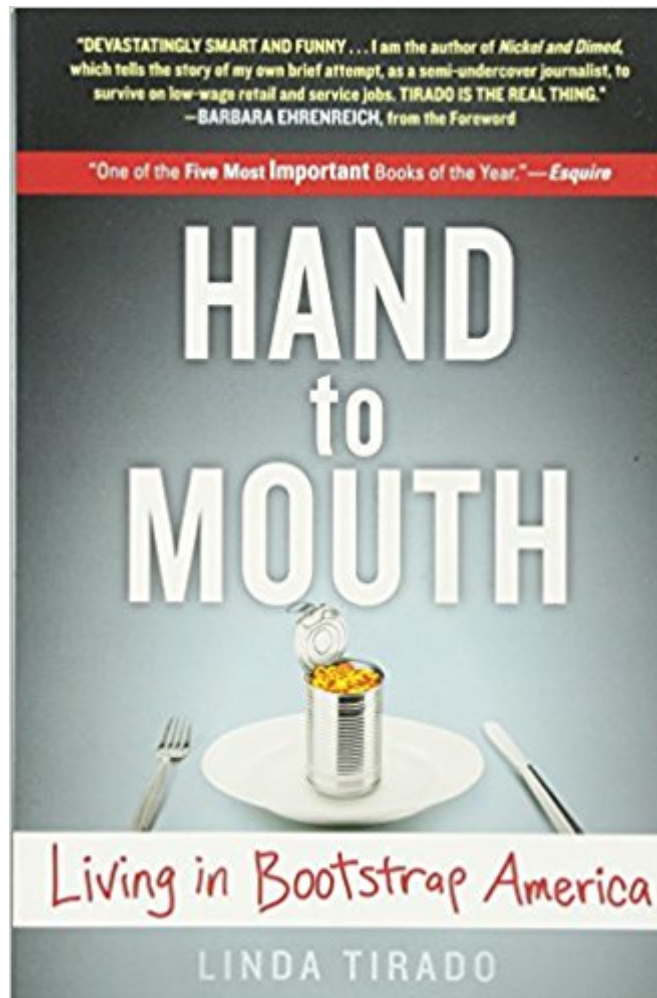




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Hand To Mouth: Living In Bootstrap America



Synopsis

The real-life Nickel and Dimed—the author of the wildly popular “Poverty Thoughts” essay tells what it’s like to be working poor in America. ONE OF THE FIVE MOST IMPORTANT BOOKS OF THE YEAR—Esquire “DEVASTATINGLY SMART AND FUNNY. I am the author of Nickel and Dimed, which tells the story of my own brief attempt, as a semi-undercover journalist, to survive on low-wage retail and service jobs. TIRADO IS THE REAL THING.” Barbara Ehrenreich, from the Foreword As the haves and have-nots grow more separate and unequal in America, the working poor don’t get heard from much. Now they have a voice—and it’s forthright, funny, and just a little bit furious. Here, Linda Tirado tells what it’s like, day after day, to work, eat, shop, raise kids, and keep a roof over your head without enough money. She also answers questions often asked about those who live on or near minimum wage: Why don’t they get better jobs? Why don’t they make better choices? Why do they smoke cigarettes and have ugly lawns? Why don’t they borrow from their parents? Enlightening and entertaining, Hand to Mouth opens up a new and much-needed dialogue between the people who just don’t have it and the people who just don’t get it.

Book Information

Paperback: 240 pages

Publisher: Berkley; Reprint edition (September 1, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0425277976

ISBN-13: 978-0425277973

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 379 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #20,792 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #34 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Poverty #54 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Class #783 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Memoirs

Customer Reviews

"The woman who accidentally explained poverty to the nation." The Huffington Post "[A] whipsmart woman’s firsthand account of what it looks and smells and tastes and feels like to be living in poverty—brilliant and to the point. You won’t soon

forget her voice or her message. • Entertainment Weekly • “Funny, sarcastic, full of expletives, and most of all outrageously honest. . . . Tirado has a way with words that’s somehow both breezy and blunt. • BusinessWeek • “In this riveting memoir, Tirado shares in vivid detail what it’s like to be a college graduate in the throes of poverty. • Women’s Health Magazine “Must-read...powerful.” • Good Housekeeping • “Educative . . . Tirado’s raw reportage offers solidarity for those on the front lines of hardship yet issues a cautionary forewarning to the critical: Poverty is a potential outcome for all of us. Outspoken and vindictive, Tirado embodies the cyclical vortex of today’s struggle to survive. • Kirkus Reviews • “Tirado tells it like it is | Enthralling and horrifying, this should be required reading for policymakers. • Booklist, starred review • “In *Hand to Mouth*, [Tirado] uses her piercing insight, coupled with a confessional but unrepentant voice, to open a nuanced and deeply unsettling window into poverty in the U.S. • Ms. Magazine • “This book should inspire important discussion. • Library Journal • “The great thing about writing is that it doesn’t discriminate, with regard to race or gender or anything, class included. Being rich and advantaged doesn’t mean you won’t be cruelly exposed on paper as a pompous fraud. Conversely, if you write well, being broke and tired won’t prevent your talent and mental clarity from shining through. Linda Tirado is just a terrific writer. There’s a crucial passage in *Hand to Mouth* where Linda asks why we all can’t at least just agree that someone has to do the grunt work, and that there’s dignity in that, too. With this strong and unembarrassed account of her life on the edges of poverty Linda single-handedly re-takes some of the dignity that has been stripped from people without means in this singularly greed-dominated, most mean-spirited generation in America’s history. Honesty has its own power and this is a most honest book. Everyone who thinks things are just fine in this country should read it. • Matt Taibbi, New York Times bestselling author “Linda Tirado tells it like it is for tens of millions of America’s low-wage workers • a group that’s growing even as America’s billionaires rake in ever more of the nation’s total income and wealth. The top hedge-fund partner got \$3.5 billion in 2013. That came to \$1,750,000 an hour. Yet somehow we can’t even raise the minimum wage. Read what Linda has to say and you’ll understand it’s not because Linda or other low-wage workers somehow deserve to be treated this way any more than the \$3.5 billion hedge-fund deserves his pay. The game is rigged and we must un-rig it.” • Robert B. Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, national bestselling author of *Aftershock* • “When our

economy and our democracy are both broken, the story Linda Tirado writes here is simply known as real life for millions of Americans who are going broke every day and feel ignored by our government. Every American deserves an equal seat at the table in the halls of power and a wage that can put food on the dinner table. *Hand to Mouth* should serve as a red flag to the politicians in Washington and the millionaires on Wall Street, this is why we the people are mad as hell, and we're not going to take it anymore.

•Cenk Uygur, Host of The Young Turks (www.tytnetwork.com)

"For those who have never had the experience, Tirado's book allows you to hear, smell, taste, feel and visualize life as a minimum wage worker. It also leaves you with two inescapable conclusions. First, poverty can happen to anyone—even if you are born into the middle class. Second, you can educate people until you are blue in the face, but as long as there are jobs that require sweeping floors, flipping burgers, or waiting tables, we will never eliminate poverty until everyone who works is paid a living wage.

•Robert Creamer, Democracy Partners, author of *Stand Up Straight: How Progressives Can Win*

"*Hand to Mouth* delivers the message to America's poorest citizens, 'You are not alone,' and it represents a wake-up call to the world's wealthiest individuals that income inequality has dangerous economic consequences for real people. It is an insightful, heart-wrenching, and at times laugh-out-loud look into how a third of our fellow Americans are living as poor people in an economy that only serves the top 1%. If you can afford to purchase this book, you will be peering into a world you likely have never known and definitely will never forget. Tirado's words read like a conversation over coffee, but she delivers a devastating blow to our current economic assumptions equivalent to a modern day *Oliver Twist* or *The Jungle*.

•Ryan Clayton, Executive Director, Wolf-PAC.com

"She is refreshingly infuriated. She acknowledges her faults, but she hones a constructive resentment to cut through her chronic depression, sharpen her wit and tune her X-ray vision into the disparities of power and money. She maps the chain reactions that lead families from one setback to another."--The New York Times

"A terrific writer...A most honest book. Everyone who thinks things are just fine in this country should read it.

•Matt Taibbi, New York Times bestselling author of *The Divide*

"You won't soon forget her voice or her message.

•Entertainment Weekly

"Enthralling and horrifying, this should be required reading for policymakers.

•Booklist (starred review)

"[An] unapologetic explanation for why she and other poor people do what they do. It's funny, sarcastic...and most of all outrageously honest.

•Bloomberg Businessweek

Linda Tirado is a completely average American with two kids and, until recently, two jobs. Her essay “Why I Make Terrible Decisions, or, Poverty Thoughts” was picked up by the Huffington Post, the Nation, and countless other publications, and was read by more than six million people. This is her first book.

Why do poor people do things that seem so self-destructive? When 32-year-old Linda Tirado, a college student, wife and working mother of two, responded to this question on an online discussion board in the fall of 2013, her stirring personal post entitled “Why I Make Terrible Decisions, or, poverty thoughts,” went viral and sparked heated community discussions about poor people’s individual and collective work ethics, motivations, food choices, childrearing, health practices, mental states and even sex lives. Many supporters, including Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *NICKEL AND DIMED: On (Not) Getting By in America*, “felt an enormous wave of vindication” upon reading Tirado’s words. And in the foreword of *HAND TO MOUTH: Living in Bootstrap America*, Ehrenreich praises Tirado for openly and unabashedly sharing the daily realities of her life as a low-wage worker and demonstrating “that poverty is not a culture or a character defect; it is a shortage of money.” “I am doing what I can to walk you through what it is to be poor,” writes Tirado. She recalls in her mid-20s holding three jobs as a bartender (a boss offered female workers better shifts if they agreed to service him sexually), waitress (the baseline hourly wage for waiting tables was \$2.13, and new staff got the slower shifts) and voter registration canvasser. The soul-killing experience, Tirado laments, “nearly killed me, and I still didn’t break twenty grand that year.” Tirado describes the fundamental lack of job security and basic benefits in the food service industry, such as paid sick leave and health insurance. “As a general manager for a chain restaurant, I got eight days of maternity leave after I had my second daughter. Unpaid.” She reports on hazardous working conditions (“Most kitchens in the middle of the summer are intolerable, with temperatures well into the triple digits. I’ve seen people sent to the hospital with heatstroke”) and recounts her own mishaps (“My arms and hands are covered in scars from the fryers. Oil at nearly 400 degrees doesn’t tickle when it hits your skin, and you can’t avoid the spatter entirely. I’ve burned my hands because the oven gloves had worn through and the owners were too cheap to spring for another pair. I’ve sliced my fingers open nearly to the bone when knives have slipped”). Tirado also offers these provocative comments to privileged folk: “You don’t need a titanium stroller” and “Science disapproves of your

anti-bacterial-spray fetish. In relating her story, Tirado goes from funny (‘‘You can’t pay a doctor in chickens anymore’’) to angry (‘‘It’s pretty enraging to poor people when rich people, who get preventative care and can afford vitamins and gym memberships, look down on us as if we don’t have a clue how to take care of our bodies. We know --- we just can’t afford it’’) in 0.2 seconds. And understandably so, because poverty is downright bleak, requiring the ‘‘stamina of Sisyphus’’ to keep going. Reviewed by Miriam Tuliao

I bought this book because it was a required text for my sociology class which I’m double majoring in, regarding contemporary social issues and in the first week alone of the semester I am nearly 75% done. Mind you we were only required to read from pages 15-53 for the first week. I have devoured this book because Tirado’s words mirror my own experiences and I can finally say ‘‘Yes! Someone who understands!’’ even if you’re not interested in sociology or whatever other field, the price is cheap for paperback or kindle, it’s a great read so far, no matter what your financial situation is, it’s easy to relate to the author in a lot of aspects. Her writing is very informal which is kind of refreshing. She’s not here to impress you or make you change your mind about people who find themselves living in poverty, she’s just telling you her experiences.

As a single mother of two who knows about being poor, I know Linda Tirado’s story well. I’ve lived on ramen for days. I’ve had jobs where going to work was an eco-challenge. I’ve worked jobs where I was expected to endure all sorts of disrespect as my kids had to eat and needed a roof over their heads. I’ve lived in rodent-infested hellholes, and know all about the indignities of being poor. It really is something to bitch about. That said, I found myself saying ‘‘yup, yup’’ throughout Tirado’s ‘‘Hand to mouth: Living in bootstrap America.’’ The sardonic, tongue-in-cheek nature of Tirado’s writing is pretty much what being poor feels like, which is a sarcastic reminder that it’s no joke. And oftentimes, the joke is on you. ‘‘Hand to Mouth...’’ had the makings of being a really great book. However, Tirado’s brutal honesty, coupled with her griping about rich people, the system, etc. comes across as whining more so than social import. Poor people know the rich don’t care, as their money and privilege shields them from doing so. We know the game is rigged and the odds of winning aren’t on our side. We don’t think about these things nor do we complain about them, as we are simply trying to survive. Our burdens are only for us to bear. Tirado’s wry writing style alone would have carried the book much better than her careening off on tangents about capitalism and

the 1 percent (the poor definitely know that capitalism always exploits the weakest, which the 1 percenters benefit from). The most poignant aspect of "Hand to mouth..." is Tirado's puts a human face on what it's like to be poor. She says f@ck a lot (I do as well, and find it cathartic and stress-relieving). She smokes. She's not ashamed that she is poor and doesn't hide it for the sake of someone else, which makes her book a memorable read.

Wow! It's a story I could have written, since I've lived it. But I couldn't have written it as well. And I'd likely have minced words more often. She's quite a girl: I wish I knew her.

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