



## Forked: A New Standard for American Dining

*Saru Jayaraman*

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## **Forked: A New Standard for American Dining** Saru Jayaraman

A restaurant critic can tell you about the chef. A menu can tell you about the farm-sourced ingredients. Now who's going to tell you about the people preparing your meal?

From James Beard Leadership Award winner Saru Jayaraman, Forked is an enlightening examination of what we don't talk about when we talk about restaurants: Is the line cook working through a case of stomach flu because he doesn't get paid sick days? Is the busser not being promoted because he speaks with an accent? Is the server tolerating sexual harassment because tips are her only income?

As most corporate restaurants continue to set low standards for worker wages and benefits, a new class of chefs and restaurateurs is working to foster sustainability in their food and their employees. Forked offers an insider's view of the highest--and lowest--scoring restaurants for worker pay and benefits in each sector of the restaurant industry, and with it, a new way of thinking about how and where we eat.

## **Forked: A New Standard for American Dining Details**

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Author : Saru Jayaraman

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## **From Reader Review Forked: A New Standard for American Dining for online ebook**

### **Mtbike40 says**

This book captured my attention and I was able to read it fairly quickly. There are parts of it that made me think, but probably not in the way the author would hope that I would. I have never worked in the restaurant business, and I am probably naive about what happens in restaurant, but I felt like this was more of the authors platform to promote the agenda of her organization than anything else.

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### **Emyrose8 says**

3.5- whew, this one took some time to read. I had to read it in small chunks because there are so many names and facts. I hadn't heard of many of the restaurants listed (lots of national chains not present in the upper Midwest and restaurants in big cities). I found much of the information repetitive. If you're short on time, just read the intro; it has a general summary of the rest of the book.

The book is broken down into chapters divided by restaurant type, each chapter talking about the industry in general, a bad example, a good example, and a case study of a worker in that industry.

The message here is important and has totally changed my view of the \$15 minimum wage (plus I want to get rid of tipping all together). But unless we get people to come together on a grand scale and businesses are open to change, I'm not sure how fast things will change.

Worth reading, though don't feel bad if you skim chapters after the intro.

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### **Rachel says**

I really like the idea behind this book and read it because I do believe that restaurant workers should not be paid by the customer and was interested in hearing the stories of individuals who appear throughout the book. However, when I got to the section about Mexican restaurants my opinion about the book and the author changed drastically. This is the chapter that the editing lapses really started to show themselves. I am very familiar with the town of Laporte, Indiana. Yes, Laporte with an "e". This is only the first example of things that I don't feel were fact-checked thoroughly along with all the rest of the grammar errors (lots of sentences throughout the book aren't coherent sentences or have spelling errors). Also, it's ironic that she bashes Taco Bell due to their numerous outbreaks of Salmonella and E. coli, but their high road restaurant is Chipotle. Whoops. I also think there is a glaring omission of one restaurant in the sandwich category: Chick-fil-A. I understand it's kind of in a category by itself with chicken sandwiches, but there's not one mention of them, even in the charts. Check the index. I don't know how they compare to the other fast food restaurants, but you can't really ignore one of the most popular and fastest growing chains in America. And they even let their employees have Sunday off! That's good, isn't it? Overall, I really wanted to like this book, but I felt like the information could just as easily come from a New York Times article and it would be edited much better (I hope).

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## **Sharon says**

Not the most engrossing book at all times but informative and reminds you to think about the people who work in the restaurants you eat at. I don't think anyone was under the assumption that you could live on a McDonalds or Starbucks wage but what I did not know was how many who are trying to. Part of me assumed that those who work there are students who don't need it to pay for food and housing. Wrong. And I didn't think about some of the small towns that might only have chain/fast food places and Walmart. That does force people to work there to have a job and they need better money and working conditions.

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## **Vince Darcangelo says**

<http://ensuingchapters.com/2016/02/23...>

Having spent nearly half of my working life in restaurants, I was excited to read Jayaraman's defense of the American service worker — especially since I was once employed by two of what she considers to be two of the worst employers in the biz: Olive Garden and Red Lobster.

Many of the back-of-the-house anecdotes in Forked are all too familiar to me, but Jayaraman, through her research and foundation, Restaurant Opportunities Center, augments these tales with stats and studies and facts that I, even as a fairly well-informed server/bartender/cook/dishwasher, didn't realize. These include the history of the tipped economy and why it has lost favor in much of the world and that the federal minimum wage has remained at \$2.13 an hour for nearly a quarter-century for those living off gratuities.

Jayaraman argues that the industry and its workers remain handcuffed by mid-1990s legislation put forth by Herman Cain, the National Restaurant Association, and Darden Restaurants, the largest restaurant company in the world. Darden's flagship chain is the Olive Garden, and until 2014 it also owned Red Lobster.

Of the restaurants where I've worked, Darden's were actually the nicest, which is more commentary on the sad state of the industry than a compliment to Darden. Jayaraman has an even lower opinion of their stores. In each section of Forked, she profiles a company taking the high road in its treatment of workers and a company taking the low road.

Not even unlimited cheddar bay biscuits could salvage a passing grade for Darden.

For me, the most illuminating aspect of Jayaraman's manifesto is her discussion of sexual harassment. Now, it's no secret (I don't think) that restaurants are sexually charged work milieus. They are also an intersection of diverse populations. The back of the house, in my experience, was a mix of drifters, creative types, future scholars and criminals. Many of my co-workers went on to earn advanced degrees. Many of them came to work wearing house arrest anklets.

Meanwhile, the front of the house was mostly staffed by young women, some of them still in high school, who drew the salacious humor and advances of the boys' club on the line. Some of it was naive or good-natured (I'm thinking of the potty humor and clumsy communication of teenaged boys), but some of it was creepy and misogynistic.

And all of it was inappropriate in the workplace, which is why I haven't witnessed much of it since leaving the restaurant industry.

But even with this knowledge, Jayaraman's research was alarming. Consider, she argues, that for millions of young women, hosting or waiting tables is their first job. "It is the industry through which they learn what is tolerable and acceptable in the workplace."

She backs this up with data (higher rates of sexual harassment in states paying tipped workers differently from non-tipped workers) and anecdotally (women who failed to report sexual harassment in later employment because, compared to what they'd endured, "it was never as bad as it was" in restaurants).

But for all there is to recommend Forked, there is a bias that must be acknowledged. The book promotes the work of ROC, a nonprofit co-founded by Jayaraman, and lacks the outsider perspective of books like Nickel and Dimed and Fast Food Nation.

While this bias is worth keeping in mind, it doesn't discredit her argument — her research and data are still valid, just maybe not as comprehensive as that of independent lab testing.

That only slightly tempers my enthusiasm for this book. Forked is well-written and informative, and I think it's a must-read for American diners — especially if they've never known the joy of cleaning out the deep fryer.

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### **Sharon says**

Oxford University Press and NetGalley provided me with an electronic copy of Forked, in exchange for an honest review.

As the founder of Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC), dedicated to raising wages and working conditions within the restaurant community, author Saru Jayaraman gives an insider view to the not so pretty parts of the industry. From low pay, to inadequate benefits, to lack of promotion opportunities, and to gender inequality, the author does an excellent job of bringing these important issues to light. Gouged or "forked" by an industry focused on feeding people, the reality is that a good portion of those who work in restaurants are unable to feed their own families without public assistance. The author wrote this book, not only to highlight the problems in the industry, but to also shed a positive light on those working to affect real change.

Forked is, at times, like a guidebook, as the author has evaluated some standout restaurants and some that are severely lacking. Part history lesson, whereas the author delves into the past, this book should serve as a cautionary tale for those looking to enter the industry. The biggest lesson that I have taken away from Forked is that change needs to not only come from new legislation and regulation, but also from within the industry itself. This book is very eye opening and I recommend it to all readers, whether you are a consumer or part of the very dysfunctional restaurant world.

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### **Michael says**

A book club colleague mentioned that the book could have used some more editing. I exclaimed "You too?"

I'm not the only one? I thought someone would proofread? A friend? A family member? An editor?!" The introduction states that a restaurant that meets three criteria out of four will get one star, and one that meets four criteria out of four will get two stars, however, when I saw the first table (and this is true for all of the tables throughout), restaurants that met two criteria got one star and three criteria got two stars. I couldn't help but to be jaded with the author's intended points of view thereafter. Then, I loved the ruling that the NLRB gave McDonald's in 2104. Yes, that says 2104. Is this a time travel sci-fi novel or a non-fiction book about serious issues? Editing mistakes damage the reliability of the content, especially when trying to make a point using statistical evidence.

That being said, I admire (and don't disagree with) the author's goal to achieving better conditions and benefits for restaurant workers. I don't know what the correct answers are, but it is good to start the conversation.

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### **Jessica says**

There are TONS of books about the evils of industrial food production, but *Forked* looks as another evil in the food industry - how cooks and wait staff are mistreated and underpaid. I think people expect that in the fast food industry, but in many mid-level and higher-end restaurants the wait staff are barely getting by and your food might be prepared by someone with the flu because most restaurant staff don't get paid sick leave and can't afford to not come in to work. I liked how the author broke down the book by type of restaurant to show that good and bad can be in any price level or type of restaurant. In each chapter she talks about that type of restaurant and then gives both a good and bad example restaurant. The author also talks a lot about the Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC) that she co-founded and co-directs that helps encourage and support long-term, sustainable changes to the restaurant industry and how its workers are treated. This is definitely an eye-opening look at an aspect of the restaurant industry.

Some quotes I liked:

"In fact, the restaurant industry is the single largest source of sexual-harassment complaints to the EEOC of any industry in the United States. Seven percent of American women work in restaurants, but 37 percent of all sexual harassment complaints to the EEOC come from the restaurant industry." (p. 11)

"Eighty percent of the almost seven hundred restaurant workers surveyed reported experiencing sexual harassment in their restaurant workplace, and 50 percent experience sexual behaviors that were scary or unwanted. Worst of all, women in states that paid the tipped-worker minimum (often \$2.13 an hour) experienced *twice* the rate of sexual harassment from customers as they did in states that paid the same wage to tipped and nontipped workers...In sum: our research showed that when workers were not reliant on customers for a base wage, they were less likely to be sexually harassed." (p. 38)

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### **Keelan says**

This book raises important points about how the restaurant industry (through the National Restaurant Association, which the author refers to as the "Other NRA") lobbies Congress to create legislation that enables them to treat restaurant workers terribly. The main issue is wages--did you know that the federal minimum wage for tipped workers has been \$2.13 / hours for almost 25 years? Seven states (California,

Oregon, Washington, Montana, Alaska, Nevada, and Minnesota) have addressed this by implementing equal minimum wages for tipped and non-tipped workers at the state level (with no negative economic consequences)--if you live in a state that isn't on this list, I would encourage you to lobby your state representatives to enact similar legislation. In addition to wages, the book also details how other aspects of restaurant work make it impossible for the workers to live decent lives; some of these include the lack of paid sick days, dynamic, algorithm-driven scheduling practices that create completely schedules on a weekly basis (think about trying to schedule childcare in this situation), and lack of opportunity to be promoted. One great aspect of the book is that, in addition to outlining all of these problems, the author also provides detailed profiles of restaurants (mostly local ones, but also a few chains) that have implemented better policies for their workers; it is nice to see examples of how these more worker-friendly approaches can also coexist with financial success.

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### **Bookfan says**

While the book was very effective in highlighting the appalling working conditions and pay practices for workers in the food service industry, I'm not sure there's much value in comparing a fast food chain to artisanal stand-alone (for the most part) restaurants. Congratulations to chains like Chipotle for proving that the cause is not hopeless, though. I wish there could have been a few more of those discussed, but the sad truth is that there probably aren't very many. This book will make you think twice about the businesses you patronize.

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### **Terry ~ Huntress of Erudition says**

Very well researched and a thoughtful presentation of the history of the restaurant service industry and the treatment of employees - I found it interesting because I was a food server and cocktail waitress for a few years during college and afterwards. I found the chapter on Chipotle especially interesting because my son was a kitchen manager and service manager for over 2 years there and he confirmed what was written was accurate.

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### **Killian says**

I requested this book a while ago, and somehow between being approved for it and actually starting to read it I had convinced myself that this was a book about the history of the fork. As in the dining utensil.

Yeah, let me go ahead and disappoint everyone by telling you that no... Not even close. My bad.

This book was written by Saru Jayaraman who is the Co-Founder/Co-Director for ROC (aka Restaurant Opportunities Centers United) which is an organization promoting fair and equal treatment, living wages, and paid sick leave for food service workers, among other efforts.

This book reads like a pamphlet or convention speech about the "high road" companies that ROC considers to exemplify their ideals, and the "low road" companies that make some missteps. Each chapter centers around a different style of restaurant (Mexican, Coffee Shops, Diners, etc) and uses one example from each "road" as well as a story from someone who works there.

Personally, I found this to be very similar to reading propaganda, though I don't mean that in a negative way. It was just painfully obvious that the stories and examples were cherry picked to highlight ROC's goals. In the intro Jayaraman says that she isn't doing this to reprimand the "low road" companies, just to highlight what they can do better, but it really just comes off as scolding in places. I also had some issues with the stories that were used.

For example, in the coffee shops chapter she uses Starbucks as the low road company, and uses a story from a former barista to highlight issues that didn't seem like they had any place in the narrative she was trying to present. The workers had to use direct deposit or a supplied debit card and the debit card company was hard to deal with (at best this is a supplier problem since most corporations do this now), she thought there weren't enough non-whites that worked there but had no actual proof of racism, and she didn't think that she was being paid for sick leave when she took it but never looked at her pay stubs so she wasn't actually sure. None of these were issues the author brought up in the intro to the chapter as things they needed to improve upon so it ended up just feeling like the author putting in gripes from a former employee just to make then look a little bit worse. See what I mean?

Anyway, this was an interesting read since it brought up a lot of issues I knew about having attained a hospitality degree, but never had to deal with due to my choice of working in hotels instead of restaurants, partly because of these problems. This would be a great read for someone who is thinking about opening or owns a restaurant so you can take the "high road" and I feel like that is probably the whole reason it was written. Not as a book to sell well, but more as one to give to potential members of ROC.

*Copy courtesy of Oxford University Press, via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.*

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### **April says**

In the ever-growing interest in ethical consumerism (an oxymoron, I know), here is a book to help the average person "vote with their wallet" by becoming informed on the restaurant industry. The most interesting statistics and insights are given away in the introduction: 43 states have legislated for a \$2.13 minimum wage for tipped workers, the National Restaurant Association is a corporate lobbying monster and 70% of all traceable stomach viruses can be directly linked to a sick food handler on the job (no sick leave leaves no recourse). Good food for thought, makes me want to tip more generously, but overall not terribly surprising that companies like Taco Bell, Denny's and Starbucks have horrible labor practices.

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### **Jessica says**

Important book but there are some major factual errors/over simplifications that their editor should have caught.

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### **Margaret Sankey says**

Jayaraman uses case studies to show that treating restaurant employees decently and paying them more than the long-frozen tipped minimum wage saves money on turnover and training, and that not making subsistence workers dependent on tolerating the horrendous behavior of bad customers is good for everyone.

