

Reader Forum

"Poor" Indexing

Librarians should take genuine pride in having saved Michael Moore's *Stupid White Men* from being pulped. They rightly applauded both Moore and Barbara Ehrenreich (*Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*) as ALA Atlanta Conference speakers (Aug., p. 66–68). 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 title.) 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?

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The editors welcome signed letters about recent contents or matters of general interest to the library profession. Letters should be limited to 300 words. Please send via e-mail to americanlibraries@ala.org; by fax, 312-440-0901; or mail, to American Libraries, Attention: Reader Forum, 50 E. Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611-2795.