The Right to Access: Citizenship and Disability, 1950-1973

D I S S E R T A T I O N

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Abstract

From the 1950s to the 1970s, the modern civil rights movement set into motion a profound transformation of citizenship rights. This study expands on this transformation, charting the development of disability rights activism and policy through the diverse campaigns that grappled with problems of public access after WWII through the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which contained the first civil rights provision for people with disabilities. Scholars have emphasized Congressional initiative, notably Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as the driving force behind providing civil rights to the disabled. My research, by contrast, synthesizes the complex relationship between the state and grassroots activism.

This study challenges the traditional narrative of the disability rights movement, placing its origins in the 1950s, rather than the late 1970s. Examining both local and national efforts, false starts, resistance, and successes, it describes a complex, contentious debate in American society that engaged student activists, federal and state bureaucrats, politicians, and corporate philanthropists. What emerged was a unique rights discourse that centered on the problem of physical access to public spaces and that contested common definitions of discrimination and disability. This study traces the development of activist networks and the social roots of political activism from rehabilitation centers, summer camps, and college campuses in pursuit of federal civil rights legislation.
Dedication

In Memory of Margaret Patterson
Acknowledgements

I am greatly indebted to the generosity of my mentors, colleagues, friends, and family, who have made this project possible. My greatest gratitude is owed to my advisor Susan Hartmann. She is a model scholar and teacher who has given me an extraordinary amount of her time, incisive criticism and advice, and support. The countless hours in her office, numerous revisions of chapter drafts and presentations, pushed me to become a better scholar. Her commitment to teaching and her demand of excellence in the classroom has without a doubt influenced my teaching and scholarship.

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with me over the past five years as I have strived to make sure each sentence says something.

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This project is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother Margaret Patterson. She instilled in me the importance of education, persistence, and standing up for what you believe. She did not live to see this project’s completion, but her unfettered strength has remained with me every step of the way.
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Introduction:

Narratives and Concepts of Disability Rights Activism in Post-War America

On April 5, 1977, disabled activist Judy Heumann and one hundred and fifty fellow protestors occupied the fourth floor of the San Francisco office of the Department of Heath, Education, and Welfare (HEW). A prolonged standoff resulted. Federal officials locked the building down, and it remained in that state for the next twenty-five days as authorities enacted what amounted to a siege. HEW officials cut off telephone lines and, applying pressure on the medical needs of protestors who were known to be disabled, denied entrance to care attendants, back-up ventilators, and food and water. As the days passed, conditions inside were far from sanitary. Due to the building’s lack of accessible bathrooms, activists were forced to urinate and defecate wherever they could.¹ The efforts of authorities were staggering but not wholly effective. Deaf protesters slipped the communications blockade by signing through the windows to interpreters on the outside. Some security guards helped activists smuggle in food, water, medicine, and catheter bags. In a show of support, one officer promised to flip a pin on his uniform as a signal if police were preparing to storm the building. Halfway through the occupation,

the mayor ordered food and air mattresses into the building. This demonstration in San Francisco was one of ten that took place on April 5 at each of HEW’s regional offices. With such community support, demonstrators in San Francisco were able to hold their position, whereas the sit-ins in Washington and Boston succumbed to pressure after twenty-eight hours.²

The issue was civil rights for the disabled. Demonstrators demanded that HEW Secretary Joseph Califano sign regulations to implement an anti-discrimination provision that Congress had enacted four years earlier. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 marked the first national legislation to prohibit federally funded programs from discriminating on the basis of disability, but by 1977 disability activists were still waiting for federal guidelines that would put teeth into the law. This changed on April 30, when the longest occupation of a federal building ended in San Francisco. Califano signed the regulations for implementing Section 504 and protestors exited the offices of HEW singing “We Have Overcome.”

Scholars have heralded this victory as the beginning of the disability rights movement. The conventional narrative of the disability rights movement begins with the

San Francisco sit-in and culminates with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. The leaders who took the national stage in the late 1970s, however, did not emerge at that moment, in reaction to the failed implementation of Section 504; nor was their activism merely a by-product of the rights revolution of that decade, as some scholars have argued. *The Right to Access* pushes the chronology backwards to 1950. It charts the development of disability rights activism and policy through 1973, ending with the passage of the Rehabilitation Act and its Section 504, which enshrined equality for the disabled under the law.

The leading accounts of disability rights prior to the late 1970s emphasize national policy formation and Congressional initiatives as the driving forces behind providing civil rights to people with disabilities. Disability activism, these accounts argue, emerged in the wake of federal legislation. To be sure, the protests that erupted in 1977 in angry reaction to the weak enforcement of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 were unprecedented in their magnitude and intensity, but they were not a beginning. Those protests were a display of activism that had been coordinated across ten cities, and they cannot be fully understood without recognizing the history and influence of disability activism as a grassroots movement that was cultivated in particular places by particular people.

Sociologist Richard K. Scotch’s and historian Edward Berkowitz’s top-down analyses of disability policy have provided the template for histories of the movement.³

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Both scholars assert that Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was written with no influence from disability rights activists. Scotch argues, “Section 504 was not developed at the urging of representatives of disabled people...It was an initiative of liberal congressional staff and not done at the request, suggestion, or demand of outside groups.” Furthermore, Scotch and Berkowitz suggest that people with disabilities were not organized before the mid-1970s. These authors focus on the level of elite policymaking. Yet, contrary to these assumptions that national politics or national organizations were the only stages of disability activism, the drama of contesting public access and demanding civil rights first played out at the local level.

Similarly, John D. Skrentny’s *The Minority Rights Revolution*, which has gained a wider readership, argues that the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 came first and that the disability rights movement emerged after the fact. He argues that this piece of civil rights legislation was a product of the momentum of federal legislation after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that gained passage because of the minority’s “deservingness.” In the same way, this wave of non-discrimination policy is said to have benefitted the rights of

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4 Scotch, *From Good Will to Civil Rights*; Berkowitz, *Disabled Policy*.
5 Scotch, *From Good Will to Civil Rights* 51.
women, Asian Americans, gays and lesbians, and Latinos. Each of these movements serves as an example of what Skrentny calls “anticipatory politics” in which policy achievements had little to do with pressures from communities outside of the corridors of legislative power. With regard to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Skrentny explains that congressional staff members anticipated that people with disabilities “would want what they were giving” and therefore gave it to them. Skrentny is correct to place disability rights within the rise of postwar rights activity, which he calls a revolution. However, his causal argument for Section 504 ignores the individuals who demanded curb cuts, ramps to buildings, access to higher education and employment, and, ultimately, full citizenship rights prior to 1973. This oversight discounts the agency of such individuals and, like Scotch and Berkowitz, emphasizes that of policymakers. More than obscuring those voices—an important problem in its own right—this interpretation neglects an array of tactics and relationships that constituted an important and understudied chapter of American political organizing.

In addition to these omissions regarding the causation of disability rights policy, scholars’ accounts, as mentioned above, have led to an inaccurate chronology of the American disability rights movement. In contrast, this study is inspired by the recent work on the “long civil rights movement.” By positioning the Rehabilitation Act of

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8 Skrentny, Minority Rights Revolution, 267-272 (quotation, 270).
10 Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” Journal of American History, 91 (March 2005): 1233-1265. For other works on civil rights that take this approach see
1973 as the impetus for the disability rights movement and solely crediting policymakers for its creation, scholars have ignored a long history of disabled people’s struggles for equality. This work examines how people with disabilities came together in local communities, forged networks, and created change in their everyday lives.\textsuperscript{11} As historian Thomas Sugrue has rightly argued, “Social movements have an impact on public policy. Public policies and national politics shape and constrain the options available to activists. Many histories of civil rights artificially separate the local and the national, the micro and the macro. Policy makers at the local, state, and federal levels were influenced by grassroots activists.”\textsuperscript{12} In accord with this view, \textit{The Right to Access} describes what was a complex relationship between the state and grassroots activism. It explores how ordinary citizens and disability rights leaders fought for equal access to employment, education, and transportation. It examines organizing at local, state, and federal levels, and it connects each of these levels of activism through descriptions of the formation of networks and the development of a disability rights consciousness.

Central to the consciousness and rights demands of disability activists was the concept of \textit{physical access}. Physical access was an important consideration throughout civil rights activism, as men and women found themselves barred from spaces and

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\item Sugrue, \textit{Sweet Land of Liberty}, xxiii
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opportunities due to negative attitudes regarding race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, but it was the central concern of persons pursuing disability rights in the 1960s and 1970s. In contrast to the legal and social segregation combated by African Americans, for disabled citizens, the most important cause of segregation and inequality lay in the built environment. Stairs and curbs, separate schools and otherwise inaccessible public buildings, combined with negative or bewildered public perceptions of disability to relegate disabled people to being “back door citizens.” People with disabilities battled public mindsets and fought to change physically the built environment. Integration for people with disabilities often came at high monetary cost. Correcting barriers to physical access required more than changes in attitudes, beliefs, or law. Integrating a school required more than a court order; it required new entrances for buildings and accessible bathrooms and classrooms. Access to transportation brought similar challenges and costs; as disabled activists described it, “we can’t even get to the back of the bus.” The problem of cost was complex, and the attempt to solve it engaged an array of experts, including student activists, politicians, federal and state bureaucrats, and corporate philanthropists. For truly effective change, advocates both had to educate society that they were worthy of citizenship and also had to convince their fellow citizens that they were worth the costs of restructuring inaccessible buildings.

In addition to altering the narrative of the disability rights movement itself, this dissertation offers a challenge to civil rights history more broadly, which is particularly due for a revision that takes disability into account. While the activism of disabled people remains absent from existing scholarship on the civil rights movement as well as on the student movement, *The Right to Access* challenges the standard claim that the African
American civil rights movement emerged first and produced other minority rights movements in the 1970s, including the disability rights movement. Rather, it demonstrates that prior to the 1970s activist networks were essential to the project of creating disability rights legislation at both state and federal levels, paralleling the development of the black freedom struggle. Disability rights constituted a genuine grassroots movement that built momentum from successes at local levels and propelled further activism by tapping into larger claims of citizenship. Unlike movements that emerged out of the civil rights struggle, as in the case of some feminist activism, for example, disability rights activism had distinct origins.

The disability rights movement intersected with the African American civil rights movement at several points and in various ways. Like African Americans, disabled citizens sought equal access to housing, employment, and education. Yet when disabled activists reached out to leaders of the black freedom struggle in solidarity, they were often rebuffed. At the same time, both African American and Mexican American activists in the 1960s employed the language of disability to promote their goals, arguing that race was a handicap.

As the relationship between disability rights activists and activists in other movements at times made clear, issues of identity were profoundly important. A note on terminology is, therefore, necessary. “Disability” is an expansive and evolving category. When the terms “disabled” or “disability” are used in this work, they refer to physical disabilities. This includes physical conditions that impede mobility as well as blindness and deafness. In the 1960s there was also a growing movement for the deinstitutionalization of people with intellectual disabilities. Though an important
episode in its own right for understanding movements for full citizenship rights, physically disabled activists often separated themselves from people with intellectual disabilities and viewed their struggle as separate.\footnote{For histories on intellectual disability movement, see Allison C. Carey, \textit{On the Margins of Citizenship: Intellectual Disability and Civil Rights in Twentieth Century America} (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009); Barbara L. Floyd, \textit{From Institutions to Independence: A History of People with Disabilities in Northwest Ohio} (Toledo: University of Toledo Press, 2011); Richard Noll, \textit{American Madness: The Rise and Fall of Dementia Praecox} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).} Activists were always conscious of their identity as disabled. They used that identity at times to achieve their political goals, and at other times they energetically defended their understanding of what it meant to be disabled, rejecting other groups, such as African Americans and Mexican Americans when they sought to influence or encroach on that term for their own policy objectives.

Chapter one examines local and state initiatives to pass architectural barrier legislation for people with disabilities in the late 1950s and 1960s. Activists disseminated architectural barrier codes, wrote articles, conducted community surveys, and served on federal task forces. They formed alliances with trade unions, philanthropic organizations, and architects in effort to achieve full access to society. Activists specifically linked architectural barriers to civil rights. These campaigns succeeded with anti-barrier legislation passed in thirty-three states and the federal Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, marking the first civil rights-based legislation for people with disabilities.

Chapter two traces the development of disability rights consciousness and the formation of activist networks in the 1960s, challenging the omission of disabled students in the historiography on student protest. One strand of early disability rights activism had its roots in rehabilitation centers and summer camps, where young people like Judy Heumann experienced community with other disabled youth and escaped the isolation of...
their homebound lives. Young people’s shared experiences in rehabilitation centers led to the creation of a network of future activists and had a far-reaching impact on those activists’ understandings of accessibility—both physical and social—which they elaborated and turned to action on college campuses in the 1960s. Disabled students, desiring the same opportunities as their able-bodied peers, fought for admission into colleges and universities, took sledgehammers to inaccessible curbs, established disabled student programs, and developed a rights consciousness.

Chapter three examines key developments at both the federal and local levels from 1968 to 1970, after passage of the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968. It analyzes evolving conceptions of rehabilitation and civil rights. Originally designed in the early twentieth century to restore physically disabled veterans and workers to the labor force, vocational rehabilitation legislation became an instrument for activists seeking access to transportation, social services, and housing. By the late 1960s, in an effort to reduce dependency on the state, rehabilitation officials sought to expand the definition of “handicapped” to include the socially and economically disadvantaged. Disability activists perceived the inclusion of the disadvantaged in rehabilitation as a threat and protested. Yet, the restructuring of rehabilitation also provided a venue for disability activists to promote a civil rights agenda. These events set the stage for the policy debates leading up to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Chapter four carries forward the momentum of activism and state-sponsored initiatives to secure civil rights for disabled people. Organizations formerly rooted in universities, as described in chapter two, became more militant as did the demand for equal rights. The reauthorization of rehabilitation legislation in 1972 provided another
opportunity for disability rights advocates to demand civil rights by protesting at the Capitol, lobbying congressmen, and testifying at Senate hearings. They ultimately triumphed with inclusion of Section 504 in the revised Rehabilitation Act of 1972, which prohibited discrimination on basis of disability in federally funded programs. When President Nixon’s vetoes of the Rehabilitation Act in 1972 and 1973 threatened the disabled’s attainment of equal protection under the law, Judy Heumann and other activists took to the streets. Four years before the national protests against the failed implementation of Section 504, disabled activists identified their work as part of a movement that was fanning across the nation. In September 1973, the Rehabilitation Act and, most importantly, Section 504 was signed into law. Though it would take four years to secure regulations for implementation, people with disabilities had finally received the principle of equality under the law.

This study reveals the benefits of looking beneath the national disability rights narrative to the social roots of political activism, where local initiative, network formation, and consciousness raising served as the foundation for accessing citizenship. These factors require a more complex model of disability policymaking than provided by state-centered explanations. Disability rights activism cannot be reduced merely to a reaction to unimplemented legislation. By 1977, there was nothing new to disability activists about forming organizations, engaging media outlets, coordinating group demonstrations, and manipulating bureaucratic structures. These skills had been long in development in a generation of activists.
Chapter 1:


In 1922, twenty-year-old Hugo Deffner contracted polio, leaving him paralyzed. The Oklahoma City native, frustrated by his newfound inaccessibility to everyday life, dedicated the next thirty-nine years to the elimination of architectural barriers. He engaged local business owners and architects, lobbied city councilmen, and pleaded with his pastor for level sidewalks and wider doors to accommodate his wheelchair. After achieving success in his hometown, Deffner broadened his efforts, publishing a regular column in *Paraplegia News*.\(^1\) In 1957 the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped (PCEH) named Deffner “Handicapped American of Year,” for his “one man crusade.”\(^2\) As Deffner wheeled himself to the stage to accept the recognition, President Eisenhower remarked to the PCEH annual meeting, “He has, as I understand it, tried to make every building in the United States accessible to one who possibly cannot climb stairs. And I hope that he is having every success in that effort, because sometimes

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\(^1\) *Paraplegia News* is the monthly magazine of the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

they do seem steep—even to me.”

Because a set of stairs blocked Deffner’s path onto the stage, two marines carried him up the steps to receive his award in honor of his efforts to eliminate architectural barriers.

Deffner’s award marked the beginning of a decade-long struggle at both the local and state levels to secure anti-barrier legislation. By the late 1950s, a growing number of activists contested the inaccessibility of buildings, an issue that symbolized the barring of people with disabilities from everyday life and relegated them to being “back door citizens.”

For people with disabilities, the steps leading into a building represented much more than a physical obstruction; activists saw the elimination of architectural barriers as an important step toward their full integration into society. They argued that architectural accessibility was the foundation for achieving other basic tenets of citizenship, including education and employment.

As one activist said, architectural barriers were “enemy number one!” As the 1960s drew to a close, more than thirty states had passed anti-discrimination legislation and architectural barriers standards in order to regulate accessibility in public spaces. Successes at the local and state levels increased the pressure on the federal government for a response, resulting in the

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3 Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Remarks to the PCEH,” Public Papers of Presidents of the US DDE (May 1957), 94.
Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) of 1968. This chapter charts the development of architectural barrier standards and the activism behind those developments, ending with the passage of federal legislation in 1968. It also examines the shift in disability activism after World War II from the focus on the right to work to the right to full participation in civic life centered on the elimination of architectural barriers.\(^7\)

The ABA was the first federal legislation to go beyond extending benefits and services to people with disabilities by addressing discrimination and civil rights. Since the enactment of vocational rehabilitation legislation in 1918, Congress had appropriated millions of dollars to restore disabled individuals to society, yet little attention was given to the physical environment beyond the walls of hospitals and rehabilitation centers.\(^8\) Activists realized that the main goal of rehabilitation—economic independence—was not fully achievable because of this “final stumbling block.”\(^9\) Despite this decade of campaigns for antidiscrimination legislation and architectural barrier standards in cities and states across the country, scholars have only briefly noted the importance of the ABA. The ABA is often dismissed because of weak enforcement and has been


overshadowed by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Moreover, our understanding of how the Architectural Barriers Act came to be is limited largely to the role of Hugh Gallagher, the disabled congressional aide to Senator Bob Bartlett (D-AK) who in a heroic tale wrote this piece of legislation single-handedly. The lack of focus on architectural barrier legislation in the standard disability history narrative obscures the role of state and local activists in securing changes in policies and reshaping understandings of disability around the basic concepts of citizenship.

**Constructing a Standard**

While Hugo Deffner became the first person to win national recognition for his anti-barrier activism, individuals and groups in various locales had championed barrier-free environments for more than a decade. In 1945, four activists established Open Doors for the Handicapped in Pittsburgh to promote accessibility in their city and surrounding Allegheny County. They embraced the motto “it takes aroused citizens to foster legislation to make possible the financial and social independence of the handicapped.”

The following year, Jack Fisher, a disabled WWII veteran, petitioned the mayor of Kalamazoo, MI, to install curb ramps at major intersections. Both independent

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10 Berkowitz, Disabled Policy; Scotch, From Good Will to Civil Rights; Skrentny, The Minority Rights Revolution.


initiatives were successful. Open Doors activists reported that because of their work in the community more than fifty percent of the 150 buildings constructed from 1954 to 1957 in Allegheny County were made accessible to the disabled. In Kalamazoo, the City Commission appropriated $680 to construct thirty-four curb cuts throughout the city.\textsuperscript{14}

As World War II came to an end and the polio epidemic reached its peak, the number of people with physical disabilities was on the rise, which drew more attention to the problem of architectural barriers. In 1945, in response to the increased awareness of limited physical access, the non-profit National Society for Crippled Children and Adults (NSCCA) formed a subcommittee devoted to achieving a barrier-free society.\textsuperscript{15} The NSCCA, established in 1920, had a long-standing history of community outreach, rehabilitation, and research for people with physical disabilities. It maintained affiliate chapters in most states and larger cities. In 1947, the first major task of the subcommittee was to evaluate the magnitude of the architectural barrier problem. The committee cataloged the physical obstructions in buildings that excluded people with disabilities in Chicago, the site of its national headquarters. As a result of their surveys, a public education program was launched in Chicago to elicit voluntary cooperation in removing architectural barriers in public buildings. The campaign proved successful with the installation of ramps and elevators in department stores, such as Marshall Fields, and a moving stairway in Illinois Central Station.\textsuperscript{16}

In the mid-1950s, the NSCCA expanded its initiatives to local chapters. In 1956, Pittsburgh’s Open Doors joined forces with the Pennsylvania Society for Crippled

\textsuperscript{15} The NSCCA, merged with the Easter Seals Foundation in 1967, and retained that name.
\textsuperscript{16} “Ramp Building Trend is Held Cripples’ Boon,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, February 19, 1953.
Children and Adults to petition the Building Code Advisory Board of the Pennsylvania State Department of Labor and Industry to eliminate architectural barriers. The following year, this new coalition achieved another milestone with Pennsylvania Governor George Leader’s initiative to revise state building codes, mandating safe entrance and exit facilities for the disabled. However, because of a lack of guidelines for architects and builders, these grassroots organizations and the NSCCA achieved only promises and a handful of small victories toward the full integration of disabled citizens into society throughout the 1950s.

That changed after 1959, when the NSCCA joined forces with the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped. The roots of the PCEH lay in activism focused on labor. Beginning in the late 1930s, people with disabilities sought to attain more rights, focusing mainly on the right to work. Disabled groups saw labor as the first step to securing other rights, regarding it as a way to reduce dependence while attaining one of the basic tenets of citizenship. Organizations including the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), and the American Federation of the Physically Handicapped (AFPH) each worked for gainful employment and workers’ rights throughout the 1930s and 1940s. World War II expanded the number of activists and organizations and ushered in early policies aimed at

18 Alice Kessler Harris, In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America (New York, 2001), 10-11. Scholars have also highlighted disabled groups’ emphasis on labor as a tenet of citizenship rights. See, Robert Buchanan Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in School and Factory 1850-1950 (Washington, D.C., 1999); Audra Jennings, “With Minds Fixed on the Horrors of War: Liberalism and Disability Activism, 1940-1960” (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Ohio State University, Columbus, 2008); Kornbluh, “Disability, Antiprofessionalism, and Civil Rights.” Jennings argues that the American Federation of the Physically Handicapped (AFPH) established in 1942 lobbied for government involvement in hiring practices for the disabled and were responsible for the creation of the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped.
increasing levels of employment among the disabled population. After the war, the AFPH launched a concerted effort to retain wartime jobs for its constituents. In 1947, President Truman responded to the labor demands of the disabled, establishing the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped (PCEH). Throughout the 1950s, legislation was amended to increase employment opportunities and integrate disabled Americans into society, including the appropriation of additional funds and services to the Vocational Rehabilitation Act in 1956.

In 1959, the PCEH credited the spectacle of Deffner’s not being able to reach the stage without assistance at the annual meeting as the impetus for its own committee on architectural barriers. The new initiative also happened to coincide with the waning results of PCEH’s efforts to employ people with disabilities in the late 1950s. While gains were made after 1947 in employment and rehabilitation, the physical inaccessibility of places of employment became a fundamental issue for the PCEH. If disabled Americans could not physically enter employers’ buildings, the PCEH’s efforts to rehabilitate and employ disabled Americans were futile. From the PCEH’s perspective, the movement to eliminate architectural barriers was inextricably tied to employment, as

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19 For a detailed history of the AFPH, see Audra Jennings, “With Minds Fixed on the Horrors of War: Liberalism and Disability Activism, 1940-1960” (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Ohio State University, Columbus, 2008).
20 It was originally called the President’s Committee on National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week until 1952. It was renamed again in 1989 to the President’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. The PCEH comprised government and nongovernment officials and was designed with the main purpose of increasing employment opportunities for people with physical disabilities. For a history of the PCEH, see Jennings, “With Minds Fixed on the Horrors of War” and Ruth Ellen Ross, 50 Years of Progress: An Overview of The President’s Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities, 1947-1990 (Washington, D.C. 1997).
they sought to establish alliances with builders, insurance companies, and labor unions to advance their cause.

The scattered instances of anti-barrier activism gained traction in 1959 as the PCEH and NSCCA joined forces with the American Standards Association (ASA) to develop a standard building code to promote accessibility. In May of the same year, New York City hosted the first meeting of this coalition, named Project A-117. Leon Chatelain, Jr., who as the former president of the American Institute of Architects, a member of the PCEH executive committee, and a trustee of NSSCA, combined three elements of the coalition, led the Project A-117 steering committee along with Timothy Nugent, a long-time disability rights advocate and director of the University of Illinois Disabled Student Rehabilitation Services Program. The PCEH, NSCCA, and ASA reached out to representatives from forty-five national organizations, including the Associated General Contractors of America, the Society of Industrial Realtors, the National Safety Council, the National Paraplegia Foundation, and the American Public Health Association, to establish comprehensive building codes and forge important allies.

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22 The American Standards Association is now called American National Standards Institute (ANSI).
In late October 1961, after three years of research and experimentation, the coalition published the first American Standards Association code for barrier-free construction, *American Standard Specifications for Making Buildings Accessible to, and Usable by, the Physically Handicapped.* These specifications addressed every aspect of a building’s design, from the appropriate incline of building entrance ramps to the acceptable width of bathroom stall doors. The standards required buildings to have at least one ground-level entrance or the installation of a ramp in at least one location, doorways thirty-two inches or wider, and at least one handrail on each set of stairs. Additionally, it specified wider parking spots and sidewalks, one restroom stall to accommodate wheelchairs, and elevators for buildings with more than one floor. With an official guideline for new building construction and for the adaptation of previously constructed buildings, the PCEH and NSCCA hoped to champion a barrier-free society that would fulfill the missions of both organizations: employment and civil rights. These standards served as the foundation for future legislation and mandates regarding architectural access. Perhaps more importantly, the campaign to raise awareness of the standards brought into the national spotlight issues of discrimination against people with disabilities and their full integration into society.

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25 In 1963, Great Britain followed the US’s lead and developed Designing for the Disabled and in 1965, Canada also published its own standards.

26 The committee identified six categories of disability they were concerned with: nonambulatory (wheelchair users), semi-ambulatory (crutches and brace users), sight handicapped, incoordinates, hearing handicapped, and the aging. *Minutes of the ASA Steering Committee, 1959,* ASPF, Box, Folder: ASA A-117, UIA; *American Standard Specifications for Making Buildings Accessible to, and Usable by, the Physically Handicapped,* (Washington, D.C., 1961).

Launching a “National Attack”

Two weeks after the publication of *American Standard Specifications* the NSCCA launched an official campaign at its annual convention in Denver, Colorado: “A National Attack on Architectural Barriers.” Conference organizers wore large yellow buttons and hung banners with the slogan “Breaking DOWN Barriers,” which stretched across the entrance and sides of the conference hotel and greeted the two hundred disabled and non-disabled attendees.

Keynote addresses from representatives of Project A-117 kicked off the convention. “This is a day to be remembered,” proclaimed Major General Melvin J. Maas, chairman of the PCEH, “In my hands I hold the standards . . . the Declaration of Independence for the Handicapped.” General Joseph J. Foss, president of the NSCCA and former governor of South Dakota, concluded the opening ceremony by reading a letter of endorsement from President John F. Kennedy:

> I am particularly pleased that your opening session will unveil a most promising development for equality for the handicapped – the project of drafting standards to eliminate architectural barriers that have prevented the handicapped from partaking fully in life around them. Yet, we must remember that standards remain nothing more than words and phrases, unless they are translated into action. To serve the purpose for which they were created, they must be adopted. The acceptance and adoption of these standards now become the business of citizens and governmental authorities everywhere. I am sure they will rise to the challenge.

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29 “Breaking Down Architectural Barriers,” *Wisconsin Easter Seal News* (December, 1961) ASPF, Box 1, Propaganda Reference folder, UIA.
I can further assure you that the agencies and departments of the Federal Government that come under the jurisdiction of my office will give full support to this worthy project.31

The following three days featured sessions that reinforced President Kennedy’s call to action. Presentations by government officials, architects, builders, and disability activists focused upon three main strategies for eliminating architectural barriers over the next seven years: public education, community activism, and local and state legislation.32

Charles Caniff, disabled World War II veteran and director of the Indiana Society for Crippled Children and Adults, referred to his fellow wheelchair users as “back door citizens,” and emphasized the direct correlation between access to buildings and access to citizenship. Caniff explained: “To fulfill our responsibilities as citizens, we often must circumvent these barriers by entering through the rear door, where freight is hauled in and garbage hauled out, and make our way through coal bins, storerooms, and boiler rooms to reach a freight elevator which can accommodate our wheelchairs.”33 While Caniff’s presentation aimed at increasing awareness of physical barriers as a form of discrimination, Leroy Laase, chair of the Department of Speech at the University of Nebraska and president of the Nebraska Society for Crippled Children and Adults, emphasized the need for citizen involvement at the local level. Laase warned audience members that they could not rely on national organizations and government agencies to do the work for them, as he proclaimed, “the elimination of architectural barriers in your

community will not happen UNLESS YOU MAKE IT HAPPEN.”

He explained how to implement the NSCCA’s and PCEH’s three strategies for effectively eliminating architectural barriers in local communities: conduct a survey of buildings and provide data to municipal and state governments, educate the public on the need for accessible facilities through a variety of media sources, including newspaper articles and television commercials, and establish alliances and networks with local churches and philanthropic organizations for funding and manpower. The other presentations echoed Caniff and Laase, trying to mobilize a movement for an accessible society.

Henry W. Haverstock, Jr., the chairman of the Architectural Barriers Committee for the Minnesota chapter of the NSCCA, showcased the success of activists in his home state. As one of the first state chapters to establish a committee on architectural barriers in 1958, Minnesota served as a model for community organizing. In 1959, Haverstock and his committee of builders, architects, labor leaders, clergy, and “influential lay persons,” received a grant from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare’s Social and Rehabilitation Services Division of Research, to conduct surveys to measure accessibility in four Minnesota communities. They collected data on architectural barriers, suggested community approaches to eliminate barriers, and published community guides to promote national public education.

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36 Henry W. Haverstock, Jr. ““Minnesota Story: Current Programs---Progress Report.” Annual Convention of the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults, November 16, 1961, 2. APSF Box 1, Folder Conferences, UIA. Haverstock was paralyzed after contracting polio. He was one of Sister Kenny’s first patients in Minneapolis and was a prominent attorney in Minnesota.
37 Surveys were conducted in Mankato, Rochester, Morrison Country, and St. Paul in efforts to reflect both diverse buildings and populations. Mankato (state college town, population 23, 797), Rochester (large
of the three-year study, the committee reported that only seven out of four hundred and eighty-five buildings were totally accessible and usable by the disabled in accordance with *American Standard Specifications*. The committee concluded, “that the problem is of sufficient magnitude to warrant an all out effort to seek solutions on every local, state, and national level.”

Like Caniff and Laase, Haverstock reinforced the importance of public education and individual activism as the keys to gaining full accessibility, declaring, “education is a process—and it takes time. You are our ambassador; you are the key link in this long chain of activity.”

The three-day conference laid the foundation for an extensive campaign in local communities and states across the nation co-sponsored by the PCEH and NSCCA. The partnership between the two national organizations provided much of the financial support and expertise, but national leaders relied on state and local affiliates and organizations to do the groundwork. Throughout the 1960s, state and local affiliates of the PCEH and NSCCA and related community organizations implemented the three

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38 Out of 485 buildings surveyed in all four communities, 234 had no barriers in the entrance path (i.e. steps leading to the entrance). Of the 234 accessible approaches, 140 had accessible exterior doors, and 128 had accessible conditions inside the primary entrance (level, no immediate steps). Of the 357 buildings not accessible at the primary entrance 68 had no barriers at the second entrance, only 17 had accessible conditions immediately inside. Out of the 145 buildings that could be entered, 135 had negotiable corridors serving an entrance. Out of 135 buildings with accessible entrances 95 were single level or had an elevator. Of the 95 that had been completely accessible to this point, only 10 had accessible bathrooms and only 7 had wide enough stall doors.

39 Emphasis original.

guiding principles set forth at the 1961 conference: public education, community action, and architectural barrier surveys.

The PCEH and NSCCA campaign made a concerted effort to raise public awareness on the discriminatory effects of architectural barriers. Their strategy was to employ multiple outlets and methods of outreach to advance their public education goals. In addition to holding state and local workshops around the country, the national organizations distributed “How-To-Do-It” kits that contained copies of Caniff, Laase, and Haverstock’s presentations along with American Standard Specifications and sample building surveys for local community leaders. Additionally, they sent a copy of the American Standard Specifications to every registered architect and construction firm in the United States. The national organizations publicized their cause and linked activists across the country by circulating stories of anti-barrier success and information on local workshops and organizational happenings in mainstream newspapers. All of the articles shared the same rhetoric and objectives put forth by the PCEH and NSCCA,

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underscoring the ways in which architectural barriers excluded disabled people from society. The Minnesota chapter alone ran articles in each of the state’s 435 newspapers.\textsuperscript{43} The PCEH and NSCCA strategically employed their membership in publicizing their project and establishing important relationships beyond the disability community.\textsuperscript{44} Well-connected NSCCA state affiliate presidents and trustees aided in gaining public awareness of the architectural barrier problem.\textsuperscript{45} Edgar J. Forio, senior vice president of the Coca-Cola Company and president of the Georgia Society for Crippled Children and Adults, pinpointed a lack of public awareness as the greatest obstacle to the architectural barrier movement. This approach aligned with the national organizations’ objectives and also called for, as Forio described, “dedicated and concerted action by both volunteers and professionals on the community level to tear down walls and build bridges.”\textsuperscript{46} Forio

\textsuperscript{43} In 1961, Minnesota also established an annual awards program to recognize businesses and architects that designed fully accessible facilities. The announcement of the award was publicized in multiple trade journals and media outlets to draw attention to the issue among building planners, architects, building designers, and the general public, benefiting both the architects and the architectural opportunity program. Schwanke and Hopkins, \textit{Minnesota Architectural Barriers Communities Surveys Final Report}, 45.


\textsuperscript{45} The NSCCA state affiliates appointed prominent figures to serve as presidents. Some examples include Former South Dakota Governor Joseph Foss, Hawaii Governor John A. Burns, former Kansas Governor Arthur Capper, A.L.M. Wiggins, former Undersecretary of the United States Treasury and president of South Carolina society, Elwood M. Brooks, President of Central Banking and Trust Company served as president of Colorado society. The National Society Board of Trustees also appointed notable figures, including Orin Lehman, Conrad Hilton, Mrs. James Skinner (former president of Junior Leagues of America) and Dorothy Houghton (former president of General Federation of Women’s Clubs). “Leaders Prominent in Many Fields Named National Society Trustees,” \textit{Bulletin of National Society of Crippled Children and Adults} (Hereafter referred to as \textit{Bulletin}), 19, no. 6-7 (October-November 1956):7, 19; “Name National Society Leaders: Distinguished Cross-Section of Americans United to Aid Crippled Children and Adults,” \textit{Bulletin}, 20, no. 7 (November 1957): 13.

\textsuperscript{46} “Easter Seal Conventioneers Seek to Break Barriers Facing Handicapped: Forio Urges Dedication, Education on Local Level,” \textit{Easter Seal News} (August 1961). ASPF, Box 1, “Reference Propaganda” Folder, UIA.
also engineered a photo-op, pushing his product as he posed with wheelchair users in front of a large Coca-Cola logo. The PCEH built upon labor alliances with trade associations and volunteer organizations to expand the scope of their campaign and target specific audiences. Representatives from both the PCEH and NSCCA presented on architectural barriers at annual trade association conferences, including the American Restaurant Association, the Hardware Manufacturers, and the Capital Building Officials Conference of America.

The PCEH also utilized the female leaders of the newly established Women’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped (WCEH). Led by women with a strong history of successful organizing, including Dr. Dorothy C. Stratton, former executive director of the Girl Scouts, and Chloe Gifford, former president of the National Federation of Women’s Clubs, their main objective was to mobilize other women’s organizations.47 The WCEH, consistent with the goals of the PCEH, allied specifically with the National Council of Catholic Women, the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), and other philanthropic organizations, including Altrusa International Foundation. Civilian International adopted the architectural removal campaign as an “action program” for its local clubs, and American Women in Radio and Television pledged to publicize the cause through their media outlets for two years.48 The WCEH worked to make the home more accessible for women with disabilities. The Handicapped Homemakers Project, launched by the University of Connecticut Home Economics department in 1955, brought together home economic professionals, nurses,

and social workers with the goal of making disabled women successful homemakers. Gifford and the WCEH joined this initiative to raise awareness of needs of accessible kitchens and appliances.\textsuperscript{49}

The NSCCA used its diverse and well-connected membership network to publish articles in a variety of professional journals in an effort to reach an audience that could potentially aid the anti-barrier movement. In 1962, Eveline Jacobs, a Baptist minister and researcher for the Chicago affiliate of the NSCCA, alerted Christians to the problem of architectural barriers. In the \textit{International Journal of Religious Education} she admonished churches for their failure to provide accessible places of congregation and worship. She deftly exposed the problems of church architecture: “Imposing flights of stairs, magnificent heavy doors, gleaming floors waxed to a high polish—all these are efforts to create beauty in the temple of worship. But these and many other elements of church structure, design, and decoration serve to bar thousands from attendance, some of whom are most in need of the church’s ministry.”\textsuperscript{50} Jacobs’ article prompted further discussions of accessibility within Christian communities. Some churches responded positively and entered important alliances for the nationwide campaign.\textsuperscript{51} In the greater Phoenix area, congregations spearheaded initiatives to provide Sunday services for people with disabilities in an effort “to make them active participants in business and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[50] Eveline E. Jacobs. “Don’t Let the Building Keep Them Away” \textit{International Journal of Religious Education} (February 1962) ASPF, Box 1, Folder: Reference Propaganda, , UIA. Articles such as “Keep Handicapped in Mind, Group Urges Church Planners,” \textit{Washington’s Archdiocesan Newspaper}, March 31, 1966, were also featured in religion-specific publications.
\end{footnotes}
social life.” However, these special services, with temporary ramps installed at church entrances for one Sunday service only, still segregated people with physical disabilities from able-bodied parishioners. 52

William F. Lotz, Project A-117 committee member and president of a Philadelphia construction firm, appealed to builders in a May 1962 article in the Associated General Contractors of America official publication. Similar to much of the anti-barrier rationale, Lotz emphasized the low cost of building alternations. He argued that implementation of the A-117 standards was an important aspect missing from the construction of most buildings not because of difficulty or cost, but merely from the thoughtlessness of architects and builders. 53 Lotz’s article reiterated the themes of civic membership and community access as he asked readers to imagine what their everyday lives would be like if they were confined to a wheelchair. “Would you be able,” he asked, “to attend classes at an educational institution in your community, worship in the church of your choice, register and vote at election time, purchase a money order at your local post office, attend a ball game or horse race, borrow a book at the library, or spend an evening at a theater?” 54 Lotz sought to make a broader connection with his readers, arguing that elimination of architectural barriers would benefit everyone, not just the disabled.

While Lotz placed the burden of change on the building community, other activists targeted the insurance industry. They emphasized a correlation between barrier-

free environments and reduced insurance claims. Articles in trade journals such as the *Journal of American Insurance* highlighted benefits to insurance companies, arguing that the elimination of barriers would reduce work-related injuries and, therefore, would reduce workman’s compensation claims. Furthermore, barrier-free environments would result in fewer accidents and losses in insurance policies. By 1964, the PCEH and NSCCA strategy of targeting specific business sectors and churches proved to be successful as organizations including the AFL-CIO, the National Council of Churches, the Society of Industrial Realtors, and the American Public Health Association passed resolutions for the adoption of A-117 standards and endorsed federal legislation. The Society of Industrial Realtors also urged other industries to adopt these standards to increase employment opportunities for the disabled.

By the mid-1960s, articles and publicity campaigns revealed a shift in strategy from emphasizing the relationship between the removal of architectural barriers as a civil right for disabled people to stressing the benefits that barrier-free design offered for everyone in society. In part, this rhetorical shift reflected the need to gain larger numbers of supporters, since architectural barriers directly affected only 18% of the population—a statistic often cited by businesses and building owners to show the lack of necessity for adapting their facilities. Activists emphasized the incremental cost and the universal benefits of constructing accessible facilities, claiming, “most persons who are healthy

now are destined to be drastically affected through disease, injury, or just plain old age.” 58 Advocates also incorporated pregnant mothers and children as way to broaden the population that would benefit from the elimination of barriers. One Minnesota activist argued, “Who among us can deny that the strongest and healthiest specimens of womanhood experience some limitations of mobility in the last two months of pregnancy?” 59

In addition to increasing public awareness, NSCCA and PCEH state and local affiliates targeted municipalities. They conducted community surveys and published guides that ranked local buildings based on accessibility. These guides, which were distributed at town hall and city council meetings, featured information such as the widths of doorways, heights of drinking fountains and toilet facilities. Community organizers presented strategies to local business owners and builders for making facilities accessible and showed the twenty-two minute film, “Sound the Trumpets,” produced by the Minnesota chapter of the NSCCA. 60 The film documented the daily struggles of people with physical disabilities, such as going to the grocery store and the post office, and was designed to “stir communities to action by presenting the problem in a dramatic, effective way.” 61 The NSCCA distributed over one hundred copies of the film to thirty states and nine foreign countries, estimating that more than 30,000 people viewed the

59 “Architectural Barriers Fading from the Scene in Minneapolis, MN” MiSCCA Report, April 24, 1969, 3.
60 MiSSCA also produced the first film on architectural barriers with the grant from the Department of Health Education and Welfare in 1963. Schwanke and Hopkins, “Architectural Barriers Film,” Minnesota Architectural Barriers Communities Surveys Final Report, 30.
film by the end of the decade. By the mid-1960s, more than forty communities published guides, including Boston, Washington, D.C., Denver, and New York City, and forty-five cities had guides awaiting publication.

While most of the literature on eliminating architectural barriers highlighted activists’ successes, especially at the local level, there was also blatant resistance to the integration of people with disabilities. In Rochester, NY, for example, activists successfully lobbied the mayor in 1964 to institute an “Architectural Barriers Week” to survey buildings in the community. While the Rochester municipal government was relatively receptive to making newly constructed buildings accessible, there was opposition by some members of the community. The survey concluded that in addition to finding that most buildings were inaccessible to the disabled, prejudicial barriers were equally oppressive. The focus of resistance within Rochester ranged from concerns about building re-construction costs to anxiety over the integration of disabled bodies with healthy citizens. Concerned that the disabled could be contagious, one opponent asked, “Should they really be mixed up with normal people?” A business owner also questioned the integration of disabled and non-disabled people, bluntly stating, “They would make my customers nervous; they might die or something.” One Rochester activist and community observer drew a parallel between the unwillingness to adapt buildings for wheelchair users and the history of African American segregation, arguing

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that the problem was rooted in prejudice rather than cost or lack of necessity.\textsuperscript{67} The Rochester survey was one of the few publications that documented specific community members’ opposition to the elimination of architectural barriers.

Such resistance caused some figures in the architectural barriers movement to adjust strategies. Activist E. H. Matthai blamed the PCEH’s and NSCCA’s promotional material for opposition by builders and architects. Matthai argued that the national organizations did not feature the most aesthetically pleasing buildings when showcasing newly installed ramps and therefore deterred potential supporters.\textsuperscript{68} He suggested that the architectural barriers campaign move away from the negative image of reconstruction, exemplified by the placement of large, unsightly wooden ramps at the front of old, beautiful churches, and highlight the architectural opportunity of new, accessible construction.\textsuperscript{69} In Illinois, activists showcased pictures of newly constructed buildings with level entrances to highlight the aesthetic benefits of accessibility.\textsuperscript{70}

Reflecting the shift in propaganda, Chicago advocates compiled a fact sheet of the advantages of barrier-free design: “Ramps are more pleasant than steep staircases. Wider telephone booths would be a boon to all. What benefits the handicapped benefits the able-bodied.”\textsuperscript{71} Some activists even went so far as to change their rhetoric and

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Matthai1} E.H. Matthai, “A Complete Reversal of Form and a New Approach to the Barriers Battle,” \textit{SACcess}, 2 (March 1967), 3. Physically Handicapped Education Division (PHED), Box 1, Folder 1, Hofstra University Archives.
\bibitem{Matthai2} Matthai, “A Complete Reversal of Form and a New Approach to the Barriers Battle,” 3.
\bibitem{Ramps} “Ramps Can Add Beauty” was the caption under the photos showing ramps in the front of buildings at the Morris Library at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale and buildings at the University of Illinois, \textit{Rehabilitation Record} (Nov-Dec, 1966).
\bibitem{FactSheet} “Fact Sheet: Public Buildings and The Handicapped,” (no date), PHED, Box 1, Folder 1 Hofstra University Archives.
\end{thebibliography}
propaganda from the negative connotation of architectural “barriers” and, instead, promoted a movement for “architectural opportunities.”

Community action remained a fundamental theme of the NSCCA and PCEH campaigns. Leaders emphasized: “American tradition has always placed great reliance upon local action…The people who make up a community represent one of the strongest forces in our country.”72 The national organizations’ efforts to elicit activism on the ground level resulted in various levels of success. By the late 1960s, local newspapers and organizational publications contained a growing catalog of community committees and success stories of architectural barrier elimination. Door-Openers, an activist group in North Carolina, lobbied architectural firms and conducted educational slide shows in communities throughout the state. Their initiatives resulted in two fully accessible colleges and the installation of ramps at the county courthouse, shopping centers, and bowling alleys in Winston-Salem and Asheville.73 In Alabama, state legislators promised that all newly built trade schools and junior colleges would be designed according to American Standards Specifications, while in Utah, new state offices were guaranteed to have at least one ramped entrance.74 Not all barriers victories were large, but they tended to highlight spaces and activities that diverse communities deemed important. Residents

of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, for example, had a ramp constructed from the municipal parking lot to the beach.\textsuperscript{75}

However, setbacks—even reversals—were not unheard of. In Fresno, California, activists successfully lobbied for curb ramps at major city intersections. However, their efforts were reversed in 1967. The Fresno City Council mandated that raised curbs replace the newly constructed ramps because they “encouraged pedestrians to stand in the street while waiting for the traffic signal to change” and posed a hazard because cars drove onto the sidewalks while making a right turn.\textsuperscript{76}

State Legislation

In addition to raising public awareness and garnering local support, the PCEH and NSCCA coalition lobbied for state legislation to achieve a barrier-free society. “Education and persuasion must be reinforced with legislative action,” leaders asserted.\textsuperscript{77} NSCCA Architectural Barriers Project Director Donald Fearn reinforced the strategy of local and state activism and supported the campaign to achieve legislation state by state, remarking, “Although much can be accomplished at the national level, real success in eliminating architectural barriers must come at the State and local levels.”\textsuperscript{78} Campaigns for state legislation focused primarily on ensuring that newly constructed tax-supported buildings adhere to the \textit{American Standards Specifications}.

\textsuperscript{75} Madeline Baker, Michael A. Fischetti, Lawrence A. Williams, and Eddie M. Young, \textit{State and Local Efforts to Eliminate Architectural Barriers to the Handicap}, National League of Cities, Department of Urban Studies (November 1967), 72.
\textsuperscript{76} Baker, Fischetti, Williams, and Young, \textit{State and Local Efforts to Eliminate Architectural Barriers to the Handicap}, 80.
\textsuperscript{78} Donald Fearn, “Arousing Community Interest,” \textit{Rehabilitation Record}, Nov-Dec 1966.
The first legislative victory came in 1961 when New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller mandated that all publicly funded buildings in that state be modified to provide access for persons with physical disabilities. South Carolina and Minnesota followed two years later. By 1966, twenty-two states had passed legislation mandating accessibility in newly constructed, publicly funded facilities. Official action to regulate accessibility was also reported in ninety-five cities (with populations of 50,000 and over) and forty-two metropolitan counties. In November 1966, Hawaii held the first statewide conference, sponsored by Hawaii Society president and Governor John A. Burns, to develop “action programs,” to eliminate architectural barriers, setting precedence for fifteen other states. “We are here today,” Burns declared, “at the threshold of a new frontier of freedom. Freedom from the oppression of architectural and physical barriers.” By 1968, only three states, Mississippi, Texas, and Utah, had made no formal effort to pass architectural barrier legislation.

1961: New York (Governor Executive Order)
1962: Massachusetts
1963: Minnesota, South Carolina, Wisconsin,
1964: North Carolina (Governor Executive Order), Rhode Island,
1965: Alabama, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Maine (Joint Resolution), Michigan, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee (Joint Resolution)
1966: Alaska, Kentucky, Oklahoma
Despite the relative ease of getting anti-barrier legislation on the record, laws on the books tended to look very different from the bills originally proposed by disability activists in most states. Although activists lobbied for legislation that applied to all buildings, the results were compromised and applied only to publicly funded facilities.\(^8^3\) The language of state laws was obscure and the specifications of accessibility standards vague. Only six of the thirty-three states with architectural barrier legislation incorporated *American Standard Specifications* into the body of the legislation.\(^8^4\) Moreover, a majority of the states did not define clear mechanisms to ensure compliance. Nine states specified no enforcement responsibility in their anti-barrier legislation.\(^8^5\) In states that did delegate a regulatory body, there were often no funds appropriated to oversee implementation. In Minnesota, for example, the elimination of architectural barriers fell under the direction of the State Fire Marshall. Ensuring that all new construction on public buildings adhered to the *American Standard Specifications*, however, fell low on the Fire Marshall’s long list of responsibilities, and there was little incentive to enforce the new law. The majority of state anti-barrier legislation contained gapping loopholes. Arkansas, for example, authorized exemptions for builders and architects in situations where “compliance is impractical in the opinion of the enforcing agency.”\(^8^6\)

\(^{83}\) Only three states, Washington, Illinois, and Wisconsin, included privately funded buildings in the architectural barrier legislation.


\(^{86}\) Alabama was the only state to mandate compliance to the standards. The other states had escape clauses in the legislation. Baker, et al, 20.
Without state oversight, volunteers formed their own “watchdog committees” to enforce the A-117 standards on construction sites.\(^8^7\) Activists screened building permit lists and announcements for construction bids and contacted builders and architects to ensure that accessibility requirements would be met.\(^8^8\) A paraplegic activist in New Hampshire loaded his hand-controlled car with copies of the state architectural barrier law, drove around to construction sites and asked to see the wheelchair entrance. If there was not one planned for the building, he pulled out a copy of the law.\(^8^9\) Despite volunteer efforts to enforce the implementation of state laws, the PCEH and NSCCA possessed no legal arm for pursuing breaches. Without the means to litigate, the elimination of architectural barriers remained, for the most part, voluntary, because the states did not enforce the law. While most state legislation left disability activists with little more than an official endorsement, it did provide a foundation for future architectural barrier legislation and, if nothing more, as one Minnesota activist stated, “We may not have gotten what we set out for, but we sure educated a lot of legislators in the bargain.”\(^9^0\)

**Federal Legislation**

While state legislation seemed to be an immediate solution to ensuring accessible design, the PCEH and NSCCA also worked toward increasing federal support. The need

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\(^{8^8}\) “The Goal is: Mobility!” Published for the National Citizens Conference on Rehabilitation of the Disabled and Disadvantaged, US Department of Health Education and Welfare (1969),54. Timothy Nugent Papers 16/6/20, Box 16, Architectural barriers and Access Folder, UIA.

\(^{8^9}\) “The Goal is: Mobility!” 54-55.

\(^{9^0}\) Schwanke and Hopkins, *Minnesota Architectural Barriers Communities Surveys Final Report*, 32.
for a national anti-barrier law became increasingly more apparent as state laws proved ineffective. In 1965, the Vocational Rehabilitation Act was due for reauthorization.\textsuperscript{91} The two organizations used this opportunity as a way to get architectural barriers on the national agenda. They successfully lobbied for the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1965 to include a statement that encouraged public facilities and government agencies to comply with A-117 standards. The legislation also established the National Commission on Architectural Barriers to Rehabilitation of the Handicapped (NCAB). Oversight of the NCAB, which had the charge of assessing the extent of the architectural barrier problem, fell to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, much to the dismay of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) director Mary Switzer. This was the first time that the RSA did not have direct control over disability-related issues. The creation of the NCAB placed new emphasis on anti-discrimination for people with disabilities, rather than the traditional focus of rehabilitation that provided medical services and employment-oriented training.

Even at the federal level, the architectural barriers movement remained under the direction of the NSCCA. Leon Chatelain, Jr., the director of project A-117 committee and former president of the NSCCA, was appointed chair of the new commission. Three other NSCCA members also served on the NCAB fifteen-person committee. Congress appropriated $250,000 to the NCAB to conduct research and to publish their results by 1968.\textsuperscript{92} The goals outlined by the NCAB included a national survey of the problem, a

\textsuperscript{91} A more in-depth discussion on the history of vocational rehabilitation and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1965 see chapter three.
\textsuperscript{92} “National Commission on Architectural Barriers to Rehabilitation of the Handicapped,” The Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1965 (P.L. 89 – 333), 89\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 1\textsuperscript{st} Sess., \textit{Congressional Record}, Report No. 432, May 28, 1965, 45.
catalog of local and state efforts to eliminate architectural barriers, and a plan to “achieve the goal of ready access to and full use of facilities in buildings of all types.”93 From 1966 through 1968, the NCAB under Chatelain’s leadership met regularly with PCEH and NSCCA officials, held two-day conferences in nine states, and reported their findings to Congress.

A year after the formation of the NCAB, Senator E. L. “Bob” Bartlett (D-AK) raised the issue of national architectural barrier legislation to Congress. Bartlett’s sponsorship of federal legislation has been attributed to his chief legislative aide, Hugh Gallagher, who at the age of nineteen became paralyzed after contracting polio.94 Bartlett witnessed firsthand Gallagher’s frustration with the inaccessibility of federal office buildings. Narrow bathroom doors and high urinals resulted in Gallagher’s use of a coffee can as a receptacle for his urine, and steps into the Executive Office Building forced him to wait outside every morning until secret servicemen carried him inside.95 In May 1966, Bartlett’s “No More Odd Man Out” address to Congress acknowledged the long history of local activism. He explained, “There are volunteer groups at work all over the country in every State and in many cities working to insure that Government agencies and private enterprise are aware of the need to plan for the handicapped in the construction of buildings and facilities.”96 Bartlett’s plea was premised on NSCCA and PCEH arguments for the need to eliminate barriers for the disabled so that they might

93 “National Commission on Architectural Barriers to Rehabilitation of the Handicapped,” 45.
gain full integration into society and achieve civil rights. He referenced the work of the activists of the previous decade, showing their influence on the proposed legislation. Three months later, Bartlett raised the issue again on the Senate floor, reiterating local efforts and pointing to the growing support for eliminating architectural barriers: “This is a subject which is receiving more and more attention, and justly so.”

In January of 1967, Bartlett, now armed with data from the NCAB reports to support his case, addressed the issue once again. This time his tone reflected an increased urgency for federal intervention. “For over 10 years,” he stated, “it has been the expressed policy of the Federal Government that planning for the handicapped shall be required on all Federal projects…As a government in this regard, we talk a good policy but we do not enforce it.” Bartlett listed each piece of state legislation that had been passed and the ones in progress, and admonished, “we are behind the States. The States are acting.” Bartlett did not mention that although the states were passing legislation, they were not implementing it.

While Bartlett pushed the issue on the Senate floor, activists raised awareness about architectural barriers on the basketball court. In 1967, Fred Fay’s Opening Doors

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99 Bob Bartlett, “Public Buildings for All the Public.”
100 Bob Bartlett, “Public Buildings for All the Public,” Congressional Record, (January 12, 1967). Hugh Gallagher Papers, Box 2, Folder 33, University of Toledo Archives. The campaign to eliminate architectural barriers was not confined to the United States. Leaders of the NSCCA and PCEH were in regular correspondence with Canadian and British organizations pursuing the same goal. In 1967, Great Britain published the British Standards Institution that required all new public buildings adhere to British Standard Code of Practice to accommodate the physically disabled. Canada also formed Committee on Standards for the Handicapped in 1963, modeled after U.S. standards. The Canadian Parliament passed National Building Code of Canada in 1965, however the bill was rather ambiguous and not enforced legislation until the legislation was amended in 1970. Sue-Anne Kirkland, “Architectural Barriers to the Physically Disabled,” Canadian Rehabilitation Council (Edmonton: Alberta, Fall 1971), 23.
Campaign organized a basketball game between the wheelchair-bound Gizz Kids and the Richmond Rebels.\textsuperscript{101} Fay, a quadriplegic student at the University of Illinois worked with closely with Timothy Nugent, Project A-117 secretary and director of the university’s Rehabilitation Services Division, throughout the 1960s to make campus accessible for wheelchair users.\textsuperscript{102} Building on his University of Illinois experiences, as we will see in chapter two, as chairman of the university’s architectural barrier project and manager of the Gizz Kids, Fay, along with his mother, established the Opening Doors Campaign and the Metropolitan Washington Chapter of the National Paraplegia Foundation in 1963. Opening Doors worked with architects and planners to make the nation’s capital more accessible and in 1964 published “A Guide to Washington, D.C. for the Physically Disabled,” a travel guide to D.C. attractions that documented levels of accessibility.\textsuperscript{103} Invitations for the game were extended to government officials, including Alan S. Boyd, Secretary of the Department of Transportation, as well as U.S. senators and representatives, emphasizing the need for policymakers and public officials to be aware of the negative attitudes and physical barriers that kept people with disabilities from achieving full citizenship rights.\textsuperscript{104} Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI), a single-arm amputee, officiated the tip-off to start the game. At half-time, William McCahill, executive secretary of the PCEH and the emcee for the game, spoke to the audience of government officials, architects, and congressmen about the irony that on a flat basketball

\textsuperscript{101}Fay, Community Organizer, 80. “Gizz Kids vs. The Rebels,” The Springboard, D.C. Department of Vocational Rehabilitation 3, (January 1967). Gizz Kids/Ms. Kids 16/6/05 Box 4, Folder Exhibition Games, Washington, D.C. UIA.

\textsuperscript{102} For an extensive history on Fred Fay and the University of Illinois program, see chapter two.

\textsuperscript{103} Opening Doors also provided peer counseling to people with newly acquired spinal cord injuries. One of their most famous clients was George Wallace who was paralyzed after an assassination attempt in 1972.

\textsuperscript{104} Janet Fay letter to Honorable Alan Boyd, 10 January 1967, Gizz Kids/Ms. Kids 16/6/05 Box 4, Folder Exhibition Games, Washington, D.C. UIA.
court these athletes were not disabled and “take a backseat to no one” but that the same young men were “senselessly defeated by an unnecessary step or two at the entrance of a building.”¹⁰⁵

The following July, the NCAB published Inaccessible Buildings: A Special Report on Architectural Barriers. The commission’s report cataloged state laws and community action programs and endorsed federal legislation. It concluded that state laws were largely ineffective due to the lack of clear standards and enforcement mechanisms. However, it noted the efforts of watchdog committees and “handicapped interest groups to make state and local officials aware of, and concerned about, the needs of the handicapped.”¹⁰⁶ Like the Rochester survey, the commission reported that the segregation of people of disabilities had as much to do with societal prejudice as it did the removal of physical barriers.¹⁰⁷ Eugene Nickerson, chairman of the Nassau County architectural barriers committee, came to the same conclusion in his testimony to the NCAB. He argued, “The physically handicapped are seldom thought of in the context of human rights…The greatest barrier which they must overcome is not architectural, but psychological.”¹⁰⁸ Nickerson’s statements underscored the growing awareness that physical access directly correlated to citizenship rights.

¹⁰⁵Letter, Joe Carvajal (National Association of the Physically Handicapped) to William McCahill, 31 January 1967, Gizz Kids/Ms. Kids 16/6/05 Box 4, Folder Exhibition Games, Washington, D.C. UIA.
¹⁰⁸Statement of Eugene H. Nickerson, Nassau County Executive, Before the Commission on Architectural Barriers, December 6, 1966. RA 7: Legislation, Microfilm #27, LBJ.
On July 17, 1967, Bartlett sponsored a hearing on bill S.222, “Accessibility of Public Buildings to the Physically Handicapped,” before the Senate Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds of the Committee on Public Works. His testimony underestimated the future impact of this federal legislation. In his opening remarks, Bartlett stated, “This bill is not a trailblazing experiment. I would characterize it a very belated attempt on our part to catch up, to discharge overdue responsibility.” He urged support based on the fact that the bill did not contain appropriations and was therefore not controversial.\footnote{Accessibility of Public Buildings to the Physically Handicapped, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds of the Committee on Public Works, 90\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 1st Sess., July 17, 1967, 3.} Representatives from multiple disability rights organizations, including Fred Fay, as well as AFL-CIO, and the American Institute of Architects, testified in support of the bill.

The hearings recapitulated the rhetoric and propaganda developed over the preceding years in NSCCA and PCEH campaigns. The audience heard, for instance, that adoption of the A-117 standard would benefit all, not just the disabled. Carl Morring, past president of the NSCCA, played on audience sympathies: “They are people, like you and me, striving for a better life. They are a child with Cerebral Palsy, a young wage earner with Multiple Sclerosis…A young soldier returning home from Vietnam as an amputee.”\footnote{Accessibility of Public Buildings to the Physically Handicapped, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds of the Committee on Public Works, 90\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 1st Sess., July 17, 1967, 3.} William Lotz’s testimony reiterated arguments from the article he published five years before and sought to dispel resistance based on increased construction costs. He testified that the accessible design did not require large-scale modifications to construction and design methods, but merely one ground level entrance.
Leslie Burghoff, Jr., president of the Paralyzed Veterans Association (PVA), grounded his testimony in the universal benefit of architectural barriers, especially in growing urban environments. He stated, “widening doors and removing steps would increase efficiency and eliminate risks. It just so happens that as an added feature, the removal of these barriers would also aid the disabled.” He presented pictures of the newly constructed capital building in Brazilia, Brazil, asserting, “If it can be done in Brazil, it can be done in the United States.” NCAB director Leon Chatelain appealed to Congress with the same argument that the PCEH used to initiate an architectural subcommittee a decade earlier, noting that nearly a half billion dollars a year were allocated for the rehabilitation of people with disabilities, but much of those services remained underutilized because workplaces were not equipped for wheelchair users. He argued that architectural barrier legislation was necessary to “protect this investment.” Both Burghoff and Chatelain also pointed to the rising number of disabled Vietnam veterans, who would benefit from this legislation.

While most of the testimonies followed the rhetorical shift of the movement that emphasized the benefits of accessible design to all members of society, John Nagle, president of the National Federation of the Blind, emphasized the relationship between architectural barriers and full civic membership for people with disabilities. “We do not plead for preferential consideration…We seek only the same opportunity that is available

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to others, we insist upon the right to fully exercise our rights as persons and as Americans, we petition for the chance to compete with the physically fit on more nearly equal terms.”

Nagle and Burghoff along with Katherine Fossett of the National Association of the Physically Handicapped Nation’s Capital Chapter, and J. Marse Grant, editor of the *Biblical Recorder*—the official organ of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina—urged that the scope of the bill be broadened by removing the provision that this legislation would apply only to public buildings. These activists argued that architectural barriers segregated physically disabled people from all facets of society, not just government-funded buildings.

In addition to activists’ testimonies, local affiliates of the NSCCA and PCEH encouraged community members to write their senators in support of the bill and to emphasize the need for the bill to include private facilities. President Johnson alone received over one hundred letters from individuals, rehabilitation centers, and philanthropic organizations, such as B’nai B’rith International, expressing their interest and urging support for federal architectural barrier legislation.

However, not everyone supported the bill. Although architects and builders endorsed the A-117 standards in 1961, legislation mandating access was contested.

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117 “DESTRY RIDES AGAIN!” *SAccess*, 2 (March 1967), 3. Physically Handicapped Education Division, Box 1, Folder 1, Hofstra University Archives.
118 B’nai B’rith International urged the passage of H.R. 6589 and authorized its “International President to convey to the proper Congressional Committees our deep interest in and approval of this bill.” Resolution, B’nai B’rith Women to President Johnson, February 3, 1968, Legislation, Box 152, File RA4, LBJ.
The PCEH and NSCCA claimed that the apprehension of these groups toward legislation was based on the fear of increased building (or re-building) expenses and a concern that it restricted architects’ creativity.\textsuperscript{120} The International Conference of Building Officials (ICBO) and the Building Officials Conference of America (BOCA), the primary building code groups for the western and northwestern states and the midwestern and north central states, respectively, opposed legislation with complaints about increased government control and “unfair additional construction cost being charged to the American public.”\textsuperscript{121}

**Conclusion**

On August 12, 1968, four months before Bartlett’s death, President Johnson signed the Architectural Barriers Act (P.L. 90-480) into law. At the signing ceremony, President Johnson stated, “The bill I sign now will end this needless and cruel discrimination.”\textsuperscript{122} Despite activists’ efforts to broaden the scope of the bill to include private buildings, the ABA applied only to future facilities intended for public use and constructed or altered with federal funds. Similar to the problems encountered with state laws, the ABA did not contain explicit provisions or funds for implementation. The unfunded and loosely implemented legislation was limited in its initial effectiveness until the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (ATBCB) was established under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{120}Access to the Environment, 94-95.
\textsuperscript{121}Baker, et al, 117.
\textsuperscript{123}The Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (ATBCB) was established under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to oversee execution of the ABA standards. Yet, implementation remained a
Despite the ABA’s limitations, the decade-long educational campaigns to raise awareness and promote community action contributed to a new understanding of disability. Since these campaigns had early on de-emphasized medical-therapeutic descriptions of disabled identity, the nature of disability activism shifted into a movement focused on achieving equal citizenship—a movement that helped usher in a new series of federal legislation, which was more clearly defined with the rhetoric of civil rights, beginning with the often overlooked ABA in 1968.\textsuperscript{124} Disability policy before the ABA focused on rehabilitating or curing disabled individuals with the goal of integrating them into society. Breaking with the past, the ABA focused on the environment around them; it sought to mold the physical environment to the needs of disabled individuals.

Moreover, important alliances and networks were established between local activists, businesses, national organizations, and government officials.

Focused primarily on employment because of the main purpose of the PCEH and its alliances with labor organizations, the architectural barrier campaigns did not address physical accessibility in transportation, housing, or higher education in a significant way. Instead, in the mid-1960s a younger generation of activists instigated a movement to make higher education accessible. Activism shifted away from the mobilization of disabled veterans and aid from federal agencies, as the young activists chastised the problem due to the ABA’s vague language and exemptions. The ATBCB dealt primary mass transit issues throughout the 1970s, but its effectiveness did not seem to go much further.

\textsuperscript{124} Harlan Hahn, “Towards a Politics of Disability: Definitions, Disciplines, and Policies,” Social Science Journal 22:4 (1985):87-101. Hahn defined a sociopolitical model of disability as: “Fundamentally, this model implies that disability stems from the failure of a structured social environment to adjust to the needs and aspirations of disabled citizens rather than from the inability of a disabled individual to adapt to the demands of society. In viewing disability as a product of a dynamic interaction between humans and their surroundings, emphasis is shifted from the individual to the broader social, cultural, economic, and political environment,” 87.
patriarchy of organizations like the PCEH and NSCCA, led predominately by white, nondisabled men. Despite their criticism of these national organizations, student activists benefited from the foundation set by a decade of consciousness-raising by the barrier removal movement, and they shared the same goal of achieving civil rights for people with disabilities.
Chapter 2:


Every summer campers from all over the country gathered in the Catskill Mountains for four to eight weeks of water skiing, dancing, and sitting by campfires with bunkmates. The main cabin greeted campers with large wood-carved letters that read “JENED.” Camp Jened was in many ways a typical camp experience. What made it unique was that all of the campers and many of the counselors were disabled. The 200-acre campground was fully accessible. Wooden ramps led into all buildings, and water sports equipment had been adapted appropriately. This summer getaway provided disabled teenagers with a unique sense of community, one that contradicted the isolation and inaccessibility of their everyday lives. Fellowship at Camp Jened fostered not only lifelong friendships among the campers but an important understanding of their disabled identity. “Jened allowed a lot of disabled people to just be people, to socialize, to learn about each other, and not be considered as a separate group of people,” as former camper and activist Bobbi Linn recalled. But the experience of Camp Jened went beyond the personal for some campers. “I think of Camp Jened,” Linn added, “as the training ground
where people learned that they had the same rights as everybody else and a lot of the original people [in the disability rights movement] were people from Jened.”

Though scholars have paid little attention to the roots of the disability rights movement, the activists and their political ideas came out of distinct experiences that often seemed as apolitical as attending summer camp. This chapter charts the formation of activist networks, from experiences and friendships created in rehabilitation centers and summer camps to formal organizations at institutions of higher education. Rehabilitation centers and summer camps, like Camp Jened, attended largely by white, middle-class, physically disabled adolescents offered a barrier-free environment and a sense of community that provided future activists an escape from their everyday experiences of exclusion. Young men and women, often for the first time, found disabled role models, who were examples of success. The intertwined processes of consciousness-raising and network formation that activists experienced during adolescence at institutions for people with disabilities transformed their understanding of accessibility—both physically and socially. As disabled students entered higher education, they cultivated these experiences and networks to fight for equality on their college

Events in this chapter will appear in slightly different form in Lindsey Patterson, “Points of Access: Rehabilitation Centers, Summer Camps, and Student Life in the Making of Disability Activism, 1960-1973,” *Journal of Social History* (forthcoming, Winter 2012). While in this essay I use the terms “access” and “barrier-free” interchangeably, according to convention, readers should know that physical access itself is governed by the dynamics of race, class, and gender, and is, therefore, not always accessible to all members in a society.

They formed organizations and fraternities, held protests, and literally dismantled campuses, taking sledge hammers to the inaccessible curbs of college streets, and lobbied for barrier-free environments. As disabled students graduated, they carried with them their experiences, tactics, and rights consciousness, becoming leaders of major organizations. By examining the connection between rehabilitation centers and college campuses, this chapter suggests two sources of the disability activism of the 1960s that are important to explaining the passage of Section 504 and presenting a more accurate description of the disability rights movement.

Much has been written on the 1960s student ferment that challenged university administrations and demanded civil rights, free speech, and peace. Yet, little attention has been given to campuses where disability activism paralleled, and in some instances preceded, other student protest movements. An examination of the reciprocal and

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dynamic relationship between higher education and disabled students builds on the recent trend in scholarship to expand chronologically our definition of disability rights activism and to enlarge our understanding of civil rights and student activism in the second half of the twentieth century.

Examining five case studies from universities in Illinois, California, and New York that experienced high levels of disability activism in the 1960s, this chapter reveals the formation of disabled student activism along three geographic axes and locates the training grounds of the future leaders of the national disability rights movement.

The Importance of a “Crip Community”

People with disabilities represent a unique community. Unlike minorities of race, ethnicity, and gender, people with disabilities rarely share their minority status with other members of their families. This fact often results in various kinds of isolation for young individuals with disabilities. In a recent study, Jonathan Young has argued that unlike African Americans and women, people with disabilities did not have the benefit of social interactions that helped to cultivate a movement. In comparing the disability rights movement to the civil rights movement, Young noted that the disability rights movement was exceptional in that “there were no comparable geographically-concentrated communities, strong gathering places such as churches, or unifying experiences such as

child-rearing.” Similar to Young, sociologist Richard Scotch has argued that disability is an individualized experience for most people, which creates a barrier for collective action among people with disabilities. While Scotch acknowledged that a shared subculture may develop among disabled residents at institutions, he argued that this kind of community is based on coping with disability and institutionalization, rather than a positive sense of identity. For disabled youth, growing up in a family without guideposts to evaluate how to be treated in society, unlike other minority groups who share similar experiences of oppression within their families, rehabilitation centers and camps provided an important space to network and create ties and gave a glimpse of what the world could be like.

Social network theory provides useful questions for looking past unsupported generalizations, such as those of Young and Scotch, to understanding the connections forged at rehabilitation centers and camps. The social forces that isolated people with disabilities in their everyday lives also created a community of future activists. A social network approach analyzes how attitudes, beliefs, and experiences shaped a disability rights consciousness. Bernice Pescosolido’s work underscores the importance of places that bring disabled people together and foster a community where people “share similar knowledge and common access to opportunities.” Similarly, Sharon Groch argues that

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4 Jonathan Young, “Same Struggle, Different Rights” (Ph.D. Diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2002), 66.
6 Scotch, “Disability As The Basis for a Social Movement,” 159-172.
both segregation and integration are essential in the development of a collective identity.\textsuperscript{8} In the case of disabled adolescents, the segregated institutions they attended because of their disabled bodies allowed for disparate individuals to come together.\textsuperscript{9} These unique experiences were essential to the beginning of a disability rights consciousness.

While the main purposes of rehabilitation centers were to provide medical care and physical therapy, the long stays, accessible environments, and shared situations of residents were important to building a community. These centers provided identifiable role models and unhindered access, an important combination that was typically not available at home, and this combination created a consciousness that developed into a fight for equality and full citizenship rights on college campuses in the 1960s. Nowhere was student disability action stronger than at the University of Illinois, the University of

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\textsuperscript{8} Sharon Groch. “Free Spaces: Creating Oppositional Consciousness in the Disability Rights Movement,” \textit{Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest}, Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris, eds., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001): 65-97. Through analyzing three disability groups, the deaf, blind, and people with mobile disabilities, Groch argues that deaf and blind groups had a much easier time developing an oppositional consciousness and collective identity because these two groups had residential schools. People with mobility disabilities, in contrast, did not attend separate schools and were more integrated into society. While Groch’s work offers valuable insight into the development of oppositional consciousness, her narrow definition of activism dismisses fundamental spaces for the development of a disability consciousness.

\textsuperscript{9} Scholars of deaf history have heavily relied on the importance of “place” and social networks in the formation of a deaf cultural identity. Residential schools, established in the early-nineteenth-century for the education of the deaf, formed the foundation of deaf culture and community. These institutions, similar to rehabilitation centers for the physically disabled, brought deaf individuals in contact with one another—often for the first time—for long periods and served as a place for American Sign Language to flourish. In the nineteenth century, students who graduated from residential schools were able to continue their education at Gallaudet University, the only higher education institution for the deaf, and many became leaders of the deaf community. Alumni often taught at the schools and established alumni associations and social clubs. Social clubs were formed in most major cities, serving to preserve a close community through sports and entertainment. The segregation of deaf students from mainstream society created a space for the development of a collective identity and culture. For more information on Deaf community identity, see Susan Burch, \textit{Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900 to WWII} (New York: New York University Press, 2002), John Vickery Van Cleve and Barry Crouch, \textit{A Place of their Own: Creating a Deaf Community in America} (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1989), and Sharon Groch, “Pathways to Protest: The Making of Oppositional Consciousness by People with Disabilities,” (Ph.D. dissertation Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois 1998).
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Illinois Axis

On a Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1961, seventeen-year-old Fred Fay mounted his family’s backyard trapeze to perform his routine “skin the cat” exercise. His sweaty palms slipped off the bar, and Fay fell ten feet to the ground, landing on his forehead. The severe damage to his spinal cord left him paralyzed. After six months of immobilization, Fay left his home in Bethesda, Maryland, to attend the Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation in Warm Springs, Georgia.

The Warm Springs Institute, founded by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1927, was the premiere treatment center for post-polio rehabilitation and spinal cord injuries. From its inception, Roosevelt supported the “Spirit of Warm Springs” and was determined that “it must never become a hospital.” Roosevelt boasted of the Institute’s uniqueness, and in the 1940 Warm Springs Annual Report, underscored the importance of a medical regime

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10 Smaller instances of disabled student activism occurred on other college campuses in the late 1960s. Wayne State University, Wright State University, University of California, Los Angeles, and Southern Illinois University had sizable disabled student programs. In 1968, six disabled students at the University of Pittsburgh chained themselves to the front entrance of the auditorium the night of a university event, forcing the audience to enter the auditorium through the janitor entrance to experience what they had to do. In March 1968, students at the University of Oklahoma threatened a “roll-in” on campus if they did not hire a disabled vice president for handicapped affairs. “Wheelchairs Are No Handicap to Students at Southern Illinois,” New York Times, February 27, 1966; “Students Wheel Handicap Protest at Pitt,” Pittsburgh Post Gazette, November 8, 1968; “Campus Violence Fades,” Spokane Daily Chronicle, March 8, 1969.

11 Fay’s great grandfather was a prominent educator in the Deaf community. His grandfather, Edward Allen Gallaudet, was vice president of Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. from 1885-1920.

12 In 1927 Franklin D. Roosevelt purchased the one thousand-acre resort for $200,000. From 1928 to 1954, the Institute expanded its facilities to a twenty-five building complex to accommodate the increasing number of post-polio people for rehabilitation.

coupled with high morale and “building of as normal a social life as is possible.”

“In my opinion,” he continued, “it would be a mistake to think of the Foundation as just a hospital.”

The perception of Warm Springs as more than a hospital created an environment among people with disabilities that was unique to this institution. Unlike other, similar places, its large, white brick buildings and expansive courtyards surrounded by flower gardens and trees resembled a hotel resort more than a rehabilitation institution. Patients from all over the country spent lengths of time ranging from a few months to years in residence at Warm Springs.

While it has been criticized, like many institutions for people with disabilities, for paternalism and sexual abuse, Warm Springs’
barrier-free environment provided a place for physically disabled adolescents to come together, rehabilitate, and form bonds.\textsuperscript{19}

The spirit of Warm Springs had a history of bolstering communities of activists from its inception. In the 1930s, Warm Springs created an activist community of adult polio survivors, who called themselves the Polio Crusaders, took their experiences at Warm Springs into their communities and fought for accessibility in mainstream society.\textsuperscript{20} Naomi Rogers explains, “When the Polio Crusade activists had spoken of ‘rehabilitation,’ they had given it a double meaning: not only medical and physiological, but social and political.”\textsuperscript{21} The Polio Crusaders used the Institute’s connection with Roosevelt to promote employment and accessibility issues in mainstream magazines such as \textit{McCall’s} and \textit{Polio Chronicle}. However, this movement declined by the late 1930s with the 1937 creation of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (known popularly as the March of Dimes), an effort by the Roosevelt administration to distance the President’s image from that of being paralyzed and to medicalize the rehabilitation center.\textsuperscript{22} In this way Roosevelt separated himself from the disability community, and by 1940 Warm Springs no longer admitted adult patients or produced adult leaders. Yet, the

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\textsuperscript{21}Rogers, 170-71.
\textsuperscript{22}Rogers, 170. Rogers cites the shift in enrollment procedures as a reason for the decline of the activism, from primarily admitting adult patients in the late 1920s and early 1930s, to focusing on adolescents by the 1940s.
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environment of the Institute continued to shape lives of adolescents and cultivated a community of future leaders in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{23}

Access to these benefits was not available to everyone. From its opening through the late 1950s, Warm Springs admitted only white men, women, and children.\textsuperscript{24} The common 1920s belief that polio was a “white disease,” rationalized the decision to exclude black patients from the institution.\textsuperscript{25} As the myth of polio and whiteness was dispelled in the early 1930s, Roosevelt defended the white-only institution. He argued that he did not want to challenge the “local customs” of segregation in Georgia, paralleling the administration’s overall reluctance to challenge racial segregation and promote civil rights.\textsuperscript{26} While the Institute had numerous black employees, the physicians and nurses were primarily white. In 1934 pressured by the NAACP and Eleanor Roosevelt, Roosevelt established the Warm Springs Negro School (through the Rosenwald Fund) in 1937.\textsuperscript{27} Roosevelt verbally agreed to support a black institution, but was reluctant to attach his name to something that might upset the Southern Democrats in Congress.\textsuperscript{28} The racial segregation of the institution influenced the formation of white

\textsuperscript{23} Rogers, 179.
\textsuperscript{24} Throughout the 1960s, while disabled black persons were admitted on an “emergency” basis, the facilities were segregated. While there were black aides that worked in the facilities, the vast majority of the physicians and nurses were white. For more on race and the Warms Springs Institute see Lippman, The Squire of Warm Springs, 155 and Naomi Rogers, “Race and the Politics of Polio: Warm Springs, Tuskegee, and the March of Dimes,” in American Journal of Public Health 97, no. 5 (May 2007): 784–795.
\textsuperscript{26} The Tuskegee Institute opened its own rehabilitation for African American polio patients with funding from the March of Dimes in 1941. Rogers, “Race and the Politics of Polio,” 793.
\textsuperscript{27} Theo Lippman, Jr., The Squire of Warm Springs, 155. The Rosenwald Fund funded thousands of schools for African American children in the South from 1912-1932. The Warm Springs School was the last school constructed in 1937.
\textsuperscript{28} Lippman, Jr., The Squire of Warm Springs,155.
leaders, ultimately influencing the dynamics of the disability rights movement that had few black leaders for decades to come.  

After seven months at Warm Springs, Fred Fay returned home to finish his senior year of high school. Faced with both physical and societal barriers—the opposite of his experience at Warm Springs—Fay gained clarity that the problem was not with his paralyzed body, but with the inaccessible environment in which he lived. He described Warm Springs as an “oasis of accessibility” and credited his time there for the opportunity he received to see the success of disabled peers and faculty as role models.

Fay was not the first person to underscore Warm Springs’s sense of community and accessibility. Susan Richards Shreve’s memoir also emphasized the familial atmosphere of the institute in the 1950s, noting that it was “a home of their own with people like themselves, a kind of substitute family in a place where they were expected to work hard and laugh hard and to reach for their highest expectation of themselves.” According to Shreve, one of Roosevelt’s goals was to create a normal environment for patients’ to develop self-confidence: “physical improvement came second to social adjustment.”

Roosevelt also boasted of the Institute’s uniqueness. In the 1940 Warm Springs annual

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29 Little scholarly attention has been paid to race and the dynamics of the disability rights movement. The leaders of the movement in the 1970s were primarily white.


31 Fay Community Organizer, 23.


33 Shreve, 78.
report, Roosevelt wrote a section called “The Spirit of Warm Springs” in which he underscored the importance of a medical regime coupled with high morale and “building of as normal a social life as is possible.”34 The perception of Warm Springs as more than a hospital created an environment among patients that was unique to this institution.

In the fall of 1962, Fay enrolled at the University of Illinois. His decision to attend the University of Illinois was not surprising, as administrators at Warm Springs had a record of referrals to the university’s nationally prominent Rehabilitation Education Services Program developed by Timothy Nugent in 1948.35 Since the late 1940s, the University of Illinois was one of the few college campuses accessible to people with disabilities.36 After World War II, the large number of college-age disabled veterans prompted the Illinois American Legion to campaign for a disabled student program. In 1948, the University of Illinois’s Galesburg campus converted an old military hospital into a dormitory for students with disabilities. Tim Nugent, a doctoral student at the University of Illinois in Educational Psychology, was appointed as the Director of the newly established Division of Rehabilitation Education Services.37 After only a year, Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson closed the disabled student’s program. In 1949, Nugent and the disabled students gained national recognition protesting Governor

35 Dr. Grace Marie Freyman, a psychologist at Warm Springs, and Tim Nugent, director of the rehabilitation program at the University of Illinois, regularly corresponded about student academics, the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped, and referrals from Warm Springs to Nugent’s program. Timothy Nugent Papers, Box 8, Folder Correspondences, University of Illinois Archives (hereafter UIA).
36 Howard Rusk, “Disabled Students: Barriers of Discrimination are Being Eliminated in Universities and Colleges,” New York Times, September 24, 1961. After World War II other campuses attempted to be more accessible to disabled veterans, including Wright State University in Dayton and Wayne State in Detroit, but their programs were not as expansive as UIC.
37 Disability was an integral part of his childhood. His younger sister was blind, and his father had both hearing and visual disabilities.
Stevenson’s decision. The protests at the Governor’s mansion proved to be successful, as the university decided to keep the program, but relocated it to the main campus at Urbana-Champaign. In 1949, Urbana-Champaign adapted three of its main halls with ramps and designated two accessible dormitories for male students. Nugent’s prominence as a disability advocate continued to grow throughout the 1950s and early 1960s as he spearheaded Project A-117 and the architectural barriers movement.38

At Illinois, Fay joined future activists Mary Lou Breslin, Kitty Cone, and Sharon Mistler, who were by then in their junior year.39 Both Breslin and Mistler had also spent time at Warm Springs in the 1950s. After contracting polio at the age of twelve, Breslin spent almost a year at Warm Springs before she returned home to Louisville, Kentucky. She continued to visit Warm Springs during her summer vacations throughout her high school years.40 Breslin’s sentiments about the Institute were similar to Fay’s. Both highlighted its communal atmosphere and credited it with redefining their perceptions of what it meant to be a person with a disability. Breslin described it as a “no-nonsense environment in terms of disability issues” that helped her realize she should neither be judged nor judge herself on the basis of her disability. As she recalled, “It sure did set the tone for how you want to be treated as a person with a disability.”41

38 See chapter one.
39 Sharon Mistler, from Oklahoma, also went to Warm Springs and attended the University of Illinois but left after her second year. Mistler moved to Berkeley in the late 1960s and became one of the founders of the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD) in the mid-1970s. Both Breslin and Cone also eventually moved to Berkeley to become integral leaders in the movement in the late 1970s. By 1962 the program at Illinois enrolled more than 165 students with disabilities.
41 Breslin, “Cofounder and Director of the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund,” 27.
The disabled students formed a tight-knit community on the Urbana-Champaign campus. In sarcastic language that signaled a sense of community, Fay referred to their group as “the wheelchair ghetto.” This rhetoric also signaled their separation on campus, turning their most conspicuous markers into symbols of their bonds. Although they lived in integrated dormitories, the students with disabilities attended classes together, went to rehabilitation together, and rode the adapted buses together, which they affectionately referred to as the “gimp ship.”

In 1949, the disabled students established their own co-ed fraternity, Delta Sigma Omicron (DSO), and their own newsletter, *Sigma Signs*. Published annually, *Sigma Signs* listed DSO’s purposes, which included promoting higher education for people with disabilities throughout the nation, furthering their social and recreational welfare, and raising awareness about the discrimination they faced. Through *Sigma Signs*, DSO asserted that campus initiatives were not the sole focuses of the fraternity and the publication; rather, they were meant to establish connections with the outside world. Attending one of the first universities to have a program for students with disabilities, the students were acutely aware of being in the national spotlight and used their prominence as a way to advocate for disability rights. Slogans on each issue throughout the 1950s and 1960s underscored that *Sigma Signs* had greater goals than simply highlighting student achievements: “We do not shy away from this position in the limelight. Instead, we proudly stand for what we represent—the personified idea of what

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42 Young, “Same Struggle, Different Difference,” 64.
43 Delta Sigma Omicron was established in 1949 at the University of Illinois. It is now a national fraternity dedicated to issues of accessibility, employment, sports, and rehabilitation. A Beta Chapter was established at the University of Florida and a Gamma Chapter at the University of Southern Illinois University in the early 1960s.
handicapped men and women can do if given the opportunity.\footnote{Sigma Signs (1960).} The organization saw itself as a bridge between able-bodied and disabled citizens, and DSO members emphasized the importance of their role in educating the public on issues of discrimination against people with disabilities.\footnote{By-Laws and Statement of Purpose, Delta Sigma Omicron. Delta Sigma Omicron Records, Box 3, UIA.}

In 1964, DSO established an architectural barriers committee to address issues of inaccessibility on and around campus. The student committee reflected the nationwide campaign for barrier-free environments. The movement launched by the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped (PCEH) and the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults (NSCCA) primarily focused on access to public buildings and the labor force, with little attention paid to college campuses. However, physical access was fundamental for disabled students to be fully integrated into campus life, and like the anti-barrier advocates, the students viewed it as the foundation for achieving the basic tenets of citizenship. Fay and sixty other students with disabilities evaluated every classroom on campus for accessibility and compiled lists of necessary curb ramps. They lobbied administrators, local business owners, and the Campus Businessmen’s Association to make the campus accessible to wheelchair users.\footnote{Fay, Community Organizer, 36.} Frustrated with a lack of response from the administration, Fay compared the segregation and oppression of disabled students on campus with the treatment of African Americans. He printed a picture of university administrators dressed as Ku Klux Klan members with signs that read, “Disabled Keep Out,” in the student newspaper.\footnote{Nugent intercepted the picture and removed it before publication. Fay, Community Organizer, 29.} While some of their demands were met quickly, curb ramps were not built until construction on a sidewalk was
necessary. Unsatisfied with this approach to implementation, Nugent and a small group of other students with disabilities under cover of night took sledgehammers to “high priority” curbs to force the university to rebuild those curbs with ramps.\(^\text{48}\) The committee also held panel discussions in university classes to “establish a bridge of communication between disabled students and ABs [able-bodied persons].”\(^\text{49}\) As their initiatives on campus were successful, the committee moved beyond campus, petitioning local businesses to make their facilities accessible to the population of disabled students. For instance, in 1964, disabled Catholic students protested the inaccessibility of St. John’s Catholic Church on the outskirts of campus, demanding that the parish build a ramp at the main entrance.\(^\text{50}\)

Beyond arousing public concern for accessibility, students strengthened the bonds of their group through participation in sports. They used athleticism to revise public perceptions of people with disabilities. The University of Illinois had multiple sports programs for students with disabilities, including football, basketball, track and field, and bowling. Each edition of *Sigma Signs* devoted a significant section to wheelchair sports, emphasizing the ability, strength, and agility of the disabled athletes. Characterized by masculinity, toughness, and competiveness, sports served as a venue for breaking down stereotypes typically associated with people with disabilities. DSO member Bob MacGregor observed this in action at a wheelchair basketball game: “The public’s view

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\(^{48}\)Fay, *Community Organizer*, 37.

\(^{49}\)Spokesman Vol. XII, No. 4 (25 February 1971) 3.Delta Sigma Omicron Records Box 3, Folder Spokesman 1971. UIA.

of the sedentary, back room, fragile cripple is simply shattered.” These sections emphasized ability and opportunity for students with disabilities through college sports. Sports provided a space for socialization and networking across the nation. Nugent believed that wheelchair sports constituted the most effective of all the student-centered programs at the University of Illinois in ending discrimination toward people with disabilities.

The Gizz Kids, the first college wheelchair basketball team in the country, exemplifies how, through athletics, DSO pursued its mission of consciousness-raising and educating the public by directly challenging the common stereotypes of physically disabled people as helpless and dependent. The athletes toured multiple cities in the U.S., competing against able-bodied college teams (with able-bodied players using wheelchairs) or against teams in the National Wheelchair Basketball Association. In

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52 Sue-Anne Kirkland, “Architectural Barriers to the Physically Disabled,” Canadian Rehabilitation Council (Edmonton: Alberta, Fall 1971), 9 argues that sport provides the opportunity to share common interests, promote self-confidence, it fosters social integration and community life. Furthermore, it demonstrates to able-bodied persons that people with disabilities “are capable of ‘normal’ activity.” “Recreation for the handicapped dramatically demonstrates the essence of democracy, for it provides activities which recognize the essential worth and dignity of the handicapped as individuals, together with their right to the pursuit of happiness.” Kirkland, 14.
54 Gizz is short for gizmo, the name of the valve on catheter bags. Administrators at the University of Illinois would not sanction the team as an official university athletic program, which is why it was not named the fighting Illini. Brown, *Breaking Barriers*, 176.
55 Nugent also established the National Wheelchair Basketball Association in 1949, the first professional athletic organization of its kind.
1962 the Gizz Kids took their educational tour abroad, traveling to Europe and South Africa. The Gizz Kids had a large following, raising several thousand dollars through ticket sales for their organization. Financially independent of the university, the team donated half of their proceeds to disability organizations like the National Paraplegia Foundation and the National Polio Foundation.

The athletic programs were not without some internal divisions. The attention placed on the male basketball team created tension between men and women. In 1969, Gwen Phillips, a sophomore and Gizz Kids cheerleader, complained to Coach Stan Labanowich, inquiring why the female cheerleaders did not travel to away games with the team. Phillips’s letter challenged Labanowich’s decision to exclude women, highlighting the value of cheerleaders. “The cheerleaders’ function at games,” Phillips wrote, “is on par with that of the team: to further public knowledge of what a person in a wheelchair can do.” She emphasized the double oppression experienced by many disabled women and the importance of disabled female role models in society. Phillips’s argument echoed the objectives of the growing feminist movement that challenged the prescribed gender roles of women. She concluded, “a woman in a chair is apt to think there is nothing she can do and will tend to lead a rather sedentary life. This is not a necessity as the cheerleaders efficiently show. A woman in a wheelchair is not confined


57 “Gizz Kids History,” (no date), Gizz Kids/Ms. Kids 16/06/005, Box 1:Correspondence, 1958-59, UIA.

58 Letter, Gwen Phillips to Coach S. Labanowich, Gizz Kids/Ms. Kids, Box 1:12, UIA. For works that discuss women and disabilities see Brenda Jo Brueggemann and Susan Burch, eds., Double Visions: Women and Deafness (Washington, D.C., 2006); Mary Jo Deegan and Nancy A. Brooks, Women and Disability: The Double Handicap (New Brunswick, 1985) and Bonnie Smith and Beth Hutchison, eds., Gendering Disability (New Brunswick, 2004).
to knitting.” Labanowich denied Phillips’s request. Two years after Phillips’s appeal, the female students moved from the sidelines to the court by establishing their own basketball team, the Ms. Kids.

The students at the University of Illinois were conscious of the unique leadership and activist experiment embodied at their institution. Fay’s experiences at the University of Illinois and his relationship with Nugent fostered a political consciousness that inspired Fay’s activism. “Having that kind of dominant role model really shaped the attitudes of a lot of students there,” Fay recalled, “it became a sort of breeding ground, in a way, for activists who would later go back to their own community and start an architectural barriers project or start a chapter of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association.”

A 1966 Sigma Signs article highlighted the influence of college experiences on the disability community: “You'll probably never hear anyone say ‘This is an idea originated at the U of I, but if you look very carefully, you get the picture. The alumni of the University of Illinois didn't stop practicing what they learned on campus and in D.S.O.; they play Johnny Appleseed and plant that knowledge wherever they go.” Sigma Signs was not far off the mark. Over the next decade, University of Illinois alumni spearheaded movements for disability rights and founded major organizations. In 1966, Fay graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Psychology and continued his work on architectural barriers. The experiences and networks formed at the University of Illinois later proved integral to his continuing fight for accessibility and civil rights.

59 Fay, Community Organizer, 27.
60 Sigma Signs (1966): 34.
California Axis

In 1952 all six members of the Roberts family contracted polio. Everyone recovered except the eldest son, Ed, who at fourteen years old became a quadriplegic and required at least twelve hours a day in an iron lung. In 1962, Ed Roberts sued the University of California, Berkeley, for admittance after the administration denied his application. Roberts recalled that one administrator stated, "We tried cripples, and they don't work." Roberts won his case and enrolled at Berkeley in 1962, the same semester the University of Mississippi admitted its first black student, James Meredith. Roberts resided in the university’s Cowell Memorial Hospital, due to a lack of accessible dormitories, where he divided his time between classes and daily twelve-hour sessions in his protest-stickered iron lung.

By 1966, seven more disabled students had joined Roberts in occupying a third-floor wing of Cowell Memorial. The makeshift dormitory consisted of six two-bed rooms on each side of the floor, two larger corner rooms for students with iron lungs, and three bathrooms. However, much like Warm Springs, the south wing of Cowell Memorial defied the typical appearance of a hospital. The students replaced drab, institutional drapes with tie-dyed fabric and beads, covered the walls with prints and posters, converted the shower room into a beer room, and housed a pool table and two pet finches in one of the bedrooms, which reeked of incense, cigarettes, marijuana, and

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61 An iron lung is a large metal cylinder that regulated breathing for paralyzed respiratory muscles.
62 “Highlights from Speeches of Ed Roberts,” Ed Roberts Papers, Carton 1, Folder 1, Bancroft Library.
burning candles.\textsuperscript{65} Despite the presence of personal attendants and towels and bedding stamped COWELL, the hospital had become home for the students.\textsuperscript{66} Segregated from most facets of the university, the disabled students created their own space and developed a collective identity.

Unlike the students at the University of Illinois and the New York colleges (which we will later see) who had developed networks and a rights consciousness prior to arriving at college, and who resided in integrated university dormitories, the disabled students at Berkeley found their formative networking experience in Cowell Memorial. Hale Zukas, one of the first students with a disability to be admitted to the University of California, Berkeley, described the experience many of his peers shared while living together in a hospital: “Through this process they have supplanted the isolation and alienation with a sense of unity and a realization that they could exercise control over the conditions shaping their lives.” Zukas recalled forming “lifelong bonds” and a “new set of roots beyond family.”\textsuperscript{67} Catherine Caulfield, the first woman to be admitted into the program in 1968, fondly recalled her experiences at Cowell, stating that it provided a space for people of “like minds and bodies” to be together, and for the first time she

\textsuperscript{65}Brean, \textit{Nurse Coordinator}, 40-43. Students ate at the former nurse’s station and eventually hired their own chef (each student contributed $14/week) after becoming tired of eating hospital food.


realized the possibilities for her life and renewed her self-esteem. The activism that emerged from the hospital setting created a mindset, as Caulfield described, to make “the world a better place for our fellow disabled brothers and sisters.” The experience at Berkeley differed from that of the University of Illinois. There were fewer disabled students. Those students lacked institutional support for their extracurricular concerns, having, for instance, no funds for creating publications and organized athletics. Yet both campus settings provided disabled students the remarkable presence of relationships founded on shared experiences of disability.

While these students came of age on the Berkeley campus, the metropolis around them swirled with political radicalism and activism. Amid these movements, with which these disabled students would develop an influential though not untroubled relationship, they began to push for changes in campus accessibility and for greater recognition of their presence in the university. Roberts credited the campus atmosphere for inspiring his own activism:

When I was at U.C. Berkeley in the ‘60s, I and almost every other student on campus became involved in the Civil Rights Movement. We were fighting for the basic rights of black people. But, during my involvement in that movement, I suddenly realized something that has since been extremely important to me –that I am part of a minority that is as segregated and devalued as any in America’s history. I quickly found that other disabled students shared my feelings. We all felt a sense of anger, frustration, and isolation. The more we talked, the more it

69 Caulfield was the only female student until 1969 when Judy Taylor entered the program. Caulfield, First Student at Cowell Memorial, 137.
70 See Anderson, The Sixties and the Movement; Cohen and Zelnik, Free Speech Movement, and Freeman, At Berkeley in the 1960s.
became apparent that we needed to organize if we were to create our own Civil Rights movement.\footnote{Edward Roberts, “The Emergence of the Disabled Civil Rights Movement,” May 1980, Edward V. Roberts Papers, Carton 1:24, Bancroft.}

In 1966, building on the spirit of self-determination that engulfed Berkeley’s campus, the original residents of Cowell formed the Rolling Quads, a coalition of disabled students determined to increase accessibility across campus, build a residence outside of the hospital, and secure financial assistance for personal care attendants. Contributing to the climate of protest, the Rolling Quads, dressed in military fatigue jackets and fedoras, rolled their chairs from Cowell Memorial down the hill to Sproul Plaza to “make a splash” and advocate for rights and accessibility on campus.\footnote{Barner, 261-262; Gerald Belchick, \textit{Department of Rehabilitation Counselor, Liaison to the Cowell Program}, an oral history conducted in 1994-1995 by Susan O'Hara, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2000, 195-196.}

While Roberts and members of the Rolling Quads participated in and felt some connection with the Free Speech Movement and the Civil Rights Movement, the feeling was not necessarily reciprocated. While many of the issues facing people with disabilities differed from other minority group interests, Roberts believed they might unify in achieving their shared goal of equality.\footnote{“The Disabled Launch Own Movement,” \textit{The Daily Californian}, January 19, 1972.}

He reached out to Native American activist Leonard Pelletier, Stokely Carmichael, and other Black Power leaders. He recalled, “When I told them that we were all fighting the same civil rights battle, they didn't believe me; they didn't understand our similarities. I did. Even now, many people don't realize it.”\footnote{“Highlights from Speeches of Ed Roberts,” Edward V. Roberts Papers, Carton 1:24, Bancroft.}

The Rolling Quads made their presence on campus known and sometimes even managed to use the inaccessibility of campus to their advantage. Roberts noted, “One fall, we decided to go to the Cal football game. We wheeled up to the stadium and asked

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\item[74] “Highlights from Speeches of Ed Roberts,” Edward V. Roberts Papers, Carton 1:24, Bancroft.
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that gatekeeper the cost of a seat. When he told us, we wheeled on in telling him that we had brought our own seats.”75

The Rolling Quads consisted primarily of young, white males. Edna Brean, nurse coordinator of the Cowell Residence Program, recalled that while the Disabled Students Program tried recruiting Vietnam veterans to their program, Berkeley’s anti-war reputation deterred them from attending the university.76 Brean also noted that it was difficult to recruit women into the program because during the 1960s there was only one female; with a nine-to-one ratio, women were not inclined to enter Cowell.77

In 1969, the Rolling Quads, now twelve members strong, lobbied the university administration to establish a Disabled Students Program (DSP) on campus. Roberts, Herb Willsmore, and Hale Zukas applied for a grant from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare under one of President Johnson’s Great Society initiatives, the Higher Education Act of 1965. Title IV, Section 408, authorized “remedial or other special services for students with academic potential who are enrolled or accepted for enrollment and who, by reason of deprived education, cultural or economic background, or physical handicap, are in need of such services to assist them to initiate, continue, or resume their post-secondary education.”78 The grant supported salaries for a director of the DSP, counselors, wheelchair repairs, student financial support, accessible vans, and funds to travel to conferences, including those of the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped. The students were successful in receiving $81,000 and

75 Roberts, “The Emergence of the Disabled Civil Rights Movement.”
76 Brean, Nurse Coordinator, 48.
77 Brean, Nurse Coordinator, 48. The Kaiser Vallejo Rehabilitation Center referred their patients to the newly established program. Herb Willsmore, Catherine Caulfield, and Phil Chavez all came from Vallejo to Berkeley
78 HEW Grant Application 1969.Disabled Students Program (DSP), Carton 1, Folder, 1. Bancroft Library.
continued to support their program through the renewal of government grants throughout the decade. With financial backing and a full-time staff, DSP was able to make significant changes to campus.

With the lack of accessible office space at the university, the office of the DSP was located just off campus on Durant Avenue. The students had a ramp built in the back of the converted apartment to make the office accessible to the students it aimed to serve. A large closet served as the wheelchair repair room and the bedroom as the meeting room. Roberts’ mother, Zona Roberts, worked at the office part-time to help with recruiting new students.

Similar to the students at the University of Illinois, the Rolling Quads pressed to make Berkeley’s campus more accessible. In 1970, a coalition of staff and students of the DSP established the Committee for the Removal of Architectural Barriers (CRAB). CRAB comprised representatives from the University Housing Office, the Office of Environmental Health and Safety, the Office of Student Activities and Programs, the Disabled Students’ Union, and the Office of Architects and Engineers. The Architectural Barriers Act had been passed two years earlier, but its lack of regulations and its application to only newly constructed facilities tended to dampen the zeal of administration to act. This inaction compelled DSP students to take initiative to make campus accessible for wheelchair users. Using the *American Standards Specifications for Barrier Free Design* developed by Project A-117, CRAB catalogued architectural

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79 HEW Grant Application 1969. Disabled Students Program (DSP), Carton 1, Folder, 1. Bancroft Library.
barriers around campus and initiated the necessary contacts within the university to have them removed.\textsuperscript{81}

DSP was also successful within the university in raising money for its organization. Mirroring the African American students who had successfully lobbied the university for a Black Student Union in 1969, the 1970 DSP campaign “Quarters for Cripples” convinced the Association of Students of the University of California (ASUC) to increase student fees by twenty-five cents to supplement the HEW grant and cover DSP operating expenses. DSP explained that, while for most students it was merely a quarter out of their pockets, the fee would ensure the independence of disabled students.\textsuperscript{82}

The Rolling Quads realized that the goals of the organization necessitated more than access to higher education and tried to instill their vision of civil rights in new members of the program: “That you're not just a person using a wheelchair, you are an individual, you have rights, you have the ability to make a change. I think that was one of the greatest things that went on with that program.”\textsuperscript{83} Roberts recounted:

We soon realized that our struggle could not be confined to the campus. The City of Berkeley offered a myriad of attractions to see but it was virtually closed off because of architectural barriers. We quickly learned the value and strength of coalition politics. As the years went by, our struggle moved from city to county to state to national politics.\textsuperscript{84}

July 1970 marked the first of multiple road trips that summer that members of the Rolling Quads took to Sacramento to protect their educational funding. Piling into two vans, the students protested Governor Ronald Reagan’s proposed budget cuts to

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81 HEW Grants Funding 1976-1977, DSP, Carton 2:1, Bancroft.
83 Barner, 266.
84 Roberts, “The Emergence of the Disabled Civil Rights Movement.”
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Rehabilitation Services, which provided $333 per month through the Aid to Totally Disabled (ATD) program funds to supplement their education. Governor Reagan’s cuts in rehabilitation services would have significantly endangered the future of the organization and eliminated medical attendants, who were necessary for the students to continue their education. Before the start of the school year, Reagan rescinded the proposed $10 million budget cuts.

Like their University of Illinois peers, Berkeley’s disabled students began to look beyond the confines of campus to make the broader community more accessible. In 1971, the Rolling Quads joined forces with the California Association of the Physically Handicapped to connect with larger community organizations. The coalition petitioned the Oakland City Council and the Mayor, demanding curb cuts for sidewalks and accessible drinking fountains and telephone booths. The following month, the City Council resolved to make the city accessible to people with physical disabilities, creating curb cuts at major intersections and mandating that future buildings be accessible.

The students at Berkeley created their own space within the university and created alternative institutions to serve the community and promote independent living. They pushed local and state governments to alter permanently the physical and cultural landscape of the Bay Area, creating a foundation for disability rights activism over the next three decades. In years to come, the next classes of disabled students continued the

struggle for accessibility, pushing for accessible housing on and off campus, ultimately ending the program at Cowell Memorial Hospital in 1974. As the students neared graduation, they built on successes at Berkeley and continued their struggle for barrier-free environments and access to transportation and employment—the key components of their conception of civil rights.

**New York Axis**

Born in 1947, Judith Heumann contracted polio at eighteen months, which resulted in quadriplegia. Twenty-three years before legislation mandated that children with disabilities be integrated into public classrooms, Heumann’s mother successfully battled the Brooklyn School District to allow her daughter to attend mainstream schools. While Heumann experienced social isolation and inaccessibility in public classrooms, summers in upstate New York offered a sense of community. Camp Jened in Hunter, New York, was one of the few camps for teenagers with disabilities. In 1952, sister-in-laws Leona Burger and Nora Rubenstein, both employed in the field of special education, converted the former recreational facility for boys in the Catskills Mountains into a summer getaway and rehabilitation center for teenagers and adults with

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89 The fight for accessibility did not end with the original group of activists. In 1974, a half dozen disabled students blocked the entrance to the popular discount record store just off Berkeley’s campus. The students protested the store manager’s ban on students in wheelchairs because he thought they would damage his equipment. The protest drew a large crowd in front of the store until the protesters were removed by the police. William Sievert, “Help for Disabled Students,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 29, 1974. Publicity, Box 1, Folder 10, UIA.
91 Most children with physical disabilities went to specialized schools or were homeschooled before passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975.
disabilities. Burger and Rubenstein’s professional skills and knowledge of limited summer options for children with disabilities inspired their initiative. In addition to offering standard activities, including baseball, cookouts, and crafts, the camp offered rehabilitation programs for campers with a wide range of disabilities from quadriplegia to deafness. As the camp opened for its third season, the Oneonta Star heralded its objectives: “The camp is unique in this part of the country, in that it combines the advantages of outdoor activities and other aspects of camping, with the therapy program.” Campers came from all over the country to spend four to eight weeks on the 200-acre accessible campsite in the Catskills. Two female campers explained why they traveled from the Midwest to attend Camp Jened: “We got tired of battling the indifference [at home] where there are almost no facilities for people like us, for people who are on crutches or in a wheelchair.” They relished newfound opportunities to participate in “water sports, shuffle board or other activities.”

Camp Jened was part of a broader trend in the late 1940s and 1950s of summer camps that began to open their doors to children with disabilities. Yet it was unique in its approach to services and the profile of its campers. Most of the other camps seemed to put the emotional needs of their able-bodied campers first. In 1948, rehabilitation specialist Howard A. Rusk, founder of the Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine in

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92 Burger was a speech therapist at the Hearing and Speech Center in Utica and Rubenstein taught children with cerebral palsy in Brooklyn Public Schools. Burger and Rubenstein purchased the deserted campsite that was once a summer camp for boys. Camp Jened is now operated by Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State and is an adult summer camp for people with disabilities over eighteen years old. It seems to have closed in 2006.
94 “High in the Catskills,” Syracuse Herald Journal. Though Camp Jened was unique for its approach to services and the profile of its campers, it was part of a broader trend of summer camps in the late 1940s and 1950s that opened their doors to children with disabilities.
New York City, stressed the importance of camps in social development in a *New York Times* article, “Camps for the Handicapped on Increase in the Nation.”

Today camping is no longer merely taking a group of city children into the country, but is recognized as a group living experience that has a special contribution to make to the emotional and social growth of a child. A valuable experience for any child, it is even more important to the physically handicapped child who, because of illness, hospitalization and immobility, may have been cut off from the normal experience of child development.95

According to the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults, camps for children with disabilities were on the rise, from only 200 children with disabilities attending camps in 1920 to 3,200 in 1947. Rusk acknowledged that while one benefit of camps was that the rehabilitation services improved campers’ physical strength, he added, “the greatest value is the growth in self-confidence and self-sufficiency.”96 However, unlike Camp Jened, the camps for children with disabilities in the 1940s were often extensions of philanthropic organizations, disability-specific, and had an age limit of fourteen years. Camp Oakhurst, for example, located in Oakhurst, New Jersey, was operated by the New York Service for Children with Orthopedic Disabilities; the New York Diabetic Association had its own camp, as did the National Association to Control Epilepsy. By the late 1950s, a new trend in summer camps for children with disabilities had emerged with the goal of integration. In 1958 the Greater New York Area office of the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the American Camping Association cosponsored a workshop expressing the benefits of integrating able-bodied camps with camps for

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children with disabilities. However, promoters emphasized the benefits to be derived by able-bodied children from associating with children with disabilities, which would teach able-bodied children about acceptance. As one proponent explained, “Our youngsters will not always find themselves in the company of perfect athletic specimens.”

Resisting this trend of integration, Camp Jened offered a special sense of community to its campers. It was at Camp Jened that Heumann met her first boyfriend and her closest friends and future fellow activists, Bobbi Linn and Freida Tankus. Camp counselor Larry Allison reflected on the importance of the camp for providing “the experience in group living with others of his own age and similar interests so seldom afforded a handicapped child.” With fondness Heumann recalled the freedom and accessibility she experienced at Camp Jened, a place that contradicted the social isolation and inaccessibility of her everyday life in New York City and gave her a “little bit of a charge for wanting to change the world out there.” Other activists echoed Heumann’s sentiments: “They gave us a real good sense about how important it is to fight for what you want. It was the first time that I really felt equal. It felt wonderful.”

99 “High in the Catskills: This Camp for the Handicapped, A Place Where They Have Fun,” Syracuse Herald Journal, June 8, 1955.
100 Heumann, Pioneering Disability Rights Advocate, 41.
101 Bobbi Linn also shared similar sentiments of the camp. She recalled, “Jened allowed a lot of disabled people to just be people, to socialize, to learn about each other, and not be considered as a separate group of people. I think of Camp Jened as the training ground where people learned that they had the same rights as everybody else and a lot of the original people [in the disability rights movement] were people from Jened.” Bobbi Linn, Activist with Disabled in Action, Counselor at Center for Independence of the Disabled in New York, and Director of Bronx Independent Living Services, an oral history conducted by Denise Sherer Jacobson in New York Activists and Leaders in the Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement, Volume III, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2004, 35. Neil Jacobson, Cofounder of the Computer Training Project; Co-chair of the
accessibility of Camp Jened and the friendships formed there proved to be foundational in the development of Heumann’s and her friends’ disability consciousness. 102

Similar to the patients of Warm Springs who went on to the University of Illinois, Heumann carried her experiences from Camp Jened to college, where she cultivated her activism. In 1965, Heumann enrolled at Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus (LIU), with aspirations of becoming a school teacher. Unlike the University of Illinois, the Brooklyn campus was not known for its accessibility or a large population of students with disabilities. However, it was close to Heumann’s family, and the small 18-acre campus made mobility relatively easy. As one of the first wheelchair users admitted to the university, Heumann appealed to the administration to live in the dormitories, setting a precedent for future wheelchair users to live on campus. While Heumann lived on the first floor of the dorm, she was forced to rely on other students to carry her up the two stairs at the front of the building and on one of her suitemates to help her up the one stair into the bathroom.

Heumann’s relatively inaccessible and isolating college experiences differed little from those of her high school years. During her summer vacations, she returned to Camp Jened as a counselor. While Heumann participated in student organizations at LIU, her involvement in organized disability rights activism did not begin until 1967. That year, Heumann and Health Sciences professor and NAACP activist, Ted Childs, established the Disabled Student Program to advocate for more accessibility on campus and to advise

102 Greene’s “The Role of Protest Waves,” also notes the role of Camp Jened in forming friendships among disability rights activists.
students with disabilities. Heumann credited Childs’s civil rights activism for broadening her conception of discrimination. Similarly, Heumann and Childs conceptualized a broader purpose for their program: more than providing student services, they viewed it as a political engine that lobbied for disabled students’ rights in higher education. Building on this premise, Heumann and the disabled students involved in the program established their own organization, the Handicapped Integration Movement (HIM), to demand equal rights and accessibility in higher education. In 1969, Childs, Heumann, and HIM organized a conference at the university for disabled students to raise awareness about the discrimination people with disabilities faced in employment, transportation, housing, and education.

Through her college years, Heumann remained in close contact with her friends from Camp Jened. Bobbi Linn attended nearby Hofstra University on Long Island, and Freida Tankus attended Brooklyn College. These women, who met and formed friendships at Camp Jened, were key participants in the disability activism that emerged on college campuses in New York. While Heumann studied at LIU, Tankus joined with other disabled students at Brooklyn College to establish their own program—Student Organization for Every Disability United for Progress (SOFEDUP)—and at Hofstra

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University, Linn and fellow students organized People United in Support of the Handicapped (PUSH).

Established in 1970, SOFEDUP was in its members’ eyes a collective agent of disabled and non-disabled individuals organized to “bring down the walls of apathy, oppression, and discrimination” that people with disabilities faced. SOFEDUP sought to correct the situation of disabled students having to choose schools according to architectural accessibility rather than academic merit. Later that year, Tankus and members of SOFEDUP aligned with Brooklyn College’s student government to protest the inaccessibility of their campus. The coalition of students occupied the office of John Kneller, President of Brooklyn College, to gain the attention of the apathetic administration and campus community, demanding that the campus be made accessible to its disabled students. As a result, Kneller committed to making newly constructed buildings accessible and created the Dean’s Committee on the Disabled, which included administrators, faculty, and students, to address issues of accessibility on campus and disabled student admissions and services. In efforts to eliminate social prejudice and educational barriers and promote consciousness-raising, the student organization held luncheons and in-service training programs to educate faculty and non-disabled students

107 Francis, SOFEDUP Handbook, 3.
about the needs of physically disabled students.\textsuperscript{109} The organization raised funds to provide scholarships and services for the disabled student population. Similar to the University of Illinois, SOFEDUP sponsored intramural wheelchair sports, including table tennis, football, karate, and basketball. SOFEDUP activists, like their counterparts in Illinois and California, soon extended their reach beyond their own campus. They formed an ad hoc committee for the Advancement of Higher Education for the Disabled in City University, spreading their mission from Brooklyn College to other universities in the CUNY system.\textsuperscript{110}

While Heumann and Tankus challenged discrimination on their campuses, Bobbi Linn worked with disabled students at Hofstra University to establish PUSH. By the late 1960s, the administration of Hofstra University had begun to make the campus more disability-friendly.\textsuperscript{111} Although Hofstra administrators boasted that theirs was the first private institution to be accessible to wheelchair users, the school had largely limited their modifications to common spaces such as paths and doorways. Linn and the members of PUSH fought to ensure equal opportunities for disabled students.\textsuperscript{112} Members of PUSH argued that students with disabilities should not be segregated from their able-bodied peers “during their formative years,” and successfully lobbied for

\begin{footnotes}
\item[110] In 1970, Fred Francis, the first president of SOFEDUP, continued his initiatives for accessibility and civil rights at New York University as a graduate student in rehabilitation counseling. In 1972, he established a disabled students program at NYU. “NYU Is Assisting Handicapped: Tripling the Enrollment of the Disabled is 4-Year Goal,” \textit{New York Times}, March 13, 1972.
\item[111] Much of this early initiative has been credited to the efforts of Harold Yuker, Associate Dean and wheelchair user, to make the campus barrier-free. “Wheelchair College: Hofstra University Has A Program that Caters to Physically Handicapped Students,” \textit{The Pittsburgh Press}, October 22, 1972, p. 4. One hundred students out of the 1,200 student population used wheelchairs.
\item[112] “Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Disabled Students But Were Afraid to Ask,” (no date), \textit{People United in Support of the Handicapped Booklet}, Physically Handicapped Education Department, Box 1, Folder 2, Hofstra University Archives.
\end{footnotes}
accessible dormitories. Similar to the University of Illinois students, disabled Hofstra students formed wheelchair athletic teams that fostered a sense of community. Hofstra’s Rolling Dutchmen, members of PUSH boasted, was the first college wheelchair basketball team on the East Coast. Like all of the disabled student programs, PUSH held workshops and distributed pamphlets around campus to educate faculty and able-bodied students on the experiences of disabled students.

Unlike the disabled student activists of the University of Illinois and the University of California, students at the New York schools did not participate in highly dramatic protests. Most of their activity occurred within their schools’ existing organizational structures. These experiences nevertheless developed a strong foundation for activism after college, as these women became important leaders in the growing push for civil rights for people with disabilities. The stories of Heumann, Tankus, and Linn highlight the significant role student organizations played in providing both organizing skills and experience in navigating institutional cultures. These stories also make clear that disabled student activism was at times focused as sharply on raising awareness as on protesting or challenging administrative power. Like their peers at Illinois and Berkeley, students in New York recognized the need for an organization outside of the college environment. “If I ever wanted to leave the campus and be able to participate in the community, we had to change the community too,” Brooklyn College activist Pat

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Figueroa recalled. Students from each of the campuses built on their early successes and continued their activism off-campus.

Conclusion

“In university groups,” one disabled student reflected, “unity of purpose is the greatest strength. When people realizing that they have similar problems, similar aims, get together for action, the road of life can only become more clear, and easier to take.” The formative experiences at Warm Springs, Cowell Memorial Hospital, and Camp Jened and in student organizations at universities proved to be points of access that raised consciousness and cultivated groups of activists. The contrasts between experiences at camps and rehabilitation centers and the inaccessibility of college campuses motivated people like Fay, Roberts, and Heumann toward activism. Their immediate concern for physical access in educational settings focused their definition of civil rights on barrier-free environments, transportation, and employment. The early, locally rooted groups continued to grow and broaden their networks with other organizations as the new college graduates moved from the east coast to the west and carried their initiatives with them. Their experiences in forming organizations, engaging media outlets, coordinating group demonstrations, and manipulating bureaucratic structures provided a foundation for a national fight to end discrimination against people with disabilities.

115 Young, “Same Struggle, Different Difference,” 52-53.
Chapter 3:

Competing Visions of Rehabilitation Policy and Civil Rights, 1968-1970

On June 24, 1969, nine hundred people gathered at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., to attend the National Citizens Conference on Rehabilitation of the Disabled and Disadvantaged. The Social and Rehabilitation Service, a division of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), sponsored the conference. Leaders from the national and local levels gathered in an effort to achieve “drastic changes” in rehabilitation programs and policy.¹ “[W]e have arrived at a time when the word handicapped means a disability to function fully in today’s economy and society, regardless of cause,” declared conference organizer, W. Scott Allan.² The guiding theme of the conference was one of empowerment, and it was expressed in the conference slogan “People Power.” This conference was the first attempt to bring into one conversation disabled consumers, government officials, and professionals and to address prejudice, discrimination, and the need for civil rights legislation for people with disabilities.³ Yet, the conference was unique for another reason. The language of

¹“People Power” Proceedings from the National Conference, June 24-27, 1969, 121; W. Scott Allan, Co-Chairman, Conference Planning Committee, 112.
²“People Power” Proceedings from the National Conference, June 24-27, 1969, 121; W. Scott Allan, Co-Chairman, Conference Planning Committee, 112.
organizer W. Scott Allan symbolized a departure from traditional notions of what constituted being “handicapped.” His words indicated a belief that the concept of rehabilitation should be broadened beyond its focus on the disabled to include individuals who did not have a physical or intellectual disability but were economically or socially disadvantaged. Even though it was championed by the leading organizer of the National Citizens Conference, this change did not represent a consensus. Indeed, present at the conference were activists who had recently led the campaign for the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA), and in their eyes, the fusing together of the problems of the disabled with those of the economically disadvantaged was neither a priority nor a desire.

During the same years, 1968 through 1970, that federal bureaucrats and national experts were pushing forward the agenda of the National Citizens Conference, disabled student activists across the country were increasing the volume with which they pressed for equal citizenship rights. During this period, the activities of the student activists and the conference participants were only tenuously connected, but the two groups came together in 1972. In that year, as the Rehabilitation Act came before Congress for re-appropriation, both groups had reached the conclusion, based on experiences in different sectors of society, that full citizenship rights would not be achieved through the offices of national civil rights organizations or governmental bureaucrats. Rather, they would result only from direct political activism that was concentrated on the problems of the physically disabled. This realization would have been less powerful and less galvanizing had the events of the years 1968 through 1970 not made clear that the unique struggles of the physically disabled faced both opposition in local communities and, perhaps worse, co-optation by leaders of other minority groups.
Definitions of key terms were fundamental to the agenda of the National Citizens Conference on Rehabilitation of the Disabled and Disadvantaged. As noted, the vision of the conference’s planners was to expand the scope of rehabilitation services. And this change was not out of line with the general tenor of progressive policymaking during the Johnson years. Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society programs had created a strong emphasis on rehabilitating America’s poor and disadvantaged and integrating them into society. This momentum led to an expanded focus on rehabilitation services, which ultimately influenced how the state and disabled activists themselves conceived of disability as a social and political identity. These challenges to the position of the disabled carried over into the presidency of Richard Nixon. During the Nixon administration, disabled activists increasingly questioned the federal government’s commitment to the plight of the disabled. The result was that federal rehabilitation services became a rallying point

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4 A word on definitions is required. As the published conference report noted, “One of the first actions of the Conference Planning Committee was to define key terms so that all who subsequently became involved in the Conference activities would know precisely what services were to be considered and what people they were to serve.” The definitions composed by the Planning Committee attempted to alter standard usage and, thereby, categories of recipients of federal services. Two terms remained standard: “Disabled” encompassed “physical, mental, or emotional condition,” and “disadvantaged” referred to “barriers to educational, economic or social opportunity and achievement.” The operative terms were “Handicapped,” which would refer to “disabled and disadvantaged persons,” and “Rehabilitation,” which covered “the handicapped person” and sought “to reduce the effects of the handicap and to help the handicapped person realize his greatest potential.” This fusion of physical, intellectual, and emotional disabilities with social and economic disadvantages aimed to redefine the scope of rehabilitation services and its necessary funding. See National Citizens Conference, People Power: A Report of the National Citizens Conference of the Disabled and Disadvantaged Held in Washington, D.C., June 24-27, 1969 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Social and Rehabilitation Service, 1969), facing title page.

The above changes, particularly the fusion “handicapped” promoted by the Planning Committee, however, do not represent modern usage by scholars and policy professionals. As a result, this dissertation employs the terms “disability” and “disabled,” unless otherwise noted, to reflect both current usage and the scope of this study, meaning 1) primarily physical disabilities, and 2) the unique cultural and political identity of the physically disabled that centers on physical accessibility and as defined by the student and architectural-barrier activists discussed in this chapter.
and a platform for further pursuit of civil rights for people with disabilities, which culminated in the Rehabilitation Act.

A short review of the history of federal rehabilitation services places this story in its proper context. From early in the twentieth century, rehabilitation legislation was tied to labor. Prior to World War I, the rehabilitation system was a pension-based system for disabled veterans that had its roots in the American Revolution. Following the Great War, the rehabilitation system changed, linking the benefits of rehabilitation and productivity, while demonizing economic dependency on the government.\(^5\) Advances in medical and social sciences coupled with concerns over a growing pension budget at the end of the war led Progressive Era leaders, such as Samuel Gompers and Julia Lathrop, to engineer a new government system for disabled veterans based on rehabilitation and treatment rather than government support. Rehabilitation advocates argued that the nation would benefit economically from providing veterans the medical assistance and vocational training necessary for them to return to the workforce.\(^6\) Disabled veterans would become producers rather than dependents, and as a result, the theory held, the nation would grow stronger.\(^7\)

From WWI through the middle 1960s, vocational rehabilitation legislation expanded its budget and services, while retaining its ultimate goal of restoring people to the workforce. A major change occurred in 1921, when rehabilitation services were


\(^7\) Linker, *War’s Waste*, 60.
extended to disabled civilians through the Fess-Smith Civilian Rehabilitation Act.\textsuperscript{8}

Legislators modeled Fess-Smith after the Smith-Sears Veterans Rehabilitation Act of 1918, and they focused the new civilian legislation on disabled people who showed the most promise of employability.\textsuperscript{9}

In 1943, a transformation of the rehabilitation program occurred under the Barden-LaFollette Act. In addition to establishing the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the law authorized medical examinations and subsidized mobility aids such as wheelchairs, crutches, and prosthetics. These new additions altered the scope of rehabilitation. Up to this point, services had focused on providing employment training. After Barden-LaFollette, the rehabilitation program expanded to medical treatment of disabilities.\textsuperscript{10} While the final objective remained employing the disabled, the strategy had changed. Scholars have been critical of this move toward handling disability as a medical issue. As Audra Jennings argues, “The growing dominance of the medical paradigm led many in the rehabilitation service and in the field of rehabilitation medicine to ignore the realities of employment and educational discrimination and instead focus on


\textsuperscript{9} Audra Jennings, “With Minds Fixed on the Horror’s of War,” argues the focus on employability created tension between disabled people and rehabilitation services. Rehabilitation Services often excluded disabled people that were deemed not “fit” enough for work, which resulted in a large population of people with disabilities that were not eligible for rehabilitation. Jennings asserts, “Rejection meant that the sole federal agency that served their interests had deemed them unemployable, cutting them off from the resources that might have improved their employability and access to social resources and civic life” (93). Furthermore, she argues that discrimination by rehabilitation services bolstered disability activism and the creation of the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped in 1949.

\textsuperscript{10} Jennings, “With Minds Fixed on the Horrors of War,” 71.
‘fixing’ the individual.”¹¹ For their part, rehabilitation officials argued that by rehabilitating “the whole man,” through both mental and physical therapy, disabled people would develop their potential, become accepted by society, and have greater success entering the workforce.¹² Eleven years later, in 1954, vocational rehabilitation expanded again. Federal allocations for state rehabilitation programs were increased, and rehabilitation centers staffed by teams of physicians, psychologists, and social workers were established with the intent to restore people with disabilities to mainstream society.¹³

In the final move that set the context for the events of the National Citizens Conference in 1969, the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1965 departed slightly from the medical and labor focuses of the rehabilitation program. In addition to doubling the program’s budget, it created two advisory committees. As described in chapter one, it established the National Committee on Architectural Barriers and required federal agencies to comply with the American Standards Specifications for accessible buildings. This inclusion of architectural barriers was out of line with rehabilitation’s traditional emphasis on treating the disabled person, whether through employment training or medicine. Instead, for the first time, federal policy substantively engaged the notion that the environment of the disabled person, rather than the disabled person herself, required adjustment. The second important product of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1965 was the creation of the National Citizens Advisory Committee on Vocational

¹²O’Brien, 78.  
¹³For a history of disability rights activism and the passage of The Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1954, see Jennings, “With Minds Fixed on the Horrors of War.”
Rehabilitation, which had the charge to evaluate the status of the rehabilitation system and recommend ways to improve it.14

The National Citizens Advisory Committee initiated the expansion of rehabilitation in the late 1960s. Howard Rusk, frequently referred to as the “father of rehabilitation medicine” and the director of New York University Medical Center’s Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine, chaired the committee, which included representatives from rehabilitation, labor, disability organizations, and medicine.15 From 1966 to 1968, the committee conducted meetings and forums with rehabilitation officials and civic leaders and established seven subcommittees to address issues of employment, research, and community outreach.16 After extensive state and local rehabilitation surveys, the advisory committee published a report for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare with recommendations for improving the vocational rehabilitation system. The committee called for: 1) a dramatic increase in federal

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15 Other committee members included: Burt L. Risley, Executive Director, Texas State Commission for the Blind; William Kuhl, Director, Research and Education Program, International Brotherhood of Boiler Makers Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers; and Alfred Slicer, Director of Illinois Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; Hester Turner, Dean of Students, Lewis and Clark College; Jacqueline Smith, Member, San Francisco Social Service Commission; Arthur Weimer, Special Assistant to the President, Indiana University; and Benigno C. Hernandez, U.S. Ambassador to Paraguay; W. Scott Allan, Vice President of the National Rehabilitation Association and Vice President of Liberty Mutual Life Insurance; Beatrice Burns, wife of the Governor of Hawaii; Leonard Goldenson, President of the American Broadcast Company and a director of the Research and Education Foundation of the United Cerebral Palsy Association; William Hobby, Jr., President and Executive Editor of The Houston Post; and Edgar Forio, a vice president of Coca-Cola and the past president of the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults (NSCCA), who had been an advocate in the architectural barriers movement.

16 The committee sent letters of inquiry regarding the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation to 637 organizations and individuals with “experience, knowledge, or interest in the needs of the disabled.” Report, National Citizens Advisory Committee on Vocational Rehabilitation, Washington, D.C., June 26, 1968.
appropriations; 2) greater flexibility at the state level; and 3) the decentralization of state vocational rehabilitation offices into local neighborhoods in order to increase public awareness of rehabilitation services. The report argued its case on grounds of both morality and economic efficiency. It concluded:

We are a humane nation and we are a nation of businessmen. Yet we violate the principles of humanity and business when we continue to permit large numbers of Americans to languish in the shadow of a serious handicap, which could be mastered. Both the conscience and the purse suffer when men and women who could be self-reliant and productive are consigned to futility and dependency.17

The report departed from the practices of emphasizing the medical, psychological, and educational training aspects of rehabilitation. Instead, the report underscored the need for people with a “handicap” to achieve equal citizenship rights, whether through employment, accessible public transportation, or state-funded programs. This expansion in scope would prove central to the claims of disability rights activists in their later fight for the Rehabilitation Act, as we will see in chapter four.

The committee initiated two controversial departures from the rehabilitation system. “This is the right time to give a broader scope to the words ‘handicapped and rehabilitation,’” the committee concluded.18 Their agenda of broadening the scope of rehabilitation services had a profound impact on conceptions of disability and disability rights. First, the emphasis on vocation weakened. One committee member argued, “There should be a reappraisal of clichés like ‘hire the handicapped, it’s good business.’ We are the victims of our own public relations . . . Perhaps the focus of rehabilitation

18 Meeting Minutes, National Citizens Advisory Committee on Vocational Rehabilitation, February 13, 1968. White House Central Files (WHCF) Subject File Federal Government Task Forces: Handicapped, Box 6, Folder HEW 1963-69, LBJ. (The emphasis is from the original.)
should be on training for responsible living and citizenship. Employment need not be the only rehabilitation goal.” Eliminating “vocational” from the program’s title meant that a much larger population of people with disabilities could qualify for rehabilitation services, not just those with moderate disabilities who could be trained to work in a particular vocation. It also meant that the attainment of gainful employment would no longer be the sole objective of citizenship rights for people with disabilities; rather, programs would aim for full participation in civic life.

While this shift away from labor in the focus of rehabilitation seemed to be an ideal situation for all people with disabilities, the moderately physically disabled who had been rehabilitated and found employment through the traditional system felt the need to defend it. Members of the National Association of the Physically Handicapped (NAPH) opposed the removal of “vocational” for fear that an increased population of consumers of rehabilitation services would take away from their benefits and services. This was the first resistance to the idea of broadening rehabilitation, but it was not the last or the most significant. The movement for a more inclusive rehabilitation system, which centered on civic participation rather than work alone, would also serve as one of President Nixon’s main reasons for opposing the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act in 1972.

The committee’s second recommendation further broadened the scope of rehabilitation. Mary Switzer, Director of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation since 1950, and Howard Rusk had worked closely together since the end of WWII to develop their vision of rehabilitation services. Switzer and Rusk had been the driving forces

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19 Meeting Minutes, National Citizens Advisory Committee on Vocational Rehabilitation, February 13, 1968. White House Central Files (WHCF) Subject File Federal Government Task Forces: Handicapped, Box 6, Folder HEW 1963-69, LBJ.
behind the idea of rehabilitating the “whole man,” which represented the thinking of experts in the newly established field of rehabilitative medicine. The creation of the division of Social and Rehabilitation Service under the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1967, along with the war on poverty, created an opportunity for Switzer to expand rehabilitation services beyond the disabled population. Switzer, who argued that impoverished people had mental health problems, linked the War on Poverty to rehabilitation, maintaining that both the disabled and the poor had to break their cycle of dependency.\(^\text{20}\) Rehabilitating the poor, instead of granting them services and rights, Switzer argued, would reduce rising welfare rolls and dependency on the government.\(^\text{21}\) Rusk and Switzer appropriated the Great Society vision through advocating for the extension of the vocational rehabilitation program to include the “socially and economically handicapped” which they referred to as “the disadvantaged.”\(^\text{22}\) Rusk used the National Citizens Advisory Committee as a vehicle to drive Switzer’s vision forward. The committee defined “the disadvantaged” as any person who “because of barriers to educational, economic or social opportunity and achievement have serious problems in


obtaining suitable education and employment or are otherwise unable to participate fully in American society.  Switzer, Rusk, and their supporters argued that the socially and economically disadvantaged also had a difficult time securing employment and that their plight shared similarities with people with disabilities. Moreover, they made the correlation that higher incidents of physical and mental disabilities appeared in poor populations. Some members of the committee, particularly Edgar Forio who was involved in the architectural barrier movement, expressed concern that combining issues of people with disabilities with those of the disadvantaged would lead to a discussion on the need to change the whole social structure and result in little effectiveness. There were multiple concerns about broadening the scope of the vocational rehabilitation program, and many of the rehabilitation professionals feared that the program did not have adequate resources even for the moderately physically disabled people it currently served, let alone a large population of the impoverished. Despite these reservations the committee concluded that the list of similarities outweighed those initial concerns, and they brought the “disadvantaged” into their mission.

24 Meeting Minutes, National Citizens Advisory Committee on Vocational Rehabilitation, February 13, 1968. White House Central Files (WHCF) Subject File Federal Government Task Forces: Handicapped, Box 6, Folder HEW 1963-69, LBJ.
25 Meeting Minutes, National Citizens Advisory Committee on Vocational Rehabilitation, February 13, 1968. White House Central Files (WHCF) Subject File Federal Government Task Forces: Handicapped, Box 6, Folder HEW 1963-69, LBJ.
26 Meeting Minutes, National Citizens Advisory Committee on Vocational Rehabilitation, February 13, 1968. White House Central Files (WHCF) Subject File Federal Government Task Forces: Handicapped, Box 6, Folder HEW 1963-69, LBJ.
Trying to Build a Coalition: the National Citizens Conference

The advisory committee’s work resulted in the National Citizens Conference for Rehabilitation of the Disabled and Disadvantaged in June 1969. Advisory committee members appointed community leaders and experts to five workgroups to examine: 1) environmental and architectural barriers, 2) delivery of rehabilitation services, 3) the legal rights of the disabled and disadvantaged, 4) the financial costs of rehabilitation, and 5) consumer involvement and community organizing. Each of these workgroups presented their findings at the conference. The audience contained a variety of opinions. Some participants came out of curiosity, while others claimed they came to tell “the Government” a thing or two. The first conference to bring together people with disabilities and rehabilitation professionals proved to be tumultuous, as the participants were “often unruly and the speeches fiery and angry.”

The ultimate goal of the conference was to serve as a starting point for extensive, nationwide action. Leaders from both disability and disadvantaged communities prepared presentations geared toward the “change-makers” in the audience. Among the speakers were student activist Fred Fay; John Nagle of the National Federation of the Blind; Durwood McDaniel of the American Council of the Blind; Lenora Chavez of the United Latin American Citizens; John Veneman, Under Secretary of HEW; and Whitney

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27Fay, Community Organizer, 77. Conference organizers postponed the conference until 1969 to include the newly elected Nixon administration. In 1967-68 meetings were held at the regional offices of HEW to discuss the goals of the conference and participants. This conference became a vehicle for the formation of the ACCD.
Young, executive director of the National Urban League. Representatives from various
government offices, including the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Office of
Transportation, many state legislators, and U.S. Senate and House staff members
attended the conference.  

From the opening speeches of the conference, it was clear that participants would
not limit themselves to academic discussions. Vice President Spiro Agnew opened the
conference, remarking, “Where our citizens are inadvertent victims of nature or
environment, society must compensate. Where individuals have a less than equal chance,
we must create better than equal opportunity. For the disabled and disadvantaged the
road is never easy. But it need not be impossible. The courageous ask only a chance.
And it is up to us to provide that chance.” His remarks were meant to assure conference
participants that the government was committed to providing opportunities to people with
disabilities and to disadvantaged minority groups that had been excluded from
mainstream society.

Following Agnew, Urban League executive director Whitney Young took a jab at
the Nixon Administration. Young criticized Nixon’s platform of “law and order”
declaring, “Law and order is not going to come in this country until there is justice,” and
sarcastically noted that Hitler’s Germany also had order. Aside from this critique,
Young’s main goal was to form a “coalition of concern” to press for changes in national

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priorities. Like Switzer and Rusk, Young supported the emphasis on social uplift to achieve economic security for impoverished African Americans. The Urban League, a civil rights organization formed in the early twentieth century, was a major advocate for social welfare issues. Young in particular argued that employment was at the heart of the problem of the black family. He was a staunch advocate for extending rehabilitation services to social problems. “For too long,” Young declared, “we have thought of poor people, physically handicapped people, and minorities—whether black, Puerto Rican, or Mexican American—as having only pathology. If we believe this, we will never begin to rehabilitate.”

He stressed the importance of coalition-building between people with disabilities and disadvantaged groups and stated that this conference would be the first of many alliances established between these two groups based on the premise that the similarities between the disabled and disadvantaged were far greater than the differences.

Richard C. Allen, Professor of Law and Director of the Institute of Law at George Washington University, supported Young’s position. Like Young, Allen stressed the similarities among the minority groups represented at the conference who had historically been seen as separate:

The Psalmist’s injunction to “…do justice to the afflicted and needy” is what this paper—what this conference—is all about. Both proceed on the assumption that the “afflicted and needy”—the disabled and disadvantaged—are not as dissimilar as their external appearances might suggest. They share a host of deprivations: of education, of job opportunities, of social participation, and of basic rights of

For more on Whitney Young, see Dennis C. Dickerson, Militant Mediator: Whitney Young, Jr. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004).
citizenship. And they have a common right to full employment of that fundamental concept of our jurisprudence: Equal Justice under law; they who have for so long had precious little of equality or justice.\textsuperscript{36}

Allen focused on the legal rights of people with disabilities and the disadvantaged, arguing for legislation that departed from victimization and charity and embraced the concept of rights.\textsuperscript{37} Allen gave a nod to the recently passed Architectural Barriers Act and noted that it was a step in the right direction for twenty million people with disabilities who were “built out of normal living by unnecessary barriers.” However, he argued that the enactment of legislation such as the ABA was not strong enough to eradicate prejudices because it dealt only with building codes and design—a position that revealed the distance between his understanding of the problems of disability and that of disability rights activists themselves.\textsuperscript{38} Throughout the 1960s, disability rights activists argued that accessible building codes were central to achieving full civic membership.

While Young and Allen called for a coalition between the disadvantaged and disabled, not everyone agreed. Those disability activists participating in the conference focused solely on issues within their own community and did not mention the disadvantaged. Rather, they understood the National Citizens Conference to be an


important opportunity to further the work of promoting a society that was free of architectural barriers. This focus did not mesh with the attention given by other speakers to defining the shared plight of the disabled and disadvantaged. Architectural barriers were an issue that was highly important to and unique to people with physical disabilities. Fred Fay and architectural-barriers expert and former president of the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults (NSCCA), Leon Chatelain, Jr., addressed the conference on behalf of the Environmental Barriers and Transportation work group.\footnote{Other committee members included: Fred Dechowitz of the American Association of Workers for the Blind, Edmund Leonard of the PCEH, Marie McGuire from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Jane Lawson from the Department of Treasury, and Bernard Nash from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.}

Even though federal legislation was passed almost a year before the conference, the Architectural Barriers Act applied only to public buildings. Federally funded buildings, members of the work group argued, were only a small piece of the barrier-free battle. They argued that this conference provided the “first opportunity for a representative national body to study and make recommendations on the total problem of architectural barriers.”\footnote{Ruth Lauder, \textit{The Goal is: Mobility!} The National Citizens Conference on Rehabilitation of the Disabled and Disadvantaged, (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D.C. June 24-27, 1969), 1.} Fay and Chatelain were at this time much more provocative than the architectural barrier movement had been earlier in the decade. As other experts at the conference championed a fusion of the interests of the disabled and disadvantaged, Fay and Chatelain drew a parallel between the lingering architectural barriers problem and, as they described it, the resulting segregation of disabled people from the rest of society. “Civil rights measures,” they argued, “indicate how this Nation stands on the question of racial segregation, but there is less unanimity about the kind of segregation that concerns
those who are disabled.” Chatelain and Fay emphasized the need to expand the architectural barrier movement’s scope to accessible housing, transportation, recreational facilities, and roads. The lack of accessible housing for people with disabilities, in particular, concerned Chatelain and Fay. The few housing projects that did incorporate barrier-free design were built solely for the use of people with disabilities and therefore segregated them from the rest of society. “Unfortunately, the present trend (if there is one) seems to be toward segregation,” Chatelain and Fay concluded.

At odds with the dominant theme of the conference was their desire to encourage community action and reignite the architectural barriers movement, which they felt had begun to wane following the passage of the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968. “Every community in the Nation, large or small, either needs to organize a program or to revitalize and expand an existing program…Success breeds success, recruits allies, and generates enthusiasm to tackle the harder and less glamorous tasks. You can be the dynamo that generates community action,” the two men asserted. They appealed to the broad audience by recapitulating the same rhetoric that had been used over the past decade to promote barrier-free design: the removal of architectural barriers benefited all members of society and the cost of construction and reconstruction of accessible buildings was inexpensive.

In addition to disability rights activists, further criticism of the combination model of rehabilitation emerged on different grounds. George Wiley of the National Welfare Rights Organization announced his opposition to including the poor under the

41 Lauder, The Goal is: Mobility!, 51.
42 Lauder, The Goal is: Mobility!, 51
43 Lauder, The Goal is: Mobility!, 52.
44 Lauder, The Goal is: Mobility!, 64.
rehabilitation system. “It is an insult to define poverty in terms of personal incapacities. It is not the poor who need to be rehabilitated, but society,” Wiley asserted. Rather than rehabilitation, Wiley argued for poor people to organize in order to influence the policies and decisions that affect welfare recipients. He explained the goals of the National Welfare Rights Organization and encouraged people to join the movement “to develop a voice for the people who are the most despised in this country—the welfare poor.”

Likewise, Manuel Rodriguez, a leader of the Brown Berets, called for action to replace “listening to this bullshit, these beautiful words that we hear right here.” He did not equivocate: “We are tired of rhetoric.” Like Fay and Chatelain, Rodriguez did not mention the grouping of disadvantaged and disabled people or the rehabilitation system, but used this forum to express his discontent with the lack of government action on behalf of Mexican-Americans and blacks. “I don’t want to be middle class. I don’t want your women. I don’t want your houses. I want an equal opportunity for my sons and my black brothers to be able to get the same advantages you have,” Rodriguez declared.

Wiley and Rodriguez’s opposition to being included in the rehabilitation program underscored the multiple perspectives from minority group leaders present at the conference.

Many of the disparate groups at the conference, however, did agree on the importance of encouraging community organization. The work group on Consumer Involvement in Rehabilitation echoed the sentiments expressed by Chatelain and Fay on this need.\textsuperscript{49} John Nagle, President of the National Federation of the Blind, who also testified at the Architectural Barriers hearings the previous year, and Leona Chavez of the League of United Latin American Citizens emphasized one of the conference’s main objectives: to demonstrate to society that disability was a social phenomenon. To make their point, they quoted from the work of a blind sociologist: “There is nothing inherent in the condition that requires a blind person to be docile, dependent, or helpless. Blindness is a social role that people must learn to play. Blind men are made.”\textsuperscript{50} Building on this framework, they urged rehabilitation consumers not to take on the “dependent role of the ‘sick’ person,” but rather to change the system to espouse “strength and normalcy” in people with disabilities.\textsuperscript{51} They urged disabled and disadvantaged consumers to serve on advisory committees, form their own organizations, and network with other movements. The work group conceded that grassroots organizations often lacked resources and funding. However, they argued that local action groups were more effective than national organizations or government-run agencies in creating change because they could focus on their membership’s immediate needs.

\textsuperscript{49}Donald Parks (Chairman) of Addicts Rehabilitation Center, John Nagle (Vice Chairman) from the National Federation of the Blind, Lenora Chavez of the League of United Latin American Citizens, Durwood McDaniel of the American Council of the Blind, Lawrence Smedley of the AFL-CIO, Linda Asay of the Council of State Governments, and Patrick Healy of the National League of Cities were the member of the Consumer Involvement work group.


\textsuperscript{51}Thursz, \textit{Consumer Involvement in Rehabilitation}, 10.
employ a larger repertoire of tactics (from militancy to press releases) as well as form communication structures that could influence government decision-making.\textsuperscript{52} Moreover, they argued that the secondary benefits of community-based organizations were equally as important, stressing that participation in these groups led to new friendships and offered the disabled person a “subtle important message that he is not alone in his struggle to overcome his fate.”\textsuperscript{53}

The National Citizens Conference, then, ended without a consensus among the participants. Organizers generally maintained their commitment to reshaping rehabilitation services toward helping the disadvantaged as well as the disabled. Other participants left more convinced than ever that substantial and effective change must grow from efforts at local activism. The organizers pushed ahead. Concerned that the conference’s momentum would dissipate soon after it was over, the National Citizens Advisory Committee outlined a work plan and established “action-oriented task forces” in an effort to ensure the progress of their agenda. Additionally, they disseminated the conference proceedings and short films to Senate and House office buildings, civic leaders, and newspapers.\textsuperscript{54} As one student has noted, this conference “marked a turning point for the national rehabilitation program.”\textsuperscript{55} The conference had served as a venue to publicize a new focus for the vocational rehabilitation program, and, thereby, the

\textsuperscript{52}Thursz, \textit{Consumer Involvement in Rehabilitation}, 18-20.
\textsuperscript{53}Thursz, \textit{Consumer Involvement in Rehabilitation}, 17.
\textsuperscript{54}Meeting Minutes, National Citizens Advisory Committee on Vocational Rehabilitation, February 13, 1968. White House Central Files (WHCF) Subject File Federal Government Task Forces: Handicapped, Box 6, Folder HEW 1963-69, LBJ.
\textsuperscript{55}Richard Verville, \textit{War, Politics, and Philanthropy: The History of Rehabilitation Medicine}. (Lanham: University Press of America, 2009),164. Verville details the history of rehabilitation starting with WWI through the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. He raises important points on the alliances between rehabilitation leaders and the development of the disability rights movement in the 1970s, however his analysis is heavily weighted toward rehabilitation leaders. His work also provides a hagiographic account of the pioneers of rehabilitation medicine, including Howard Rusk and Mary Switzer.
definition of “handicapped” as a social problem. This conference also served as a foundation for the re-appropriation of the Rehabilitation Act of 1972. “Vocational” was removed from the title of the legislation, reflecting the shift in emphasis from work alone to rehabilitating the “handicapped” as full citizens. Despite opposition by some of the disadvantaged and disabled activists, “disadvantaged” was added as a category to the same bill. As we will see in the next chapter, these changes helped explain why Nixon vetoed the bill in 1972 and 1973, as he argued that it moved too far away from the original goal of rehabilitation for employment and into the realm of civil rights.

**Beyond the National Citizens Conference**

The National Citizens Conference reflected two important and generally adversarial lines of thought: that rehabilitation should include the disadvantaged and that the rights of the disabled, the traditional clients of rehabilitation, were unique and required greater attention. Conversations on these points did not end with the conference. While the conference failed to build a coalition between the disabled and disadvantaged, it did forge important alliances among disability rights activists. Quarterly meetings during the conference’s two-year planning process had brought together disability rights activists on a regular basis.56 Six of the nine individuals who would found the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD) in 1974 had worked on the planning of the National Conference for the Disabled and Disadvantaged.57

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56 Fay, *Community Organizer*, 76.
57 Harry Schweikert, executive director of Paralyzed Veterans of America; Durwood McDaniel, executive director of the American Council of the Blind; Fred Schreiber, executive director of National Association of the Deaf; Bob Smithdas, worked at the Helen Keller National Center for the Deaf Blind in New York City. Fay, *Community Organizer*, 76-77.
A new organization that would be instrumental in the movement for disability rights in the late 1970s and early 1980s grew out of the National Citizens Conference. Fred Fay had networked with leaders of the National Federation of the Blind and the National Association of the Deaf to establish the ACCD. ACCD reflected many of the themes of the conference on the disabled and disadvantaged, focusing on civil rights, grassroots organization, and networking among minority groups. Departing from the spirit of the conference, however, they restricted their membership to people with physical disabilities.

With increased national attention to the need for federal intervention to secure accessible housing, transportation, and jobs for people with disabilities, activists pressured the Nixon administration to respond. A month after the conference, disability rights organizations wrote to President Nixon questioning his commitment to disability rights and legislation. The Congress of Organizations of the Physically Handicapped (COPH), an umbrella organization for two hundred local disability rights organizations, asked, “So we landed a man on the moon – hurrah. When are you going to do something for the physically handicapped? The Nixon Administration is seven (7) months old today, when are you going to do something for the physically handicapped?” The same day, the National Association of the Physically Handicapped, Inc. (NAPH), also wrote to Nixon. “We are frustrated by the lack of social legislation, specifically, legislation

58 Letter from Vicki Cox Stanton, National Congress of Organizations of the Physically Handicapped to President Nixon, July 20, 1969. WHCF, WE 8 Vocational Rehabilitation, Box 42, Nixon Presidential Library (NPL).
59 Many of the former members of the disbanded American Federation of the Physically Handicapped (AFPH) established the NAPH in 1958. The AFPH was central in lobbying for disability rights in the 1940s and early 1950s. For a history of the AFPH, see Audra Jennings, “With Minds Fixed on the Horrors of War.”
pertaining to the physically handicapped, in your administration thus far,” the NAPH asserted. It was not coincidental that these two letters were sent on the same day. The NAPH was one of the groups associated with the COPH and Vicki Cox Stanton, who served as a board member for both organizations, signed both letters. The COPH and NAPH continued to pressure the Nixon administration for action on disability-related issues and, as we will see in the next chapter, spearheaded movements at the state-level for civil rights legislation.

While citizens with disabilities pressed Nixon about his administration’s plans for people with disabilities, Kansas Republican Senator Robert Dole, a disabled World War II veteran, proposed a presidential task force or commission to enable “an overview of how to provide the handicapped more help and hope.” In response, Nixon created a Task Force on the Problems of the Physically Handicapped, which was to “provide a needed overview of problems faced by our handicapped people in order to determine how they can achieve maximum independence, security, and dignity,” and to propose legislative and executive action for 1970. While many of the same members from the National Citizens Advisory Committee served on the new task force, it differed in one

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60 Letter from Vicki Cox Stanton, National Association of the Physically Handicapped, Inc., to President Nixon, July 20, 1969. WHCF, WE 8 Vocational Rehabilitation, Box 42,NPL.
61 Bob Dole’s right arm was paralyzed in World War II.
62 Senator Dole suggested the following subjects to of primary concern: architectural barriers, expansion of employment, transportation, and recreational opportunities, a directory to inform people with disabilities of public and private assistance, and income tax deductions and/or other financial assistance programs for people with disabilities and their families. Dole’s suggestions echoed the work groups established for the Conference.
Letter from President Nixon to Walton Gillespie and Congressman Findley (IL) October 31, 1969. WHCF FG 221 Task Forces Box 8, Folder EX FG 223-61, NPL.
important respect. It did not address in a meaningful way the inclusion of the disadvantaged under the rehabilitation system.\(^{63}\)

In March 1970, the Task Force on the Problems of the Physically Handicapped published an official report to the President. It called for comprehensive public information programs about the accomplishments of people with disabilities and the nature of disability. The public information campaigns reiterated what the architectural barriers movement did throughout the 1960s, educating people about disability and discrimination and emphasizing the need to view people with disabilities as fellow citizens, rather than as patients needing to be cured. The committee members also recommended that Nixon personally endorse a “national commitment to serve the physically handicapped” and establish a Presidential advisory committee to review and evaluate existing public programs for people with disabilities.\(^{64}\) The task force called for better enforcement of existing legislation, specifically concerning architectural barriers and public transportation, and promoted establishment of a National Commission on Transportation and Housing for the Handicapped. Lastly, the task force advised amending the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, which was due for reauthorization the following year, to include all people with disabilities—not just those deemed suitable for rehabilitation for employment.\(^{65}\) These recommendations were part of the incremental

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\(^{63}\) W. Scott Allan, Lawrence Smedley, Assistant Director of the AFL-CIO; John Melcher, Director, Wisconsin Bureau of Handicapped Children, and Alfred Slicer were members of both presidential committees. New members included, Ralph DeForest, American Medical Association, Robert Bennett, Warm Springs Medical Director; and Henry Viscardi, Jr., President of Human Resources Center in New York City. WHCF FG 221 Task Forces, Box 8, Folder Ex FG 223-61, NPL.

\(^{64}\) Report, White House Task Force on the Problems of the Physically Handicapped, March 20, 1970. WHCF FG 221 Task Forces, Box 8, Folder Ex FG 223-61, NPL.

\(^{65}\) Report, White House Task Force on the Problems of the Physically Handicapped, March 20, 1970. WHCF FG 221 Task Forces, Box 8, Folder Ex FG 223-61, NPL.
shift over the previous decade at the federal level to address issues of full civic participation for disabled people, as opposed to focusing solely on rehabilitating physically disabled people for employment. This shift also involved the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped (PCEH), which also expanded its focus beyond employment and increased the population it served. PCEH added representatives from the Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development to its Advisory Council. While these committees differed on the priority they assigned to bringing the disadvantaged under the scope of rehabilitation services, they were in accord on a point that was crucial to the agenda of disability rights activists. Both the Task Force and the PCEH reflected, at the level of presidential advice, the shift from narrow rehabilitation for employment to promoting the rights of disabled people to live and travel as well as their able-bodied fellow citizens.  

The PCEH Broadens its Scope

As the Rehabilitation Act neared re-appropriation, the effort to broaden the scope of the legislation came increasingly under fire. Leaders of groups representing the socially and economically disadvantaged continued to see federal rehabilitation services as a potential source of help to their troubled constituencies. They argued that the social problems that inflicted African-American and Hispanic individuals were as much a disability as any physical limitation and reached out to the PCEH in support of their cause. The mission of the PCEH was to promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities through alliances with labor and through year-round publicity. Minority

66 Minutes, PCEH Executive Committee Meeting, December 1, 1969. WHCF FG 221 Task Forces, Box 8, Folder EX FG 221-61. NPL
group leaders understood the value that these functions might hold for the disadvantaged if only the scope of the PCEH could be broadened beyond the problems of the physically disabled. Physically disabled activists, for their part, continue to resent attempts to expand the definition of “handicapped” and feared that doing so would lessen the benefits that they received and overtax the already scarce resources available to people with disabilities. Both sides sought to promote the positions of their constituencies and gain access to the benefits of the PCEH and rehabilitation services.

The effort to resist expansion had a voice within the PCEH. Paul Messmer, assistant executive secretary of the PCEH, expressed to his chairman William McCahill his concerns about the movement to broaden the PCEH eligibility to include socially and economically disadvantaged populations. He cautioned McCahill, “The popular swing to calling the disadvantaged ‘handicapped’ appears to be an attempt to profit from the acceptance and prestige of the term ‘rehabilitation of the handicapped.’ And this rush to redefine handicapped may be the greatest barrier the physically and mentally handicapped have ever faced.” Messmer also expressed concern that the PCEH’s campaign to “hire the handicapped” would result in employers favoring able-bodied, economically disadvantaged workers over people with disabilities because of convenience. “It is ironic,” Messmer said, “that, with the public finally aroused to the point that helping others is a desirable and attainable goal, the handicapped, who were reaching a degree of equality of opportunity should suddenly find themselves again

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67 Nancy MacLean, Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workforce (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006) argues a key component to the African American civil rights movement, and later, Hispanics and women, was employment. MacLean asserts that equality under the law was not enough to secure full citizenship rights, highlighting these movements battles against economic inclusion.

68 Memo from Paul Messmer to William McCahill, July 10, 1969. WHCF FG 221 Task Forces, Box 8, Folder EX FG 221-61. NPL
relegated to the lowest rung of service on the ladder of social assistance.”\textsuperscript{69} Messmer pleaded that the PCEH remain solely focused on the original purpose of their organization and “not to abandon the handicapped” in the growing attempt to redefine rehabilitation and broaden the services that came along with the definition. Moreover, Messmer asserted that the PCEH had the esteem and power to mold public opinion and should publicly express its concerns and commitment to people with disabilities.\textsuperscript{70}

Following Messmer’s letter, the PCEH Executive Committee established an ad hoc committee to evaluate the pros and cons of including the disadvantaged. The Executive Committee was heavily weighted with members from rights-based disability organizations and leaders of the architectural barrier movement, including Leon Chatelain, Jr., who had represented the architectural barriers workgroup at the National Citizens Conference in 1969 and was also former chairman of the National Commission on Architectural Barriers and President of the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults. Other influential members of the Executive Committee were Sumner Whittier, Executive Director of the National Easter Seal Society for Crippled Children and Adults, and Clarence Averill, President of the National Association of Physically Handicapped (NAPH). Committee member George Sawyer expressed concerns similar to Messmer’s and cautioned that disadvantaged people and disabled people had different goals and therefore were not compatible. He argued that the disadvantaged did not view employment as way to solve their problems, as the disabled did, and were only

\textsuperscript{69} Memo from Messmer to William McCahill, July 10, 1969. WHCF FG 221 Task Forces, Box 8, Folder EX FG 221-61. NPL.

\textsuperscript{70} Memo from Messmer to William McCahill, July 10, 1969. WHCF FG 221 Task Forces, Box 8, Folder EX FG 221-61. NPL.
“concerned with social and other gains.” He believed they would exploit and dilute the rehabilitation system and the services provided by the PCEH.71

In February 1970, the ad hoc committee invited Sterling Tucker, Executive Director of the National Urban League, and Dickie Carter and John Flores of the Urban Coalition to present their rationale for the expansion of PCEH services.72 Tucker and Flores sought the support of the PCEH to aid in employment efforts for economically disadvantaged minority groups. As former National Urban League director Whitney Young had argued a few years earlier, jobs were at the heart of the problem for black families, and he was particularly concerned with the employment of black males.73 Tucker’s argument echoed Young’s presentation at the National Citizens Conference in 1969, as he asserted, “That every child born with colored skin in America is born ‘with what amounts to a physical handicap.’”74 Tucker’s speech was heavily weighted with phrases such as “Color makes a difference, color is a handicap.” He argued that it was only appropriate for the PCEH to expand its campaigns to include African Americans because all of the arguments made for hiring people with disabilities could also be applied to black workers.75 Dickie Carter reiterated Tucker’s argument, asserting that “the present plight of the disadvantaged was ‘dismal’” and that Great Society programs did not properly train the disadvantaged for employment, underscoring the need for the

71 George Sawyer was the Assistant President of Medical Services for Liberty Mutual Insurance Company. PCEH Executive Committee Minutes, 1970.WHCF, Charles “Bud” Wilkinson, Box 36. NPL.
72 Minutes, Ad Hoc Committee on Disadvantaged, PCEH, February 9, 1970. WHCF, Charles “Bud” Wilkinson, Box 36. NPL.
74 Minutes, Ad Hoc Committee on Disadvantaged, PCEH, February 9, 1970. WHCF, Charles “Bud” Wilkinson, Box 36. NPL.
75 Minutes, Ad Hoc Committee on Disadvantaged, PCEH, February 9, 1970. WHCF, Charles “Bud” Wilkinson, Box 36. NPL.
PCEH to aid socially and economically disadvantaged African Americans.\textsuperscript{76} John Flores urged the PCEH to give Mexican Americans particular attention because they “suffered greater oppression than blacks.”\textsuperscript{77} He asserted that Mexican Americans often had two fewer years schooling than African Americans and experienced more discrimination in social welfare services, concluding that the PCEH should expand both its definition of “handicapped” and the services it provided.

By equating the experience of African Americans and Mexican Americans to people with disabilities, all three advocates argued that the greatest social problem was to be “handicapped,” which had traditionally been defined as disability. Despite some of the committee members’ disapproval, the PCEH concluded that it was necessary to broaden its objectives to include the disadvantaged and committed itself to directing resources to “overcoming the problems faced by people with serious handicaps, whatever the nature or origin.”\textsuperscript{78}

This decision to broaden the definition of “handicapped” and, thus the population served, sparked opposition from disability rights organizations. Physically disabled activists shared the sentiments of Paul Messmer and George Sawyer. They feared that they would suffer from the PCEH’s new initiative. Before activists could organize public opposition to inclusion of the disadvantaged under the PCEH, a resolution was introduced in Congress to remove the word “physically” from the “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week,” which took place annually during the first week in

\textsuperscript{76} Minutes, Ad Hoc Committee on Disadvantaged, PCEH, February 9, 1970. WHCF, Charles “Bud” Wilkinson, Box 36. NPL.
\textsuperscript{77} Minutes, Ad Hoc Committee on Disadvantaged, PCEH, February 9, 1970. WHCF, Charles “Bud” Wilkinson, Box 36. NPL.
\textsuperscript{78} Letter from Russell Dean to William McCahill, February 10, 1970. WHCF Wilkinson Papers, Box 36, Folder PCEH. NPL.
October. The resolution was passed with no prior announcement to the public and enacted without hearings or debate.\textsuperscript{79}

When a small number of physically disabled organizations heard of the new amendment, they scrambled to petition President Nixon to veto the resolution. Members of the NAPH and its local affiliates, such as the Teays chapter in Lima, Ohio, and the Able Disabled Club, sent telegrams to Nixon pleading for his veto.\textsuperscript{80} “We have vigorously opposed this change with just cause and if we had known what was taking place we would have taken positive action prior to this date. Only today was our organization notified by the PCEH and we feel an injustice is about to take place where those concerned had no opportunity to speak,” asserted the NAPH leaders.\textsuperscript{81} Despite last minute opposition from consumers of disability services, Nixon approved the joint resolution to remove the term “physically” on the same day that it passed through the House and Senate. As we will see in the next chapter, the removal of one word carried significant ramifications for people with disabilities.\textsuperscript{82}

**Local Activists and their Definitions of Disability**

Debates and decisions at the level of federal policymaking between 1968 and 1970, as we have seen, influenced parts of the nation’s rehabilitation services program

\textsuperscript{79} Letter from William McCahill to State Chairman and Secretary, October 2, 1970. WHCF Wilkinson Papers, Box 36, Folder PCEH. NPL. Public Law 91-442, S.J. Res. 110, National Employ the Handicapped Week, approved on October 8, 1970.

\textsuperscript{80} Telegram from Teays Chapter of NAPH to Bud Wilkinson, October 8, 1970; Telegram from Able Disabled Club, October 8, 1970. WHCF Wilkinson Papers, Box 36, Folder PCEH. NPL.

\textsuperscript{81} Telegram from NAPH to President Nixon, October 7, 1970.WHCF Wilkinson Papers, Box 36, Folder PCEH. NPL.

\textsuperscript{82} Public Law 91-442, S.J. Res. 110, National Employ the Handicapped Week, approved on October 8, 1970.
and began to reshape the way the government viewed the part of the population deemed “handicapped.” These discussions included advocates and activists for the physically disabled and particularly those people who had pushed for architectural barriers standards. These advocates, however, were not entirely representative of the community of people agitating for more rights for people with disabilities. While federal advisory committees and task forces discussed new definitions of “handicapped” and revised the rehabilitation system, activism at the local level continued to grow across the nation in the years 1968 through 1970. Disabled student activists from colleges and universities in Illinois, New York, and California who had championed rights on their own campuses broadened their struggle for civil rights. As these activists graduated, they looked beyond their institutions to the broader community. The early, locally-rooted groups grew and networked with other organizations as the new college graduates moved from the east coast to the west and carried their initiatives with them. While each group took its own path, all became more assertive in their language and goals and more aggressive in their tactics.

After working on architectural barriers projects in Washington, D.C., Fred Fay returned to the University of Illinois in 1969 to earn a doctorate in psychology. He found that activism at his alma mater was changing. Members of the fraternity of disabled students, Delta Sigma Omicron (DSO), identified and rebuked the paternalism and dependence promoted by Timothy Nugent’s program. They acknowledged the program’s necessary functions, but they asserted that it also encouraged social isolation from able-
bodied students. In 1971, disabled students drew up a set of complaints and proposals for the rehabilitation staff, arguing that DSO should become more autonomous from Nugent’s supervision to “participate in the decisions that affect our lives.” The Daily Illini reported that disabled students “are demanding a greater voice in all the administrative decisions that directly and indirectly affect their own lives and those of fellow students. Like other American minority groups, they are becoming more resentful of the paternalistic and condescending attitudes which many feel the staff exhibits.”

They deplored their segregation from the rest of the community. They demanded that more dormitories be made accessible to allow for their integration into the general residential population. Some of the more physically disabled students resented the success of the Gizz Kids, the disabled student basketball squad, whom they disparaged as “red-blooded all-American Gimp” because the team raised unrealistic expectations of the disabled. While the University of Illinois program was in the national spotlight for being on the cutting edge of rehabilitation and campus accessibility, it suffered from internal turmoil.

Opposition to Nugent’s administration did not hinder DSO’s larger objectives. In line with the Fred Fay and Chatelain’s focus on accessibility, in October 1970 the University of Illinois disabled student newspaper, The Spokesman, featured an article that described the inaccessibility of the Chicago transit system and urged students to take action: “If we physically disabled people do not speak loudly enough to win our right of

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83 “Rehab Center Charged with ‘Paternalism,’ Daily Illini, October 1, 1970 and “Students Seek to Define the Role of UI Rehabilitation Center,” Daily Illini, April 2, 1971.
86 Barbara Roth, “Students Seek to Define the Role of UI Rehabilitation Center,” Daily Illini, April 2, 1971.
freedom of movement, no one will.”

The article encouraged students to write the chairman of the board of directors of the Chicago Transit Authority and refer to the recent Illinois legislation requiring that all public accommodations be accessible. In December of the same year, The Spokesman also encouraged DSO members to become involved in advocating for civil rights and for an anti-discrimination provision to be added to the Illinois constitution. It urged DSO members to join the Illinois Congress of the Blind and the Illinois Council of the Congress of Organizations of the Physically Handicapped in Chicago during the following week for a rally to end the “isolation, segregation, and unequal status of the disabled in this society.”

Students at Berkeley, too, made organizational advances beyond the campus. The process started with recently hired assistant professor Fred Collignon. Before Collignon joined the faculty of Urban Development and Planning at Berkeley, he interned at the Bureau of the Budget and the President’s Office (now the Office of Management and Budget), where he established vital connections with congressmen. Through this job, he became close friends with Ed Newman of the President’s Bureau of the Budget. In 1969, Collignon helped Newman’s campaign to replace Mary Switzer as Commissioner

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91 Newman was a former professor at Tufts University and director of Rehabilitation in Massachusetts.
of Rehabilitation Services. As newly appointed commissioner, Newman hired Collignon’s firm, Abt Associates, to evaluate the Social and Rehabilitation Service (SRS). This led to its reorganization, as Newman wanted to use the next reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act to “revamp the RSA [SRS] and create social change.”\(^\text{92}\) Following Newman’s appointment, Collignon turned down an offer from Newman to work permanently for him, choosing instead to take the position at the University of California, Berkeley.

Newman and Collignon continued to work closely with one another. In 1970, Newman authorized a $10,000 grant from the SRS to conduct social policy research at Berkeley.\(^\text{93}\) The grant was designed to set up a social policy studio on campus for students to focus exclusively on improvements in disability policy. Among Collignon’s students partaking in the SRS-funded study were Herb Willsmore, Larry Biscamp, and Judy Taylor—all members of the Berkeley disabled student organization Rolling Quads. Their goal was to research the state of vocational rehabilitation and propose new legislation to address the program’s deficiencies.\(^\text{94}\)

In 1971, the Rolling Quads established the Disabled and Blind Action Committee of Northern California (DBAC). DBAC served as the political arm of the Disabled Student Program in order to separate the federally funded university organization from political activity and provide the small core of students more weight. In 1972, with the

\(^{92}\) Collignon, *UC Professor of City and Regional Planning*, 76. In his oral history interview, Collignon refers to the Social and Rehabilitation Service by its later name, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

\(^{93}\) Collignon, *UC Professor of City and Regional Planning*, 78.

\(^{94}\) Collignon, *UC Professor of City and Regional Planning*, 78. Among the students with disabilities who enrolled in Collignon’s policy development class were Herb Willsmore and Judy Taylor. Judy Heumann also took courses with Collignon during her graduate work at Berkeley in 1973.
help of Collignon and an additional grant from Newman’s SRS, Willsmore and Zukas founded the Center for Independent Living (CIL), the first such organization in the country, on the outskirts of Berkeley’s campus. One of its fundamental goals was to provide an environment like that of Cowell Memorial, an incubator for the first generation of disabled leaders, bringing together people with disabilities and fostering a sense of community. The directors of the Center lobbied state and national officials for funds and civil rights for people with disabilities and attracted disability rights leaders from across the country, including Judy Heumann and Mary Lou Breslin, both of whom moved to Berkeley in the early 1970s. Political Scientist Ruth O’Brien argues that the creation of the Center for Independent Living was a direct challenge to the ineffective rehabilitation system. As opposed to medical experts “rehabilitating” disabled people to find employment, the CIL promoted the model of disabled people helping each other to find accessible housing, work, and medical care.

On the east coast, activism in New York also intensified in 1969. Judy Heumann continued to pursue a career in primary education, despite being warned by New York vocational rehabilitation counselors that wheelchair users were historically denied

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Collignon, *UC Professor of City and Regional Planning*, 86. Contrary to many historical accounts, Roberts was not involved in the founding of the CIL. He worked at the University of California, Riverside during the initial CIL planning phases and did not become directly involved with the center until 1973. The CIL served as model for more than three hundred independent living centers throughout the country by the late 1980s. Corbett Joan O’Toole, “Dale Dahl and Judy Heumann: Deaf Man, Disabled Woman—Allies in 1970s Berkeley,” in *Deaf and Disability Studies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds., Susan Burch and Alison Kafer (Washington, D.C., 2010): 193-204.

Heumann was the director and board member of the CIL from 1973-1981 and received a Masters in Public Health from the University of California at Berkeley in 1975. For more on Heumann’s role in the CIL, see Corbett O’Toole, “Dale Dahl and Judy Heumann,” Breslin also moved to California in the early 1970s. She worked at the CIL as a job counselor and co-founded the Disabled Rights and Education Defense Fund (DREDF) in 1979.

licensure for teaching at that level. Upon graduating, Heumann passed her written and oral examinations, but she failed the medical examination required to obtain a teaching license. Heumann then filed a lawsuit against the New York City Board of Education.

Two prominent civil rights attorneys, Elias Schwarzbart and Roy Lucas represented Heumann in what they called the “first civil rights case of its kind.”

The case brought Heumann into public view in 1970, when appeared in multiple newspaper articles and on television shows, including *The Today Show*. Presiding in Heumann’s case was Constance Baker Motley, the first black woman judge appointed to a federal district court. Motley was already recognized for her work on school desegregation and civil rights, serving on the NAACP’s legal team for *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) and as lead counsel for James Meredith in his attempt to enroll at the University of Mississippi. Ultimately, the New York City Board of Education settled out of court, granting Heumann a teaching license, and Motley never had to rule on the case.

98 Heumann, *Pioneering Disability Rights Advocate*, 90.
100 Elias Schwarzbart was notable for his role in defending the 1930s Scottsboro Boys case. According to Heumann, Schwarzbart was a customer at her family’s meat shop in Brooklyn and took interest in her case after reading about it in the *New York Times*. Heumann, *Pioneering Disability Rights Advocate*, 149-151. Roy Lucas is predominately known for his contributions to the “right to privacy” argument used in the Roe v. Wade abortion case and establishing the James Madison Constitutional Law Institute based in Manhattan.
The publicity generated by Heumann’s case motivated members from SOFEDUP, PUSH, and HIM to form Disabled in Action (DIA).²⁰³ Twenty-two year-old Heumann was the organization’s first president, and her Camp Jened friends Bobbi Linn and Frieda Tankus served on the predominately female board of directors.²⁰⁴ The organization, originally called Handicapped in Action, began informal meetings at Heumann’s Long Island University apartment.²⁰⁵ They wanted to form an organization dedicated to ending discrimination against people with disabilities. While the majority of the board members themselves had physical disabilities, the group made a concerted effort to be a cross-disability organization, one that included blind, deaf, and intellectual disabilities. They had to use money from their previous student organizations to help with the initial set-up.²⁰⁶ DIA networked with other grassroots organizations in the New York area, including the Handicapped Students Organization (HSO) and People for Rehabilitating and Integrating the Disabled through Education (PRIDE), to advocate for equal education for people with disabilities.²⁰⁷ Spokespersons boasted that it was one of the first cross-disability organizations, dedicated to eradicating systemic discrimination against people with disabilities. The group began staging small protests, such as gathering at Governor Rockefeller’s office in New York City to demand enforcement of architectural barriers legislation, and then expanded to conducting hunger strikes outside of the Jerry Lewis
Muscular Dystrophy Telethon in order to protest what they considered to be his exploitation of people with disabilities.\footnote{Disability rights advocates have condemned telethons like Jerry Lewis’ Muscular Dystrophy Telethon because it reinforced the stigmatization of disabled people as helpless and needing pity. Heumann, \textit{Pioneering Disability Rights Advocate}, 177.} DIA quickly grew along the East Coast, establishing chapters in Boston, New Jersey, and Baltimore. These activists were building toward a national movement. In contrast to the many discussions of policymakers and experts at the national level, they pursued their own conception of disability and civil rights, which was heavily defined by the experiences of physical disability and the need for increased physical accessibility.

**Conclusion**

Two key developments from the years 1968 to 1970 significantly impacted the disability rights movement and set the stage for the politics of the Rehabilitation Acts in 1972 and 1973. The mission of federal rehabilitation services underwent a significant but ultimately short-lived expansion of scope. Originally aimed solely at providing medical and physical treatment for people with moderate physical disabilities, the rehabilitation program gained attention from civil rights leaders promoting the interests of the socially and economically disadvantaged. This expansion was the result of the realization by leaders that the rehabilitation program could be used for promoting civil rights, not just teaching employment skills. Disability rights advocates also saw this potential, and they pressed the claim that federal rehabilitation efforts should be directed at providing full civil rights for the disabled. This too pushed rehabilitation beyond its practical role as a gateway to the workforce. Just as disability rights advocates perceived this opportunity,
they glimpsed the threat represented by the inclusion of the disadvantaged. The disadvantaged were indeed included as part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1972.\textsuperscript{109}

The second development was the increasing activism of the disabled student population at several important campuses. Though student activism was not closely tied to the level of federal policy discussions during this period, the two trends met in the congressional hearings on the Rehabilitation Act.\textsuperscript{110} In these hearings, physically disabled activists continued to promote their accessibility-focused conception of civil rights for people with disabilities and to oppose the inclusion of socially and economically disadvantaged people.

\textsuperscript{109} The disadvantaged would later be removed from the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as will be discussed in chapter four.

\textsuperscript{110} Fred Fay is an exception to this generalization. He served on the National Citizens Advisory Council Architectural Barriers workgroup after receiving his bachelor’s and returning to graduate school at the University of Illinois in 1969.
Chapter 4:

The Road to the Rehabilitation Act, 1971-1973

Late on the afternoon of November 2, 1972, twenty-four year old Judy Heumann and fifty fellow members of Disabled in Action (DIA) guided their wheelchairs into the middle of Manhattan’s Madison Avenue, turned to face the rush of oncoming cars—and stopped. For the next forty-five minutes they snarled traffic across Midtown to protest Richard Nixon’s recent veto of a bill to provide people with disabilities equal protection under the law. The New York police stood and watched, unable to arrest the protesters because their vehicles were not equipped for disabled passengers. From Madison Avenue these activists carried their demonstration to the headquarters of the New York Committee to Re-Elect Nixon, occupied the office until midnight, remained firm through a bomb scare, and demanded that the President explain his veto to the public.\(^1\) For the next eleven months Heumann and the DIA kept up the pressure, staging protests across the country including in Washington, DC; Champaign and Urbana, IL; Berkeley, CA; and Boston, MA, until President Nixon signed the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.\(^2\)


Section 504 of the Act marked the first national legislation to prohibit federally funded programs from discriminating on the basis of disability. In the early 1970s, the struggle to secure civil rights for the disabled mounted. Organizations formerly rooted in universities became more militant as they asserted equal rights for people with disabilities. Policymakers, meanwhile, tried to incorporate disability rights into civil rights legislation. In the end, however, the most viable path for securing disability rights proved to run through the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act. This chapter analyzes local activism and policymaking from 1971 through the passage of the Rehabilitation Act in 1973. Highlighting events at local, state, and federal levels, it traces the interconnections of activism and state-sponsored initiatives. It emphasizes and assesses activists’ responses to President Nixon’s vetoes of the Rehabilitation Act in 1972 and 1973. When those vetoes threatened the attainment of civil rights, Heumann and other activists took to the streets. They also went to Congress, where the Rehabilitation Act hearings gave them a chance to defend their definition of disability and to demand civil rights. They engaged in a politics of terminology, insisting that definitions of who was “disabled” had profound consequences for shaping federal programs and impacting society. In particular, disabled activists contested the removal of the term “physically” from the name of the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Physically Handicapped in 1970. Though they failed in their attempts to retain that term in 1970, during the next two years they were able to transfer that momentum toward the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act. Their goals were achieved with the inclusion of Section 504 and the exclusion of the socially and economically disadvantaged from the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
Scholars have failed to examine fully the forces behind the inclusion of Section 504. Scholars of the disability rights movement and disability policy, most notably Richard Scotch and Edward Berkowitz, argue that Section 504 was written with no influence from disability rights activists. Scotch insists, “Section 504 was not developed at the urging of representatives of disabled people...It was an initiative of liberal congressional staff and not done at the request, suggestion, or demand of outside groups.” Berkowitz likewise argues, “This section had almost nothing to do with the vocational rehabilitation program itself, and hence it did not attract any notice from either the President, the major congressional players, or the powerful groups.” This strict focus on policymakers in the years leading up to Section 504 misses the growth and influence of disability activism. Congressional initiatives, in fact, reflected two decades of activism prior to the 1970s. Before legislators inserted anti-discrimination provisions into the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act, disability activists were already helping to shape the federal government’s rehabilitation policies.


4 Scotch, *From Good Will to Civil Rights*, 57.

The Legislative Path to the Rehabilitation Act

By the early 1970s, the question of disability rights had reached the highest levels of the American government. In November 1971, fifteen senators proposed a declaration of rights for people with mental and physical disabilities, the first federal attempt to secure civil rights for disabled people. Notable among that group were Charles Percy (R-IL), Alan Cranston (D-CA), Hubert Humphrey (D-MN), Jennings Randolph (D-WV), and Robert Dole (R-KS), all of whom took leading roles in disability rights or broader civil rights initiatives in the mid-1960s and early 1970s. The concurrent resolution outlined ways “in which these human beings are constantly denied their rights” in education, employment, and transportation.6 “It amazes me that we even need such action and that handicapped all over the country are not being allowed full rights as a citizen,” declared Senator Marlow Cook (R-KY).7

The following month, Democrat Charles Vanik of Ohio took the resolution one step further, proposing legislation in the House of Representatives to ensure “equal treatment of the handicapped in all programs which receive Federal assistance.”8 Vanik read aloud letters from his disabled constituents that underscored the discrimination they faced in employment and education. The “treatment and disregard of the handicapped

6 S. Con. Res. 52, Congressional Record (November 19, 1971): 42293-42294. The other Senators included Bob Bennett (R-UT), Marlow Cook (R-KY), Ernest “Fritz” Hollings (D-SC), Ted Stevens (R-AK), Kennedy (D-MA), McGovern (D-SD), Edward Brooke (R-MA), Hugh Scott (R-PA), Taft (OH), and Walter Mondale (D-MN).
8 H.R. 12154 Congressional Record (December 9, 1971): 45974-75. Vanik cited learning about discrimination faced by his disabled constituents and that nearly 4 million disabled children were being denied access to public education as the impetus to this bill. Vanik also mentioned learning about need for civil rights for the disabled from activist Ralph Hotchkiss. Hotchkiss was a member of DIA and Judy Heumann’s partner, suggesting, at the very least, there was correspondence between him and Vanik.
citizens in our country is one of America’s shameful oversights,” he insisted. In particular, he cited as proof public transportation, architectural barriers, and the four million disabled children excluded from public schools. Vanik’s bill aimed to give people with disabilities “at the very least” an equal opportunity.

In January 1972, Humphrey and Percy sponsored Vanik’s bill in the Senate. Humphrey framed the issue as Senator Cook had—inexplicably, the sizable disabled population was being overlooked. “But injustices confronted by the hidden population of millions of handicapped persons across America,” Humphrey said, “are being increasingly brought to light, with challenges being raised where a handicapped person cannot travel alone on an airline flight, or is denied mortgaged life insurance protection or a fair wage for his work, or experiences the discriminatory effect of job qualification questionnaires or employment procedures.” Senator Percy called attention to the declaration of rights that he and Humphrey had proposed two months earlier, asserting that an amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include disabled people would “ensure that the handicapped will receive the basic rights to which every human being is entitled…In essence, our amendment will give the handicapped their rightful place in

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9 H.R. 12154 Congressional Record (December 9, 1971): 45974-75.  
10 "Law Sought to Halt Bias to Disabled," Chicago Tribune, February 14, 1972, A5.  
12 Congressional Record, Jan 20, 1972 pp. 525-6.
society.”

Sixty members of the House and twenty members of the Senate co-sponsored the bill. Yet neither proposal made it past committee.

Two months later, Arthur Abramson and Bernard Kutner published “A Bill of Rights for the Disabled Person.” Abramson was the president of the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, a member of the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped (PCEH), and a disabled WWII veteran. Kutner was a social psychologist. “The Congress of the United States and the legislatures of various states, counties, and municipalities,” they said, “have not as yet, by legal means, made it possible for the disabled person to attain equal access to those benefits of life enjoyed by the able-bodied.” A bill of rights would correct that by ensuring that disabled people could “obtain for themselves what all Americans believe to be their birthright—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Abramsom’s and Kutner’s thirteen resolutions encompassed many of the issues that disability rights activists had been fighting for over the past decade: employment, education, access to buildings and public transportation, and civil rights. To secure those rights, Abramsom and Kutner argued “that civil rights legislation, national and local, be amended to include disability as one of the categories against which discrimination is unlawful,” as Vanik, Humphrey, and Percy, had proposed.

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13 Congressional Record, Jan 20, 1972 pp. 525-6.
14 Jonathan Young, “Same Struggle, Different Difference,” Ph.D. Dissertation (University of North Carolina, 2002), 60, argued that the bill did not get sufficient support because civil rights advocates were hesitant to support amending the Civil Rights Act of 1964 for fear it would dilute it. Furthermore, he asserted that these Congressmen did not have a large enough constituent to support their initiative because large disability organizations focused primarily on service rather than rights. The small grassroots organizations did not have a “critical mass to influence Congress.”
a couple months before.\textsuperscript{17} Almost immediately, disability rights organizations, including the United Cerebral Palsy Association and the National Association of the Physically Handicapped, adopted the bill of rights.\textsuperscript{18} Policymakers and activists were now moving together.

**The Rehabilitation Act of 1972**

A year before civil rights for disabled people was introduced at the federal level, activists pressured state governments for equal protection under law. In June 1970 the Congress of the Physically Handicapped (COPH) protested the exclusion of people with disabilities from Illinois’ Bill of Rights at the Illinois Constitutional Convention. They launched a campaign to convince the delegates “that the handicapped should not be ignored.”\textsuperscript{19} The University of Illinois disabled students’ fraternity Delta Sigma Omicron (DSO) was a member of the umbrella organization COPH.\textsuperscript{20} DSO called upon disabled students to join the fight to end the “isolation, segregation, and unequal status of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17}Arthur S. Abramson and Bernard Kutner, “A Bill of Rights for the Disabled,” *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*, 53 (March 1972).
\item \textsuperscript{18}“The Bill of Rights for a Disabled Person” also included resolutions for people with cognitive disabilities and institutionalization. The 1972 court case Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Pennsylvania was the first case to mandate equal education opportunities for cognitively disabled students in public schools. The same year, Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia reinforced the PARC decision by extending such a decision to all students with disabilities. The decision mandated that no child with a disability should be educated in an environment not within the regular public school unless they were granted due process proceedings, prior to removal, to establish appropriateness of such placement. Both of these cases provided the foundation for *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* passed in 1975.
\end{itemize}
disabled in this society.” The COPH and DSO’s efforts were successful: seven months later, the Illinois Bill of Rights was amended to include people with disabilities in the State Constitution, making Illinois the first state to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability. Governor Richard Ogilvie signed four separate bills prohibiting discrimination in employment, education, accommodation & amusement, and housing. COPH members viewed this as a sign of progress toward their ultimate goal of federal legislation. They believed that government officials were “seeing the needs of the handicapped Americans as a question of civil rights.” Furthermore, they emphasized that this milestone was solely the result of disabled activism. To win federal civil rights legislation, the COPH encouraged the disabled to write their congressmen, petition Congress, and stage demonstrations. The same year, Alaska, New York, and Wisconsin followed Illinois’ precedent and passed anti-discrimination provisions for disabled people. In Minnesota, Handi-Action, a coalition of twelve local organizations, also lobbied state legislators for equal protection under the law, calling for barrier-free polling facilities and anti-discrimination provisions in education, housing, and employment. They won in 1973 with an amendment to Minnesota’s Human Rights Act. Not all of the state campaigns were successful: in 1970, Indiana defeated a civil rights bill for the disabled.

25 “Handi-Action Girds for Action,” COPH Bulletin (9) 1, February 1973, Rehabilitation Education Services Division, Publicity File 16/6/6, Box 1. UIA.
While organizations like the COPH championed antidiscrimination measures, other disabled activists argued that to make civil rights meaningful architectural accessibility issues must be resolved. A Florida activist criticized the activists’ narrow focus on civil rights. “It does no good to have the ‘right’ to work if we cannot get into the building,” he said. Some legislative progress toward removal of architectural barriers had occurred with the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, but there had been little enforcement. Therefore, critics argued that without changes to the built environment from which disabled persons were excluded civil rights legislation was little more than a gesture. The Florida man argued that disability rights activists needed to “prove that architectural barriers violate our civil rights.”

In Orange County, California, a paraplegic woman concerned about the segregation of physically disabled people asserted the relationship between an accessible built environment and civil rights. She argued that separate buses, schools, and the common reality of having to enter buildings through their garbage rooms marginalized and isolated wheelchair users. “Separate but equal,” she insisted, “It’s still discrimination.”

Disability rights activists also sought to make public transportation accessible.

Even with the passage of the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 and the amended Urban Mass Transit Act of 1970, access to public transportation was not guaranteed. The Architectural Barriers Act applied only to federally funded buildings constructed after

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1968. Activists successfully lobbied for full accessibility to the newly constructed Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system, which ran from San Francisco to Oakland. This victory has been attributed to Harold Wilson, a member of the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults, who volunteered on the BART board of directors for nearly a decade.\footnote{National Society for Crippled Children and Adults (NSCCA) member Harold Wilson volunteered on the board from 1964 to the BART’s opening in 1973 to ensure accessibility. The BART had braille signs, low drinking fountains, fifty-five elevators, ramps, and hand bars, and is regarded as “model for accessibility” for mass transit systems. “BART Features Real Accessibility for Handicapped,” COPH Bulletin (February 1973) 16. Rehabilitation and Education Services, Publicity File 16/6/6, Box 1. UIA.}

The battle for accessible public transportation in D.C. was more difficult. The Washington Metro Area Transit Authority (WMATA) argued that it was a regional agency, as opposed to a federal agency, and therefore did not have to comply with federal laws that regulated accessibility. WMATA officials’ main opposition was the cost-to-population ratio of making facilities accessible to people with disabilities. Negotiations between disability organizations and WMATA during 1968 and 1969 resulted in little progress. In response, the House of Representatives held a hearing to amend the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 to require accessibility. During the 1970 hearing, representatives from the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped (PCEH), the Paralyzed Veterans Association, and the United Cerebral Palsy Association, argued that an accessible transit system would benefit not only people with physical disabilities but also children, pregnant women, and elderly people.\footnote{Design and Construction of Federal Facilities to be Accessible to the Physically Handicapped, Hearings before the House Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds of the House Committee on Public Works, 91 Congress, 1\textsuperscript{st} Sess. (GPO, 1970). While Fred Fay was not listed in the minutes of the hearing, his mother, Janet Fay, University of Illinois mentor Timothy Nugent, and fellow architectural barrier expert Leon Chatelain Jr., all members of the President’s Committee for the Employment of the Handicapped (PCEH) transportation advisory panel, did attend. Richard Heddinge, “The Twelve Year Battle for a} Activists who
attended the hearings also insisted that inaccessible public transportation was a violation of their civil rights.\textsuperscript{32} “[The physically handicapped] must be given every possible social and economic opportunity to participate in all aspects of public life,” an activist declared.\textsuperscript{33} Responding to the cost-benefit concern WMATA representatives had raised, he argued that elevators and ramps would be less expensive than paying disabled people welfare and unemployment compensation.\textsuperscript{34} The House passed legislation that required WMATA to make buildings and structures accessible; however, policymakers did not extend the legislation to require accessibility in the trains or buses that served those buildings.\textsuperscript{35} For the next couple of years WMATA continued to skirt the issue of elevators in each station. In April 1972, Fred Fay’s Opening Doors, along with the National Paraplegia Foundation and the Paralyzed Veterans Association, took WMATA to court. Their case went through multiple appeals with occasional injunctions to stop the construction of the Metro until 1975, when WMATA was forced to comply with the Architectural Barriers Act.\textsuperscript{36}
As accessibility issues slowly gained traction in Congress, the rights perspective suddenly moved forward. In March 1972 the House Committee on Education and Labor, led by John Brademas (D-IN) and Albert Quie (R-MN), held hearings on the re-appropriation of the Rehabilitation Act. The bill, H.R. 8395, reflected the work of the National Citizens Advisory Committee (under the Johnson administration) and Nixon’s Task Force on the Physically Handicapped. Following the committees’ recommendations, the bill departed from the traditional rehabilitation legislation that focused on training the moderately physically handicapped capable of entering the labor force. The removal of “vocational” from the title of the legislation reinforced this shift away from employment-oriented services and training toward achieving full civic membership and independent living. New additions to the rehabilitation program included a National Commission on Transportation and Housing for the Handicapped, rehabilitation centers dedicated to services for deaf youths and adults, independent living centers for severely disabled people, and an Architectural Barriers Compliance Board. Despite physically disabled activists’ opposition, Title III of the bill extended vocational rehabilitation services to the socially and economically disadvantaged. The loosely defined category of disability therefore drastically expanded the population of eligible rehabilitation recipients and proved to be one of the most controversial parts of the bill. Representatives from rehabilitation services and the PCEH testified at the House hearings in full support of the bill. But, disability rights advocates outside of government

37 *Vocational Rehabilitation Services to the Handicapped*. Hearings before the Select Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, 92 Cong., 2nd Sess., (GPO, 1972).
positions were not invited to testify. With little opposition, the House authorized amendments to the Rehabilitation Act by a 318-57 roll-call vote.

On May 5—five months after the unsuccessful proposals to amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include disability and two weeks before the Senate hearings on the Rehabilitation Act—Judy Heumann and over one hundred activists marched three miles from the Washington Hilton Hotel to the bottom of the west stairs of the Capitol building to demand equal rights. On the day DIA declared National Advocacy Day for the disabled, Heumann addressed the crowd in front of the three flights of stairs, a symbol of the barriers that separated the disabled from their government. This rally launched National Civil Rights Week for the Disabled, as declared by the DIA, the National Association of the Physically Handicapped (NAPH), and several smaller New York City-based organizations. These groups aimed to challenge “the humanity and imagination of the legislators and private citizens whose indifference and inertia has created a crisis in social justice within our society.” Heumann read excerpts of the civil rights proposals that had recently stalled in Congress. She outlined the ways in which people with disabilities had been denied citizenship rights in employment, education, transportation, and housing and she pressed the case for federal civil rights legislation for people with disabilities. Among the speakers accompanying Heumann was Senator Harrison

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38 *Vocational Rehabilitation Services to the Handicapped*, Hearings before the Select Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, 92 Cong., 2nd Sess., (GPO, 1972).
41 On January 20, 1972, Senators Hubert Humphrey (D-Minn) and Charles Percy (R-Ill) and Congressmen Charles Vanik (D-OH) introduced bills to amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to “prohibit discrimination on the basis of physical or mental handicap in federally assisted programs.” However, their proposal did not advance beyond its initial introduction. S. 3094 and H.R. 12154, 92nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1972; Scotch, *From Goodwill to Civil Rights*, 43-45; Skrentny, *Minority Rights Revolution*, 267-270. Section 504 was not included until August 1972, after Congressional hearings.
Williams (D-NJ), who echoed Heumann’s declarations and explained his plan to establish an office for disability issues within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.\(^{42}\)

At the end of May, the Senate Subcommittee on the Handicapped of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare held hearings on H.R. 8395.\(^{43}\) Unlike the House hearing two months earlier, a number of disability rights activists testified.\(^{44}\) While there was little debate over the need for rehabilitation services, disability activists fervently opposed the broadened definition of disability to include the socially and economically disadvantaged. Yet many of these same activists supported the expansion of rehabilitation to include the severely physically disabled. The hearing also served as a venue for activists to once again call for anti-discrimination legislation.

The question of inclusion ran through the hearings. Stephen Kutzman, Assistant Secretary for Legislation for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, expressed concern about extending of services to those who would not be entering the labor force. Including severely disabled Americans, Kutman insisted, “might weaken [the program’s] major strengths.”\(^{45}\) Kutzman was in the minority; most witnesses supported the new direction of rehabilitation services. E. B. Whitten, director of the

\(^{42}\) “Disabled Protest U.S. Bias,” Washington Post, May 6, 1972, B2; Madden, “Disabled Tie Up Traffic Here to Protest Nixon Aid-Bill Vote.” Senator Williams was chairman of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare and the head of the subcommittee to oversee the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1972. Credit has been given to Williams’ staff for writing and including Section 504 in line with the liberal opposition to the Nixon administration and with no influence from disability rights activists. From 1974-1975, Heumann was an intern for Senator Williams. See Scotch, From Good Will to Civil Rights, 47-49 and Skrentny, Minority Rights Revolution, 263-328.


\(^{44}\) Testimonies were heard from rehabilitation physician Howard Rusk, representatives from the National Easter Seals Society (formerly the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults), National Paraplegia Foundation, Paralyzed Veterans Association, PCEH, National Association of the Deaf, Alexander Graham Bell Foundation, Council of Organizations Serving the Deaf, and Edward Newman, Commissioner of Rehabilitation Services Administration.

\(^{45}\) Testimony, Stephen Kutzman, Hearings on S. 3094, 92nd Congress, 2nd Session (1972), 136.
National Rehabilitation Association, spoke in support of the expanded scope of rehabilitation. “A rehabilitation program should serve all individuals whose impairments constitute substantial barriers to the achievements of their life’s goals,” he asserted.\footnote{Hearings on S. 3094, 92\textsuperscript{nd} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session (1972), 372.}

Milton Cohen, executive director of the Federation of the Handicapped, largely agreed with Whitten. While Cohen, and most physically disabled representatives, opposed the inclusion of the disadvantaged, he supported services for the severely disabled, whom he argued were neglected under the current rehabilitation system. He stated, “No one is speaking for this group of individuals, they are invisible…the time is coming shortly when they will become visible, when civil rights for the handicapped becomes a real strong issue.”\footnote{Hearings on S. 3094, 92\textsuperscript{nd} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session (1972), 358.}

Ernest Weinrich of the United Cerebral Palsy Association argued that services for people with disabilities were a right rather than a gift. “Marginality for the handicapped is a creation of social forces, based on prevailing values,” he insisted, “it can be altered through bold, committed effort to change social values, to modify existing institutions and create new ones.”\footnote{Hearings on S. 3094, 92\textsuperscript{nd} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session (1972), 708; 785.}

The hearings also highlighted disagreements over defining persons who had no physical disability at all as disabled. For the most part, leaders of disability rights organizations opposed including the socially and economically disadvantaged under the category of disabled. Activists argued that women and racial minorities had already secured protective federal legislation, whereas the disabled had only rehabilitation policy to serve their interests. John Nagle, President of the National Federation of Blind, drew distinctions between those disadvantaged by race, ethnicity or poverty and disabled
people. “No persons in our society are more seriously disadvantaged than persons who are severely physically or mentally impaired…they are ten times more subjected to unfair and unjustified discrimination,” Nagle claimed.\textsuperscript{49} He also said that, if socially or economically disadvantaged people were to be made eligible for rehabilitation services, there should be a provision stating that physically disabled people should receive preferential treatment. Durwood McDaniel of the American Council of the Blind echoed Nagle’s concerns and fear for the future: “This program may someday be diluted to attempt to serve several million more who are now being served through certain manpower and health programs of the federal government.”\textsuperscript{50} Representatives of the National Association for Retarded Children reinforced Nagle’s and McDaniel’s opposition.\textsuperscript{51}

Further opposition to Title III came from the husband and wife team of Barney and Vicki Cox Stanton, disability activists who testified on behalf of both the National Association of the Physically Handicapped (NAPH) and the Congress of Organizations for the Physically Handicapped (COPH). Vicki Stanton served as the president of both organizations, Barney as the legislative chairman for the COPH. When Senator Alan Cranston asked Vicki Stanton if she agreed with the definition of “handicapped” as given by Title III, she replied, “Oh my God, no.”\textsuperscript{52} She insisted that if the term “handicapped” were expanded to “include every group having some problem living in our society” then

\textsuperscript{49} In addition to the National Federation of the Blind, the American Foundation for the Blind, American Association of Workers for the Blind, and the Blinded Veterans Association also testified. \textit{Hearings on S. 3094, 92\textsuperscript{nd} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session (1972)}, 633.

\textsuperscript{50} McDaniel also argued that the expanded population, to include the socio-economic disadvantaged already had government assistance and programs to aid them, but the vocational rehabilitation program was the only one available for people with disabilities. \textit{Hearings on S. 3094, 92\textsuperscript{nd} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session (1972)}, 652.

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Hearings on S. 3094, 92\textsuperscript{nd} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session (1972)}, 855.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Hearings on S. 3094, 92\textsuperscript{nd} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session (1972)}, 1509.
the physically disabled were going to “get lost in the maze.”\textsuperscript{53} What’s more, the Stantons argued that mentally disabled people should have a separate program, because the combining of mental and physical disabilities in the same program would give the public “the impression that the person with a physical disability must also be mentally retarded to some degree.”\textsuperscript{54} The Stantons’ aversion to the inclusion of the mentally disabled reflected the hierarchy of disability to which many people with physical disabilities adhered.\textsuperscript{55}

In addition to the Stantons’ testimony, the NAPH also submitted a written statement, highlighting the work of its local chapters in garnering civil rights legislation. The D.C. chapter successfully lobbied for anti-discrimination legislation in Housing, Employment, Accessibility to public buildings, and Transportation (HEAT), insisting, “this should be the law of the land.”\textsuperscript{56} The Cincinnati chapter requested the City Council “grant full citizenship rights to her handicapped citizens” by passing anti-discrimination laws to include people with disabilities. The Columbus chapter also underscored the importance of anti-discrimination legislation by urging action on Representative Vanik’s civil rights amendment to include people with disabilities.\textsuperscript{57}

Although Judy Heumann did not testify, her partner Ralf Hotchkiss, director of the Center for Concerned Engineering and DIA member, did, explicitly calling for anti-discrimination legislation. He referred to Heumann’s court case with the New York City

\textsuperscript{53} Hearings on S. 3094, 92\textsuperscript{nd} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session (1972), 1508.
\textsuperscript{54} Hearings on S. 3094, 92\textsuperscript{nd} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session (1972), 1507-1508.
\textsuperscript{55} The deaf community does not associate themselves with disability, but argues they are a linguistic minority. Paraplegia was seen to be on the high end of the hierarchy, followed by quadriplegia, and blindness. Mental/cognitive disabilities were regarded on the lowest end of the hierarchy.
\textsuperscript{56} Hearings on S. 3094, 92\textsuperscript{nd} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session (1972), 1513.
\textsuperscript{57} Hearings on S. 3094, 92\textsuperscript{nd} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session (1972), 1524-1525.
School Board as an example of institutions requiring medical testing unrelated to job performance for people with disabilities. He concluded, “If this legislation is to achieve its goals of more satisfying and independent lives for America’s disabled and less dependence upon public aid, then Congress must pass concurrent bills prohibiting discrimination on the basis of any factors not directly related to the task at hand.”

Representatives from the National Association of the Deaf also underscored the need for anti-discrimination legislation, citing the difficulty of deaf workers finding employment.

Advocates not in leadership positions also supported the demand for civil rights legislation. Senator Lawton Chiles (D-FL) told the committee, “We speak of equality of opportunity and equal access to all aspects of society, but the intrinsic rights of the handicapped have not been fully recognized.”

Dartmouth College senior James Stearns, who was quadriplegic, underscored Chiles’ statement, submitting to the hearings his senior thesis, “Crutch Power: A Study of the Physically Handicapped in America.” Crutch power, Stearns asserted, “is the ability to make the government and other elements of society respond to the needs of the handicapped.”

Stearns’ thesis chronicled disability rights activism throughout the 1960s, highlighting the architectural barriers movement and emphasizing the potential benefits of Vanik’s stalled civil rights bill.

A month before the Rehabilitation bill was up for vote, Senate staff members added Section 604 (which would later be revised to Section 504). The amendment stated, “No otherwise qualified handicapped or severely handicapped individual in the United

58 Hearings on S. 3094, 92nd Congress, 2nd Session (1972), 1402.
59 Hearings on S. 3094, 92nd Congress, 2nd Session (1972), 1542.
States, as defined in Section 6 of this Act, shall, solely by reasons of his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or actively receiving Federal financial assistance.  

There is conflicting anecdotal evidence on how the anti-discrimination provision became part of the Rehabilitation Act. According to six congressional aides, Section 504 was added late in August toward the end of a meeting on the revisions to the Rehabilitation bill. Robert Humphreys, aide to Jennings Randolph (D-WV), recalled that the genesis of Section 504 as “essentially a self-generated item on the part of the staff of the [Labor and Public Welfare] Committee.” The staff assistants to Senators Cranston, Williams, and Randolph feared that despite the improvements in the rehabilitation program, employers would still discriminate against people with disabilities. Nik Edes, aide to Harrison Williams (D-NJ), referred to the work of the Senate staff as the “Martin Luther Kings of the disability movements…The movement [of disabled people] was stimulated by the acts of a very few individuals who were in the legislative branch.” The recollection of the staff members has been the dominant narrative of Section 504.

Other evidence suggests a different story. In Berkeley, four members of the Rolling Quads “worked on the original language including the concepts in [Sections] 503 and 504,” according to activist John Hessler. He credited his experience establishing

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61 Rehabilitation Act of 1972, S. Rept, 91-1135 (GPO, 1972), 77-78.
62 As quoted in Scotch, 57.
63 Scotch, From Good Will to Civil Rights, 51.
64 As quoted in Scotch, From Good Will to Civil Rights, 57. In addition to Robert Humphreys and Nik Edes, Lisa Walker (Senator Williams), Michael Burns and Jonathan Steinburg (Alan Cranston D-CA), and Patria Forsythe (Jennings Randolph) were also in the meeting and credited with writing Section 504.
65 John Hessler, “Disabled Activists and Section 504,” The Disability Rag (September 1985): 3. Activist John Hessler tied the role of the Rolling Quads in the legislation to Berkeley professor Fred Collignon, who had a long-standing professional relationship with Rehabilitation Services Administration commissioner Ed Newman. Fred Collignon interned for the Bureau of the Budget (now called the Office of Management and
the Physically Disabled Students Program and the Center for Independent Living at Berkeley and his vision of equality as the two key factors that “shaped the language and ideas for the Rehab Act.” He tied the Rolling Quads’ contribution to the legislation to their work with Berkeley professor Fred Collignon. Collignon’s long-standing professional relationship with Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) commissioner Ed Newman led to multiple RSA grants for Berkeley students to study disability policy and underwrote the Center for Independent Living. At the University of Illinois, Timothy Nugent recalled consulting on the drafting of the legislation. He occasionally received “inquiries from responsible people in Washington,” he remembered, and he attended meetings on the issue. In New York, federal officials visited the LIU-Brooklyn campus, where they consulted students and Ted Childs, the head of the disabled students program and Judy Heumann’s mentor. These accounts suggest that key figures in university disability programs in California, Illinois, and New York worked with federal policymakers during the drafting of Section 504. Policymakers operated in a context defined by activists who were pushing for civil rights legislation.

Budget) in 1968 where he met Ed Newman. Newman was named Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration in 1970. After Collignon’s internship, he worked for the research firm Abt Associates that was hired by Newman to evaluate the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Collignon was hired as an assistant professor at Berkeley in 1971 and offered independent study courses on disability and social policy. Frederick C. Collignon, “Professor of City and Regional Planning: Policy Research and Funding Advocacy,” an oral history conducted in 1998 by Mary Lou Breslin in Builders and Sustainers of the Independent Living Movement in Berkeley, Volume IV, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2000, 70-92; Hessler, “Disabled Activists and Section 504,” 3.  

66 Hessler, “Disabled Activists and Section 504,” 3.  

67 For more information on Collignon and Newman and the Center for Independent Living see chapter three.  

68 Nugent, Founder of the University of Illinois Disabled Students Program, 161.  

In September 1972, the Senate voted unanimously, 70-0, to amend the Rehabilitation Act.\(^70\) The bill was largely similar to the one passed by the House in March, but contained some important additions. “Vocational” was removed from the title of the legislation. The committee explained the revised title, remarking that it “expresses the new thrust of bill, in that, for the first time, those individuals who apply for services need not have a vocational goal.”\(^71\) However, there was not an explanation or comments on the inclusion of Section VI, which stipulated that employment under federal contracts should require affirmative action for people with disabilities and prohibited discrimination in federally-funded programs.\(^72\)

Despite receiving a long list of letters in support of the Rehabilitation Act of 1972, President Nixon exercised a pocket veto on the bill on October 27. The Rehabilitation Act had been on his “watch list” of legislation to veto based on the substantial cost of the new legislation. Moreover, Nixon argued, the additions to the bill distracted from the legislation’s traditional focus on employment. It should not have been a surprise that Nixon opposed the bill. From its drafting, the bill had been flagged as “veto bait,” and the administration tried to figure out a strategy to “bottle the bill up.”\(^73\)

**Response to Vetoes**


\(^72\) Rehabilitation Act of 1972, S. Rept, 91-1135,77.

Six days after Nixon’s pocket veto, Heumann and the DIA took to the streets, stopping traffic in midtown Manhattan. Not receiving the level of publicity they wanted, they staged another demonstration the night before Nixon’s reelection.74 This time they marched against Times Square traffic. To heighten the effect, they recruited disabled Vietnam veterans to join them. Again, they made their way to the Nixon headquarters and shut down the offices.75 And, again, Nixon did not respond.

The veto also ignited protests on the west coast. By 1972, the original members of the Rolling Quads, including Ed Roberts, Herb Willsmore, and Hale Zukas had established the Disabled and Blind Action Committee of Northern California (DBAC), which they thought of as the political arm for their Disabled Students’ Program and the Center for Independent Living (CIL).76 DBAC’s tactics relied heavily on manipulating perceptions. Willsmore recalled, “One of Ed [Robert’s] famous sayings was, ‘You don't have to be a big organization. You just get yourself some letterhead and a telephone, and you got it made.’ Basically, that's what we did. We just looked like we were a big organization and like we took in a large area and represented a lot of disabled people…The legislators and the administrators that we worked with don't know that we were just basically a small corps of people--although we did represent the interests of the broader disabled population.”77 Roberts’ apartment served as a venue for brainstorming

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74 Heumann recalled that the protest did not receive the publicity they had hoped. Heumann, Pioneering Disability Rights Advocate, 195-196.
77 The DBAC was a 501(c) 4 organization, a non-profit organization to promote social welfare. Herbert R. Willsmore, Student Resident at Cowell, 1969-1970, Business Enterprises Manager at the Center for
ways to expand their campus initiatives to the broader community. The small group lobbied at the local and state levels for accessibility and attendant care services. While some of the activists wanted to include disability under the Civil Rights Act, Roberts argued “that it might also allow enemies or opponents of the bill to add their own amendments that would weaken the Civil Rights Act of 1964.” Instead, he called for a separate piece of civil rights legislation for disabled people.

The day after protests in New York and Boston, DBAC called its members to action. In response to the veto, the organization announced a demonstration at the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare’s San Francisco office. DBAC mobilized more than seventy-five people to demonstrate with signs reading “Cripple Power” attached to their chairs. They chanted, “Don’t Veto Us.” DBAC also drafted a letter to President Nixon, declaring, “The veto of the Rehabilitation Act perpetuates the isolation that most disabled and blind people experience. And it encourages us to remain a silenced minority.” Because the President had no physical disability himself, DBAC said, he had no sympathy for the disabled:

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82 Letter, Disabled and Blind Action Committee of Northern California to President Nixon, November 6, 1972, Hale Zukas Papers, 2:28, Bancroft Library.
You betrayed us and showed blatant disregard for our needs when on October 26, you vetoed the Rehabilitation Act of 1972. Why did you kill this bill and refuse us the opportunities which it offered for our future? One reason is that you are not severely disabled and confined to a wheelchair without feeling or movement or the use of your limbs, and without control over your bladder. Nor are you without the use of your eyes to read and write and experience the beauty around you.  

They also criticized Nixon’s vetoing of the bill based on its costs. They questioned the President’s priorities, raising issues of transportation, employment, vocational training, and the price tag he placed on people with disabilities in the country. Furthermore, they argued that not passing the bill would actually cost taxpayers more money because people with disabilities, instead of becoming contributing members of society, would remain on welfare.

While some activists took to the streets, the COPH used its quarterly newspaper *The Bulletin* to inform its members and call them to action, declaring, “For far too long the civil rights of the handicapped have been ignored.” The November 1972 issue focused exclusively on civil rights. It highlighted the work of Barney Stanton, legislative chairman for the NAPH who had testified and lobbied Congressmen and President Nixon. Chronicling successes at the state level in Illinois and New Jersey and the failed attempts to pass civil rights legislation at the federal level, the COPH asserted, “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are somewhat empty phrases to thousands of

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85 “Disabled of America Entitled to Civil Rights,” *COPH Bulletin* (8) 4, November 1, 1972. UI Archives, Rehabilitation Education Services Division, Publicity File 16/6/6, Box 1
86 “The Handicapped Have a Lobbyist in Washington,” *COPH Bulletin* (8) 4, November 1, 1972. UI Archives, Rehabilitation Education Services Division, Publicity File 16/6/6, Box 1.
physically handicapped citizens…It will take the concentrated and combined efforts of America’s 22 million physically handicapped if any appreciable progress is to be gained in the area of civil rights.”

Activists also took their campaign to the mainstream press. “The physically disabled constitute an ‘invisible minority’ group in our society, a group which suffers all the discrimination practiced upon ethnic minorities,” wrote an activist in the *Los Angeles Times.* This sentiment reflected a growing consciousness among disabled people that their greatest handicap was not their physical disability. Rather, the problem they faced was rooted in a society that equated disabled people with “helplessness and incapacity.” As a result, people with disabilities were denied equal employment opportunities and received “separate but unequal” education. Furthermore, accessible housing, particularly in the rental market, was difficult to obtain because stairs and bedroom and bathroom doors were too narrow for wheelchair users, and because blind persons at times were not be allowed to have seeing-eye dogs in apartments. It “is the same as racial segregation,” the activist insisted, repeating the common claim that the plight of people with disabilities was as bad or worse than that of African Americans.

Disabled persons increasingly wrote to the President expressing their concern about discrimination in education and employment. Many questioned the administration’s commitment to people with disabilities. Reverend Calvin Peterson,

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President of the Advanced Association for the Physically Handicapped, Inc., in Georgia, wrote to Nixon about the growing need to “secure equality for the physically handicapped.”

Some letters came from leaders of disability organizations. Others came from individuals concerned about finding employment. Charles Rush, a physically disabled man from Ohio, questioned why rights had been granted to blacks and “women’s lib groups” but nothing had been done to give equal opportunity to disabled people. Other activists spent pages explaining the frustration of having a college education and being unable to find employment because of society’s negative perception of disabled people.

Patricia Phillips, a wheelchair user from California, wrote to Nixon to bring to his attention the different kinds of discrimination people with disabilities faced. She drew attention to Heumann’s experience of being denied a teaching license. She also noted occurrences of wheelchair users who had been prohibited from flying in airplanes. She concluded that “Attitudinal barriers [are] often as frustrating as a flight of steps to a person in a wheelchair.”

After the news of Nixon’s vetoes of the rehabilitation bills in 1972 and 1973, disabled citizens wrote in larger numbers and declared more explicitly for the need for civil rights legislation.

As Congress convened in January 1973 to revise the rehabilitation bill, the Illinois chapter of COPH urged its members to contact their congressmen to voice support for the bill. The COPH called attention to the strengths of the legislation, including the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board and Section 504, as well as

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91 Letter from Calvin Peterson to President Nixon, February 8, 1971. NPL CFSF LA 2-3.
to what the group deemed the greatest threat, an expanded definition of disability that threatened to reduce the resources of the physically disabled. COPH advocated for more than just anti-discrimination legislation. In the spirit of affirmative action, they urged members to lobby Congress for a separate bill to require industries to employ a minimum of 5% of disabled people in each company, as was the law in Sweden and Israel. COPH also called for the disability community to join the second annual March on the Capitol in May 1973.95 “It is time for the physically handicapped to wake up and demand their rights,” said the COPH.96

In March 1973, Nixon vetoed the bill again. He cited the same reasoning as he did for his first veto: that it was an irresponsible bill financially that departed from the original goals of the vocational rehabilitation program. “By promising increased Federal spending for this program in such a large amount,” Nixon insisted, “S. 7 would cruelly raise the hopes of the handicapped in a way that we could never responsibly hope to fulfill.”97 Two days later, he appealed to his supporters through radio and television addresses, encouraging them to write their congressmen and senators to vote against federal spending, specifically the rehabilitation bill, in order to avoid a tax increase.98 The Nixon administration likewise reached out to fellow Republicans to support the President’s position. Senator Percy, however, opposed upholding the veto. In a letter to Nixon’s aide, Percy said that to vote against the bill, “would be to renounce several

96 “Illinois COPH Supports Passage of Vocational Rehabilitation Act,” COPH Bulletin (9) 1, February 1973. UI Archives, Rehabilitation Education Services Division, Publicity File 16/6/6, Box 1.
years’ work and would undercut the efforts that I have made to put into this bill the seven anti-environmental barriers amendments that I drafted, as well as the insertion of language in Title VII, Sections 704 and 705, which the Committee agreed to insert, protecting the employment rights of the handicapped, and insuring their equal participation in programs receiving federal assistance.” The following week the Senate failed by four votes to override Nixon’s veto. Nixon heralded their action as “a resounding victory for the American taxpayer.” However, Hubert Humphrey declared Nixon’s veto as “the most cruel, the most inhumane veto the President ever handed down,” asserting, “he ought to be ashamed of himself.” Nixon held a reception for “Congressional Veto Supporters” at the White House on April 12 and made personal phone calls to each Senator who supported his veto.

After the second veto, the DIA aligned with more prominent organizations such as the Cerebral Palsy Association and Paralyzed Veterans of America and returned to the Capitol for a two-day protest. On May 3, more than two hundred people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial for an overnight candlelight vigil. The next morning they marched two-and-a-half miles to the Capitol steps. At the steps of the capitol the group sang “We Shall Overcome,” as they laid their bodies across the steps and had their able-bodied peers carry themselves up the steps as a symbol of the nation’s inaccessibility. Heumann

99 Letter from Charles Percy to Tom Korologos. April 2, 1973. NPL WHCF SF WE Box 43, Folder WE8 VR.
102 “Senate Fails to Override Nixon Veto,” Chicago Tribune, April 4, 1973
said the purpose of the protest was to publicize that people with disabilities had been discriminated against in “all aspects of private and public life.”

Senator Bob Dole, a proponent of disability rights, addressed the protesters and assured them that new legislation for people with disabilities was in the works. Thirty of the protesters attended the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped (PCEH) annual meeting and staged a walkout when Nixon’s daughter, Julie Eisenhower, began to address the crowd on behalf of her father.

DIA activists also took to the streets in Boston. Having recently graduated with his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois, Fred Fay had moved to Boston, where he joined with forty local activists and Heumann to stage a “street guerilla theatre.” They carried signs that asserted, “We are only as handicapped as society makes us.” The group piled up an old wheelchair, cane, and crutches in front of the John F. Kennedy federal office building in Boston. With the goal of “raising hell,” a paraplegic activist donned a mask of President Nixon and took a sledgehammer to the pile while the crowd chanted, “Dick, pass the bill.”

On May 5, in reaction to Nixon’s second veto of the Rehabilitation Act, fifty disabled students at the University of Illinois marched from one end of campus, through the quad, to the other. Comparing themselves to the black freedom struggle and the feminist movement, representatives of DIA wrote the editor of the Daily Illini declaring,

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107 “Disabled Protest Nixon Veto of $2.6b Rehabilitation Bill,” Boston Globe, April 2, 1973
108 “Disabled Protest Nixon Veto of $2.6b Rehabilitation Bill,” Boston Globe, April 2, 1973; Fay, Community Organizer, 74-76.
“the handicapped constitute the most poorly neglected civil rights movement in the country.” They harnessed the language of the civil rights struggle and drew connections to the experiences of black student activists, explaining,

Not being able to get into a restaurant because of stairs is no different than a black person barred from one. Not being able to attend school because it is inaccessible is no different than James Meredith not being admitted to a college in the south. These barriers don’t look as menacing as an axe-handle or a lynching but their results are equally devastating. In short, we’ve been told to play dead.109

The activists called attention to the large upcoming march in Washington, under the leadership of Heumann, Tankus, and Linn. They placed their own local demonstration in the context of similar events being held in Boston, New York, New Jersey, Topeka, New Mexico, and Berkeley.

Not all of the opposition to Nixon’s vetoes took place on the streets. Letters to newspapers, petitions to Congressmen, and television appearances all raised public awareness about the Rehabilitation Act. Deaf students from Gallaudet College petitioned their congressmen. “Today we have written a new history for the deaf people in this country by protesting President Nixon’s veto of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act Bill,” one deaf activist explained.110 Opponents of the President’s veto expressed their discontent in the Los Angeles Times, chastising Nixon and members of Congress who upheld the veto. “Members of Congress who supported the Nixon veto don’t deserve to represent the American people,” one advocate insisted.111 Another attacked the veto by writing, “If pulling out crutches from under the arms of crippled and lame men, women,

Robert Muller, a disabled Vietnam veteran and law student at Hofstra University, voiced his disappointment during an interview on The Today Show. “They talk about civil rights in this country. A lot of people think it just relates to one specific minority group. That’s what we’re talking about. We’re talking about civil rights for all of us,” Muller insisted.

Following Nixon’s second veto, the Rehabilitation bill went back to the Senate and House committees for substantial revisions. In committee, the price tag of the bill was decreased from the originally proposed 3.4 billion dollars to 1.3 billion dollars. The revised version also eliminated comprehensive services to people with severe disabilities who did “not have readily identifiable vocational goals.” Information and training centers for the deaf, blind, and spinal cord injuries were also cut, as were many of the recommendations from Johnson’s National Citizens Advisory Council and Nixon’s Task Force on the Physically Handicapped pertaining to civil rights and fair and equitable employment standards. This included a permanent National Advisory Council for the Handicapped, a Federal Interagency Committee on the Employment of Handicapped Employees, and a Transportation and Housing Committee for Handicapped Individuals. But the bill was not gutted. It created an Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board to implement the relatively ineffective Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, and most importantly, it kept in place the anti-discrimination provisions of Section 504. While historians have argued that the inclusion Section 504 went unnoticed,

\[115\] H.R. 8070, *Congressional Record*, June 5, 1973, 18128-18129. The anti-discrimination provision was in Section 503 of the House bill and Section 504 of the Senate bill.
Congressman Vanik made it a point to thank committee members for adopting his antidiscrimination proposals in order to “protect the rights of handicapped people.”\textsuperscript{116}

The removal of Title III was also a victory for the physically disabled activists. Congressman Brademas expressed his support for eliminating the economically or socially disadvantaged in rehabilitation services, stating, “This measure before you today would encourage the administration of this program to remember the overall purpose of this act, which is to serve the handicapped; that is those with physical and mental disabilities.” Brademas continued, “the term ‘handicapped individual’ has been broadly defined by regulation during the past few years and it is for this reason that H.R. 8070 restates clearly the original intention of the Congress that physically or mentally handicapped receive vocational rehabilitation services.”\textsuperscript{117}

There was opposition to the revised bill. Senator Alan Cranston remarked that it was the seventh time the legislation had been brought to the Senate floor in the past year.\textsuperscript{118} Senator Jennings Randolph (D-WV) supported the bill, but remarked that it was not “broad enough or ambitious enough,” and Representative Charles Vanik (D-OH) expressed similar sentiments.\textsuperscript{119} Representative Earl Landgrebe (R-IN), an early opponent of the bill who voted against it more than once as it made its way through Congress, urged representatives to vote against it, insisting that H.R. 8070 “kicks the crutches out from under the handicapped” because of the drastic compromises made to

\textsuperscript{118}“Third Handicapped Aid Bill Signed After Two Vetoes.” \textit{CQ Almanac} 1973.
\textsuperscript{119}“Third Handicapped Aid Bill Signed After Two Vetoes.” \textit{CQ Almanac} 1973.
the Rehabilitation Act.\textsuperscript{120} Other opponents argued that the price tag attached to the bill was still too high and feared another veto.\textsuperscript{121} Enough compromises were reached that the bill, despite disappointing some supporters, passed the House 400-0 and the Senate 88-0.\textsuperscript{122}

**Conclusion**

In the end, the Nixon administration triumphed. After two vetoes, Nixon finally signed the Rehabilitation Act on September 26, 1973. The cost of the bill was slashed by more than half, and the bill’s primary focus remained preparing the physically disabled for employment. Nixon boasted, “This bill keeps the Federal vocational rehabilitation program focused on its original and proper purpose, that of preparing people for meaningful jobs, rather than burdening that program with broad new medical or welfare functions better performed elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{123} Yet, the Nixon administration was not the only party with cause to celebrate the achievement of paring down the legislation. While disability activists sharply criticized Nixon, they shared the view that the attention of rehabilitation services should stay focused solely on the physically disabled. The activists had raised the alarm about Title III, which threatened the definition of disability—a change with real policy consequences. Nixon’s opposition to the rehabilitation bill ultimately removed that threat.

Further, despite massive cuts to the Rehabilitation Act, disability rights activists won through Section 504 the civil rights principle they had pursued, a triumph Nixon

\textsuperscript{121} Thirteen congressmen opposed it during the floor debate in the House. “Third Handicapped Aid Bill Signed After Two Vetoes.” *CQ Almanac* 1973.
\textsuperscript{122} “Third Handicapped Aid Bill Signed After Two Vetoes.” *CQ Almanac* 1973.
never acknowledged. Here scholars have argued a negative: that the President’s lack of comment demonstrates that he did not realize the anti-discrimination provision was there. The inclusion of an anti-discrimination provision, however, was the cheapest aspect of the bill, as it had no regulations or money attached to it. If Nixon’s focus was truly on cost, perhaps he did not comment on Section 504 because he took little or no issue with it. Regardless of Nixon’s opinion of Section 504, for disability activists it enshrined equal protection for the disabled under the law. The significance was not lost on deaf activist Frank Bowe. He observed, “Section 504 is historic in its scope and depth, the single most important civil rights provision ever enacted on behalf of disabled citizens in the country.” This federal anti-discrimination measure was the culmination of disability activism that had, in numerous local communities, states, and in Congress, championed civil rights and physical access. The hearings on the Rehabilitation Act proved an important forum for disabled activists to press the issue of civil rights. Only after the testimonies of disabled leaders did Section 504 become part of the legislation. When Nixon’s vetoes threatened their imminent rights, disabled activists resorted to other measures. The DIA and DBAC, once locally rooted, brought together disability activists in multiple cities in protest of President Nixon’s vetoes. Nixon’s signature turned into law the anti-discrimination protections that activists had demanded. Without federal

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funds or regulations, implementation of Section 504 left much to be desired, but the fundamental principle of equality under the law that it expressed and guaranteed—a promise from a government to its people—was the foundation for the national movement that took hold in 1977.
Conclusion:

Section 504: From Promise to Reality

In 1973, disability activists celebrated the triumph of Section 504. It had been decades in the making; the protests and lobbying had finally paid off. However, the forty-four-word provision was, in the minds of some activists, only symbolic. Unlike all other aspects of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 lacked guidelines and a timeline for implementation. It took four years for the promise of equality enshrined in Section 504 to become a reality.

Responsibility for developing regulations and for ensuring implementation of Section 504 went to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), instead of the Rehabilitation Services Administration, which oversaw all other provisions of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.¹ Placement of Section 504 under the OCR profoundly impacted the interpretation of the provision.² The first action of the OCR, which was also responsible for the implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, was to draft a definition of disability that matched the intent of Section 504. Under rehabilitation legislation, the term “handicapped individual” applied only to those who had “a physical or mental disability which for such individual

¹ Berkowitz, Disabled Policy, 212-213.
² Scotch, From Good Will to Civil Rights, 66.
constitutes or results in a substantial handicap to employment.”\(^3\) Through amendments in 1974 to the Rehabilitation Act, the OCR added a new, broader definition of disability specifically for Section 504. A handicapped individual, in accordance with 1974 amendments, constituted “any person who (A) has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such person’s major life activities, (B) has a record of such impairment, or (C) is regarded as having such an impairment.”\(^4\) The OCR defined two types of discrimination against disabled people: attitudinal and architectural. The regulations that addressed attitudinal discrimination were modeled on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.\(^5\) Compared to the regulations dealing with architectural barriers, these revisions were not controversial. Recipients of federal funding, who were obliged to comply, contested the architectural provisions. However, the OCR dismissed cost-based arguments against the architectural barrier provisions, arguing that any cost associated with compliance to Section 504 would be outweighed by the benefits to people with disabilities.\(^6\)

In July 1975, the OCR submitted a draft of the regulations to HEW Secretary David Mathews for approval. The broadened definition of disability under Section 504 and the disregard of costs of implementation led Secretary Mathews to question the regulations. Mathews feared that the vague definition of disability would allow for alcoholics, drug addicts, and homosexuals to benefit from Section 504. HEW estimated

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\(^3\) Scotch, *From Good Will to Civil Rights*, 66.

\(^4\) H.R. 17503, 93\(^{rd}\) Congress, 2\(^{nd}\) Session (1974); Scotch, *From Good Will to Civil Rights*, 66.

\(^5\) Scotch, *From Good Will to Civil Rights*, 70.

\(^6\) Scotch, *From Good Will to Civil Rights*, 77.
that compliance with Section 504 would cost billions of dollars. Mathews requested further analysis of the regulations and delayed publication.\textsuperscript{7}

As Secretary Mathews stalled, pressure to implement Section 504 mounted. In 1974, a small group of activists came together in Washington, D.C., to form the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD). The ACCD, spearheaded by Fred Fay, served as a cross-disability organization to “enhance communication among people with disabilities, promote the rights of disabled people, educate people about their rights and foster political action.”\textsuperscript{8} The idea of a national organization that represented multiple disability organizations had its roots in the 1969 National Citizens Conference for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled and Disadvantaged, where Fay had networked with disability leaders.\textsuperscript{9} Judy Heumann, Ed Roberts, and University of Illinois alumnies Sharon Mistler and Kitty Cone, were among the original members of the ACCD. The ACCD brought together various disability-focused organizations in unprecedented numbers. Unlike white cane laws for the blind, wheelchair access for people with physical disabilities, or American Sign Language interpreters for the deaf, Section 504’s expanded definition of what constituted “handicapped” was a mutual concern and rallied various organizations around one cause.\textsuperscript{10} By 1977, ACCD served as the main political

\textsuperscript{7} Scotch, \textit{From Good Will to Civil Rights}, 87-89.
\textsuperscript{8} Young, “Same Struggle, Different Difference,” 69.
\textsuperscript{9} Six of the nine original board members of the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD), officially incorporated in 1974, worked on the planning of the National Conference for the Disabled and Disadvantaged. Members from the conference that served on the ACCD board included: Harry Schweikert, executive director of Paralyzed Veterans of America; Durwood McDaniel, executive director of the American Council of the Blind; Fred Schreiber, executive director of National Association of the Deaf; Bob Smithdas, employee at the Helen Keller National Center for the Deaf Blind in New York City. Fay, \textit{Community Organizer}, 76-77.
voice for one hundred and seventy disability organizations. It gained national
prominence with its demonstrations to implement Section 504 regulations.

On February 13, 1976, James Cherry, a disabled attorney, filed a lawsuit against
HEW Secretary David Mathews—though it is unclear if the ACCD prompted Cherry to
file suit or if he was affiliated with the ACCD in any way. HEW officials responded that
because the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 did not require the issuance of regulations or
comprehensive guidelines for Section 504, they were not in violation of the law.¹¹ On
July 19, the Washington, D.C., district court ordered Mathews to sign regulations for
Section 504, but gave no specific timetable for completion of that task.¹² It was another
six months before Mathews sent the 185-page regulations to the Senate Committee on
Labor and Public Welfare for review on January 18, 1977. Two days later, as the Carter
administration was inaugurated, Mathews left office. What little headway disabled
activists had made during Mathew’s administration would have to begin anew with
incoming HEW secretary Joseph Califano.

The ACCD wasted little time before pressing the Carter administration to take
action on the Section 504 regulations. On Secretary Califano’s first day in office, the
ACCD sent him a telegram urging him on the need for regulations. Receiving no
response, ACCD leaders decided to take direct action. “He’s got to feel pressure he
doesn’t know how to deal with,” recalled deaf activist and ACCD leader Frank Bowe,
“something coming at him that’s outside his experience. There’s only one thing I can

¹¹ Fleischer and Zames, *From Charity to Confrontation*, 51.
¹² Young, “Same Struggle, Different Difference,” 80.
think of that meets those criteria: thousands of disabled people in his own offices.”  

On March 18, ACCD wrote to President Carter threatening to take political action if the regulations were not signed by April 4. Califano delayed signing the regulations. “The previous administration took 2 ½ years to produce a complex regulation that it then refused to sign,” Califano asserted; “I believe it is reasonable to take 2 ½ months to examine those regulations so that I may understand them and assess their implications.”

He established a task force to review the regulations. Disabled activists feared that Califano and the task force wanted to revise the regulations to allow longer compliance periods, waiver provisions, and to weaken the accessibility requirements.

When it became clear that Califano would not sign the regulations by ACCD’s deadline, the organization called for “a massive sit-in demonstration in every HEW regional office coast to coast.” Judy Heumann, who had moved to Berkeley in 1973 to join the board of directors of the Center for Independent Living, and Kitty Cone led the movement on the West Coast. “The 504 Emergency Coalition,” as Heumann and Cone dubbed their group, distributed flyers reading: “People with Disabilities: The Federal Government is Trying to Steal Our Rights. Demonstrate April 5.”

Mary Lou Breslin, who attended Warm Springs and the University of Illinois with Fay, Cone, and Mistler, became deaf at three years old after contracting measles. He credited his experiences at Gallaudet University and reading Saul Alinsky’s Rules for Radicals for his activism. Bowe served as director of the ACCD from 1976 to 1981. Pelka, What We Have Done, 262.

Young, “Same Struggle, Different Difference,” 82.


Scotch, From Good Will to Civil Rights, 110.

Pelka, What We Have Done, 262.

Heumann received her Masters from University of California Berkeley in Public Health Administration. In 1974, she interned for Senator Harrison Williams (D-NJ). After her internship she returned to Berkeley and served as the executive director of the Center for Independent Living until 1982. Pelka, What We Have Done, 270.
had also moved to Berkeley to work at the Center for Independent Living and to help organize the Bay area to pressure implementation of Section 504.\textsuperscript{19}

On April 5, over five thousand disabled people took action.\textsuperscript{20} In Washington, D.C., ACCD president Frank Bowe and three hundred fellow activists protested outside of the Hubert Humphrey Building. Seventy-five activists entered Califano’s office and remained through the night. Starved out—being permitted only one cup of coffee and doughnut each—the protesters left Califano’s office after twenty-eight hours. In Boston, Fay and sixty others occupied the HEW regional office.\textsuperscript{21} That protest fizzled after a day as well. Similar events happened at HEW offices in Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, New York, Philadelphia, and Seattle. The San Francisco demonstration outlasted all the others.\textsuperscript{22} Activists remained for twenty-eight days. During the occupation, disability advocates across the country wrote to President Carter and Secretary Califano, and some held candlelight vigils in front of the White House to draw attention to Califano’s inaction.\textsuperscript{23} The protests made front-page headlines in the \textit{Los Angeles Times}, the \textit{Washington Post}, and the \textit{New York Times}.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{20} Bowe, \textit{Handicapping America}, 210.
\textsuperscript{21} Fay, \textit{Community Organizer}, 111-112.
\textsuperscript{22} For a detailed account of the HEW demonstrations see, Bowe, \textit{Handicapping America}, 205-211; Scotch, \textit{From Good Will to Civil Rights}, 86-120; Shapiro, \textit{No Pity}, 64-70; Zames and Fleischer, \textit{From Charity to Confrontation}, 50-56; Young, “Same Struggle, Different Difference,” 79-85.
\textsuperscript{23} Bowe, \textit{Handicapping America}, 210.
On April 28, 1977, Califano signed the original regulations without revision.\textsuperscript{25} The regulations addressed both attitudinal and architectural barriers, stating that recipients of federal funds could not deny a disabled person participation in regular programs on the basis of disability.\textsuperscript{26} More specifically, the regulations required that existing federal facilities be made accessible without exemptions, making the Architectural Barriers Act enforceable a decade after its passage.\textsuperscript{27} They stipulated that disabled children were entitled to a free, appropriate, and public education and that colleges and universities were required to make “reasonable modifications” and provide auxiliary aides, such as braille readers or captioning for the deaf, where necessary. In employment, a disabled person could not be denied for a position on the basis of disability, and pre-employment physicals were prohibited.\textsuperscript{28}

Yet, the focus on public accommodations and programs in the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 and in Section 504 left much to be desired in the view of some disabled citizens. The struggle to secure civil rights for people with disabilities in all parts of society continued to gain momentum throughout the late 1970s and 1980s. Overwhelmingly, activists who emerged from the Illinois, California, and New York axes

\textsuperscript{25}In 1978, amendments to the Rehabilitation Act included a new statutory definition of handicapped to address the concerns over the inclusion of alcoholics and drug addicts. It stated the term handicapped did not include, “Any individual who is an alcoholic or drug abuser whose current use of alcoholics or drugs prevents such individual from performing the duties of the job in question or whose employment, by reason of such current alcohol or drug abuse, would constitute a direct threat to property or the safety of others.” Quoted in Scotch, \textit{From Good Will to Civil Rights}, 135.


led this phase of the struggle. During the 1980s, new activist groups emerged, going to the courts to enforce Section 504 and the legislature to broaden its scope. They built on the work of the early leaders for disability rights of the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. On July 26, 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) into law. Section 504 served as the foundation for the ADA, which extended the reach of antidiscrimination legislation into the private sector.

Much work needs to be done to understand fully the four-year period from the passage of Section 504 to the implementation of its regulations. Richard Scotch’s analysis of the implementation of the regulations serves as the main work on this period. But it is incomplete. Aside from a superficial understanding of James Cherry, who initiated the lawsuit against HEW, and the main leaders of the ACCD protests, we have little understanding of the events that occurred. As vocal as most of the activists were at the time, they are mostly silent in its history.

One thing is clear. In order to understand fully the national movement to implement Section 504 and the passage of the ADA, we need to extend our analysis backward. Section 504 was the culmination of decades of grassroots organizing. The elimination of architectural barriers in cities, states, and federal buildings across the country did not happen simply because of sympathetic congressional aides. Beginning in the 1950s, disabled citizens across the country took action to eliminate architectural barriers. The work of the National Society for Crippled Children and Adults (NSCCA)

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29 In 1974, Fay and Mistler established the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD). Heumann and Roberts established the World Institute on Disability in 1983. In June 2010, Heumann was appointed to the U.S. State Department as Special Advisor for International Disability Rights. Fred Fay passed away in August 2011.
and the President’s Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped (PCEH) to develop standards for barrier-free design, distribute pamphlets, hold workshops, and print articles brought together local activists and equipped them with tools and strategies to organize effectively and eliminate architectural barriers. The *American Standards for Barrier-Free Design* developed in 1961, served as the blueprint for providing physical access to buildings. Linking *physical access* to civil rights, activists vigorously lobbied city councils, states, and the federal government for barrier-free environments. They secured anti-barrier legislation at local, state, and the federal level with the passage of the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968. Weak enforcement and the narrow scope of these laws resulted in continued activism, as advocates formed watchdog committees and fought for accessible housing and public transportation. While the architectural barrier laws in most states and at the federal level lacked teeth, they provided disabled activists a platform from which to protest segregation in public spaces.

For all of these bouts of activism and the people behind them, the particularities of places and networks mattered a great deal. The Warm Springs Institute, Cowell Memorial Hospital, and Camp Jened served as training grounds for disabled activists. There, young people with disabilities came to understand themselves and the inaccessibility of society. They began to develop a vision for what they needed in order to achieve their place as full members of society—a vision that was in many ways unique and more detailed than broader conceptions of civil rights. Their social experiences in these disability-specific spaces created a disability consciousness that helped them form coherent and durable networks. Shortly after individuals left these places, those networks became vital to their fights for integration on college campuses. While national
organizations like the NSCCA and PCEH focused primarily on securing legislation for public buildings, they rarely addressed educational settings. A younger generation took the struggle for access to college campuses. Student organizations, sports teams, publications, and, at times, outright protest educated young activists. In these sites, disabled students like Ed Roberts, Judy Heumann, and Fred Fay worked out strategies of activism and often achieved the early successes that built their confidence.

After graduation, they continued their pursuit of equal opportunity for full civic membership, rooted in a barrier-free society. Building on their campus successes, activists demanded equal employment opportunities, accessible housing and transportation, and independent living. As they pursued their goals, these activists broadened their networks, relying again on a shared disability consciousness.

From 1968 to 1970 protests for civil rights mounted. Meanwhile, federal rehabilitation services expanded its traditional focus on securing employment. Disabled activists fought to defend their view of the appropriate use of rehabilitation policy. In addition to being an important contest for the future of disability rights, this episode illustrated the divisions that often existed between various rights constituencies, which held different priorities but interacted with the same federal government. While disability rights activists sought to be included in civil rights legislation, they protested the inclusion of other minority or disadvantaged groups in rehabilitation legislation. Though activists had reached out to leaders of the African American civil rights movement to no avail, they too rebuffed other groups when the tables were turned.

No forum was more important for demanding civil rights than the hearings on the re-appropriation of the Rehabilitation Act. Only after activists testified to Congress was
the anti-discrimination provision added. When battles between President Nixon and Congress over the budget for the bill forestalled progress, activists took to the streets in cities across the country. Disabled activists used their networks and the skills they had developed in college to form organizations, engage media outlets, and coordinate protests.

Disability rights constituted a genuine grassroots movement that had multiple phases and built momentum from successes at local levels and propelled further activism by tapping into larger claims of citizenship. Despite this, students of the civil rights era, when they think of it at all, often see it on the margins of a larger social movement history of the twentieth century and as a reactionary tale of disabled citizens responding to congressional action. That former comparison enforces this latter misconception, because disability rights has not been investigated as a substantial movement in its own right. If scholars want to fully understand the post-World War II phenomenon of movements for equal citizenship, they need to look closely at each of the movements and incorporate the resulting insights into the broader historical narrative. The fight for physical access refines our understanding of concepts like segregation and inclusion in American society. What seemed a barrier and an injustice to a person in a wheelchair was of little concern to many non-disabled activists who had struggles of their own in mind. It was this fact that led disabled citizens to remind their fellow citizens that their plight included not only stigma and prejudice, problems of equal employment and education, but also building codes, architects, city planners, and an expensive but forbidding physical environment of sidewalks, churches, public buildings, and college campuses. Resistance to disability rights particularly stemmed from these costs of
integration or accommodation. Employers would have to spend money to adapt equipment and buildings and to provide American Sign Language interpreters or braille readers. On top of concerns over costs, people with disabilities also faced discrimination that was rooted in the feelings and beliefs of their fellow citizens, and so activists sought to breakdown stereotypes through educational campaigns via media outlets, town hall meetings, and public demonstrations. Some of their tactics were unconventional compared to other civil rights narratives, such as hosting basketball games for federal officials, taking sledgehammers to curbs, and laying their disabled bodies across the steps into the U. S. Capitol.

The story of the disability rights movement offers not only an important episode of political activism but also a deeper understanding of the distinct political ideology of the physically disabled. This ideology was founded on the concept of physical accessibility, and that concept was the main difference between the disability rights movement and other civil rights movements of the twentieth century. Other groups faced barriers to entering public and private facilities, but those barriers—despite being entrenched in law and accompanied by violence—were attitudinal. As disability activists explained time and time again, their primary obstacles were architectural. Attitudinal objections—whether about cost or conscious discrimination—to disability rights were, then, often secondary, though they made the removal of architectural barriers significantly more difficult. But these activists did not allow difficulty to stand in their way. As popular perceptions often take the disabled to be passive members of society, the evidence from the civil rights era suggests they are anything but.
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