

Disability: A Democratic Dilemma

PLSC 304/AMCULT 319/WGS 326

[Course Time]

[Location]

Professor: Ann K. Heffernan

Email: akheff@umich.edu

Office: Haven Hall 7632

Office Hours: By appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course considers the challenge presented by disability to the way we think about democratic inclusion in the United States. Put simply, what would it mean to achieve full inclusion for people with disabilities? Can we reconcile the demand for inclusion with the difference posed by disabilities that require more extensive support to realize their full potential? Is full inclusion possible for individuals with profound disabilities, and if so, what forms might it take? How does disability intersect with other categories of marginalization and oppression, such as race, gender, ethnicity, and class? And finally, how has our understanding of disability shifted in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic?

With these questions in view, we will begin by tracing the emergence of the concept of disability in the 18th and 19th centuries, and in particular its role in securing the boundaries of “normal,” able-bodied citizenship. Often used as a justification for exclusion, disability plays a prominent (if underappreciated) role in debates over slavery, immigration, reproduction, and the limits of state control. Focusing on the tension between equality and dependence, we will proceed to examine the ways in which the demand for inclusion stands at odds with the perception of disabled people as the proper objects of pity, charity, and care. Turning to the civil rights struggles of the mid-twentieth century, we will explore the evolution of disability rights as well as the limits of rights-based approaches to equality and integration. The final segment of the course looks to the future to ask how we might imagine disability and disability inclusion differently.

This course meets the Race and Ethnicity (R&E) requirement. Using disability as its primary lens, this course invites you to think critically about how notions of ability structure other categories of inequality and subordination, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and class. Rather than viewing disability and ability as discrete categories to be considered alongside or in addition to race and ethnicity, we will consider the ways that these forms of marginalization have become intertwined and co-constitutive. Lectures, readings, and assignments are designed to help you to identify and address these dynamics as well as to draw connections between contemporary manifestations of ableism, racism, and other forms of inequality and difference and their historical antecedents.

Readings include work in political theory, history, disability studies and feminist theory. While this course is not intended as an introduction to disability studies, it assumes no prior knowledge of the field.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify and define ableism and analyze its operation in a range of historical and contemporary contexts.

- Closely read a text, focusing on the careful reconstruction of authors' arguments. Close reading will be discussed and modelled in lecture before being developed in discussions and assignments.
- Address the intersection of disability and other categories of inequality and social exclusion.
- Consider the benefits and drawbacks of relying on civil rights as the primary vehicle for addressing inequality and oppression.
- Plan, write, and revise argumentative essays, employing complex, analytical, and evidence-based arguments.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING CRITERIA

Lecture Attendance and Participation 25%

I view this class as a collaborative enterprise grounded in engaged discussion and open debate. I understand participation to include not only comments and questions, but also the ability to actively listen to your classmates and thoughtfully and respectfully engage with their ideas. Each student is responsible for taking notes in 3 class sessions (these will be assigned in advance and discussed in the second class section).

Short Essay (3-4 pages), due Friday, October 23rd at 6pm 20%

Mid-Term Take-Home Exam (due Friday, October 4th at 6pm) 25%

Final Project (due date TBD) 30%

You will have a choice between writing a 6- to 8-page final paper or a creating a podcast on a topic of your choosing.

Extra Credit (10 points)

Students are invited to present (5-10 minutes) on a recent event/topic in the news and its connection to the issues discussed in the course. This does not need to be a formal presentation, but it should 1) explain the news item or event, and 2) make explicit connections to the assigned reading(s).

OTHER POLICIES AND INFORMATION:

Attendance: While complete attendance is encouraged, you may miss 3 sessions over the course of the semester. You do not need to provide a reason for your absence(s). 5 or more absences may result in possible failure of the course. That said, please reach out if you are struggling and please (please!) stay home if you feel ill.

Late Policy: You are allowed on 48-hour extension to be used at your discretion. You do not need to provide a reason, but please do let me know in advance. Late assignments will be graded down 1/3 of a letter grade per day late (an A- would become a B+, etc.).

Accessibility: If you have a physical, sensory, cognitive, or psychological disability and require accommodations, please let me know if I can do more to make the class (and class materials) more

accessible. You do not have to disclose your disability status in order to request accommodations from me. I do want to know about what kinds of accommodations will make our classroom a productive learning environment for you, but I also want you to know that disclosure is a choice. Disclosure isn't limited to disability status, either: it may come up with respect to past trauma, gender identity, sexuality, etc.

Formal requests for accommodations may be made by contacting the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) Office located at G664 Haven Hall. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined you will be issued a verified individual services accommodation (VISA) form. Please present this form to me at the beginning of the term. While I don't require you to have completed a formal request with the SSD Office, it can be helpful for accessing resources and accommodations (Screen-readable PDFs, for example).

Student Well-Being: Students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being (especially this year). These may include academic pressure and challenges associated with relationships, mental health, alcohol or other drugs, identities, finances, etc.

If you are experiencing any issues, seeking help is a courageous thing to do for yourself and those who care about you. If the source of your stressors is academic, please contact me so that we can find solutions together. For personal concerns, U-M offers many resources, some of which are listed at [Resources for Student Well-being](#) on the Well-being for U-M Students website. You can also search for additional resources on that website.

Academic Honesty and Integrity: The University of Michigan community functions best when its members treat one another with honesty, fairness, respect, and trust. The college promotes the assumption of personal responsibility and integrity, and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct. All cases of academic misconduct will be referred to the LSA Office of the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Education. Being found responsible for academic misconduct will usually result in a grade sanction, in addition to any sanction from the college. For more information, including examples of behaviors that are considered academic misconduct and potential sanctions, please see lsa.umich.edu/lsa/academics/academic-integrity.html.

Contacting me: I am here to be a resource for you. **Do** take advantage of my office hours (sign up [here](#)), and feel free to email me at any point with questions or concerns. I will try to reply to emails within 48 hours.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(All readings will be posted on Canvas under the “modules” tab. Please read in the order that they appear here and on Canvas)

R&E Annotation note: Where relevant, I have marked which of the three issues below are addressed in each lecture and reading.

- a. The meaning of race, ethnicity, and racism
- b. Racial and ethnic intolerance and resulting inequality as it occurs in the U.S. or elsewhere
- c. Comparisons of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, social class, gender identity and/or gender expression, ability/disability status, sexual orientation, or national origin

Monday, August 26th: Introduction

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture begins by introducing the concept of disability and the many ways it has been defined by policymakers, doctors, and disabled activists and scholars, both historically and in the present. Briefly addressing the status of disabled people in the United States (with data on employment, poverty, education, income, and integration) the bulk of the lecture will address the socially constructed and historically specific nature of disability. Using two recent examples—long COVID and rising rates of chronic illness—as entry points for thinking about disability’s porosity and variability, I will also address the intersection between disability and race and ethnicity, giving particular attention to the ways race and ethnicity have been defined relative to notions of ability and capacity. While intersectionality as a method and approach will be addressed more fully in later readings and lectures, I introduce it here both as a way of framing the course’s approach to disability and in preparation for the readings for the following class (Baynton’s “Disability as a Category of Inequality in American History”). I conclude by briefly considering what it might mean to engage with disability as a category of analysis, rather than as a characteristic of individuals. What possibilities might this open up? How does this shift students’ preconceived understandings of disability? How might it make disability more legible to disciplines like political science?

This lecture addresses R&E requirements B and C.

PART I: HISTORIES OF DISABILITY

Wednesday, August 28th: Locating Disability, Part 1

- Douglas C. Baynton, “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History,” in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, eds. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 33–57.

R&E Application Annotation: Taking up Douglas Baynton’s claim that “disability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it” (52), this lecture considers the utility of disability as a category of scholarly analysis. Tracing the ways that disability has been used to justify discrimination against women and other minority groups, Baynton offers a novel perspective on familiar historical debates over immigration, abolition, and women’s suffrage. This lecture will address, first, what it means to use disability (or race, or gender) as a

category of analysis; and second, the evidence that Baynton presents of the ways that disability “was called on to clarify and define who deserved, and who was deservedly excluded from, citizenship” (33). Together, we will discuss what qualities are attributes are often ascribed to “good” or “bad” citizenship, as well as the implications of Baynton’s argument for the present. Why were attributions of disability so rhetorically powerful in fights for and against inclusion? In what ways do these arguments persist in the present? While the bulk of the lecture will focus on how disability was used both to defend and contest slavery, immigration, and women’s suffrage, we will conclude by looking to more recent examples: Donald Trump’s claim that “Mexico...[is] not sending their best” people to the United States, and Canada’s use of a merit-based points system in evaluating candidates for immigration.

This lecture addresses R&E requirements A, B, and C.

Monday, September 2nd: No Class (Labor Day)

Wednesday, September 4th: The Body in/of the Archive I

- Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 26 (June 2008): 1-14.

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture challenges students to expand their understanding of what “counts” as a text about disability. Beginning with Sami Schalk and Jina Kim’s observation that “feminist-of-color approaches to disability, illness, and health do not always align with the language, approaches, and perspectives within mainstream disability studies and disability rights activism” (2020, p. 32), this lecture makes two broad interventions. Revisiting Baynton’s notion of disability as a category of analysis, we will first discuss what Hartman’s piece—which does not, on its surface, concern disability—is doing in a class on disability. Grappling with the violence of the archive, Hartman’s piece confronts what it means to tell a history woven out of the traces that are left behind—ship manifests, bills of sale, insurance records. How, for example, do we “do more than recount the violence” of enslavement (1998, p. 2)? In many ways, this parallels similar issues that confront historians of disability, who must often reconstruct disabled lives out of institutional records, legal cases, and medical files (here we will consider some examples of the ways that disabled people “appear” in the archive). But Hartman’s piece also points to the institution of slavery as itself disfiguring and disabling—indeed, in *Scenes of Subjection* (2022) she refers to the “force and disfigurement of slavery in the present” (xxix). As such, “Venus in Two Acts” offers a useful lens through which to discuss the formation (and limits) of the archive, as well as what it means to offer counter-histories that contest the terms of archival representation.

This lecture addresses R&E requirement B.

Monday, September 9th: The Body in/of the Archive II

- Marisa J. Fuentes, “Jane: Fugitivity, Space, and Structures of Control in Bridgetown,” and “Epilogue,” in *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); 13-45, 144-148.

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture will continue the discussion begun in the previous session over what counts as a text about disability. Like Hartman, Fuentes is

interested in “trace[ing] the distortions of enslaved women’s lives inherent in the archive” (1). Heavily influenced by Hartman but trained as a historian, Fuentes uses “archival fragments” to give an account of the “quotidian lives of enslaved women” in Barbados. The lecture will begin by raising two related questions. What happens when the archives available to us don’t include the voices of the people we wish to study? And how do we tell their story in a way that does justice to their experience without reinscribing the violence to which they were subject? In answering these questions, we will also consider how enslaved bodies appear in the archive—in this case, through Fuentes’ extended analysis of a fugitive slave advertisement for “Jane” who is described as having “country marks in [sic] her forehead and a fire brand on one of her breasts, likewise a large mark of her country behind her shoulder almost to the small of her back, and a [stab] of a knife in her neck” (13). Key here are the ways that enslaved bodies were marked, “violated” and “disfigured” by slavery (5). Indeed, disablement and injury were essential and inescapable aspects of slavery. We will also discuss how Fuentes reconstructs Jane’s story using newspaper archives, maps, and visitors’ accounts of Bridgetown in the 18th century. What do students make of this approach? How does it compare (or follow upon) Hartman’s “Venus in Two Acts?”

This lecture addresses R&E requirements A, B, and C.

Wednesday, September 11th: Spectacles of Disability

Content warning: both assigned articles contain graphic depictions of their subjects. The ethics of reprinting these images, even for the purposes of critique and analysis, is discussed in Samuels (and is an issue we will discuss further in class).

- Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “The Cultural Work of American Freak Shows, 1835-1940,” in *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (Columbia University Press, 1997), 55-80.
- Ellen Samuels, “Examining Millie and Christine McKoy: Where Enslavement and Enfreakment Meet,” *Signs* 37, no. 1 (2011): 51-81.

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture continues the discussion of how bodies—and abnormal or “disfigured” bodies, in particular—appear in the archive. Both the Garland-Thomson and Samuels pieces concern the 19th century “freak show” and the broader cultural fascination with “non-normative” and “extraordinary” bodies (Garland Thomson 1997). In this lecture we will discuss the freak show and “racialized enfreakment” (Samuels 2011, 57) as responses to rapid social, cultural, and economic change, drawing connections with the contemporaneous emergence of the idea of the “normal” and “average” citizen. We will then shift to a broader discussion of the ethics of engaging with this archive, which often consists of promotional images and stories, caricatures, and medical records. Here Samuel’s discussion of the McKoy’s case is especially useful. Conjoined twins born into slavery, Millie and Christine “authored” a promotional biography that was sold at their exhibitions (the booklet was likely written by their managers and former owners). Noting the “lack of unmediated source material,” Samuels grapples with how to tell the McKoy’s story without treating them as “pure victims” (Samuels 2011, 59). Together, we will discuss how power is represented in the archive—whose stories get recounted, whose voices are trusted—and our responsibilities to subjects (like the McKoys and Sarah Bartmann) whose appearance in the archive is the result of violence and oppression. “Reveal[ing] imperatives of agency and triumphs of subjectivity that have been largely overlooked,” Samuels engages

in an extended analysis of an 1871 photo of the twins, in which Millie is “positively glaring at the camera” (72). Choosing to only reproduce the part of the image that includes the twins’ face, Samuels provides a way into a broader discussion about race, disability, and the ethics of representation.

This lecture addresses R&E requirements A and C

Monday, September 16th: Slavery, the Laboring Body, and Disability

- Walter S. Johnson, “Reading Bodies and Making Race,” in *Soul by Soul: Life Inside an Antebellum Slave Market* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 135-161.
- Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy, “Unfree Labor and Industrial Capital: Fitness, Disability, and Worth,” in *Between Fitness and Death: Disability and Slavery in the Caribbean* (University of Illinois Press, 2020), 69-93.

R&E Application Annotation: Together, these pieces address what Johnson refers to as “the relation of slavery to race...[and] of the process of economic exploitation to the ideology of racial domination” (1999, 135). Crucial to this discussion is the emergence of the raced body as an index of productivity and a testament to the violence of slavery. Recalling the Baynton reading, Johnson and Hunt-Kennedy show how slavery, productivity, disfigurement, and disability became intertwined, producing a “set of ideas about slave character that was central to the medical and racial philosophy of the antebellum South” (Johnson 1999, 146) Johnson does not specifically address disability, but reading him alongside Hunt-Kennedy reveals the “debilitating nature of enslavement,” not as accidental, but as central to the practice’s persistence (Hunt-Kennedy 2020, 71). In our discussion we will pay particular attention to the relationship between race and disability and the paradox of a system that demands “physically and psychologically healthy workers” only to “weaken and debilitate the enslaved from the very moment of the seizure in sub-Saharan Africa” (Hunt-Kennedy 72). We will also consider how the value of disfigurement challenges conventional understandings of disability, which often frame disability as the inability to work.

This lecture addresses R&E requirements A and C

Wednesday, September 18th: Figuring the Good Worker/Citizen

- Judith Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Harvard University Press, 1991): 1-24, 63-101.

R&E Application Annotation: Using excerpts from Shklar’s *American Citizenship*, this lecture engages more fully with the relationship between work, race, and citizenship in the United States. Highlighting the tension between a professed commitment to equality and the persistence of profound social, economic, and racial inequality, Shklar looks to its origin in the institution of chattel slavery, calling attention to the legacies of slavery in the present. On this view, the veneration of work and the acceptance of work’s drudgery cannot be understood apart from its contrast (both real and imagined) with enslavement. Looking to the political present, Shklar’s text raises two questions: First, how we ought to grapple with the enduring significance of enslavement; and second, what citizenship means apart from the ability to “contribute” in some way to the polity. Can we imagine a world in which political belonging is not conditional on productive capacity? What might this look like? How does disability challenge or contribute to Shklar’s analysis?

This lecture addresses R&E requirements B and C

Monday, September 23rd: Disability, Immigration, and Race Suicide

- Jay Timothy Dolmage, “Disabled Upon Arrival: The Rhetorical Construction of Disability and Race at Ellis Island,” *Cultural Critique* 77 (Winter 2011): 24-69.
- In class: E. H. Mullan, “Mental Examination of Immigrants: Administration and Line Inspection at Ellis Island,” *Public Health Reports* 32, no. 20 (May 18, 1917), 733-746.

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture examines the intersection of race, ethnicity, ability, and citizenship using Dolmage’s analysis of U.S. immigration in the early 20th century. Predating the more draconian restrictions of the 1920s, Dolmage shows how earlier efforts to curtail immigration relied on racialized assumptions about immigrants’ cognitive and physical fitness. Class discussion will focus, first, on what a disability lens offers to the history of immigration. How does Dolmage’s account—and in particular his focus on “the practices of visualizing the body” (26) during this period—shift the way we think about immigration in the past as well as the present? Where and how do ideas of the normal and the abnormal appear in contemporary debates over immigration? We will also spend a portion of the class analyzing excerpts from E. H. Mullan’s “Mental Examination of Immigrants: Administration and Line Inspection at Ellis Island,” (1917) with Dolmage’s text as a guide.

This lecture addresses R&E requirements B and C

Wednesday, September 25th: Eugenics, Social Control, and Social Protection I

- Dorothy Roberts, “The Dark Side of Birth Control,” in *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (Vintage Books, 2016): 56-103.
- In class: Linda Villarosa, “The Long Shadow of Eugenics in America,” *New York Times*, June 8, 2022.

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture introduces students to the eugenics movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While the concept of eugenics will have been introduced in the previous class’s readings, the focus here will be on the complex interaction between notions of “racial betterment,” scientific expertise, women’s liberation, and coercive reproductive policies. Why were Progressive Era reformers and politicians so concerned with heredity (59)? What problems were eugenic policies—both positive and negative—intended to remedy? How did fears of social degeneracy intersect with broader concerns about immigration, economic inequality, and black political advancement? How should we think about the links between the birth control movement and eugenics? And finally, what legacies of the eugenics movement remain in the present. Although students will have been introduced to *Buck v. Bell* in Roberts’s text, I will end the lecture with a brief discussion of how to read Supreme Court decisions (in preparation for reading Holmes’s opinion).

This lecture addresses R&E requirements B and C

Monday, September 30th: Eugenics, Social Control, and Social Protection II

- *Buck v. Bell*, 274 U.S. 200 (1927)

- Eli Clare, "Yearning Toward Carrie Buck," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 3 (2014): 335-344.

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture will focus on the *Buck v. Bell* Supreme Court decision from 1927. Permitting the forcible sterilization of so-called "defective persons," it illustrates both the widespread legitimacy of eugenic beliefs and the perception that disabled people do not deserve the same protection of the laws granted to other citizens. Using Clare's text, we will consider why contemporary analyses have expended so much energy disproving Carrie's diagnosis of feeble-mindedness, as if her not having a disability makes her sterilization more egregious. Thinking back to the Roberts' reading, we will also address the longer legacies of legal sterilization, and particularly its impact on nonwhite, poor, and imprisoned populations. Students will be divided into groups to discuss Villarosa's "The Long Shadow of Eugenics in America," about Minnie Lee and Mary Alice Relf, two black girls who were sterilized without their consent in 1973. Interviewed by Villarosa in 2020, they provide a reminder of just how recent this history is.

This lecture addresses R&E requirements B and C

Wednesday, October 2nd: Midterm Exam distributed, no lecture ***Exam is due Friday, October 4th at 6pm***

PART II: IMAGINING EQUALITY

Monday, October 7th: Equality of What? Part I

- Elizabeth S. Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109, no. 2 (January 1999): 287-337.

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture will introduce a new section of the course. Raising the question of how we ought to remedy the inequalities introduced in earlier readings and lectures, we will begin by considering what equality means. Here, Elizabeth Anderson's landmark "What Is the Point of Equality," is especially helpful, offering a clear and concise account of democratic equality, as well as a critique of dominant philosophical approaches to inequality. Lambasting her colleagues for their disregard for "inequalities of race, gender, class, and caste" (288), Anderson highlights the difficulty of defining and achieving equality. Although Anderson only mentions disability in passing, her text offers a useful jumping off point for thinking about what equality would mean for individuals with more severe physical and cognitive disabilities. Here we will also discuss how disability equality intersects with other efforts to secure equality on behalf of racial and sexual minorities.

This lecture addresses R&E requirements B and C

Wednesday, October 9th: Equality of What? Part II

- Anita Silvers, "Formal Justice," in *Disability, Difference, Discrimination: Perspectives on Justice in Bioethics and Public Policy*, eds. Anita Silvers, David Wasserman, and Mary B. Mahowald (Roman and Littlefield, 1998), 13-53, 132-145.

R&E Application Annotation: Continuing the discussion begun in the previous session, this lecture will grapple with the question of what equality looks like for people with disabilities. Focusing on the challenge disability “pose[s] for democratic society,” Silvers pushes beyond the usual focus on physical accessibility to address the widespread “ambivalence about whether people with disabilities should assume ordinary roles or be confined to socially protected ones” (19). As she observes, most “public and private special services programs for people with disabilities are aimed at individuals whose participation is feared to disrupt the efficiency of our ordinary transactions” (21). Doing away with special, segregated services like paratransit and sheltered workshops would require radical changes to transportation infrastructure and the way we understand employment. In discussing these issues, we will also discuss how disability differs from other forms of inequality (race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.). Why are disability rights often treated as “special” privileges? What can disability teach us about rights as a remedy for inequality?

This lecture addresses R&E requirement C

Monday, October 14th: No Class (Fall Break)

Wednesday, October 16th: Citizenship, Membership, and Belonging

- Alison Carey, *On the Margins of Citizenship: Intellectual Disability and Civil Rights in Twentieth-Century America* (Temple University Press, 2009): 13-35.
- In Class: Beth A. Ferri and David J. Connor, “Tools of Exclusion: Race, Disability, and (Re)segregated Education,” *Teachers College Record* 107, no. 3 (2005): 453-474.

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture addresses the challenges presented by intellectual disabilities for the way we understand, practice, and theorize citizenship. As Carey notes, while “work on citizenship and disability rights has burgeoned recently” (2009, p. 14), this work has not meaningfully addressed intellectual disability. Rather than focusing on disabilities that least challenge the rationality and autonomy thought to be essential requirements for citizenship, Carey’s text presses students to think about the unstated presumptions that undergird their notion of rights and citizenship. Beginning with Carey’s assertion that “the politics of rights are principally centered on attempts to create a particular pattern of relationships within society” (2009, p. 27) we will discuss what kinds of relationships are encouraged (or discouraged) by the extension (or denial) of rights. Building upon Carey’s observation that “rights can both empower individuals with intellectual disabilities and bring them into systems of regulation and control” (2009, p. 31), we will conclude by considering how the right to education for disabled children has been used as a tool of racial (re)segregation.

This lecture addresses R&E requirement C

Short essay due Friday, October 18th at 6pm

PART III: DISABILITY RIGHTS

Monday, October 21st: Deinstitutionalization and Independent Living

- Doris Zames Fleischer and Frieda Zames, “Deinstitutionalization and Independent Living,” in *Disability Rights: From Charity to Confrontation* (Temple University Press, 2011): 33-48.
- Harriet McBryde Johnson, “The Disability Gulag,” *The New York Times Magazine*

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture will introduce students to the American disability rights movement. Beginning with the deinstitutionalization and independent living movements of the 60s and 70s, we will address the dominance of institutionalization and segregation as mid-century “solutions” to the problem of disability. Together we will consider why these movements arose when they did and how they challenged dominant assumptions about people with disabilities.

This lecture addresses R&E requirement C

Wednesday, October 23rd: Crip Camp

- Jim LeBrecht and Nicole Newnham. *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution*. Netflix, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFS8SpwioZ4> (available for free on YouTube, with captions and audio description)
- Resources: [Section 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture will focus on a discussion of *Crip Camp*, a 2020 documentary about a summer camp for disabled teens, many of whom went on to be active in the disability rights movement and the 1977 Section 504 sit-in in San Francisco. Succeeding in pressuring the Carter Administration to sign the 504 regulations allowing the law to go into effect, the sit-in signaled the emergence of a more militant and organized rights movement. While this lecture will not explicitly address race, we will discuss the involvement of the Black Panther Party, the Butterfly Brigade, the United Farm Workers, and other labor unions and cross-movement organizing more broadly.

This lecture addresses R&E requirement C

Monday, October 28th: Revisiting the Section 504 Sit-In

- Susan Schweik, “Lomax’s Matrix: Disability, Solidarity, and the Black Power of 504,” *DSQ: Disability Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2011).

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture will focus on how we tell the story of the early disability rights movement, with a particular emphasis on the involvement of the Black Panther Party in the 504 sit-in. Using Schweik’s text, we will consider how “prior disability activism within...[the BPP] laid the groundwork for the moment of alliance remembered as ‘504.’” Why, despite the history of disability activism within the BPP, did this alliance not persist beyond the 504? How did the Independent Living Movement’s emphasis on independence and opposition to charity foreclose alliances that might have been made with movements for racial and economic justice like the National Welfare Rights Organization? What lessons might we draw for the political present?

This lecture addresses R&E requirement C

Wednesday, October 30th: The Americans with Disabilities Act

- Doris Zames Fleischer and Frieda Zames, “The Americans with Disabilities Act” in *Disability Rights: From Charity to Confrontation* (Temple University Press, 2011): 88-109.
- In class: [Video of the Signing of the ADA on July 26th, 1990.](#)

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture will not explicitly address race and ethnicity, although we will discuss the analogies often made between the Civil Rights Act of 1966 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). While it is true that the ADA—and Section 504 before it—is modelled on the Civil Rights Act, its passage occurred in a very different political climate. Sold to the business community and more conservative lawmakers as a way to move disabled people off welfare and into the workforce, it is symptomatic of the rightward shift that culminated in the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996. Together, we will examine the limits of this “cost-benefit” approach to civil rights and the progress achieved in the years since the ADA’s passage.

This lecture addresses R&E requirement C

PART IV: RIGHTS AND LIMITS

Monday, November 4th: Rights and the Dilemma(s) of Difference

- Martha Minow, *Making All the Difference: Inclusion, Exclusion, and American Law* (Cornell University Press, 1990); 1-11, 19-48.

R&E Application Annotation: Shifting away from a focus on the disability rights movement, this lecture presses students to consider the limits of civil rights statutes for addressing inequality and discrimination. Highlighting the “way[s] legal analysis simplifies the world” (2), Minow’s text both recognizes the necessity of legal remedies and their tendency to rely on “categories, conceived as bounded rather than open-ended or determined through interaction with events” (1990, 8). This is especially true in the case of race and disability. Expanding upon Minow’s analysis of *Mill v. Board of Education* (concerning bilingual education) and *PARC v. Pennsylvania* (concerning the right of intellectually and physically disabled children to a public education) we will explore the limits of legal reasoning and the tension—particularly apparent in civil rights law—“between similar and special treatment” (21). What are the benefits and limitations of legal recognition? How might we better navigate the paradoxes that Minow highlights? What do we make of efforts to mainstream disabled children, on the one hand, and calls for bilingual education programs or community control of education, on the other? As Minow astutely observes, “neither separation nor integration can eradicate the meaning of difference so long as the majority locates difference in a minority group that does not fit the world designed for the majority” (25).

This lecture addresses R&E requirement C

Wednesday, November 6th:

- Lezlie Frye, “Crippling the ‘Crack Baby’ Epidemic: A Feminist Disability Genealogy of Welfare Reform,” *Feminist Formations* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2022): pp. 69-98.
- In class: Priscilla van Tassel, “Schools Trying to Cope With ‘Crack Babies,’” *New York Times*, January 5, 1992.

- In class: Catherine Saint Louis, “Rise in Infant Drug Dependence Is Felt Most in Rural Areas,” *New York Times*, December 12, 2016.

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture will use disability as a lens through which to view the so-called “crack baby epidemic” of the 80s and 90s. “Tak[ing] account of the history of welfare reform through and against the contemporaneous history of US disability rights and its crucial legislative victories,” Frye shows how the figure of the crack baby was deployed to “determine the borders of and access to special education” (70, 71). Looking to what Frye refers to as the “coproduction of Blackness and disability” (76), we will spend a portion of the class comparing media coverage of the epidemic with more recent accounts of babies born addicted to oxycodone. Implicitly and explicitly racialized, the crack baby epidemic stands in sharp contrast to the opioid epidemic, which is often framed as a problem affecting white, rural problem.

This lecture addresses R&E requirements B and C

Monday, November 11th: Rights and Limits

- Jeffrey R. Dudas, “In the Name of Equal Rights: ‘Special’ Rights and the Politics of Resentment in Post-Civil Rights America,” *Law & Society Review* 39, no. 4 (2005): 723-758.

R&E Application Annotation: Why are minority rights so often framed as “special rights”? What does “special” mean in this context, and how is it used to discredit the demands of historically marginalized peoples? Using Dudas’s text as a jumping off point, we will consider how “resentment over the gains of historically powerless Americans” prompted conservative backlash and clarified a particular vision of American democracy. “Fortifying particular institutional [and social] configurations,” the allegation that minority rights are special or exceptional places these groups on the defensive, forcing them to justify their presence in the American polity. In an effort to expand Dudas’s analysis beyond his focus on treaty rights in the Pacific Northwest, we will consider two examples: *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* and recent debates over the limits of inclusive education.

This lecture addresses R&E requirements B and C

Wednesday, November 13th: Fear of the Disability Con

- Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword in the U.S. Welfare State,” *Signs* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 309-336.
- In class: Terrence McCoy, “Disabled or Just Desperate?” *Washington Post*, March 30, 2017.
- In class: Alice Wong, “My Medicaid, My Life,” *The New York Times*, May 3, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/03/opinion/my-medicaid-my-life.html>

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture will consider why dependency—and especially welfare dependency—is so condemned within American political discourse. Looking to the historical meanings of dependency, Fraser and Gordon show how the term became one of moral disapprobation. Focusing on the racialization and pathologization of dependency (embodied in the figure of the “welfare queen”), we will then turn to recent controversies surrounding Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Income and

accusations of disability fraud. Where earlier disability activists often framed rights as a way out of dependency, Wong's piece offers a useful rebuttal, pushing students to imagine a world in which inclusion is not conditional on one's contributions (often monetary) to the polity.

This lecture addresses R&E requirements B and C.

PART V: NEW DIRECTIONS

Monday, November 18th: Disability in Public

- Bess Williamson, "Introduction" and "From Accessible to Universal" in *Accessible America: A History of Disability and Design* (New York: NYU Press, 2019); 1-16, 147-184.
- In class: clips from

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture introduces the final segment of the course, which looks to future directions in disability organizing and activism. Shifting our focus from disabled people to the natural and built world, we will pay particular attention to what kinds of relationships—romantic, political, economic, associational—are encouraged or foreclosed through the "construction of everyday spaces and things" (3). The emphasis in this and subsequent lectures is on getting students to notice how aspects of their environment—from their classrooms to their dorm rooms—facilitate certain modes of being in the world. Departing from the usual focus on ramps, curb cuts, and other "icons" of accessible design, we will look instead to the "broader practices of planning and making the material world"—from the Cuisinart food processor to the Ed Roberts Campus in Berkeley, California—that have facilitated disability inclusion and participation.

Wednesday, November 20th: The Right to Live in the World

- Sara Hendren, "Who is the Built World For?" and "Limb," in *What Can a Body Do? How We Meet the Built World* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2020), 3-64.
- Mia Mingus, "Access Intimacy: The Missing Link," *Leaving Evidence* (blog), February 12, 2011, <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/05/05/access-intimacy-the-missing-link/>
- Assignment: Please come to class prepared to discuss an object, action, or relationship that facilitates your movement through the world (this will be clarified in the previous lecture)

R&E Application Annotation: Continuing our discussion of the themes introduced in the previous session, this lecture will begin by dividing students into small groups to share the objects, actions, or experiences that facilitate their movement through the world (see assignment above). The emphasis here is on getting students to expand their understanding of design beyond baseline accessibility. These objects may seem mundane or insignificant—for example, I used to go to the UMMA Café because they were one of the few coffee shops that hadn't switched to the larger-mouthed cold iced drink lids (which I can't use because of my balance). This may seem tiny (and in many ways, it is) but it meant that I could go for coffee and carry it back to my office without 1.) spilling it, or 2.) needing the help of a friend or colleague. Together will then explore how attention to the "shape of the world—buildings and streets but also institutions, cultural organizations, centers of power" shifts our "sense of what a body does or does not do, how it moves and organizes its world" (Hendren 2020, p.

15). Although Hendren and Mingus are focused on disability, we will extend their analyses to race, ethnicity, and gender.

This lecture addresses R&E requirement C

Monday, November 25th: Disability Justice and Disability Studies I

- Sami Schalk and Jina B. Kim, “Integrating Race, Transforming Feminist Disability Studies,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 46, no. 1 (Fall 2020): 31–55.

R&E Application Annotation: The beginning of this lecture will provide an overview of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” first published in the *NWSA Journal* in 2002. Part review and part manifesto, Garland-Thomson’s piece highlights the significance of feminist theory for disability studies (and vice versa). But it is also illustrative of disability studies’ tendency to ignore or overlook race. And yet as Schalk and Kim point out, feminists of color have a long history of writing about disability, even if the scholarship they produce doesn’t always “align with the language, approaches, and perspectives within mainstream disability studies and disability rights activism” (32). Examining some of the examples offered by Schalk and Kim in greater detail, we will discuss future avenues for collaboration, critique, and transformation. As Schalk and Kim persuasively argue: “A feminist-of-color disability analysis aims not to be additive—simply layering disability on top of a laundry list of identities—but to demonstrate how disability is in fact central to the gendered and sexual management of women and queers of color” (38).

This lecture addresses R&E requirement C

Wednesday, November 28th: No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Monday, December 2nd: Disability Justice and Disability Studies II

- “10 Principles of Disability Justice,” *Sins Invalid*, <https://tinyurl.com/DJ10Principles>.
- Derecka Purnell, “Police Violence is a Disability Justice Issue,” *Boston Review*, September 29, 2021.
- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), selections.

R&E Application Annotation: This lecture will introduce students to the disability justice framework. Responding to the elisions and exclusions of the disability rights movement, the disability justice framework adopts an intersectional and collective approach to disability liberation. “Liftin up, listening to, reading, following, and highlighting the perspectives of those who are most impacted by the systems...[they are] fighting against,” disability justice is both less enamored with rights-based solutions and more committed to cross-movement solidarity. Turning to Purnell’s article, we will explore what a disability justice framework can offer to ongoing debates surrounding police violence and abuse.

This lecture addresses R&E requirement C.

Wednesday, December 4th: Slow Death and Toxic Harm

- Sunaura Taylor, *Disabled Ecologies: Lessons from a Wounded Desert* (University of California Press, 2024), selections.

- s. e. Smith, “When Disability Is a Toxic Legacy,” *Catapult*, April 23, 2019.
<https://catapult.co/stories/when-disability-is-a-toxic-legacy-se-smith>.

R&E Application Annotation: Although I can’t speak to the specifics of Taylor’s highly anticipated book (it’s scheduled for release in May 2024), this lecture will again challenge students to go beyond commonly accepted understandings of disability. In particular, we will focus on toxic harm as both a cause of disability and a product of environmental racism and exclusion. Also important here is the shifting nature of disability—from conditions with clear (or relatively clear) biological, physical, or behavioral markers (like cerebral palsy or epilepsy) to lead poisoning, which is neither easily diagnosable nor predictable. We will conclude by revisiting the necessity of thinking of disability, race, and class together—not as distinct categories, but rather as overlapping axes of oppression.

This lecture addresses R&E requirement B and C.

Monday, December 9th: Wrap-up

- Ari Ne’eman, “What if Disability Rights Were for Everyone?” *New York Times*, October 1, 2021.