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So You Think I Drive a Cadillac? Karen Seccombe

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Book Notes

Karen Seccombe, *So You Think I Drive a Cadillac?* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1999. \$27.93 papercover.

With the enactment of the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* in 1996, the nation's welfare system was changed from one of entitlements to one of requirements. People living in poverty would not longer be guaranteed an income or other services by the state. Many experts believe that the legislation will transform habits, encourage self sufficiency and end welfare dependency. Others content that these changes will have a negative impact on the lives of poor families, creating even more poverty and deprivation.

Welfare reform was prompted by electoral politics. An overwhelming majority of voters, and especially those from the middle and wealthy classes, believe that welfare recipients are lazy, shiftless and irresponsible and that government action is needed to change their behavior. Welfare recipients are also believed to flout the American work ethic and to threaten the very fabric of society. However, in forming these images, politicians and the media failed to gain authentic insights into the lives of those who receive welfare benefits. Neglecting the experiences of those on welfare and failing to understand their situation, policy makers introduced legislation which accepted myths and rhetoric that bore little relation to reality.

In this thought provoking book, Karen Seccombe describes the welfare system and its recipients from the perspective of those who live in poverty. She also offers an account that draws in the insights of a feminist perspective. Poverty is, after all, concentrated among single mothers and their children. She interlaces personal accounts of welfare recipients with an analysis of the welfare system and the recent changes that have been introduced. She effectively demolishes many of the myths that are widely accepted about welfare, and provides a powerful instructional tool which should be used by all who really want to know the truth about welfare and poverty today.