



### A Brief and Highlighted History of Individuals with Disabilities

**“People with disabilities have had to battle against centuries of biased assumptions, hateful stereotypes, and irrational fears. The stigmatization of disability resulted in the social and economic marginalization of generations of Americans with disabilities, and like many other oppressed minorities, left people with disabilities in a severe state of impoverishment for centuries.” (www.ada.gov)**

**Ancient Greece/Rome:** Sparta. It was a legal requirement that “deformed and sickly” infants were abandoned. Aristotle (385-322 B.C.) recommended a law “to prevent the rearing of deformed children.” Politically he wrote, “As to the exposure and rearing of children, let there be a law that no deformed child shall live.” Exposure meant that a child would be left out in the weather to die. In Rome, children who were born with a disability were publicly ridiculed, or thrown in the Tiber River by their parents, or left with their feet bound together in the woods to die. Others were mutilated to further their value as a beggar.

In Rome, individuals with a mental or physical disability were kept by nobility as “fools,” for amusement.

<https://mn.gov/mnddc/parallels/one/3.html>

**130 – 200 A.D.** Galen, a Greek physician/scholar, recognized the brain as the central organ of the nervous system which provided evidence for the physical, and the natural causes of disability. <https://mn.gov/mnddc/parallels/one/4.html>

**4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.** The rise of Christianity led to the ceasing of infanticide, and more humane practices towards individuals with disabilities. <https://mn.gov/mnddc/parallels/one/4.html>

### **Middle Ages (476 – 1800)**

Individuals exhibiting mental illness, or disabilities were taken out of society and put into dungeon-like institutions. It was believed that these individuals were possessed by the devil and the treatment often involved inflicting pain and torture to “drive the devil out of them.” Living conditions were brutal, often leading to death or very low quality of life. People with disabilities were sometimes seen as “Children of a Caring God” or “Child of God,” and were spoken about as “different,” but never considered normal.

**787 A.D.** The first asylum was founded for abandoned infants, by Datheus, the archbishop of Milan. However, the institutions were custodial at best, and most children still did not survive.

### **Indigenous North America, Pre-1492**

The concept of turning an individual with a disability over to others, or to an institution for care, was not thought of until Europeans arrived in the Americas. What we might call a disability today was believed to have been caused because

someone may have transgressed or stepped too far outside of a way of life, or actions of parents that caused an imbalance between mind, body and spirit. While beliefs varied among tribes, individuals with disabilities (they did not have term equivalent to the word 'disability') were often honored for what they were able to do instead of what they were not able to do, each would "find their gift within their community." For example, one might be able to carry water, pick herbs, or tend to children. They were not stigmatized, or cast out, rather a core belief was followed in which "everyone had gifts," to contribute to their tribe or clan. Europeans were able to document the use of sign language among tribes as early as the sixteenth century. Many of the tribes did not speak the same language, and sign language was a way for them to communicate beyond the boundaries of spoken language. Those that were born deaf, or hard of hearing, also had the ability to communicate due to developed sign language among the tribes. *A Disability History of the United States* by Kim E. Nielsen

### Back in Europe:

**Spain, Pedro Ponce de Leon** is believed to have created the first method for teaching the deaf in the mid-1500s.



Image: Fool's Cage c. 1530 by Erhard Schon

"Idiot Cages," were placed in town center to 'keep people with disabilities out of trouble.'

"Ships of Fools," were also formed where individuals with disabilities would be shipped off and go from port to port, charging admission to see their cargo or in some cases abandoning their cargo in another city.

**1563 – 1601 Queen Elizabeth** prompted parliament to pass a series of laws to take care of the "poor and disadvantaged," shifting the responsibility to the government to care for them. Almshouses were created for those who were "unemployable." The conditions in these houses were grim.

**North America Late 1600s/early 1700s** as long as one could work, a physical disability was often ignored. Intellectual and mental disabilities were the problems of the families of those individuals. Homeless individuals with intellectual and mental disabilities had to be able to prove that they could provide for themselves, or that they were "economically viable," in order to stay in a community. If they were not, they were threatened with a lash, or "warned out," of a community. In 1701 in Massachusetts, laws were passed to prevent the "poor, vicious, and infirm" from coming to America. If anyone who was "lame, impotent, or infirm persons, incapable of maintaining themselves," came off of a ship, the captain was had to return them to their port of origin at his expense. People with disabilities were discouraged from coming to America. Many women who stepped outside of theological beliefs during this time, were often thought to give birth to stillborn children, or a child with disabilities or – having a "monstrous birth," or punishment from God, because of their poor behavior (witchcraft or heresy). These children were thought to be "deviant and threatening," and symbolic reminder to people at the time. Almshouses began to be developed; however, they were to house both the criminals and those with disabilities together. - *A Disability History of the United States* by Kim E. Nielsen

**1715 – 1780 Portugal Jacob** Rodriguez Pereire instructed "deaf mutes" teaching them to hear and speak by touch and vibration of muscles.

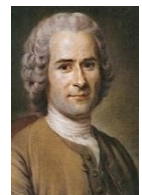
**In 1780's Valentin Haüy** developed embossed print to teach the blind to read.



Image: Cartoon drawn by Thomas Rowlandson in 1789 showing patients chained to the wall in Bedlam, the infamous British asylum.

### France:

**Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778)** believed in instructing children in physical and sensory methods, developing intellectual skills, and moral capacity.





**Philip Pinel (1745 – 1826)**, a French physician, was the first to recognize a disability as a disease rather than sinful or immoral. In 1793 he removed restraints from the inmates in an asylum. Along with English reformer, William Turk, he developed “moral management,” using gentle treatment and patience rather than physical abuse and restraints. He began to classify mental illness, kept individual case histories, and emphasized vocational and work experience.



**Image:** Philippe Pinel supervises the unchaining of female mental patients at Salpêtrière Hospice. Painting by Tony Robert-Fleury



**Image: 1619 The First Africans Arrive in the New World**  
**1619 – 1865 North America** - Slaves brought over from

Africa were considered disabled by definition due to racist ideology. They were thought to have inherent mental and physical inferiority, and their bodies were seen as abnormal and abhorrent in order to legitimize slavery. However, when the slave traders requested the type of slaves sought and brought them to be shipped over to North America, they insured that they were free of disability and deformity. Sadly, those that were not seen as fit to be a slave - such as old men, women, children, and those with a disability, were often killed off in Africa during slave raids. Those with extreme deformities, were seen as potential items to be exhibited for money. Slaves who fell subject to illness, which in turn caused a disability or deformity during their trip over the America's were often disposed of at sea, as their value was greatly decreased, and the ship captain would still be fiscally compensated at a higher rate than he would if they arrived in a disabled state. Many that obtained disabilities or deformities due to disease during travel were either abandoned and left to die upon arrival in the states or sold for very low prices. - *A Disability History of the United States* by Kim E. Nielsen It should be noted that, “from the early 1500s forward, the Portuguese, Spanish, English, French, and Dutch were responsible for and facilitated the dislocation of indigenous peoples of Africa and the Americas.” - *The misguided Focus on 1619 as the Beginning of Slavery in the U.S. Damages Our Understanding of American History* by Michael Guasco, Smithsonian.com, September 13, 2017



**1773** – The “Public Hospital for Persons of Insane and Disordered Minds,” the first asylum in North America was opened in Virginia. Confinement only occurred if it was thought “necessary,” but treatment was often grim. Curative methods at the time in many institutions included: being whipped with no less than ten lashes upon admittance, being kept in a cell with bared windows, being changed to walls by their wrist or leg, being rendered motionless with constricting cylindrical tubes of fabric (“idiot sleeves”), “shock” water treatments, electric shock, bleeding, purging, and blistering. In John Welsey’s 1747 *Primitive Physic*, home remedies for “raging madness,” included only eating apples for month, or applying cold

water to the head. For “lunacy” one should apply a daily ounce of vinegar to apply a boiled blend of ivy, oil and white wine to one’s shaved head every other day for three weeks. - *A Disability History of the United States* by Kim E. Nielsen  
**Image:** Public Hospital, [www.history.org](http://www.history.org)



**1789**, British clergyman and economist, **Thomas Malthus**, published “Essay on the Principle of Population,” which argued that the population would outgrow the food supply. He advocated that all people that were “defective,” should be identified and eliminated. Leaving only that that were “normal,” and could contributions to society. During this time schools were formed in England and Germany, but abuse and neglect was still widespread within.

**1791 – US – the first 10 Amendments to the U.S. Constitution referred to the Bill of Rights confirm fundamental rights for U.S. Citizens.**



Rousseau influenced **Jean Marc Gaspard Itard** in **1800** to develop a broad educational program that was adopted throughout most of France and other parts of Europe. Known for educating the deaf. Credited with describing the first case of Tourette syndrome. Publication: *An Historical Account of the Discovery and Education of a Savage Man: Or, the First Developments, Physical and Moral, of the Young Savage Caught in the Woods Near Aveyron in the Year 1789.*

**1776 – 1865 North America** With freedom came the need to create a “fit” population, to “distinguish between the good and bad.” There was a rapid expansion of institutions in which those that were seen as “unfit,” or “deviant and the dependent,” could be placed. “White citizens considered insane, idiotic, or unable to support themselves economically due to physical difference were increasingly institutionalized, and voting restrictions based on justifications of mental inadequacy expanded.” In addition to that immigration laws were expanded to restrict the entrance of disabled persons into North America.

**1842 – Germany** opened the first training schools, ten years later the UK and the US followed.



**1848, social reformer and educator Dorothea Dix**, visited jails, poorhouses, asylums across the U.S. and presented her observations to congress through Samuel Gridley (women were not allowed to address congress). She had witnessed physical abuse, restraints, and violations of human rights. She asked the US to set aside 5 million acres of land in the nation for individuals with disabilities. It was passed by both houses of Congress but vetoed by President Pierce. She still helped pave the way for public institutions.

**Image:** Man seated on folding stool, sells items from the open box on his lap. His hand-written sign reads, “I am totally blind. New Haven is my home. Please buy my goods and help me.” Smithsonian National Museum of American History, exhibit: *Everybody: An Artifact History of Disabilities in America.*

<https://everybody.si.edu/words/appearance>



**Mid 1800s Ugly Laws** “Some cities in the United States began to ban individuals with certain appearances from the public streets. The laws were directed at individuals with disabilities who relied on begging. As many individuals with disabilities were unable to obtain employment at the time, begging was often the only resort some people had. “Any person who is diseased, maimed, mutilated, or in any way deformed so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object, or an improper person to be allowed in or on the streets, highways, thoroughfares or public places in the City of County of San Francisco, shall not therein or thereon expose himself or herself to public view.” – San Francisco “Ugly Law,” 1867”



Itard's student, **Edouard Sequin**, applied it to children with mental retardation (in 2010, now referred to as intellectual disabilities) – teaching them self-help and vocational skills. **In 1850** he immigrated to the U.S. and became the driving force in education for individuals with mental retardation.

**1850s – 1860s** as the institutions grew in size, they became more concerned about how economical they could be made, rather than focusing on returning the residents to the community. The “pupils” or “inmates” were trained and became free labor to become productive workers in the institutions. This was not the original intention behind the institutions. In 1876 a group was founded called the AAMR (American Association for Mental Retardation). (Today it is now called the AAIDD – American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities – which now promotes Person-Centered Practices. For more information: [www.aaidd.org](http://www.aaidd.org)) Its aim in the 1800s was to make the institutions become medically oriented and focused to help cure the residents. People were categorized and housed in different colonies with the colony plan – for example a person with epilepsy was housed in an “epileptic colony.” People with disabilities, or the “feeble-mindedness” were still seen as an economic burden and were put in the same category on the U.S. census as other social problems including crime, prostitution, and vagrancy. As institutions expanded farm colonies were created that housed “high-grade” residents that supplied hard physical labor to produce food and dairy products to sustain the larger institutions.

**1882 – New York** opened the first live and work farm colonies to relieve chronic overcrowding at institutions.

**1883 – Scientifically unsupported concept of eugenics** “to improve the stock of humanity,” began to gain popularity. The U.S. uses it to develop immigration laws and to determine who can marry and have children, used them to support the formation of institutions and mass forced sterilizations.

**1890s** – People with disabilities are seen as drains on or a danger to society.

**1892:** 28 residential training schools existed in the US for youth with mental retardation. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nearly every state had a training school. However, when the schools couldn't “cure” mental retardation the citizenry lost interest, states cut back financial support, they became overcrowded and could no longer offer an educational approach for individuals with mental retardation. They “warehoused,” the “inmates.” They became overcrowded and lacked proper sleeping quarters, or medical access. In the south many of these schools were also racially segregated which resulted in even further disparities for individuals of color with disabilities.

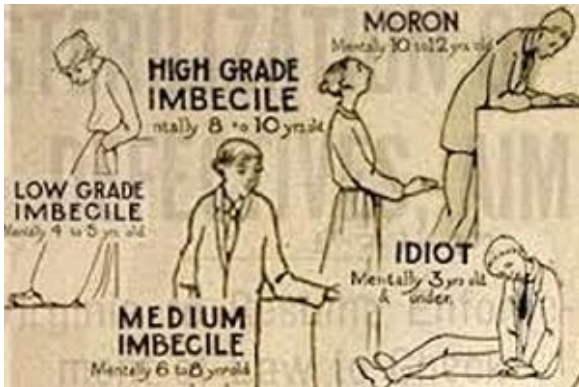
**1896** – Charles Norton, American, recommended the “painless destruction” of insane and deficient minds VS in the UK parliament passed an act where people with disabilities were identified as needing education.

**1899** - The first special education classes commence in Boston, Massachusetts for the first time.

**1900** – 10 private institutions open in the US.

**1905** – Average of 500 people living in each institution.

**1907** – In Indiana the Eugenics sterilization law was enacted. Over the next 24 years 27 other states followed.

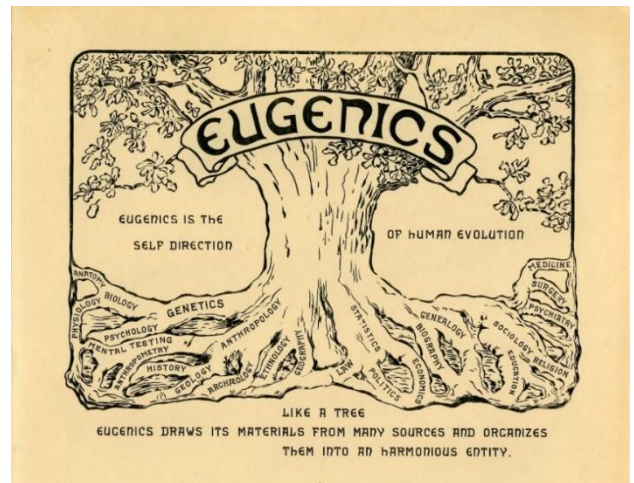


**1913 Eugenics** was being used by the U.S. Public Health Service. The basic principle was that the only way society could improve was through better human breeding practices.

The term “undesirable,” was widely applied to many including those with disabilities – both intellectual and physical, immigrants, the homeless, prostitutes, criminals, homosexuals, children in orphanages, and African Americans. Industrialization and urbanization were causing a large chasm between the wealthy and the poor to develop.

In an effort to explain why there were so few wealthy, and so many poor, the idea that the poor were so deficient was due to their poor breeding. A newly invented Binet IQ test was given to immigrants

arriving at Ellis Island and recorded that, “79% of the Italians, 80% of the Hungarians, 83% of the Jews, and 87% of the Russians are feeble-minded.” The xenophobic hysteria that was created focused on racial minorities and people with disabilities. Immigrants that had disabilities, or poor physical appearances would be deemed unfit to work, or obtain a job, and would in turn, “likely become a public charge,” were deported back to their country of origin. Proponents of eugenics advocated for the sterilization of people with disabilities so that they would not ruin the human species. One doctor from an Indiana Reformatory, Dr. H.C. Sharp, boasted of performing sterilizations without anesthesia. In 1917 the same test was given to 1.75 million army recruits with the results showing that 40% of white males were “feeble-minded,” a result of bad breeding (hereditary), and bad parenting. In 1924 Congress passed the Immigration Restriction Act. Fences put in place surrounding institutions had previously served to protect the inhabitants, they were now isolating them from the rest of society. Sterilization and fences were needed to solve America’s social problems.



Not only did individuals with disabilities suffer because of these misguided beliefs, but women, inmates, and Native Americans did as well whenever a lawyer, reservation superintendent, or white agent of the (BIA) Bureau of Indian Affairs could convince the court that an individual had “imbecils” or insanity in their family lineage. There are documented cases where lawyers concocted these fake family lineages to get an individual sterilized or warehoused away from the public. There are also documented cases of families, out of societal pressure, sending newborns off to institutions, and telling the remaining family members that the child had passed away during birth.

**1923** there were **80 private institutions across the country.**

**There were also** almost 34,000 students in special education classes. In search for training, schools turned to institutions, and some institutions incorporated “special” schools, or offered classes to schoolteachers on training. “Feeble-minded” children were stigmatized as morally bad or genetically flawed and families were told to institutionalize them and keep them out of sight. During this time, some professionals did discover that individuals with disabilities did benefit from education and could function in the community.

**1920s/30s** Special Education Classes were typically only offered in cities, and parents continued to send their children to institutions as it was the only place they could get training. The financial strain of the Great Depression added to negative perceptions of individuals with disabilities. As industrialization grew, so did the number of injuries from machinery which resulted in many individuals becoming disabled. Many of them lost their jobs, or were given a job with far less pay, while many others were never able to regain employment.

**1926** Franklin Delano Roosevelt, paralyzed from the waist down by polio, founded the Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation (which served whites only). **1938** Roosevelt and others associated with Warm Springs formed NFIP, the

National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, which later on became known as the March of Dimes. In **1945** Warm Springs was desegregated at the insistence of Eleanor Roosevelt. – *A Disability History of the United States* by Kim E. Nielsen

**1935** The League of the Physically Handicapped formed over protesting that the “New York City and federal policies automatically rejected all people with disabilities from work relief programs – categorizing all people with disabilities as “unemployable.”” – *A Disability History of the United States* by Kim E. Nielsen

**Image:** Prosthetic devices on display at Auschwitz,

**Image Credit:** Florida Center for Instructional Technology, University of South Florida.



**1930/40s** the extreme of Eugenics came to a head in Germany with the rise of **Adolf Hitler** who believed in racial hygiene, purity, and national health. In 1933 the Nazi government instituted the “Law for the Progeny with Hereditary Diseases.” It called for the sterilization of all who suffered from hereditary diseases, learning disabilities, intellectual or physical disabilities, and those with severe alcoholism. The propaganda at the time labeled them as “life unworthy of life” or “useless eaters.” In the fall of 1939, he authorized “mercy death,” or “Operation T4,” between 1940 and 41 approximately 70,000 Austrian and German disabled people were killed by using poisonous gas. By the end of the war an

estimated 275,000 individuals with disabilities were killed. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)) His regime committed to removing individuals unfit to live and produce inferior offspring. The Holocaust killed 6 million Jews, Poles, Romanian Gypsies, Homosexuals, Individuals with Disabilities, and other groups by the Nazi party. Some who lived were subjected to inhumane and unconscionable medical experiments. In America, attendants at many institutions supporting individuals with disabilities were drafted to fight in WWII, leaving a shortage of workers, and many institutions closed. Many of those that remained open quickly saw overall living conditions become even more crowded with people sleeping two to a bed and in hallways. Back in the United States, those who were not institutionalized were sometimes able to find work where they were previously turned away because of the labor shortage.

#### **1940 AFPH – American Federation of the Physically Handicapped formed by Paul Strachan**

The first national cross-disability activist group advocated for employment for individuals with disabilities, urged building accessibility policies, and advocated for better injury prevention in the workplace that resulted in disabilities. – *A Disability History of the United States* by Kim E. Nielsen

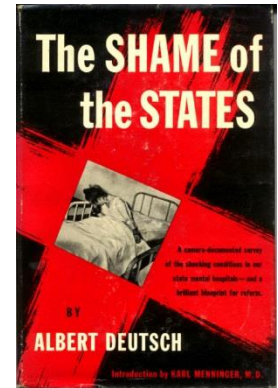


**1946: “Bedlam 1946”** Reporter Albert Maisel wrote an article for *Life* magazine focusing on the lack of proper staffing at a major mental institution, Byberry, in Philadelphia. In the article he stated, “The fact is that beatings are merely the extreme end product which thrusts upon overworked, poorly trained and shamefully underpaid employees the burden of controlling hundreds of patients whom they fear and despise.” *With the Best of Intentions: Byberry Asylum* by Dolores D. Zollo, Image: 1946: Nakedness and Idleness, Life Magazine, 1951

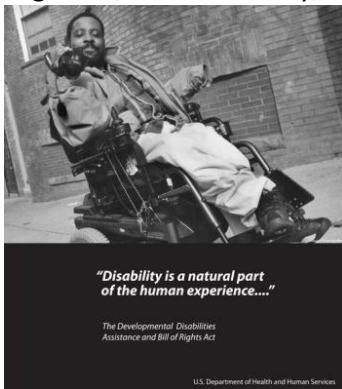
Fall 2009, Pennsylvania Center for the Book. [www.pabook.libraries.psu.edu](http://www.pabook.libraries.psu.edu)



**1948, Albert Deutsch** wrote *Shame on the States*, which was a photographic expose that highlighted horrible conditions that put persons living in institutions as objects of attention in society again. In his book he explained, "I was reminded of the pictures of the Nazi concentration camps at Belsen...I entered buildings swarming with naked humans herded like cattle and treated with less concern, pervaded by a fetid odor...living under leaking roofs, surrounded by moldy, decaying walls and sprawling on rotting floor for want of seats." *With the Best of Intentions: Byberry Asylum* by Dolores D. Zollo, Fall 2009, Pennsylvania Center for the Book. [www.pabook.libraries.psu.edu](http://www.pabook.libraries.psu.edu)



**1950s – 1970s Lobotomies** a pointed steel rod would be inserted behind a patient's eye and used to destroy or "disconnect" the prefrontal lobe of the brain. This was seen as a form of treatment for those who suffered from mental illness. While there were some success stories, they caused far more damage than good, often further incapacitating the subject in a variety of different ways ranging from paralysis, loss of cognition, loss of memory, additional mental problems or events left their victims in a vegetative state.

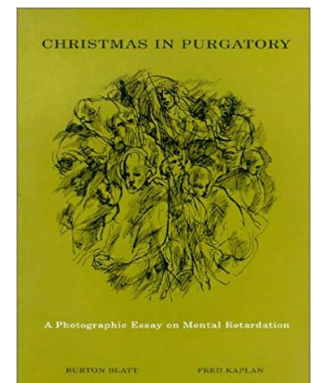


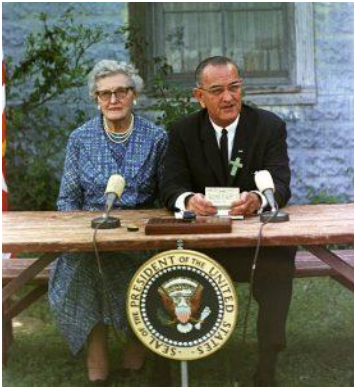
**1960 Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act)** uses federal funds to support the development and operation of Councils on Developmental Disabilities, Protection and Advocacy Systems, University Center, and Projects of National Significance.

**1961** – The first Camphill community is formed in Copake, New York based on the belief that the people you support should be able to live alongside people without disabilities in 'life sharing' communities.

**1963 President John F. Kennedy** who had a sister that had a mental illness, Rosemarie Kennedy, recommended the deinstitutionalization of large mental asylums to create smaller mental health facilities with more personalized care. He launched the President's Panel of Mental Retardation and developed a "plan to combat mental retardation. The way in which the Kennedy family embraced the cause of intellectual disabilities continued to challenge the former claims of those who subscribed to Eugenics. One sister, Eunice Shriver Kennedy, wrote in *The Saturday Evening Post*, "Mental retardation can happen in any family. It *has* happened in the families of the poor and the rich, of governors, senators, Nobel prizewinners, doctors, lawyers, writers, men of genius, presidents of corporations – the president of the United States."

**1964 Burton Blatt and Fred Kaplan** stated in the opening of their book, entitled *Christmas in Purgatory: A Photographic Essay on Mental Retardation*, "There is a hell on earth, and in America there is a special inferno." The book was written after the pair visited five institutions for the mentally retarded and secretly took hundreds of photos. They depicted children living in solitary confinement, with their hands and legs bound, residents dressed uniformly in institutional garb, living in gloomy sterile quarters. The book prompted society to reconsider how it cared for individuals with disabilities. States were pressured to adequately fund their schools and states began to deinstitutionalize. People who had been in state training schools were brought back to their home community and into the public.





### 1965 – Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

“It was a program to distribute funding to schools and school districts with a high percentage of low-income families. To support school libraries and textbook acquisition for both private and public schools, and it funded preschool programs. Supplementary educational centers and services would receive funding for additional support services to bolster school attendance. Mandated educational programming even when school was not in session, and it provided for special education and related services in isolated or rural areas. An amendment to this act in 1968 provided the basis for the Bilingual Education Act and the Education of the Handicapped Act. The original act has had numerous amendments and went through a consolidation process in the 1980s.”

[https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/programs/education/elementary-and-secondary-](https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/programs/education/elementary-and-secondary-education-act-of-1965/)

[education-act-of-1965/](https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/programs/education/elementary-and-secondary-education-act-of-1965/)

Image: Lyndon B. Johnson at the ESEA signing ceremony, with his childhood schoolteacher Ms. Kate Deadrich Loney

Photo: Public Domain

Prior to this act, many families with children with disabilities had to keep children with disabilities at home and educate them themselves, or they had to pay high fees for their children to receive an education, which often meant that those in the lower-income bracket went without.



**1968 Architecture Barriers Act** – Requires access to facilities designed, built, altered, or leased with Federal funds. It marked one of the first efforts to ensure access to the built environment for individuals with disabilities. Four agencies are responsible for the standards: the Department of Defense, the Department of Housing, and Urban Development, the General Services Administration (for USDA and DOI), and the U.S. Postal Service.

Image: Wheelchair at an impassable curb, 1970s from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History exhibit entitled: *Everybody: An Artifact History of Disability in America* ([www.everybody.si.edu](http://www.everybody.si.edu))

For details on the Architecture Barriers Act visit:

[https://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/accessibility/Architectural\\_Barriers.htm](https://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/accessibility/Architectural_Barriers.htm)

**Accessibility Today - MINI LESSON:** *Please note that this lesson is more appropriate for college aged students and adults as it does contain language that has been bleeped out...* Watch the following clip that was posted on Youtube in 2017.

*Zach Anner & the Quest for the Rainbow Bagel.* Zach has cerebral palsy and this clip shows him traveling from New York City to Brooklyn to get a bagel and all of the architectural barriers he still encounters in order to get his bagel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhpUJRGrZgc>

### Parent’s Movement 1940s -

During the late 1940s and early 50s parents began to come together to demand services for their children.

**The 1960s and 70s** movements lead by parents worked on improving conditions in institutions, community services, and educational and employment opportunities. Actions were taken to close public institutions and assure people that individuals with disabilities could live in, and be a part of, the natural community. During this 40-year time period, parents contributed more to the advancement of individuals with disabilities than ever before. They wanted to change the words, “Nothing can be done for your child.”

**1970 – Disability rights activists lobbied Congress and marched on Washington to include civil rights language for people with disabilities into the 1972 Rehabilitation Act.**



### **WILLOWBROOK LESSON:**

#### **Share the following word and definition:**

**Humanity:** 1. The human race; human beings collectively. 2. Humaneness; benevolence.

**Humane:** 1. Having or showing compassion or benevolence. 2. Intended to have a civilizing or refining effect on people.

Ask students to provide examples of humanity, or humane treatment. Watching the series of video clips on Willowbrook is a lesson in and of itself. Prior to viewing these with students, please note that the

videos do contain disturbing images, and nudity, similar to watching historical films on concentration camps during WWII. If students are under the age of 18, consider sending a permission slip home to have parents sign.

Prior to viewing have student write down the following:

What are the basic needs that every human being has?

Discuss the students' answers as a class.

- 1) Ask students what it would be like if all they had was food, shelter, and a bed? What other things would be missing from the picture? How could that affect a person's life?
- 2) What if you didn't have any clothes?
- 3) What if you lived in a room full of other people who regularly used the floor as a bathroom and you had to walk, stand, lay, or sit in it?
- 4) What would life be like if you were only given five minutes to eat a meal?
- 5) What if you lived in a place where you didn't have anything to do? Look around the classroom, here you see posters, books, games, computers, televisions, and activities. Outside there is a playground, and in the school, there is a gym and a library. At school you have things like art, choir, shop classes, band, and orchestra.
- 6) What if you spent your day in a blank room, with no playground (or outdoor area for older students), no gym, no library, and no classes? What if the room had a concrete or linoleum floor, concrete walls, and the paint on the walls was peeling, and there was mold on the ceiling from a leaking roof. How would you start to feel?
- 7) Why is it important that you have access to the outdoors, and activities at school?
- 8) Take a look at your classroom, can you image what it would be like to have 100 people in this space with nothing to do, and only one person to help those 100?

### **Watch the Willowbrook clips.**

Stop and process each segment and discuss the conditions that students noted, and how it makes them feel.

### **Following the clips ask the following questions:**

1. How did you see your fellow human beings being treated in the Willowbrook institution?
2. Were the conditions humane, why or why not?
3. Just because an individual has a disability, does it mean that they don't deserve to be treated in the same way that everyone else in our society is treated?
4. In some of the clips we start to see students get out of the institution, and into smaller settings. We see those students start to have access to activities, books, and lessons. How are the students different in that setting vs. the institution? Should anyone not be allowed access to an education?

**1972 Willowbrook** – Geraldo Rivera's expose: *Willowbrook: The Last Great Disgrace* was broadcast into living rooms across the nation and revealed the unsanitary, abusive and neglectful conditions at the Willowbrook State School in New York. Warning: All of the following video clips contain disturbing images. To view the whole documentary:

<http://mobile.gerald.com/page/willowbrook>

**Willowbrook Five Years Later** while the budget and staffing were increased for the intuition, and the population was decreased by 2,000 individuals following public outcry and pressure, there was a follow up in which Gerlado spoke to one survivor about transitioning from Willowbrook to living on his own. The neglect and abuse were still prevalent in spite of the changes. To watch the full segment on Good Night America (starting at 34:13)

<http://mobile.gerald.com/page/good-night-america-18>

**Willowbrook Ten Years Later** 20/20 revisited Willowbrook with Willowbrook-II.

To view the full segment: <http://mobile.gerald.com/page/Willowbrook-II>

Another documentary, *Unforgotten: Twenty-Five Years After Willowbrook* was also created apart from Gerlado and gives a glimpse into Willowbrook from the perspective of family members. To watch the award-winning documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcjRIZFQcUY>



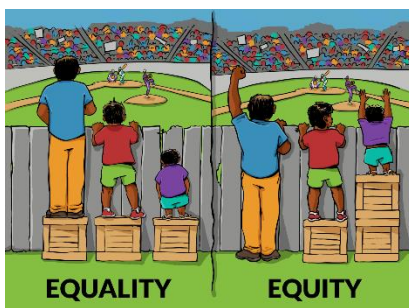
**1973 Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act** banned discrimination on the basis of disability by recipients of federal funds. **This was the first time in history that the civil rights of individuals with disabilities were protected by law.** This provided equal opportunity for employment within the federal government and federally funded programs, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of either physical or mental disability. It also establishes the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, mandating equal access to public services (such as public housing and public transportation services) to people with disabilities, and the allocation of money for vocational training.

Image: [www.disabilityawareness.us/rehabilitation-act-of-1973](http://www.disabilityawareness.us/rehabilitation-act-of-1973)

**1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Education of Handicapped Children Act**, passed by the US Congress. Prior to the legislation school administrators would turn children with disabilities away, this law provided rights and protection to children with disabilities and their parents. Schools now must find and evaluate students suspected of having disabilities – at no cost to parents. Once children are identified as having a disability, schools must provide them with special education and related services (such as speech therapy and counseling) to meet their unique needs. Parents have a say in the educational decisions that the school makes about their child and must get consent before providing services to a child from their parents. The law covers kids from birth through high school graduation, or until age 21, whichever comes first. It also provides early intervention services up to age 3. To qualify a child's issues must fall under one of the 13 disability categories covered by the law, and as a result of that disability the students must need special education in order to make progress in school. **IDEA requires**

**FAIR ISN'T**  
everybody getting the  
same thing.....

**FAIR IS**  
everybody getting  
what they need  
In order to be  
**SUCCESSFUL.**



**that an IEP – Individualized Education Plan** be designed with parental approval to meet the educational needs of a child with a disability. **Public Law 94-142 said that any school receiving federal money had to provide an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to all children regardless of their disability.** Educators panicked as they would no longer be allowed to use restraints and solitary confinement (these were only used at state run institutions.) They were worried about controlling individuals without them. Prior to IDEA it was estimated that 1 in 5 individuals with disabilities were receiving an education. For the next 40 years staff at state run institutions and educators used the reward/punishment

system to control the behavior of individuals with disabilities. As of 2015 – approximately 5.9 million students in the U.S. received special education services under IDEA.

Image: Equality vs Equity is from Interaction Institute for Social Change by Artist Angus Maguire. Interactioninstitute.org and madewithangus.com



**1977 Protests Held** even though the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, the Architectural Barrier Act, and IDEA had been passed, many were not following the laws. A series of protests were held across the nation in which many individuals with disabilities held demonstrations, and staged sit-ins at each of the ten Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) offices around the country. They wanted the government to enforce the laws that had been passed. In San Francisco, 120 protesters occupied the HEW building, with over half of them staying for 25 days. Many people compromised their health to achieve their goal. Many other activists group supplied those who were protesting with food (Chicano Activists), one hot meal a day (The Black Panthers), cots (the Salvation Army), and

walkie-talkies (the Butterfly Brigade). – *A Disability History of the United States* by Kim E. Nielsen



**1970/80s Independent Living Centers** Edward Roberts, the first student with major disabilities to attend the University of California Berkeley and others began forming independent-living centers that worked towards deinstitutionalization, consumer control, and were based on the principle of self-determination. “The centers worked toward and created institutional supports and accommodations that would enable people with disabilities to live independently manage their own lives, make their own decisions. Services ranged from wheelchair repair, attendant care services, peer counseling, legal assistance, adaptive equipment, and training in self-advocacy to providing safe community spaces in which people could openly discuss their families, their sex lives, clothing adaptations and dreams.” – *A Disability History of the United States* by Kim E.

Nielsen **Image:** Don Galloway, manager of blind services, and Ed Roberts, executive director for the fledgling Center for Independent Living in 1974 on the Berkeley Campus Photo: UC Berkeley Library

### 1970s Sheltered Workshops

“By the 1970s sheltered workshops provided employment to people with disabilities – but at dismally low wages, basically exempt from labor law, with few benefits, and with virtually no possibility of advancement or additional training. Built into them was the assumption that people with disabilities could not survive in the outside world and needed a special, protected environment.” – *A Disability History of the United States* by Kim E. Nielsen

**2010s - Almost 40 years later** the idea of sheltered workshops is being challenged.

**The 1970s, 80s and 90s** saw Paralympians change the idea of what an athlete was. Poetry was redefined by deaf poets, publications centering on activism and culture for individuals with disabilities came into being, and art galleries, dance troupes, and theatre companies began to redefine art and societal norms through the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. – *A History of the United States* by Kim E. Nielsen

**1980: The US Civil Rights of Institutionalized Person’s Act** provides powers to the Department of Justice pertaining to institutions that hold people with disabilities against their will. Whenever the Attorney General has reasonable cause to believe that any State or political subdivision of a State, official, employee, or agent thereof, or other person acting on behalf of a State or political subdivision of a State is subjecting persons residing in or confined to an institution, as defined in section 1997 of this title, to egregious or flagrant conditions which deprive such persons of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured or protected by the Constitution or laws of the United States causing such persons to suffer grievous harm, and that such deprivation is pursuant to a pattern or practice of resistance to the full enjoyment of such rights, privileges, or immunities, the Attorney General, for or in the name of the United States, may institute a civil action in any appropriate United States district court against such party for such equitable relief as may be appropriate

to insure the minimum corrective measures necessary to insure the full enjoyment of such rights, privileges, or immunities, except that such equitable relief shall be available under this subchapter to persons residing in or confined to an institution as defined in section 1997(1)(B)(ii) of this title only insofar as such persons are subjected to conditions which deprive them of rights, privileges, or immunities secured or protected by the Constitution of the United States.

**1982 – 1983 Baby Doe Rules** – Medical professionals cannot withhold any form of treatment unless it would be of no benefit to the child. This law was created due to severe cases where infants with disabilities were being allowed to die because critical care was not being given or because fluids or food were being withheld – parents of infants with disabilities were allowed to choose whether they want all the standard procedures to be undertaken.

“The Baby Doe Rules mandate that, as a requirement for federal funding, hospitals and physicians must provide maximal care to any impaired infant, unless select exceptions are met. If a physician or parent chooses to withhold full treatment when the exceptions are not met, they are liable for medical neglect. - Arizona State University, Jack Resnik, *Embryo Project Encyclopedia, The Baby Doe Rules*, [www.asu.edu](http://www.asu.edu)

**1989 Michael Smull and Susan Harrison** started Essential Lifestyle Planning to help individuals that were “trapped” at institutions to help them successfully move into the community.



**1990 The Americans with Disabilities Act** Introduced to congress in 1988. **US labor law prohibits unjustified discrimination based on disability. It also requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities and imposes accessibility requirements on public accommodations.** This fought against architectural and communication barriers that many individuals with disabilities experienced. For the first time in the history of our country, and world, businesses had to stop and think about access to people with disabilities – not as a matter of charity, but as a basic civil right. ([www.ADA.gov](http://www.ADA.gov)) Photo: President George H.W. Bush signing the Americans with Disabilities Act on the South Lawn of the White House, July 26, 1990.

**1999 – U.S. Supreme Court** rules that people living in institutions have the right to benefit from the “most integrated setting” that is “appropriate to their needs.”

**Current Day** There is an emphasis being put on developing relationships with individuals with disabilities through **Person Centered Thinking**, thanks to David Pitonyak, Ph.D. Now we ask, “How do we help you discover and move towards a more desirable future? And “How can we offer assistance in a way that promotes valued experiences for you?”

Individuals with disabilities still often lack meaningful relationships which help create a sense of safety, well-being, power, and a sense of value and self-worth and experience extreme loneliness.

Many individuals with disabilities struggle with things such as PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and are more likely than non-disabled people to be abused physically, emotionally or sexually. In 1994 it was estimated that 61% of the people with developmental disabilities living in a hospital setting met the criteria for PTSD.

**Compiled from:** *A Disability History of the United States* by Kim E. Nielsen, [www.ADA.gov](http://www.ADA.gov) (Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act), [www.dimagine.com](http://www.dimagine.com) (David Pitonyak Imagine), [www.disabilityawareness.us/rehabilitation-act-of-1973](http://www.disabilityawareness.us/rehabilitation-act-of-1973), [www.dredf.org](http://www.dredf.org) (Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund), [www.geraldo.com](http://www.geraldo.com), [www.mn.gov/disability-mn](http://www.mn.gov/disability-mn) (Disability Minnesota, *Parallels In Time: A History of Developmental Disabilities*), Open Future Learning – [www.openfuturelearning.org](http://www.openfuturelearning.org), [www.pabook.libraries.psu.edu](http://www.pabook.libraries.psu.edu) (Pennsylvania Center for the Book), [www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov) (Department of Labor), [www.vcu.edu](http://www.vcu.edu) (Virginia Commonwealth University – VCU Libraries Social Welfare History Project), [www.smithsonian.org](http://www.smithsonian.org), [www.understood.org](http://www.understood.org), [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org) (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

## **TED Talks and MINI LESSONS:**

**TEDx Talk by Judith Heumann, “Our fight for disability rights –and why we’re not done yet,”**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/judith heumann our fight for disability rights and why we re not done yet/transcript](https://www.ted.com/talks/judith_heumann_our_fight_for_disability_rights_and_why_we_re_not_done_yet/transcript)

**TEDx Talk by Elise Roy, “When we design for disability, we all benefit.”**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/elise roy when we design for disability we all benefit](https://www.ted.com/talks/elise_roy_when_we_design_for_disability_we_all_benefit)

**TED Talk, Ryan Gersava, “A disability – inclusive future of work.”**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/ryan\\_gersava\\_a\\_disability\\_inclusive\\_future\\_of\\_work](https://www.ted.com/talks/ryan_gersava_a_disability_inclusive_future_of_work)

**TED, Tiffany Yu, The Way We Work, “How to help employees with disabilities thrive.”**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/tiffany\\_yu\\_how\\_to\\_help\\_employees\\_with\\_disabilities\\_thrive](https://www.ted.com/talks/tiffany_yu_how_to_help_employees_with_disabilities_thrive)

**TEDxWomen, Sue Austin, “Deep Sea diving...in a wheelchair”**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/sue\\_austin\\_deep\\_sea\\_diving\\_in\\_a\\_wheelchair?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/sue_austin_deep_sea_diving_in_a_wheelchair?language=en)

**TEDWomen, Maysoon Zayid, I got 99 problems...palsy is just one.**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/maysoon\\_zayid\\_i\\_got\\_99\\_problems\\_palsy\\_is\\_just\\_one?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/maysoon_zayid_i_got_99_problems_palsy_is_just_one?language=en)

**TED@Tommy, Mindy Scheier, “How adaptive clothing empowers people with disabilities.”**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/mindy\\_scheier\\_how\\_adaptive\\_clothing\\_empowers\\_people\\_with\\_disabilities](https://www.ted.com/talks/mindy_scheier_how_adaptive_clothing_empowers_people_with_disabilities)

**TED Talk, Meghan Hussey, “4 ways to design a disability-friendly future.”**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/meghan\\_hussey\\_4\\_ways\\_to\\_design\\_a\\_disability\\_friendly\\_future](https://www.ted.com/talks/meghan_hussey_4_ways_to_design_a_disability_friendly_future)

**TEDx Brussels, Charles Hazlewood + British Paraorchestra, “The debut of the British Paraorchestra”**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/charles\\_hazlewood\\_british\\_paraorchestra\\_the\\_debut\\_of\\_the\\_british\\_paraorchestra?utm\\_campaign=tedsread&utm\\_medium=referral&utm\\_source=tedcomshare](https://www.ted.com/talks/charles_hazlewood_british_paraorchestra_the_debut_of_the_british_paraorchestra?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare)

**TEDx Dirigo, Kings Floyd, “The cost of failing to design accessibly.”**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/kings\\_floyd\\_the\\_cost\\_of\\_failing\\_to\\_design\\_accessibly](https://www.ted.com/talks/kings_floyd_the_cost_of_failing_to_design_accessibly)

### STILL TODAY:

While we like to say that people who are diversely abled now receive better treatment, take a look at this example from the Spring of 2017: **Lawsuit claims teacher taped special-needs woman's mouth shut.**

By [Deanna Hackney](#), CNN Updated 6:48 PM ET, Fri November 3, 2017

#### Story highlights

- Rosa Smith, 27, has cerebral palsy.
- The school district says it took action once it learned of the incident.

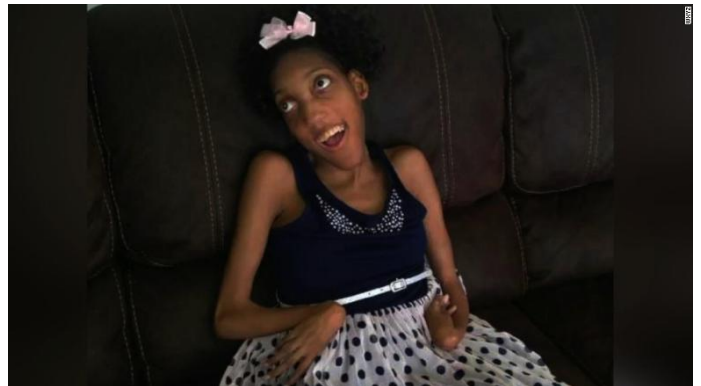


(CNN)A federal lawsuit filed on behalf of a 27-year-old woman with cerebral palsy alleges that a teacher used duct tape to close her mouth because she was making too much noise in her special education classroom. The incident took place in March 2016 at High Point School in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The suit, filed this week, said staffers overmedicated Rosa Smith, left her in a bathroom and slapped her. It alleges that the teacher, Nesa Johnson, duct-taped Smith's mouth shut and texted her mother a photo of it with the caption "Help. She won't be quiet!!!!" There were two aides in the classroom at the time in addition to the teacher, the suit says. The Washtenaw School District said in a statement that no one reported the incident when it happened.



"The intensive program that Rosa was in, every time the parents would report a problem the school would assure them that it was safe and that they were going to resolve the issues," the Smith family's lawyer, Jonathan Marko, said Thursday. "This was not a situation where they could pull their daughter out of the school and put them in another school. It's not that easy. This is an intensive program she was put into that was supposed to keep her safe."

The Washtenaw Intermediate School District told CNN it was not aware of any issues with Smith at the time and took immediate action once it was. "As to the subject of this lawsuit, the family did not report this, or any other complaint to the district, until nearly a year after it occurred," the



district said in a statement. "During that subsequent year, the student continued attending school, in the same classroom, with the same teacher. When we were first informed of the family's concern, we immediately conducted a complete investigation and took appropriate remedial action." Rosa Smith withdrew from High Point School and now receives full-time care and instruction from her parents at home, who are retired. Johnson is no longer employed by the district and said she did not wish to comment when reached by CNN.