

10/15/2014

**SPARE PARTS**
**Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream**
**Author: Joshua Davis**

**Review Issue Date:** October 15, 2014
**Online Publish Date:** October 8, 2014
**Publisher:** *Farrar, Straus and Giroux*
**Pages:** *240*
**Price ( Hardcover ):** *$25.00*
**Price ( Paperback ):** *$14.00*
**Publication Date:** December 2, 2014
**ISBN ( Hardcover ):** *978-0-374-18337-0*
**ISBN ( Paperback ):** *978-0-374-53498-1*
**Category:** Nonfiction

The story of four high schoolers from the wrong side of Phoenix who built a robot, entered it in a national competition that included such prestigious schools as MIT, and won.Wired contributing editor and Epic magazine co-founder Davis explores the lives of four teenagers who could have easily fallen through the cracks but instead managed to channel their creative energy into a preposterous victory in a much-regarded robotic competition. The author lets the narrative grow organically: Nothing came easily; brainstorms didn't save the day, but ingenuity did; there was anger, poverty and neglect, as well as the quandary of U.S. immigration policy, which, when this drama was taking place, 2004, was actively spawning xenophobic vigilante groups. "[S]tudents who were living in the country illegally could be sought out and detained...Even a seemingly harmless summer science competition bore life-altering risks," writes Davis. There were also intergroup struggles that had to be overcome, as the author rightly points out that since these boys didn't have deep pockets, they had to fall back on cooperation and ingenuity and the help, guidance and advice of two mentors. There were also a few angels in the picture, scientists who lent their valuable equipment and wisdom to the project; they didn't give the boys the answers, but they helped point them in the right direction. Always hovering in the background of the story, and often intruding to the front of the action, is the Border Patrol, as well as "the tractor-beam pull of poverty and low expectations." This is the everyday life of the illegal immigrant, but these immigrants are trying to win the Marine Advanced Technology Education Robotics Competition. What motivated those involved and what impressed the judges was "that there was no reason to come up with a complex solution when an elementary one would suffice." Well-handled by Davis: both heart gladdening and a challenge to start making sense of national immigration policy.