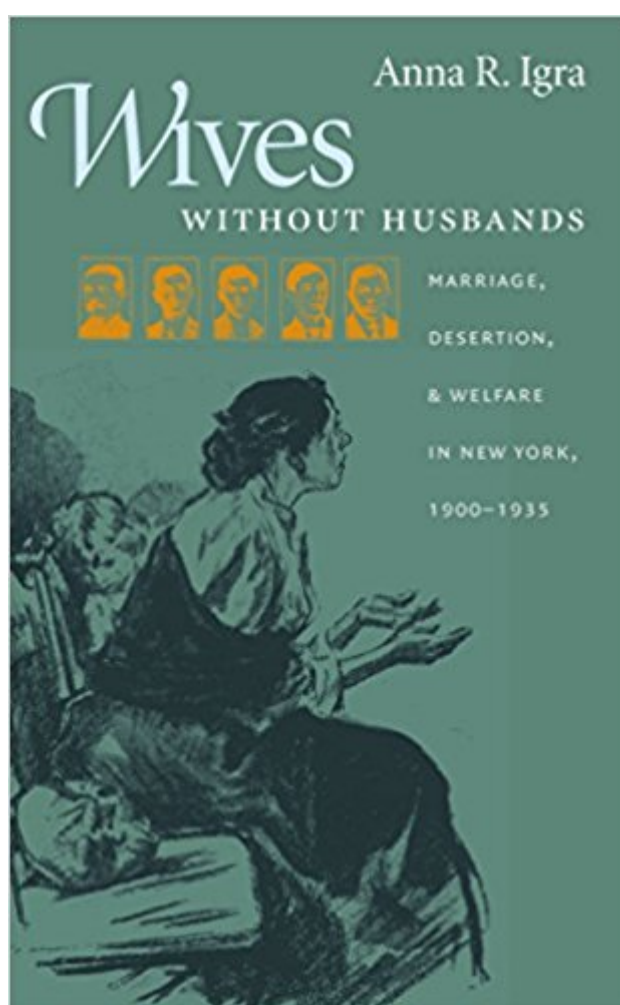


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# Wives Without Husbands: Marriage, Desertion, And Welfare In New York, 1900-1935 (Gender And American Culture)



## Synopsis

Shedding new light on contemporary campaigns to encourage marriage among welfare recipients and to prosecute "deadbeat dads," *Wives without Husbands* traces the efforts of Progressive reformers to make "runaway husbands" support their families. Anna R. Igra investigates the interrelated histories of marriage and welfare policy in the early 1900s, revealing how reformers sought to make marriage the solution to women's and children's poverty. Igra taps a rich trove of case files from the National Desertion Bureau, a Jewish husband-location agency, and follows hundreds of deserted women through the welfare and legal systems of early twentieth-century New York City. She integrates a broad range of topics, including Americanization as a gendered process, breadwinning as a measure of manhood, the relationship between consumer culture and social policy formation, the class dimensions of family law, and the Jewish community as a source of welfare policy innovation. Igra analyzes the history of antidesertion reform from its emergence in social policy debates, through the establishment of domestic relations courts, to Depression relief programs. She shows that early twentieth-century reformers, by attempting to make instrumental use of poor people's intimate relations, anticipated welfare policies in our own time that promote marriage as an answer to poverty.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A richly told tale.--*Law and History Review* Rich in provocative analysis and especially interesting for the look it gives into the lives of abandoned families, [and] the difficulties that they faced.--*American*

Historical Review Fresh and original scholarship. . . . Makes a valuable contribution to American immigrant history and to women's history. . . . Igra has told a significant story in the annals of Jewish immigrant history.--American Jewish History For social welfare policy pundits and historians of the Jewish family, *Wives Without Husbands* will be fascinating.--Jewish Book World Igra deftly combines a study of immigrant social patterns and assimilation with an investigation into the changing meaning of marriage. . . . A well-researched book that touches on many of the major social issues of the early twentieth century.--Journal of American History [An] excellent glimpse into the social welfare debates of the early twentieth century and how Progressive Era rhetoric clashed with the daily realities of the working class. . . . A welcome addition to anyone in the fields of American Jewish history, legal history, and women's studies.--Journal of American Ethnic History Convincing analysis, delivered through engaging prose. . . . A significant contribution to the study of gender and the American welfare state.--Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare An outstanding contribution to the history of social welfare policy in the early twentieth century. The author tells a lively and complex story. . . . An impressive effort in constructing the history of the anti-desertion system in New York. . . . The results are rich indeed.--Register of the Kentucky Historical Society

Written with great energy and clarity, Igra's analysis provides an important and unfashionable insight: that the desire to secure permanent marriage--not children's needs--framed the impulses of the law reformers who constructed crucial institutions of social welfare.--Hendrik Hartog, Princeton University This is a first-rate book that provides a sharp argument, excellent and thorough documentation, and fine writing. It earns a place among the key texts in women's history, reform history of the Progressive era, policy history, and American Jewish history.--Hasia Diner, New York University

Fascinating. An entry into NYC Jewish history, domestic life, and the pressures for immigrants to conform to American concepts of men's roles in society and the vulnerability of women. Read it for some quick research -- and got hooked.

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