

P R E F A C E

MY EXPERIENCE WITH WRITING HAS taught me that no book ever evolves precisely as planned, and this one is certainly no exception. My initial intent was to focus on baby boomers of color and the cultural assets they bring to their families, communities, and the country at large. I wanted to highlight the strengths of this population, which are often ignored in the national discourse or characterized in terms of needs and issues (what I refer to as a *deficits perspective*). I also wanted to emphasize the potential of the social work profession to serve this population. A strengths or assets perspective is not new to social work.

Early reviewers of the book prospectus encouraged me to include the ongoing policy debates over Social Security and Medicare and how these programs would impact (and be impacted by) baby boomers of color. I was initially prepared to touch upon this, as well as concerns over the “tsunami-like” economic havoc baby boomers are about to wreak upon our financial and health care systems. I was not eager to devote much attention to this; I preferred to focus on my analysis of baby boomers of color from an *assets* or *capacity enhancement* perspective. However, to fully discuss the forthcoming financial and health challenges that baby boomers of color face, I had to delve into the economic literature far more than I anticipated and, quite frankly, felt comfortable with. I tried to capture the major points in sufficient detail, but not so deeply that the reader is drowned in financial analyses. I have endeavored to make this material “reader friendly,” but I am not sure that I have succeeded.

Part I of the book focuses on why baby boomers—particularly those of color with low wealth—present such challenges to our financial and health

care systems and to those in the helping professions, especially social work, that are the focus of this book. These chapters have a heavy emphasis on a deficit perspective, which is quite contrary to my original intent in writing this work. Further, it is impossible to examine the current state of boomers of color without also addressing how racial discrimination has played an instrumental role in shaping the challenges they face as they enter their retirement years.

Part 2, however, shifts to an analysis of the many assets brought by baby boomers of color and (I hope) offers a counternarrative to the more negative prevailing views of this population. The reader will have a sociocultural-economic-political comprehensive view of boomers of color and, as a result, will be in a stronger position to understand the national debates on deficits and debts and how boomers have been cast as a key element in this “crisis.” Part 3 considers the economic crisis that is projected to be caused by boomer retirement and how it will bankrupt Social Security and Medicare, which has taken central stage in social policy debates about what needs to be done to avoid this nation-undermining event.

BOOK GOALS

Four goals have guided the development of this book:

- (1) To provide a current and projected detailed sociodemographic picture of baby boomers of color (African American, Asians/Pacific Islanders, Latino/as, and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives) against a backdrop of baby boomers in general;
- (2) to aid social workers and others in the helping professions develop an understanding and appreciation of the unique rewards and challenges that baby boomers of color provide health and social service systems now and in the future;
- (3) to present social policy, research, and practice implications of baby boomers of color; and
- (4) to provide an assets perspective that is uniquely tailored to the unique characteristics of boomers of color and their cultural backgrounds, with implications for the structuring and delivery of social work services to this population cohort.

These four goals are woven throughout this book in an attempt to provide a comprehensive and in-depth view of boomers, with an emphasis on those

of color. To do so, the book draws upon literature and research from an interdisciplinary perspective.

BOOK OUTLINE

This book consists of three parts, eleven chapters and an epilogue. Part 1, “Setting the Context,” provides the reader with a multifaceted introduction to various perspectives on baby boomers in general, and those of color in particular. In part 2, “Cultural Assets,” the reader is grounded in a new paradigm for viewing boomers of color, based upon strengths and community assets. Part 3, “Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research,” presents a variety of ways we can address the needs of baby boomers of color that tap into social work values, particularly social justice and empowerment.

Finally, as I began researching this book, I anticipated that there would be limited research literature on baby boomers of color—but I was not prepared for the extent of the dearth that I found. My sincere hope is that this book spurs additional research that will do justice to this crucial subject in the years to come.

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BABY BOOMERS OF COLOR

