



A Disability History of the United States (ReVisioning American History)

By Kim E. Nielsen

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A Disability History of the United States (ReVisioning American History) By Kim E. Nielsen

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.

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Editorial Review

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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

Review

“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. Disability, Nielsen reminds us, is beautifully and inextricably entangled with all the other forces that shape identities and communities. This remarkable ‘peoples’ 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*

About the Author

The author of three books, including two on Helen Keller and one on Anne Sullivan Macy, **Kim E. Nielsen** is a professor of history and women's studies at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. She lives in Green Bay.

Users Review

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