

Who's Not Yet Here? American Disability History

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In 1919 one Deaf man advised other Deaf people, “By and by maybe society will recognize the fact that deafness is neither a crime nor a mental defect which separates those so handicapped from the rest of mankind. But society is a good deal self-contained and probably we will have to put up with the snub until by gradual education society becomes enlightened.”

—“Bide the Time,” 1919

As with the experiences of many minorities in America, the story of disabled people in America has remained, until recently, in the margins—one might even say in the locked wards—of academic inquiry. Beginning in earnest in the 1980s, Disability Studies emerged with and from the Disability civil rights movement. The scholarship of Disability Studies reflects and responds to other social histories. In America, race, class, and gender have been the dominant models for studying social history since the 1950s. This classic interpretive troika has enabled scholars to produce invaluable materials and methodologies. Their conspicuous impact can be seen in American history classes across the nation; today, thankfully, it is inconceivable to write American history textbooks without including the important role of ethnic minorities, the working class, or women. Disability history is a natural extension of these models, and it offers new analytical tools for exploring issues of identity.

In 2003, Cathy Kudlick, a historian at the University of California at Davis,

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published a review article titled “Why We Need Another ‘Other;’” partially as a response to critics of social history and Disability history. Kudlick argued that Disability history “helps historians ask and attempt to answer the overarching questions central to our mission as scholars and teachers in the humanistic disciplines: what does it mean to be human? How can we respond ethically to difference? What is the value of a human life? Who decides these questions, and what do the answers reveal?”¹ Disability history provokes these questions and more, as well as ideas for answering them. Indeed, this essay intends to demonstrate that as a model of interpretation, Disability history represents the next—and a necessary—dimension of historical scholarship.

Disability history offers provocative insights into the experiences of Americans and America. By incorporating, expanding, and sometimes challenging traditional social models of interpretation in their work, scholars of Disability examine the meaning of such fundamental concepts as identity, community, citizenship, and normalcy from a cultural perspective. In the past two decades, interest in Disability Studies, and within it Disability history, has taken root. Today, numerous universities in the United States offer individual classes, undergraduate majors and minors programs, and even doctoral programs in Disability Studies or history. The purpose of this essay is to outline the evolution of American Disability history as a field of study, discuss its contributions to the discipline of history, and touch on some of the challenges it poses and faces. How scholars study the past, and how we express our understanding of it, tells us as much about who we are today as about the past itself.²

Until the 1980s, historical assessment of disability came almost exclusively from outsiders: educators, doctors, and policy makers. Most adhered to what we now call a medical model of disability.³ Simply put, this interpretation regards disability exclusively or primarily as pathology. Advocates of this method examine and express disability as a defect or sickness that requires medical intervention in order to cure the problem. A related approach has been the “rehabilitation model,” which views disability as a deficiency that could be alleviated by professional, rehabilitative assistance.⁴ In both of these paradigms, disabilities, and all complications related to them, reside *within* the individual. They imply or state explicitly that if an individual’s disabilities could be cured, all related problems would also be cured. This has broad implications, to wit, disabled people are seen as dependent on the authority of the medical profession—not just to “get better” but also to “be better.”

The rehabilitation and medical interpretations by their very nature generally overlook the *lived* experience of Disability and avoid very real factors. By focusing on the deficiency of disabled people, medical interpretations view important issues like relationships to work, family, political participation, and education mainly in terms of the condition of the person, generally neglecting the role of social, legal, economic, religious, and political factors that affect the success or quality of life for

disabled individuals. Yet even while neglecting these social factors, many medical and rehabilitation analyses about disability are themselves strongly influenced by them. What qualifies as disability? What are appropriate accommodations for disabled individuals? What are reasonable expectations of disabled people? Throughout our history, social values and cultural perceptions have strongly framed what qualifies as a disability and have influenced the responses.

This introduces a more complex perspective: if Disability is socially constructed, how is it also a lived experience? As Joan Wallach Scott demonstrated with the category and analytical tool of gender, the two are not mutually exclusive. What it means to be Disabled in our society is understood through the lens of the social category, and through the social construction, which is not less powerful and has no less impact on Disabled people than if the parameters of the construct were true. The social construction imposes its own set of meanings on Disability that affect the lived experience of the Disabled; it is also a limited and prejudiced understanding of what a Disabled life can or cannot be, one that must be challenged and broadened by the lived experience. For example, what is the meaning of being blind? It is society's constructed concept of Disability (and more specifically, of blindness) that gives a social meaning to that experience, both limiting it and in some cases pushing its meaning well beyond the simple condition of not being able to see. But the blind person acting in the world will confront time and again the idea of blindness, the idea of disability, which becomes the nexus of the lived experience and the social construction. It is our job as historians to understand how those meanings have evolved.

Inspired by the academic and sociopolitical trends of the civil rights era, a new generation of historians began to look at the lives of disabled people and the factors that inform the meaning of disability. Disability scholars argue that disability is a social construction, and some have summarized it this way: disability is often less about physical or mental impairments than it is about how society responds to impairments. This is important for moving disability from what has been called the "unglamorous backwaters primarily of interest to people in rehabilitation, special education, and other applied professional fields."⁵ The social model of Disability in fact rejects the notion that people with disabilities are inherently "defective" and solely in need of rehabilitation; rather, Disability is seen as a common factor in life.

Demographics bear this out. According to the U.S. census in 1997, roughly one out of every five Americans qualified as disabled. That is 55 million people; 33 million people qualified as severely disabled. The numbers are probably much higher than this. And as Americans live longer, their chances of being at least temporarily disabled rise significantly. Yet the irony of disability is that it is both present and absent. As Doug Baynton eloquently expresses it: "Disability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it, but conspicuously absent in the histories we

write.”⁶ Among the readers of this article, *all* of you likely have or had some kind of disability yourselves, know someone who has a disability, or—and you are not going to like this—will become disabled at some point in your life.

Using Disability as an analytical framework reveals much about our past. It challenges as incomplete the classic American narrative of self-reliance, individualism, of unlimited possibility for those with skill and motivation. How can you “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” if you are unable to walk in the first place? The question of how much responsibility the community has for those with a disability speaks to the tension between charity and individualism, the relative roles of religion, community, family, and government in caring for those who need care, and the problems of determining who needs care, who provides it, and who determines how much and what kind. This also reveals more about the tensions among local, state, and federal responsibility in social issues. A related question asks how to handle a social benefit like education: who provides it, who pays for it, who decides what it should consist of? It also confronts the ideal of the citizen: citizenship is predicated on the idea of rights and duties, but if Disabled people cannot serve in the army, perhaps not pay taxes, or contribute [equally] to the economic output of the nation, and perhaps cannot engage fully in the political discourse of the nation, does this alter our view of their status, or our assumptions about full citizenship?

As a subfield, Disability history is still quite young. In its earliest phase, historical scholarship on people with disabilities followed the path of women’s and African American history; they were primarily celebratory and compensatory. Gerda Lerner once called it “add and stir history.”⁷ Books like *No Pity* and *Deaf Heritage* gave a human face to disabled populations, and they remain popular community histories.⁸ Some of the works from the first generation depended heavily on documenting discrimination and presented people with disabilities mostly as victims of oppression.⁹ A look at the historiography reveals a rapid evolution to deeper and more provocative analyses.¹⁰

Case studies of specific populations of the disabled have been the bedrock of Disability history. One especially provocative work is Steven Noll’s *Feebleminded in Our Midst: Institutions for the Mentally Retarded in the South, 1900–1940*.¹¹ Noll uncovers the ambivalent expectations of cure versus care for institutions serving the mentally retarded. Asylums originally sought to aid mildly retarded people, to help them become contributing citizens. Yet society at large also expected asylums to control inmates, shielding it from their presence and supervising their behavior. Noll argues that the rising professionalization of workers in such institutions fostered the tendency to control inmates. He also views the evolution of asylums as a conflict between northern and southern ideals. Northern philanthropic goals, embodied by reformers who came to the south, clashed with southern realities of economic depression and social prejudice against welfare programs. Conflicted ideas about mentally retarded citizens—deviants versus rehabilitatable, integratable

peoples — also undermined institutions' success. Noll includes a valuable discussion of race, gender, and sterilization. He contends that southern racism perhaps shielded some from the oppression of institutionalization and sterilization by neglecting and excluding them from institutions. Women, in contrast, frequently became targets for sterilization because of their potential roles as bearers of the race. The author reveals the great power that individual staff and superintendents held over mentally retarded people, starting a new dialogue about the complex experiences of these institutionalized peoples.¹²

Likewise, employing Disability as a tool of analysis yields new insights into the history of war veterans. Although wars and military history have received considerable attention, the issue of veterans and their experiences is often neglected. David Gerber seeks to correct this oversight, incorporating studies of the lived experience of disabled veterans (as individuals and as groups), as well as considering Disability as a means of analyzing topics like public policy and representation of disabled veterans. For example, in his essay “Heroes and Misfits: The Troubled Social Reintegration of Disabled Veterans in *The Best Years of Our Lives*,”¹³ Gerber critiques the representation of Homer Parrish, played by real-life war veteran Harold Russell, in William Wyler's 1946 Academy Award–winning film. Parrish is the disabled character who embodies competing traits: inspiring resilience, helplessness, and violence. The film's treatment of masculinity, assimilation, rehabilitation, and citizenship vis-à-vis Disability, Gerber argues, reflects and reinforces society's deep ambivalence toward disabled veterans and Disability. Gerber's edited collection, *Disabled Veterans in History*, highlights the political meaning of the category *veteran* and its relation to public policy.¹⁴ The various essays demonstrate the complex experiences and meanings of this group by critiquing factors like pensions, physical rehabilitation, the perspectives of disabled veterans in defeated countries, chemical addiction, images of disabled veterans, and labor issues. Such studies complicate common views on military history, technology, labor, and public policy.

One of the most prolific areas of study within Disability history involves education, in part because it so obviously and strongly affects the lives of disabled Americans, and because materials are abundant and accessible. Inserting into historical studies a social model of Disability has significantly changed how we understand the history of education and education policy. For example, by focusing on educational trends for blind, deaf, and mentally disabled children in *A History of Special Education: From Margin to Mainstream*, Margret Winzer closely allies the theories and motivations behind educational and institutional models to broader social ideals.¹⁵ Highlighting factors like racial segregation in mainstream schools, eugenic ideology, and civil rights activism, Winzer draws clear parallels between disabled citizens and racial minorities. Others have followed in this vein, contrasting disabled people with select student groups, analyzing cultural factors and social expectations.¹⁶ This alters the way traditional educational history has been depicted,

for example, by questioning the common purpose and result of education and its link to employment and aspirations to full citizenship.

In similar ways, scholars like Edward Berkowitz, Richard Scotch, and others provide cogent critiques of another vital topic in the field: public policy toward people with disabilities. At first observing that certain programs did and do discourage disabled people from work or marriage, these scholars examine the social motivations and implications of government policies. In addition, they look more closely at actions by disabled people and at the role media and networks play in expressing, applying, and responding to policies in America. The application of a Disability lens shifts our view of policy by challenging the common belief that people with Disabilities are mostly dependent beings needing charity and pity. Instead, this interpretative approach exposes prejudice against people with Disabilities, discomfort with integration, and perspectives of those usually portrayed only as *recipients* of policies. For many in the field, deconstructing these stereotypes and acknowledging Disabled peoples' active role in history motivates our activism and our scholarship.¹⁷

Interest in Disability rights activism has inspired several important works. Historian Paul Longmore, whose work will be described at greater length later in this piece, has produced some of the most influential studies of the Disability civil rights movement.¹⁸ Other scholars commonly depict individual groups' activism or adopt a sociological or policy perspective. An example of the former is Joseph Shapiro's *No Pity*, which uses vignettes that describe examples of Disability activism, from the independent living movement to vocal protests against patronizing telethons.¹⁹ Shapiro paints an eminently human picture of Disabled people, mixing humorous anecdotes with telling messages. These stories show that Disabled people neither want nor deserve pity, and that society must overcome its stereotypes and prejudices that undermine these citizens' status. A particularly compelling and sophisticated analysis of Disability activism is James Charlton's *Nothing About Us Without Us*.²⁰ Placing Disability rights activism in a global context, Charlton compares this movement to other campaigns for liberation and human rights. In the process, he offers clear evidence of political, economic, and cultural oppression, as well as the rise of Disability-based consciousness and resistance.²¹

As with other minority groups, Disabled Americans began fighting for their rights and resisting oppressive forces long before the civil rights movement of the 1950s. For example, in 1864, Deaf Americans, united with hearing allies, convinced the federal government to establish the Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb (later known as Gallaudet University). In the 1920s and 1930s, they successfully combated efforts to deny deaf people the right to drive cars. Deaf Americans have outlasted numerous efforts by reformers who sought to eliminate their sign language and eradicate their culture. Similarly, Blind people compelled Congress to pass laws protecting blind peddlers, founding sheltered workshops, and supporting

kiosks in cities so blind individuals could have greater employment options. Blind people have published journals to educate employers and empower members of their community, and they have protected blind schools from closing. In the mid-1930s, individual Disability groups and confederations of diverse Disabled activists staged sit-ins to protest employment discrimination in federal government programs such as the Works Progress Administration; other activists have empowered wounded veterans by demanding improved rehabilitation services, as well as larger federal pensions. As this list suggests, scholarship on Disability activism illustrates that individuals with disabilities, like other marginalized people, were not merely passive victims of oppression in America. Even in the margins of society, they actively participated in their lives and influenced those around them.

Like issues of activism, critical studies of the representation of Disability figure prominently in Disability Studies scholarship. As Rosemarie Garland Thomson notes, “The history of disabled people in the world is in part the history of being on display. Of being visually conspicuous while being politically and socially erased.”²² In her edited collection titled *Freakery*, Thomson and others apply the term *freak* to a broad range of populations, from carnival sideshow performers and conjoined twins to modern-day bodybuilders, talk-show participants, and even Michael Jackson in order to reexamine cultural identities and social tensions about the historical body.²³ As Thomson explains, one effect of modernization and industrialization was a new interest in the Other as expressed in different bodies. Lori Merish’s study of Tom Thumb and Shirley Temple, for instance, shatters common assumptions that their appeal was in any way natural; Merish compellingly avers that strong prejudices based on race, class, gender, and sexuality inform what she calls the “commodification of cuteness.”²⁴ Other essays in the collection challenge scientific and medical assumptions about the disabled body by assessing the treatment of such non-normative bodies as those of hermaphrodites and conjoined twins.

Some of the most fruitful historical studies focus on traditional presentations of Disability: the freak shows that regularly circulated in American popular culture from the 1840s through the end of World War II, which have made a reappearance in American youth culture in recent years. In *Freakery*, three historians face off on the topic. Challenging images of disabled people as victims, Robert Bogdan posits that performers (many of whom were “normal”) showed considerable agency; he also describes a strong community of freaks, a community that valued greater deformity and difference above more normal appearances, and that exploited the audience more than it was exploited. Christopher Vaughan, by contrast, challenges Bogdan’s position, emphasizing the inherent exploitative nature of freak shows. Finally, David Gerber complicates the issue by deconstructing Bogdan’s premise that performers truly consented to their roles in the first place. Taken together, these studies resemble earlier works and debates by women’s and African American historians interested in hegemony, power, and performance. But by applying cultural rep-

resentations of Disability and assessing Disability from an insider's perspective, these chapters also complicate standard notions of community, culture, health, and success.²⁵

Assessing public presentations of Disability through media history has proven a rich area for Disability interpretations too. A common text in the field is John Schuchman's *Hollywood Speaks: Deafness and the Film Entertainment Industry*, in which the author argues that Hollywood has routinely misrepresented deaf people, particularly by portraying deaf characters as fluent lip-readers and speakers.²⁶ In this carefully researched work, Schuchman presents several prominent stereotypes in Hollywood films from the early 1900s until 1986. Because most hearing people do not personally know deaf people, Hollywood films and mass media in general are the primary means for them to see and understand this community. By misrepresenting deaf people, particularly by denying their communal identity and culture, Hollywood further marginalizes these citizens. Only in the last decades of the twentieth century did some of the stereotypes and barriers change, primarily motivated by Deaf people's activism and broader social reforms regarding diversity and inclusion.

In *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies*, Martin Norden argues that films primarily represent disabled people as isolated characters, and he links this image to the genuine marginalization they face in mainstream society.²⁷ Norden, like many Disability historians, further shows that social stigma and misperceptions of Disability limit Disabled people perhaps more than their physical conditions do. Following Schuchman's model on Deaf subjects, Norden reveals many of the problematic approaches and images used in cinema from the silent films to the 1990s. This includes stereotypes of Disabled people as comic misadventurers, monsters, and noble warriors, or as childlike, depressed loners or "overcomers."²⁸

Martin S. Pernick's book *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of "Defective" Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures since 1915* combines media representation with the history of science, particularly the history of the eugenics movement in the early decades of the twentieth century.²⁹ As Pernick notes, movies served "as a battleground on which professionals, popularizers, journalists, censors, and audiences struggled to shape the meaning of eugenics and euthanasia and to define the connection between them."³⁰ This work studiously examines the intersection of medical ethics, health policies, and mass culture within a strong cultural context. The author focuses on Harry J. Haiselden, a physician who publicly advocated—and in some cases personally facilitated—the killing of "unfit" children and adults. *The Black Stork* (dir. Leopold Wharton, U.S.), a 1916 movie written by and starring Haiselden, was perhaps the most obviously negative eugenic film of its time, depicting a fictionalized version of a Haiselden case in which he successfully counseled parents of a deformed newborn to let their child die. According to

Pernick, Haiselden and his film were deliberately “erased” in later decades because of two important forces: the medical community, which resented Haiselden’s self-aggrandizement (but not his ideas of eugenics and euthanasia), and the development of “aesthetic censorship” in film, which pushed more literal and “ugly” films like *The Black Stork* to academic lecture halls and road shows, leaving more “artistic” and palatable films for theaters. But Pernick’s book offers more than a case study, and in the end it reveals the ways in which the medicalization of disability influenced the mass media and shows how cultural opinions about Disability informed science.

Other scholars have examined eugenics from a different vantage point, emphasizing its intellectual and legal evolution. One of the most thorough studies is Mark Haller’s classic *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought*.³¹ Focusing primarily on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Haller argues that “old eugenics”—highly prejudicial and dogmatic—gave way to a “new eugenics” movement—more flexible and constrained—during the 1930s. Haller carefully examines various factors that helped shape eugenic ideology, including religion, politics, and sociology. While highlighting eugenics’ social implications, he primarily views eugenics as a movement of experts, paying less attention to the actual experiences of individuals and groups directly targeted by eugenic policies and research.³² In *Surgical Solution: A History of Involuntary Sterilization in the United States*, Phillip Reiley challenged Haller’s premise that eugenics waned after the 1930s. Focusing on eugenic legislation, Reiley demonstrates that sterilization as “therapy” continued well into the 1960s and 1970s.³³ Some scholars criticize Reiley’s work for some factual errors, but they acknowledge its valuable analysis of legal issues and statistical evidence. More recent works in Disability Studies have turned their attention to the potent impact of eugenics on people with disabilities.³⁴ Few, however, have adopted the perspective of Disabled victims of eugenic policies.³⁵

For those who argue that Americans have, historically, recognized disability, the inclusion of Disability as a tool of analysis can yield new and perhaps surprising results, even with studies of figures as well known as Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) and Helen Keller. As the ultimate overcomer, FDR presents an ambivalent example for disabled citizens today. He demonstrates the possibilities of great success for Disabled people when resources are available. Yet unwilling to acknowledge his disability publicly, he also discouraged Disabled people from claiming their identity as legitimate, worthy of recognition and support. In *FDR’s Splendid Deception*, Hugh Gallagher reinterprets FDR’s life by focusing primarily on his disability and exposes the extensive efforts by FDR and his advocates to hide his paralysis from mainstream view. Journalists at that time tacitly participated in this cover-up, and until recently, most presidential biographers continued to do so as well, some by omission and some by commission. Studies like Gallagher’s offer a more intimate portrait of the president, but they also clarify the role of technology such as radio—the perfect vehicle for someone like FDR—and the power of media in

the pervasive social stigma of disability. This last point is particularly valuable for members of the Disability community. As Gallagher demonstrates, using Disability in analysis tells us much about how we understand leadership in gendered, racial, and embodied terms. Widespread awareness of his disability would have rendered FDR ineligible for leadership, just as racial Otherness would have. Society's continued ambivalence toward Roosevelt's disability and its depiction erupted in the public debate over his memorial in Washington, DC. The original sculpture of FDR masked his disability, literally cloaking his wheeled chair, and sparked protests from Disability activists. A determined campaign resulted in the addition of a "prologue" section to the memorial, which includes a sculpture of FDR openly seated in his wheelchair, and an inscription referring to his disability.³⁶

Kim Nielsen reinterprets perhaps the most famous disabled person in American history, Helen Keller.³⁷ In *The Radical Lives of Helen Keller*, reviewed in this issue of *Radical History Review*, Nielsen moves past the familiar and sentimentalized Hollywood imagery of Keller as a child saved by her teacher and given life through language. Nielsen instead looks at Keller's adulthood, a significant and overlooked part of her history. In the process, she presents us with a Helen Keller who was an active socialist and a suffragist whose "radical" activism motivated the U. S. government to keep massive files on her. Nielsen closely examines the politics of civic fitness and Keller's own ambivalent positions on disability. She outlines the empowering and disempowering role of the American Foundation for the Blind, which sponsored Keller, at once providing her with economic opportunity and world travel, while also censoring her and controlling her public image and private relations. For many reasons, this adult, complicated Helen Keller advocated eugenics and distanced herself from most disabled people. Nielsen concludes that Keller's disability in some way "uniquely enhanced her citizenship," while at the same time full political citizenship was denied to her because of her disability.³⁸ Simply put, Keller's disability "made her an inspirational novelty but not a comrade" where matters of politics were concerned.³⁹ Such Disability-focused biographies profoundly alter common perceptions even of famous disabled individuals.⁴⁰

Although biographical portraits of people known for their disabilities are compelling, several Disability scholars have turned their attention away from single individuals to examine Disability within the intimate history of families.⁴¹ Hannah Joyner, for example, unites southern and family history with Deaf cultural history in a work titled *From Pity to Pride*.⁴² Filled with colorful vignettes, Joyner's book reveals tensions caused by southern deaf children's education in northern schools during the Civil War. Such schools frequently mixed children of different races and economic backgrounds, undermining southern hierarchies and notions of dependence and competence. She also demonstrates that the war actually created opportunities for some disabled individuals, a fact that has previously gone unrecognized. In an article in Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky's *The New Disability History*,

Janice Brockley describes the stories of two fathers who murdered their severely disabled children in New York during the 1930s.⁴³ The fathers, claiming that their disabled sons depleted limited family resources, were found not guilty of murder. In their testimony, both mothers defended their refusal to institutionalize their children, describing their sons as full human beings who needed protection. Ultimately, the media portrayed the fathers as merciful and the mothers as misguided martyrs. In this study, Brockley offers a fresh view of “how a lack of social support encouraged a perception of people with severe disabilities as burdens, incapable of having rewarding relationships,” and how “the same stereotypes facilitated . . . eventual death.”⁴⁴ This example, and others like it, offers a broader context and new perspectives to examine current pressing debates about assisted suicide.⁴⁵

Using Disability as a tool of analysis can alter fields that may seem at first to be minimally related to Disability. For example, in his work of intellectual history titled *Enforcing Normalcy*, Lennard Davis shows that the meaning of disability fundamentally changed during the nineteenth century, in large part because of the rise of the social sciences, industrialization, and eugenics.⁴⁶ Etymology helps to illuminate this point. The term *handicap*, for example, originated in horse racing. A *handicap* is a weight placed on a superior animal to compel it to compete more equally with other horses. As used by eugenicists, handicap meant impairment; it was a burden on a person that compelled him or her to perform below a normal level. Eventually, the term became a synonym for disability. Likewise, the term *dumb* previously had meant only muteness, the inability to speak. By the late 1800s, *dumb* also meant “stupid,” “unintelligent.” *Deaf and dumb* was a common expression among scientists, policy makers, and educators, long after it had been proven that deaf people can speak, but just do not because they cannot hear. This denigrating misnomer remained in use because Deaf citizens, with their “medical condition,” were grouped with “defective” and “deviant” people (both popular catchphrases for disabled, criminal, and other “abnormal” populations). This segregation emphasized their impairment and inability. In addition to this enhanced pathological view, Davis demonstrates that deaf peoples’ inability to pronounce words well, and their inability to read lips proficiently, marked them as Others—intellectually impaired as well as seemingly foreign. Davis’s most recent work, *Bending over Backwards*, which illuminates historical expressions of minority identities and criticizes the traditional social models, goes further. In a chapter called “The End of Identity Politics and the Beginning of Dismodernism,” Davis uses the example of transgender politics and intersex to reveal the “dissolving boundaries” of traditional identity categories.⁴⁷ Simply put, he demonstrates that even our standard models in social history—race, class, and gender—are inherently flawed and will thus wither away as more malleable categories rise to replace them and more accurately reflect identity. For Davis, Disability promises to transcend these categories, thereby altering how we frame and understand history.⁴⁸

Using Disability as an example and as an analytical tool confirms that race, class, and gender do not represent enduring transhistorical categories of humanness by which people of all societies and eras can be understood. Rather, Disability shows us how to challenge even the most apparently fundamental of categories, and we would do well to use our new understanding to examine our ideas of the boundaries of social categories: gay/straight, white/black, male/female, and so forth. In doing so, Disability history can help us to see even the most fundamental and apparently enduring categories as ultimately artificial and imposed, and recognize the means by which those categories were created and how they function in society as something to be analyzed and understood.⁴⁹

Similarly, Douglas Baynton approaches the broad issues of identity and Disability in intellectual history from a different angle, achieving equally weighty results, however. Baynton eloquently argues that supporters of slavery and opponents of female suffrage and immigration policy often used Disability as a tool to maintain social and political hierarchies.⁵⁰ Opponents of female suffrage and abolition, for example, often claimed that both women and slaves lacked sufficient intelligence to be equals in society or to participate fully in the political process; their inherent weaknesses prohibited their realization of freedom or political equality. Indeed, the argument maintained that, if given freedom or suffrage, women and African Americans would in fact become *more* disabled. Many female suffrage advocates argued that they were not disabled and did not belong with a group of degenerates, while others countered that they were indeed disabled, but only because they had been excluded from political equality. Baynton shows that by distancing themselves from disability, suffrage advocates tacitly accepted the idea that disability was a legitimate reason for inequality.

Similarly, employing Disability as an analytical tool also alters our understanding of American immigration history. Immigration bans specifically targeted people with disabilities because, the argument went, such individuals would most likely prove unable to support themselves. In some cases, immigrants were turned away because inspectors felt their perceived disability would cause employers or coworkers to mock them, thus rendering them unemployable. Slavs and Jews, for example, were considered more likely to be mentally defective, which meant that an immigrant's appearance took on added meaning. This common scenario clearly shows that disability was less the impairment than was society's response to disability. Baynton maps out how medical models of disability revealed a common social perception that disability justified unequal treatment.

In labor history, the use of a Disability lens challenges commonly held or consensual understandings of what workplace solidarity, productivity, accessibility, and employability has historically meant. John Williams-Searle's work, for example, shows how Disability influenced the responses of government, business, and labor unions to workers, as well as how it shaped workers' relationships to their jobs and

each other. In a study of railroad workers between 1870 and 1900, Williams-Searle demonstrates the impact of deteriorating economic and work conditions on perceptions of and policies toward Disability. He argues that initially a physical disability “marked a skillful veteran and true railroading man” and was a “rallying point for a general criticism of industrial capitalism.”⁵¹ As capitalism spread and railroad companies and unions resisted financial responsibility for permanently injured employees, disabled workers were increasingly seen as “less than men” and “useless.” Their able-bodied brothers grew more suspicious of disabled workers, often allying with employers to expel disabled trainmen from the workforce rather than maintaining class unity. Williams-Searle’s work is but one of many examples that show how Disability caused a schism within economic classes and within labor struggles. But it also demonstrates the ways in which Disability as a topic and as a mode of analysis enhances the understanding of labor history by challenging the ways society and scholars commonly define the ideal worker and by depicting ways that disabled bodies signified different meanings at different times.⁵²

Robert Buchanan, by contrast, uses a cultural interpretation of Deafness to tackle the issue of education, concepts of normalcy, and employment in his book, *Illusions of Equality*.⁵³ Covering the years 1850 to 1950, he argues that the rise of oralism (which in its strictest form seeks to teach lip-reading and speech to the exclusion of signed communication) in American schools for the deaf materially undermined deaf peoples’ economic opportunities. Using sign language, which was the dominant vehicle for deaf education in the first half of the 1800s, deaf students could focus their time and attention on a broad range of subjects, including English, history, science, and mathematics, as well as vocational training. Oralism ultimately became the dominant method used in deaf schools from the 1890s until the 1920s. This was due in part to powerful advocates like Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, and mainstream society’s increasing fear of anyone who seemed different from white, English-speaking, middle- and working-class Americans. Deaf scholars spend a lot of time discussing the cultural ramifications of this mainstream societal shift, but Buchanan shows that oralism also had specific employment liabilities.⁵⁴ For example, students in strict oral programs spent so much of their time focused on learning lip-reading and speech skills that their academic training degraded. In addition, Deaf people were increasingly excluded from teaching positions in schools because they could not and would not promote oralism. Thus pressure to appear more “normal” — as exemplified by strict oral training — ultimately weakened Deaf peoples’ power to support themselves financially and be good, “normal” taxpayers.

A commitment to activism through scholarship defines most of these works, but perhaps the strongest example of this fusion is seen in the collection *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability*.⁵⁵ Paul Longmore, the George Washington of Disability history, offers a lucid description of Disability from social-

political-, and cultural-historical perspectives. His work speaks poignantly to Longmore's personal story as a scholar with a disability; it also alludes to the complicated challenges Disability Studies present and face. Ranging from measured and accessible essays on collective Disability action during the Great Depression to analyses of media images and assisted suicide, this collection ends with a powerful autobiographical piece that unites historical scholarship, the experience of Disability, and American public policy. Due to federal health insurance policies and the rules of vocational rehabilitation, Longmore faced extensive barriers to earning a doctoral degree in history and fulfilling the requirements expected of professionals in the discipline. The successful completion of a well-received study of George Washington might have merely demonstrated the abilities of people with disabilities, but the results of Longmore's work highlights the irony and tragedy of public policy. After having had to refuse scholarships and fellowships because of federal work disincentives for people with disabilities, Longmore learned that he could not earn royalties from his book because the income would render him ineligible for essential health insurance assistance. Protesting these discriminatory and disabling policies, he gathered supporters in front of the Los Angeles branch of the Social Security Administration and burned his book there. Sustained Disability campaigns across the country later resulted in Congressional removal of some of the restrictive policies, but Longmore's tale exposes the continued need for members of academe to help make our work and our society truly inclusive and fair.

As all these examples show, Disability historiography has evolved considerably since its founding. The most significant change thus far has been the shift from a medical model of disability to the social model. Virtually all the examples included in this essay use the latter paradigm. This theoretical leap takes *history* to heart, for it examines how the very concept of Disability and, conversely, normalcy, changes over time. It then broadens the inquiry, asking questions about why this happens.⁵⁶ Increasingly, though, some scholars apply a "situational identity" concept to Disability history. A popular concept developed from general social history and feminist theory, situational identity recognizes that contexts shift all the time. Right now, for example, these authors and some of the readers may feel especially American, writing and reading about works related to the United States. But at the same time we recognize other facets of our identities, deriving from our gender, race, economic class, level of education, geographical origin, and intellectual or physical ability. Other factors also profoundly inform our identities: religious beliefs, political affiliation, social, economic, or physical-mental handicaps. All this is to say that at any given time, we might be more mindful of certain personal characteristics, but we are always all of them, and the sense of self and self-identification changes. Incorporating situational-identity interpretations specifically acknowledges the complexity of peoples' sense of self, highlighting why social history, including Disability history, is so complicated. While we struggle to acknowledge the diverse nature of America,

we also now must struggle to realize that even our categories—race, class, gender, and disability—ebb and flow for the people labeled as such.

Paying closer attention to diversity within the Disability model exemplifies and clarifies a common assumption in this field—that what we most share in common is our difference from one another. This is a complicated business, though. American Deaf cultural history provides an excellent example. Since its origin, America's Deaf community has presented itself as a highly unified society, bonded through a common language, but also sharing common cultural values. Closer study, however, shows that, among many factors, race, class, gender, and disability caused considerable fissures within the Deaf world. As in mainstream society, for example, the south had racially segregated schools for deaf children from Reconstruction through the 1950s, and many white Deaf people—northerners and southerners—held mainstream, discriminatory views of their Black peers. Likewise, elite Deaf people (often educated at Gallaudet University) saw themselves as the voice of all Deaf society, endorsing conservative campaigns that promoted their interests often to the detriment of working-class Deaf people. And America's Deaf world has long held ultraconservative views of gender, resulting in restricted employment opportunities for deaf women, limited roles in deaf organizations, even a different relationship to sign-language use.⁵⁷ Situational identity, applied to Deaf history, proves what many know in reality: there is no monolithic “thing of deafness.” At Gallaudet University, historically the only liberal arts institution primarily serving deaf and hard of hearing people, there are students (and faculty) with some hearing and some with no hearing, community members who were born deaf from deaf parents and those who became deaf in their teens. There are gay and lesbian Deaf students, students with cochlear implants who like to speak, Jewish deaf students, conservative Christian students, Latino, liberal, and Asian American deaf students. Acknowledging and assessing these diverse groups within the Deaf world uncovers cultural values and prejudices that have almost never been addressed by scholars, or leaders of the community for that matter. A common label of Disability—or even of Deafness—does not imply a common experience. Studying multiple situational identities and understanding diversity within the category of Disability helps us to move beyond the simplistic bifurcations of the world into neat categories and opposite poles to which we (as people) seem so easily drawn, and into which we (as historians) so easily slip.

There are other challenges of identity within Disability history. Deaf people again serve as a helpful point of reference. Since the origins of an American Deaf community, members have rejected the label of *disability*, proposing instead that they were a linguistic and cultural minority. Classic works in the field such as John Van Cleve's and Barry Crouch's *A Place of their Own* and *Deaf History Unveiled*, or Harlan Lane's *When the Mind Hears*, all celebrate Deaf culture and critically assess mainstream society's oppressive attitudes and policies toward this minority.⁵⁸

Virtually no history of Deaf people, however, has directly and deeply examined why they rejected the label of *disability* or why they rebuffed invitations by Disability activists to join broader campaigns to end discrimination against all people deemed “defective.” The contentious historic relationship between Deaf people and the broader Disability world has produced a critical barrier within the academic study of Disability history.

Other conceptual and material factors handicap Disability history. Language itself poses problems. Historically, terms like *disability*, *handicap*, *incompetent*, *impairment*, *feeble-minded*, *epileptic*, *crippled*, *idiot*, or *insane* have been used interchangeably—and sometimes those considered sexually promiscuous, gender deviant, or whose behavior is considered racially inappropriate have been cast into the disability mix. Few historical indices include precise references to Disability, and interpreting the meaning of historical terms is complicated. This highlights the need for historical scholarship on terminology.⁵⁹ Moreover, there are some who uphold the essentialist argument that Disability history must be done by members of the community, and not—or at least not mostly—by outsiders. Just as scholars of women and racial communities struggle with the politics of identity, so do scholars of Disability.

Because Disability is a social construction, its meaning and definition are highly contingent on history. Its application to Civil War veterans, for instance, takes on a different meaning than its application to mentally ill people in colonial almshouses or the “hysterical” housewife of the 1950s. For scholars, especially close attention to context is mandatory to comprehend the full force of Disability in history. Methodology poses complications too. Deaf people, institutionalized people, and many others with disabilities tend to leave sparse records about themselves. Creative research often uncovers rich and vast documentation about Disability and Disabled people, but autobiographical accounts are more difficult to come by. When individuals with communication disorders, or various mental disabilities, are taken into account, challenges to research become even more complex. For example, how does a historian handle the testimony of someone who is—or is perceived to be—insane? The issue of privacy also proves important. When dealing with topics that involve mental institutions, medical records, social work evaluations, and the like, historians confront considerable legal barriers. This is not to say that scholars should be able to violate the privacy of disabled individuals, but it highlights a common barrier that is less present in many other historical endeavors. Not surprisingly, altering established methods frequently becomes necessary. Oral history interviews, for instance, are quite popular. But audiotaping simply does not work with deaf subjects. Interviews must be videotaped, ideally utilizing at least two cameras in order to capture fully and clearly the dialogue between interviewer and subject. Because both persons are signing, and must maintain eye contact, the interviewer cannot simultaneously type or write notes. It also obviously requires knowledge of a foreign

language, that is, sign language, and conditions like arthritis, which many elderly deaf people have, strongly affect communication.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for Disability history and for Disabled people is ignorance and fear. Society and academe still rely heavily on the medical model of disability, enforcing prejudice against people with disabilities. Stories abound about history programs and professors who consider Disability merely political correctness, a nonsubject, or a topic more aptly studied in the fields of rehabilitation and special education. To date, no American history textbook has included Disability in a meaningful way, rendering it invisible, insignificant, inaccessible. Present yet absent, disabled students and faculty continue to face hostility and discrimination as they seek access to and up the ivory tower. To be fair, America has made considerable progress in the past three decades: laws like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1975) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) provide legal support for disabled people to get an education, and, if they choose, to become educators. But for Disability scholars and advocates who actively seek the great inclusion, there is much left to be done. Disability history has asked us to consider “who’s not yet here?”—in our scholarship, as well as in our classrooms. In order to make a lasting impact, Disability scholars must continue to ask that question, and we as a society must continue to broaden our scope of recognition, acceptance, and understanding to help answer it.

Notes

We wish to thank Kim Nielsen and Barry Bergen for their thoughtful critiques of this work. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the University of Leipzig, Germany, in Spring 2004, and portions appear in Susan Burch, “Disability History: Suggested Readings—An Annotated Bibliography,” *Public Historian* 27 (2005): 63–74.

1. Catherine J. Kudlick, “Why We Need Another ‘Other,’” *American Historical Review* 108 (2003): 764.
2. Language plays a vital role in Disability history, and scholars in the field frequently argue about terminology. For the sake of this essay, the following terms and their definitions will be used:

Disability is generally believed to be a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of an individual; it is also a record of such an impairment; and being regarded as having such an impairment. *Disability*, as in *Disability Studies*, with a capital *D*, expands and challenges this pathological perspective by focusing on its social construction, meaning the historic processes that have “accorded particular meaning to disability and that have determined the treatment and positing of people with disabilities in society.” Lennard J. Davis and Simi Linton, “Introduction: Disability Studies,” *Radical Teacher* 48 (1985), 2–3. For Disability scholars, then, the experience and historic condition of disability constantly changes. In written works, we often delineate these concepts by using a lowercase *d* for the medical understanding of disability and a capital *D* for its cultural understanding, much in the same way that scholars of race often use *black* to denote the skin color and *Black* to denote cultural identity.

Another important term is *handicap*. Handicap is a disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal—depending on age, sex, social, and cultural factors—for that individual. There are also socially constructed handicaps that may disadvantage temporarily able-bodied or disabled individuals.

The last term is *Deaf*. The lowercase word *deaf* refers to the audiological condition, whereas *Deaf* is used to designate a particular group of people who share American Sign Language (ASL) as a primary means of communication. Many of these Deaf attend state residential schools for the deaf, associate primarily with other Deaf people, join social and political clubs that promote Deaf cultural awareness, read publications produced by and for the Deaf, have a common folklore, and see themselves as separate from mainstream society. Deaf Americans also generally reject the label *disability*, which complicates and deepens the meaning of this for scholars in the field of Disability and Deaf history. Some Deaf historians consider Deaf history, like Deaf people, a cultural-linguistic phenomenon *and* a part of disability.

3. See, for example, Paul Longmore, "Disability Watch," in *Why I Burned My Book* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 19–31; Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Harlan Hahn, "Civil Rights for Disabled Americans," in *Images of the Disabled, Disabling Images*, ed. Alan Gartner and Tom Joe (New York: Praeger, 1987), 81–94.
4. See Deborah Kaplan, "The Definition of Disability," World Institute of Disability, forum. wso.net/library/the_definition_disability.rtf (accessed May 16, 2005).
5. Kudlick, "Why We Need," 765. By viewing disability largely in terms of pathology, medical paradigms distort the analysis of disability history.
6. Douglas Baynton, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History," in *The New Disability History*, ed. Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 52.
7. When describing "add and stir" history, Lerner meant that academic fields (and, we would argue, society at large) are not truly enhanced merely by mentioning minorities, or even by noting their contributions or celebrating their distinct identity. Some early works in Disability history attempted to incorporate this group using an add and stir approach. Quickly, however, scholars in this field have adopted highly sophisticated approaches and methodologies, utilizing models from various social histories and adapting them to address unique issues in Disability history. A primary goal of Disability history, like that of other minority histories, is to achieve full inclusion and recognition in our study of the past.
8. Jack Gannon, *Deaf Heritage* (Silver Spring, MD: National Association of the Deaf, 1981). Joseph P. Shapiro, *No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Three Rivers, 1994). See also Frances A. Koestler, *Unseen Minority* (New York: D. McKay, 1976); Lois Markham, *Helen Keller* (New York: F. Watts, 1993); Nora Groce, *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Christopher Krentz, ed., *A Mighty Change: An Anthology of Deaf American Writing, 1816–1864* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2001); Lois Bragg, ed., *Deaf World: A Historical Reader and Primary Sourcebook* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).
9. Harlan Lane's works, although produced later, still fit this category. His *Mask of Benevolence* (New York: Knopf, 1992) and *When the Mind Hears* (New York: Random House, 1984) focus almost exclusively on the various ways that hearing people have

manipulated and oppressed deaf people in the past two centuries. His works frequently depict deaf people as victims and the period of oralist dominance as a dark time for Deaf culture.

10. For a variety of reasons, including the complexities posed by addressing the body in history and accessing subjects hidden behind medical files and institutional walls, many Disability works involve interdisciplinary methodologies; they tend to be article-length rather than book-length works; and they appear in collections or special periodical issues whose contents are intentionally interrelated.
11. Steven Noll, *Feeble-minded in Our Midst: Institutions for the Mentally Retarded in the South, 1900–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).
12. People with polio are another specific population that has received scholarly attention. An excellent example is Dan Wilson's *Living with Polio: The Epidemic and Its Survivors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). See also J. D. Smith and A. L. Mitchell, "Sacrifices for the Miracle: The Polio Vaccine Research and Children with Mental Retardation," *Mental Retardation* 39 (2001): 405–9. The National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, unveiled an exhibit in April 2005 titled *Whatever Happened to Polio?*
13. David Gerber, "Heroes and Misfits: The Troubled Social Reintegration of Disabled Veterans in the *Best Years of Our Lives*," *American Quarterly* 46 (1994): 545–74. See also David Gerber, "In Search of Al Schmid: War Hero, Blinded Veteran, Everyman," *Journal of American Studies* 29 (1995): 1–32.
14. David A. Gerber, ed., *Disabled Veterans in History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000). For treatment of prosthetics and veterans, see also Katherine Ott, David Serlin, and Stephen Mihm, eds., *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives: Modern Histories of Prosthetics* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).
15. Margret Winzer, *A History of Special Education: From Margin to Mainstream* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1993).
16. See Robert Osgood, *For "Children Who Vary from the Normal Type"* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2000); Tricia Leaky, "Vocational Education in the Deaf American and African-American Communities," in *Deaf History Unveiled*, ed. John Van Cleve (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1992), 74–91.
17. See, for example, Ruth O'Brien, *Crippled Justice: The History of Modern Disability Policy in the Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); and Ruth O'Brien, ed., *Voices from the Edge: Narratives about the Americans with Disabilities Act* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
18. See Longmore, *Why I Burned My Book*.
19. Joseph Shapiro, *No Pity* (New York: Three Rivers, 1993).
20. James Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
21. See also Doris Z. Fleischer and Frieda Zames, *The Disability Rights Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Richard K. Scotch, *From Good Will to Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Sharon Barnardt and Richard Scotch, *Disability Protests: Contentious Politics, 1970–1999* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2001); Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); University of California at Berkeley, "Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement," bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/drilm/ (accessed May 16, 2005).

22. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "Seeing the Disabled," in Longmore and Umansky, *The New Disability History*, 335–74.
23. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ed., *Freakery* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).
24. Lori Merish, "Cuteness and Commodity Aesthetics: Tom Thumb and Shirley Temple," in *Freakery*, 185–206.
25. In Thomson, *Freakery*; see Robert Bogdan, "The Social Construction of Freaks," 23–37; David A. Gerber, "The 'Careers' of People Exhibited in Freak Shows: The Problem of Volition and Valorization," 38–54; and Christopher A. Vaughan, "Bernth Lindfors—Ogling Igorots: The Politics and Commerce of Exhibiting Cultural Otherness, 1898–1913," 219–33.
26. John S. Schuchman, *Hollywood Speaks* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).
27. Martin Norden, *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994).
28. Beth Haller has also produced excellent work on media images of disabled people, focusing especially on print media and telethons. See her "The Misfit and Muscular Dystrophy," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 21 (1994): 142–49; and Robin Larsen and Beth Haller, "The Case of the Freaks: Public Reception of Real Disability," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 29 (2002): 164–72.
29. Martin S. Pernick, *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of "Defective" Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures since 1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
30. *Ibid.*, 14.
31. Mark Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought*, rev. ed. (1963; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984).
32. The original edition of Haller's book contained a number of errors and oversights that were corrected in a revised edition.
33. Phillip Reiley, *Surgical Solution: A History of Involuntary Sterilization in the United States* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).
34. See, for example, Lennard Davis, *Bending Over Backwards* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); and Burch, *Signs of Resistance*.
35. One work, which examines Europe, eugenics, and Disability, is Donna Ryan and Stan Schuchman's *Deaf People in Hitler's Europe* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2002).
36. Hugh Gallagher, *FDR's Splendid Deception* (Arlington, VA: Vandamere, 1994). Many Disability scholars wrote about this debate. See, for example, Sally Stein, "The President's Two Bodies: Stagings and Restagings of FDR and the New Deal Body Politic," *American Art* 18 (2004): 32–57; Otis L. Graham Jr., "On the Mall, a Monument to the Nineties," *Public Historian* 19 (1997): 7–10; John Duffy, "Franklin Roosevelt: Ambiguous Symbol for Disabled Americans," *Midwest Quarterly* 29 (1987): 113–35; and Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "The FDR Memorial: Who Speaks from the Wheelchair?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 26, 2001, B11–B12.
37. Another notable figure often cited is Laura Bridgman. For strong contemporary analyses see Ernest Freeberg, *The Education of Laura Bridgman* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Elisabeth Gitter, *The Imprisoned Guest: Samuel Howe and Laura Bridgman, the Original Deaf-Blind Girl* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).
38. Kim Nielsen, *The Radical Lives of Helen Keller* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); and Kim Nielsen, "Helen Keller and the Politics of Civic Fitness," in Longmore and Umansky, *The New Disability History*, 273.

39. Nielsen, "Helen Keller and the Politics of Civic Fitness," 276.
40. See also Nielsen's edited *Helen Keller: Selected Writings* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
41. See also Emily Abel, *Hearts of Wisdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Hannah Joyner, *From Pity to Pride* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2004). Several chapters in Steven Noll and James W. Trent, eds., *Mental Retardation in America: A Historical Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), deserve mention: Penny Richard, "'Beside Her Sat Her Idiot Child': Families and Developmental Disability in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America" (65–86); Katherine Castles, "'Nice, Average Americans': Postwar Parents' Groups and the Defense of the Normal Family" (351–70); and Janice Brockley, "Rearing the Child Who Never Grew: Ideologies of Parenting and Intellectual Disability in American History" (130–64).
42. Joyner, *From Pity to Pride*.
43. Janice Brockley, "Martyred Mothers and Merciful Fathers: Exploring Disability and Motherhood in the Lives of Jerome Greenfield and Raymond Repouille," in Longmore and Umansky, *The New Disability History*, 293–312.
44. Brockley, "Martyred Mothers," 294–95.
45. See also Jerrold Hirsch and Karen Hirsch, "Disability in the Family? New Questions about the Southern Mill Village," *Journal of Social History* 35 (2002): 919–33.
46. Lennard David, *Enforcing Normalcy* (New York: New York University Press, 1995).
47. Davis, *Bending Over Backwards*, 17.
48. *Ibid.*, 29.
49. Barry Bergen, interview by the authors, Gallaudet University, Washington, DC, April 20, 2005.
50. Baynton, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History."
51. John Williams-Searle, "Cold Charity: Manhood, Brotherhood, and the Transformation of Disability, 1870–1900," in Longmore and Umansky, *The New Disability History*, 157–86.
52. For more on this, see Sarah F. Rose, "Labor Historians and the Challenge of Disability," *Labor* 2 (2005): 27–54.
53. Robert Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1999).
54. See Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, *Deaf in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*; John Van Cleve and Barry Crouch, *A Place of Their Own* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1988); and Burch, *Signs of Resistance*.
55. Longmore, *Why I Burned My Book*.
56. See, for example, William Roth, "Handicap as a Social Construct," *Society* 20 (1983): 56–61; Paul Longmore, "Book Review: Bruce Clayton, *Forgotten Prophet: The Life of Randolph Bourne*," *Reviews in American History* 13 (1985): 581–87; Paul Longmore, "Uncovering the Hidden History of People with Disabilities," *Reviews in American History* 15 (1987): 355–64.
57. See, for example, Susan Burch and Brenda Jo Brueggemann, eds., *Double Visions: Studies of Women and Deafness* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, forthcoming).
58. Van Cleve and Crouch, *A Place of Their Own*; Van Cleve, *Deaf History Unveiled*; and Lane, *When the Mind Hears*.
59. One excellent study of the language of disability is Linton, *Claiming Disability*.

Americans with disabilities are a significant minority group in the United States, making up a fifth of the overall population and over half of Americans older than eighty. There is a complex history underlying the United States and its relationship with its disabled population, with great progress being made in the last century to improve the livelihood of disabled citizens through legislation providing protections and benefits. Most notably, the Americans with Disabilities Act is a comprehensive... The views expressed here are those of the authors. Read more opinion on CNN. (CNN) In remembering disabled activists who were instrumental in the creation of America's disability rights movement and imagining what a more inclusive movement for social justice and full civil rights for the future could look like, we keep coming back to the partnership during the late 1970s between the Black Panther Party and the 504 activists, disability rights advocates who were. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) a disabled person is anyone who has "a problem in body function or structure, an activity limitation, has a difficulty in executing a task or action; with a participation restriction". What are the different types of disabilities? How many people are affected? Which populations are most at risk? What impact has COVID-19 had on people with disabilities? Let's take stock of the facts and figures around the world. How many people have disabilities in the world? You may not see disabled people in your everyday life, and yet the WHO has identified over 1 billion disabled people, 20% of whom live with great functional difficulties in their day-to-day lives. Yet the share of Americans with disabilities varies widely across demographic groups and geography. (The Census Bureau's American Community Survey defines disability status through six types of questions measuring serious difficulty with hearing, vision, cognition, walking or climbing stairs, as well as difficulty with self-care and independent living. Other surveys with different definitions have estimated that a considerably larger share of Americans have disabilities.) Here are seven facts about Americans with disabilities. 1 Older Americans are significantly more likely than younger Americans to have a disability, according to the American Community Survey. The disability civil rights movement has many distinct narratives, but the prevailing themes are of community, justice and equity. [Image description: People seated in wheelchairs in front of an American flag. The stars on the flag form a symbol of a person in a wheelchair.] Though it is difficult to distill modern disability history in one thread, here are a handful of moments that have stood out in the collective memories of disability advocates. Image. "Linda Bove" who's a fabulous Deaf actor was playing Linda, the librarian, but there are also other disabled folks and disability topics popping up in "Sesame Street" across the 1970s," said Susan Burch, a professor who teaches critical disability studies at Middlebury College in Vermont. "That was a big darn deal!"