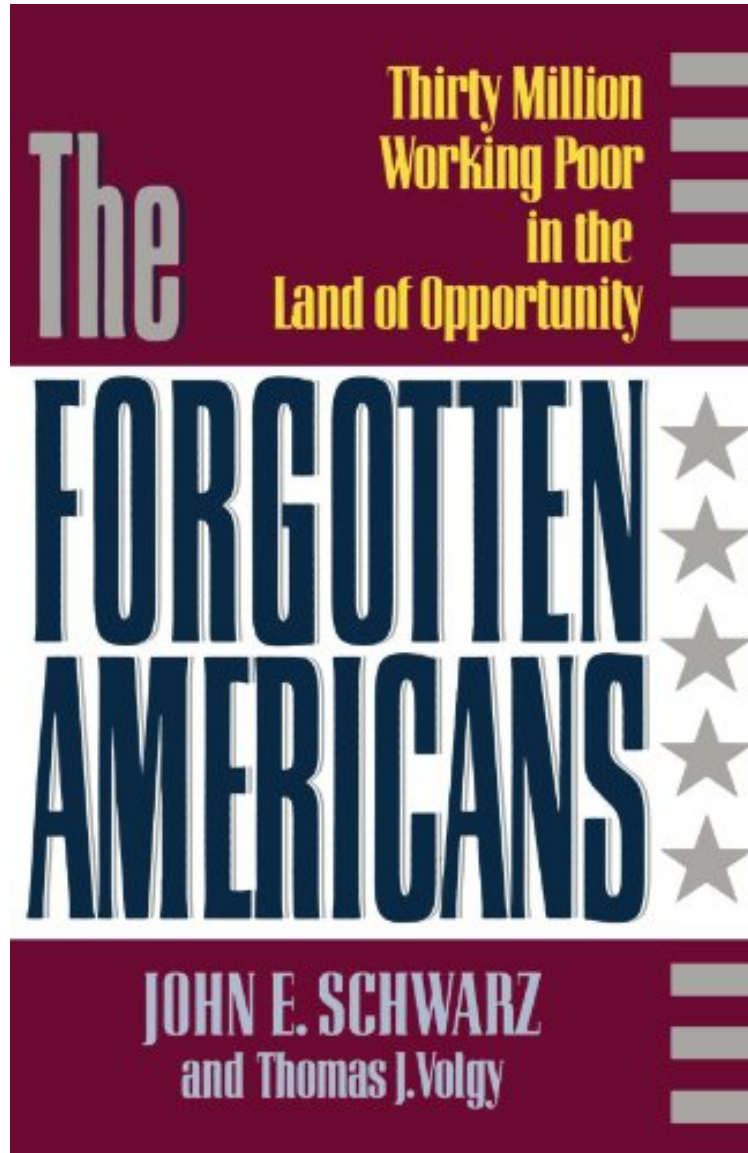


The Forgotten Americans

John E. Schwarz, Thomas J. Volgy
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John E. Schwarz, Thomas J. Volgy : The Forgotten Americans before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Forgotten Americans:

John E. Schwarz and Thomas J. Volgy have joined forces to produce an incisive analysis of the nations economic problems, illustrated their book with real people, and linked their material to the political process. This is a major

contribution to the most important debate taking place in America. Thomas B. Edsall Does the American Dream still exist when nearly 30 million Americans live in families in which workers find a paycheck and poverty in the same envelope? Just as Michael Harrington's *The Other America* shocked the nation with its disclosure of poverty in the 1960s, John E. Schwarz and Thomas J. Volgy's *The Forgotten Americans* exposes the breadth of poverty that exists today among responsible, hardworking Americans. At the end of the prosperous 1980s, the number of Americans living in working-poor families equaled the combined populations of the nation's 25 largest cities. Contrary to conventional wisdom, this situation is not largely confined to minorities, women, the undereducated or young adults. It is commonplace for workers from nearly all segments of society to be employed in low-paying jobs even during good economic times. *The Forgotten Americans* reveals the betrayal of the hopes and expectations of these industrious people through broad-based factual evidence and the real-life stories of individual families. Their hardship has been ignored at enormous cost to them and the country. Numerous problems at the forefront of national debate—welfare dependency, crime, and the inadequate performance of many American schools—are closely connected to the existence of working poverty on a large scale. Unless corrective action is taken, the country risks the creation of a deeply fractured society arising from the despair of millions of employed people who have discovered that practicing the work ethic yields little reward. The problem is staggering and often misunderstood by politicians, the media, and the public. Once Schwarz and Volgy have outlined the implications of this social and economic tragedy, they propose effective solutions that require simple changes to existing policies—solutions that are politically feasible and can be accomplished without new taxes.

From *Publishers Weekly* In a concise exploration of the problems of the working poor, two political scientists from the University of Arizona provide just enough statistics to prove their point: hard work, a good education, an unblemished employment history and/or a full-time job will not necessarily prevent a person from falling below the poverty line in the United States. In fact, Schwarz and Volgy challenge the government's very definition of poverty, stating (and backing up their contention with the budgets of actual households) that a family must make at least 50% more than the amount that constitutes the official "poverty line" in order to meet its basic needs. They recommend raising the minimum wage and providing substantial tax credits to people with low-paying full-time jobs. They dismiss such proposed solutions as "enterprise zones" and the infusion of foreign capital. The book recalls the classic work of Malthus—not in its conclusions, but in its terse, trenchant analysis of grim facts. (Sept. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.)

From *Library Journal* One of the problems emerging in the recent welfare reform debate is the dilemma facing those leaving public assistance for low-wage employment. Losing such non-cash benefits as food stamps and Medicaid, these new workers join the ranks of the "working poor" and become "the forgotten Americans." In this persuasive book, political scientists Schwarz and Volgy (who is also mayor of Tucson, Arizona) combine anecdotal material on the struggles of low-income families with a review of government poverty calculations and their plans for reform. The authors contend that the real size of this group is masked by the fact that the official "poverty line" lies far below actual economic insufficiency. The result is that millions of Americans who in fact are poor are not counted as such. To raise their standard of living, Schwarz and Volgy propose an increase in the minimum wage combined with an extension of the Earned Income Tax Credit, which would bridge the gap between wages and a decent life. Recommended for all libraries. — Mary Jane Ballou, Ford Fdn. Lib., New York Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From *Kirkus* An arresting appraisal of America's working poor. Drawing on anecdotal evidence as well as statistical data, Schwarz (Political Science/Univ. of Arizona) and his colleague (mayor of Tucson from 1987-91) limn the hard lives of the industrious individuals whose paychecks are too low to provide them or their families with basic necessities—adequate housing, food, clothing, medical care, transport, etc. During 1989, they calculate, 56 million Americans resided in households that could not make ends meet despite one or more breadwinners with full-time jobs. By the numbers, the authors estimate, an income at least 155% of the federal government's official poverty line is necessary for households to reach the threshold of self-sufficiency. To bring the needy employed up to these subsistence levels, they propose that Washington increase the minimum wage to \$4.85 per hour and expand earned-income tax credits on a sliding scale. In the course of investigating the hand-to-mouth existence of the working poor, Schwarz and Volgy made some discoveries that go against the grain of conventional wisdom—e.g., that capitalism's low-profile casualties are neither uneducated nor unskilled: In fact, two thirds have high-school diplomas, and approximately one million hold college degrees. While white males account for the single largest segment, moreover, the ranks of the working poor encompass all age, ethnic, and racial groups in the US. Nor, the authors determined, has either the putative decline in domestic manufacturing or decelerating gains in industrial productivity contributed measurably to the impoverishment of these wage-earners; and the writers argue that the public sector's job-creation programs, however successful, cannot solve what is a problem involving shortfalls in income. Accordingly, Schwarz and Volgy conclude, an affluent society owes its working poor an affordable helping hand. A heartfelt and persuasively documented reminder that all isn't well at home. — Copyright 1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.