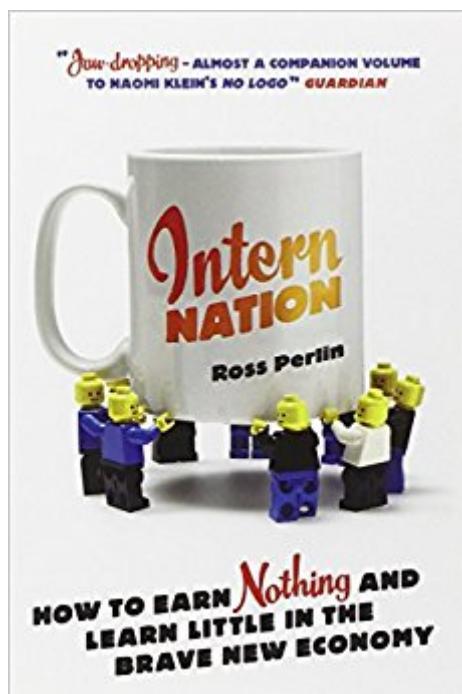


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# Intern Nation: How To Earn Nothing And Learn Little In The Brave New Economy



## Synopsis

Millions of young people— and increasingly some not-so-young people— now work as interns. They famously shuttle coffee in a thousand magazine offices, legislative backrooms, and Hollywood studios, but they also deliver aid in Afghanistan, map the human genome, and pick up garbage. *Intern Nation* is the first exposé of the exploitative world of internships. In this witty, astonishing, and serious investigative work, Ross Perlin profiles fellow interns, talks to academics and professionals about what unleashed this phenomenon, and explains why the intern boom is perverting workplace practices around the world. The hardcover publication of this book precipitated a torrent of media coverage in the US and UK, and Perlin has added an entirely new afterword describing the growing focus on this woefully underreported story. Insightful and humorous, *Intern Nation* will transform the way we think about the culture of work.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

How many interns does it take to screw in a light bulb? Who cares, it's free. If that joke triggers cringe-inducing memories of schlepping coffee, Perlin, an intern turned intern activist, is your man. His exposé on the internship model initiates a critical conversation on internships— when are they exploitative and when are they necessary? can they help you land your dream job?— and his thoughtful book is necessary reading for the millions of young people trying to break into the working world through internships. Perlin begins by casting a harsh light on Disney World's massive internship program, the Disney College Program, a so-called "educational

experience" that is, in reality, a revolving door bringing in thousands of undergraduates— even high school students—who keep the Disney Magic alive by performing menial labor for meager wages. Perlin's exposé of Disney demonstrates his eye for irony as well as his gift for engaging the reader with a steady stream of insight, humor, and well-deployed anecdotes. Perlin pivots from Disney villains to the evolution of the internship, a word borrowed from the French term "interne" used to describe junior medical men performing simple physician's tasks. He compares and contrasts internships with the fading practice of apprenticeships, investments of time and labor that actually gave young people a foothold in an industry, and reveals how the internship trend represents a change in how individuals conceive of work and their role in the economy. Perlin also teases out the class issues inherent in the intern debate— many young people who must support themselves simply cannot afford to take on an unpaid internship, no matter how great a career opportunity it might be. But Perlin's most shocking revelation isn't that many internships are exploitative but that most are illegal. Companies of all sizes and across industries flout (with no consequences) the requirements outlined in the Fair Labor Standards Act to benefit from free labor. Perlin covers the complicity of colleges, many offering dubious internship programs aimed more at generating revenue for the school than benefiting students. Not even the federal government's massive, intensely competitive internship programs escape Perlin's scorn; he describes them as a hotbed of nepotism and squandered talent—but still, the right government internship is an all but necessary career step for an aspiring politician. Fortunately, Perlin also offers hope and bright solutions, and ends the book with an Intern Bill of Rights and the observation that "a general strike of all interns would show all they contribute for the first time a delicious low-level chaos to the world's work." By Ben Zarov  
Ben Zarov is an intern at Publishers Weekly, a graduate of Grinnell College, and an urban explorer. (c)

Interns built the pyramids, the great magazine *The Baffler* once declared. And that was just the beginning of their labors, as Ross Perlin demonstrates in this fascinating and overdue exposé of the wage labor without wages, the resumé-building servitude, at the heart of contemporary capitalism. • Benjamin Kunkel, a founding editor of *n+1* and author of the novel *Indecision* • A book that offers landmark coverage of its topic. • Andrew Ross, *London Review of Books* • Perlin contends that most internships are illegal, according to the Fair Labor and Standards Act, stripping people who are employees in all but name of workers' rights. • *New Yorker* • A

portrait of how white-collar work is changing ... thought-provoking and at times jaw-dropping. •almost a companion volume to Naomi Klein's celebrated 2000 exposé of modern sweatshops, *No Logo*. •Andy Beckett, *Guardian* A compelling investigation of a trend that threatens to destroy what's left of the ordered world of training, hard work and fair compensation ... Full of restrained force and wit, this is a valuable book on a subject that demands attention. •Anna Winter, *Observer* "[An] eye-opening, welcome exposé." •Sunday Times "This vigorous and persuasive book ... argues that the fundamental issue is the growing contingency of the global workforce." •Roger D. Hodge, *Bookforum* "Organizations in America save \$2 billion a year by not paying interns a minimum wage, writes Ross Perlin in *Intern Nation*. •Economist "Well-researched and timely." •Daily Telegraph "[E]ye-opening ... The book tackles a sprawling topic with earnestness and flair." •Katy Waldman, *Washington Post* "Perlin ... has an eye for polemical effectiveness." •Times Literary Supplement "A timely book addressing the exploitation of the nation's younger workforce under the guise of the internship model." •Most Anticipated Books of Spring 2011, *Huffington Post* "A serious and extremely well-written text that offers sophisticated historical material about the origins of internship and its impact on the individuals concerned, the firms that use it and the world of work more generally. •Cary L. Cooper, *Times Higher Education* "Perlin's attempt to understand internships as a symptom of wider trends in the economy ... makes the book such a fascinating read." •Spectator "When you are competing for jobs during a recession, the only thing worse than being exploited can be not being exploited. Yes, many internships are really crummy, but then some of them do ultimately lead to something ... which is why, when people have no access to internships at all, it makes them invisible." •Ross Perlin speaking to Kaya Burgess, *Times of London* "Perlin dissects the employment practices of some of the world's biggest corporations, including Disney, which he accuses of replacing well-trained, decently compensated full-timers with an army of low-paid interns. But for employers that approach recruitment strategically, internships are typically a cost •albeit one they hope will pay off in better, happier recruits." •Financial Times "[Perlin's] exposé on the internship model initiates a critical conversation on internships ... his thoughtful book is necessary reading for the millions of young people trying to break into the working world through internships." •Publishers

Weekly. "That fact that it took this long for someone to write this book seems as blatantly wrong as the practice itself. Perlin provides a welcome, long-overdue and much-needed argument." Kirkus Reviews "Perlin's writing is engaging and the questions he raises are valid ones in an increasingly competitive job market." Library Journal "[A] blistering, highly entertaining attack on today's internship culture." Boston Globe "Cloaked in the innocent idea of the intern, aggressive employers are using young people trying to get a foothold to weaken the leverage of existing workers, especially professionals. Ross Perlin gives us an account of another subterranean strategy to undermine working people in the US." Frances Fox Piven, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Sociology at the Graduate Center, CUNY "Alas, the valuable internship institution is being widely and flagrantly abused, as Ross Perlin demonstrates in this eye-opening book. A huge chunk of the American workplace has been distorted in an unhealthy way, and Perlin provides not only the diagnosis but the beginnings of a prescription." James Ledbetter, editor in charge of Reuters.com, and author of Unwarranted Influence "The world has been waiting for this book. It's lucky that someone as thoughtful and politically aware as Ross Perlin was there to write it." Anya Kamenetz, author of Generation Debt and DIY U "Few books have been written about the effect of internships, so this short book will be eye-opening for many. Students and parents should add it their reading lists." Repps Hudson, St. Louis Post-Dispatch "For critics such as Ross Perlin, author of Intern Nation, unpaid labor harms everyone in the labor market." Alexandra Alper, Reuters "Intern Nation provides a wide-angle overview of an international system of labor subsidization masked as career opportunity." indeed, as a de rigueur component of baccalaureate and even postgraduate degree work, without which a young person cannot hope to secure a gratifying and adequately remunerative professional career in the twenty-first century." Cecelia Tichi, Academe Magazine "[A] scathing look at the internship culture" ... Washingtonian "[Intern Nation] tracks how the explosion of internships in creative fields changed the entry level of many industries." New York Times Critic's Notebook

Although Perlin wasn't the first to opine on the flaws (to put it nicely) of our current internship culture/economy, INTERN NATION has contributed mightily to a national discussion that continues to this day about the place of young people in the 21st century economy. There's a reason the book

has attracted a lot of attention: It takes a phenomenon that's felt everywhere, defines its scope, and, perhaps most importantly, shows the very real, very human effects it's had. That's a good enough reason to pick it up. But there's a second reason it deserves your time: Perlin's professor-meets-trickster voice, which makes **INTERN NATION** not just an informative read, but also an entertaining one.

The book was thin and in excellent condition. It is a quick, easy read. I could relate to some of the subjects (interns) who were written about in this book (I had three unpaid internships). I did not know of the awful conditions some interns in other fields endure to gain invaluable experience while the companies profit by not having to pay interns any salary/hourly wages and benefits. I recommend reading this book especially if you have been an intern or if you are considering being an intern for the first time.

I first heard the author on National Public Radio and was intrigued by the insight and expose like qualities of their work. As an internship director at a 4 year college that has set up internship programs outside of academia I bought the book in anticipation of new perspectives on internships I had not considered or been exposed to. Prosl found the investigation quite revealing especially when issues touched on social justice like access and equal opportunity. For example there are student populations that cannot access internship because they work to get through school and little or no financial support from their families. Even our service veterans cannot always afford to do internships. Perlin does a good job identifying some of these important issues that I confess had escaped me before reading these insights. I have experienced the financial incentives companies see for themselves using interns and there have been unscrupulous companies that have sought to benefit themselves at the expense of our students. We don't do business with these entities anymore. Perlin did a good job lifting up the carpet on this and I did feel it was quite true for many small businesses that the reason for the internship was to lower labor costs and advantage themselves with no guarantee of on the job learning taking place. Essentially they talk up the experience but don't do much to create real value for students. Cons The tone is a little bitter and twisted and I found it consistently so throughout the text. More solutions were needed. I found it was like Perlin shouted alarm and then ran from the scene. I would have preferred more provocative ideas about how to make internships better; more case studies of when companies and non-profit organizations do a good job. I was not looking for a balanced approach but I did expect more examples of best practice to learn from. The final chapters on the internship bill of rights and the

right for payments was interesting but at the time of writing on the wrong side of history. Overall The author got me thinking, I reviewed my own work and that of my colleagues and it made me aware to be an advocate for best practices aligned with those supported by the National society for Experiential Education. It was useful and I have it in my office for reference.

For people looking to get started , the whole premise is short sighted, and makes it appear that it is not even worth trying to do an internship. Of course, then how do you get a job ever.

It's about time. Quietly, so-called "internships" have been increasingly replacing real jobs with real pay and benefits with faux pas "jobs" that do the same exact work as their full-time co-workers. What their full-time counterparts are not realizing is, in the big picture, their own jobs are being undermined, downgraded and diluted by having essentially full-time "volunteers" do the same work for virtually free. This makes the workplace an even tougher place for workers to compete, meaning less bargaining power, lower wages, more expensive group insurance rates, lower morale, (especially in unionized workplaces), and the big-time employers are loving every penny of it, laughing all the way to the bank!Imagine people actually PAYING YOU TO WORK FOR YOU! That's what many internships are, in essence.What's more ironic is that the "internships" that used to be a "foot in the door" towards real employment with a major company has become the very stumbling block towards real employment that the student worker seeks. The carrot on the end of the corporate stick has gotten smaller and much further away.It's a real eye-opener!

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