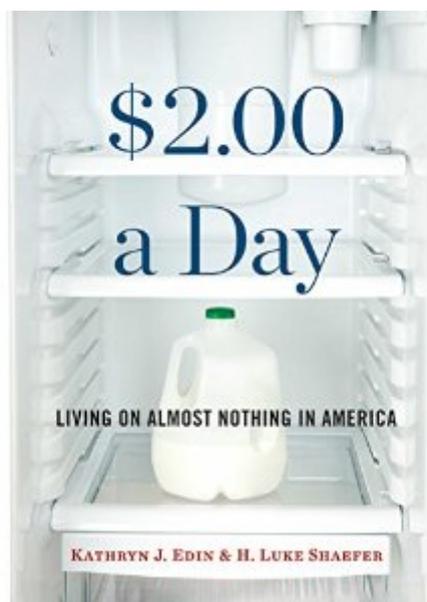


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# \$2.00 A Day: Living On Almost Nothing In America



## Synopsis

We have made great steps toward eliminating poverty around the world - extreme poverty has declined significantly and seems on track to continue to do so in the next decades. Jim Yong Kim of the World Bank estimates that extreme poverty can be eliminated in 17 years. This is clearly cause for celebration. However, this good news can make us oblivious to the fact that there are, in the United States, a significant and growing number of families who live on less than \$2.00 per person, per day. That figure, the World Bank measure of poverty, is hard to imagine in this country - most of us spend more than that before we get to work or school in the morning. In *\$2.00 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*, Kathryn Edin and Luke Schaefer introduce us to people like Jessica Compton, who survives by donating plasma as often as 10 times a month and spends hours with her young children in the public library so she can get access to an Internet connection for job-hunting; and like Modonna Harris who lost the cashier's job she had held for years, for the sake of \$7.00 misplaced at the end of the day. They are the would-be working class, with hundreds of job applications submitted in recent months and thousands of work hours logged in past years. Twenty years after William Julius Wilson's *When Work Disappears*, it's still all about the work. But as Edin and Schaefer illuminate through incisive analysis and indelible human story, the combination of a government safety net built on the ability to work and a low-wage labor market increasingly designed not to deliver a living wage has delivered a vicious one-two punch to the would-be working poor. More than a powerful expose of a troubling trend, *\$2.00 a Day* delivers new evidence and new ideas to our central national debate on work, income inequality, and what to do about it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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. ...

I wanted to champion this book. I've lived beneath the poverty level my entire adult life. In fact, for most of the 1980s I lived on \$80 a month food stamps, and daily trips to the mission for food. I'm one of the very worst examples of what Reagan's dismantling of social benefits has done to this country. I've seen abject poverty, and know its misery. Once I read this book, I was appalled at the manner in which Kathryn Edin portrayed destitute poverty. Although I found the actual sociological information about the rise of the welfare system, along with its fall, quite helpful, that's not what this book is mostly about. Nor does it offer many viable solutions to this problem, if solutions are even to be hoped for. Instead, the book is overfilled with the most outlandish collection of hard luck stories, uttered by people, the majority of whom, come across as sociopaths. Why did she choose these people, and voice their tales in such over the top, tear jerker vocabulary? Far from feeling empathy for the poor, after reading this book, you're more likely to walk away thinking that people who live on

\$2 a day for food, do so due to their own irresponsibility and poor life choices. Edin herself uses language that would validate the worst anti-welfare, "Nanny State" rhetoric of the most viscous Fox News commentator. I honestly wonder if this book wasn't intended as reverse propaganda, to end welfare, rather than promote some ideas on how to help these people by expanding the entitlement programs. If you look at some of the other reviews, you'll notice others who question these characters Edin describes in her book. The first example I might make, is a young woman named Modonna. She had a job at a cash register for 7 years, but one day came up short \$10 and is fired. No second chances.

I really want to understand our welfare system in the US. And why generation after generation of some cultures never seem to escape it. Is it the fault of the recipients or the government or society at large? This book left me feeling very frustrated, though not immune to the children suffering from hunger and worse. As far as solutions, this book seemed to say we need to raise the minimum wage and up welfare payments. But reading this book did not leave me convinced that is the solution at all! It made me instead wonder how we can stop the unbearable cycle that repeats itself: women subjugated by abusive lovers, having multiple children when they can't care properly for even one child. Why is birth control glossed over? And if women are selling their food stamps to pay for utilities, and that's the cause of not having enough money to feed their kids, then we need to offer utility company credits that go directly to the utility companies (so the credits cannot be sold on the black market) in addition to food stamps. We need to turn festering vacant lots in inner cities into community vegetable gardens, so that good healthy food can be distributed to those in need along with some sweat equity and community spirit. We need to mobilize churches to increase mentoring partnerships between members who are in need and those who are not. It was interesting that the people in this book who were the most desperate had no connection to a faith-based institution, which could give so much help financially, in employment, in babysitting, in friendship, etc. Also not mentioned is that the US military is a very real haven for people who want to escape this pattern.

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