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Stoecker, R. (2016). *Liberating service learning and the rest of higher education civic engagement.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. 219 pp.

Review essay by Gabrielle Hickmon, Patti H. Clayton, and Sarah E. Stanlick

From the Associate Editor...

In his book *Liberating Service Learning and the Rest of Higher Education Civic Engagement (2016)*, Randy Stoecker offers a broad critique of the current practice of service-learning as context for advocating what he describes as a liberating vision for civic engagement education. In a sense, the book is a provocation by a respected critical scholar and practitioner of service learning to others in the field. While reviewers Gabrielle Hickmon, Patti H. Clayton, and Sarah E. Stanlick share some philosophical ground with Stoecker, they take exception to several aspects of the central arguments of his book.

Their review is not typical of those published in the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*. First, it is a review essay. This form of writing calls on reviewers to offer broader reactions to books under review and fuller contextualization of them within the literature. In order to accommodate such thoroughly constructed commentary, review essays are longer than traditional reviews. In this case, five times longer than most *JHEOE* reviews. Secondly, this review is the product of a small team of authors, rather than a single reviewer. Hickmon, Clayton, and Stanlick refer to the experience of reviewing the book together within their review. By example, they make the case for group reading and discussion more generally. Most reviewers read and write alone, and even when partnered with a second reviewer (often a graduate student), offer no commentary on having had a shared experience reviewing a book. I appreciated that element; often scholarship – particularly community-engaged scholarship – is strengthened by being a community endeavor. Finally, this is a fairly critical review. Given the brevity of most reviews and the positive dispositions of people in this field, *JHEOE* reviewers are typically loath to focus on critique, sometimes needing to be urged to offer even constructive criticism in the service of authors and our readers. That was not the case here. Like Stoecker, Hickmon, Clayton, and Stanlick have a point of view. In sharing their divergent views both author and reviewers contribute to the intellectual quality of discourse in this field. Collectively, we are all well-served by their efforts.

As associate editor for book reviews, I would welcome manuscripts of well-written review essays, particularly of books of wide interest to the field like the one at hand. Please know that there is a place for this kind of writing in the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*.

Burton Bargerstock
Associate Editor

Voice, Liberation, and the Future of Service-Learning

"If you are like me, you will alternately feel defensive, amused, and consternated" *(p. xvi)*. Author Randy Stoecker successfully predicts some of what will go on in readers' hearts and minds—at least, some of what did in ours. We were also intrigued, impatient, and irritated. Stoecker thinks and writes with passion, and he evokes the same in his readers—in part, we suspect, by intent. Whether you have heard him literally speak or not, you cannot help but hear his emphatic voice as you read, and it is also in part because of that dynamic that a rich emotional and intellectual response to the book is likely. *Liberating Service Learning and the Rest of Higher Education Civic Engagement* (hereafter referred to as *Liberating Service Learning*) is Stoecker talking, with conviction and passion, in his own no-holds-barred voice. In our experience, service-learning and community/civic engagement (SLCE: the abbreviation we use throughout this essay, use of which, to clarify, is our practice, not Stoecker's) people tend to be attuned to voice—to its use and abuse, what cultivates and silences it, what it reveals and obscures. To who speaks and who does not, who speaks over others, who tries to speak on behalf of others. Voice matters to us, and we engage with it. If we were less inclined to do so, we probably would not respond to it strongly, either affectively or cognitively. We probably would not try to stay open to it when it troubles us. We probably would not read—or review—books with an eye—an ear?—focused on it.

This review essay has a lot to do with voice . . . and not only Stoecker's, although certainly that is part of it. It is also about our own voices: Gabrielle's, Sarah's, and Patti's. It is an expression of our voices, individually and collectively, and part of our ongoing development of them. Gabrielle brings to this review experience with and study of international educational development as well as the personal and professional identity and lived experience of an

emerging young scholar of color. Sarah brings years of experience in work related to global citizenship and human rights as well as current immersion in the leadership of an SLCE center focused on ethical, partnership-centric engagement. Patti writes as a veteran SLCE practitioner-scholar whose work has focused primarily on community-engaged learning and on cocreation among all partners in SLCE.

It is our intention to exercise our voices in this space, in part, to honor ideas and practices we fear are not acknowledged in this book. Stoecker frequently lumps most current SLCE into a homogeneous set he describes as "focus[ed] on being the least intellectual practice in higher education" and "offer[ing] the least we can rather than the most" *(p. 4)*. This is unfair to and disrespectful of decades of hard work and serious thought by deeply committed individuals and programs who share his concerns about insufficient community impact. We are concerned that such characterizations are at odds with our own and others' sustained efforts to nurture an ever more inclusive and self-critical community of SLCE practitioner-scholars that continues to better understand and improve the quality of its processes, inquiry, and impacts across the full range of arenas, including communities at large. We attempt to offer what we believe is a more fair consideration of the author's ideas than he extends to most members of the SLCE community, and we invite readers to try to look beyond the pervasive dismissive tone to engage with significant questions the book raises.

Unheard Voices

We readily acknowledge that the voices of individuals who are not based at least partly in higher education are not directly expressed in this review. At the same time, we believe that we write not only as academics but also as community members and citizens who are part of community organizations, participate in civic processes, and interact with a range of individuals who are both more and less affected by various injustices than we are. As with our colleagues and neighbors around the United States, we have of late been especially entrenched in thinking about race, dialogue, and the power of narratives. We have thus been taking a hard look in the mirror, grappling with questions of voice, meaningful representation of self and others, and what liberation looks like in our country and world in the 21st century.

This review essay is, in some ways ironically, about "unheard voices," including those of community members to whom

Stoecker and his colleagues called the SLCE movement's attention almost a decade ago. The book *The Unheard Voices: Community Organizations and Service Learning (Stoecker, Tryon, & Hilgendorf, 2009)*, perhaps the most well-known of Stoecker's previous work, challenges student-centric SLCE to ask whether communities benefit from and become empowered through partnerships and projects that proponents so often label with the—we completely agree—overused adjective "transformative." Students in a seminar on qualitative research interviewed staff of community organizations who partner in SLCE and wrote up their analyses of what they heard as a way of opening space for otherwise "unheard voices" to be shared. Almost all chapters in that book include quotes from community partners, and Chapter 8 is authored by Amy Mondloch, then director of a nonprofit organization. Her chapter is, to us, the highlight of that book, as through it we are all able to hear an SLCE community partner giving voice directly to the commitment to everyone being a learner, a teacher, and a leader. That the voices of community members are, with the exception of that chapter, heard only through the representation of them by Stoecker and his students is both a lost opportunity and an indicator of Stoecker's long-standing tendency—continued in *Liberating Service Learning*—to position members of the academy primarily, and in rather sharp contrast with members of broader communities, as knowledge workers.

A Vision for SLCE

That earlier book closes with an epilogue that lays the foundation for Stoecker's ongoing development of an approach to SLCE that engages with the voices of community members. It posits two potential futures, one in which the nature and practice of SLCE continue down the "current" path, "with not enough attention to community outcomes," and the other in which "community outcomes are the first priority, not the last, and service learning is structured to maximize community impact" *(p. 187)*. *Liberating Service Learning* exists because of Stoecker's disappointment, frustration, and anger that the movement in the United States—his acknowledged focus—has not, as he sees it, chosen the second possible future. He now uses the term "institutionalized service learning" for SLCE that stayed on the student-centric path, which means for almost all instances of it. "Liberating service learning" is the unrealized alternative future. The term explicitly speaks both to the need to liberate all participants in SLCE from a practice that makes us "complicit in maintaining exclusion, exploitation, and

oppression" *(p. 6)* and to the need to liberate SLCE itself from the "historical baggage" *(p. 7)* that has become deeply rooted in the neoliberal higher education landscape and maintains systems of power and privilege underlying class, race, gender, and so on. A "liberating" SLCE would, instead, be "part of real social change—[helping] to end conditions of oppression, exploitation, and exclusion in society" *(p. 4)*. It would not be theorized and implemented primarily as pedagogy, out of assumptions that it is fundamentally "about affecting students, not communities" *(p. 7)*, but rather as a social change strategy. We consider below how the contrasts Stoecker draws between these two possibilities may enshrine conceptual and practical hierarchies that, as we see it, are at the heart of the world—and worldview—that SLCE at its best seeks to uncover, inquire into, understand, and change.

What Stoecker wants to liberate SLCE from and what his proposed liberating vision consists of in theory and practice are clearly laid out. Before we summarize the book and explore a few of our own responses and questions, we offer the following excerpt from the poem that closes it. We would have found it easier to engage with his perspective had the poem opened the book, as it reveals concretely his take on the appropriate role of members of the academy in social change initiatives. We invite readers to pause over it and acknowledge the assumptions you bring to the book and to SLCE itself, as we believe this is a necessary prerequisite to engaging Stoecker's ideas with an open mind.

. . . all through the land
The master had silenced each woman, person, and man. . . .
The poor were most hungry and the sick sicker yet . . .
Oppression was normal, accepted, and unseen,
And the windows to truth were all fogged and uncleaned. . . .
. . .
. . . together they talked about ways to make change,
. . .
. . . they all could agree that the system was slop,
And the oppression of people was the first thing to stop.
. . .
"We need to know more," they said, "before we get lost,"
. . .
So they sought out the teachers and asked for the books,
But their efforts resulted in stares and blank looks.
. . .

[One] teacher said, "Sorry, I know not what to do,"
"Though I know how to learn--about that I've a clue."
And the people said, "Yes, we don't want you to tell us."
"We want to learn learning; perhaps you can help us?"
So the teacher and people, who were now both together,
They started to study, teaching each other.
And the knowledge they built grew faster and faster,
And the people grew ready to throw off their master.
Out into the streets the people went with their clout,
And confronted the master and said, "You are out!"
"No more will we swallow your lies and deceit,"
"We've learned how to learn and you now face defeat!"
And the people and teacher, who now were as one,
Started a new world. . . . (pp. 183–185)

With the orientation to the vision of "liberating" SLCE this poem provides, we turn to a critical overview of the structure and content of the book and examine a few aspects of Stoecker's argument that stand out to us. We encourage you to read the book and bring your own work into conversation with it—in a way that poses critical questions to both and thereby contributes to our collective efforts to better understand and continuously enhance the processes and impacts of SLCE.

Part of the Solution or Part of the Problem?

Liberating Service Learning opens with a personal prelude in which Stoecker shares his concerns about his own SLCE practice, noting that 30 years of it have increasingly led him to "see the contradictions, the unrealized potential, the unrecognized urgency of the causes" *(p. xi)*. The prelude lays out his standard for his own work:

> If I can't make a difference—not-a-maybe-someday-in-the-future-because-some-student-I-taught-maybe-influenced-someone-who-maybe-indirectly-influenced-some-change difference but an immediate and visible difference in the ability of a collective of oppressed, exploited, and excluded people to gain and practice power—then I have failed. I have also failed if I can't help turn out students who can also do this. *(p. xiii)*

Stoecker is deeply disappointed by "what we have not accomplished" as a movement generally, given that "things are really bad out there"; as one example, "those who have endured the legacy of slavery, genocide, and colonization continue to find not just liberty and the pursuit of happiness but life itself to be elusive dreams" *(p. xiii)*. He thus writes most fundamentally "to figure out whether there are practical ways to do . . . this work better. Not a little better. A lot better" *(p. xiii)*.

We share that goal in our work and are pleased to see Stoecker's intent to "learn from and amplify the critiques of those who directly experience" the issues he is most concerned with SLCE addressing—oppression, exploitation, and exclusion—although we find his related claim that he is "not pursuing [his] own critique" to be a bit disingenuous (pp. x–xi). On the one hand, we, and we expect many readers, share uncertainty about whether the work we do makes a meaningful difference. On the other hand, Stoecker's characterization of the type of difference he implies academics often settle for and the type he considers successful seems to us oversimplified and perhaps even inappropriately manipulative of his readers. Are we being shamed into judging our own work a failure unless we frame it in these terms? We ourselves often speak of "*nudging* the world, any part of the world, toward a shared, desired vision of the possible" and have summarized the set of visions we and many of our colleagues (those based primarily in communities and those on campuses) hold as "a world that is increasingly peaceful, compassionate, just, inclusive, and verdant" *(Clayton et al., 2014, p. 6)*. We are concerned that Stoecker's standard for not-failing—at least insofar as his rhetorical strategy seeks to place it on others—is not only rarely obtainable but an inappropriately grandiose and narrowly constrained take on the community-oriented goals many of us may bring to SLCE.

Stoecker writes this book, he concludes in the prelude, to be "part of the solution rather than part of the problem" *(p. xiii)*. One of the questions we kept coming back to throughout the book concerns whether his understanding of academics, but not community members more generally, as "knowledge workers" perpetuates "the problem" through enshrining the dualisms that are arguably at the heart of the changes democratically engaged SLCE seeks to bring about. The prelude left us with the primary question each of us had upon first picking up the book largely unresolved: Given what he is trying to do here, why is this not a coauthored book or one that at least substantively and directly incorporates voices other than Stoecker's own? The range of "unheard voices" in this book needs

justifying, and the lack of both those voices and such an explanation raised serious qualms for us that only deepened as we read further.

Stoecker's Worries

After the prelude, the book is divided into three parts. Part 1 lays out Stoecker's concerns about SLCE as he sees it currently conceived and practiced. Chapter 1 ("Why I Worry") goes right to the heart of his concerns about "institutionalized" SLCE with a story of student civil disobedience on behalf of worker unionization on campus and the resultant disciplinary hearing. The students "had done their homework" and were "supporting a community effort getting at one of the root causes of poverty" *(p. 4)*. This not being considered legitimate SLCE—whereas students putting in a small number of hours serving at a community organization as part of a formalized course is—serves as a microcosm of Stoecker's concerns about how we define and undertake SLCE. Stoecker's own experience teaching a course that included working with a neighborhood group to turn a vacant building into a community center serves as a second example:

> My students and I helped the group learn city zoning code, housing code, . . . accessibility law . . . [and] what other community centers did. We helped them gather information from their own community so they could say what they wanted to happen in such a center. But we (and I should really say "I") didn't do nearly as well helping the residents learn lobbying, organizing, and change making, so while they actually got the city to purchase the building, its transformation into a community center was tied up for more than two years in all kinds of bureaucratic red tape and residents did not have the organizing capacity to move things along. *(p. 7)*

Institutionalized SLCE is tame, apolitical, and nonthreatening to existing power structures. It is focused on student learning, reduces to forced volunteerism, neglects serious consideration of whether and how community outcomes result, and serves to keep everyone adjusted to—rather than mobilized to dismantle—the status quo. A "liberating" conception and practice of SLCE would be driven by a very different understanding of "our role in contributing to theory that people can use to make more sense of their world and act in

more collectively liberating ways within it by understanding how to transform it" *(p. 7)*.

Chapter 2 ("A Brief Counter-Intuitive History of Service Learning") and Chapter 3 ("Theories [Conscious and Unconscious] of Institutionalized Service Learning") are designed to "help us see not just the need for change but the possibilities for it" *(p. 10)* and thereby complete the stage-setting for the in-depth examination of the sources of and differences between "institutionalized" and "liberating" SLCE that comprise most of the book. Stoecker challenges the tendency to claim Dewey's theorizing about experiential learning as the primary source of SLCE and instead takes us back to the very earliest experiments with "university settlements" in London in the 1880s and traces a line of development from there through the Highlander Folk School, civil rights and antiwar movements, and associated campus activism. He suggests that "the best higher education service learning done in the history of the United States was done under the label 'student activism'" and that "it is completely missing from the official histories of institutionalized service learning" *(p. 15)*.

We want to note the extent to which examples of Stoecker's earlier practice seem to be light years beyond the volunteer placement approach to "SLCE" that we and many others share his concerns about. At the same time, however, the reification of his two categories of SLCE (institutionalized and liberating) highlights for us a troubling reductionism that imposes mutual exclusivity on a set of complex and varied practices, denies the multiplicity of forces that influence the work of SLCE, and makes nuanced critique and associated improvement all but impossible.

SLCE as Firefighting

Between Part 1 and Part 2 is a two-page interlude that concretizes Stoecker's take on institutionalized SLCE by applying it to the imagined operations of fire departments. If they were organized along the same lines as most current SLCE, he claims, fire departments would fight fires "only at certain times of the year" and for a limited number of hours and firefighters would "get to choose" whose fires they wanted to fight *(p. 27)*. People whose homes were on fire would have a hard time getting in touch with firefighters who could help and would have to supply the needed water. Not only would there not be advance training in firefighting but the very purpose of fighting fires would be to provide it. The analogy is

humorous, and we expect some readers will—likely as intended—wince when it hits a bit too close to home for comfort.

The analogy also, however, embodies in microcosm what we see as a problematic aspect of Stoecker's thinking that pervades the book; readers who agree with us will likely be annoyed if not angered. In short, the analogy conveys his tendency to hold up current understanding of and practice of SLCE in a way that comes across as a strawperson. It takes much of what the movement knows to be poor practice—which we quite agree is happening—and overgeneralizes it to represent current practice as a whole. Stoecker largely ignores the reality that better practice is also happening and dismisses the effort that, in our experience, many SLCE practitioner-scholars located primarily in communities and those on campuses make to do this work in ways that engage with its complexities. Equating students, faculty, and staff with modern-day firefighters, whose job it is to come in and save us when we need them, suggests that SLCE positions people from the academy as the primary if not the only ones responding to community issues—as the well-resourced experts who can and should fix problems in communities. Does some current practice assume that? Certainly. However, a growing number of practitioner-scholars are calling upon us and our colleagues to move beyond such technocratic orientations. We do not have to read deeply into the literature or look at many community–campus partnerships to find evidence that SLCE at its best does not take such a stance. We would find the book much more useful if it engaged with SLCE in its full complexity rather than reducing it to what often comes across as a cartoon version of itself.

An analogy with firefighting could carry that weight were it treated differently, perhaps set outside the contemporary urban Western context and framed as a task that everyone takes on and used to concretize the difficulties of collaborating on change *(K. Edwards, August 13, 2017 personal communication)*. Firefighting thus construed might, for example, involve everyone coming together in the moment with water and shovels and also working to reduce incidents of fire through innovative safety measures, trash removal processes, and housing regulations. If we start with the assumption that we all see ourselves as members of broader communities and are all doing our best to contribute responsibly, then we can come together in a nuanced exploration of the shortcomings—indeed, the dangers—of some current practices and the possibilities for alternatives that are increasingly empowering and impactful. But if we start with the conviction that most if not all of us are care-

less at best or intentionally exploitative at worst, then we are not very likely to cocreate ever better ways of being and doing together. The Interlude serves the author's purpose of illustrating the nature and consequences of the version of SLCE he has written this book to challenge, but in doing so it reveals what we see as an unfair, uncritical, and ultimately unhelpful set of assumptions.

Contrasting Liberating With Institutionalized SLCE

Part 2 includes four chapters focused on the "theories of" learning (Chapter 4), service (Chapter 5), community (Chapter 6), and change (Chapter 7) that Stoecker argues undergird institutionalized SLCE. Parallel chapters unfold in the reverse order—change (Chapter 8), community (Chapter 9), service (Chapter 10), and learning (Chapter 11)—in Part 3 to structurally embody liberating SLCE's explicit reversal of these priorities. "A different ordering," Stoecker explains, "provides a foundation for a different practice" *(p. 26)*. Table 1 provides a few of the key elements of one of these four underlying bodies of theory—learning—as Stoecker sees it emerging in "institutionalized" and "liberating" SLCE. We offer this glimpse into these chapters as an aid to readers in understanding Stoecker's two frameworks.

Table 1. Learning: Institutionalized and Liberating SLCE

Institutionalized SLCE	Liberating SLCE
SLCE is a pedagogy (a way to teach) and is designed to achieve preestablished (by the instructor) learning objectives. The focus of SLCE is on the learning of college students. Learning is experiential and comes from reflection. Academic credit is given for learning, not for service. SLCE includes civic education goals. Draws on: Dewey, Kolb, Lewin, Piaget, Boyer	Teaching college students is a "secondary consideration" to "building the knowledge power of grassroots constituency members, and then their allies, to support local action toward social change" *(p. 147)*. The model is a participatory process of popular education, in which people set their own change agendas and learning is in the service of pursuing them. Academics bring to the table "the ability to find things out—to do research—so [we] can facilitate the group to figure out, first, what they need to know and, second, how to know it" *(p. 157)*. Draws on: Gramsci, Freire, Horton, Knowles, science shop model, community organizing

These sections of the book raise several concerns for us, particularly around fairness, representation, and voice. Stoecker indicates that Part 2 "will consider how institutionalized service learning thinks about" each of these four core concepts *(p. 26)*, which led us to expect a summary of each on its own terms that fairly represents—before critiquing—the voices that have contributed to the development of these central concepts. But that is not how these chapters proceed, which does serious disservice to these voices. Each chapter opens with an epigraph that highlights not the central tenet of the concept in question as understood from the perspective of institutionalized SLCE but rather an aspect of Stoecker's critique of that take on the concept. Chapter 4 ("What is Institutionalized Service Learning's Theory of Learning?"), for example, opens with a quote from Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that speaks to a criterion for "truly liberating" pedagogy *(p. 31)*, and Chapter 5 ("What is Institutionalized Service Learning's Theory of Service?") opens with a quote from the book *Toxic Charity* that posits lack of real concern for "the benefits received by the served" *(p. 47)*. Each of the chapters in Part 2—the section that purports to document the theoretical underpinnings of what the author refers to as "institutionalized" SLCE—is thus framed in terms of Stoecker's critique.

We are concerned that this discourages readers from engaging with the theories he shares and distracts them from developing their own interpretations of the influence of the theories on SLCE.

Indeed, we found it next to impossible to replicate the type of summary in Table 1 for the other three core concepts—service, community, and change—as he explores them in Parts 2 and 3 because the corresponding chapters in Part 2 got progressively worse in terms of fair representation of the conceptualizations held by SLCE practitioner-scholars and progressively more like soapboxes for the author's criticisms. Explained by Stoecker as conceptual confusion and undertheorizing within institutionalized SLCE, this lack of actual review of the held meanings of the concepts comes across to us as unscholarly and self-serving. This apparent unwillingness to represent ideas he does not agree with fairly (i.e., as those who hold them would represent them) is one of the ways Stoecker undermines himself in this book—reducing readers' confidence in his critical thinking and his commitment to truly understanding those whose perspectives differ from his.

The chapters in Part 2 would be stronger had Stoecker more fairly presented a representative range of underlying conceptual frameworks in each. As illustrated in Table 1, in each of the chapters in Part 2 and Part 3 Stoecker draws on several bodies of thought related to the concept in question (i.e., learning, service, community, change), but we are concerned that in Part 2 they are cherry-picked to support the story he wants to tell as a foil for his proposals in Part 3. Using Chapter 5 as an example, service is presented as obedience to authority and as charity, but not also as healing, despite the critical engagement with service in these terms in Remen's *(1999)* widely used essay "Helping, Fixing, or Serving." There is little acknowledgment of work such as Davis's *(2006)* essay, "What We Don't Talk About When We Don't Talk About Service," that problematizes simplistic, hierarchical, self-serving notions of service.

Further, the selected works are sometimes misrepresented, as for example, again in Chapter 5, with his description of the servant leader as "someone with enough power to command others engag[ing] voluntarily in the act of serving and developing others" *(p. 47)* rather than, as its founder Greenleaf *(1977)* conceptualizes it: as one who listens first, empathizes, fully accepts others, and sustains others. The "mark of a servant leader," in Greenleaf's writings and in the substantial body of work that builds on them, is commitment to asking, "Do those served grow as persons? Do they . . . become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more

likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?" *(p. 6)*. One of the founders of the SLCE movement in higher education, Robert Sigmon *(1979)*, drew on this conception of service as he established foundational principles of SLCE, insisting upon identities and relationships among community members and their academic partners similar to those that *Liberating Service Learning* advocates, so it is particularly puzzling to us that Stoecker fails to represent this body of work accurately.

Puzzled is, in fact, an accurate label for the feeling we had throughout our reading of Parts 2 and 3. Why does Stoecker almost completely ignore the framing and work of many of the pioneers of SLCE, who decades ago gave voice to the justice-oriented, systems-change goals that gave rise to the practice in the first place (e.g., see *Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999*)? Why does he suggest in Part 2 that "service" is intended merely to modify "learning," quite to the contrary of some of the early work in the field that clearly established that "service, combined with learning, adds value to each and transforms both" *(Honnett & Poulson, 1989, p. 1)*? Why does he essentially claim a complete lack of concern within SLCE for learning beyond that of students when thought leaders in SLCE have from the beginning insisted that all teach and all learn and have increasingly explored what it means to position all partners as coeducators, colearners, and cogenerators of knowledge and practice? And perhaps most inexplicable of all, given his emphasis on community voice, why does Stoecker seem to diminish instances of community members' taking on the role of educating young people? He interprets such actions as mere exploitation of community members' time to benefit students that does not return equal value and expresses concern that "they don't resent it" *(p. 56)* despite documentation going back over 15 years of community partners indicating the importance to them of helping to educate the next generation of citizens whose choices will shape the future of the community issues their organizations exist to address *(see Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2002; Sandy & Holland, 2006)*. Although we appreciate Stoecker's critical look at some of the philosophical underpinnings and contemporary practices of SLCE in Parts 2 and 3 of the book, we question whether all that he claims for liberating SLCE is as new and revolutionary as he seems to believe.

Two issues in particular concerned us as we read Part 3. First, we are troubled by Stoecker's prioritization of "big A" activism—the protest and imprisonment model that became a hallmark of the 1960s—including in terms of how it cannot be lived in the same

way for students of color. Stoecker frequently calls our attention to examples of students who have risked their standing at their university and their permanent record to protest, sit in, and participate in what he considers radical action. As we see it, although there are times when this type of activism is appropriate and effective, educators must be extremely conscious of the risks of these activities as they decide whether to support and hold them up as exemplars of student engagement. There is a vast difference between being arrested for civil disobedience if you are a White student from Wisconsin (where Stoecker lives) and if you are a Black student from Baltimore. That difference could be not only life-changing but life-ending.

Second, we are troubled by Stoecker's representation of global citizenship. His assertion that "simple volunteerism" *(p. 135)* is a central tenet of global citizenship education is for us yet another example of his reliance on strawperson caricatures. Global citizenship is often framed in this book (and more generally) as being about shedding labels of self or nationality in order to ascend to a pannational ethos or identity. It is unrealistic to think that one can shed national identity, even if one wanted to, especially as one travels or interacts across borders with people from cultures that have been impacted by Western influence or colonization. But more to the point, highly nuanced recommendations for global citizenship education exist, although Stoecker does not acknowledge them. Global citizenship can serve as a critical lens, a transformative experience, and a framework that makes possible world-changing social, political, and economic shifts. SLCE curricula developed by UNESCO *(2014)* and Oxfam *(2006)* describe a global citizen as one who commits to social justice, nurtures peace, exercises civic agency, adopts sustainability, and embraces diversity. *Critical* global citizenship education is focused on dismantling the oppressive systems that nation-states, dictators, and institutions have fostered while also developing the self *(de Andreotti, 2014)*. At its best, global citizenship education should shift one's worldview and engender a sense of interconnectedness while also prompting civic agency to call out and remedy injustice.

The Future of SLCE

In the concluding Chapter 12 ("Toward a Liberated World?") Stoecker seems to speak with a voice of resignation when he shares that he has "difficulty imagining that any higher education institution would actually support the alternative [of liberating service learning]" *(p. 163)*; he is "not even sure [he'd] want them to" *(p.*

163), as that would put at risk the "insurgent" nature of the practice he envisions *(p. 166)*. Walking readers point by point through his "professional civic engagement mission statement" and the associated practice steps he seeks to follow, he provides a concrete distillation of individual-level implications of liberating SLCE (e.g., questioning the role of allyship, taking risks against administrators, experiencing tension around who is doing the "teaching"). Although he thinks they are unrealistic, Stoecker posits several institution-level implications (e.g., professional development in the dynamics of community organizing, less rigid curricular frameworks, and civic education that takes many forms besides SLCE) that strike us as well worth exploring, although not new, as we regularly hear and give voice ourselves to versions of them. There is also a nod in this chapter to an institution from which "we can take a lesson" (De Anza College); we would have appreciated much more depth in this and the handful of other acknowledgments scattered throughout the book that "examples of such practices do exist" *(p. 178)*.

The tone of Chapter 12, that things aren't likely to get better in SLCE, leaves us with the sense that we must highlight examples of where conscious, critical, and counternormative work is happening. One such place, where the three of us are active, is the SLCE Future Directions Project (SLCE-FDP), an international learning community that has been a generative space for multiple stakeholders to discuss their ideas about the future of the movement *(http://www.slce-fdp.org/)*. Many of the thought pieces published in the last round invited reimagining of how we organize SLCE: "crossing presumed boundaries between campus and community if not dismantling them, positioning all partners as co-creators in inquiry and action, becoming part of processes already underway within communities, and developing relationships in the context of particular places" *(Stanlick, Kniffin, Clayton, Zlotkowski, & Howard, 2017)*. Looking at the arena of global citizenship, one example of undoing the type of dysfunctional global citizenship education Stoecker describes can be found in Fine's *(2016)* thought piece; it outlines a nuanced and complex version of global citizenship that "teaches the partnership," modeling cocreation of knowledge and leveraging critical university studies to critique dominant narratives of SLCE. Several pieces emphasize the multidirectional flow of knowledge in SLCE practice and scholarship, honoring community experts, and centering SLCE on community voice. A thought piece by Stanlick and Sell *(2016)* on empowerment as a key factor in a community–campus partnership that focuses on refugee resettle-

ment is coauthored by a community partner and faculty member, the curriculum discussed in it is codesigned by both, and the students work as colleagues within a learning community in which refugee support and community thriving are paramount concerns. Augustine, Lopez, McNaron, Starke, and Van Gundy *(2017)* call on us to locate SLCE within social justice collectives led by people from marginalized groups to address systems of oppression. And Hussain and Wattles *(2017)* offer examples of and recommendations for critical dialogues among all partners about social class– and race-based inequality that lead to SLCE projects that are codesigned, sustainable, and focused on local issues. SLCE-FDP has from the beginning intended to be critical, cocreative, and appreciative. We also know that the ideal we seek is aspirational, and it is the commitment of the contributors to stay engaged, humble, and curious that allows the space to continually improve and to offer an example of how this work can be done ever more democratically and impactfully.

Our Worries

Overall, we share Stoecker's readiness to consider whether SLCE can do more harm than good but not his characterization of essentially all current practice as subject to that charge. We disagree that our colleagues "won't be able to wrap their heads around" *(p. 166)* his proposed reprioritizing of change, community, service, and learning and instead suggest that the way forward ought to involve a more integrative orientation to these four important domains of commitment and work. Echoing the title of Chapter 1, what *we* worry about is that repolarizing what one sees as a hierarchy isn't all that radical or even to the point; indeed, it remains within, rather than dismantles, a problematic hierarchical worldview. That insisting on "knowledge worker" as the distinct identity, role, and function of "academics" does not help us position ourselves appropriately in work in partnership to advance justice, but further enshrines us and only us as "in the knowledge business" *(p. 168)*. That, consequently, Stoecker not only fails to challenge but indeed reinforces the dualisms that ignore, deny, or diminish the everyday knowledge work of all who seek to understand and change the world around us.

We worry that characterizing SLCE practitioner-scholars as "oblivious to" challenges related to such issues as "women's control over their own bodies" *(p. 179)* disrespects and simplifies voices representing a wide range of perspectives that are actively engaged with one another in trying to understand and act in the face of

associated trade-offs and complexities. We worry that Stoecker inappropriately generalizes—if not insincerely lauds—his own acknowledged "unreflective individualism" *(p. 180)*, claiming it as a feature of basically all SLCE practitioner-scholars and thereby perpetuating the uncritical tendency of the dominant culture he challenges to stand in the center and define others' experience in light of one's own. We do not consider ourselves or our colleagues "comfortably ensconced inside of higher education institutions" *(p. 179)* as democracy crumbles around us, and we worry that leveling such a charge against colleagues—many of whom work creatively and self-critically to advance democracy and justice within and through our questions, our practices, and our partnerships—serves more to distance than to engage potential allies in the quest for liberation.

Fundamentally, we worry that "we" (i.e., academics) are positioned in liberating SLCE—not so differently than in institutionalized SLCE—as privileged outsiders (i.e., allies) who can and should help "them" (i.e., the oppressed, excluded, exploited). We wonder if, instead, it is more the case that we are all interdependently caught up in, shapers of and shaped by, relationships, systems, and paradigms that often do violence but also hold the seeds of liberation for all.

Liberation to What End, for Whom, and How?

"But what does it mean for my liberation to be bound up with another's, and especially what does it mean to work together?" asks Stoecker after interrogating the well-known quote from an Australian Aboriginal activist group: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together" *(pp. 128–129)*. For Stoecker, this quote begins to flip service on its head, creating space for its liberation within his proposal for liberating SLCE. One of the primary vehicles of the liberation he calls for is allyship, which he defines as a practice that acknowledges difference between those who have a "common social structural experience and those who lack the experience" *(p. 129)*. His definition of allyship hinges on various principles, one of the most important being that "the people with a common experience determine the other principles of allyship" *(p. 129)*. He expands his definition by emphasizing the following: listening is more important than speaking among allies, allyship is a practice requiring engagement in one's daily life, and allies do not speak for the community with which they are allied—they only speak their own views as

aligned with the community. His use of this quote is curious. The language, examples, and scholarship used throughout the book are not always congruent with the values and practices emphasized by allyship. There are many instances (see Chapter 10, for example) in which the focus on the oppressed, exploited, and excluded comes dangerously close to an othering that blames the community for its position and puts the onus of "its" liberation squarely on "their" shoulders. This feels like the opposite of the Aboriginal collective's perspective, inserting a "them" versus "us" dynamic when there should be "we." Though we agree with Stoecker that liberation is and should be a collective effort, we take issue with three aspects of his argument: (a) his colonizing use of the work of scholars of color, (b) his positioning of marginalized people, and (c) his attempt to regulate the anger of marginalized groups.

White scholars have long used the work of scholars of color as their own—moving words around or rephrasing sentences in ways that lend themselves more to exploitation than building and growing knowledge by deconstructing or further interrogating ideas *(Vázquez, 1992)*. We fear Stoecker does this in his references to social justice service-learning, critical service-learning, and other approaches that in his judgment only marginally do the work of "developing a theoretical understanding of the underlying social/political/economic issues exhibited by that placement" *(p. 11)*. Social justice SLCE and critical SLCE are not "liberating," he claims, because "much of the intellectual and research focus is still on the students and higher education institution"; as a result, "the effects of service learning on the community [are] reduced to an afterthought and community members [are] labeled as 'recipients' even when they are to become 'empowered' as a consequence" *(p. 23)*. This portrayal of social justice and critical SLCE seems to us to lack respect for the complexity of how scholars such as Tania Mitchell *(2008)*, who is cited by Stoecker and who has generated robust scholarship around critical SLCE, define and understand both the term and the process of engagement. Mitchell argues that "critical service-learning programs encourage students to see themselves as agents of social change and use the experience of service to address and respond to injustice in communities" *(p. 51)*. It requires educators to focus on social responsibility and critical community—for Stoecker, "constituency"—issues. Framed within such critical or social justice terms, problem-solving grounded in SLCE is a means of social and political reform.

Such reform-oriented SLCE does not seem that different from "liberating SLCE." Stoecker calls for work rooted in community

or constituency, social change, and allyship. He challenges educators and students to prioritize the needs of a constituency as communicated to them and to work collectively toward remedying or eliminating social ills, all of which fall under the purview of critical or social justice SLCE (although sometimes without the deficit-based focus on "needs"). Why, then, does Stoecker dismiss them when they seem to be voicing similar concerns about and future directions for SLCE? Our concern is that Stoecker, like other White scholars before him, uses the work of scholars of color to prop up his own arguments and ideologies. If the liberation of liberating SLCE were tied up in a collective struggle, Stoecker would not only be able to positively acknowledge work such as Mitchell's but also to recognize the ways in which the ideas he offers throughout the book align with those of critical and social justice SLCE advocates. He would be able to build on such work in a manner that does not merely prop up his own argument. With such a stance he might, for example, have invited coauthorship, included one or more chapters of critical reflection by such scholars on some or all of the book, or used any of a number of approaches to anthologizing similar ideas, integrating his own ideas, and further nuancing the conversation in a noncolonizing way.

With this critique about voice in mind, it is important to note that Stoecker recognizes and emphasizes the danger of narratives being written by researchers and others who hold academic power. He opens his book with the notion that SLCE might have it wrong in terms of how we engage with marginalized people. He hits the nail on the head when he states that SLCE can reinforce stereotypes, yet he does not seem to consider that throughout *Liberating Service Learning* he in some ways engages in problematic practices himself—reinforcing stereotypes (e.g., assumptions about collegiate demographics, *p. 145*), policing behavior (e.g., anger and Blackness, *p. 96*), and lacking nuance in how he addresses issues marginalized populations face as well as how SLCE might serve as remedy (e.g., asset-based language and SLCE, *p. 73*). Based on his larger call for liberating SLCE, these approaches seem to be in tension with the transformative values he claims for his work and with his expectations for a more radically situated, social-justice-oriented SLCE.

Second, Stoecker vacillates throughout the book between two positions with regard to marginalized populations, particularly people of color (POC). POCs and other marginalized populations either do not show up at all or exist to serve his narrative. In Chapter 4, while discussing experiential learning, Stoecker

writes, "The student does not directly experience poverty—they only experience what it is like to be a volunteer doing things for someone experiencing poverty" *(p. 35)*. This analysis of experiential learning in some ways strikes us as a useful corrective to imprecise conceptualizations of this type of pedagogy, although it ignores the ways in which meaning can be made of experiences by examining them critically for what they do not, as well as what they do, offer direct engagement with. More to the point, however, this criticism of framing SLCE as experiential learning ignores the experiences of students who may indeed come from or currently live in poverty even though they have gained access to higher education and SLCE. Stoecker does not account for the ways in which the various and varied subject positions of students interact with their SLCE activities in, for, and with communities. In this instance, the marginalized do not show up for Stoecker.

The focus on poverty to make his point about whether SLCE is indeed a type of experiential learning seems to be another strawperson, as we know of no SLCE practitioner-scholars who intend for their students to actually experience poverty as part of learning about course content, disciplinary perspectives, themselves, others, community issues, or social change. Students are to become aware of and reflect critically on their and others' assumptions and beliefs about the issues, questions, people, organizations, and places they interact with . . . on the similarities and differences between theorized and lived experience in these contexts . . . on the sources and significance of underlying explanatory and justificatory systems that serve some at the expense of others. To suggest that SLCE functions as experiential learning only when students directly experience oppression, exclusion, and exploitation seems to us equivalent to accusing it of resting uncritically upon the appropriation of experiences that may or may not be one's own while also reducing the appropriate bandwidth of SLCE to stereotypically "othered" concerns. This disrespects both the practice and those thereby "othered."

Referring to the tendency of "institutionalized service learning [to] . . . attract those who are white and privileged . . . and . . . to alienate students who do not come from privilege," he indicates that "we know little of why" and posits that "perhaps these notions of 'charity' and 'giving back' don't square very well with many students of color and working class students . . . the people, in many cases, who have suffered from the elites who have taken from them or from their forebears" *(p. 47)*. This notion that the movement lacks an understanding of why SLCE is predominantly White and privileged

is both offensive to every marginalized person who ever engaged in SLCE and completely unfounded. Here the oppressed show up but are positioned as unable to be understood. In reality, the reasons for their disengagement (e.g., deficit-based language, experiences of double consciousness, not identifying with the privilege often seen in SLCE spaces) are obvious to many in the field and have also been documented both within and beyond formal academic spaces (see, e.g., *Gilbride-Brown, 2008; Hickmon, 2015*).

Third, Stoecker later transitions from ignoring or lacking nuance in his engagement with oppressed groups to arguing for the use of their anger to catalyze social change. He begins his argument for the power and use of such anger with the claim that "the most important community asset is its people's anger" *(p. 91)*. Chapter 8 opens with a quote from Ella Baker in which she defines radicalism as "getting down to and understanding the root cause. . . . facing a system that does not lend itself to your needs and devising means by which you change that system" *(p. 95)*. Stoecker argues that constituencies, through the example of Black people, need to exercise "cold anger" as they process and respond to injustices: anger that is "rational" and "constructive" (*pp. 97, 98)*. He argues for Black restraint in the face of continued police brutality and in the process demonstrates that he only approves of the "anger" of Black people, the poor, the LGBTQ community, or other marginalized groups when it is packaged in a way he can use and understand—in a way that does not endanger him or force him to examine the role he plays in both benefiting from and upholding White privilege. By doing so, Stoecker asks the oppressed to quell their reactions to wrongs committed against them and channel their now "cold anger" toward working with him or those like him in liberating SLCE to create "radical" social change.

In addition to believing that Baker would resist a politics that encourages such restraint, we do not believe Stoecker demonstrates the allyship he calls for. Here again, we are concerned with his penchant for taking the work of Black activists and using it to support his either unfounded or devoid-of-nuance arguments. Stoecker compares the 2014 Ferguson protests of the police-involved fatal shooting of Michael Brown to the uprisings of the 1960s and the 1992 Rodney King protests; instead of doing the work of trying to understand the very real anger of Black people regarding the Ferguson shooting, he praises protesters for their restraint, arguing that it is what lends itself to the possibility of real social change. We were shocked upon reading such policing of behavior and emotions that the author cannot possibly understand and were troubled

by his presumption in dictating the conditions under which social change can most legitimately happen. The protests of the 1960s yielded the Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act, and countless other pieces of legislation and policy that changed American society in positive ways. The 1992 King protests had complicated results. The riots that took place during that time led to the problematic passage of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which allocated billions of dollars in federal funding to hire more police, create mandatory sentencing minimums, and expand the prison system; in conjunction with uneven adherence to the law, this all directly led to an increase in incarceration of Black Americans. At the same time, the protests also shed light on injustices faced by Black people subjected to police brutality—something "cold anger" would not have achieved.

Much of our concern about Stoecker's arguments lies not in the fact that he is making them but in how he grounds, conveys, and explores his ideas. The conviction that liberation is collective and should be practiced through a politics of allyship as outlined in Chapter 10 ought to include the recognition that it is never appropriate to tell others (i.e., "the oppressed, excluded, and exploited") how they should experience, process, or respond to oppression. No one, particularly those with acknowledged positions of power and privilege, has the right to insist upon a particular way to begin conversations about what social change that gets to the root of oppression and works to ameliorate it looks like. Stoecker calls for allyship but then colonizes the work of scholars of color, positions the marginalized in ways that do not allow for the full expression of their humanness or that deny them humanness entirely through erasure, and tells people how they should channel their sentiments toward their oppression and oppressors. We worry that the liberation of SLCE and broader society as portrayed throughout *Liberating Service Learning* is not a collective, empathetic, or nuanced endeavor.

Beyond Single Voices and Single Stories

For us, a primary strength of *Liberating Service Learning* lies in the complex tensions we surfaced throughout our reading and discussion. Our read gave us pause, invited ongoing conversation, and kept us struggling with our own questions. Stoecker's book is certainly provocative, in ways that he both may and may not have intended, with examples and assertions that invite scrutiny and discussion. Ultimately, we found reviewing the book, critically dialoguing with the ideas as well as debating and reconsidering

our own assumptions, a worthwhile exercise. *Liberating Service Learning* is important and challenging in its stimulus to critical reflection among both emerging and veteran SLCE practitioner-scholars. Its value can be derived from what is said as well as what is missing. The book should prove a useful text for inviting the next generation of SLCE practitioner-scholars into conversation regarding the intent and impact of our work, the systems we operate in, and the society we shape and are shaped by.

That being said, we circle back to consciousness of the voices not heard here in their own authentic and primary way. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *(2009)* issues a warning that we find relevant. She reminds us that in the absence of other voices to help complete the picture or at least provide multilayered information, our fallible human selves create stories and stereotypes to fill the void: "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." Ultimately, our response to *Liberating Service Learning* lies in our understanding of the danger of a single story. Though Stoecker talks an inclusive talk, the examples, tone, and theories used to illustrate his points demonstrate less "walking a walk that is backed up by talk" than simply . . . talking. Stoecker uses very broad strokes to characterize SLCE practice and thereby creates a single story of the movement, complete with uncritical stereotypes and incomplete narratives.

Stoecker's points are not completely unfounded. It is important for SLCE practitioner-scholars to focus on the challenges of communities as communicated by individuals living most closely with them. It is crucial for allies to listen before speaking. Students should learn about communities and prepare well for engagement with them, and social change is indeed an important, if not the ultimate, aim of SLCE. Where we disagree or offer critique is not on the intent to call the movement toward difficult, self-critical questioning or on the goals of fundamental change in our world but rather on approach, nuance, and voice. We believe that achieving the liberation Stoecker calls for is, always has been, and will truly need to be a collective endeavor. This makes all of our stories and voices not only valuable but critical to the work going forward: "Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity" *(Adichie, 2009)*. Stoecker's intent is to envision and empower the SLCE movement toward a world in which all are valued, yet the examples, frameworks, and anecdotes found in

this book tend to reinforce a singular narrative that might have unintended impacts.

To Stoecker and the SLCE movement at large, we offer a final thought from Adichie (2014):

> If you don't understand, ask questions. If you're uncomfortable about asking questions, say you are uncomfortable about asking questions and then ask anyway. It's easy to tell when a question is coming from a good place. Then listen some more. Sometimes people just want to feel heard. Here's to possibilities of friendship and connection and understanding. *(p. 406)*

Friendship, connection, and understanding. Ultimately perhaps these are what SLCE and even our liberation are all about and tied up in. It is with this in mind that we look forward to the next book Stoecker writes, the one that is cocreated with those whose voices he only nods to in this book.

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