

Just How Far Will \$15 an Hour Really Go?

Perhaps at no other time of the year is it clearer that elective self-denial is just another privilege of affluence. If you indulged in December without abatement, then you are likely to approach January with the intent to say

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no — to cheese, to craft beer, to Shake Shack, to cake doughnuts, to the braised short ribs you have perfected in an Instant Pot. You will stay home and make safads

and eat undressed grains, and presumably the money you save will be spent on virtuous things.

During these exercises in asceticism you may often feel hungry, but in most cases you will not think about hunger in any broader or meaningful sense. This is not (necessarily) because you are cold and indifferent to the misfortunes of others.

Hunger as a defining symptom of poverty in the United States is rarely discussed, either at the level of engaged civilian conversation or as a political talking point. To do so would be to admit to a failure of democracy for which too many are to blame.

According to government statistics, one in eight households in the United States is food insecure, meaning those households are unable to afford a consistent supply of nourishment throughout the year. In New York City, the number of people living with food insecurity has decreased during the past six years, but the figure is still higher — by 22 percent — than it was before the recession. In the Bronx, more than one-third of all children go hungry regularly.

On Tuesday, the new minimum wage



Supporters of raising the minimum wage rallying in New York in 2015. The new rate went into effect last week.

actually, when you see how much money is actually required to live there already, before housing prices are destined to be driven up even further by the company's expansion. A single parent with two school-age children, for example, would need to make nearly \$69,427 a year, according to City Harvest's Self-Sufficiency calculator. That amounts to an hourly wage of just under \$33.

So to live comfortably enough in all but the most expensive quarters in Brooklyn, a two-parent family with two children would need to make about \$70,000 a year, which would mean that each parent would need to earn just over \$16 an hour. That figure accounts for the \$433 the family would receive in child-related tax credits. All across the city, the cost of basic needs is rising

The new minimum wage is unlikely to solve the city's affordability crisis.

faster for low-income families than conventional inflation metrics actually indicate. Also dispiriting is the fact that nearly a quarter of households that fall below the self-sufficiency standard include an adult with a bachelor's degree.

What this tells us is that the arrival of a \$15 hourly minimum wage cannot be considered the end of something. New York may be a city of self-invention, but it is not a city of self-sustenance. We are