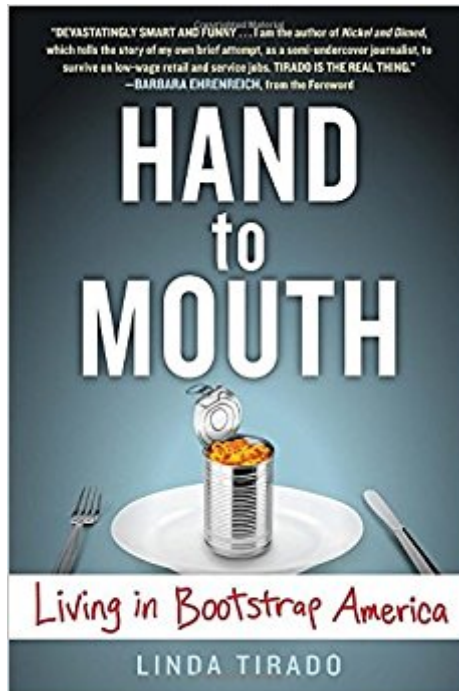




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# Hand To Mouth: Living In Bootstrap America



## Synopsis

The real-life Nickel and Dimed—the author of the wildly popular •Poverty Thoughts• essay tells what it's like to be working poor in America. ONE OF THE FIVE MOST IMPORTANT BOOKS OF THE YEAR--Esquire •DEVASTATINGLY SMART AND FUNNY. I am the author of Nickel and Dimed, which tells the story of my own brief attempt, as a semi-undercover journalist, to survive on low-wage retail and service jobs. TIRADO IS THE REAL THING.â • Barbara Ehrenreich, from the Foreword

As the haves and have-nots grow more separate and unequal in America, the working poor don't get heard from much. Now they have a voice—and it's forthright, funny, and just a little bit furious. Here, Linda Tirado tells what it's like, day after day, to work, eat, shop, raise kids, and keep a roof over your head without enough money. She also answers questions often asked about those who live on or near minimum wage: Why don't they get better jobs? Why don't they make better choices? Why do they smoke cigarettes and have ugly lawns? Why don't they borrow from their parents? Enlightening and entertaining, Hand to Mouth opens up a new and much-needed dialogue between the people who just don't have it and the people who just don't get it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Why do poor people do things that seem so self-destructive? When 32-year-old Linda Tirado, a college student, wife and working mother of two, responded to this question on an online discussion board in the fall of 2013, her stirring personal post entitled •Why I Make Terrible Decisions, or, poverty thoughts," went viral and sparked heated community discussions about poor people's

individual and collective work ethics, motivations, food choices, childrearing, health practices, mental states and even sex lives. Many supporters, including Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *NICKEL AND DIMED: On (Not) Getting By in America*, "felt an enormous wave of vindication" upon reading Tirado's words. And in the foreword of *HAND TO MOUTH: Living in Bootstrap America*, Ehrenreich praises Tirado for openly and unabashedly sharing the daily realities of her life as a low-wage worker and demonstrating "that poverty is not a *^culture^*™ or a character defect; it is a shortage of money." "I am doing what I can to walk you through what it is to be poor," writes Tirado. She recalls in her mid-20s holding three jobs as a bartender (a boss offered female workers better shifts if they agreed to service him sexually), waitress (the baseline hourly wage for waiting tables was \$2.13, and new staff got the slower shifts) and voter registration canvasser. The soul-killing experience, Tirado laments, "nearly killed me, and I still didn't break twenty grand that year." Tirado describes the fundamental lack of job security and basic benefits in the food service industry, such as paid sick leave and health insurance. "As a general manager for a chain restaurant, I got eight days of maternity leave after I had my second daughter. Unpaid.

First, let me say what's great about this book. There are some funny, sharp, wonderfully expressed insights in this book — the author has a comedian's natural sense of timing. The writing flows well, so the story is easily read in a day. Tirado tells us about poverty in a way that many of us have experienced it so, in that sense, the story *^œrings true^* •. Tirado has a *^œyoung^* • voice — most of her narrative occurs when she was in her twenties — this may be why her account focuses on a struggle with authority that many older women in similar circumstances wouldn't put as much emphasis on. The details about cashing checks at Wal-Mart, smoking as an antidote to hunger, losing a vehicle because you can't afford to spring it from the impound lot, prepaid payroll cards, the decade-or-more wait for Section 8 housing, the inability to ever afford a vacation, and the complete and utter lack of affordable dental care despite occasional, large-scale, dental clinics for the poor are all accurate. There were a lot of critical complaints about the last chapter titled, *^œAn Open Letter to Rich People^* • — "I couldn't understand why. Any reader with sense could see the tone was *^œtongue-in-cheek^* • and supposed to be funny — the only reader who could possibly be offended is a sensitive, sheltered reader who mistakenly thought the author had declared *^œopen season^* • on middle-class folks — I certainly didn't read it that way. The biggest flaw of this book is that all dates were obscured or left out, so it was impossible to determine a time-frame for an account that is essentially a memoir. A more sensitive editor would have been immediately alert to the issues of credibility that

this would raise.

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