
Are Tipped Workers Being Exploited?

Videos:

“Think Tipping Is Out of Control? Watch This. | Robert Reich”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zS71sdrfm8U> (5:17 minutes)

“The End of Tipping”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1asMxMyxXxg> (5:28 minutes)

Guide:

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

Analysis Questions:

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. Robert Reich said that millions of tipped workers make a minimum wage of \$2.13 per hour. Were you aware that many tipped workers have a different minimum wage than other workers? If not, what was your initial reaction to finding that out?
3. John Stossel said that server Alcieli Felipe makes way more than minimum wage thanks to tipping. Did this surprise you? Why/Why not?
4. Robert Reich said: “Arguing over who deserves a tip and how much they should get distracts from what we really should be angry about.” What did he think we should be angry about?
5. In the Stossel video, Alcieli Felipe said: “If you raise the minimum wage, it will be harder for restaurants to keep the same amount of employees.” Why would this be?
6. In the Robert Reich video, Saru Jayaraman said that the subminimum wage perpetuates sexual harassment on the job. Why would this be the case?
7. John Stossel said that many tipped workers don’t report their tipped income. Should this change our perspective on the number of tipped workers who are eligible for welfare programs? Why/Why not?
8. Saru Jayaraman explained that replacing wages with tips is a relic from the post-Civil War era, when employers didn’t want to employ formerly enslaved black workers. Should this affect the way we view tipping now? Why/Why not?

9. John Stossel said that states that increased the minimum wage for tipped workers saw increases in sexual harassment. Does this affect your view on the connection between tipping and sexual harassment? Why/Why not?
10. While employers would have to pay employees more if the subminimum wage were raised, Saru Jayaraman said there are some benefits to employers. What are those benefits?
11. Alcieli Felipe questioned whether the activists working to raise the minimum wage for tipped workers have worked in the restaurant industry. Is it important for activists to have experience in the fields for which they're advocating? Why/Why not?
12. Raising the subminimum wage could lead to some tipped workers losing their jobs. Is this a good argument against raising the subminimum wage? Would it be worth it for some employees to lose their jobs if it meant the remaining workers were making more money? Why/Why not?
13. Do the arguments against raising the subminimum wage apply equally to raising the minimum wage itself? Why/Why not?
14. Did these two videos share any common ground? Were there any points on which they agreed? If so, what were they?
15. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
16. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from these videos that affects your views on this topic?
17. What else would you like to learn about this topic?