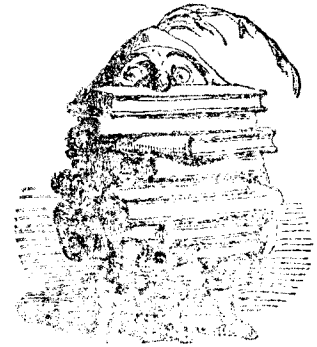


August 8, 2002

"Reader's Forum"
American Libraries
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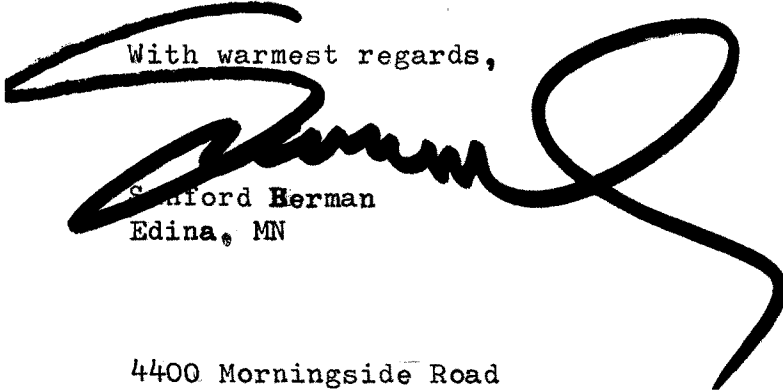
Dear Colleagues,

Librarians should take genuine pride in having saved Michael Moore's Stupid White Men (ReganBooks, 2001) from being pulped. They rightly applauded both Moore and Barbara Ehrenreich (Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By In America [Holt, 2001]) as AIA Atlanta Conference speakers. And their latest books ought to be in every collection. Amid the euphoria, though, has anyone actually looked at these tomes and noticed anything troubling about them?

Ehrenreich, for instance, devotes a whole chapter (pages 122-191) to her experience as a Wal-Mart associate. Moore deals extensively with the Bushes, Clinton, Gore, the 2000 election, race relations, foreign policy, the ZapMe! Corporation and Channel One, and Ralph Nader. He even includes a directory of sex toy sources (pages 161-162). However, no entries appear for "Wal-Mart," "Bush," "Clinton," "Nader," or "Sex toys" in the indexes to either volume. Because there ARE NO INDEXES. Serious (and also semi-serious) nonfiction works demand back-of-the-book indexes to make content more accessible and retrievable. And librarians should be loudly insisting to authors and publishers alike that indexes are necessities, not frills. Further, the Ehrenreich work addressed one topic in general: the situation, or plight, of working ^{poor} people. After repeated lobbying, the Library of Congress finally established a subject heading for WORKING POOR. It was already available when Nickel and Dimed appeared. Yet it was NOT assigned to that title, meaning that a WORKING POOR subject search in most library catalogs will not unearth the Ehrenreich book. (Neither will oversold keyword searching since "working poor" doesn't figure in the prime, sub, or chapter titles.) So will colleagues "liberate" this

landmark tome by adding WORKING POOR to local bib-records and urging LC to do likewise? Or is "standardization" more highly prized than access and accuracy?

With warmest regards,



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Millions of Americans work full-time, year-round, for poverty-level wages. Barbara Ehrenreich decided to join them, inspired in part by the rhetoric surrounding welfare reform, which promised that any job equals a better life. But how can anyone survive, let alone prosper, on six to seven dollars an hour? To find out, Ehrenreich moved from Florida to Maine to Minnesota, taking the cheapest lodgings available and accepting work as a waitress, hotel maid, house cleaner, nursing home aide, and Wal-Mart salesperson. She soon discovered that even the "lowliest" occupations require exhausting mental and physical efforts. As one job is not enough; you need at least two if you intend to live indoors.

Nickel and Dimed reveals low-wage America in all its tenacity, anxiety, and surprising generosity—a land of Big Boxes, fast food, and a thousand desperate strategies for survival. Instantly acclaimed for its insight, humor, and passion, this book is changing the way America perceives its working poor.

"Jarring, full of riveting grit . . . This book is already unforgettable."

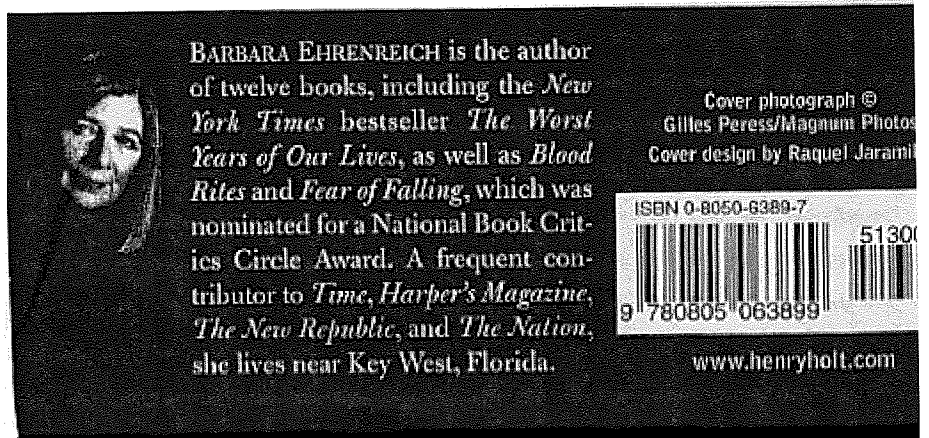
—Susannah Meadows, *Newsweek*

"Valuable and illuminating . . . We have Barbara Ehrenreich to thank for bringing us the news of America's working poor so clearly and directly, and conveying with a deep moral outrage. . . . She is our premier reporter of the underside of capitalism."

—Dorothy Gallagher, *The New York Times Book Review*

"Impassioned, fascinating, profoundly significant, and wildly entertaining . . . I kept grabbing family members and phoning friends to read passages aloud."

—Francine Prose, *O: The Oprah Magazine*



BARBARA EHRENREICH is the author of twelve books, including the *New York Times* bestseller *The Worst Years of Our Lives*, as well as *Blood Rites* and *Fear of Falling*, which was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award. A frequent contributor to *Time*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The New Republic*, and *The Nation*, she lives near Key West, Florida.

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