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Anna Marie Smith
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Welfare Reform and Sexual Regulation

When Americans think about welfare reform, they generally refer to its “workfare” requirements and strict time limits. Anna Marie Smith argues, however, that the sexual regulation dimensions of welfare reform are also significant. Inspired by the political and philosophical interventions of feminist women of color and Foucauldian social theory, she explores the scope and structure of the child support enforcement, family cap, marriage promotion, and abstinence education measures that are embedded within contemporary welfare policy. Presenting original legal research on both federal and state law and drawing from historical sources, social theory, and normative frameworks, she makes the case that these measures seriously violate the rights of poor mothers. She also shows that welfare reform’s intervention in the kinship structure and intimate behavior of the poor has several historical precedents. In particular, welfare policy has consistently constructed the sexual conduct of the racialized poor mother as one of its primary disciplinary targets. At the same time, Smith pays close attention to the political and institutional specificity of sexual regulation in the context of welfare law. She concludes with a vigorous and detailed critique of Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton’s support for welfare reform law and an outline of a progressive feminist approach to poverty policy.

Anna Marie Smith is a professor of government at Cornell University. She is the author of *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality: Britain, 1968–1990* (Cambridge, 1994), and *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary* (1998). She has also written numerous articles published in *New Formations*, *Feminist Review*, *Diacritics*, *Radical Philosophy*, *Social Text*, *Constellations*, and *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law*, and she is the author of chapters published in numerous cultural studies and social and political theory anthologies.

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To Patsy Mink

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We lost a great leader in the struggle for poor women's rights when Patsy Mink passed away in 2002. I am dedicating this book to her to honor her work.