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Traveling Light: On The Road With America's Poor



Synopsis

How far can you get on two tacos, one Dr. Pepper, and a little bit of conversation? What happens when you're broke and you need to get to a new job, an ailing parent, a powwow, college, or a funeral on the other side of the country? And after decades of globalization, what kind of America will you glimpse through the window on your way? For five years, Kath Weston rode the bus to find out. *Traveling Light* is not just another book about people stuck in poverty. Rather, it's a book about how people move through poverty and their insights into the sweeping economic changes that affect us all. The result is a moving meditation on living poor in the world's wealthiest nation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this accessible gem of a narrative, Weston makes a special contribution to the conversation (and glut of ethnographies) that seek to describe how the other half lives. Raised in the working-class outskirts of Chicago and trained as an anthropologist, the author is devoid of condescension or naïve astonishment as she zigzags across the country by bus—one of the last quasi-public spaces—swapping advice, snacks, favors, worldviews and nuggets of profound wisdom with her fellow travelers. Within these shared stories, Weston interweaves her own experiences in traveling on a limited budget with acute anthropological analysis. Attuned to the hardships of bus travel (no guaranteed seats after long waits to board, bad food at rest stops, hiked up prices for the poorest travelers), Weston is also refreshingly self-reflective on her own relative privilege (being white and a citizen, having a credit card). Although her writing occasionally reads like choppy journal entries, her simple observations are marked by a spare grace: Arrival is not all.

Often the road is the thing. This book is a piece of 21st-century Americana in motion, and its characters and cities will resonate and linger with readers. (Sept.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Part travelog, part polemic, this book follows Weston (studies in women & gender, Univ. of Virginia; *Render Me, Gender Me*) as she travels around the nation via Greyhound bus. Combining anecdotes about incidents that take place on and around the bus with occasional didactic asides about the history and sociology of various regions of the country, Weston documents the extreme poverty and oppressive social structures that she encounters as she uses one of the only affordable travel options available to the least affluent people in the United States. Told exclusively through the first person, Weston's book includes autobiographical details about her girlfriend, economic situation, and Qigong routine. Although Weston's ambition to give voice to an otherwise often voiceless segment of the population is admirable, many of her character sketches of fellow passengers reduce them to mere caricatures with nicknames like Too-Tired and Bible lady. Unfortunately, her book offers no new solutions or information to those who are familiar with modern critiques of poverty in America; however, it will likely be an accessible and engaging read for those who are less familiar with the literature. Appropriate for public libraries. —April Younglove, Linfield Coll. Lib., Portland, OR Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Came in expected condition

Only read like a chapter of it because that's all my professor assigned from it, but that chapter was actually pretty interesting. Might get around to finishing it sometime, pretty good book from what I saw.

I haven't laid eyes on this book, but I very much enjoyed the author's talk at the Harvard Co-op on C-Span Book TV. Thought I'd speak from my own and my son's experiences on long bus trips. When I attended Smith College (1962-66), I didn't want my parents to feel that my expenses were a burden, and I rather stubbornly insisted on bus and train transportation from St. Louis, Missouri, whenever possible. I'm sure I was influenced by books like Carson McCullers' *Ballad of the Sad Cafe* and movies like... what else?... *Bus Stop*, with Marilyn Monroe, based on William Inge's

Broadway comedy. Not surprisingly, back in the 1960s I had many interesting conversations with a wide variety of people on the 24-hour bus trip from St. Louis to New York City, and on the 6-hour trip to Northampton. It was a good balance to going to college at an Eastern women's college. I was already well aware of the value of seeing how the other half lives. After all, I had been deeply influenced in high school by James Agee's chronicle of his stay with white sharecroppers, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, with Walker Evans' unforgettable photos. The St. Louis-to-New York bus trips had their own aesthetic. It was unforgettable to see, at 4 a.m., Pittsburgh's then glowing steel foundries reflected in the Allegheny, Monongehela, and Ohio rivers, punctuated by the great bridges designed and built by U.S. Steel. Much, much later, in the late 1990s, our son was attending community college instead of putting in two miserable and completely unproductive junior and senior years of high school. (Enrollment in home schooling, though no cure-all, is the magic key to loosening the legal hold of organized school systems on young people sinking like stones in high school.) To expand our son's horizons, we urged him to take an Outward Bound backpacking course in Montana. And we had him take the bus, from southern Michigan through Chicago to Minneapolis and west to Montana. His wallet was stolen in the Minneapolis bus terminal.... not the end of the world, thanks to a Visa advance. He was the only Outward Bound participant not to arrive by air. Back at community college in fall, his English teacher asked students to write about summer experiences that influenced them. Our son described not Outward Bound itself, but his bus trip and the people met. For them, he wrote, life was Outward Bound . . . full of everyday challenges in survival. Was I proud and impressed! At a relatively young age, that boy got it....he really understood and appreciated what some other people go through in their difficult lives. He had passed the test of empathy and understanding. I've had a few occasions to take a bus recently on Indian Trails. It connects Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan towns to Lansing, Flint and "down below." The bus was clean and comfortable... almost on a par with those I've taken in Europe. Just as Kath Weston has written, there's nothing like a bus trip to connect you with a broad cross-section of humanity. One bus trip included a poignant stop near a prison to pick up an ex-convict re-entering society. Another distinguished bus traveler and natural anthropologist (though not by training) was Kentucky author Janice Holt Giles. She was a most perceptive chronicler of rural Kentucky circa 1940, starting with her nonfiction classic memoir *"Forty Acres and No Mule."* College-educated, she met her rural Kentucky husband, then a soldier, on a long bus trip. She lived among his kin on a remote ridge for the rest of her life. Several distinguished historical novels grew out of the interest first stimulated on that long bus ride.

While reviewing information on my writing name online, someone posted a picture of the greyhound bus that ran next to your online story on Real Change. I just found out about your book as I followed to picture....I have been "traveling Light" for 3 years...mostly on the train, some airports. My journey has mostly been about "looking for my homeland - and my people, and listening to the worlds change around me via words from others." It's been delightful and hard." While I wasn't sure why someone would post this picture, I am delighted to find that it lead to your book. It has given me more inspiration to write, write, write..... and read. Blessings to you.

No, I haven't read the book either. But I'm delighted it has been written. I regularly ride the Greyhound between Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Brownsville, Texas, on my way to and from my second home in Xela, Guatemala (thus I also ride the buses in Mexico and Guatemala). Most educated Americans, including nearly all my friends and family, are clueless as to the 5% of Americans who are at the bottom of the social/economic/health/IQ bell curve. Riding the bus is a crash course in who they are. I've often thought Washington politicians should be required to make one 24 hour Greyhound trip annually. Then again, Washington politicians don't seem very trainable. Ride the bus! Read the book!

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