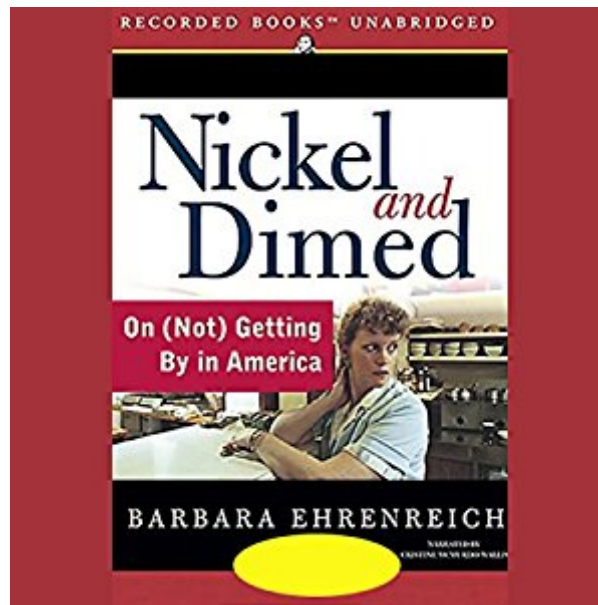


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Nickel And Dimed: On (Not) Getting By In America



Synopsis

The bestselling, landmark work of undercover reportage, now updated. Acclaimed as an instant classic upon publication, *Nickel and Dimed* has sold more than 1.5 million copies and become a staple of classroom reading. Chosen for "one book" initiatives across the country, it has fueled nationwide campaigns for a living wage. Funny, poignant, and passionate, this revelatory firsthand account of life in low-wage America—the story of Barbara Ehrenreich's attempts to eke out a living while working as a waitress, hotel maid, house cleaner, nursing-home aide, and Wal-Mart associate—has become an essential part of the nation's political discourse. Now, in a new afterword, Ehrenreich shows that the plight of the underpaid has in no way eased: with fewer jobs available, deteriorating work conditions, and no pay increase in sight, *Nickel and Dimed* is more relevant than ever. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours and 17 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Recorded Books

Audible.com Release Date: August 13, 2004

Language: English

ASIN: B0006IU7B8

Best Sellers Rank: #33 in Books > Business & Money > Economics > Labor & Industrial Relations #34 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Labor & Industrial Relations #99 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Poverty

Customer Reviews

Barbara Ehrenreich seems to have missed the point of her own research. Her proposed plan was to move to a new city with a small amount of capital, find a minimum wage job and a place to live and try to make ends meet. She was searching for insight into the working poor who represent a large segment of American workers, made larger since welfare reform. She had the opportunity to be their spokesperson, but instead she was too busy complaining about her own discomfort. For starters, Ms. Ehrenreich doesn't give up her health insurance or car during this entire experiment. In fact, at one job she develops an itchy rash and instead of doing what the working poor who have no health

insurance would do - go to the nearest drug store and buy something OTC and hope for the best - she calls her personal out-of-state dermatologist for a prescription so she is itch-free in a matter of days. Barb, honey, that's not how it works for people without health insurance! They work sick, uncomfortable, injured and even itchy. Really. She also had the advantage of a car, which she used to drive to multiple employers during the first few days of a new job hunt, filling out applications, having interviews and hunting for an apartment. A car is a luxury many working poor don't have, so they are not able to visit 10 or more potential employers on a single day to put in applications and have interviews like she did. The real working poor use public transportation, bicycles or shoe leather. If the job location or housing is more than a mile from a public transportation route, it's off the radar for many people. I wish Barb had tried this at one of her test cities so that she could see how inconvenient, frustrating and limiting public transportation can be.

I'm not sure I'll be able to adequately explain my feelings about this book. While I expected to love it, it left me disappointed. But I can't understand all the anger I've seen in reviews I have read. Barbara Ehrenreich's heart is in the right place, I'm just not sure that she has the proper attitude or experience to write a realistic picture of what it's like to try to survive on a low paying job. She tried, though, and I suppose I need to give her more credit for that. Her premise is that no one can have a decent standard of living while working for minimum wage, and I agree it's very difficult. But she believed that before she started her experiment, and I don't think she learned anything new from her adventures in the world of low paying jobs. She only searched for details that confirmed what she already believed, and in the end, she persists in placing blame on the workers who probably feel trapped in a situation they don't know how to leave. I think that the major fault I find with this book is Ms. Ehrenreich's attitude. She seems condescending towards her fellow employees and resentful towards her employers. And at all times, it's obvious that she can't understand what it really feels like to have to live on what she's making. She knew she would never have to. Her attitude towards her co-workers is perhaps understandable. What seems most inconsistent to me is her opinion towards ALL of her bosses. I was especially disappointed in her description of one of her managers at Wal-Mart. She introduced her boss, Ellie by saying "I like Ellie", but then went on to scornfully describe her style as "the apotheosis of 'servant leadership'...the vaunted 'feminine' style of management.

I don't think someone from a privileged upbringing like Mrs. Ehrenreich could possibly understand what it feels like to live the lives of those she profiled in this book. While she could step into their

shoes for a brief few days, she knew she had a lavish book contract she was doing it for, she knew she had an education and a world of options available to her. She would never be able to experience something more intense: knowing she would have no safety nets, no help, no future, and a past she feared to reminisce in. I found her condescension offensive at times. At one point, she referred to TGI Friday's in a scoffing manner, as part of an example of things the poor like; in reality most struggling people could not afford TGI Friday's, that seems to be a middle class establishment. I remember that in my own life (rife with struggle), I had seen TGI Friday's as a special occasion place, for celebrations like birthdays and holidays. Ehrenreich's attitude sheds light on how limited her understanding and pity is. She sees TGI Friday's like I would see a Burger King. Her choice to go to a dry cleaners was far removed from the choices most underprivileged people would make. Most would hide a stain or purchase a few new outfits from a thrift store rather than blow money on dry cleaners - I cannot name a single truly poor person that I have known in my life that would even know what a dry cleaners is like and what it costs. When you struggle, you don't have room in your budget for such expenses. Barbara could only make room because she never felt real struggle. Her food choices were also illustrative of a life of privilege. I made do with oatmeal and Ramen when I struggled, budgeting 5-10 dollars a week for food.

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