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Unsung Heroines: Single Mothers and the American Dream. Ruth Sidel.

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Ruth Sidel, *Unsung Heroines: Single Mothers and the American Dream*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006. \$ 45.00 hardcover, \$ 17.95 papercover.

Although the terms “deserving” and “undeserving” the poor are not frequently used today, they continue to resonate in American culture. Originally, the undeserving poor were able-bodied, unemployed men who, it was believed, should be compelled to work. Those who were deserving of compassion and public aid included the disabled, frail elderly and widows with children. During the early 20th century efforts to expand services and income benefits to these groups resulted in several state initiatives which provided means tested old-age and widows pensions. Subsequently, these programs were nationalized and the federal government assumed primary responsibility for providing cash benefits to these groups of needy people.

However, during the latter half of the 20th century, a new definition of the undeserving poor emerged. It focused on single women with children, particularly on those who had never married. The payment of income benefits to these women was frequently challenged and they were increasingly demonized in the political arena and in the media. In time, public opinion towards single mothers changed. As Ruth Sidel shows, old prejudices against illegitimacy and promiscuity were resurrected and, as larger numbers of minority women sought financial aid, racist sentiments played an increasingly important role in defining single mothers as deviants who scrounged off hard-working taxpayers and enjoyed a comfortable if not lavish lifestyle. The so-called welfare reform initiatives of the 1980s and 1990s translated these views into public policy.

Sidel directly attacks the myths underpinning current public policies towards single mothers and argues instead that these women are “unsung heroines” who seek to raise their children and make ends meet in the face of enormous challenges. Her argument is based on in-depth interviews with no less than 50 women who have been single mothers at some point in their lives. The interviews were conducted between 2001 and 2003 in New York and the women came from a variety of

ethnic, class, and age backgrounds. The ethnographic portrait that Sidel presents is a moving one which provides valuable, powerful insights into the experiences of these women, their backgrounds, the difficulties they encountered, their resilience and their achievements.

In addition to reporting on her interviews in great detail, Sidel quotes extensively from the literature to support her case. She does not dismiss the role of marriage or of the need to avoid teen pregnancies but she rejects the simplistic theologies on which current public policies towards single women are based. She argues convincingly that efforts to reduce teen pregnancy and promote marriage must be linked to policies that address the fundamental problems of low income and material need that, she contends, present the greatest barrier to the realization of the American dream for these women and their children. The book offers a powerful alternative to the current orthodoxies that shaped government policy. Hopefully, its alternative imagery will influence public opinion and ultimately promote policies and programs that support rather than demonized single mothers. Sidel's extremely important book deserves to be widely read.

Charles Lemert and Anthony Elliott, *Deadly Worlds: The Emotional Costs of Globalization*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. \$ 19.95 paperback.

Much of the social science literature on globalization has focused narrowly on economic aspects and on the way international trade, the flow of finance capital, the activities of multinational corporations and currency speculation have fostered far more frequent exchanges and a growing interdependence between the world's nation states. Although this focus predominates, social science literature has been criticized for neglecting the other dimensions of globalization such as communications, population movements and the diffusion of culture. Fortunately, a more comprehensive approach to globalization has emerged and many facets of the processes accompanying globalization have now been explored.