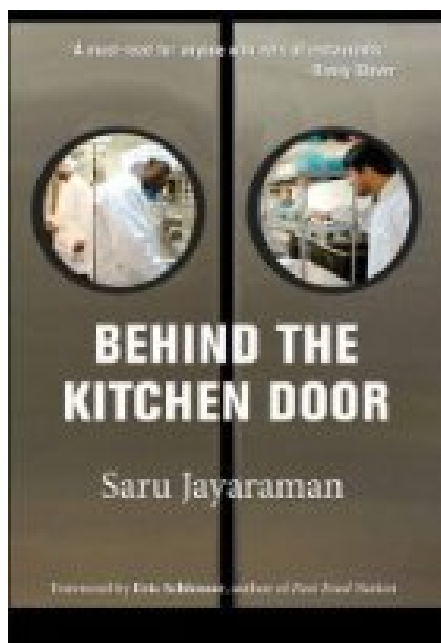




Behind the Kitchen Door

Sarumathi Jayaraman , Eric Schlosser (Foreword)

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How do restaurant workers live on some of the lowest wages in America? And how do poor working conditions-discriminatory labor practices, exploitation, and unsanitary kitchens-affect the meals that arrive at our restaurant tables? Saru Jayaraman, who launched a national restaurant workers organization after 9/11, sets out to answer these questions by following the lives of restaurant workers in New York City, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Houston, Los Angeles, Houston, Miami, Detroit, and New Orleans. Blending personal and investigative journalism, Jayaraman shows us that the quality of the food that arrives at our restaurant tables is not just a product of raw ingredients: it's the product of the hands that chop, grill, saut, and serve it.

Behind the Kitchen Door Details

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From Reader Review Behind the Kitchen Door for online ebook

Melanie says

Important book: not uplifting, but hopeful. The book narrates the author's work with restaurant workers, beginning with her involvement just after 9/11 with the former Windows on the World restaurant employees. (One nice surprise for me: the author is one of the founders of ROC, who has an app identifying restaurants that have good labor practices--truly sustainable restaurants.)

Most restaurant workers can't afford to pay their rent: the National Restaurant Association has kept the tipped minimum wage at \$2.13/hr for decades, even though a full time restaurant worker would have to work 40 hrs a week at \$18.25/hr to earn enough to afford a 2 bedroom apartment at a fair market rent of \$959/month. They also don't have sick days, and thus come to work in restaurants and work around food while they are sick, because they can't afford to have zero income for the day.

The last section "Recipes for Change" has a list of 7 things we can all do to change the working conditions of restaurant workers, from including sustainable labor practices in your definition of 'sustainable food' to voting for paid sick days and legislation that raises the minimum wage for everyone to picketing with your wallet: refusing to patronize restaurants that segregate employees by race and gender.

Allee says

Pretty accessible and quick read that really makes one point a variety of ways: if you care about where your food comes from, you should also care about the people that are preparing it. Surprise surprise, restaurants that routinely commit labor violations also routinely commit health code violations.

Joann says

As I have not worked in the food industry, this was certainly an eye opening book.

Kristin says

I really wanted to like this book, I think it tackles important issues that we, as workers and consumers, should all be concerned about. Unfortunately, I think those issues got lost in the pages of this rambling, repetitive, and many times off-topic book. I think the author spent far too much time on the individuals' back stories, going on for pages and pages at times about where they were born, what their parents did for work, etc. It's not that I don't think including their backgrounds is important, but a little brevity here would have been appreciated. The author would go completely off-topic about a worker's life, holding the reader hostage until she FINALLY got to the point of the whole book and wrote about their experiences as restaurant workers. Furthermore, at times this book reads like one long pamphlet espousing ROC and its accomplishments. I think ROC does important work, but the book almost felt propaganda-ish at times. I also

felt that the author took many horrible, but worse case scenario stories, and painted the entire restaurant industry with that brush. Again, I'm not denying that these situations exist, but as someone who has worked in many restaurants, I found that many of the situations (specifically the chapter on women workers and sexual harassment) seemed to be exaggerated for the sake of the cause. I also found this book repetitive and boring at times, and by the end was definitely trudging through it just wanting it to be over (never a good sign). I think this had the potential to be a great read about a thought provoking subject, but ultimately just fell short on multiple levels.

Sue Merrell says

I read this for my church book club and although it offers some interesting facts about the restaurant business it's not exactly scintillating reading. The author is director of the Restaurant Opportunities Center which sponsored many of the surveys that the data is based on, so I am not sure I believe all the numbers. Bottom line is that the staffs of most restaurants, even fine dining establishments, are grossly underpaid because tips are necessary to get their salary up to minimum wage and their bosses often require them to exaggerate the tips received so the restaurant doesn't have to make up the difference. Bosses also require them to clock out and continue working so they don't receive overtime. The employees are so desperate for work that they put up with such treatment. And they work when they are sick and contagious for the same reason. They put up with racial discrimination-- the higher paying front jobs go to lighter skinned, while blacks and latinos end up in the kitchen with no hope of working their way up. Women are also discriminated against, she can be a hostess but not the chef or manager, even though she will be asked to train the tall inexperienced white guy they hire instead. These are common complaints, and although I don't doubt there is some truth here the documentation is a little thin.

Darren says

Increasingly the consumer is concerned about the sustainability of the food they eat, how it has been produced and other ethical concerns. Yet often the treatment their fellow man has received whilst tending to the ingredients, particularly in so-called developed countries, is often forgotten. The same "lack of concern" can also exist in the hospitality industry up to when it is placed on your table.

But do we care? This book lifts the lid on something many people tend not to think about, whether by accident or on purpose. Written from a U.S.-perspective, an objective, thoughtful look is given to an interesting topic - many people will enthuse or even obsess about the provenance of their diet and ingredients, some might even consider the plight of foreign workers who might tend the crops, but not so many will think about what happens to those in their own country who handle or prepare the food as it completes its journey.

The author founded a national restaurant workers organisation to help campaign for a fairer deal for the industry and within this book the lives of typical restaurant workers in New York City, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Miami, Detroit, and New Orleans are placed under the research microscope. The reading is far from comfortable. It is a lot more than just the (abhorrent to European standards) practice that wait staff must effectively live on tips. Poor wages, discriminatory labour practices, often unsafe and unsanitary working conditions and general exploitation are all brought up. Of course one cannot label an entire industry as bad, but equally the examples cited are apparently far from being unique, rare and unheard of.

Read the following two quotations, taken from this book, that come from testimony given to the author:

"I'm not even worth one cheeseburger an hour"

"I had a really bad cold. My nose was running, I was sneezing, and I had a bad cough and a fever ... Halfway through the day, the sneezing, coughing, and runny nose got worse. I said to the manager, "I am really sick and need to go because I could make others sick and I am dealing with food." She laughed and told me, "Try not to cough then."

Do you feel good? Do you feel necessarily confident in eating the food in these circumstances?

The book, despite its relatively informal writing style, does feel heavy going in places. Partially due to the material under consideration and partially due to the large blocks of never-ending text. It feels at times that you need to really persevere to read this interesting, moving text. At the end of the book features a bibliography and further reading notes, should you wish to learn more or should you think that many claims are so far fetched as to be made up. Reading additional source documents might be eye-opening.

Sadly this is no "feel good" book, yet an important message is being provided. Will you look at your choice of food and where you eat in the same light again?

Behind the Kitchen Door, written by Saru Jayaraman and published by Cornell University Press/ILR Press. ISBN 9780801451720, 208 pages. Typical price: USD21.95. YYYY.

// This review appeared in YUM.fi and is reproduced here in full with permission of YUM.fi. YUM.fi celebrates the worldwide diversity of food and drink, as presented through the humble book. Whether you call it a cookery book, cook book, recipe book or something else (in the language of your choice) YUM will provide you with news and reviews of the latest books on the marketplace. //

Bookish Jen says

We are a nation of foodies. We are concerned that the food we consume is sustainable, organic and locally-grown. We post photographs of our meals on Instagram. We revere well-known chefs like they are rock stars. And we make countless trips to restaurants, whether they are greasy spoon diners or high-end white tablecloth establishments.

I admit to being a foodie, too. Though I eat plenty of homemade meals, I consider it to be a blessing to live in such a great restaurant town. My own neighborhood boasts of great eateries featuring all kinds of food- Indian, Middle Eastern, Thai, Mexican, Italian, Greek, French, Ethiopian and so on. There is even a restaurant in my neighborhood that makes gourmet, artisanal grilled cheese sandwiches.

I eat at these restaurants, enjoy my meals with relish, treat the staff with respect and always leave a good tip. But I truly know what it's like to work at a restaurant? Well, I thought I had some idea, but Saru Jayaraman's book Behind the Kitchen Door really opened up my eyes and my mind.

Behind the Kitchen Door takes a very thorough look at how those who make our food and deliver it to our tables are treated by the restaurant industry, an industry that can treat its workers quite cruelly. And this doesn't just happen at fast food joints or national chains like the Olive Garden or Denny's. Fancy, high-end restaurants are also guilty of treating their employees poorly.

Jayaraman first became aware of restaurant workers' plight when she was contacted by some people who used to work at the restaurant Windows on the World. Windows on the World was located at the World Trade Center. On September 11, 2001 73 of Windows' workers perished when the WTC was attacked and over 200 of its workers were displaced. Windows' owner promised his surviving workers he would hire them for another restaurant in uptown Manhattan. He broke his promise prompting several workers, most notably Fekkah Mamdouh, to work together along with Jayaraman and protest this initial development. Windows' owner recanted and offered these employees work at the new restaurant. Thusly, Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC) was created, and it is working incredibly hard making sure restaurants workers are treated with respect and dignity and are rewarded properly for their hard work.

Reading this book really confirmed why ROC is so necessary. Behind the Kitchen Door relayed story after story of despicable low wages, no decent benefits including sick leave or health insurance, stolen tips, sexual harassment and blatant racism and sexism. And much of this doesn't just happen to bussers or wait staff; workers we assume aren't skilled or educated. Even highly-trained cooks and chefs deal with these issues. In one profile, Jayaraman tells the story of pastry chef Alicia. Alicia graduated from a well-regarded culinary school. She's a talented and creative pastry chef at a good restaurant who is often praised for her amazing creations. Yet, she is making barely over minimum wage. For some odd reason her bosses don't see her education, talent and skills as a pastry chef worthy of a sustainable wage.

Other profiles discuss anger-inducing stories of women being sexually-harassed and denied promotions. Minorities tell of tales of whites given better positions or promotions even if they don't have the skills or experience. Many of the workers profiled told Jayaraman of coming in sick because they aren't given any type of sick leave and are worried they might lose a job if they do call in sick. I don't know about you, but I really want the people handling my food to be healthy.

Why are these things allowed to happen? Well, the other NRA-the National Restaurant Association-has enough money and clout, especially with politicians, to work against the plight of restaurant workers. And some restaurant owners are just not ethical employers.

But Behind the Kitchen Door reminds us that not all is lost. Yes, ROC is doing great work and its influence is spreading throughout the country. But Jayaraman also gives us positive tales of restaurant owners who treat their staff with common decency and fair wages. LA's Good Girl Dinette offers its workers good pay and is figuring out how to get them better benefits. Its owner, a young woman named Diep, also is open-minded to her staff's ideas and concerns. And Jason and Ben who own Russell Street Deli in Detroit also offer good pay and hope to offer good benefits like health insurance. Russell Street Deli also boasts of a very diverse staff.

But what can we do as restaurant patrons do make sure the industry's workers are treated fairly. Behind the Kitchen Door offers many options. We can ask restaurant managers about their labor practices, we can encourage our politicians to focus on raising the minimum wage for tipped workers, we can boycott restaurants that are known for treating staff poorly and we can also join ROC's campaign support all restaurant workers and check out its ROC National Diner's Guide, which rates how various restaurants treat their employees. Not all of these things will be easy (I'd be a bit nervous confronting a restaurant manager about his or her labor practices). And just picking up Behind the Kitchen door and being open to the plight of restaurant workers is a positive step in the right direction. Behind the Kitchen Door isn't always a comfortable read-many of the stories will truly make you lose your appetite-but it is definitely important food for thought.

Originally published at The Book Self Blog:
<http://thebookselfblog.wordpress.com/...>

Snuggles with Rainbows says

This book was an interesting experience for me. Going into this book, I expected a lot of statistics (hey I like that kind of stuff) and to learn a lot of cool things about how fast paced it is in the kitchen. That's not what I found.

This book is centered on life experiences and stories from actual people in the food dining industry. It also is focused on the impact of the 9/11 events on the restaurant business. All this seems really cool and the writing is very thorough but this book just wasn't for me.

Here is the list:

1. Impact of 9/11

The events of the 9/11 attacks were terrible and affected almost every industry in the United States. In my opinion, it is kind of unfair to isolate one sector, namely the restaurant industry, and expand on all of its awfulness. The bombings were terrible and everyone was in a state of disarray after. It definitely irked me that this book was making it seem like all of a sudden, after the 9/11 attacks, anyone who ever worked at a dining establishment ever had their lives ripped out at the seams...like everyone else was eating cake. So that's quite an exaggeration there.

Since this book was trying so hard to remain focused on post 9/11 time period, it also came across that waiters and waitresses basically had it made before the terrorist attacks. A lot of the issues with the dining industry have nothing to do with the events of 9/11. Waiters used to live off of tips...and they still do. Competition for amazing cooks is still crazy rigorous. These facts have almost no relevance to whatever that happened on 9/11. It was very annoying that the authors kept trying to bring it back to that one day in history and blame all the troubles on it.

2. Woe the Sad Stories

When I said I was excited about statistics...I meant it. That is the main reason why I read these kinds of nonfiction books. I like knowing probabilities of random events that may never affect my life...doesn't mean I don't find them interesting. It also provides important and substantial support for whatever point the author is trying to make. Part of the challenge with these books is your skeptical audience. The authors have to win over their readers and the only way to do that is with Legit evidence.

While personal stories are awesome, and I do love a good heart wrenching story in a fictional format, using them as support for an argument just doesn't cut it for me. I just don't buy it is all. I need some cold hard facts to sway me over to your side. Just saying.

3. Super Thorough

I know I mentioned this earlier but the authors did such an incredible job that I have to elaborate. The issues of the dining industry are analyzed from every angle possible. They looked at poor wages, working women, sick people handling food, race, ethnicity, sustainability, and even solutions to the various issues presented. The authors have also included plenty of pictures and figures to emphasize their stand point. Even though I don't agree with their argument, I do like how thoroughly they have analyzed the topic.

Sorry folks this review was kind of heavy. It is mostly just me being stubborn. This book is meant for all

different audiences...really anyone interested should read it. Don't let me and my crazy opinions shy you out of reading this puppy. So Give it a try and see what happens.

A very many thanks to the publisher and Netgalley for providing me with the ARC to review.

Happy Snow!!!

Skyler says

A must read if you enjoy dining out.

David Kimball says

Book Review: "Behind the Kitchen Door " by Saru Jayaraman

All of us are familiar with the "front" people at restaurants – those who take our orders, who serve us our meals, who pour our water for us, who serve us our wines and drinks, and tempt us with tasty tarts. But do we really know them? Even the waitstaff that know and recognize us as big tipppers. Do we really know them? Probably not.

And how much do we know of the "back" people? The salad makers? And pastry chefs? And grill chefs? And line chefs? And dish washers? We hardly ever see them to say nothing about know them. Yet many, if not most of them are among the "Working Poor" in a society where one is paid not according to the value which they add to a product, but whose pay is minimized the most when the surplus of people looking for work is greatest – like now.

I remember years ago being challenged with the question, "What would a head of lettuce cost if our society paid fair wages to the migrant workers?" And that same challenge could, and should be asked regarding restaurant workers. And while this book doesn't try to answer that question, it does raise the issue of why the working conditions of the restaurant workers should matter to all of us who eat out – not just for the sake of compassion, but also for our own safety and especially for our own enjoyment.

The objective of this book is to "ensure that dining out is a pleasurable experience for everyone – on both sides of the kitchen door". It describes the problems on several fronts such the fact that our society is often more concerned with the well-being of the animals used for meat for the meals than for the welfare of the workers. Poverty wages, denying medical benefits and sick pay, tolerating racism and sexism create an environment of exploitation and lack of hope require our society to enforce existing labor laws and raise the minimum wage for these workers.

Employers have done a good job of creating an environment filling the workers with futility and inevitability so that those with only one job skill never get a chance to advance and never get a chance to change careers. Each chapter of this revealing book presents an issue, case studies, and then presents what Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC) has done to address these problems.

When 9/11 happened, over 13,000 restaurant workers in New York City lost their jobs and needed help. The author started to work with a handful of these workers and found that the environment for restaurant workers

was deplorable, humiliating, and oppressive. She and some of these unemployed workers formed ROC and ROC soon became a national movement addressing the sorry conditions of so many restaurant workers.

Many restaurants operate under a paradigm that doing the minimum will maximize the profits. The problem here is that this is an unsustainable approach as it is only a short-term approach looking at only the financial bottom line immediately. To be sustainable, a restaurant, actually any business, needs to approach their business in a sustainable fashion by asking the question: “What do I need to do today to be viable 20 years in the future?” This means that the focus needs to be shifted from the shareholder to the stakeholders. If the stakeholders, such as the workers, are not treated in a sustainable manner, the business will not be viable in the long term. The current environment of many restaurants are unsustainable for the stakeholders due to poverty-level wages, wage theft by management, discrimination, and lack of benefits.

Lack of benefits includes non-promotability and also no health benefits. Many workers are forced to go to work even when sick because they need those few dollars. This increases the odds of food-borne illnesses being passed to the consumers as well as often makes the sick worker even more sick. The industry puts workers at high risk of injury (burns and cuts) without providing them the wages or health benefits to deal with them. Restaurant workers are the third highest in total number of non-fatal occupational injuries and illnesses in the US.

Restaurant workers hold 7 of the lowest paid occupations in the United States at an average of \$8.90 an hour after tips. They are the Working Poor as this amount does not allow them to pay rent for a modest apartment on their own. And considering that many workers have dependents, either children, or parents, the problem is extreme. In many States, they are paid a minimum of \$2.13 an hour by their employer and then a meager share of the tips. This minimum has been frozen for the past 20 years. The restaurant owner must see that the minimum, plus their share of the tips equals the standard Federal minimum wage of \$7.25. However many managers will clock a worker out early, or skim money from the tips personally. This is why many, if not most restaurant workers need food stamps for subsistence. Which means that the government is subsidizing the restaurant industry. Because of a lack of oversight of managers, some workers don’t receive the minimum pay, some don’t get proper overtime pay, some don’t get paid for all the hours they are required to work, and some get paid late or not at all. Some are even required to pay for customers who walk out without paying.

Racial discrimination is rampant in restaurants. White workers get to wait on tables while people of color are relegated to more servile positions like bussing or dishwashing. Workers are segregated in the workplace by position in the restaurant (server, busser, dishwasher), segment of the industry (fine-dining, family-style, and fast-food), and location (poor, middle-class, and upper-class neighborhoods). Diversity of color within a restaurant does not mean that there is equality in position or advancement opportunities. Managers can be very discriminating when it comes to position as well as advancement because they are seldom held accountable for their decisions or actions.

Sexism is also rampant in restaurants. The median weekly wage for women for servers is \$387 while for men it is \$423 – a difference of almost 10%. Most women who get positions of chef, are relegated to the lower paying positions of pastry chef or salad chef with little or no hope for promotions. Many female chefs from culinary schools or with hospitality training wind up as cake decorators in supermarkets. And sexual harassment is ubiquitous. Women experience this from the male consumers, from management, and from the other workers. Since managers are considered “untouchable” in terms of recourse, they often try to get away with as much as possible. And since the managers are the ones who determine positions, hours, and promotions, they often expect “favors” from the female workers.

What can and should be done by the average consumer? 1) Adopt a definition of “sustainable food” that includes sustainable labor practices; 2) Talk to the workers when you eat in a restaurant; 3) Engage restaurant managers in a conversation about labor practices; 4) Help raise the federal minimum wage for

tipped workers! Tell policymakers and restaurant managers that you think \$2.13 is unacceptable; 5) Vote for paid sick days for restaurant workers. And tell restaurant managers you consider workers' health when choosing where to eat; 6) Picket with your wallet – don't eat in restaurants segregated by race and gender; and 7) Join the ROC campaign to support workers all along the food chain.

I found this book to be a wealth of resources for gaining empathy for these restaurant workers. It was very similar to another book I read "Nickel and Dimed" by Barbara Ehrenreich. In this book, the author travelled to five places in the US and attempted to live on the minimum wages of \$7.00 an hour. Her final point was that – it cannot be done without devising ways to beat the system or without safety nets. Both books are revelations into the lives of the Working Poor. The Working Poor are those people who work 40 hours a week (or as much as they can) and still cannot afford the necessities of life. And this is a timely issue as there is much discussion about this as in the Huffington Post article about the Working Poor:

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12....> Also, recently in the Huffington Post there is yet another article about raising the minimum wage

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12....>

I was surprised that the author did not make a greater case for the irresponsibility of the managers because there is seldom any oversight or responsibility to a Human Resources Department like there are in many business offices. And I would have liked more information on the training programs for hospitality students and also other groups dedicated to helping the restaurant workers such as unions.

But this eye-opener tells us a lot about this industry and how it operates from the inside on both sides of the kitchen door and what is required for a restaurant to be sustainable. And the biggest factor in a restaurant being sustainable is for the consumers to be aware of what it takes. Transformation will only come when consumers are knowledgeable and insistent that restaurants be managed in a sustainable fashion.

(Note: While reading this book, I took extensive notes which were then culled to develop this review. For anyone interested, they may view the 7 pages of notes at this address:

<http://writemeister.blogspot.com/2013...>)

David Kimball

Dayspring says

If you don't read this book or read any of this review, please at least check out the ROC National Diner's Guide: <http://rocunited.org/dinersguide/>

For anyone who has felt perplexed by the disconnect between the "sustainable food" and "local food" movement, and discussions about workers rights, I highly recommend Saru Jayaraman's book. Unfortunately, sustainability and "food justice" are often delineated as separate concerns. But as Jayaraman argues, you cannot tout your restaurant meal as "sustainable" without taking into account the working conditions of those preparing, serving, and cleaning the meal at your table. "Behind the Kitchen Door" highlights Jayaraman's work with Restaurant Opportunities Centers, and specifically, ROC's work organizing

with restaurant workers who worked in restaurants in the Twin Towers and were directly impacted by 9/11. Jayaraman's book raises questions about the political, economic, and social implications of dining out.

Neil Harmon says

This is an worthwhile book talking about an important and widespread issue. While I'm glad I read it (and would recommend it) I found the combination of the discussion about the "slow food", local food, and organic food movements distracting from what I saw as the primary issue, the labor practices of this industry.

I believe the authors see a consistency of issue involving the way food is sourced as well as the way that it is prepared and served but, to me, these are pretty separate issues and I think a focus on labor practices would have more impact (and, for me, would earn an additional star). There seem to be two patterns of abuse that emerge, small restaurants that mistreat their employees while they struggle with staying in business and large, professionally managed corporations that engage in deliberate predatory labor practices. In one case, helping small guys learn how to manage ethically might be effective, in the other, only PR and legal pressure can work.

I read this book because it was selected as a "common read" by the Unitarian Universalist Association and I'm glad they selected it. It did it's job of raising my awareness and sensitivity. I just wished it seemed a little more focused on labor since IMHO it would have been more effective.

Michelle says

Food service labor issues have been getting their due recently, and *Behind the Kitchen Door* is well-suited to those with a keener interest in the topic. It's a polemic, but an eloquently written one; Jayaraman has an admirable compassion for food and restaurant workers that led to both founding the Restaurant Opportunities Centers and writing this book.

The topics are familiar, but I definitely didn't know the full story about restaurant working conditions. For instance, I thought the tipped minimum wage (\$2.13 an hour) was a formality, since employers had to make up any shortfall up to the federal minimum wage. But this is not true for smaller restaurants, meaning workers can really get paid next to nothing! And it's not just McDonald's, as much of the book focuses on fine dining and how racism, sexism, and bad management can oppress even relatively well-paid workers.

Despite her suggestions, though, I'm not really going to get into confrontational arguments with restaurant management over their labor practices; seeing a color gradient from the front of the house to the kitchen is disturbing, and perhaps indicative of a larger problem in discriminatory hiring, but what can making a big fuss do? I prefer the route of legislative advocacy and informed consumer choice - refusing to patronize places with bad records might be the path of least resistance, but it makes an impact.

Katie says

"We tend not to realize that diversity is not the same as equity--that simply seeing a lot of restaurant workers from different backgrounds doesn't mean that restaurant workers have equal opportunities to advance to jobs that will allow them to support themselves and their families." (128)

Mo Shah says

I'm divided here. On one hand, there's a very engaging and important book somewhere in here. On the other hand, this book really is an unabashed marketing piece for ROC. (Restaurants Opportunities Center). Which is an organization worthy of support and any positive word that it can get, but that really gets in the way of the very real stories that could have been told here.

Great books like (Nicked and Dimed and others in the same genre) really allows you to swim around in someone else's life a little bit, to live in a world that we normally don't. While this book lets you get ankle deep into the stories that it tells, each story is capped with how labor organizing was successful in helping in some way. Again, that's all great - but when the message the author is trying to convey drowns out the stories that it is attempting to tell, the entire effort suffers.

The message is important though - the people that make the restaurant industry work are invisible and are often taken advantage of. Something to think about next time I go out to dinner.
