

Bait and switch: the (futile) pursuit of the american dream



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The American Dream And the Plight of the Middle In Corporate America.

ABSTRACT

Though Barbara Ehrenreich is trying to discover the struggle of the middle class in pursuing the so called “ American Dream”, the real plight of this class eludes the reader. The book ends up as one dealing with the author’s experience of job hunting than with the life and plight of the jobless white color workers in the American corporate world

Though Barbara Ehrenreich is trying to discover the struggle of the middle class in pursuing the so called “ American Dream”, the very concept of the American Dream is not that inspiring or clear today as it was conceived by James Adams in 1930s. To quote Jim Cullen (2003) : “ In the twenty-first century , the American Dream remains a major element of our national identity and yet national identity is itself marked by a sense of uncertainty that may well be greater than ever before.” (The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation, PP 6).

How ever unclear the concept of the dream may be Ehrenreich is making another attempt of undercover operation after her successful “ Nickel and Dimed” operation, this time to find out the plight of the American white collar class in the corporate world. She finds out that this world is full of injustice, with no security and with perpetual anxiety. But her undercover operation this time was not that successful as her “ Nickel and Dimed” exploration which revealed startling insights into the lives of low-wage laborers and what they thought of their low paid jobs. May be it was easier to pose as a waitress or a house cleaner than as an executive. Anyway this <https://assignbuster.com/bait-and-switch-the-futile-pursuit-of-the-american-dream/>

time the author is in search of a job that pays about \$50000 an year and provides health insurance too. She undertakes this job search in the pseudo name of Barbara Alexander in 2004, with a new social security number and an exaggerated resume. She expected the exploratory job search to last for just four to six months and to cost about \$5000. But the adventure got extended up to ten months costing her \$6000. But the sole offer she could manage was a sales position for an insurance company on the basis of commission-only, work-from-home condition.

The plight of the white color workers in America is the worst in recent times, affected adversely by both out sourcing as well as in sourcing of jobs.

According to Phyllis Schlafly (2010): “ Since 2000, the U. S. has lost millions of jobs due to outsourcing and in-sourcing..... The winners in this game include the corporate executives and stockholders who benefited by cheap labor, but the losers are the U. S. middle class .” (Eagle Forum, Jan8, 2010). Barbara Ehrenreich tries hard to get a proper white color job, through various career coaches so as to get into the core realities of this white collar life. She posts her resume on line and sends it to numerous companies. But she fails to line up for a single informational interview. She attends all sorts of net working events and job fairs. But in such places she could meet only the job seekers and by meeting the job seekers she would not be able to explore the plight of the white color workers. In addition to this she goes for an image make over to look more feminine and reads a lot of books that advises one on how to secure an executive job. But all these don't help much. One cannot apprehend the sad plight of the middle class or the white collar class by being a job hunter or by working from home, where the author ends up after ten months of job hunt.

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Thus unlike Barbara Ehrenreich's "Nickel and Dimed" exploration, which resulted in the book *Nickel and Dimed: On (not) Getting By in America*, a best seller in 1998, the book *Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream*, under discussion here is disappointing to the reader. The story turns out to be all about the job hunt. Of course Ehrenreich is able to tell us that in the world of college educated but unemployed white color workers, job searching it self is a full time job. But Ehrenreich seems to have failed in giving the reader a fair test of the unemployment market. No body seeks a job relying on strangers, as the author mostly indulges in her job hunt here. The disadvantage of not having solid contacts, which the author herself admits, makes the whole operation very contrived and less engaging to the reader. In "Nickel and Dimed", the author was able to explore and reveal the life of the low-waged workers. But not here in this book, for it deals more with the author's experience of job hunting than with the life and plight of the jobless white color workers in the American corporate world. One of the job hunters the author meets calls that world "the land of the undead". But the author herself fails to concentrate on the men and women in that land whom she meets on her way. The stories of these easily disposable workers, with little social support when they are unemployed and no security even when they have jobs would have made this book more engaging. But unfortunately Ehrenreich concentrates more on her efforts to get a job than on the life of those she met during those exploring efforts. Thus it fails to give us a victims, (and not an explorer's) eye view of the life with in the corporate America.

The exploration helped Ehrenreich to find out what the so called white collar is. She explains in an interview with Amy Goodman: "well, any kind of <https://assignbuster.com/bait-and-switch-the-futile-pursuit-of-the-american-dream/>

person can go into this, but the white -collar person after certain months of unemployment generally ends up swallowing his or her pride and going down to, you know, Best Buy or Circuit City or somewhere and getting a job at \$8 an hour or \$7 an hour.” (Democracy Now, October 17, 2005). But unfortunately, the real plight of this class eludes the reader.

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Sources Cited:

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- 2) Cullen Jim, The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation, Oxford University Press , New York , 2003
- 3) Schlafly Phyllis, Eagle Forum, Jan8, 2010, www.eagleforum.org/column/2010