If I have been shown one thing in my nineteen years of life as an American it is that this country is primarily founded on the basic principle that you need to acquire as many possessions as you can so that you can have the best reputation that you can, regardless of who it hurts. This must be true only because that idea is what I am shown every single day. Apparently, in order to achieve the reputation required to be a citizen in this country, I need every product in existence, because it boosts my reputation and, therefore, makes me a better person:

“When you got it, flaunt it”--Braniff Airlines
“Have it your way.”--Burger King
“If you want to get ahead, get a hat.”--The Hat Council
“Because you’re worth it.”--L’Oreal
“Be all you can be.”--U.S. Army
“Reassuringly Expensive.”--Stella Artois
“Breakfast of Champions”--Wheaties
It’s hard to argue with a few of the biggest companies in the world. I guess without these things, we can’t live the “Good” life. Or can we?

Possibly the biggest opponents of the apparent truth are the 35 million people surviving in poverty in the United States. These people go every day without the Nike shoes, the Tommy jeans, the “choice cuts” of beef, and the “free” public education that we middle and upper-class folks take for granted, along with our $40,000 to $80,000 per year. They live on an income of around $12,000 to $18,000 a year in a house of 3 people with only one working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year at $6.00/hour, before taxes. While they are not looked at by society as important, many are and they are proud of what they give to a society that gives them nothing in return. So what if they do not make a ton of money and are not members of the local country club. Edgar Allen Poe died
penniless, none of his stories sold beyond the local newspaper for a few dollars, but he is still regarded as one of the most important and influential writers and Americans in history. Without these people, the “lower class”, you, the wealthy would have no one to pump your gas, serve you at McDonald’s, fold the clothes you mess up at Wal-Mart, or pick up the trash you create. These people live the “Good” life, loving it, not just doing it.

As Barbara Ehrenreich found out during her “research” for her book *Nickel and Dimed: On (not) getting by in America*, those who often work the hardest, also live the hardest. She lived in a trailer park in Key West, and in the “Worst Hotel in the World” in the Twin Cities. She experienced it for a month in each location, while many of her coworkers lived this life everyday, 12 months a year, for their entire lives, here in the land of opportunity. Are you only afforded this guaranteed opportunity when you
enter a certain tax bracket? One would think there would be opportunities for people willing to work crap jobs for crap pay just to live in crap housing, but there isn’t. Some go days and weeks looking for the lowest “entry level” job, while needing to pay rent, feed a child, and put gas in the car they may have. Many employers, as Ehrenreich discovers, “...run ads almost continually, if only to build a supply of applicants to replace the current workers as they drift away or are fired, so finding a job is a matter of being in the right place at the right time and flexible enough to take whatever is being offered that day.” (Ehrenreich 15) With this obstacle tripping up the “wage slaves” (Ehrenreich 2), they don’t have the luxury of waiting for a better position to open up. They are thankful for what little they are given. Shame on us for having the gall to complain when our Benz gets scratched in the mall parking lot. Should we not be happy to be able to be at
the mall?

Some critics of the welfare system would say that the "lower class" are just as guilty of being money hungry as their "upper-class" counterparts. The big difference is that these "lower class" people don't want money so much as they need it. They are not working two or three jobs in order to buy a condo in the Bahamas, nor are they living in trailers because they are on vacation. They work so hard because at only $6 or $7 an hour, you need multiple jobs just to scrape by. They are not greedy people, only those who are working hard to get by with what they have been presented.

These people may not be happy to be where they are, but they are damn proud that they are doing something, because the basic, down and dirty principle in this country is not how much you can get or what your reputation is, but what you do with what you're given. Or
is it? Do you honestly think you could expect to go up to a middle aged worker in Wal-Mart, ask them about their job satisfaction and expect a positive response? I bet not one person in the place will say this is where they wanted to be, this is what they wanted to do with their life. They probably hate cleaning up after me in the store, waiting on me in the restaurant, and taking my toll money. We, the students and faculty of one of the best schools in the country, need to be thankful for the opportunities we have been given. They work with what they have because they don't have any other option. The real gift that we, the "upper-class," have is that we have other options. It's all a gift that we should be grateful to have, but to often we take it for granted. When life throws you lemons, make lemonade and be happy they weren't rocks. Who cares what we, the middle and upper-class, think about the quality of help at Dollar General. If you think you can do
better, “Just Do It.”

Works Cited


The Advertising Hall of Fame-The Best in Branding. 2003 <http://www.adslogans.co.uk/hof/top10.html>