

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910958455703321
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Titolo	The fragile middle class : Americans in debt // Teresa A. Sullivan, Elizabeth Warren, Jay Lawrence Westbrook
Pubbl/distr/stampa	New Haven, CT, : Yale University Press, c2000
ISBN	9786611730048 9781281730046 1281730041 9780300128147 0300128142
Edizione	[1st ed.]
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (400 p.)
Altri autori (Persone)	WarrenElizabeth <1949-> WestbrookJay Lawrence
Disciplina	332.7/5/0673
Soggetti	Bankruptcy - United States Consumer credit - United States Finance, Personal - United States
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Bibliographic Level Mode of Issuance: Monograph
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references (p. [297]-365) and index.
Nota di contenuto	Front matter -- Contents -- Illustrations -- Tables -- Preface -- Chapter 1. Americans in Financial Crisis -- Chapter 2. Middle-Class and Broke The Demography of Bankruptcy -- Chapter 3. Unemployed or Underemployed -- Chapter 4. Credit Cards -- Chapter 5. Sicknes and Injury -- Chapter 6. Divorce -- Chapter 7. Housing -- Chapter 8. The Middle Class in Debt -- Appendix 1. Data Used in This Study -- Appendix 2. Other Published Studies -- Notes -- Index
Sommario/riassunto	Since 1997, the number of American families filing for federal bankruptcy annually has exceeded one million. By most measures, those who file are members of the middle class-a group that has long provided stability and vitality for the American economic system. This raises the troubling question: why, during the most remarkable period of prosperity in our history, are unprecedented numbers of Americans encountering such serious financial trouble? The authors of this important book analyze court records and demographic data on thousands of bankruptcy cases, as well as debtors' own poignant

accounts of the reasons for their bankruptcies. For many middle-class Americans, the findings show, financial stability is fragile-almost any setback can be disastrous. The erosion of job stability, divorce and family instability, the visible and invisible costs of medical care, the burden of home ownership, and the staggering weight of consumer debt financed with plastic combine to threaten the financial security of growing numbers of middle-class families. The authors view the bankruptcy process in the light of changing cultural and economic factors and consider what this may signify for the future of a large, secure, and dynamic middle class.
