, the loss of union security, and wage stagnation. To this end, Mr. Uchitelle does a creditable job.

Most authors who are critical of modern-day business practices merely cite the ill-effects of layoffs and business closures. Uchitelle, however, offers potential solutions to the problem. He convincingly argues that government can and should adopt policies that encourage companies to restrict layoffs and generate new jobs. Moreover, he details specific recommendations for achieving these goals which, in his opinion, will improve the economy and once again instill in workers a sense of job security and pride.

Individuals who are tired of quick-fix schemes driven by current social policy will find "The Disposable American" interesting and informative.

Jerry Kinard is Head of the Department of Management and International Business in the College of Business at Western Carolina University. For previously reviewed books, visit our web site at www.wcu.edu/cob.