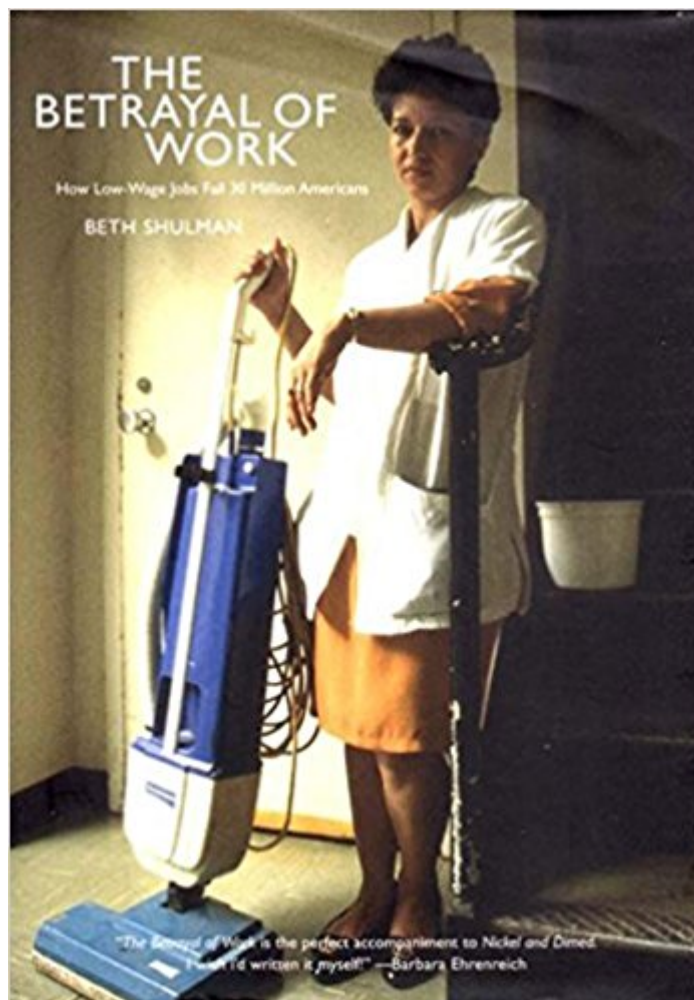


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# The Betrayal Of Work: How Low-Wage Jobs Fail 30 Million Americans And Their Families



## Synopsis

Following its publication in hardcover, the critically acclaimed *Betrayal of Work* became one of the most influential policy books about economic life in America; it was discussed in the pages of *Newsweek*, *Business Week*, *Fortune*, *The Washington Post*, *Newsday*, and *USA Today*, as well as in public policy journals and in broadcast interviews, including a one-on-one with Bill Moyers on PBS's *NOW*. The *American Prospect*'s James K. Galbraith's praise was typical: "Shulman's slim and graceful book is a model combination of compelling portraiture, common sense, and understated conviction." • Beth Shulman's powerfully argued book offers a full program to address the injustice faced by the 30 million Americans who work full time but do not make a living wage. As the influential Harvard Business School newsletter put it, Shulman "specifically outlines how structural changes in the economy may be achieved, thus expanding opportunities for all Americans." • This edition includes a new afterword that intervenes in the post-election debate by arguing that low-wage work is an urgent moral issue of our time.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One out of four U.S. workers earns less than \$8.70 an hour. So begins Shulman's fact-filled look at the lives of America's working poor, and their struggles to survive without adequate health benefits, child care and job security. A former v-p of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union in Washington, D.C., Shulman doesn't hide the fact that she is addressing the same issues as Barbara

Ehrenreich did in *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, the bestselling 2001 book based on the author's own experiences in the low-wage workforce. But Shulman's book lacks the verve and wow factor of *Nickel and Dimed*, despite her efforts to include personal stories of poultry processors, janitors, child-care workers and others who earn poverty-level wages. The anecdotes often come across as overly broad and pandering. ("It can get very busy at the pharmacy counter, especially during flu season," she writes about the life of a pharmacy technical assistant.) Even the more compelling stories lose impact because of their failure to present more than a superficial point of view of the employers. The book is at its strongest when citing labor statistics and challenging long-held beliefs that low-wage work is synonymous with a lack of skills or that most low-wage employees will graduate into better positions. Still, many of the examples (working conditions are unsafe; employers of immigrants exploit wage laws) will come as no surprise to anyone who regularly picks up a newspaper. The book is useful as a reference tool for policy wonks and conscientious employers, but anyone looking for further insight into the reality and pervasiveness of the working poor will probably be disappointed. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"A vital book." —Thomas Oliphant, *The Boston Globe* "A powerful book." —E.J. Dionne, *The Washington Post* "Shulman documents the personal stories and explodes many of the myths of America's lowest-paid workers." —*Fortune* "Betrayal shows how working lives can get nasty fast." —*USA Today* "Must-reading for anyone who cares about the future of the American economy and American society." —Hedrick Smith

This is an eye-opening book. Though it was written about ten or so years ago, the information and dynamics exposed are still, unfortunately, germane. Written with compassion and thoroughly researched, this little tome is essential for understanding the mechanics of poverty among the (hard) working class.

Interesting. Loved it.

Ordered this book late for my son who needed it for school. It came right away and in great condition for a used book!

There is a gross misperception that all employed working Americans are doing well living the American dream, well this book rips off the cover from this blanket of lies, on pages 4-5 "BUT THE

GREAT SECRET OF AMERICA IS THAT A VAST NEW IMPOVERISHED POPULATION HAS GROWN UP IN OUR MIDST. YET THESE ARE NOT AMERICANS WHO HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED FROM THE WORLD OF WORK; IN FACT, THEY MAKE UP THE CORE OF MUCH OF THE NEW ECONOMY. INDEED, OUR RECENT PROSPERITY RESTS, IN PART, ON THEIR MISERY. THEIR POVERTY IS NOT INCIDENTAL TO THEIR ROLE AS WORKERS, BUT DERIVES DIRECTLY FROM IT. THEY ARE AMERICA'S SUPER-EXPLOITED. AND THAT IS BOTH A SHAME AND A CHALLENGE OF HISTORIC PROPORTIONS. A SHAME BECAUSE AMERICA HAS ALWAYS HONORED WORK, YET NOW FINDS ITSELF IN THE POSITION OF DEGRADING IT. A CHALLENGE BECAUSE WHATEVER ONE THOUGHT OF AMERICA'S WELFARE POOR, FEW PEOPLE WERE MAKING MONEY OFF THEM. THE SAME CANNOT BE SAID OF OUR NEW WORKING POOR. CORPORATIONS, CORPORATE EXECUTIVES, SHAREHOLDERS, AND AMERICAN CONSUMERS ARE MAKING A LOT OF MONEY OFF OF THEM. THIRTY MILLION AMERICANS, ONE OUT OF EVERY FOUR WORKERS, MAKES LESS THAN \$8.70 AN HOUR. AND THESE LOW-WAGE, NO-BENEFIT JOBS TRANSLATE INTO BILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF PROFITS, EXECUTIVE PAY, HIGH STOCK PRICES, AND LOW CONSUMER PRICES."In case you're wondering exactly who are these low-wage workers then turn to the bottom of page 5-6, "THEY ARE NURSING HOME WORKERS AND HOME HEALTH-CARE WORKERS WHO CARE FOR OUR MOTHERS AND FATHERS, YET MAKE SO LITTLE INCOME THAT MANY QUALIFY FOR FOOD STAMPS. THEY ARE POULTRY PROCESSING WORKERS WHO BONE AND PACKAGE THE CHICKEN WE EAT FOR OUR DINNER, YET THEY ARE NOT ALLOWED TO LEAVE THE LINE TO GO TO THE BATHROOM. THEY ARE RETAIL STORE WORKERS WHO HELP US IN DEPARTMENT STORES, GROCERY STORES AND CONVENIENCE STORES, BUT CAN'T GET ENOUGH HOURS OR BENEFITS TO SUPPORT THEMSELVES WITHOUT AT LEAST TWO JOBS. THEY ARE HOTEL WORKERS WHO ENSURE THAT THE ROOMS WE SLEEP IN ON OUR BUSINESS TRIPS AND FAMILY VACATIONS ARE CLEAN, BUT WHO HAVE NO SICK DAYS OR FUNERAL LEAVE OR VACATION TIME. THEY ARE JANITORIAL WORKERS WHO EMPTY OUR WASTEBASKETS AFTER DARK BUT WHO HAVE NO CHILD CARE. THEY ARE CATFISH WORKERS WHO PROCESS THE FISH WE ENJOY, BUT MUST WORK WITH INJURED WRISTS FROM CONTINUOUS MOTION ON THE LINE. THEY ARE 1-800 CALL-CENTER WORKERS WHO ANSWER OUR REQUESTS AND TAKE OUR ORDERS WHILE UNDER CONSTANT MANAGEMENT SURVEILLANCE. AND THEY ARE CHILD-CARE WORKERS WHO EDUCATE AND CARE FOR OUR CHILDREN WHILE THEIR OWN LIVE IN POVERTY."Another term for these lies is myths which can be found on page 7

"HOWEVER, THE REIGNING AMERICAN MYTHOLOGY THAT BEING IN A LOW-WAGE JOB IS A TEMPORARY SITUATION, THAT MOBILITY WILL SOLVE THE PROBLEM, UNDERMINES SUCH CONCERN. BUT THE EVIDENCE BELIES THE MYTH. WHILE SOME LOWER-WAGE WORKERS WILL MOVE UP THE LADDER, MOST WILL NEVER MOVE INTO THE MIDDLE CLASS. THEIR CHILDREN WILL SUFFER THE SAME FATE. IGNORING THIS REALITY LEAVES IN PLACE WHAT HAVARD ECONOMIST RICHARD FREEMAN CALLS AN "APARTHEID ECONOMY."INADEQUATE WAGES ARE ONLY ONE PART OF THE PROBLEM. MOST OF THESE WORKERS LACK BASIC JOB BENEFITS SUCH AS HEALTH CARE, SICK PAY, DISABILITY PAY, PAID VACATION, AND RETIREMENT."The entire chapter 5 HOW LOW-WAGE JOBS DAMAGE US ALL from pages 81-100 should be read by everyone who feels they're not affected by people who work in low-wage jobs, for those people who feel low-wage workers should move up the ladder then you need to read the section titled THE MOBILITY MYTH pages 101-103. I salute this book's author BETH SHULMAN for telling the truth about the millions of low-wage workers in America, if you care about this issue as much as I do then you need to go to .com and buy this book.

Although I haven't read the oft-referenced NICKLED AND DIMED, I discovered this book totally by accident and found it both informative and True. As one of the new "working poor", I responded immediately to the personal anecdotes. I am an educated white male in my early-forties who as recently as three years ago made \$35,000 a year. Now, the best job I can find is in a bookstore for \$8.50 an hour! And in my own immediate family, there are three others who have been struggling to find ANY job for two years, one of whom has a BA in Accounting!! So if anything, the book's alledged questionable anecdotes criticized by others certainly speak to this reader. Indeed, one could argue that anecdotes often reveal greater Truths than dry facts....Of course, Shulman has an agenda, but it is one backed up by facts, quoted in her book and elsewhere. It is undebatably true that the job situation in the US is changing for the worse, and it doesn't take this book, or others, to prove it, but simple observation. However, it is great to see many of the facts I've heard so many times elsewhere collected in a single volume.Sadly, Shulman is probably preaching to the converted. While I agree with every point in the book, its doubtful a Conservative or corporate-apologist would -- but then again, they are the ones who got us in this mess and are profiting from it, so what do they care? For me, this book makes me want to read more, so I think I'll check out "Nickled and Dimed" now....

Although in the blurb on the front of this book, Barbara Ehrenreich says she wishes she'd written it herself, this book is no Nickel and Dimed; it is less readable and much more tendentious. Beth Shulman does a satisfactory job of describing the problems low-wage workers face (although I think she could've used a lighter hand with the statistics), but her proposed solutions are radically socialistic ones that in my opinion would have a devastating effect on the fabric of life in the U.S. She does make several incisive points, though. Contrary to what many of us believe, there is very little mobility out of low wage work, even if one works hard. Also, low wage earners in most other affluent countries are significantly better off than their counterparts in the U.S., which is touted as the Land of Opportunity. This book, for all its shortcomings, did make me think differently about low wage earners and the problems they face, but if you're only going to read one book on the subject, I'd recommend Nickel and Dimed.

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