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The Page 99 Test

"Open the book to page ninety-nine and read, and the quality of the whole will be revealed to you." -- Ford Madox Ford

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2019

David Pettinicchio's "Politics of Empowerment"

[David Pettinicchio](#) is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto and affiliated faculty in the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy.

He applied the "Page 99 Test" to his new book, *Politics of Empowerment: Disability Rights and the Cycle of American Policy Reform*, and reported the following:

These four passages on page 99 allude to the larger overarching themes of the book.

Frustrated that disabled Americans still faced gross injustice, six years following the Rehabilitation Act, Williams was searching for policy solutions well beyond Section 504. He thought that the real conflict pitted "big ideas" against immediate programmatic fixes, with the latter only postponing more robust interventions.

Rights entrepreneurs, then, were not naïve. Biaggi observed, 'We find our- selves still groping to achieve the lofty mandates of the act.... We approach this hearing as advocates of Public Law 94-142. Yet, we do not pledge blind allegiance. We are aware of present day realities.' Attitudes, particularly among Democrats, were shifting amid the rise of the conservative movement. Reagan's election looked like a reflection of changing public sentiments about the role of government in solving social



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At the Page 69 Test:

problems. Reagan's famous inaugural address line that 'government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem' perfectly encapsulated the moment. Elites both in and out of government bought into this perspective; coupled with tremendous pushback from policy stakeholders, it led many legislators sympathetic to disability rights to soften their position.

that cities and states would not endeavor to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream educational programs.

Opposition to mainstreaming grew more vocal and more organized. School administrators cautioned that legislation would increase the number of students (and parents) seeking special education in regular schools. Teachers and teachers' unions claimed that accommodating children with disabilities would take away from educating nondisabled students.

Readers get a pretty good idea about how policymakers who acted entrepreneurially to get disability rights onto the legislative agenda then had to worry about backtracking and retrenchment. That's because page 99 gives readers a small taste of a key theme in the volume which is that despite policy innovations like disability rights, obstacles to entrenching these policies were already making themselves known. The discussion on Page 99 and that entire section of the book foreshadows the more intense efforts to undermine disability rights laws and points to the fact that these policy entrepreneurs - members of Congress - despite believing that the right course of action was to persevere with civil rights for people with disabilities, still recognized that the future of disability rights was in question. It briefly alludes to a specific example of this that I return to later in the book about initial opposition from the educational sector against integrating disabled people into mainstream educational settings. As part of the fourth chapter which focuses on the organizational aspects of the disability rights movement, page 99 provides part of the backdrop motivating the kind of political advocacy and protest (the subject of chapter 5) by disability organizations demanding the government make due on its civil rights promise.

Visit [David Pettinicchio's website](#).

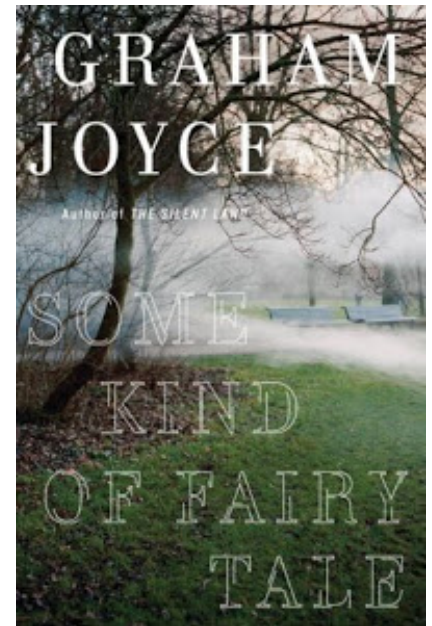
--Marshal Zeringue

Posted by Marshal Zeringue at [7:05 AM](#)



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