

THE DISABILITY HISTORY ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Fall 2007
Volume 3, Issue 2

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I'm pleased to announce that in May 2007 DHA officially became a nonprofit corporation in the state of California! In addition to allowing me to claim the exalted title of "CEO," this means that we're well on the way to legitimacy, and can now turn from laying the foundation to building the house. The next two years should be more interesting for members as we launch book and article prizes, work on a higher profile within the AHA, and do outreach abroad. To start, DHA is co-sponsoring North America's first disability history conference in summer 2008 at San Francisco State University. It is a credit to the field that the conference has drawn proposals from across the English-speaking world.

Over the past nine months I have been working closely with the leaders of the AHA to establish a task-force on disability issues. At its June 2007 meeting, the governing council authorized funding for a committee that will consist of two DHA members and three from the Professional Division. We will meet over the next three years to make recommendations for the AHA to follow in changing the mood of the profession. I confess to glazing over whenever I hear the words "task" and "force" together, since usually the two terms contradict rather than complement one another; too often task forces put in hours of work that ultimately lead nowhere beyond lip service. But Anthony Grafton, the current head of the Division, assures me that these committees actually have some clout in the organization. Over the next couple years we will be soliciting member input about what you think would improve the history profession.

In other news, DHA will be updating its website and adding new features. At our recent meeting the DHA Board discussed creating sections where members could post syllabi and provide photographs and other materials for use in the classroom. As part of the redesign, we also plan to incorporate a way for members to pay dues online using Paypal. This will make it easier for people outside of the United States to join. We invite members to offer feedback about what features they would like to have included. We will, of course, be particularly mindful of access for screen readers and other assistive technologies. Since the website, like the organization, is a work in progress, we depend upon you to let us know how we're doing.

If you would like to help out with web improvements, please contact Audra Jennings, our web person at: jennings.160@osu.edu. We are especially interested in finding websites that you think would serve as good models, either because of their design, their content, their mood, their ease of use, whatever. And if you have suggestions for features you'd like to see on the site, please let her know at your earliest convenience, since we're already previewing candidates for redesign.

The DHA Board continues to feel strongly about having an organization that is international in scope. Our first formal step in this direction was to appoint Dr. Wendy Gagen to the Board. An

energetic promoter of disability history in the UK, she brings an impressive background of research and teaching to our ranks. (See her profile below.)

Periodically, we will be looking for specific skills and input from members. Anyone interested in serving the organization should feel free to contact me. And your contributions to this Newsletter are always welcome.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME

At last year's spring meeting, the DHA Board voted to handle membership dues on a calendar year basis. This means that it's that time of year! You will be receiving an email shortly from our Treasurer, Lee Pennington explaining how to renew. Our dues are small, but your contribution helps lay the groundwork for our efforts to promote an exciting new scholarly field. The more members we have, the stronger the case we can make to the profession and the discipline. A growing membership base will also help our fund-raising committee make the case to donors for our book and article prizes. If you've been a lurker (or, more likely, if you know one, since lurkers usually skip over this part), please succumb to guilt just this once, and join!

This is an important and vital time for our organization, and I thank everyone for your continuing support and encouragement. It means more than you can ever know!

Sincerely,
Catherine Kudlick
President, and Editor-Provocateur
cjkudlick@ucdavis.edu

IN THIS ISSUE

This Fall 2007 edition of the newsletter offers a focus on teaching disability history in the US. Not only do we have a number of syllabi, but the faculty members who have written them offer explanations for their choice of materials and comments about experiences in the classroom.

In addition, we have a section on three recent books that offer new perspectives on disability history. Susan Burch and Hannah Joyner have just published *Unspeakable: the Story of Junius Wilson* with University of North Carolina Press. Meanwhile Carole Poore has a new book, *Disability in Twentieth-Century Germany* out in the "Corporealities" Series from University of Michigan Press. Finally, Douglas Baynton offers a meditation on Kenny Fries's *The History of My Shoes*, a creative nonfiction work that interweaves personal history with discussions of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

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There will be a number of sessions devoted to Disability History at this year’s American Historical Association meeting in Washington, DC (see <http://dha.osu.edu/news/aha08.html> for a

list of AHA sessions and/or papers on Disability History). I am especially pleased to be chairing a panel on disability in the Middle East; it is terrific to watch the field expand beyond its focus on recent America and western Europe. At the same time, interesting work continues to come out in these fields, as will be evident in the section on books below.

There will also be a follow-up to last year's Open Forum on Disability Issues hosted by Anthony Grafton of the AHA's Professional Division on Friday, January 4, 4:45-6:00 p.m. in the Marriott, McKinley room. We are in the process of determining the content. If you're in DC please make every effort to attend this discussion—it is the time when we can make a public case to the AHA at large that we are committed to changing the profession. Anyone who has ideas for things they want brought up, be sure to let any member of the board know soon. Most important (!) there will be the second annual DHA Party, which was a huge success last year. It will likely be in Cathy Kudlick's room at the Marriott right after the Forum. Stay tuned for details.

MEET WENDY GAGEN, NEW DHA BOARD MEMBER

My work on disability history sprang from an interest in the relationship between gender and corporeality. More specifically, whilst at the University of Essex in the UK, I wanted to explore masculinity and the male body during the First World War in Britain. In this case I saw disability as a lens through which to understand the relationships we have with our bodies. In understanding the narratives surrounding gender and corporeality via the state and individual experience, I wanted to ask- What impact did war have on doctor-patient relations; how did art interact with medical discourses of the body; what factors shaped the construction of gender and disability, and how was rehabilitation constructed in a period of upheaval? Some of these discussions can be found in 'Remastering the Body, Renegotiating Gender: Physical Disability and Masculinity during the First World War, the Case of J. B. Middlebrook', *European Review of History* (December 2007).

Continuing to utilise disability as a lens through which to understand the past, I have begun to explore disability and bioethics at the Peninsula Medical School in the UK, where I have helped set up the Disability History Group. This research has focused upon prenatal screening and treatment for spina bifida and the way in which ethical issues and disablement was constructed within a particular period. (See, 'Ethics, Justification, and the Prevention of Spina Bifida', *Journal of Medical Ethics* September 2007 (33), 501-507, co-written with Dr Jeffrey Bishop). By combining ethics and history, I think more searching questions can be asked about the relationship between medicine and disability and the impact of wider political and socioeconomic factors that go to shape medical practice and the medical model. Such questions have always influenced my teaching which has recently brought together history and contemporary medical practice through teaching medical students at the Peninsula Medical School.

Wendy Gagen
Peninsula Medical School, UK
wendy.gagen@pms.ac.uk

NEWS FROM BEYOND NORTH AMERICA

UNITED KINGDOM

(provided by Julie Anderson, University of Manchester, UK)

Inspired by Anne Borsay, a leading disability scholar in the UK, the Disability History Group (DHG) was formed under the auspices of the Society for the Social History of Medicine. Its goal is to broaden the scope of disability history in the UK. It delivers fresh and dynamic perspectives on the way disability has been used to legitimate and understand norms, social relations, inequality, and oppression. The Group's inaugural meeting and conference was held June 28-29 2007 at the Knowledge Spa at the Peninsula Medical School in Truro, Cornwall. Organised and hosted by DHG Committee member Wendy Gagen, *Reassessing Disability: New Approaches to Disability History* examined the practise of disability history, especially in the UK. We were indeed fortunate to have two leading disability scholars from the United States, Paul Longmore and David Serlin to provide the conference with insights into American disability history, as a contrast. More conferences are planned as well as a programme of workshops. In 2008 two workshops will be organised. Called 'Sight' and 'Sound' they are planned for June and September and will both be held at the University of Manchester. For details please contact Neil Pemberton: neil.pemberton@manchester.ac.uk or Julie Anderson: julie.anderson@manchester.ac.uk.

A conference was just held at the University of Swansea in October 2007. Hosted by Anne Borsay and Pamela Dale, "Children, Disability and Community Care" evaluated the role of specialised care for disabled children and adults and examined a wide range of subjects and issues including institutionalisation, child abuse and the voluntary sector.

The December 2007 publication of the *European Review of History* is a special edited issue focusing on disability. Edited by Ana Carden-Coyne and Julie Anderson, the *Review* contains a selection of papers from the 2005 conference *Enabling the Past: New Perspectives in the History of Disability*. For details see: <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/13507486.asp>.

For information about the DHG contact Wendy Gagen wendy.gagen@pms.ac.uk or Julie Anderson julie.anderson@manchester.ac.uk.

THE GERMAN LANDS

(provided by Carol Poore, Brown University, USA)

[Editor's Note: in Spring 2006 *Disability Studies Quarterly (DSQ)* devoted a special theme issue to Germany and disability that can be found at: http://www.dsq_sds.org/2006_spring_toc.html]

There is a huge amount going on now in Germany (and Austria and Switzerland, too) with respect to developing disability studies. Below are a few of the most important initiatives/websites.

The best place to start is with the International Research Project on Disability Studies organized by Professor Anne Waldschmidt at the University of Cologne. This web site contains links to many of the most important disability studies initiatives located throughout the German-speaking countries and also contains information in English.

http://idis.uni_koeln.de/.

Furthermore, the Working Group Disability Studies in Germany brings together scholars from all over Germany: <http://www.disabilitystudies.de/>.

Another important web site is:

http://www.disability_studies_deutschland.de/.

The Institut Mensch, Ethik und Wissenschaft is concerned with bioethical issues from a disability studies/rights perspective and has a web site in English:

<http://imew.de/>.

Transkript Verlag has begun publishing a Disability Studies book series:

http://www.transkript_verlag.de/ts641/ts641.htm.

bidok is a digital full text library of disability studies/disability rights publications.

<http://bidok.uibk.ac.at/>.

INTERNATIONAL STANDING CONFERENCE ON THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION (ISCHE)

(presented by Cathy Kudlick)

In July 2007 the ISCHE held its annual meeting at the University of Hamburg, Germany, where the theme was "Children at Risk," and where I presented as a keynote speaker. The meeting attracted more than 200 people from 35 countries around the world. I was impressed not only by the warmth and intellectual openness of many participants, but also by the many overlaps between this group's interests and those of us doing disability history. Their next conference will be July 2008 in Newark, NJ (USA), and future conferences are planned for the Netherlands

and beyond. For more information, visit: <http://www.inrp.fr/she/ische/>.

TEACHING DISABILITY HISTORY IN THE CONTEMPORARY UNITED STATES

[Editor's Note: Below several scholars discuss their experiences in teaching a variety of courses that introduce students to disability history. In the future, I am eager to present courses for other times and places. The DHA will also be launching a syllabus pool that will contain annotated copies of syllabi as well as any relevant discussions. Please feel free to contribute anything you feel might be useful.]

“U.S. DISABILITY HISTORY” (ONLINE COURSE FOR GALLAUDET UNIVERSITY)

PENNY RICHARDS, RESEARCH SCHOLAR, UCLA TURLEY2@EARTHLINK.NET

Because I don't spend enough time online already (ha!), I'm teaching a US disability history course, for Gallaudet University this fall. I'm attaching the schedule of readings, but what's cool about teaching online—besides the very relaxed dress code, and the fact that I can hold office hours at 5am or midnight, as I please—is the wealth of online resources so close at hand: we've been mining the Image Archive on the American Eugenics Movement, for example (<http://www.eugenicsarchive.org>).

We're half-way through the course as I type this, and so far so good, I think.

A few notes about the selection of readings: The four students who are taking this course have mostly already taken Brian Greenwald's US Deaf History course, so I didn't choose many readings that might overlap with that. I would have liked to use more articles from state historical journals, but they're less often in article databases that the library can easily link for online courses (a few we scanned from my paper copies to include). There's a bit more emphasis on the history of cognitive disability, family life, and women's histories of disability here than I've seen in some syllabi, just reflecting my own interests. And finally, I pulled a lot of these readings from the monthly bibliographies I compile for H-Disability, so keep submitting cites to that, everyone, please!

HIS 735-OL1/PST 260-OL1
Gallaudet University Fall 2007
US Disability History
Penny L. Richards

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

NOTE: NDH=*New Disability History* (Longmore & Umansky)—this is an assigned text, so those readings don't need to be linked or reserved or copied

1. August 27-September 2 Introduction, overview

Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, "Introduction: Disability History: From Margins to Mainstream," in NDH (1-29).

Douglas C. Baynton, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History," in NDH (33-57).

Elizabeth Bredberg, "Writing Disability History: Problems, Perspectives, and Sources," *Disability & Society* 19(2)(1999): 189-201.

Catherine J. Kudlick, "Disability History: Why We Need Another 'Other'," *American Historical Review* 108(June 2003): 763-793.

2. September 3-9 Early America to 1825

Parnel Wickham, "Conceptions of Idiocy in Colonial Massachusetts," *Journal of Social History* 35(4)(2002): 935-954.

Lawrence B. Goodheart, "The Distinction between Witchcraft and Madness in Colonial Connecticut," *History of Psychiatry* 13(4)(2002): 433-444.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Derangement in the Family: The Story of Mary Sewall, 1824-25," *Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings* 15(1990): 168-184.

Penny L. Richards, and George H. S. Singer, "'To Draw Out the Effort of his Mind': Educating a Child with Mental Retardation in the Early-Nineteenth-Century South," *Journal of Special Education* 31(4) (Winter 1998): 443-466.

3. September 10-16 Mid-Nineteenth Century: Institutions

James F. Gardner, "The Era of Optimism, 1850-1870: A Preliminary Appraisal," *Mental Retardation* 31(April 1993): 89-95.

David J. Rothman, "Introduction," from *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Little Brown & Company 1971): xiii-xx.

Penny L. Richards, "'Beside Her Sat Her Idiot Child': Families and Developmental Disability in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," in Steven Noll and James W. Trent, eds., *Mental Retardation in America: A Historical Reader* (NYU Press 2004): 65-86.

Myra Samuels Himelhoch and Arthur H. Shaffer, "Elizabeth Packard: Nineteenth-Century Crusader for the Rights of Mental Patients," *American Studies* 13(3)(1979): 343-375.

Carla Yanni, "The Linear Plan for Insane Asylums in the United States before 1866," *Journal—Society of Architectural Historians* 62 (1)(2003): 24-49.

4. September 17-23 "Invalid" Women in 19c.-20c. America

Natalie Dykstra, "'Trying to Idle': Work and Disability in The Diary of Alice James," in NDH (107-130).

Peter McCandless. "A Female Malady? Women and the South Carolina Lunatic Asylum, 1828-1915," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 54(4)(October 1999): 543-571.

Emma Dominguez-Rué, "Madwomen in the Drawing Room: Female Invalidism in Ellen Glasgow's Gothic Stories," *Journal of American Studies* 38(3)(December 2004): 425-438.

Basil Meyer. "Till Death Do Us Part: The Consumptive Victorian Heroine in Popular Romantic Fiction," *Journal of Popular Culture* 37(2) (2003): 287-308.

5. September 24-30 Eugenics Pt. 1: Race, Contagion, and Immigration Control

Steven Selden, "Eugenics and the Social Construction of Merit, Race, and Disability," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 32(2)(March-April 2000): 235-252.

June Dwyer. "Disease, deformity, and defiance: Writing the language of immigration law and the eugenics movement on the immigrant body," *MELUS* 28(1)(Spring 2003): 105-121.

Howard Markel. "'The Eyes Have It': Trachoma, the Perception of Disease, the United States Public Health Service and the American Jewish Immigration Experience, 1897-1924," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 74(3)(2000): 525-560.

6. October 1-7 Eugenics Pt. 2: Sexuality and Eugenic Sterilization

Stephen J. Gould, "Carrie Buck's Daughter," *Natural History* 93(July 1984): 14-18.

James W. Trent, "To Cut and Control: Institutional Preservation and the Sterilization of Mentally Retarded People in the United States, 1892-1947," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 6(1993): 56-73.

Johanna Schoen. "Between Choice and Coercion: Women and the Politics of Sterilization in North Carolina, 1929-1975," *Journal of Women's History* 13(1)(Spring 2001): 132-156.

P. K. Wilson. "Harry Laughlin's Eugenic Crusade to Control the 'socially inadequate' in Progressive Era America," *Patterns of Prejudice* 36(1)(January 2002): 46-67.

7. October 8-14 Special Education

Brad Byrom, "A Pupil and a Patient: Hospital-Schools in Progressive America," in NDH (133-156).

Edwin W. Martin, Reed Martin, and Donna L. Terman, "The Legislative and Litigation History of Special Education," *The Future of Children* 6 (1)(Spring 1996): 25-39.

Barry Franklin, "Progressivism and Curriculum Differentiation: Special Classes in the Atlanta Public Schools, 1898-1923," *History of Education Quarterly* 29(1989): 571-593.

Joseph Tropea, "Bureaucratic Order and Special Children: Urban Schools, 1890s-1940s," *History of Education Quarterly* 27(Spring 1987): 29-53.

Robert L. Osgood. "From 'Public Liabilities' to 'Public Assets': Special Education for Children with Mental Retardation in Indiana Public Schools, 1908-1931," *Indiana Magazine of History* 98(September 2002): 203-225.

8. October 15-21 Work, Unions, Organizing

John Williams-Searle, "Cold Charity: Manhood, Brotherhood, and the Transformation of Disability, 1870-1900," in NDH (157-186).

Thomas A. Krainz, "Transforming the Progressive Era Welfare State: Activists for the Blind and

Blind Benefits," *Journal of Policy History* 15(2)(2003): 223-264.

Edward Slavishak. "Artificial Limbs and Industrial Workers' Bodies in Turn-of-the-Century Pittsburgh," *Journal of Social History* 37(2) (Winter 2003): 365-388.

Paul K. Longmore and David Goldberger, "The League of the Physically Handicapped and the Great Depression: A Case Study in the New Disability History," *Journal of American History* 87(3) (December 2000): 888-922, online at: <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/87.3/>

9. October 22-28 War and Disabled Veterans

K. Walter Hickel, "Medicine, Bureaucracy, and Social Welfare: The Politics of Disability Compensation for American Veterans of World War I," in NDH (236-267).

David A. Gerber, "Blind and Enlightened: The Contested Origins of the Egalitarian Politics of the Blinded Veterans Association," in NDH (313-334).

Peter Blanck and Chen Song, "'Never Forget What They Did Here': Civil War Pensions for Gettysburg Union Army Veterans and Disability in Nineteenth-Century America." *William and Mary Law Review* 44(February 2003): 907-1520.

Beth Linker, "Feet for Fighting: Locating Disability and Social Medicine in First World War America," *Social History of Medicine* 20(1) (April 2007): 91-110.

Robert F. Jefferson. "'Enabled Courage': Race, Disability, and Black World War II Veterans in Postwar America," *The Historian* 65(5) (2003): 1102-1124.

10. October 29-November 4 Families and post-WWII Activism

Susan Schwartzenberg, *Becoming Citizens: Family Life and the Politics of Disability* (University of Washington Press 2005).

Gerald O'Brien, "Rosemary Kennedy: The Importance of a Historical Footnote," *Journal of Family History* 29(July 2004): 225-236.

Kathleen W. Jones, "Education for Children with Mental Retardation: Parent Activism, Public Policy, and Family Ideology in the 1950s," in Steven Noll and James W. Trent, eds., *Mental Retardation in America: A Historical Reader* (NYU Press 2004): 322-350.

Katherine Castles, "Nice, Average Americans: Postwar Parents' Groups and the Defense of the Normal Family," in Steven Noll and James W. Trent, eds., *Mental Retardation in America: A Historical Reader* (NYU Press 2004): 351-370.

Barbara Bair, "The Parents' Council for Retarded Children and Social Change in Rhode Island, 1951-1970," *Rhode Island History* 40(1981): 144-159.

James W. Trent, "The Remaking of Mental Retardation: Of War, Angels, Parents, and Politicians," Chapter 7 in Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (University of California Press 1994): 225-268.

11. November 5-11 Disability Rights Movement/Independent Living

Mary Johnson & Barrett Shaw, eds. *To Ride the Public's Buses: The Fight that Built a Movement* (Advocado Press 2000).

Joseph Shapiro, "From Charity to Independent Living," Chapter 2 in Shapiro, *No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement* (Times Books 1994): 41-73.

Jacqueline Vaughan Switzer, "Social and Political Activism," Chapter 4 in Switzer, *Disabled Rights: American Disability Policy and the Fight for Equality* (Georgetown University Press 2003): 68-89.

12. November 12-18 ADA

Jane West, "The Social and Policy Context of the Act," *Milbank Quarterly* 69(1/2)(1991): 3-24.

William P. McCrone. "Tracking the Disability Pendulum: The First Decade of the Americans With Disabilities Act," *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 11(1)(2006): 134.

Jacqueline Vaughan Switzer, "The ADA as Policy," Chapter 6 in Switzer, *Disabled Rights: American Disability Policy and the Fight for Equality* (Georgetown University Press 2003): 112-143.

Jacqueline Vaughan Switzer, "Life Beyond the ADA: Policy Hot Buttons," Chapter 7 in Switzer, *Disabled Rights: American Disability Policy and the Fight for Equality* (Georgetown University Press 2003): 144-172.

13. November 19-December 2 Disability Culture

Harriet McBryde Johnson, "Art Object," in Johnson, *Too Late to Die Young* (Picador 2005):

229-249.

Lennard J. Davis, "Crips Strike Back: The Rise of Disability Studies," *American Literary History* 11(3)(Autumn 1999): 500-512.

14. December 3-9 Student presentations

15. December 10-14 WRAP UP

UPPER-DIVISION LECTURE COURSE: DISABILITY AND CULTURE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

CATHERINE KUDLICK, PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS
CJKUDLICK@UCDAVIS.EDU

When I sat down to draw up my first lecture course on disability history, I was struck by how many fewer "teachable" materials there are for the rest of the world. This explains why as a Europeanist I ended up designing a course on the twentieth-century United States. In fact, because I didn't want to go through the bureaucratic ordeal of gaining course approval, I taught it under a generic "Topics in Twentieth-Century America" course. Since the class was offered at an appealing time, and since few students bothered to read the expanded description of the class's focus, sixty people showed up on the first day. Though I was convinced that at least half would flee after the first session, miraculously only a few did. And more miraculously, several added it, even though as you'll see from the description, it was a demanding class. Judging from their comments in office hours and in course evaluations, this "stealth" approach had its merits; several said that they would never have signed up for a class on disability history, but that they stayed because they were intrigued, and ultimately were glad they did.

For anyone familiar with disability history the class lacked some nuance. I hammered home the message of needing to approach disability as a category of human experience on a par with race and gender. Moreover, I relied much on contrasting the pathology and social models of disability because this was so new for them. At times I felt uncomfortable with being so didactic; my usual method is to let students discover new perspectives on their own. But the old ideas of pity are so deeply ingrained, that I believed it was more important to insist, arguing that I was teaching them a new approach. A few complained about my having "an agenda," but even these admitted that they learned something.

The course also benefitted from a brilliant teaching assistant who, despite having zero background in disability history and not identifying as a person with a disability, came up with a suggestion that helped unlock in-class discussion. For the first few sessions I found it nearly impossible to get anyone to say a word. My TA suggested inviting students anonymously to write down whatever it was they wanted to know about disability and disabled people but were afraid to ask. I egged them on, urging them to be as politically incorrect as they could, and I

promised that I would throw in a couple of my own questions for good measure. I collected them, then grouped them into themes related to each lecture. The questions were open and honest, but seldom as offensive as one might fear. This being California, a lot of them centered around driving and “handicapped parking” stickers. Another clump dealt with what were the proper words to use. Still others asked about how a person with a disability did x or y. (A couple even asked about my own vision impairment.) The amazing thing was, once they’d filled out the little cards and I made it clear that I would try to address the issues over the course of the term, the conversations about historical subjects flowed. In fact, I think it was some of the best discussion I’ve ever managed to generate in a lecture class.

I benefitted greatly from the insights of Douglas Baynton, Paul Longmore, and Jim Ferris when designing the class and assignments. I also took advantage of being near the activist and scholarly disability community of the Bay Area by bringing a number of guest lecturers to the class.

Below, I provide the syllabus with my annotations [in brackets].

History 174D
Fall 2005
Prof. C. Kudlick

Office: 4203 SS. Hum. Building
Contact:: 752-1635; cjkudlick@ucdavis.edu
Hours: W 9:00-10:30, F2:00-3:30 or by appt.

Disability and Culture in Twentieth-Century America [I’ve learned from my friends north of the border that I in fact taught a class on the United States, not America!]

This upper-division lecture course will cover major topics in 20th-century American history - eugenics, immigration, the Great Depression, World Wars I & II, Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement, and the emergence of identity politics - through a fascinating, little explored lens. Disability has always been an experience shared by more than 20% of Americans, and even more if you consider family members. But in a nation that celebrates youth, fitness, strength, independence, and progress, it has also served as a way of defining “normal” and what it means to be American. One of our primary goals will be to understand disability not as the tragedy that befalls an isolated individual, but rather as a key social category on a par with race, gender, sexuality, and class. Through a variety of physical and mental impairments, we’ll explore sites where politics, popular culture, economics, medicine, religion, and technology converge to create a new way of thinking about hierarchy and power.

Required Readings are on sale at the UCD bookstore and all are also on reserve in Shields Library, unless they are online.

David Bakke, *God Knows His Name: the Story of John Doe No. 24* (Southern Illinois University Press)

[I’m pleased to have Susan Burch and Hannah Joyner’s more scholarly *Unspeakable The Story of*

Junius Wilson which covers similar territory]

Nora Groce, *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Vineyard* (Harvard)

[while I know this book is controversial in the Deaf community, I still teach it as an accessible entry into thinking about disability being integrated naturally into a mainstream society]

Harriet McBryde Johnson, *Too Late to Die Young: Nearly-True Tales from a Life* (Henry Holt)

[this book had just come out, and most students loved it - feisty, well-written, witty; the author is refreshingly political and forthright about US politics in the 1970s-1990s]

Martin Pernick, *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of 'Defective' Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures Since 1915* (Oxford)

[this is a top-notch scholarly book, and it's definitely "teachable." There's a lot for students to digest, however, so some prepping is necessary in order to get them to consider the interplay of various themes]

Joseph Shapiro, *No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement* (Three Rivers Press)

[until a historian of disability takes up the challenge of writing one, this is the best textbook currently available; Shapiro is a journalist and tells a good story, plus he largely "gets it" about new ways for thinking about disability. Purists will find some inaccuracies and omissions.]

Additional articles to be made available online on the course website.

Grading: Writing plays a critical role in helping you come to terms with themes and ideas from the past; it will help transform you from a passive to an active learner. In order to pass the course you must complete ten weekly reaction papers to the readings. You can use the questions for each week for inspiration, but you should not simply answer each question and move on; the idea is to think about the material synthetically. Reaction papers must be typed (500 words, 1 inch margins, double-spaced 16 pt font = approx 2 pages 12 pt font) and will be collected on Mondays. I will grade three at random, and each grade will be worth 10% You must turn in all assignments in order to pass the course. No incompletes will be given except in the case of a documented emergency.

Reaction papers (10% x 3) 30%

In-class mid-term: 20%

Website Contrast Paper: 20%

Take-home final: 30%

Brownie points: Extra Credit will be given for attending and writing about various events that will be announced throughout the term. Class participation, visits to office hours and/or posting email responses can also help!

[much to my embarrassment, it's only in annotating this that I realized that I had failed to offer a statement about accommodating people with disabilities! I have experimented with different ones over the years, but still am not completely satisfied. The current one I offer in my courses reads as follows: Reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities can be made by talking with the professor and/or your TA as early in the quarter as possible; solutions that benefit one student can end up benefitting the class as a whole, so please feel free to come forward with any questions or suggestions. You can also contact the Student Disability Center:

<http://sdc.ucdavis.edu/> or 2-3184.]

Schedule of Class Meetings

Sep 30 Introduction

Week of October 3:

Reading: Shapiro, *No Pity*, 3-40; Groce, *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language*, 1-110; visit the course website and explore three sites from the American Disability History resource list that intrigue you - record your impressions in an informal journal that will be useful for the paper assignment and take-home final exam.

Questions: How does each author present disability? Do they share the same view? What seems to be most difficult about disability? What surprises you about what you've read?

Oct 3 Models of Disability and Disabled Models

Oct 5 Freaks and Geeks before 1900

Oct 7 America Takes Stock: the Progressive Era

Week of October 10:

Reading: Pernick, *The Black Stork*, 3-178; explore three websites specifically from the "Disability Organizations" list, take notes!

Questions: How did Harry Haiselden embody 'progressive' ideas? What characterized these ideas? What seems least/most surprising about them today? How do the media and scientific ideas reinforce one another in Pernick's story?

Oct 10 The Eugenic Imagination

Oct 12 America Gets Ugly

Oct 14 New Ways to Read and Write

Week of October 17:

Reading: Baynton, "Defectives in the Land: American Immigration Policy, 1882-1924," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24:3 (Spring 2005); K. Walter Hickel, "Medicine, Bureaucracy, and Social Welfare: the Politics of Disability Compensation for American Veterans of World War I," in Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, eds., *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, 236-67; explore more organization websites, take more notes

Questions: What role did World War I play in defining disability and disabled people? How would you characterize the relationship between immigration and disability? How did the links that immigration officials drew between immigrants and disability reflect attitudes of the times they lived in?

- Oct 17** **Defectives in the Land**
Oct 19 **World War I and its Aftermath**
Oct 21 **Changing Ideas of Citizenship**

Week of October 24:

Reading: Sally Stein, “FDR, Disability, and Politics: A View from the South,” *The Public Historian* 27:2 (Spring 2005) 83-90; “FDR Memorial Controversies” on course website; explore more websites, take notes.

Questions: What similarities does the Warm Springs site share with the FDR Memorial in Washington, DC? How do they differ? What can commemorations of national figures and/or events teach us about the past? And our own relationship to the present? What is at stake, and what makes the controversies so contentious?

- Oct 24** **America in Denial: FDR**
Oct 26 **The Battle for Social Security**
Oct 28 **IN-CLASS MIDTERM**

Week of October 31:

Reading: Shapiro, 184-210; Bakke, xv-140; explore an organization website in-depth

Questions: What made John Doe a victim? What is the relationship between disability and race in his story? How might he have benefitted from the “revolution” Shapiro describes? How does Bakke’s approach to the story compare to other depictions of disability we’ve read about this term?

- Oct 31** **World War II and its Legacy**
Nov 2 **The Cultural Transformation of American Medicine**
Nov 4 **Rediscovering the Asylum**

Week of November 7:

Reading: Kim Nielsen, “Helen Keller and the Politics of Civic Fitness,” in Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky, eds., *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* (NYU Press, 2001) 268-91; visit the collection of Keller’s writings at:

<http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=1&TopicID=193> and pick three topics that interest you, and read the letters associated with them

Viewing: “The Miracle Worker” (1962)

Questions: Which of these media most confirmed ideas you already had about Keller? Which challenged your ideas, and how? How have new ideas from disability studies made historians rethink who Helen Keller was and her significance?

- Nov 7** **Helen Keller’s FBI File**
Nov 9 **Hollywood Does Disability**

Nov 11 VETERANS' DAY HOLIDAYWeek of November 14:

Reading: Harriet McBryde Johnson, *Too Late to Die Young*, 47-75; Jacobus ten Broek, "The Federation at Twenty-Five: Post-View and Pre-View"

<http://www.nfb.org/books/books1/wam07.htm#post>

Website exercise

Questions: Why does Johnson hate the Telethon? What ideas do ten Broek and Johnson share? Where do you think they might disagree and why? What distinguishes them as people writing in mid-twentieth-century America rather than in some other time and/or place?

Nov 14 America Takes Pity: Jerry Lewis**Nov 16 Activists Take Aim****Nov 18 The Blind Fighting the Blind**Week of November 21:

Reading: Shapiro, 41-73

Web: visit one of the Virtual Archive websites on the "American Disability History Resources" section of the course website (excluding AFB Keller archive). Instead of a response paper, write a two-page description/review of the site. What is its chronological and geographic focus? What kinds of materials does it contain? Do they seem exhaustive or more like fragments? Is there anything you wished it contained but doesn't? Is it easy to use? If you had only the information contained within it, what ideas would be most significant for understanding disability in America? Don't just answer the questions: think about presenting a cogent picture of the archive you chose that would be helpful to others.

Questions: How is disability similar/different from other movements for justice? Is it fair to draw analogies with Civil Rights?

Nov 21 America in Turmoil**Nov 22 The Independent Living Movement****Nov 24 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY**Week of November 28: COMPARATIVE WEB SITE ASSIGNMENT DUE NOVEMBER 30

Reading: Shapiro, 74-183; Johnson, 1-46, 76-132

Questions: Is deafness a disability? What are the implications for seeing it as such? Who has most/least to gain? Which historical factors most influenced how people like Johnson and the Gallaudet students understood their place in American society? How do these ideas differ from those of Jerry Lewis?

Nov 28 The 504 Sit-In

Nov 30 Deaf President Now!

Dec 2 The ADA

Week of December 5:

Reading: Shapiro; 211-339; Johnson, 133-258

Questions: Why are many disability rights activists against physician assisted suicide? In addition to the eugenics movement earlier in the century, what other historical factors might have influenced their ideas?

Dec 5 The Ultimate Cure

Dec 7 Crip Culture Talks Back

Dec 9 Conclusion

TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAMINATION DUE WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 1:30 P.M.

Comparative Web Site Analysis - Due November 30.

Using your skills as a historian, choose two web sites that you believe present contrasting views of disability to the outside world. One should be from “Disability Organization Websites” posted on the course website; the other you are free to choose. In your paper explain what model or perspective of disability the site operates under - what is the organization's perspective toward disability, and toward disabled people? How do you know? Be sure to support your argument with specific references to the site (and include URL for the pages). Do not assume that your readers know the models - explain them concisely but clearly. As part of your analysis, figure out who the site's intended audience is. Who are they seeking to reach? Who do they expect to use their pages? Most importantly, how does it follow logically from material we have learned this term? Whenever possible, bring in observations from lectures, class discussions, and course readings.

All papers must be 1,200-1,900 words typed, double-spaced with 1 inch margins and 16-point font. (This is the equivalent of 5-7 pages in 12-point font.)

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“A SELECTIVE HISTORICAL GLIMPSE AT HOW AMERICAN SOCIETY HAS TRIED TO EDUCATE, REHABILITATE, OR OTHERWISE INTERVENE IN THE LIVES OF DISABLED CHILDREN AND ADULTS, AND THEIR FAMILIES, AND HOW SOME OF THEM HAVE ALWAYS RESISTED.”

PHILLIP FERGUSON, PROFESSOR, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY,
PFERGUSON@CHAPMAN.EDU

Based as I am in a School of Education, very few of my students think of themselves as historians (an occasional doc student might be the exception). So, when I teach a ‘history of disability’ course, or spend a few classes on historical background within a class on current theory or practice (say in a course on “Family-School Relationships”), it is with students who, for the most part, believe history to be a supplementary component of their program of course requirements.

One unit of a course I teach looks at the rise of specialized institutions in the last half of the 19th century and early part of the 20th, with special attention to the growth of the so-called “idiot asylums.” I have them read a chapter by the historian Michael Katz on “The Morphology of Evil” (from his book *Poverty and Policy in American History*, 1983) that does a wonderful job of deconstructing the 1880 special census report on the “Dependent, Defective, and Delinquent” population. I find the chapter works well to model for my students how to approach primary sources with an analytical approach that goes beyond a kind of superficial dismissal of the offensive language and moralisms couched as science. Katz’ devastating critique of Frederick Wines and his report well-illustrates the process by which social categories become reified in ways that both reflect and influence the social and professional assumptions about the sources of human difference. It is a topic that my students usually know little about, and we use it to look at the social context for the rise of large congregate facilities and the abuses associated with those places.

For my students, the discussion often moves to the pervasive categorization and labeling that drives much of special education today. While cautious of looking too hard for the “lessons” of history, I am always struck by how well the unit leads the students to reflect critically on what had previously seemed objective. We move from Katz to looking at various examples of admission forms for the asylums that we are discussing. What previously could have seemed as little more than curious artifacts of bureaucratic record-keeping, is now more readily approached as catalogues of professional conceits and social obsessions. Why do some of the institutions ask more developmental questions (“Can the child tie his or her shoes?”) while others focus primarily on heritage and personal behavior (“Does the person exhibit any disgusting habits?”). By the end of the unit, I think the students have a heightened sense of the relevance of history for even a field so applied as special education.

On one or two occasions, a student has taken exception with the discussion. In one of my early semesters of teaching (OK, this was a few years ago), a student began shaking her head during our discussion and seemed to be getting upset. When she finally spoke up, she said that she felt that my entire approach was way too “anti-institutional.” After a few minutes of back and forth (not angry, but certainly engaged), she said that her interest in this was personal. It turned out

that she had a sister who lived in an institution in another state. She felt that my approach was implicitly criticizing the choice her parents had made to institutionalize her sister. My response at the time was to pull out the “private troubles” vs “public issues” distinction, where I try and emphasize the difference between a “macro” level discussion of policy and practice, and the individual choices that families or others feel forced to make at any given time and place. The conversation continued for a few minutes and we moved on.

The incident stayed in my mind. Had I been too glib or dismissive? Or had I somehow backed away from my true beliefs and moved to quickly to “defuse” the situation? In reflecting on the incident, I decided that my response was at least incomplete and that I had missed an opportunity for a deeper discussion. When teaching this topic since then, I try and surface such tensions, if students don't raise them first, as important parts of the conversation and historical perspective (without forcing them to talk about their personal circumstances or experiences). My main strategy for this has been to try and find the voices of those who were actually involved in those choices from earlier eras.

Over the years, my research in institutional history has allowed me to review case files of residents going back to the 19th century. This, in turn, has allowed me to collect examples of actual correspondence from parents to institution superintendents about various issues of care (including support or resistance to the sterilization of their child), admission, or discharge. (I also use a documentary video called “My Uncle Joe,” [1991 - <http://librarymedia.org/health/Titles/joe.html>] by Bill Rogers that uses old home movies and interviews with Joe Rogers and his siblings to reconstruct a family history where Joe's parents had placed him in an institution in Massachusetts.) Many of the letters reflect the emotions that my student expressed that day in class: anger at a perceived lack of choices; a sense of deference to professional opinion; and a clear plea just for someone to listen to their "side" of the story. The letters quickly establish an emotional connection with my students that cuts across the decades of policy reform and program development. Even if we can disagree with the choice, we can recognize the sense of marginalization and neglect.

“TEACHABLE MOMENTS IN DISABILITY HISTORY FOR A CLASS THAT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH DISABILITY”

KIM NIELSEN, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, GREEN BAY, NIELSENK@UWGB.EDU

Several weeks ago my semester-long U.S. Women's History class discussed the short stories of Zitkala-Sa. Her collection, *American Indian Stories* (Bison Books, 2003), chronicles the governmental and religious boarding school experiences of indigenous children. In the past I've used the stories to discuss Indian women's experiences of westward expansion and how the dominant culture used such schools to teach specific gender roles that were often contrary to

indigenous cultures.

This semester my students became engrossed in Zitkala-Sa's portrayal of how school staff attempted to deny native children use of their own language. We analyzed why that happened, why and how students resisted, and the contentious and ever-changing links between language and American identity.

In the midst of this discussion, with no planning (I'm embarrassed to admit), I explained that deaf students had similar experiences. At deaf boarding schools administrators also attempted to deny students use of their own language. I went on to draw parallels between the gender ideals taught in both boarding school systems.

That day I unexpectedly learned two things:

One, the linkage between these two boarding school experiences greatly enhanced and deepened the intellectual energy in my classroom. By broadening the picture, students better understood the suppression of indigenous language not only as “being mean to Indians” but as part of an effort to define American identity. It allowed us to recognize the specifics of the boarding school experience for both deaf and Indian students, while placing those specifics in a much broader ideological and historical moment. Additionally, it forced them, and allowed them, to place deaf history—something they'd never before considered—in their personal historical arsenal and as a part of the American story.

Two, this brief mention greatly empowered at least one of my students. After class a young woman approached me, nearly jumping out of her skin with excitement. A large portion of her extended family was deaf, she said, and she had grown up on stories of deaf boarding schools. She knew some deaf history, had seen the recent PBS production “Through Deaf Eyes,” but never had one of her teachers acknowledged the history of her family. This thrilled her.

Thus, my accidental link between the boarding school experiences of Native and Deaf students expanded my students both intellectually and personally. It reinforced the possibilities of disability history as both intellectual force and pedagogical tool.

RECENT BOOKS OF INTEREST TO DISABILITY HISTORIANS

[Editor's Note: the books profiled below offer but one indication of the diverse topics and approaches to the field of Disability History. If you would like to review a book or have one profiled in the Newsletter, please contact me at cjkudlick@ucdavis.edu]

A CONVERSATION WITH SUSAN BURCH AND HANNAH JOYNER, AUTHORS OF *UNSPEAKABLE: THE STORY OF JUNIUS WILSON*

Published November 19, 2007 by the University of North Carolina Press
\$27.50 hardcover, ISBN 978-0-8078-3155-7

Susan Burch is a DHA Board Member, and has taught history at Gallaudet University; Charles University, Czech Republic; and the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. She is author of *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900 to World War II*. Hannah Joyner is an independent scholar and author of *From Pity to Pride: Growing Up Deaf in the Old South*.

Q: Why is the story of Junius Wilson so remarkable? Tell us a little bit about him and his life.

A: Junius Wilson was a deaf African-American born in North Carolina during the early years of the twentieth century. In 1925 he was accused of the attempted rape of a relative, found insane at a lunacy hearing, committed to the criminal ward of the State Hospital for the Colored Insane, and surgically castrated. Although he may have been falsely accused, was not found guilty, and was apparently never diagnosed as insane or retarded, Wilson was still an inmate at the hospital sixty-five years later. What happened to him once his advocates realized that he was completely misplaced is the subject of the final chapters of the book.

Wilson's story is "remarkable" in both its power and its particulars. But we should not dismiss his history as merely an isolated story, irrelevant to our understanding of the past more generally. Fundamentally, what happened to Wilson highlights the extent of what a society based on hierarchy and violence can do to its most vulnerable members. His story allows us to explore the depth of racism and disability discrimination, the intersection of Jim Crow policies and the eugenics movement, the impact of institutionalization, the changing meanings of mental health and social work across the twentieth century, and the unexpected sources of strength that emerged in the face of such a terrible tragedy.

Q: How did you first become aware of Junius Wilson?

A: Living in North Carolina in the 1990s, Hannah read about Wilson in local newspapers when his story first became public. In 2000, Susan was researching issues of diversity in America's deaf community and found the same articles Hannah had read. After initial research, it was clear to Susan that this story deserved greater attention. Wilson's advocates agreed, and generously provided access to private materials and memories. A shared interest in deaf history and African American history made our collaboration an obvious choice.

Q: Wilson attended a segregated institution, Raleigh's North Carolina School for the Colored Blind and Deaf. How was he educated? What kind of sign language was used at the school?

A: Wilson became part of a rich cultural community at the segregated deaf school, one that had its own form of sign language (called Raleigh signs) that deaf people – black or white –

elsewhere did not know. At white schools for the deaf, in North Carolina and around the nation, students used American Sign Language.

Within the confines of the Raleigh school, the linguistic isolation was not a problem; Wilson and his peers shared a common language as well as a rich cultural identity. But when Wilson was kicked out of the school, he was unable to communicate clearly even with his relatives and neighbors back home. His linguistic isolation contributed to the wrenching experiences he endured.

Q: In what ways did Junius Wilson's racial background in the Jim Crow South allow the charges to be made against him?

A: Complicated issues of race, economics, family, and disability contributed to Wilson's initial arrest, but it appears that racial stereotypes also particularly affected his treatment in jail. The white jailer, judge, and jury likely saw the charge against Wilson's attempted rape of an African American woman as proof of his genetic and racial inferiority. Like the image of the savage black rapist in "Birth of a Nation," a movie that played to packed houses in Wilmington the week he was sentenced, Wilson seemed threatening. His inability to speak vocally (the result of his deafness) only emphasized his dangerousness. To the white observers at the courthouse, Wilson's staring, gesturing, and inarticulate speech were perceived not as deaf behaviors but as manifestations of his status as the 'black savage.'

Q: Was Junius Wilson illiterate as well as deaf? If so, does this explain why he was unable to defend himself in writing against the accusation of rape?

A: Literacy presented a surprisingly complicated issue in Wilson's story. Having attended a segregated deaf school for eight years, he had some literacy skills – although how much is unclear. Despite the fact that Wilson could in fact write at least basic information, the jailer, judge, and jury all apparently assumed that the deaf man was illiterate. They never provided paper or pen to the prisoner.

Language and racial barriers barred Wilson from a fair trial. No one who could understand Wilson played any part in his hearing. The assumptions of the jailors and judge combined with the accusation of attempted rape primarily defined the court proceedings. Wilson never stood trial for attempted rape nor was he ever found guilty of any crime. Instead, he was sent to the criminal ward of an insane asylum.

Q: What were Junius Wilson's relationships with staff members and with other patients at Cherry Hospital in Goldsboro, North Carolina like?

A: Many people assume that inmates in a psychiatric hospital don't share a sense of community, but Wilson's story shows a rich and diverse social history. He clearly had warm friendships with several staff members, playing pranks and running errands for them. He also interacted with other patients both in and out of the wards. They had a surprising amount of mobility around the campus of the institution. Wilson and other patients dug worms from the riverbanks to sell to

various locals on their way to favorite fishing holes. From the money he made at this entrepreneurial activity, Wilson eventually bought himself bicycles, which allowed him to explore the area and get to know other citizens in the town of Goldsboro.

In addition, his relationship with another black deaf inmate from a similar background, James McNeil, points out that Wilson's story is not as singular as we might have wished. The ways in which Wilson, McNeil, and others provided support to each other and a sense of belonging reminds us that 'life on the inside' is as much a rich lived experience as life on the outside.

Q: When was it discovered that Junius Wilson was not insane?

A: Wilson was sentenced to an insane asylum in 1925, but evidence suggests that he never received a formal diagnosis of insanity. Following the trend to deinstitutionalize patient-inmates, staff at Cherry Hospital in the 1970s looked more closely at Wilson's case and doctors began to acknowledge that he was not mentally ill and almost certainly never had been. In spite of this fact, they chose to keep him another two decades in the locked wards of the institution.

Q: What was Junius Wilson's life like after he was finally freed?

A: Newspapers and advocates proclaimed that Wilson was “free at last” when he was transferred from the locked wards to a renovated cottage on the hospital grounds. There was much to celebrate. For example, he now had the ability to make more decisions about his daily schedule, including taking car trips away from the hospital grounds. Wilson also acquired more personal property to call his own. He loved to show off his hat collection to his visitors.

But moving to the cottage wasn't a complete victory. Hospital policies meant that Wilson couldn't have friends stay overnight. He was closely supervised at all times by the same staff members who had supervised him in the locked wards. For the first year in his cottage, he didn't even have a key to open his own front door. Some argued that this was no liberation—only another form of captivity, furnished with colonial style fixtures and a front porch. Junius Wilson's story is complex, demonstrating how difficult it is for even well-intentioned people to determine how to undo years of injustice.

Q: How did you research *Unspeakable*?

A: Researching this work was an adventure in itself. Wilson left behind precious few clues—like diaries or letters—that show how he saw his life and the world around him. We were fortunate to have access to his medical files, but privacy rights policies and hospital mandates made it especially difficult to find answers to some of the thorny questions Wilson's experiences raised about the lives of institutionalized people.

To learn about some of the events of Wilson's life, we were able to use court documents, public hospital records, newspapers, census records, and school reports. But the richest sources for us were the many interviews (some in sign language) that we conducted with friends, family, and others who knew Wilson. As outsiders to both the African American deaf community and to

psychiatric hospitals, as well as other communities whose members we interviewed, we had to be especially sensitive in our approach to this deeply troubling history. The people we talked to were incredibly generous with their time and memories. It is clear that Wilson touched many lives and that many people wanted his story to be told.

Q: It is unusual for a biography to be co-written. Can you tell us about your experience working together?

A: Part of the gift of writing this work was doing it collaboratively. We have very different approaches to history, and different talents. Working together allowed us not only to bounce ideas off each other. Each of our strengths could come through. It also helped us learn new working styles that may influence future projects even when we're not working together.

Collaboration was especially helpful while writing this particular book. Because this story is fundamentally about isolation, we were mindful of the benefits of having another person just as intimately involved with the story with whom we could share our ideas and experiences as well as our emotional reactions.

Q: What do you hope will be the impact of *Unspeakable*?

A: We as a society have a lot more to learn about the experiences of many of the people of this world. This work strives to shed light into some of these unexamined corners. African Americans from all walks of life remain in the margins of too many of our academic studies, as do deaf people of all walks of life. These two populations are both everywhere present and far too rarely seen. Institutionalized people are almost always left out of the story of our past. It is certainly our hope that this book will encourage others to investigate people who at first glance seem to be unknowable or invisible.

At the same time, we hope that Wilson's story will help us remember how complex history can be. Writing *Unspeakable* forced the two of us to move away from simple accusations or understandings. It would be easy, for instance, to place the blame for the injustices Wilson experienced on racist judges or hospital administrators. But in reality, the issues Wilson presented to participants in his story – participants from family members at the beginning of the twentieth century to social activists at its end – required them all to engage in intricate moral thinking. The truth of human motivations is far more complex than simple good and evil.

This is a story with many heroes: people who tried to do the right thing for Junius Wilson and for their families and communities. They all faced limitations on their heroism – limitations shaped by their times. Racism, disability discrimination, the power of institutions and institutionalization – as well as the effects of deeply entrenched poverty – chiseled into the options available to those who sought to act justly.

We hope that as readers explore how this story could happen, they will explore their own moral landscapes, and the moral landscape of this country. Fundamentally, Wilson's story is an

American tale, and thus it is part of us all.

CAROL POORE'S *DISABILITY IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY GERMAN CULTURE* (UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, 2007).

From the publicity flyer: *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture* reveals the contradictions of a nation renowned for its social services programs yet notorious for its history of compulsory sterilization and eugenic dogma. Covering the entire scope of Germany's most tragic and tumultuous century, this comprehensive volume reveals how central the notion of disability is to modern German cultural history. Carol Poore examines a wide range of literary and visual depictions of disability, focusing particular attention on disability and Nazi culture. Other topics explored include the exile community's response to disability, socialism and disability in East Germany, current bioethical debates, and the rise and gains of the disability rights movement. The book concludes with a brief memoir of the author's experiences in Germany as a person with a disability.

Richly illustrated, wide-ranging and accessible, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture* gives students, scholars, and all those interested in disability studies, German studies, visual culture, Nazi history, and bioethics the opportunity to explore controversial questions of individuality, normalcy, citizenship, and morality.

Carol Poore is Professor of German Studies at Brown University. She is also author of *The Bonds of Labor: German Journeys to the Working World 1890-1900* and *German-American Socialist Literature 1865-1900*.

**DOUGLAS C. BAYNTON (ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA)
REVIEWS KENNY FRIES, *THE HISTORY OF MY SHOES AND THE EVOLUTION OF DARWIN'S
THEORY*, NEW YORK: CARROLL AND GRAF PUBLISHERS, 2007. (XVII, 206 PAGES.) \$14.95**

“We anchor in Tagus Cove off Isabela, the Galapagos island where Charles Darwin landed on September 30, 1835,” begins the first chapter of Kenny Fries' latest memoir, an idiosyncratic and fascinating reflection on disability and evolution.

“‘Take off your shoes,’ Dr. Mendotti says,” begins the next, with Fries recounting a medical examination required by Social Security to determine if he is “still disabled.” He gazes at the institutional looking clock on the wall, which transports him back to his third-grade classroom where Mrs. Krinsky is explaining “survival of the fittest.” Her words, “sharp to my skin as a surgeon's knife,” he remembers, threw him into a panic: “Forget about dreams, with these deformed legs and feet. How will I survive?”

Next chapter and we are back to the Galapagos, where Fries is wondering “what is a five-foot-tall man without fibulae in both legs doing at the top of this mountain.” Fries' readers are also wondering where Fries is taking them, a question that first arose when they saw the book's odd and enchanting title. Fries has two stories to tell: on the one hand, Darwin's voyage of discovery on the Beagle, the subsequent years of his struggle to understand the meaning of all that he had found, and his relationship with the younger, less privileged, and less accomplished Alfred Lord Wallace; on the other, Fries' own life journey, his struggle to understand the meaning of his unusual feet and the shoes made to fit them, and his relationship with his partner, Ian.

It is a surprising juxtaposition at first, and yet what could be more clearly related to the questions raised by disability than an evolutionary theory based on chance variation, complex webs of interdependence, and a never-ending process of adaptation? All of these are key not only to Darwin's theory, Fries maintains, but also to his life and to his success as a scientist. Darwin knew well to what extent he stood on the shoulders of other scientists such as Thomas Malthus, Joseph Hooker, and Charles Lyell. He knew also that his inherited wealth and supportive family afforded him leisure to research, think, and write (in a way never available to Wallace), even as he struggled with recurrent illness, disability, and the death of a beloved daughter. Variation, interdependence, adaptation were everywhere and helped him make sense of what he saw in nature.

Fries suggests that they can also help us make sense of disability. His partner's everyday life is often complicated by his Attention Deficit Syndrome, yet the characteristics that give people such trouble in modern societies may have once been adaptive, perhaps just the ticket for a successful hunter:

This scene will be repeated many times throughout the afternoon: Ian, ahead of me beckoning to the guide, motioning me to be as quiet as I can be, pointing to where only he can see what we have come to see: an entire family of rare and endangered black monkeys. In the jungle, Ian's brain is firing on all cylinders, full of color, sound, light, and movement.

(p. 139)

Other trouble-causing characteristics may have suited past environments but not our present one. Fries notes that just as beginning to walk upright held both advantages and disadvantages for humankind, certain genes that predispose us to illness and disability have fitness benefits as well, such as the genes for sickle-cell anemia, Tay Sachs disease, and cystic fibrosis. Fitness and disability are all about context. He tells, for example, of when he was unexpectedly better able to climb a mountain trail than Ian: “Because of the shape of my shoes I was able to transform metal rungs stuck in the side of a cliff into footholds” (p. 13). At first it seems a stretch to suggest that the variations we call disability and the variations that drive evolutionary change are similar or even analogous. Most disabilities are not heritable, in any case, contrary to the fears of the eugenicists (or perhaps to their hopes?). Surely there is no argument to be made that disability plays any significant role in producing adaptive change over time.

Yet what Fries reminds us by the comparison is that variability itself, regardless of what we might think or say about any particular variation, is the rule everywhere and necessary for the continuance of life. We might not think so of this deviation or that abnormality. Why a foot at a 45 degree angle to the leg sans ankle, as in Fries' case? There was a time, Fries writes, when he "could not stop asking why at birth I was missing bones in my legs. Chance, the fuel of natural selection, was not at that time a satisfactory explanation" (p. 114). It was not a fruitful question, he eventually came to realize. Perhaps this variation or that freak of nature, this anomaly or that sport (as Darwin and others of his day termed spontaneous mutations), this illness or that injury will play no productive part in the development of the species. But variation itself is the force that drives adaptation, providing the raw material of evolutionary change. There cannot be variation in general without variations in particular, nor productive variations without unproductive ones - not that we are capable of telling the difference in any case. Evolutionary change is inscrutable and those who think they can see through the veil have invariably (a word I use advisedly) done harm.

Laurent Clerc, a deaf man and one of the founders of the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, said something much the same in an address to the Connecticut legislature in 1818: "Every creature, every work of God is admirably well made; but if any one appears imperfect in our eyes, it does not belong to us to criticize it. Perhaps that which we do not find right in its kind, turns to our advantage without being able to perceive it." Clerc puts in a religious context what Fries puts in a secular one, yet the point is much the same. "Everything," Clerc concludes, "is variable and inconstant."

Many of Fries' observations follow well-worn paths for those of us in disability studies, though couched in pleasantly unfamiliar terms and fresh contexts. This is not a fault in a book one hopes will gain a wide and general readership. Thankfully, there are ideas that insiders might find challenging as well, as when he writes about help, sympathy, and dependence, topics of high emotional and intellectual charge. Fries does not offer many answers. This is not a book of arguments. It is rather an absorbing walk among questions and intriguing juxtapositions, a walk well worth taking.