

21W.731 Discussion Questions on excerpt, Barbara Ehrenreich - *Nickel and Dimed*

1. Barbara Ehrenreich in “Nickel and Dimed...” uses the metaphor of a “parallel universe” (p.761) to describe the world of low wage work. How well does this metaphor work?
2. How well does Ehrenreich capture the world of waitressing? How would you describe her voice as a writer? Are there any paragraphs or sentences that seem particularly powerful?
3. In what ways does her experience of low-wage work compare with yours (if you’ve held low-wage positions)?
4. How well does Ehrenreich use outside research to provide a larger context for her personal narrative? In what ways do the footnotes add to the text? What would it be like if the footnotes were included in the body of the essay?
5. How might this piece have been different if Ehrenreich had used more traditional journalistic methods (interviewing, observation)? Is this method of first-person experience superior for certain kinds of topics?
6. Ehrenreich draws upon her low-wage work experience to make an argument about welfare reform in America. What is her argument? Is it persuasive to you as a reader?

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