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\$2 A DAY: Living on Almost Nothing in America

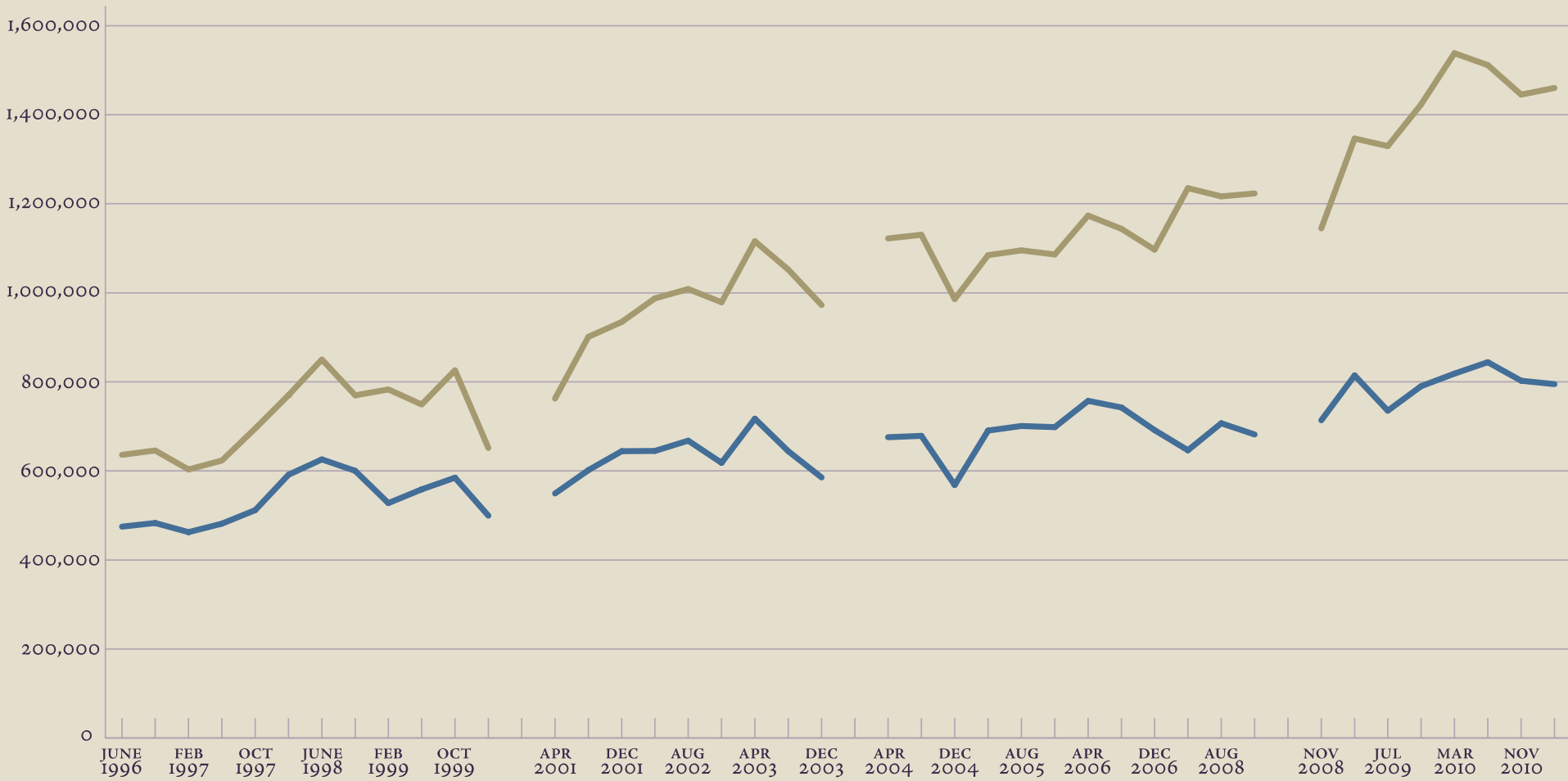
#2DOLLARS

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Figure 1. The Number of Households with Children in Extreme Poverty

- \$2 per person per day
- \$2 per person per day, with SNAP

Source: Authors' analyses of the 1996 through 2008 Panels of the SIPP. The horizontal axis represents approximate years and months of SIPP 4th reference month estimates. The vertical axis represents households.



***How did they end up in
\$2-a-day poverty?***



***What
were the
consequences,
esp. for kids?***

What do they do to survive?

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Welfare: A Shell of Its Former Self

IN 1994, AFDC SERVED

- 14.2 million people
- 9.6 million children
- 4.6 million adults
- 5.5% of Americans
- Roughly two-thirds of poor families

Welfare: A Shell of Its Former Self

IN 1994, AFDC SERVED

- 14.2 million people
- 9.6 million children
- 4.6 million adults
- 5.5% of Americans
- 68% of poor families

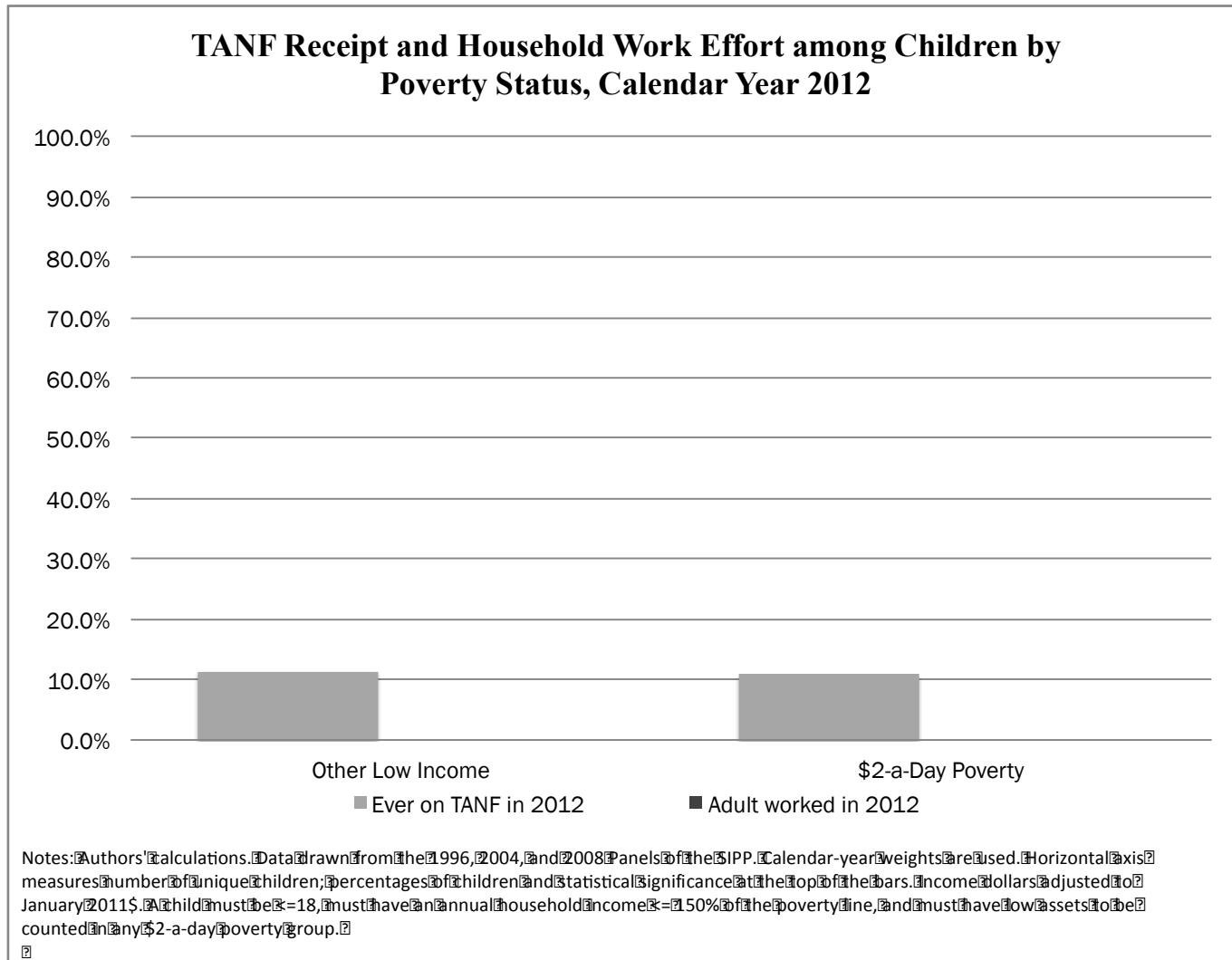
TODAY, TANF SERVES

- 4.1 million people
- 2.9 million children
- 1.1 million adults
- 1.3% of Americans
- 23% of poor families

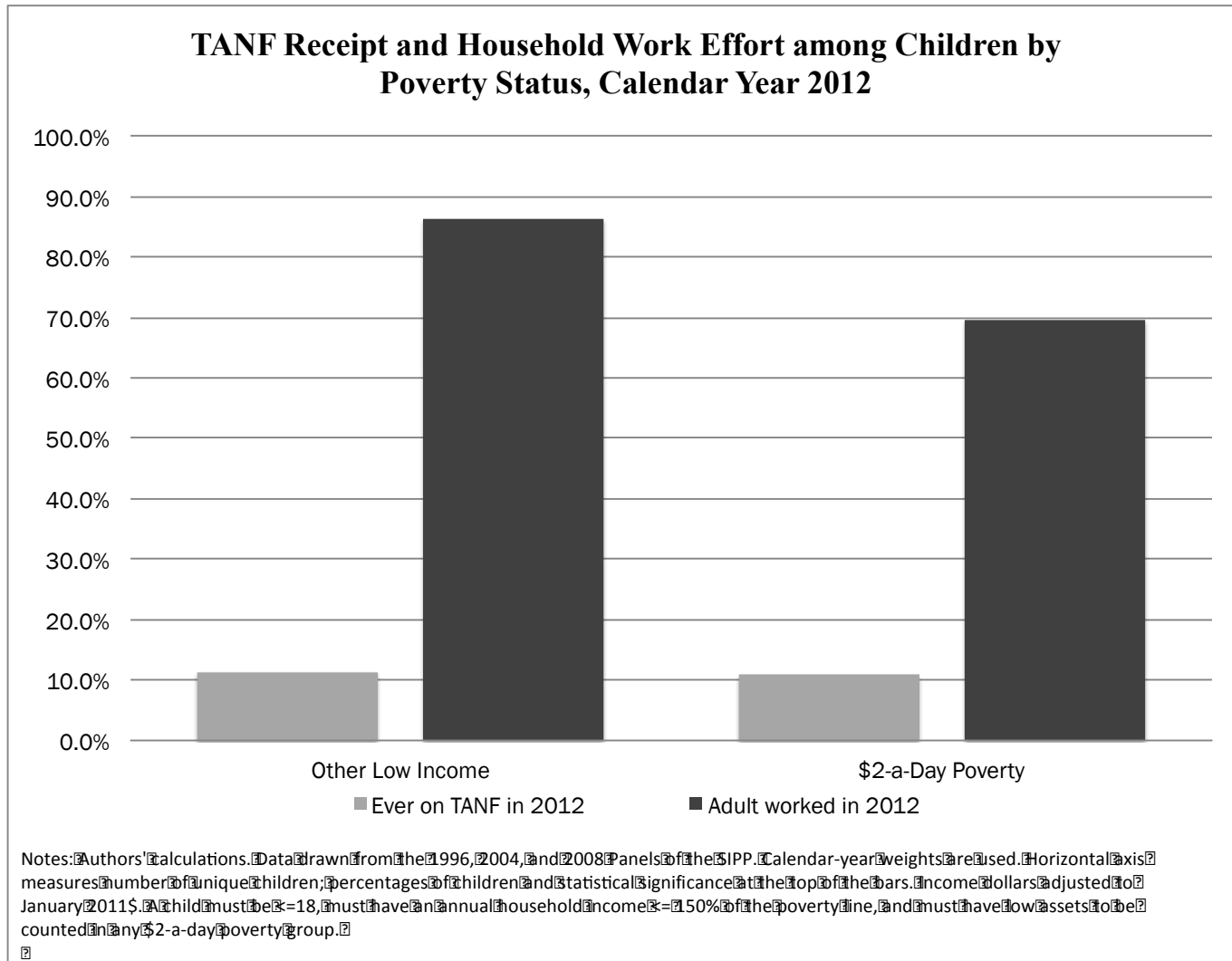
Welfare is Dead

- Modonna Harris (Chicago) has heard that **“they just aren’t giving that out anymore”**
- Travis Compton (Johnson City, TN), when asked if he would apply for TANF, said **“What’s that?”**
- Rae McCormick (Cleveland) finally applies and is told, **“Honey, I’m sorry. There are just so many needy people, we just don’t have enough to go around.”**

Work or Welfare?



Work or Welfare?



Perilous Work

Unstable Jobs

- Unsafe work condition
- Not enough hours
- Work hours fluctuate
- Labor law violations

Unstable Housing/Personal Lives

- Volatile living arrangements
- Family and friends can be unsupportive,
and even harmful

A Room of One's Own

- Housing instability is a hallmark of life
- Doubling up can be an important source of support
- But for the \$2.00-a-Day poor, it too often ends in sexual, physical, or emotional abuse
- Jennifer Hernandez's 9-year old daughter Kaitlin is molested by her uncle. **"I never expected that,"** Jennifer says
- Rae McCormick: **"I've been beat, I've been raped."**

The Work of Survival

- Private charity helps, but is not evenly distributed across the country
- It is common to trade SNAP for cash, at 50 to 60 cents on the dollar
- Jessica Compton (Johnson City) donates plasma weekly: **“Especially if my iron’s down, I get, like *really* tired.”**
- With the water shut off, Paul Heckewelder (Cleveland) **“took the gutter apart, rigged it up over the garbage can”** and used rainwater to flush the toilets



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What does it feel like to be that hungry?

**“Well, actually, it feel like you want to be dead.
Because it’s peaceful being dead.”**

--Tabitha Hicks, 18

The Ultimate Litmus Test

The ultimate litmus test we endorse for any reform is whether it will serve to integrate the poor—particularly the \$2-a-day poor—into society, rather than isolate them from it.

- All deserve the opportunity to work
- Parents should be able to raise their children in a place of their own
- Sometimes work won't work, we need a functioning cash safety net