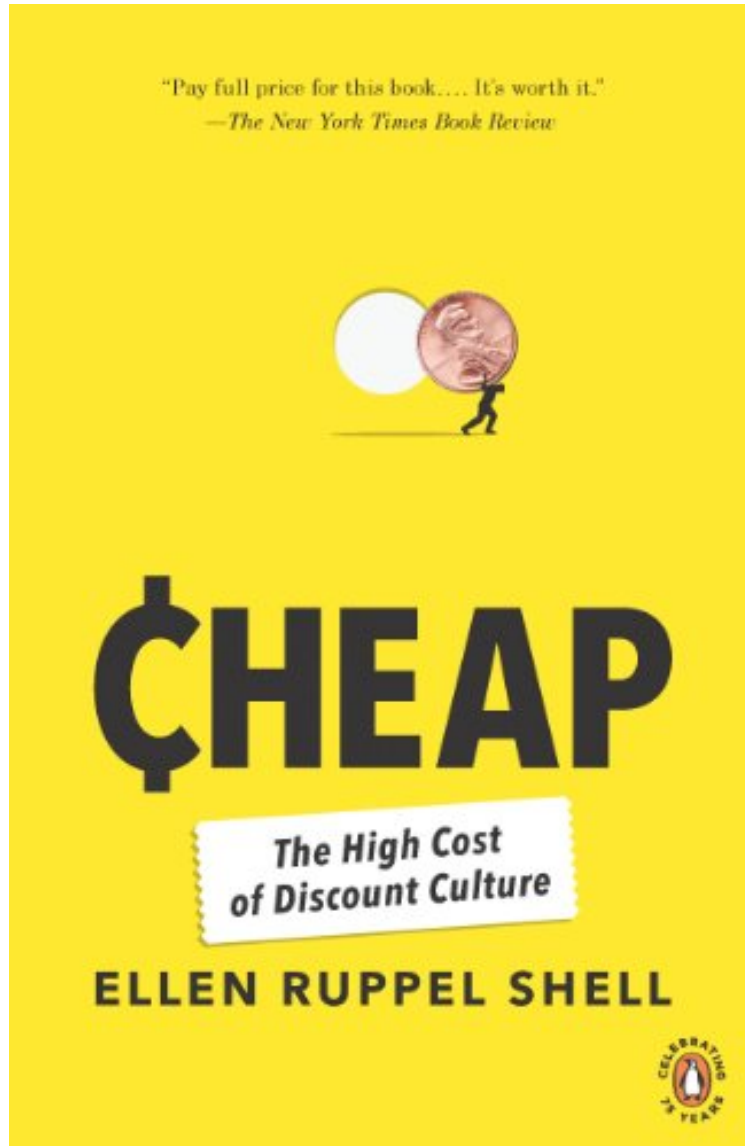


[Download] Cheap: The High Cost of Discount Culture

## Cheap: The High Cost of Discount Culture

*Ellen Ruppel Shell*

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**Ellen Ruppel Shell : Cheap: The High Cost of Discount Culture** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cheap: The High Cost of Discount Culture:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Cheap is good. Free is even better. By Doug HMy employer's top customers are major retailers. Despite the indictment of modern retail practices, (many of which are really old practices that have been refined and re-packaged) I actually still found this book to be an interesting read. While there are parts of the book that I disagree with, Shell does succeeds in peeling back "some" of the layers of retail practices giving readers, of all backgrounds, a glimpse into this esoteric world. She also understands that we, the consumers, are

part of the problem as without "demand" there would be reduced "supply" of the cheaper goods. Shell's research regarding the psychology of retail customers is sound. I say this because part of my job actually involves implementing software tools, sold to retailers, that help them formulate promotional offerings that leverage the very psychological factors that Shell outlines in this book. These areas of the book are spot on. Whether you work in retail or not - retailers touch our everyday lives. Love it or hate it, this book will cause you to pause around whether that last "great deal" really was a "bargain". Cheap might even change how you approach shopping. I found it worth the read if you can get it "used" or "new with a heavy discount off the publisher's suggested retail price. Even better - borrow it from the library. :-)

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Well Written but Narrow Focused  
By T. Flanagan  
Ms Shell's background as a journalist comes through clearly and convincingly. Her writing style is very easy and enjoyable to read. Like a journalist, she spends most of the book describing the what and why of her subtitle, "The High Cost of Discount Culture." She explores how the consumer based economy has evolved over the past century from one of high service and quality products to a consumer driven run toward lower prices. And like a journalist, she frames the resulting problems in a narrow focus. The book repetitively describes how discounting has caused workers to suffer a declining lifestyle. It also presents a consistent drumbeat of how unions have been prevented (perhaps unjustly) from maintaining a reasonable middle class standard of living. The observations which she makes are thought provoking, and the book is worth reading for them alone. However, it left me wondering when it comes to the potential future for the global economy. There are many avenues left unexplored. Ms Shell does make an attempt at what we as consumers can do about it, but my impression is that her editor asked for it while her heart (and analysis) lagged. In her last chapter she briefly stated that solving the problem in the future lies in the choice each of us has to bypass the cheapest products. By favoring higher cost options, consumers would elevate living standards for workers around the world. It left me feeling like the train stopped before it reached the station.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. What a surprise  
By Queen of thorns  
This book was so surprisingly great. I really mean - it's not what I expected I guess. So much information. I loved the history part that was in almost every chapter. History of shopping/retail, very interesting. I highly recommend you read this book

A myth-shattering investigation of the true cost of America's passion for finding a better bargain From the shuttered factories of the Rust Belt to the strip malls of the Sun Belt-and almost everywhere in between-America has been transformed by its relentless fixation on low price. This pervasive yet little-examined obsession with bargains is arguably the most powerful and devastating market force of our time, having fueled an excess of consumerism that blights our landscape, escalates personal debt, lowers our standard of living, and even skews of our concept of time. Spotlighting the peculiar forces that drove Americans away from quality, durability, and craftsmanship and towards quantity, quantity, and more quantity, Ellen Ruppel Shell traces the rise of the bargain through our current big-box profusion to expose the astronomically high cost of cheap.

From Publishers Weekly  
Atlantic correspondent Shell (The Hungry Gene) tackles more than just discount culture in this wide-ranging book that argues that the American drive toward bargain-hunting and low-price goods has a hidden cost in lower wages for workers and reduced quality of goods for consumers. After a dry examination of the history of the American retail industry, the author examines the current industrial and political forces shaping how and what we buy. In the book's most involving passages, Shell deftly analyzes the psychology of pricing and demonstrates how retailers manipulate subconscious bargain triggers that affect even the most knowing consumers. The author urges shoppers to consider spending more and buying locally, but acknowledges the inevitability of globalization and the continuation of trends toward efficient, cost-effective production. The optimistic call to action that concludes the book feels hollow, given the evidence that precedes it. If Shell illuminates with sharp intelligence and a colloquial style the downside of buying Chinese garlic or farm-raised shrimp, nothing demonstrates how consumers, on a mass scale, could seek out an alternative or why they would choose to do so. (July) Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "That cycle of consumption seems harmless enough, particularly since we live in a country where there are plenty of cheap goods to go around. But in her lively and terrifying book "Cheap: The High Cost of Discount Culture," Ellen Ruppel Shell pulls back the shimmering, seductive curtain of low-priced goods to reveal their insidious hidden costs. Those all-you-can-eat Red Lobster shrimps may very well have come from massive shrimp-farming spreads in Thailand, where they've been plumped up with antibiotics and possibly tended by maltreated migrant workers from Burma, Cambodia and Vietnam. The made-in-China toy train you bought your kid a few Christmases ago may have been sprayed with lead paint -- and the spraying itself may have been done by a child laborer, without the benefit of a protective mask. "Cheap" is hardly a finger-wagging book. This isn't a screed designed to make us feel guilty for unknowingly benefiting from the hardships of workers in other parts of the world. And Shell -- who writes regularly for the Atlantic -- isn't talking about the shallowness of consumerism here; she makes it clear that she, like most of us, enjoys the hunt for a good deal. "Cheap" really is about us, meaning not just Americans, but citizens of the world, and about what we stand to lose in a global economic environment that threatens the very nature of meaningful work, work we can take pride in and build a career on -- or even at which we

can just make a living. -Stephanie Zacharek, Salon.com "This highly intelligent and disturbing book provides invaluable insight into our consumer culture and should be mandatory reading for anyone trying to figure out our current financial mess. As Shell proves, the hunt for cheap products has hurt us all. Highly recommended for smart readers." -Library Journal "Diligent, useful cultural criticism, akin to Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* and Tom Vanderbilt's *Traffic*." -Kirkus "I just finished *Cheap: The High Cost of Discount Culture* by Ellen Ruppel Shell and I am now both disgusted and totally freaked out. Ed is hosting a round table discussion on this one in the coming weeks which I am a part of so I won't go into too much detail here but really, Shell has done an outstanding job of bringing together all the facets of our need to buy cheap: food, clothing, furniture, etc. She doesn't just talk Wal-mart (in fact she doesn't talk much about Wal-mart at all) but she does talk IKEA and Red Lobster and China and the history of discount shopping in our country (Woolworths, etc.) which is truly fascinating. Beyond all the info though, Shell's writing style is utterly and completely top notch. This is popular history/culture at its finest and after you read it, you will approach every single purchase you make with a high level of suspicion. We have been roundly manipulated folks, for our entire lives. And while we all kinda know it, you have to read *Cheap* to really appreciate it. Staggering stuff." -Colleen Mondor, reviewer for Booklist, Bookslut, Eclectica Magazine and the Voices of New Orleans "Talk about timely!-in the midst of our economic confusion, Ellen Ruppel Shell talks good sense about cost, price, value-about what constitutes a bargain, and about what makes for a (literal) steal." -Bill McKibben, author of *Deep Economy* "Americans have always loved a good deal. But, as this courageous book argues, that love has evolved into a destructive obsession. Shell shows through in-depth reporting that our never-ending hunt for discounts has fed a plethora of social ills. And by moving our production to the world's lowest-cost labor markets, we have scarified such basic values as handcraftsmanship and product integrity. As *Cheap* ably proves, you get what you pay for." -Dana Thomas, author of *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster* "There is no free lunch. Ellen Ruppel Shell powerfully argues that we have paid a high price for buying cheap goods. Hers is compelling story that will hopefully convince Americans that making different choices as consumers can fundamentally change our society-and the world." -Lizabeth Cohen, author of *A Consumers' Republic* "Around the world, people are being forced to reconsider the very idea of prosperity, and to ask what kind of wealth matters most and can be sustained. *Cheap* appears at just the right moment to enrich this discussion. This history of discounting and bargain-mania will change the way shoppers think about their next trip to the mall. As an examination of the global effects of the quest for rock-bottom prices, *Cheap* an important addition to arguments about America's economic future. This is a valuable book for a troubled time." -James Fallows, author of *Postcards from Tomorrow Square* "More stuff for less! -the American recipe for material well-being. Now Ellen Ruppel Shell takes a hard look at this apparently simple notion and finds it isn't so simple after all. *Cheap* pulls apart the old economic verities and subjects the glib new promises of Wall Street and globalization to scrutiny. How did we find ourselves in our current mess? Shell finds part of the answer in our confused ideas about what, exactly, is a bargain price." -Charles C. Mann, author of *1491* About the Author Ellen Ruppel Shell is a correspondent for the Atlantic Monthly, and has written for The New York Times Magazine, The Washington Post, National Geographic, Time, Discover, Seed, and dozens of other national publications. She is the author, most recently, of *The Hungry Gene*, which was published in six languages, and is Associate Professor and Co-Director of the Knight Center for Science and Medical Journalism at Boston University.