
Devon Brooks
University of Southern California

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw

Part of the Politics and Social Change Commons, Race and Ethnicity Commons, and the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.

California is on the verge of becoming the first state in the continental United States to be comprised of a majority of people of color. In the 1990s, politicians, power brokers, and power seekers, who were threatened by this development and unwilling to accept its inevitability, launched a series of political initiatives designed to arrest the progress of people of color and immigrants in the state by undermining their civil rights, eroding their civil liberties, and restricting their access to employment and educational opportunities. Such is the landscape as skillfully and colorfully portrayed by Jewelle Taylor Gibbs and Teiahsha Bankhead in this new and important book.

A central premise of Gibbs and Bankhead’s book is that the California mosaic of racially and ethnically diverse people, languages and cultures generates the energy that drives the economy, fosters innovation, and nurtures the creative arts. The authors propound that California is the benchmark for the rest of the country, the initiator of trends, the cradle of creativity, and the bellwether for change. Thus, the darker forces in the California landscape, including racism, xenophobia, classism, and punitive social forces, are particularly disconcerting and problematic for the rest of the country. Gibbs and Bankhead describe the factors that promote these forces against those deemed different and undeserving of sharing the ‘California dream’—in other words, immigrants and people of color. These factors resulted in a series of initiatives passed in the 1990s—Propositions 184 (the “Three Strikes and You’re Out” initiative), 187 (the “Save Our State” initiative), 209 (the “California Civil Rights” initiative) and 227 (the “English for the Children” initiative). The authors masterfully trace the major political, economic, social and historical events of the past fifty years that laid the foundation for these initiatives. They then analyze each initiative, as well as their pro and con arguments, major financial contributors, campaign strategies, ethnic voting patterns, and implications.

Gibbs and Bankhead convincingly argue that if considered collectively, a credible case can be made that the initiatives were
designed to deprive people of color of their civil rights, disem-
power them politically, deny them equal opportunities, and strip
them of their linguistic and cultural identities. The impetus for
this, they assert, was to preserve the political, economic, and
social privileges held by the dominant majority group in the
United States. *Preserving Privilege* also considers the consequences
of these initiatives as well as trends in California and the nation
in relation to other multiethnic western industrialized countries,
including Canada and Great Britain. Gibbs and Bankhead close
the book by outlining the challenges of multiculturalism and the
millennium. As they point out, when examining international
trends it is important to recognize the links between develop-
ments in the United States and other countries. They further point
out that individuals live in an increasingly interdependent global
world, linked by satellites that permit the flow of communications
on a 24-hour basis, shaped profoundly by international economic
forces and political exigencies, and filtered through the lens of an
aggressive, intrusive and omnipresent media. Ironically, technol-
gy and the media, which have been used to promote division,
fear and hatred among different racial and ethnic groups, also
offers a source of hope for the future. Indeed, Gibbs and Bankhead
anticipate that the challenge of the 21st century is to “transcend
the racial and ethnic hostilities of the past by using the power
of science and technology to alleviate poverty and to control
disease.” They also recognize the “power of information and mass
communication to foster greater interracial and intercultural un-
derstanding among the world’s diverse societies, and the power
of education and the arts to eliminate prejudice and ethnocen-
trism and to elevate the human spirit so that ignorance, fear, and
hatred will eventually be eradicated for human consciousness”
(p. 168).

*Preserving Privilege* is a brilliantly researched and written
book. It is intelligent, insightful, timely, and rich in detail. Gibbs
and Bankhead are certifiable “Renaissance” scholars, proficient in
conducting multicontextualized, critical analyses of public policy
and the economic, social, cultural, historical and technological
factors that shape public policy. The arguments put forth by the
authors and their treatment of the multifaceted and complex
issues are balanced and supported by statistical and empirical
data. Despite the scholarly nature of the book, it is accessible to the lay reader and has much to offer teachers and students in varied disciplines, including sociology, social welfare, political science, history, ethnic studies, education, cross cultural studies, and psychology. Most importantly, Preserving Privilege offers California and the rest of the nation a sense of vision and direction. 

Devon Brooks
University of Southern California


The Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) has three primary goals: child safety, permanence and well being. Currently, the Children's Bureau has requested ASFA outcome evaluations from the states which are focused primarily on the first two goals, safety and permanence, while for the most part deferring on child well-being. In fifteen essays by well respected authors in this field, this book deftly ties child well-being and strength-based, family-centered services together.

In the first essay, Peter Pecora presents a typology, brief history, overview of current program implementation, and evaluation challenges of family centered practice. He cautions evaluators to be rigorous in specifying the service model used, and in providing supervision and consultation in order to insure fidelity to the service model. He urges that evaluations based on experimental designs while the service model is still evolving, be avoided. Next John Ronnau notes how complex and challenging the issues of boundaries, confidentiality, and values are in family-centered services. He cautions against "vague principles that take on specific meaning and generate controversy only [emphasis added] as policies and programs flesh them out." Rowena Fong covers cultural competency in family-centered services including assessments using culturally competent, strength based practice.

Elaine Walton discusses several conceptual frameworks for family-centered services which are derived from family systems