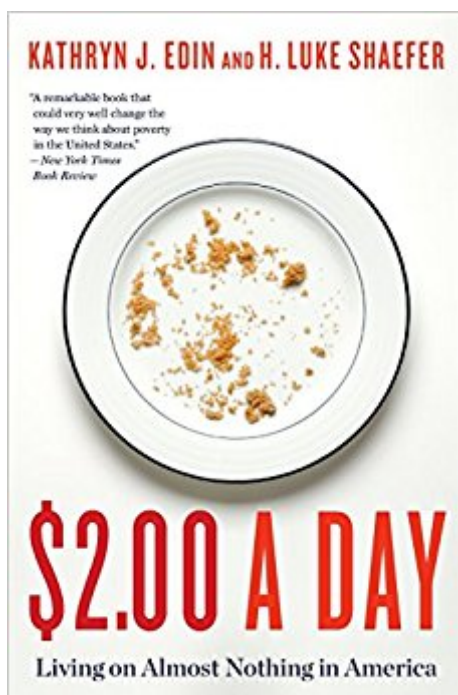


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# \$2.00 A Day: Living On Almost Nothing In America



## Synopsis

A New York Times Notable Book of the Year—“A remarkable book that could very well change the way we think about poverty in the United States.” • New York Times Book Review—“Powerful . . . Presents a deeply moving human face that brings the stunning numbers to life. It is an explosive book . . . The stories will make you angry and break your heart.” • American Prospect—“Jessica Compton’s family of four would have no income if she didn’t donate plasma twice a week at her local donation center in Tennessee. Modonna Harris and her teenage daughter, Brianna, in Chicago, often have no food but spoiled milk on weekends. After two decades of brilliant research on American poverty, Kathryn Edin noticed something she hadn’t seen before—households surviving on virtually no cash income. Edin teamed with Luke Shaefer, an expert on calculating incomes of the poor, to discover that the number of American families living on \$2.00 per person, per day, has skyrocketed to one and a half million households, including about three million children. Where do these families live? How did they get so desperately poor? Through this book’s eye-opening analysis and many compelling profiles, moving and startling answers emerge. \$2.00 a Day delivers new evidence and new ideas to our national debate on income inequality.” • “Harrowing . . . [An] important and heart-rending book, in the tradition of Michael Harrington’s The Other America.” • Los Angeles Times

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“A remarkable book that could very well change the way we think about poverty in the

United States . . . This essential book is a call to action, and one hopes it will accomplish what Michael Harrington's *The Other Americans* achieved in the late 1960s—arousing both the nation's consciousness and conscience about the plight of a growing number of invisible citizens. The rise of such absolute poverty since the passage of welfare reform belies all the categorical talk about opportunity and the American dream.

The New York Times Book Review "With any luck (calling Bernie Sanders) this important book will spark election year debate over how America cares for its most vulnerable."

Mother Jones "Affluent Americans often cherish the belief that poverty in America is far more comfortable than poverty in the rest of the world. Edin and Shaefer's devastating account of life at \$2 or less a day blows that myth out of the water. This is world class poverty at a level that should mobilize not only national alarm, but international attention."

Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *Nicked and Dimed* "In *\$2.00 A Day*, Kathy Edin and Luke Shaefer reveal a shameful truth about our prosperous nation: many far too many get by on what many of us spend on coffee each day. It's a chilling book, and should be essential reading for all of us."

Alex Kotlowitz, author of *There Are No Children Here* "Kathryn Edin and Luke Shaefer deliver an incisive pocket history of 1990s welfare reform and then blow the lid off what has happened in the decades afterward. Edin's and Shaefer's portraits of people in Chicago, Mississippi, Tennessee, Baltimore, and more forced into underground, damaging survival strategies, here in first-world America, are truly chilling. This is income inequality in America at its most stark and most hidden."

Michael Eric Dyson, author of *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* "Kathryn Edin and Luke Shaefer, with compelling statistics and wrenching human stories, illustrate how—with incomes far below the pay of low-wage jobs that cripples families by the millions—a shocking number of Americans live in an almost unimaginable depth of poverty, with near-zero incomes. We have let the bottom go out of the American economy. This powerful book should be required reading for everyone."

Peter Edelman, Carmack Waterhouse Professor of Law, Georgetown Law Center and author, *So Rich So Poor: Why It's So Hard to End Poverty in America* "This searing look at extreme poverty deftly mixes policy research and heartrending narratives... Mixing academic seriousness and deft journalistic storytelling, this work may well move readers to positive action."

Publishers Weekly, starred review "An eye-opening account of the lives ensnared in the new poverty cycle."

Kirkus Reviews "A close-up, heartbreaking

look at rising poverty and income inequality in the U.S. • Booklist

A revelatory account of a kind of poverty so extreme, and so often hidden, most Americans don't think it exists. Jessica Compton's family of four would have no income if she didn't donate plasma twice a week at her local donation center in Tennessee. Modonna Harris and her teenage daughter Brianna, in Chicago, have gone for days with nothing to eat other than spoiled milk. After two decades of groundbreaking research on American poverty, Kathryn Edin noticed something she hadn't seen: households surviving on virtually no cash income. Edin, whose deep examination of her subjects' lives has turned sociology upside down ("Mother Jones"), teamed with Luke Shaefer, an expert on surveys of the incomes of the poor. The two made a surprising discovery: the number of American families living on \$2.00 per person, per day, has skyrocketed to one and a half million American households, including about three million children. But the fuller story remained to be told. Where do these families live? How did they get so desperately poor? What do they do to survive? In search of answers, Edin and Shaefer traveled across the country to speak with families living in this extreme poverty. Through the book's many compelling profiles, moving and startling answers emerge: a low-wage labor market that increasingly fails to deliver a living wage, and a growing but hidden landscape of survival strategies among America's extreme poor. Not just a powerful expose, "\$2.00 a Day" delivers new evidence and new ideas to our national debate on income inequality.

This book makes me want to thank my mother, profusely, for everything she did for me/us while I was growing up. Until reading this exposé, I hadn't really realized that some of her own strategies \*were\* actually strategies -- I just thought that, for example, going to the library a few times a week was what everyone did. It also made me think to the time I spent living in the Bronx during grad school (yes!), making dismal adjunct wages relative to New York City living conditions. My neighbors would occasionally see me out reading on my stoop -- not making dinner --, and one family in particular paid special attention: even though the 3 of them (a mother, father, and teenage daughter) lived in a one-bedroom apartment, they often brought me a plate of whatever meal they had made. I knew that they did not have much, but of course to refuse the meal would be rude (and besides, the food was hearty and delicious). Since meeting them, I have had a soft spot for the supposed "lazy" people who get government subsidies. Some, like the family I knew, made do fairly well with what they had. Others, such as the people featured in this book, could only \*wish\* they had enough food to share. In some senses, \$2 A Day preaches to the choir; it's likely that those who are buying and reading the book 1) aren't in the position of its case studies, 2) already know there's a

problem with how America's poor are "dealt with," and 3) are already fairly sympathetic to the issues that this volume addresses. But in many other ways, the book is, not to sound too cliché, a revelation. For one, the notion that "we, as a country, aren't spending less on poor families than we once did. ... In fact, we now spend much more" struck me in particular, and signals that the very readership the book probably targets are also probably the most able and willing to address the problems. While the book sometimes veers into moderately-lengthy analyses of government policies, which might tire some readers, I feel that it presents a good mixture between these and the case studies showing these policies "at work," so to speak. I don't think this book will be the next Freshman Read, but I do think it can hold its own in the roster of readable sociology texts for perhaps the next decade. (Hopefully, the next book coming out won't present a worse picture of things.) If anything, it makes one think about what one has, or hasn't had.

This book is frightening, informative and depressing. Realizing that there is no longer any safety net for the poorest Americans and that a huge number of families of the working poor suffer unimaginable depravition on a daily basis was shocking to me even though I have taught inner city children for several years. I never realized what life is like for the rural poor where even good banks are often unavailable. Thought provoking and at the same time giving hope that Solutions do exist.

We don't tend to think of the working poor as living at the extreme poverty levels shown in \$2.00 a Day, but it's something we, as citizens, and our government certainly should. This book shows how shocking it is that those who are willing and able to work often can't pull themselves out of poverty due to unavailability of decent work, of practices that make saving or even paying for daily expenses possible, and the underground economy that pays penny on the dollar for the few benefits the US government still allows. Essential reading for anyone wishing to make a difference to the state of poverty in America

This book is excellent. Of all people to kick the poor people when they are down leave it to Bill and Hillary who OVERTURNED a 60 year law that was lifting up the poor for decades. Wow. If you bless the poor as an individual then you are blessed by God as an individual. Therefore, who can argue against----- if we bless the poor as a nation then God will bless us as a nation???? It's Psalm 41:1-3. It's in the Bible people. The cuts affect children the most because many single moms have more than one kid. So if you got 15 million on welfare ---- 5 million are moms and 10 million are kids, roughly. You gotta think about who you are starving out. It were better for a millstone to be hung

around your neck than to harm some of these kids (Math. 18:6). If you loan to the poor it costs you nothing. Nothing because God pays it back and then some (Prov. 19:17) - both to individuals and nations. Granted If you don't work--- you don't eat, but for single moms raising kids is a job in itself and the only job they should have to worry about. Able bodied adult males is a different story. Welfare reform cut off single moms in the millions. It's fruit is untold misery and its initiators were unmerciful.

I'm not finished reading this book, but so far I am finding the stories very compelling. I'm learning that people who are very poor, such as the ones written about in this book, were very likely born very poor. These are people who live in food deserts, have little access to transportation, who, despite their limitations, work or try to work. I wish it were required reading for policy makers everywhere, to let them know what effect continuing cuts to aid is having on vulnerable populations.

A look into the often overlooked deeply impoverished population scraping by every day. Reviews changes in America's social welfare programs that left that sector of society completely unprotected and vulnerable to malicious exploitation. Shares heartbreaking stories of interviewees from the research. Offers ideas for how to revise currently failing welfare policies.

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