

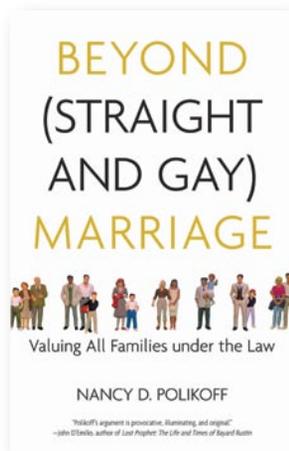
Changing Tactics

These good reads highlight thinking outside the box. | **By Rachel Pepper**

Two new nonfiction books present important perspectives on critical issues today—Nancy Polikoff reframes the gay marriage debate and INCITE!'s anthology *Color of Violence* presents innovative strategies to end violence against women of color.

Beyond (Straight and Gay) Marriage, Nancy D. Polikoff (Beacon Press):

Gay marriage is the topic of many recently published books. While I understand the need for the rights that institutions such as marriage can provide, I've always felt that marriage itself is fundamentally flawed. Why emulate something that feminists have challenged for so many years in the name of LGBT progress? Thus, I have wondered for some time why LGBT writers haven't actually challenged the notion that marriage is the key to all partner and family legal protections. By protecting only "married" couples, a two-tier system of rights would develop within the LGBT community. Hardly a solution to inequality. The esteemed professor of law Nancy Polikoff tries to steer the argument in a new direction. Her book *Beyond (Straight and Gay)*

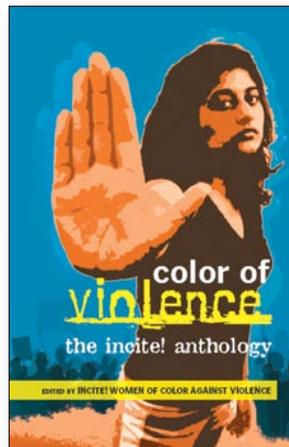


Marriage: Valuing All Families under the Law is part of a series from Beacon Press edited by Michael Bronski and seeks to address important intellectual questions facing the LGBT movement. Polikoff's book comes just in time. She proposes family law reform "that would recognize all families' worth." Most importantly, she writes, "Marriage as a family form is not more important or valuable than other forms of family, so the law should not give it more value." Further, she advocates for "solutions to the needs all families have for economic well-being, legal recognition, emotional peace of mind and community respect." Polikoff examines how the gay and anti-gay rights movements have focused almost exclusively on marriage as the central LGBT cause, to the detriment of the actual LGBT movement. Indeed, she writes, "The focus on access to marriage may be constricting the imagination of advocates for LGBT families who attribute every problem a same-sex couple experiences to marriage discrimination." In fact, when Polikoff examines countries (like Canada) where laws protecting unmarried couples—straight and gay—predated gay marriage legislation, she shows that while marriage was a civil rights victory, LGBT families there "were already fully recognized."

Using real case studies, Polikoff makes a strong case that furthering the legal protections for all people, regardless of relationship status, will help the LGBT community more than marriage itself. A harder path to imagine, perhaps, but a realistic message that activists would do well to heed. (beacon.org)

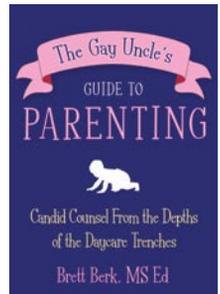
Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology (South End Press):

The idea for this collection began in 2000 at the first Color of Violence Conference, which took place in Santa Cruz, Calif. Organized by INCITE! for feminist women of color, the conference gathered 2,000 activists, who began to visualize the shaping of their collective vision into a compilation such as this one. The group, which has chapters in many U.S. cities as well as internationally, envisions ending racism, fighting patriarchal and gender oppression and promoting social justice and liberation for all people. This book is a collection of essays that seeks to transcend the politics of inclusion "to actually address the concerns of women of color," including ending violence against women of color—both



systematic violence and domestic violence in families and communities. As such, many essays deal specifically with variations on this theme—including Andrea J. Ritchie's "Law Enforcement Violence Against Women of Color," Rosa Linda Fregoso's "The Complexities of Femicide on the Border," and "The Medicalization of Domestic Violence" by Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo. There are essays on women in prison

and women in shelters, as well as an essay on how women of color are affected by our heightened "national security." In fact, every essay in this collection reveals another critical aspect of being a woman of color in the United States today. Most are written by academics, but some are by activists, and all include women from a broad spectrum of racial and ethnic affiliations. A piece by TransJustice highlights the importance of thinking beyond the gender binary to achieve equality. A poem "on trying to love without fear," by Maiana Minahal, provides a reflective pause before the start of the book's endnotes. Although the book is more academically inclined than one the average reader might embrace, it is an excellent starting point for understanding some of the issues today for women of color actively working for social change. (incite-national.org) ■



INTERN'S PICK

The Gay Uncle's Guide to Parenting, Brett Berk (Three Rivers Press):

Are you ready for a realistic approach to parenting? In his book, Brett Berk, M.S. Ed., navigates through parenting with an "outside approach," because sometimes parents lose touch with their own needs. For example, he says an intervention is needed when it's been a decade since parents have had a night out alone. In each chapter, Berk thoroughly explains important lessons (garnered from his experiences as an educator, his family and his personal relationships). Issues range from toilet training to talks on sexuality. Be prepared for some straight talk from your new gay uncle. (threeriverspress.com)

— *Liberty Valez*