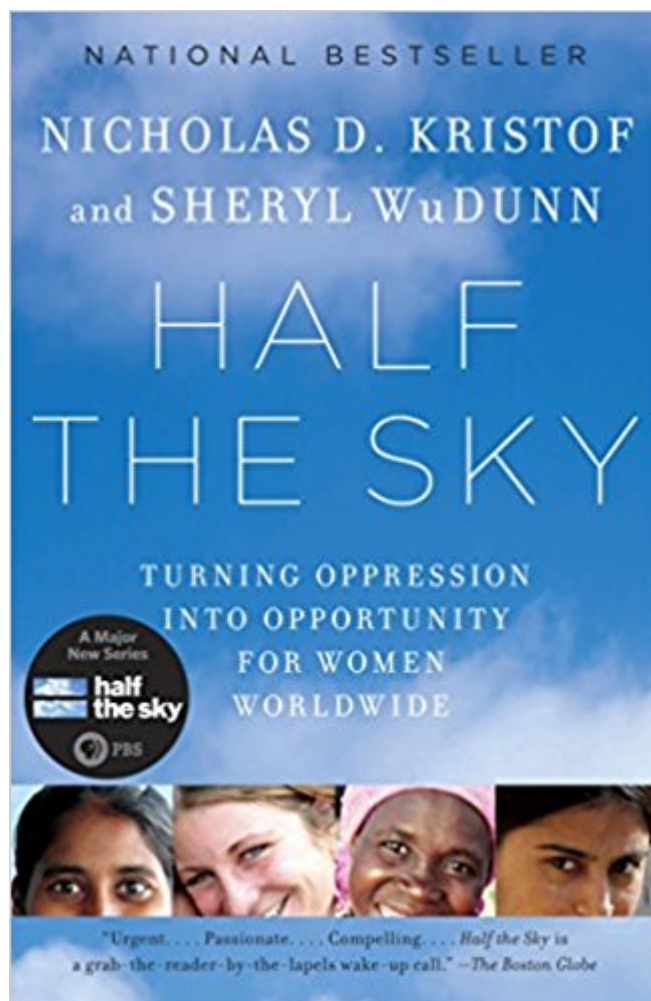


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Half The Sky



Synopsis

#1 National Bestseller From two of our most fiercely moral voices, a passionate call to arms against our era's most pervasive human rights violation: the oppression of women and girls in the developing world. With Pulitzer Prize winners Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn as our guides, we undertake an odyssey through Africa and Asia to meet the extraordinary women struggling there, among them a Cambodian teenager sold into sex slavery and an Ethiopian woman who suffered devastating injuries in childbirth. Drawing on the breadth of their combined reporting experience, Kristof and WuDunn depict our world with anger, sadness, clarity, and, ultimately, hope. They show how a little help can transform the lives of women and girls abroad. That Cambodian girl eventually escaped from her brothel and, with assistance from an aid group, built a thriving retail business that supports her family. The Ethiopian woman had her injuries repaired and in time became a surgeon. A Zimbabwean mother of five, counseled to return to school, earned her doctorate and became an expert on AIDS. Through these stories, Kristof and WuDunn help us see that the key to economic progress lies in unleashing women's potential. They make clear how so many people have helped to do just that, and how we can each do our part. Throughout much of the world, the greatest unexploited economic resource is the female half of the population. Countries such as China have prospered precisely because they emancipated women and brought them into the formal economy. Unleashing that process globally is not only the right thing to do; it's also the best strategy for fighting poverty. Deeply felt, pragmatic, and inspirational, *Half the Sky* is essential reading for every global citizen.

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Customer Reviews

I was able to read most of an advance copy of this book before Bill Drayton (founder of Ashoka: Innovators for the Public) snatched it away and ran off with it on his annual 2-week hiking trip to the mountains. I think this has to be the most important book - not just for women's rights globally but for human rights - published in my memory. Kristof and WuDunn weave together a most compelling story of how culture and customs historically suppress women. They tackle many tough, taboo topics - for example honor killing. But more importantly, they champion the stories of heroic women worldwide wholly committed to changing the many evils of the status quo. What is more, they posit a kind of general framework theory that the really important advances in human rights that are going to be made in the near future are going to be brought about by these entrepreneurial pioneering women. In essence, that the backbone of the human rights movement and of real change across all societies is going to be a direct function of brave women who give themselves permission to say "NO" to thousands of years of (to most Westerners) unimaginable oppressive cultural customs and who take it upon themselves to lead to a new way. Once you have read the book, it is very hard, if not impossible, to disagree with Kristof and WuDunn's general theme. To wit, the brave women of Iran who took to the streets to protest the results of the recent election.

As a feminist, I really looked forward to reading this book. I was lucky enough to find it at a book swap and didn't have to pay for it myself. Boy, am I glad I didn't. I give it three stars for what is trying to be accomplished: raising awareness about the plight of women around the world. Despite the heroic effort to bring this worldwide tragedy to light, Kristof and WuDunn have done a serious disservice to journalism, especially of the investigative nature. While their attempts to draw attention to the oppression of women through statistics as well as grueling and gruesome stories deserve an applause, they consistently pushed ideas without revealing the whole truth. This is lying through omission. In the section on prostitution, Kristof and WuDunn routinely would dismiss Western prostitution as "voluntary" and would flippantly dismiss the idea that women of America and other

Western cultures can be enslaved. Page 24 of this book really revealed how disgustingly inattentive Kristof and WuDunn have been to sexual slavery in the West. "Moreover, Western men usually go with girls who are more or less voluntary prostitutes..." Combine this with page 9, "We certainly don't think of prostitutes as slaves, forced to do what they do, for most prostitutes in America, China, and Japan aren't truly enslaved." Are they out of their minds? Either they have turned a blind eye to the nature of prostitution as a whole or they are purposefully leaving it out in order to make the culture of prostitution of more developing countries appear more bleak. Let us not forget the average of prostitutes in America is roughly 15-years-old. That doesn't sound very voluntary to me. I highly suggest they take a look at some of Rachel Lloyd's work and maybe they'll stop spewing such ignorance.

I believe in book's main premise: by empowering women and girls, we can change the world and help end poverty. However, I found it disappointing and shocking to read this entire book and not find a single story about water and sanitation. You can't even find the word "water" in the index. No doubt, the stories Nick and Sheryl tell are horrific and inspiring, and women living in poverty face obstacles that I can't even imagine. But, as I read it, I felt it was more of a collection of anecdotes from Nick and Sheryl's international travels rather than as advertised: a "must-read" and "call to arms" about how we can end global poverty. Having spent 19 years working in international aid, I don't see how you can seriously talk about helping women in poverty and not mention water or sanitation. For millions of girls from poor households, there is a straight tradeoff between time spent in school and time spent collecting water. For their mothers, time spent collecting water means they have little time for more productive work or rest. Being without access to water means that to obtain the water they need to survive, people resort to ditches, rivers and lakes polluted with human or animal excrement, and they carry that water home on their heads or backs, causing chronic back pains and sores, wearing flip flops if they are wearing shoes at all, walking uphill on steep, rocky or muddy paths. This daily walk for water saps their energy, diminishes their health status, and prevents them from participating in economic and social activities that are vital to the development of communities.

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