



---

Volume 29  
Issue 4 December

Article 11


---

December 2002

**Review of *Preserving Privilege: California Politics, Propositions, and People of Color*. Jewelle Taylor Gibbs and Teiahsha Bankhead. Reviewed by Devon Brooks.**

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**

Brooks, Devon (2002) "Review of *Preserving Privilege: California Politics, Propositions, and People of Color*. Jewelle Taylor Gibbs and Teiahsha Bankhead. Reviewed by Devon Brooks.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 29 : Iss. 4 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol29/iss4/11>

This Book Review is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact [wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).



Jewelle Taylor Gibbs and Teiahsha Bankhead, *Preserving Privilege: California Politics, Propositions, and People of Color*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001.

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, disempower 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 developments 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, technology 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 understanding among the world's diverse societies, and the power of education and the arts to eliminate prejudice and ethnocentrism 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

Elaine Walton, Patricia Sandau-Beckler and Marc Mannes (Eds.), *Balancing Family-Centered Services and Child Well-Being: Exploring Issues in Policy, Practice, Theory, and Research*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. \$49.50 hardcover, \$29.50 papercover

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