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Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work *by Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein. New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1997. 320 pp. Cloth, $42.50; paper, $19.95.*

Edin and Lein present a painstaking examination of the factors that contribute to single mothers' decisions either to go to work or to depend on welfare. To correct the distortions of reality that they argue arise from government statistics' underrepresentation of the true depths of poverty, the authors set out to collect primary data on the personal finances of 214 single mothers on public assistance, and then compared these mothers' situations to those of 165 of their working counterparts. Their research presents policy makers with the most intimate insight yet into the realities of life for the poorest Americans. *Making Ends Meet*'s greatest value, however, lies in the context it provides for viewing recent efforts to break long-term dependence by coaxing single mothers into employment.

Making Ends Meet follows the lives of welfare-dependent mothers, examining their financial decisions and questioning the view that many turn to public assistance simply because they have too much difficulty managing their own money. In fact, Edin and Lein found just the opposite: almost all of the mothers on welfare were careful consumers, struggling to maximize the spending power of their minimal welfare checks. Nearly all paid their fixed housing and food costs before turning to discretionary needs. Even basic necessities often were purchased from ''boosters''—shop-lifters who sold their goods at a fraction of their ticketed price. Yet Edin and Lein found that no matter how carefully or frugally these mothers lived, the public assistance their families received (cash grants, food stamps, housing assistance, etc.) fell significantly short of their expenses. In virtually every instance, families dependent on welfare were able to survive only by not ''playing by the rules.'' Edin and Lein found that all but one of the welfare mothers supplemented their welfare income with unreported work, cash assistance, or other forms of support, most often depending on live-in boyfriends to help pay bills, or on family members to care for their children so they could take on unreported work. Mothers could not provide for their families on welfare without such assistance without leaving their children at risk of foster care placement or their families at risk of homelessness. In fact, the only woman in the study who did *not* supplement her public assistance could not afford to send her child to school in anything but tattered clothing and was reported to child welfare for neglect.

While life on welfare clearly was not easy, the experiences of mothers who chose low-wage work over welfare proved equally unenticing. Those who took low-skill jobs were left with an even larger gap between their income and expenses than their welfare-dependent counterparts. The addition of work brought with it additional expenses—such as child care, transportation, and health care—that low-wage jobs simply could not meet. Even when money was available to cover these primary needs, the irregular hours associated with many low-skill jobs created logistical obstacles ranging from the need for child care at odd hours to limited public transportation. Indeed, ''to make it while working, unskilled single mothers had to be extra-ordinarily lucky: They had to have a set of special circumstances that artificially lowered the cost of working and they had to be able to employ a set of survival strategies that were consistent with work'' (p. 220).

In the end, Edin and Lein conclude that the choice between welfare and low-wage work is simple. Work offers no financial incentive and compromises the care mothers can provide for their families. Those women who choose employment are motivated by the value they place on work and their distaste for dependence on public hand-outs. For the rest, welfare, supplemented with outside support, makes more sense.

The value of *Making Ends Meet* does not rest solely in its findings, none of which will startle anyone experienced in social policy. The book's real value lies in the depth of the insight and the documentation it adds to the discussion of welfare policy, and the forecast of the future to be read from its lines. TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) has replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children on which families barely survived at the time of Edin and Lein's research and has brought with it stringent work requirements and time limits. *Making Ends Meet* shows that TANF may be short sighted in its efforts to mandate employment as an alternative to long-term dependence. Virtually all of the mothers in the study will soon be working. Yet even if no longer dependent on welfare, they will be barred from independence by the trappings of poverty and their inability to earn a living wage. Edin and Lein's findings make it clear that the answer to permanent welfare dependence cannot be jobs alone, but higher paying jobs that enable employees to afford the costs of working—jobs that today are available only to those with higher levels of education and skills.

In their introduction, Edin and Lein tell of Mary Ann, a single mother of three. She had little work history or skills, had abused drugs, had even lived in a shelter. Like so many other single mothers, she depended on the help of her live-in boyfriend to get by. In 1994, the *New York Times Magazine* reported that Mary Ann had thrown her boyfriend out, found a full-time job, and was working sixty hours a week. In December 1997, after publication of *Making Ends Meet*, the *Times* revisited Mary Ann. She is back on welfare and her dreams of permanent independence have vanished; the work required to manage her family's transition off welfare was simply too much. *Making Ends Meet* does more than explain the rational decision made by Mary Ann and other mothers on welfare. It predicts the storm to come if these decisions continue to be overlooked. Either way the flags are up and the book is worth reading.

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Morning Glories: Municipal Reform in the Southwest *by Amy Bridges. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997. 244 pp. $35.00.*

In this study of municipal reform in the Southwest, Amy Bridges demonstrates her superb skill as an analyst of urban political history. Anyone who has studied a single city at length will appreciate the enormity of her effort in closely examining political development across the twentieth century in seven major cities—Albuquerque, NM; Austin, TX; Dallas, TX; Phoenix, AZ; San Antonio, TX; San Diego, CA; and San Jose, CA. The result is a major reinterpretation of the urban experience in the modern United States. We can no longer look at regional differences in political culture as a sufficient explanation for variation in political style and orientation. Bridges makes us see that political culture is in part the result of the framing of legal and organizational arrangements. Rules shape political institutions and provide staging grounds for political action.

Her insight about the central importance of rules is only part of what Bridges brings to the analysis of reform in the Southwest. She asks the key political question: how does one body of actors rather than another gain the opportunity to write the rules? In answering this question, Bridges uses her skill as urban historian so effectively. In the early days of the