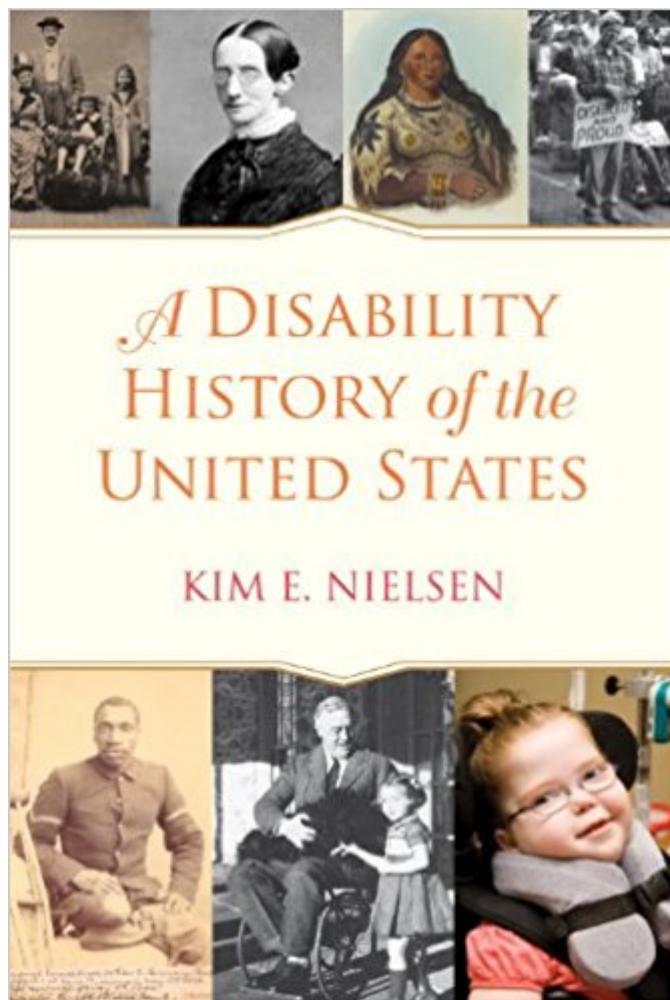


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# A Disability History Of The United States (ReVisioning American History)



## Synopsis

The first book to cover the entirety of disability history, from pre-1492 to the present. Disability is not just the story of someone we love or the story of whom we may become; rather it is undoubtedly the story of our nation. Covering the entirety of US history from pre-1492 to the present, *A Disability History of the United States* is the first book to place the experiences of people with disabilities at the center of the American narrative. In many ways, it's a familiar telling. In other ways, however, it is a radical repositioning of US history. By doing so, the book casts new light on familiar stories, such as slavery and immigration, while breaking ground about the ties between nativism and oralism in the late nineteenth century and the role of ableism in the development of democracy. *A Disability History of the United States* pulls from primary-source documents and social histories to retell American history through the eyes, words, and impressions of the people who lived it. As historian and disability scholar Nielsen argues, to understand disability history isn't to narrowly focus on a series of individual triumphs but rather to examine mass movements and pivotal daily events through the lens of varied experiences. Throughout the book, Nielsen deftly illustrates how concepts of disability have deeply shaped the American experience—from deciding who was allowed to immigrate to establishing labor laws and justifying slavery and gender discrimination. Included are absorbing—at times horrific—narratives of blinded slaves being thrown overboard and women being involuntarily sterilized, as well as triumphant accounts of disabled miners organizing strikes and disability rights activists picketing Washington. Engrossing and profound, *A Disability History of the United States* fundamentally reinterprets how we view our nation's past: from a stifling master narrative to a shared history that encompasses us all.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Individuals with physical, psychological, sensory, and cognitive disabilities occupy center stage in this unique perspective on American history. Nielsen, professor of history and mother of a disabled daughter, gives us a scholarly yet stirring narrative of our nation's uneasy relations—part pity and empathy, part discrimination and social stigmatization—with disabled people. Prior to 1492, most indigenous North Americans had no word for disability. European settlement of the continent injected disability via the diseases the colonists brought as well as the conflicts, displacement, and environmental changes they wrought. Some large cities implemented ugly laws, prohibiting maimed or deformed people from appearing in public places. For a time, disabled individuals were subject to restrictive immigration policies, institutionalization, and even forced sterilization. WWII saw a surge in the employment of disabled people. The rise of activism and empowerment culminated in the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. There is still much to do if all disabled persons are to achieve pride and place and live a good life in the U.S. --Tony Miksanek --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"At last: a truly inclusive history. This groundbreaking book braids together the history every American knows with the history most Americans have never even imagined—and our society has long forgotten. Fascinating, enlightening, absorbing, well-researched, and concise, *A Disability History of the United States* isn't just the book I wish I'd read in school. It's the book I'd encourage every American to read." •Rachel Simon, author of *The Story of Beautiful Girl and Riding The Bus With My Sister*"This brave book is full of surprises; a page-turner that tells a story I had not known. In every chapter there is at least one episode that made me shiver. Read it for Kim Nielsen's fresh interpretations, read it for her wisdom. U.S. history will not look the same." •Linda K. Kerber, author of *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies*"Path-breaking, meticulously researched, and drawing on a stunning array of sources, *A Disability History of the United States* fundamentally changes our understanding of the nation's past. I was amazed by Kim Nielsen's ability to convey a richly

peopled history while still detailing a national experience. A Disability, Nielsen reminds us, is beautifully and inextricably entangled with all the other forces that shape identities and communities. This remarkable *people's* story stretches the chronological, analytical, and thematic borders of U.S. and disability history. Everyone interested in U.S. and disability histories will benefit from reading this book.

•Susan Burch, author of *Signs of Resistance*  
"A wonderful, beautifully written, remarkable achievement that will certainly become a classic within the field and should become standard reading."

•Michael A. Rembis, Director, Center for Disability Studies, University at Buffalo  
"By displacing the able-bodied, self-subsisting individual citizen as the basic unit (and implied beneficiary) of the American experience, she compels the reader to reconsider how we understand personal dignity, public life, and the common good."

•Inside Higher Ed.  
"A scholarly yet stirring narrative of our nation's uneasy relations—part pity and empathy, part discrimination and social stigmatization—with disabled people."

•Booklist  
"Nielsen excavates the long-buried history of physical difference in America and shows how disability has been a significant factor in the formation of democratic values." The range of this book is marvelous.

•The Wilson Quarterly  
"I think you'll like this book, too, especially if you're an advocate, a student of history, or just looking for a different angle on American society. For you, *A Disability History of the United States* is a book you can't afford to miss."

•The Price County Daily

*A Disability History of the United States* by Kim E. Nielsen "A Disability History of the United States" is the informative book about the history of the United States through experiences of people with disabilities. It's a story of stigma and pride denied, it's a journey of overcoming special challenges to make oneself at home. Professor of history and author of three books, Kim E. Nielsen takes the reader on an enlightening and often-disregarded history in the United States through the lives of people with disabilities. The book begins prior to European conquest and colonization and ends to the present time. I found the book to be more informational than inspirational but overall educational, I appreciate the author's candor for the need to explore even further and this book will help whet the appetite of such pursuits. This instructive 272-page book is composed in the following eight chapters: 1. The spirit chooses the body it will occupy: Indigenous North America, Pre-1492, 2. The poor, vicious, and infirm: Colonial Communities, 1492-1700, 3. The miserable wretches were then thrown into the sea: The Late Colonial Era, 1700-1776, 4. The deviant and the independent:

Creating Citizens, 1776-1865, 5. I am disabled, and must go at something else besides hard labor: The Institutionalization of Disability, 1865-1890, 6. Three generations of imbeciles are enough: The Progressive Era, 1890-1927, 7. We don't want tin cups: Laying the Groundwork, 1927-1968, and 8. I guess I'm an activist. I think it's just caring: Rights and Rights Denied, 1968-.Positives:1. Straightforward accessible prose, a well researched and enlightening book.2. An interesting and often overlooked topic.3. The author does a wonderful job of being fair and even-handed. There is no political agenda whatsoever in this book; it's all about telling a story as accurately as possible. Bravo.4. The description of disability. What it has been equated to and the struggle to redefine it.5. The author does a good job through countless examples, to describe the struggles that people with disabilities have lived with and continue to do so. It's also interesting to see the evolution of the struggle.6. The book takes the reader on a journey through time, progressing chronologically through history and the experiences of people with disabilities.7. Indigenous understanding of disability. How the western concepts of wellness tragically conflicted with the indigenous embrace of body, mind and spirit as one.8. The effects of European incursions. How early European colonists viewed disability.9. The impact of racist ideologies. Tragic stories. The vicious tenets of scientific racism. Slavery.10. Categorizing disability. Understanding the new nation's quest to define good and "bad" citizens. Incompetent citizenship. "Dumb" residents. Legislation. The many different categories of disability and the factions and groups that form to combat societal indifferences .11. The consequences of war.12. There are some stories that will raise some eyebrows, "No woman, he warned, could simultaneously use 'a good brain' and a good reproductive system that serve the race." Thankfully, times have changed generally for the better.13. An exploration of the eugenics, oralist movements. Immigration restrictions and state compulsory-sterilization laws. "The belief that an immigrant was unfit to work justified exclusion, but so did the belief that an immigrant was likely to encounter discrimination because of disability." Some stories will make your jaws drop.14. The impact of industrialization.15. The period that led to activism among people with disabilities. The legislation that resulted from such activism. Education, opportunities.16. The impact of diseases, polio as an example.17. Overcoming architectural barriers through legislation.18. The struggle to overcome employment discrimination.19. Disability activism, disability pride and empowerment. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act.20. Links worked great.Negatives:1. My biggest complaint has to do with style versus substance. The book lacked passion or panache, it is clearly more informational than inspirational.2. A section of acronyms was warranted.3. A summary of laws enacted would have added value.4. An excellent notes section but no formal bibliography.5. This book is more an appetizer than the main entree but it's a very good appetizer indeed.In summary,

this is quite an educational book. As an engineer I have firsthand knowledge of dealing with productivity and instrumentation as it relates to human methods but my history on disability was sadly lacking. This book did a wonderful job of filling that void. This book caught my eye and I'm very pleased to have read it. My only major criticism and it's merely one of style than substance, is the lack of passion or panache. The book is definitely more informative than inspirational, so if you the reader are looking for a book that inspires a call for action this is not that type of book. Sticking to her professorial roots, Nielsen took the educational route and in doing so did accomplish the goal of enlightening the public on this seldom-covered topic. "The Disability History of the United States" fills a void of knowledge, I recommend it! Further suggestions: "A Journey Into the Deaf-World" by Harlan Lane, Robert Hoffmeister and Ben Bahan, "Miracle Boy Grows Up: How the Disability Rights Revolution Saved My Sanity" by Ben Mattlin, "No Pity : People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement" by Joseph P. Shapiro, "Reflections from a Different Journey : What Adults with Disabilities Wish All Parents Knew" by Stanley Klein and John Kemp, "From Disability to Possibility: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms" by Patrick Schwarz, "The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public (The History of Disability)" by Susan M. Schweik, "One Nation, Underprivileged: Why American Poverty Affects Us All" by Mark Robert Rank, and "Encyclopedia of American Disability History (3 Volume set)" by Susan Burch.

The book is interesting, I especially liked the beginning chapters, talking about disability among Native Americans...there was no such thing! If one person couldn't perform an activity, the tribe pitched in, accepting whatever it was he/she could contribute. The evolution in American history all the way to modern day is quite humbling, and at times shocking: epileptics were confined to mental hospitals? The only flaw, for me, was the tempo of the book changes dramatically from a very formal almost dissertation type of format to a more relaxed writing style, which was much more enjoyable to read. I wish it had been softened through out, dragged a bit in the middle chapters. Otherwise, still highly recommend this book. A real education.

It was a requirement for an introductory Disability course, but really - the read and stories told of people with disabilities are so intriguing and I've learned so much. I feel enlightened.

Even though I have lived with post polio since 1941, and consider myself well educated, this book taught me the position of those considered to be disabled throughout the history of our country. I was appalled to realize just how deep the cancer of prejudice and distrust grows among those who

make the rules. This well documented, thoughtful academic saga touched me in ways that I cannot describe. I remember in the 1960's trying to decide which was the most disturbing to family and acquaintances - being female or being on crutches. The answer was a toss-up...professionally it was the female thing while socially it seemed to be the crutch thing. At any rate, I would recommend this book to any literate professional who is truly interested in the development of our social structure - especially when including those who are different from ourselves.

Our reactions to different things are often a function of society and time. Think about modern views on age and family. That is why this is such an important book to read. It looks at the way we have viewed disabilities at different times in what is currently known as the US. In doing so it asks us to consider where our current beliefs about disabilities and disabled people come from and if they are truly accurate. I would like more about this topic as it has readers consider an important facet of our society that we tend to dismiss or not acknowledge. I am glad I read this.

I was interested in the subject matter of this book and having trouble finding a central source for this information. There was a limit to the amount of time I had to do original research. This book fills a much needed gap. While I was aware of some of the content there was other information which was new to me and was the result of a great deal of primary research by the author. This is also a well written book, which makes it a nice change of pace from some of the other work available in the field.

Nielsen has written a wonderful book for those within and without the disabled community. Any reader will be thoroughly enlightened regarding the extent and scope of disability discrimination, as well as the community's efforts to combat it. Some will certainly be challenged to reconsider any ableist notions they might hold, without having previously been aware of them. Highly recommended!

Not at all what I expected, but fascinating. Written for all audiences. Easily read in a weekend. Thought provoking, and well written. Not preachy or condescending. An excellent choice for book clubs! Reading level, middle school and up. Topics suitable for 14 yes and up.

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