



Ghosts of Tom Joad: A Story of the #99 Percent

Peter Van Buren

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A story about growth, failure, and redemption, *Ghosts of Tom Joad* traces the rise of the working poor and the don't-have-to-work-rich as it follows the fortunes of the protagonist Earl. A product of the post-Korean War era, Earl witnesses his parents' kitchen table arguments over money—echoed in thousands of other Rust Belt towns—experiences bullying, relishes first kisses, and comes of age and matures as a man before the economic hardships of the 1980s and 1990s wear on his spirit. Earl takes his turn at a variety of low-paying retail jobs in the new economy before becoming mired in homelessness and succumbing to meth, alcohol, and destitution. As he takes a final, metaphorical bus ride, Earl reflects on his past, considering the impact of the war on his father—and, subsequently, on himself—his own demise, and the romance between himself and Angel, which ultimately redeems him. This is a tale about the death of manufacturing, the deindustrialization of America, and a way of life that has been irrevocably lost. Anyone interested in the impact of political and business policy on the American Dream will be drawn to this profound, humorous, and moving novel.

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