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**Review of *The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Stealth Assault on America's Children*. Katherine Stewart. Reviewed by John E. Tropman.**

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rights, including prenatal care or quality education and ultimately citizenship. Chavez ends with the enumeration of concrete policy recommendations “to alleviate the damage caused by the Latino Threat Narrative and to ensure a rapid integration of Latino immigrants and their children” (p. 217).

Chavez writes with compassion and integrity, restoring dignity to the lives deformed by these narratives. At times, the reader would have preferred more analysis of the economic and labor issues that also drive these narratives. *The Latino Threat* is accessible and essential reading for students and professionals alike, and fosters advocacy for policy change, as well as the need to understand the psychologically and emotionally damaging repercussions of structural racism and nativist discourse practices, and their effects on provision of language access, health disparities and social services for Latino immigrants.

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Katherine Stewart, *The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Stealth Assault on America's Children*. Public Affairs (2012). \$25.99 (hardcover).

This book is an unusual one for review in a scholarly journal for several reasons. First, the author herself is not a scholar in the conventional sense; she is a journalist. Secondly, the work is more of a call to action than to contemplation. Thirdly, the book, though exploring an important social phenomenon, does not seek to explain that phenomenon.

Alternatively, though the author is a public intellectual, she presents not screeds but substance in a developing form of social organization that has gone, for the most part, unnoticed. She uses recognized qualitative methods—participant observation, interviews, and detailed textual examination. Overall, the book merits review.

*The Good News Club* documents various ways the Christian Right is infiltrating the American educational system through sponsored after school activities that are highly planned centrally and then “franchised,” as it were, to local church groups

which place them in schools as optional co-curricular after school elements. They are offered on a study/learn basis as their manifest function but really have the goal of capturing children's commitment to their evangelical perspective and world view as their latent function. These are the Good News Clubs.

There are 12 chapters in all, and a conclusion. The first 6 focus on the operations and formal and social organization of the Clubs. Chapters 7-9 focus on the literary strategies of the evangelical movement, specifically "The Texas Textbook Wars" and "The Bible 'Literacy' Wars." Chapter 9 discusses the ways in which some of the school-related activities marketed as "co-curricular offerings" are repackaged as "character" development programs and move into the curriculum itself. School underfunding makes local schools more likely to accept these initiatives because of their internal needs for staffing.

Chapter 10 focuses on "The Peer-to-Peer Evangelism Loophole." Here students try to "recruit" other students, while the following chapter looks at joining the Good News Club's volunteer cadre. Stewart gets the application and goes through the many requirements for belief that are outlined as needed for volunteers in order involve committed followers who are desired for the volunteer jobs. The chapter then details Stewart's participation as an "observer" in a Good News Club training.

The final chapter, "If You Can't Own It, Break It: The Plan to Undermine Public Education" outlines a greater initiative to "...defund and ultimately eliminate" the public schools (p. 245). In the conclusion, Stewart observes that,

The goal of the national assault on public education is to turn America into a 'Christian Nation.' I am not worried that they might succeed. I am worried about the damage they will cause when they fail. ... And I am alarmed that we have allowed them to get so far so fast." (p. 257)

With the book's thesis and evidence before us, how can we evaluate the work, its meaning, and its contribution? The work seems convincing. The writing is good. Stewart outlines all the material she read, names the people she talked with, and employs a "let the facts speak for themselves" presentation

strategy. Her concern about the dangers presented by a committed minority that seeks to have everyone on its bus does indeed pose a danger to any pluralistic community, organization or society. Hoffer's *True Believers* are always and everywhere a concern, regardless of what particular belief system they represent.

There are some omissions, however. One is that America seems to be doing a good job of dismantling the public education system on its own and replacing it with a "charter" school system. This larger social process, heavy with racial implications, is not mentioned. Secondly, there have always been special schools in this country: Catholic Schools might be the biggest example, but Yeshivas and International Schools are other examples. So is home schooling (2.7% of American children were home schooled in 2007). Faith-based groups and those with other commitments have established their own institutions but have not really tried to "convert" others to them, although there always has been, for many religious especially, a strong subtext of missionary work, often coupled with a "social work" or helping function.

But the sociological question is "Why." How do we explain the impetus to assertively, aggressively, subtly, openly have everyone believe as you do and be subject to your interpretation of what is right and wrong? How can we understand "values imperialism?"

This is not a question Stewart answers, but she provides a partial suggestion. Explanations for values imperialism will surely vary. For evangelicals, though, one part of the answer may lie in the hopeless strictures and structures of predestination, a big variable for Max Weber in *the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and discussed also in my books on Catholic value systems. It is a somewhat grim doctrine. Stewart gives us a taste in detailing the requirements of becoming a volunteer in the Good News Club circuit.

The anxiety of "uncertainty and powerlessness" must be overwhelming. So what is a believer to do? There are at least two possible of answers. One is the secularization of salvation. This solution depends upon the assumption that God would not allow someone who is saved be a failure in this life. Hence success—especially financial success derived from work—is an "outward sign" of inward grace. The other is recruiting new

souls for Christ—bringing the “good news” to more people. Surely such recruitment would assist in winning divine approval and might also be considered an “outward sign.”

So one answer to why evangelistic Christians pursue values imperialism is for them to assuage the uncertainty of predestination by working hard for His son, in the hope that doing so might move the needle to the salvation goal line. Anxious uncertainty is a powerful motivator. A similar dynamic might be a factor in other aggressive value systems.

In sum, the book reads well and would be useful for courses in the sociology of religion and courses in social and public policy especially.

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Jal Mehta, *The Allure of Order: High Hopes, Dashed Expectations, and the Troubled Quest to Remake American Schooling*, Oxford University Press (2013). \$29.95 (hardcover).

Jal Mehta challenges our tendency to believe that every education reform effort is “new,” and therefore holds fresh promise for improving student performance. In *The Allure of Order*, Mehta provides a retrospective of the standards reform movement, showing that its roots hail back to the Progressive Reform era. He traces forward from this period, demonstrating how publication of *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* in 1983 gave fresh legitimacy to the standards movement that has lasted through today. Although the value of standards as a primary driver of educational improvement has generated a plethora of literature, Mehta’s search for why this reform has persisted, despite frustration with student achievement gains, adds depth to an ongoing and urgent policy discussion about strategies to improve student performance.

Mehta reminds us that the repeated cycles of school rationalization that define our education reform path were the result of a series of decisions by “policy entrepreneurs” able to invoke a sense of crisis to install their reform notions. The Progressive Era was characterized by two trends: the Deweyan path that foregrounded a rich liberal arts education, dependent on a high quality of teacher-student interaction; and a rationalist path, where top-down decision-making through a