



American Hunger: The Pulitzer Prize-Winning Washington Post Series (A Vintage Short)

Eli Saslow

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An eBook short.

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting

In this Pulitzer Prize-winning collection, *Washington Post* reporter Eli Saslow traveled across the country over the course of a year—from Florida and Texas to Rhode Island and Tennessee—to examine the personal and political implications and repercussions of America's growing food stamp program.

Saslow shows us the extraordinary impact the arrival of food stamps has each month on a small town's struggling economy, the difficult choices our representatives face in implementing this \$78-billion program affecting millions of Americans, and the challenges American families, senior citizens, and children encounter every day in ensuring they have enough, and sometimes even anything to eat. These unsettling and eye-opening stories make for required reading, providing nuance and understanding to the complex matters of American poverty.

American Hunger: The Pulitzer Prize-Winning Washington Post Series (A Vintage Short) Details

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From Reader Review American Hunger: The Pulitzer Prize-Winning Washington Post Series (A Vintage Short) for online ebook

Sofija says

Very, very sad. Good reporting though. Should be mandatory reading for all Americans.

Roland Martinez says

This was so educational

This is a very good series of articles about food stamps, the people who use them, the stores that profit from them and the lawmakers that love and hate them.

DENNIS g BRUNSWICK says

This book really helped me realize how the Lord has blessed my family and myself. We aren't rich by any means but we have never had to go without. My heart goes out to these people

This book really makes me thankful and appreciative of what I have, especially my family. We are not rich by any means, but have never had to go without. My heart goes out to these families.

Michael says

As a guy who can see all three sides to any two-sided issue, I have struggled mightily with the idea of the government--the federal government in particular--providing things like food, shelter, medical care, and housing to the people of the United States. It's not that I'm against the idea in theory (I am actually against it on the days I'm not all for it), but in practice it's been a catastrophe (where it hasn't been a triumph). If you were to ask me my opinion of the food stamp program, I'd say no way, and yes of course. Or, we definitely should have it, but it needs to be dismantled.

Full disclosure: I am a Great Society baby. When my dad (for all intents and purposes) abandoned us, my mother had to avail herself of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs for a few years: food stamps, section eight housing, Medicaid, etc. She was fortunate to have earned her Mrs. degree after a short time (that is, she married my stepdad, who had a good union job, and who very kindly joined her in raising my brother and I), so we didn't need Uncle Sam's largesse for very long...but we did, and it mattered. So there's a success story: we used these programs for a little while, until things improved, then we were off them. Never needed them again. Easy-peasey.

Fast-forward forty years and we are looking at generations of people who have known no other life than one of attachment to the government. If they don't get food stamps, they don't eat. If they don't have some sort of government housing, they are homeless. If they don't have government sponsored medical care, they have

none. If there kids don't eat a free or subsidized breakfast and lunch, they don't eat at all. There are people who use these programs during hard times, which was the intent, and there are those who know no other way of life but to use these programs, which was not.

Further, there are the 'deserving' poor--a widow, a fellow who has fallen sick, a disabled child--and the 'non-deserving poor'--a single mother with multiple children from multiple partners who is married to none of them, a drug addict, and illegal immigrant, someone who is gaming the system. Public policy cannot discriminate between those who legitimately need help, and those who simply like the help because it's just one less thing they need to be responsible for in their lives. I have known both sorts of people. It is murky and tangled most of the time. The lines are unclear. There are circumstances; there are messes.

In reading this series of articles from *The Washington Post*, I was reminded that, in the end, we are all better off when children, old people, the sick, and those going through hard times have enough to eat. Our system is inefficient, maddening, fraught with waste, and hardly the best we can do, but it's the system we have. I am willing to accept the waste, fraud, and abuse so that small children get to have lunch, and so that a disabled elderly person doesn't have to go to bed hungry. Don't get me wrong: I'd love to see the programs tightened up, and see those who abuse it treated harshly. For example, my friend is a cop in Maine. He was food shopping one Saturday and watched a man buy several cases of water with an EBT card, then take the water into the parking lot, dump it all out, return the plastic bottles for a despot, then march over the the liquor store to buy alcohol. My friend arrested him and said, "I'm sure what I'm charging you with, but I'll think of something."

An anecdote, right? Maddening. That's my property this low-life was abusing; the money he got for free from Uncle Sam represents hours I am away from my family at work, commutes in the dark and snow. hard decisions my wife and I have to make about our own retirements, our children's educations, repairs to our home, savings, food.

Here's another anecdote: a little boy, crying in the office of my school because his mother couldn't make him lunch for several days since they ran out of food, and their food stamp money wouldn't show up until the end of the week. If we reduce the food stamp program, we may very well curtail the abuses, but we will also make the lives of innocent little kids, struggling parents, and those who just need a frigging break, much harder.

I am not a Democrat, and I find the modern Democratic party to be pretty much repulsive, but I have always liked this quote from Franklin Roosevelt: "Better the occasional faults of a government that lives in a spirit of charity than the consistent omissions of a government frozen in the ice of its own indifference." It may be that, in trying to aid the most weak and vulnerable among us, we have to tolerate certain abuses, as irritating and demoralizing as they can be. "There but for the grace of God go I," someone once said, and they were right.

Put another way, "As you do unto the least of these my brothers, you do unto me." My rabbi taught me that one.

This is a worthy (and brief) read that reminded me not to be an asshole, which I am in constant need of.

Leah Bayer says

I am a serious food stockpiler. I have enough food in my apartment to last my husband and I a month, probably 2, maybe 3 if we really stretched (in case the zombie apocalypse happens, we are ready!). Boxes of pasta, bags of rice and beans, tomato sauces and tuna cans, mac n cheese, pasta- and rice-a-roni, a freezer full of dumplings, chicken thighs, and sausage, tons of imported ramen... just a LOT of food. And the thing is, this is not insanely expensive. It's not something I spend a lot of time or money on. We're on a budget, and our food one is often tight, but I like to feel secure about our eating future. But for so many people in America, cupboards stocked with cheap food is literally an impossible dream.

This is kind of a soul-crushing series of articles. I know there's poverty in America, and like most "middle class" people I deal with periods where things are very tight, often uncomfortably so. But I've never stopped and thought about the families who literally can't feed their children. The ones who rely on school meals and when summer break hits the panic sets in. The families who can only afford/have access to cheap crap so they have obese kids who are starving and suffering from malnutrition. The mothers who have to chose between milk and cereal because they can't afford them both. This book is about those people, the ones we try not to think about, the millions of suffering Americans who have it rougher than I'd imagined.

I think it's a very important read and, thankfully, it is wonderfully written. The tone is compelling, the information and facts presented seamlessly within the narrative of these families. I was so intrigued by this that I'm reading another book on the subject, and have quite a few more in the queue. Highly recommended.

Stuart H Crepea says

Real eye opener

Makes insight into poverty real and story telling is very good. Fast read. Good stats to backup theses. Keep in the list for students of society

Jessaka says

When I was in high school one of the teachers showed us a film on hunger in America, and it was shocking to me back then, but it appeared to be just a section of America that sent hunger. Things are fall worse now.

This is another story about people in American not making it. For these people there is never enough food, jobs, or enough money to make ends meet. The food they get doesn't last out the month, and much of it is what I consider junk food--prepackaged foods that cause disease.

When I was fresh out of high school I moved to Davis, CA to be near my high school boy friend, who I later married. I lived with a couple and took care of their child. The woman, Jill, went to college at U.C. Davis. For two weeks out of the month they would feed me well, but the next two weeks money was low. I didn't make enough to buy my own food. Months later I ended up getting anemia. Luckily, I married shortly after.

But back to prepackaged foods: Do you think that the wealthy people are eating prepackaged foods? I know many aren't. They are eating fresh fruits and vegetables, good meats, dairy and cheeses and drinking good wines. They often have a cook that serves them gourmet meals. Well, some say, "They deserve it; they worked hard for it. These welfare people don't want to work, and so they deserve prepackaged foods."

Those on food stamps need to work, yes, but the jobs are not always there, and if they do find jobs, they never pay enough to make ends meet. They even have programs that teach them new skills, so that they can find work, but that doesn't mean that they will get the work, because they often don't, as there are too many people looking for the same job. And how do you get a job without a car? How do you find work when you don't have transportation money? It isn't that easy anymore to get around unless you live in large city like the Bay Area of San Francisco that has great bus service, but then you can't afford to live there either. Many low paid workers are now living out of the city and have to travel far to get to work. Poverty breeds more poverty.

One woman, that the author interviewed, goes as far as to unscrew a light bulb in her refrigerator. That saves nothing, but she doesn't know this. Another unscrews every bulb in the house. Well, Americans lived without electricity in their not so distant past, so why not? Why not? Because people shouldn't have to live like this. They could even turn off their hot water and heat. Many do. It helps even more. I have a pen pal who lives in snow country, and when her husband lost his job he couldn't get into town to even collect food stamps. They spent the winter without heat, no propane or wood. A year later his boss called him back to work.

Then there are the long food lines at food pantries, and much like the bread lines in the depression era, some who stand in line to get food end up with very little since they were at the back of the line hours ago, and the food ran out. When I worked at a food pantry, I saw this every time I was there. And what do you say to those that end up with nothing, other than, I'm sorry? Or "Here, we do have a bag of cocoa puffs left." When you volunteer at these places you are not allowed to give them money, you can only give sympathy. This is not an easy volunteer job.

Now we have a day care center and 6 days a week we pass out peanut butter and jelly sandwiches or bologna and cheese on white bread—all processed food. Then there are potato chips, a banana, and sometimes homemade soup. They can get by on this for a while, but in the long run they will end up with illnesses, and most of these people are too sick to work.

The author of this book reports what he sees; he doesn't give solutions. I am not sure if there are solutions since being poor is demonized by others, as well as criminalized. And how do you change people's views? I haven't seen it happen, and I have tried. Not everyone has a heart and many have been too brainwashed to see things as they really are.

I think that the food stamp program really needs to be changed. For one thing I feel that people need more food stamps, not less, but I am also in agreement with ruling out most prepackaged foods. The problem right now is that they have to make their food stamps stretch. Prepackaged foods, while lacking much in nutrition goes farther than real food. Everyone know how expensive fruits, vegetables, meat, eggs, milk, and real cheese are.

Then we need to bring jobs back to America, and not just jobs but good paying ones.

All of that may not happen, and our country is so rigged that people have a very hard time raising themselves out of poverty. But in comes help: Rep. Steve Southerland had a plan to make changes to the welfare system. Let's make these people volunteer for their food for at least 20 hours a week, he said. Now, that isn't really a bad idea, except I believe that this volunteer work will be free, and if it isn't, it will not be equal to a paying job, not even an \$8 an hour lousy job. So now you would have slave labor, as if we ever abolished it in the first place, and price wise, I doubt if these 20 hours will be equal to the food they buy.

Note: Since writing this review I read that teachers in Florida can't afford to rent a house, so they want to

build them apartments on the campuses instead of raising their pay.

Arun Budhathoki says

Startling read about America's dark side. Food stamps seem to be a curse to the poor. The world's richest country where people go starving. Disturbing.

Bill says

Every American – that is, every American not on SNAP (food stamps) – and especially every politician making decisions about the future of the SNAP program – should read this book.

Like the ground breaking television documentary, Hunger in America, this book illustrates all too clearly that no American is free until all Americans are from hunger.

This is nothing new; we have known this for generations; that is why the freedom from hunger was one of President Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms – but we have known this centuries before that – it is, after all, only common sense.

Freedom now? Most certainly.

Elizabeth says

Everyone absolutely should read this series. It is very easy to think simplistically about a singular issue - in this case SNAP benefits, aka food stamps - but this narrative unpacks the various aspects we need to consider in order to truly understand the true costs and effects of hunger. And this piece is written in such a way that it combines policy and science and research with the very human side of hunger.

Book says

American Hunger: The Pulitzer-Prize Winning Washington Post Series by Eli Saslow

“American Hunger” is an eye-opening book about poverty in America. Washington Post staff writer and contributor to ESPN The Magazine, Eli Saslow, travels across America to share stories on the government food stamp program from the perspective of six families. This illuminating 99-page book includes the following six chapters: 1. Rep. Steve Southerland believes in hard work. And that's what he got., 2. Too much of too little, 3. December 7th. December 8th., 4. Hungering for a new month to begin, 5. “I'm not ready to sign up for this yet.”, and 6. Driving away hunger.

Positives:

1. A well-written and succinct book.

2. A very important topic, poverty.
3. The main goal is to provide the public with everyday stories of how people in poverty deal with the cycle of government food stamp assistance.
4. Saslow is a gifted reporter, he is a keen observer and treats the subject with the utmost respect and care.
5. Limited but effective use of charts and plenty of photos that complement the narrative.
6. Provides valuable information of the state of the government food stamp program. “The government food stamp program has tripled in size during the last decade, growing to serve 47 million Americans at a cost of nearly \$80 billion each year.”
7. The first chapter covers Rep. Steve Southerland’s quest to overhaul the food stamp program. “The United States had already spent 50 years and \$16 trillion on the war against poverty, and yet the wealth gap continued to grow and the rate of extreme poverty in rural Florida had increased for eight consecutive years.”
8. Interesting facts. “The USDA showing that the fastest-growing demographic on food stamps was people who did work, but in jobs that paid so little they still qualified for the benefit.”
9. The book revolves around six families and how they coped with poverty and hunger. “For almost a decade, Blanca had supported her five children by stretching \$430 in monthly food stamp benefits.”
10. Discusses different strategies attempted to curtail poverty and increasing health-care costs. “Research showed that every \$1 spent on nutrition education saved the government \$10 in future health-care costs.”
11. Captures the practical and at times desperate actions people in poverty take to make ends meet. “Her own food stamps no longer seemed like enough for the family, and neither did Tiara’s, but there was another option. Her eldest son had yet to enroll in the food stamp program. He had no income. She was sure he would qualify. His likely benefit would be about \$160 each month.”
12. A look at the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). “Spending on SNAP has doubled in the past four years and tripled in the past decade, surpassing \$78 billion last year. A record 47 million Americans receive the benefit—including 13,752 in Woonsocket, one-third of the town’s population, where the first of each month now reveals twin shortcomings of the U.S. economy.”
13. An inside look behind government workers in charge of enrolling new people. “In fact, it is Nérios’s job to enroll at least 150 seniors for food stamps each month, a quota she usually exceeds. Alleviate hunger, lessen poverty: These are the primary goals of her work.”
14. The impact to local economies. ““Every \$5 in SNAP generates \$9.20 for the local economy.”
15. A behind the scenes look at food truck drivers feeding poor children. “More than 1 in 4 children now depend on government food assistance, a record level of need that has increased the federal budget and changed the nature of childhood for the nation’s poor.”

Negatives:

1. The book’s focus is describing the disease not so much on providing the cure.
2. No links or notes.
3. No formal bibliography.
4. More charts and supplementary material would have added value.

In summary, this is a very good brief eBook that captures the plight of people living in poverty and hence hunger. Saslow does a wonderful job of describing the financial challenges of six families and how they make use of government assistance to deal with everyday life. Eye-opening, heartbreakingly but treated with utmost care and respect. I recommend it.

Further recommendations: “\$2.00 a Day” by Kathryn J. Edin, “Evicted” by Mathew Desmond, “The Working Poor” by David K. Shipler, “The Other America: Poverty in the United States” by Michael Harrington, “Runaway Inequality: An Activist’s Guide to Economic Justice” by Les Leopold, “Divided: The Perils of Our Growing Inequality”, “Perfectly Legal”, “The Fine Print” and “Free Lunch” by David Cay Johnston, and “The Price of Inequality” by Joseph E. Stiglitz.

Ali says

Caught a few of his articles in the post but really appreciated the chance to read all. Interesting stories to show the effects of hunger on psyche, health, & family dynamics.
