



Below the Radar: How Silence Can Save Civil Rights (Studies in Postwar American Political Development)

Alison L. Gash

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In 1993, the nation exploded into anti-same sex marriage fervor when the Hawaii Supreme Court issued its decision to support marriage equality for gay and lesbian couples. Opponents feared that all children, but especially those raised by lesbian or gay couples, would be harmed by the possibility of same-sex marriage, and warned of the consequences for society at large. Congress swiftly enacted the Defense of Marriage Act, defining marriage as between a man and a woman, and many states followed suit. Almost a decade before the Hawaii court issued its decision, however, several courts in multiple states had granted gay and lesbian couples co-parenting status, permitting each individual in the couple to be legally recognized as joint parents over their children. By 2006, advocates in half the states had secured court decisions supporting gay and lesbian co-parenting, and incurred far fewer public reprisals than on the marriage front. What accounts for the stark difference in reactions to two contemporaneous same-sex family policy fights? In *Below the Radar*, Alison Gash argues that advocacy visibility has played a significant role in determining whether advocacy efforts become mired in conflict or bypass hostile backlash politics. Same-sex parenting advocates are not alone in crafting low-visibility advocacy strategies to ward off opposition efforts. Those who operate, reside in, and advocate for group homes serving individuals with disabilities have also used below-the-radar strategies to diminish the damage caused by NIMBY (not in my back yard) responses to their requests to move into single-family neighborhoods. Property owners have resorted to slander, subterfuge, or even arson to discourage group homes from locating in their neighborhoods, and for some advocates, secrecy provides the best elixir. Not every fight for civil rights grabs headlines, but sometimes, this is by design. Gash's groundbreaking analyses of these strategies provide a glimpse of the prophylactic and palliative potential of low-visibility advocacy.

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