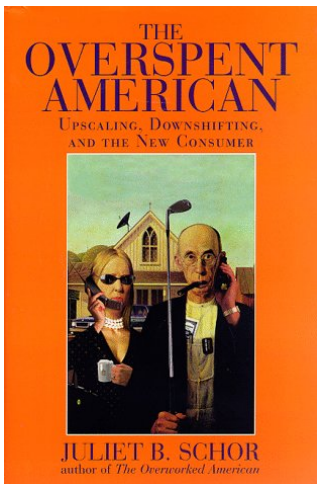


[PDF] The Overspent American: Upscaling, Downshifting, And The New Consumer

Juliet B. Schor - pdf download free book



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Description:

If getting and spending define our lives, then Juliet Schor now has us covered. Six years ago, her book scrutinized the getting part. It focused public attention on the disappearance of leisure and the harmful effects thereof on families and society. It sparked a debate over whether Americans really work as much as we proudly claim. (If so, how to explain the audience for *Monday Night Football*?) Nevertheless, Schor can take credit for helping push Congress into passing the Family Leave Act in 1993.

Now she is back with a critique of our spending. Schor notes that, despite rising wealth

and incomes, Americans do not feel any better off. In fact, we tell pollsters we do not have enough money to buy everything we need. And we are almost as likely to say so if we make \$85,000 a year as we are if we make \$35,000. Schor believes that "keeping up with the Joneses" is no longer enough for today's media-savvy office workers. We set our sights on the lifestyles of those higher up the organizational chart. We seek to emulate characters on TV. For teenagers, "enough" is the idle splendor that hardly exists outside of what MTV un-ironically calls *The Real World*. Schor offers an original and provocative analysis of why many Americans feel driven and unhappy despite our success. As an alternative, she profiles several "downshiffters" who've taken up voluntary simplicity in search of a more satisfying way of life. No policy solutions suggest themselves this time, only a change of heart. --*Barry Mitzman*

From Publishers Weekly Whereas Schor's 1992 bestseller, *The Overworked American*, touched a nerve among all classes of American society, her latest study is geared to middle- and upper-middle-class consumers who, in her diagnosis, are participating in a national orgy of overspending and living beyond their means. She traces this competitive, status-conscious consumption to the diverging income distribution and growing inequality beginning in the 1980s, as increasingly overworked, insecure, dissatisfied consumers, pressured by advertising and television imagery, sought to emulate the upscale lifestyle of the most affluent. An economist and director of women's studies at Harvard, Schor presents her arguable conclusion that the more TV a person watches, the more he or she is likely to spend. In counterbalance, she also reports on her nationwide survey of "downshiffters," people who deliberately reduce their hours on the job in exchange for more leisure, time with family or other pursuits. In self-help fashion, she outlines nine steps individuals can take to break free of the cycle of compulsive spending. Although Schor's jeremiad lacks the impact of her earlier book, it offers trenchant commentary on Americans' overspending lifestyle and lack of savings.

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The overspent american. Why We Want What We Don't Need. Featuring Juliet Schor, professor of Sociology at Boston College and based on her book *The Overspent American: Upscaling, Downshifting and the New Consumer*. Producer, Editor & Camera: Kelly Garner Executive Producers: Loretta Alper & Sut Jhally. Media Education Foundation © MEF 2004. "The Overspent American" explores why so many of us feel materially dissatisfied, why we work staggeringly long hours and yet walk around with ever-present mental "wish lists" of things to buy or get, and why Americans save less than virtually anyone in the world. Unlike many experts, Harvard economist Juliet B. Schor does not blame consumers' lack of self-discipline. Nor does she blame advertisers. Millions of middle-class Americans want or need more from their lifestyles as they join the ranks of the new consumer, the "overspent American." More than a quarter of all families making more than \$100,000 a year say they cannot afford to buy everything they need. Overall, half the population of the richest country in the world claims not to be able to afford the basics. "Philadelphia Inquirer" Offers trenchant commentary on Americans' overspending lifestyle and lack of savings." -- "Publishers Weekly" Consuming more now and enjoying it less? Let me share one of numerous quotables from this section: "American consumers are often not conscious of being motivated by social status and are far more likely to attribute such motives to others than to themselves. Schorr is a fine writer with a good idea, but the lightweight and naive solutions she suggests to solve our overspending are clearly New York editor-think. The book notes that most people who "downshift" were only making \$30,000 a year or so to start with - not a lot of room to maneuver downward. City. New York, NY.

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