The Feminization of Poverty:
From a War on Poverty to a War on Women

Mimi Abramovitz
Bertha Capen Reynolds Professor of Social Policy,
Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College and
The Graduate Center, City University of New York.

The 2012 Presidential campaign turned women’s rights into a hot political topic! Until then it is safe to say that women’s issues had fallen off the public policy agenda. Today reports by women themselves, backed by hard data, make it clear that women from all walks of life are having a hard time making ends meet. Some blame women for their own plight. But the hidden story is that the two traditional sources of income for women -- marriage (for those who choose to marry) and the market (employment) -- have become less reliable. In the past, when marriage or the market failed them women could turn to the state (i.e., government programs) for help--due in large part to the victories of social movements and the war on poverty. On the 50th anniversary of these movements, the war on poverty has become war on the poor. Faced with austerity, all three institutions---marriage, the market, and the state – have let women down. What explains the feminization of austerity and what needs to be changed!