

## Nickel and Dimed

For Sociology 101 I was required to read Nickel and Dimed, by Barbara Ehrenreich. I had known very little about the book before I started to read, but it was about to have a great impact on my life. The best books are the ones that give us a fresh perspective on the world. They motivate readers to make changes in their own lives for much larger causes. This book has done just that for me.

Nickel and Dimed, is a novel about a female journalist who investigates poverty in several major cities in the United States. She does this by shedding her own identity, in order to live and work among people in low-income situations. Ehrenreich takes on many jobs throughout her research such as waitressing, cleaning homes, and retail positions. Although she was an experienced journalist, Ehrenreich still chose to live on the same income as the workers she was investigating. This would help her to better understand the circumstances people face living in poverty. This proved itself to be a major challenge for Ehrenreich. She found it very difficult to purchase groceries, clothing, and pay for her housing on this extremely low budget.

Throughout her experience working in low-income positions, Ehrenreich met many individuals who influenced her book. One young woman whom Ehrenreich met while housekeeping, had a hard time saving money due to her low income. This woman would only eat half a bag of Dorritos for lunch each day in order to save the money for her rent. The young woman became thin and looked disturbingly fragile. Ehrenreich was really touched by the struggles of the individuals she worked with. She concluded that most of the people had to move in with roommates, or even live in their vehicles to

survive on such a small budget. These extreme circumstances made Ehrenreich feel privileged to reside in an apartment of her own.

Ehrenreich discusses in her book that the people she met in her low-income jobs were intelligent, hard-working, and above all, courageous. What they lacked in monetary status they made up in their diligent approach to the jobs they worked in. Not for a moment should anyone confuse low-income for laziness or stupidity. This was one of the top lessons taught by Nickel and Dimed. By taking the time to experience life in another persons standing Ehrenreich achieved much more than information alone. She was able to gain clarity and understanding through interactions with others and through her own life experience.

Nickel and Dimed is an extraordinary journey through the experiences and trials of one journalist. Ehrenreich's quest to reveal the issues facing the impoverished is truly breathtaking. To catch a glimpse of how these people get through a day really says a lot about their strength and character. After reading this book, I wanted to take action myself. Journalists hold a very powerful role in the world. By bringing events and situations to light they can provoke change in our society. Selectively choosing the types of stories to research is the most important thing a journalist must consider before investigating. I was moved by Ehrenreich's choice to investigate those in poverty, rather than write a lighter and less controversial piece. This choice made the field of journalism much more powerful and important.

As an aspiring journalist myself, I have been inspired by this book to select stories about those who are voiceless. In a role that has such impact over both the government and the public it would be a waste to speak of issues for those who could do it for

themselves. By giving low-income earners a voice, Ehrenreich made it known that this is a situation we need to pay more attention to. This is exactly what a great journalist does, and her technique should be shadowed by anyone who wishes to enter the field.

Nickel and Dimed is truly an inspiring book. It brought me directly into the lives of those who work very hard, yet get little back in return. By understanding what goes on in low-income families, I can better appreciate my own good fortune as well. With Ehrenreich's work as my guide, I feel I can use my career choice and work in order to improve the lives of others less fortunate.