



2007

## *Quixote's Ghost: The Right, the Liberati and the Future of Social Policy.* David Stoesz. Reviewed by Stephen Pimpare.

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### Recommended Citation

Pimpare, Stephen (2007) "*Quixote's Ghost: The Right, the Liberati and the Future of Social Policy.* David Stoesz. Reviewed by Stephen Pimpare.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 34 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol34/iss1/12>

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health epidemiology model, the environment is a powerful and intervening force in considering the interaction between the host and the causative agent leading to a specific outcome. In other words, the environment can either alleviate, exacerbate, or maintain the relationship between the specific causative agent and the individual or host. For example, when trying to get people to reduce or stop smoking, the impact of tobacco, where marketing and advertising are promotional activities and are key agents in the process, one must remember that each is external/environmental to the primary relationship between tobacco intake (agent) and the individual host. Thus social research must continually take into account the particular context or environment and period of time when social studies are conducted. Stinchcombe's perspective refers his brief introduction to his check of the core logical issues and problems in sociology and methods that have formed the bases of his argument. These issues include outlining the argument; economy in data collection; using data to refine concepts; using data to find mechanisms and processes; theory testing and using data to refine theories.

To place his thoughts in perspective, one must view with caution today's commentaries on the Civil Rights Movement, the War on Drugs, the War on Poverty, when the measurement and analysis fails to take into account the social, economic and political context of the time when these societal efforts emerged, and the relative impact such had on society over time. Thus, affirmative action, and substance abuse diversion programs are examples of specific programs which emerged in response to critical needs at that time, and which are often examined and judged by today's "standards."

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David Stoesz, *Quixote's Ghost: The Right, the Liberati, and the Future of Social Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. \$ 35.00 hardcover.

David Stoesz's *Quixote's Ghost* is an odd, infuriating and engaging book, one that can cause a sort of intellectual

whiplash: it moves from sharp observation to absurd generalization to reasoned analysis to wild assertion, sometimes within the same paragraph. I felt a bit like Quixote myself - or more accurately, like Sancho Panza, chasing after a madman, not sure whether to protect the world from him or him from the world. That, I suspect, was part of the intent. Stoesz wants to explain why contemporary American social policy has failed to better provide safety and security, or to adapt to the post-industrial world, and he clearly wants to be an equal opportunity offender—that's all to the good, for the Republican and Democratic parties surely share the blame. Republicans may be callous and stingy, guilty of sins of commission, Stoesz suggests, but Democrats have been blind to political reality and bereft of bold ideas, guilty of sins of omission. The passion with which he makes his case, and his determination to think beyond liberal-conservative paradigms are admirable, but Stoesz's arguments and analyses—compelling at first glance—cannot bear up under the weight of careful scrutiny. *Quixote's Ghost* is provocative, but ultimately unsatisfying.

His argument is this: Republican ascendancy in social policy is attributable to their successful efforts to build "networks of influence" in the aftermath of Goldwater's 1964 defeat, efforts driven by think tanks that would come increasingly to embrace empiricism, Stoesz asserts, to advance their cause. They adapted pragmatism – what he identifies as a Liberal philosophy of the New Deal - to their own ends. By contrast, those Liberal pragmatists who could once be counted upon for constructive participation in policymaking have retired to their ivory towers, been consumed by post-modern theories that have caused them to "reject empiricism in favor of identity politics," and, as a result, have been in "denial of conservative control of social policy" and failed to provide an alternative to the obsolete paradigm that was the hallmark of the twentieth century. These ineffectual intellectuals are Stoesz's "Liberati." Guilty too is the social work profession, which has similarly been obsessed with identity politics (witness the National Association of Black Social Workers' policy against trans-racial adoption, he says). They too have rejected empiricism in favor of ideology, leaving anthropologists and sociologists to produce the most important works of policy research. And they are also

in denial, stubbornly refusing to acknowledge the successes of conservative achievements, like 1996's welfare reform. Worse, they have failed to convince policymakers of the need for fundamental reform in child welfare and other arenas.

Hence the whiplash—the radical critique is so bound up with casuistry and conventional wisdom that it is difficult to know where to begin. Let me focus here only on one of the largest problems: I heartily agree that the Democratic Party has failed those most in need of their advocacy, that the academy has produced some very silly scholarship under the rubric of post-modern theory, that social work education is insufficiently rigorous, and that social work practice can too often suffer from crippling naiveté. But to lay the blame for decades of regressive social policy at the feet of post-modern professors and social workers is to blame Sancho Panza for the destruction Don Quixote leaves in his wake. To claim that the Liberati are complicit would seem defensible. But surely there are more proximate causes, and more powerful actors to attend to, if we truly seek to explain the current state of social policy.

Stoesz's solution to these and other problems is a call for "radical pragmatism," an approach that is "post-conservative" and "post-liberal," decentralized and democratic, and which depends upon technical expertise and acknowledges the efficiency of market mechanisms. Much of this sounds like an updated Progressivism (if anything united the Progressives it was a belief in expertise, and in practicality), and seems too little informed by the messy reality of politics and policy-making. Ask Harvard professor Mary Jo Bane, the Clinton advisor who resigned in the aftermath of welfare reform once she saw what the political process had done with her careful, practical, *pragmatic* scholarship. Good policy ideas are useless if one cannot control enough of the political system to enact and implement them, and Stoesz's radical pragmatism takes little account of, for example, the debts Democrats and Republicans both owe to very similar sets of narrow interests who have little stake in social policy; of the manipulation, by Democrats and Republicans alike, of Congressional districts, which hardens their monopoly over elected offices and reduces their accountability to the public; and of the manner in which mainstream media so poorly serve democratic interests and so rarely help

citizens make informed appraisal of the policy choices before them, leaving them susceptible to partisan propaganda.

Too much in *Quixote's Ghost* is asserted or assumed, and it is the lack of evidence, just as it was with Thomas Frank's best-selling *What's the Matter with Kansas*, that constitutes its fatal flaw. Indeed, Frank's entertaining book is a useful comparison: the more one reads, the less the engaging prose and the provocative theses are able to obscure the thinness and incoherence of what lies beneath. *Quixote's Ghost* seems to be a book about the politics of social policy, but isn't, because it pays too little attention to politics and to policy analysis. Ironically, what Stoesz offers is a work of political philosophy—his own kind of post-modern theory, nearly bereft of the empiricism he so yearns for.

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Sheila H. Akabas, Ph.D. and Paul A. Kurzman, *Work and the Workplace: A Resource for Innovative Policy and Practice*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. \$ 49.50 hardcover.

The workplace of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will increasingly become leaner, technologically reliant, and more aggressive in pursuit of a healthy bottom-line. The global competition for resources and customers creates tensions between corporations' fiduciary responsibility to their shareholders and their ethical responsibility to their employees, their host communities and the environment. Forward looking work organizations recognize that, amid these trends, recruiting and retaining a productive and loyal workforce is dependent on careful attention to employees' well being and on their ability to assist employees in balancing the often conflicting demands of work and family. Sheila Akabas and Paul Kurzman's book, *Work and the Workplace* is the definitive scholarly text on occupational social work practice. Building on their extensive research, teaching, and practical experiences, the authors review the history, contemporary practices and new professional opportunities for social work in the workplace, and create a comprehensive