

# "You Drop a Petal in the Water, and It Has a Ripple Effect"

The Disability Rights Movement, 1950–1990



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# “You Drop a Petal in the Water, and It Has a Ripple Effect”:

## The Disability Rights Movement, 1950–1990

by Kory Loyola

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### UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit is part of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. These units were developed to enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate original documents of historical significance. They will focus on how those documents reflect the ways in which people with disabilities and their allies fought for and, in many cases, achieved greater civil rights in the United States.

Students will learn and practice the skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on visual and textual source materials.

Over the course of the four lessons in this unit, the students will examine primary and secondary source materials that cover the period from just after World War II to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. The lessons highlight four different aspects of the disability rights movement—post–World War II emphasis on employment, independent living, 504 regulations, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Students will be asked to employ various historical-thinking skills—contextualization, comparison, causation, and continuity and change over time—as they use included activity sheets to focus their examination of the material.

The unit culminates in three activities that ask students to assess the significant events in the disability rights movement in the period between 1950 and 1990.

**NUMBER OF CLASS PERIODS:** 4–5 (plus extra time for extension/culminating activities)

**GRADE LEVEL(S):** 7–12

### UNIT OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to

- Analyze primary source documents
- Draw inferences from primary source texts
- Summarize the meaning of primary source texts

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How did the disabled community fight for civil rights?
- To what extent did the disability rights movement focus on independence for those with disabilities?
- How did the movement for disabled rights change over time?
- How did other movements for civil rights influence the disability rights movement?

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.2: Analyze the purpose of information in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2: Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.2.B: Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2.B: Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### The Disability Rights Movement in America by Jaipreet Viridi, University of Delaware

Disabled people have always fought for their rights.

This is because they know that every policy issue, health crisis, inaccessible space, and fight for justice is a disability issue. Demanding access and advocacy for *all* people, disabled protesters have rallied against social barriers, created equitable

opportunities, fought to secure social services, and achieved milestones in legislation. Achieving remarkable success, they've proved to the world that disability does not mean that someone is incapable.

Yet so many disabled people's lives and achievements are left out of history lessons. Learning disability history brings this ancestral past to light. It begins with the recognition that disabled people have always been a part of society, but it was not until the late nineteenth century that they were increasingly segregated, institutionalized, and sterilized under the new science of eugenics that declared their lives worthless. Deaf people had their language stripped from them. Mentally and physically disabled people were kept in underfunded and understaffed institutions for years. Some never reunited with their families. Hundreds were forgotten.

Disabled people pushed back against discrimination. Their fights were for dignity and freedom: to make their own decisions about their bodies, to live independently, and to get access to essential healthcare and assistive technologies that they needed to be self-sufficient. They fought not just for themselves, but for future generations. Activist Judith Heumann writes of this: "You drop a petal in the water, and it has a ripple effect."

As the Civil Rights Movement ignited waves of protests for rights across the country, disabled people created direct-action groups to seek out full inclusion in society. The Disabled in Action group led sit-in protests across the country to demand the passage of Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability. For four weeks in 1977, protesters occupied the Department of Health, Education and Welfare office in San Francisco, joining coalitions such as the Black Panther Party to hold the longest non-violent occupation of an American federal building. It was a historic milestone that provided disabled people federal civil rights protection for the first time and sparked similar transformations, including the Education of Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (later IDEA), which provided equal access to education; the American Disabled for Accessible Public Transit, which fought against wheelchair inaccessibility of public buses in 1977; and the 1988 Deaf President Now! campaign, which aimed to empower deaf people.

The results of all these protests culminated in March 1990 when thousands of activists from thirty states headed to Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, to demand the passage of the most significant legislation for disability rights—the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). After a series of rallies and speeches, sixty activists abandoned their crutches, wheelchairs, and walkers and climbed the eighty-three stone steps that led up to the Capitol to symbolize the barriers that disabled people experience daily. Four months later, President George H. W. Bush signed the ADA into law, saying, "Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down."

But the fight is far from over. Disabled people still experience discrimination and are disproportionately impacted by systemic medical bias, racism, and ableism. They are always the first to place their bodies on the line in the fight for equality, and this is why we need to remember the work they've done and embrace our collective history so we can join their battles and continue fighting for equality and equity.

*Jaipreet Virdi is an associate professor of history at the University of Delaware specializing in the history of medicine, technology, and disability. She is the author of Hearing Happiness: Deafness Cures in History (University of Chicago Press, 2020). She is pursuing questions about how disabled people tinkered with their prostheses and perceived them as extensions of themselves, and how we think of deafness and deaf/tech collaborations.*

## LESSON 1

## Disability Rights in the Wake of World War II

## OVERVIEW

This lesson focuses on the post–World War II period and the war’s effect on those with disabilities. It lays the groundwork for this unit, as the primary sources highlight changing attitudes toward those with disabilities. Like the sources in other lessons, the poster and the statement supporting a new law focus on independence for the disabled, but unlike the other lessons’ sources, there is no explicit call for changes to make the environment more accessible for people with disabilities. Students will analyze the poster and statement using the provided activity sheets. Because this is the shortest lesson in the unit, you may find it useful to combine it with Lesson 2.

## MATERIALS

- Optional: Historical Background: “The Disability Rights Movement in America” by Jaipreet Virdi, Associate Professor of History, University of Delaware
- In Context: An excerpt from Kim E. Nielsen, *A Disability History of the United States* (Strawberry Hills, New South Wales, Australia: Read How You Want, 2012), 146.
- Source 1: “Hire the Handicapped” Poster with Details, Description, and Decision activity sheet
  - Edgar F. Wittmack, “America Needs All of Us,” President’s Committee on National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week,” 1951, in *EveryBody: An Artifact History of Disability in America*, Smithsonian National Museum of American History, <https://everybody.si.edu/media/675>.
- Source 2: Statement of Paul A. Strachan with Important Phrases and Critical Thinking Questions activity sheet
  - Paul A. Strachan, “Statement of Paul A. Strachan, President, American Federation of the Physically Handicapped On: S. 2570, to Establish a Federal Agency for Handicapped,” April 7, 1954, Texas Disability History Collection, UTA Libraries, <https://library.uta.edu/txdisabilityhistory/doc/20001875-0>.

## PROCEDURE

1. Optional: Have students read Jaipreet Virdi’s Historical Background essay as an independent reading assignment or discuss the content of the essay with your class before beginning the lesson.
2. Display the unit’s essential questions.
3. Distribute In Context for Lesson 1 and the two primary sources and their accompanying activity sheets.
4. Have students read the “In Context” excerpt on their own or “share read” it in class. This is done by having the students follow along silently while you begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Then ask the class to join in with the reading after a sentence or two while you continue to read aloud, still serving as the model for the class. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
5. Have the students work individually, as partners, or in small groups of three or four to examine Source 1, the “Hire the Handicapped” poster, and complete the Details, Description, and Decision activity sheet.

6. After giving the students enough time to complete the activity, reconvene the class and discuss different responses and interpretations.
7. Have students read Source 2, Paul Strachan's statement, on their own or share read it with the whole class.
8. Have the students work individually, as partners, or in small groups of three or four to complete the Important Phrases activity sheet.
9. After giving the students enough time to complete the activity, reconvene the class and discuss different responses and interpretations.
10. Have students answer the critical thinking questions. They can do this independently in notebooks or use digital platforms. These questions can also be used as prompts for whole class or small group discussions.

## LESSON 2

## The Independent Living Movement

## OVERVIEW

This lesson focuses on the Independent Living Movement. Its sources highlight the ways that people with disabilities self-advocated and pushed for changes to the built environment and other societal accommodations. This lesson uses a variety of primary sources—an interview, speeches, a magazine cover, and a map. Students will combine independent, small group, and whole class work to analyze these documents.

## MATERIALS

- In Context: Excerpts from Doris Z. Fleischer and Frieda Zames, *The Disability Rights Movement: From Charity to Confrontation* (Temple University Press, 2001), 33 and 47.
- Source 3: Disabled In Action of Metropolitan New York: Interview with Founder Judy Heumann with Important Phrases activity sheet
  - Excerpts from “A Discussion with Judy Heumann on Independent Living” ca. 2002, Disabled In Action of Metropolitan New York, [disabledinaction.org/heumann.html](http://disabledinaction.org/heumann.html).
- Source 4: “On Disability Rights: Highlights of Speeches by Ed Roberts” with Important Phrases and Critical Thinking Questions activity sheets
  - Ed Roberts, n.d., “On Disability Rights: Highlights from Speeches by Ed Roberts,” CommonLit, [commonlit.org/en/texts/on-disability-rights-highlights-from-speeches-by-ed-roberts](http://commonlit.org/en/texts/on-disability-rights-highlights-from-speeches-by-ed-roberts).
- Source 5: Cover of *The Independent* and Details, Description, and Decision activity sheet
  - *The Independent* showing Berkeley’s “Wheelchair Route,” Fall 1974. Center for Independent Living, [centerforindependentliving.org/](http://centerforindependentliving.org/).
- Source 6: “Wheelchair Ramps 1973 Location Map” and Details, Description, and Decision and Critical Thinking activity sheets
  - “Wheelchair Ramps 1973 Location Map.” n.d., The Berkeley Revolution: A Digital Archive of the East Bay’s Transformation in the Late-1960s & 1970s, [revolution.berkeley.edu/ruths-wheel-chair-route/#menu-main-nav](http://revolution.berkeley.edu/ruths-wheel-chair-route/#menu-main-nav).

## PROCEDURE

1. Display the unit’s essential questions.
2. Distribute the In Context excerpts for Lesson 2 and Sources 3–6 and their accompanying activity sheets.
3. Have students read the In Context excerpts on their own or share read with the class as described in Lesson 1.
4. Have the students read Source 3, the interview with Judy Heumann, on their own or share read it with the class.
5. Have students work individually, as partners, or in small groups of three or four to complete the Important Phrases activity sheet.

6. After giving the students enough time to complete the activity, reconvene the class and discuss different responses and interpretations.
7. Have students read Source 4, the excerpts from speeches given by Ed Roberts, on their own or share read it with the class.
8. Have students work individually, as partners, or in small groups of three or four to complete the Important Phrases activity sheet.
9. After giving the students enough time to complete the activity, reconvene the class and discuss different responses and interpretations.
10. Have students answer the critical thinking questions for Heumann's interview and Roberts's speech excerpts. They can do this independently in notebooks or on digital platforms. These questions can also be used in whole class or small group discussions.
11. Have the students work individually, as partners, or in small groups of three or four to examine Source 5, the cover of *The Independent*, and complete the Details, Description, and Decision activity sheet.
12. After giving the students enough time to complete the activity, reconvene the class and discuss different responses and interpretations.
13. Have the students work individually, as partners, or in small groups of three or four to examine Source 6, the wheelchair ramp map, and complete the Details, Description, and Decision and Critical Thinking Questions activity sheets.
14. After giving the students enough time to complete the activity, reconvene the class and discuss different responses and interpretations.
15. As you conclude the lesson, ask students to consider what changes they are noticing in the disability rights movement from the 1950s to the 1970s. Ask them what historical situation might account for that change and how other movements for civil rights influenced the disability rights movement.



## LESSON 3

### Ratifying Section 504

#### OVERVIEW

This lesson focuses on the disability rights movement's fight for the implementation of Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act. Its sources emphasize the meaning of 504, who pushed for its implementation, and its significance to the movement. This lesson uses a variety of different primary and secondary sources—language from Section 504, a video about the 504 sit-ins, audio of a speech (with a sign-language interpreter and closed captioning), a newspaper, and a protest sign. Students will combine independent, small group, and whole class work to analyze these documents while using activity sheets.

#### MATERIALS

- Source 7: Excerpt from Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and In Your Own Words activity sheet
  - “Civil Rights Center,” US Department of Labor, [dol.gov/agencies/oasam/centers-offices/civil-rights-center/statutes/section-504-rehabilitation-act-of-1973](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/centers-offices/civil-rights-center/statutes/section-504-rehabilitation-act-of-1973).
- In Context on Ratifying Section 504
  - PotsieSpoons, “A Brief Recounting of the 504 Sit-In,” 2020, YouTube, [youtube.com/watch?v=z3Swx-FNQVI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3Swx-FNQVI).
  - Excerpts from Julia Carmel, “Before the A.D.A., There Was Section 504,” *New York Times*, July 22, 2020, [nytimes.com/2020/07/22/us/504-sit-in-disability-rights.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/22/us/504-sit-in-disability-rights.html).
- Source 8: Kitty Cone, “Patient No More” Speech and Guided Listening activity sheet
  - Joe Quinn, Lucy Muir, and Ken Stein, “Patient No More: Kitty Cone Victory Speech,” April 1977, YouTube, posted July 15, 2015, [youtube.com/watch?v=HQ3kcSgAX-w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQ3kcSgAX-w).
- Source 9: “Handicapped Win Demands,” *The Black Panther*, May 7, 1977, and Analyzing a News Article and Close Reading activity sheets
  - “The 504 Protests and the Black Panther Party – Disability Social History Project,” 2021, Disability Social History Project, <https://disabilityhistory.org/2021/12/19/the-504-protests-and-the-black-panther-party/>.
- Source 10: Ken Stein’s “Sign 504 Now” Picket Sign and Discussion Questions activity sheet
  - “Sign 504 Now” picket sign, San Francisco, 1977, in *Everybody: An Artifact History of Disability in America*, Smithsonian National Museum of American History, <https://everybody.si.edu/media/745>.
- Source 11: Ken Stein Oral History and Critical Thinking Questions activity sheet
  - Alice Wong, “Ingrid Tischer and Ken Stein, Berkeley, CA,” Disability Visibility Project, December 27, 2014, [disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2014/08/02/disability-visibility-project-ingrid-and-ken-berkeley-ca/](https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2014/08/02/disability-visibility-project-ingrid-and-ken-berkeley-ca/).

#### PROCEDURE

1. Display the unit’s essential questions.
2. Distribute Sources 7–11 with their accompanying activity sheets.

3. Read the excerpt from Section 504 to the students. Have them underline five to ten keywords and paraphrase the excerpt.
4. Discuss student responses as a whole group.
5. Ask students what they know about the 504 Sit-ins. This will be part of the K-W-L (Know, Wonder, Learn) sequence. Then ask them what they want to know about the 504 Sit-ins. Discuss and/or write their responses on the board.
6. Have students watch the video, “A Brief Recounting of the 504 Sit-In.”
7. Ask students what they learned from the video. Discuss and/or write their responses on the board.
8. Have students read the In Context excerpts on their own or share read the text with the whole class.
9. Read the Guided Listening questions for Kitty Cone’s “Patient No More” speech to students. Reading the questions before listening will help students focus their attention on the questions.
10. Play the first part of the speech and the ASL interpretation of the speech. Stop at 1:24. Have students answer questions 1–3. Students can answer these questions on their own, in pairs, in groups, or as part of a whole class discussion.
11. Play the second part of the speech and the ASL interpretation of the speech. Stop at 3:30. Have students answer questions 4–7. They can answer these questions on their own, in pairs, in groups, or as part of a whole class discussion.
12. Play the last part of the speech and the ASL interpretation of the speech. Have students answer questions 8–10. Students can answer these questions on their own, in pairs, in groups, or as part of a whole class discussion.
13. Have students read Source 9, the “Handicapped Win Demands” article from *The Black Panther*, or share read it with the whole class.
14. Have students work individually, as partners, or in small groups of three or four to complete the Analyzing a News Article activity sheet for Source 9.
15. After giving the students enough time to complete the activity, reconvene the class and discuss different responses and interpretations.
16. Have students work individually, as partners, or in small groups of three or four to complete the Close Reading activity sheet for Source 9.
17. Reconvene the class and discuss different responses and interpretations.
18. Have the students work individually, as partners, or in small groups of three or four to examine Source 10, the “Sign 504 Now” poster, and complete the accompanying discussion questions.
19. Reconvene the class and discuss different responses and interpretations.
20. Read Source 11, the oral history by Ken Stein, to students. As a part of a whole class discussion, ask students to respond to the critical thinking questions.
21. As you conclude the lesson, ask students to consider what changes they are noticing in the disability rights movement from the 1950s to the 1970s. Ask them what historical situation might account for that change. Ask them how other movements for civil rights influenced the disability rights movement.

## LESSON 4

## The Americans with Disabilities Act

## OVERVIEW

The final lesson in this unit focuses on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the meaning of the short- and long-term reasons for the passage of the ADA, the individuals and groups who pushed for it, and its significance to the disability rights movement. This lesson uses a variety of primary and secondary sources—summaries that compare the ADA and 504, two photographs, and the transcript of President George H. W. Bush’s Statement on the ADA. Students will combine independent, small group, and whole class work to analyze these documents.

## MATERIALS

- In Context: Excerpt from Kim E. Nielsen, *A Disability History of the United States* (Strawberry Hills, New South Wales, Australia: Read How You Want, 2012), 180–181.
- Source 12: Comparing the ADA and Section 504
  - “Introduction to the Americans with Disabilities Act,” ADA.gov, <https://www.ada.gov/topics/intro-to-ada/>.
  - Office for Civil Rights (OCR), “Civil Rights Requirements-Applicable to Persons with Disabilities,” HHS.gov, August 10, 2021, <https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/special-topics/needy-families/persons-with-disabilities/index.html>.
- Source 13: “Capitol Crawl” photograph and Details, Description, and Decision activity sheet
  - Anders Norén, n.d., “Capitol Crawl,” Used by permission. © Tom Olin Collection, MSS-294, Ward M. Canaday Center for Special Collections, The University of Toledo Libraries, <http://tomolincollection.com/?p=166>.
- Source 14: Transcript of George H. W. Bush’s Statement on ADA and Important Phrases and Critical Thinking Questions activity sheet
  - “Transcript of Statement by the President, July 26, 1990,” National Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/research/americans-with-disabilities/transcriptions/naid-6037493-statement-by-the-president-americans-with-disabilities-act-of-1990.html>.
- Source 15: “Adapt and People First Members Protest Nursing Homes” photograph and Details, Description, and Decision activity sheet
  - ADAPT and People First members protest Atlanta nursing homes, October 2, 1990. Used by permission. © Tom Olin Collection, MSS-294, Ward M. Canaday Center for Special Collections, The University of Toledo Libraries

## PROCEDURE

1. Display the unit’s essential questions.
2. Distribute the In Context excerpts for Lesson 4 and Sources 12–15 and their accompanying activity sheets.
3. Have students read In Context on their own or share read it with the whole class.
4. Have students read Source 12, Comparing ADA and 504, on their own or share read it with the whole class.

5. Have students work independently or in pairs to create a Venn diagram that compares ADA and 504.
6. Have the students work individually, as partners, or in small groups of three or four to examine Source 13, the *Capitol Crawl* photograph, and complete the Details, Description, and Decision activity sheet.
7. Reconvene the class and discuss different responses and interpretations.
8. Have students read Source 14, the transcript of President Bush's speech, on their own or share read it with the whole class.
9. Have students work individually, as partners, or in small groups of three or four to complete the Important Phrases and Critical Thinking Questions activity sheets for Source 14.
10. Have the students work individually, as partners, or in small groups of three or four to examine Source 15, the photograph of the ADAPT protest, and complete the Details, Description, and Decision activity sheet.
11. After giving the students enough time to complete the activity, reconvene the class and discuss different responses and interpretations.
12. Assessment: Ask students to consider all of the unit's essential questions. These questions can be answered in notebooks, on a Jamboard, in Google Classroom, or as part of a discussion.
  - a. How did the disabled community fight for civil rights?
  - b. To what extent did the disability rights movement focus on independence for those with disabilities?
  - c. How did the movement for disabled rights change over time?
  - d. How did other movements for civil rights influence the disability rights movement?

## CULMINATING AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

### Option 1

1. Have students watch this video, *How the ADA Changed the Built World | Crip Camp | Netflix*, [youtube.com/watch?v=5aiFVhXSvgc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aiFVhXSvgc). Then, have them do "fieldwork" by examining the area where they live, work, or go to school to look for examples in their built environments of the effects of the ADA.
  - Have them document their findings in a "field notebook."
  - Field notebooks should include
    - i. Notes on what they observe
    - ii. Photographs or sketches of their observations
    - iii. Conclusions about the effects of the ADA on their environment
    - iv. Conclusions about the extent to which the ADA's effect on the built environment is incomplete
    - v. Conclusions about how the ADA makes life easier for all people

### Option 2

2. Have students write a document-based essay that incorporates at least seven of the sources included in this lesson. Here are two prompts to use:

- For the period 1950 to 1990, to what extent did the disability rights movement change over time?
- For the period 1950 to 1990, to what extent did other movements influence the disability rights movement?

This essay should

- Establish historical context
- Establish a clear and historically defensible thesis statement
- Prove an argument with a clear line of reasoning
- Prove an argument with evidence from at least seven of the sources used in this unit

### Option 3

3. Several disability rights activists are mentioned in this unit. Have students do a “deep dive” into the life of the individual by doing their own research. They can then use Canva, <https://www.canva.com/templates/> (or a similar digital platform), to create a “Did You Know About . . .” social media post about how that individual made a difference in the lives of people with disabilities. Once the post is complete, students should share it with their classmates and on your school’s social media page, if they choose.

Their posts should include

- An image of the individual
- A brief description of their contributions to the movement
- A quote by the individual
- A quote about the individual

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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Yet so many disabled people's lives and achievements are left out of history lessons. Learning disability history brings this ancestral past to light. It begins with the recognition that disabled people have always been a part of society, but it was not until the late nineteenth century that they were increasingly segregated, institutionalized, and sterilized under the new science of eugenics that declared their lives worthless. Deaf people had their language stripped from them. Mentally and physically disabled people were kept in underfunded and understaffed institutions for years. Some never reunited with their families. Hundreds were forgotten.

Disabled people pushed back against discrimination. Their fights were for dignity and freedom: to make their own decisions about their bodies, to live independently, and to get access to essential healthcare and assistive technologies that they needed to be self-sufficient. They fought not just for themselves, but for future generations. Activist Judith Heumann writes of this: "You drop a petal in the water, and it has a ripple effect."

As the Civil Rights Movement ignited waves of protests for rights across the country, disabled people created direct-action groups to seek out full inclusion in society. The Disabled in Action group led sit-in protests across the country to demand the passage of Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability. For four weeks in 1977, protesters occupied the Department of Health, Education and Welfare office in San Francisco, joining coalitions such as the Black Panther Party to hold the longest non-violent occupation of an American federal building. It was a historic milestone that provided disabled people federal civil rights protection for the first time and sparked similar transformations, including the Education of Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (later IDEA), which provided equal access to education; the American Disabled for Accessible Public Transit, which fought against wheelchair inaccessibility of public buses in 1977; and the 1988 Deaf President Now! campaign, which aimed to empower deaf people.

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But the fight is far from over. Disabled people still experience discrimination and are disproportionately impacted by systemic medical bias, racism, and ableism. They are always the first to place their bodies on the line in the fight for equality, and this is why we need to remember the work they've done and embrace our collective history so we can join their battles and continue fighting for equality and equity.

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## LESSON 1

**Disability Rights in the Wake of World War II  
In Context**

“World War II had profound impact on the disabled community as a whole. Even though wartime federal policies were ostensibly designed to meet labor needs, they sometimes had the ironic consequence of driving people with disabilities away from the workplace--regardless of race or sex. Simultaneously, however, other government and industrial policies encouraged the employment of people with disabilities in order to meet wartime crisis demands. And like other wars before it, World War II expanded the ranks of Americans with disabilities.”

Source: Kim E. Nielsen, *A Disability History of the United States* (Strawberry Hills, New South Wales, Australia: Read How You Want, 2012), 146.

## Source 1: "Hire the Handicapped" Poster, 1951



Edgar Franklin Wittmack, "America Needs All of Us," President's Committee on National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week, US Department of Labor, 1951 (Smithsonian National Museum of American History)




**DETAILS, DESCRIPTION, AND DECISION**

Name

Period

Date

**Details, Description, and Decision: “Hire the Handicapped” Poster**

Give this poster a title:

**PEOPLE**
**Details About:**

Identify the person/people in this image.

**OBJECTS**
**Details About:**

Identify the object(s) in this image.

Descriptive Summary Sentence:

Descriptive Summary Sentence:

**ACTION/ACTIVITY**
**Details About:**

Identify the action/activity in this image.

**OVERALL ASSESSMENT**
**Decision:**

What have I learned from this image about disability rights in the United States during the mid-twentieth century?

Descriptive Summary Sentence:

**Source 2. “Statement of Paul A. Strachan, President,  
American Federation of the Physically Handicapped,” 1954**

Mr. Chairman:

The most important problem before the Nation today is, safeguarding and improving the health and economic conditions of our own citizenry.

Rehabilitation and Employment of our 38,000,000 Handicapped citizens, including the Blind, Partially Sighted, Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Amputees, Arthritics, Cardiacs, Cerebral Palsied, Diabetics, Epileptics, victims of Muscular Dystrophy, Multiple Sclerosis, Poliomyetitis, Rheumatism, Tuberculosis, and other “cripplers”, as well as those having Congenital Defects and Deformities, is, of necessity, of prime concern to you, and to all Members of Congress, generally. . . .

We respectfully point out the necessity of establishing this Agency, not only for the advancement of welfare of Handicapped, themselves, but for the benefit of the whole Nation, and, briefly, the bill would –

1. Establish an Independent Agency, based for housekeeping purposes in the Department of Labor.
2. Establish in said Agency, an Advisory Council on Affairs of the Handicapped . . .
3. Establishes an Office of Services for Blind in the Agency . . .
4. Establishes Cooperative Enterprises for Handicapped Revolving Fund, with 10,000,000 as initial appropriation, to take the first step towards providing Handicapped a practical means to be trained in business and job conditions, so they may stand on their ‘own feet’ . . .
5. Establishes a Federal Inter-Agency Committee on Rehabilitation and Employment of Handicapped . . .
6. Provides a \$60 monthly Federal grant to totally disabled persons, who are unfeasible for rehabilitation . . .
7. Provides \$5,000,000 initial, and \$2,000,000 annual continuing appropriation, for grants for training of homebound persons.

This is very important, since, particularly in rural areas, today, there is little or no means for providing this essential service at all, and, given such training, many such home-bound, could support themselves, wholly, or in part.

8. Provides \$10,000,000 Revolving Loan Fund, from which States which have exhausted their appropriations for rehabilitation may borrow . . .
9. Establishes a Division of Handicapped in the United States Civil Service Commission. As we are dealing with millions of Handicapped, including Disabled Veterans, facilitating their examinations, tests for physical capacities, and ultimate appointment, make such Division imperative.
10. Provides for promotion of public safety programs designed to safeguard life and limb on Federal property. This, no doubt, would save the Government millions of dollars in present cost of accidents and disease.

11. Provides for reports from Federal agencies having parts of the Handicapped program . . .
12. Provides special programs for the Severely Handicapped, (those from 60 to 100%) disabled,) . . .
13. Provides for Rehabilitation Centers throughout the Nation . . .
14. Establishes a Federal Second Injury Tax and Fund, something which has been vitally needed for the past 50 years, and which, when functioning, will enable hundreds of thousands of Severely Handicapped, with multiple disabilities, to secure and hold remunerative employment, and thus be enabled to support themselves, their families, and make their contribution to the Nation, as a whole, by paying Federal, State, County and Municipal taxes.
15. Provides legal definitions of Physically Handicapped person, and, persons who are totally disabled and unfeasible for rehabilitation. Lack of clear definitions, today, are not only confusing, but often seriously obstruct the application of benefits needed by the individual.

\* \* \* \* \*

. . . We are today at the point where, as a matter of national policy, we must determine whether or not we shall continue the expensive fallacy of so-called Public Assistance, which produces nothing, and provides no remedies other than meagre, temporary aid, or, that we shall make a capital investment in the individual Handicapped citizens and get them onto their feet so they may make their own contribution to our economic and social life, and be tax-payers, instead of tax-eaters.

Source: Paul A. Strachan, "Statement of Paul A. Strachan, President American Federation of the Physically Handicapped On: S. 2570, to Establish a Federal Agency for Handicapped," April 7, 1954, Texas Disability History Collection, <https://library.uta.edu/txdisabilityhistory/doc/20001875-0>.

**IMPORTANT PHRASES**

Name

Period

Date

**2. "Statement of Paul A. Strachan," 1954**

Which phrases or sentences in these excerpts from the "Statement of Paul A. Strachan" are the most important or powerful? Choose three and give the reason for your choice.

Phrase 1:

Why is this phrase  
important or powerful?

Phrase 2:

Why is this phrase  
important or powerful?

Phrase 3:

Why is this phrase  
important or powerful?

**CRITICAL THINKING**

Name

Period

Date

**2. "Statement of Paul A. Strachan," 1954**

Cite evidence from the text in your answers.

**Critical Thinking Question 1**

What problem does Paul Strachan hope the bill, S. 2570, will solve?

**Critical Thinking Question 2**

What are four specific measures that Strachan suggests are included in the bill?

**Critical Thinking Question 3**

Paul Strachan argues that the bill would benefit all people in the United States. What is his argument? Is it an effective strategy? Explain.

## LESSON 2

### The Independent Living Movement In Context

“The trend in the late 1950s and early 1960s toward deinstitutionalization allowed people with severe disabilities to begin entering the mainstream, bring a new population to the developing disability rights movement. Nearly all people with serious physical impairments had trouble coping with a physical environment so ill-adapted to their needs, and many were spurred into activism by the discrimination and lack of understanding they encountered.”

“The emergence of people with severe disabilities from institutions, in combination with strategies for independent living that allowed them to participate in the community, was a pivotal force in the evolving disability rights movement. At a previous time, many of the individuals who would become prime movers in the ongoing civil rights struggle for equal rights for people with disabilities might have remained hidden away in institutions or confined in their homes.”

Source: Doris Z. Fleischer and Frieda Zames, *The Disability Rights Movement: From Charity to Confrontation* (Temple University Press, 2001), 33 and 47.

### Source 3. Disabled In Action of Metropolitan New York: A Discussion with Founder Judy Heumann, ca. 2002

“ . . . We asked her about the need for the independent living movement.”

Judy: . . . I was feeling the effect of the lack of exposure in our society, that’s lack of exposure from disabled people being integrated in the community . . . resulting in . . . not only people treating me differently, and talking to me differently, acting differently towards me, but it was also resulting in many barriers that were placed before myself and the millions of other disabled children, and adults. . . .

“What are independent living and the independent living movement?”

Judy: The independent living movement is really all about a disability rights, disability control movement, where we are looking at every aspect of what needs to be changed in order to allow people to live their lives where disability isn’t a handicap and I think you know we have the centers as one component of what goes on with the independent living movement, disability rights movement. . . .

“We asked Judy how she got involved in the independent living movement.”

Judy: . . . One of the positive things were that when I was at camp with other disabled kids we got to begin to be able to do some . . . thinking about how we would organize. . . . I got to college . . . I have never really seen a building where there was a step into the bathroom . . . and so it really became incumbent on all of us all of us with disabilities to begin to look at what we needed to do in order to deal with some of these problems and there were many other problems. . . .

I was interested in being a teacher and what I learned was that there were no people who used wheelchairs who had been hired to teach in the entire New York City system. . . .

When I actually applied for my teaching credentials you had to take three exams, a written exam, an oral exam and a medical exam. All three of those exams were given in completely inaccessible buildings. So I had to be carried up 1 to 2 flights of stairs. . . . I passed the oral exam and I passed the written exam but I failed the medical exam and the board wrote down that I failed because I couldn’t walk and so I sued the Board of Ed. . . .

So suing the Board of Ed and getting that credential and actually teaching really helped me personally to make decisions and realize that, again, when you begin to push, push, push, in many cases you can beat the system.

“How did she become an activist in the disability rights movement?”

Judy: When I was going through this lawsuit with the Board of Education there was a lot of publicity. . . . When the first article appeared in the paper, in the New York Times, I started to get calls from people, letters were being written to me saying: I have someone in my family who is experiencing discrimination or I have a disability myself and these were some of the problems that I have been facing. . . .

So we were really interested in looking at creating something that had the influence of younger people. . . . The transportation problems, the housing problems, the education problems, the employment problems, the effect of the telephone on our lives, all of those; the sheltered workshops, travel, all of those issues were things that we wanted to deal with. . . .

So we set up an organization that was originally called Handicapped in Action. I hated that name . . . handicapped was a beggar’s term . . . and we changed the name to Disabled in Action.

Source: “A Discussion with Judy Heumann on Independent Living,” ca, 2002, Disabled In Action of Metropolitan New York, [disabledinaction.org/heumann.html](http://disabledinaction.org/heumann.html).

**IMPORTANT PHRASES**

Name

Period

Date

**3. "A Discussion with Judy Heumann"**

Which phrases or sentences in these excerpts from "A Discussion with Judy Heumann" are the most important or powerful? Choose three and give the reason for your choice.

Phrase 1:

Why is this phrase  
important or powerful?

Phrase 2:

Why is this phrase  
important or powerful?

Phrase 3:

Why is this phrase  
important or powerful?



#### Source 4. “On Disability Rights: Highlights from Speeches by Ed Roberts,” 1977

. . . I went to Berkeley. When I first began talking with the administration, they told me, “We tried cripples, and they don’t work.” I was adamant about going there. It was 1964 — I had to sue them to get in; the same semester James Meredith was escorted into an all-white classroom, I was rolling into a Berkeley classroom.

. . . The dorms weren’t accessible, and we had to find a place that would accommodate my 800 pound iron lung. They finally decided that I could live . . . on the edge of campus. Soon there were a bunch of us crips at Berkeley. It was an exciting time. The protests and student movements were rising all around us, and we were right there. . . .

I encourage everyone to go out and get arrested. Not just for anything, but for the cause, with ADAPT [Americans Disabled for Accessible Public Transit] for example. Getting arrested for what you believe in can really change your perspective; it can strengthen your resolve. . . . I learned a lot from the women’s movement. They used to let me go to their meetings; I guess they saw a connection between our experiences. I remember them talking about how to deal with stereotypes of weakness and passivity that society placed on them. I heard women talk about how they had manipulated men by capitalizing on these stereotypes. I realized that disability is actually a strength. . . .

I remember meeting with Leonard Peltier before he was arrested. I met with Stokeley Carmichael, and others in the Black Power movement. When I told them that we were all fighting the same civil rights battle, they didn’t believe me. . . .

I learned a lot about organizing while I was at Berkeley. As a teacher’s assistant, a small group of us organized a student strike in order to fight for reasonable wages. We held teach-ins and thousands of students skipped their classes. I realized then that a few people could really make a big difference. . . .

Soon after that, a few of us decided to try and replicate our vision of what the DSP [Disabled Student Program] was for the community. . . . The Berkeley CIL [Center for Independent Living] was also revolutionary as a model for advocacy-based organizations: no longer would we tolerate being spoken for. Our laws said that at least 51% of the staff and Board had to be people with disabilities, or it would be the same old oppression. . . . We secured the first curb cut in the country. . . .

We can only really be free and take our place in this society if we have economic freedom, which means careers. I remember we used to talk to employers about hiring people with disabilities as a moral issue: it was a charitable thing to do. Now, we have the ADA and there are companies like McDonald’s who are hiring many people with disabilities. I once met the president of McDonald’s and asked him why he hired disabled people. “Because it’s good for my bottom line,” he said. “We have found that people with disabilities are loyal workers.” This is how it is today. People with disabilities want to work. We have converted our approach from asking to be hired out of sympathy to marketing ourselves as a significant employee pool, and a consumer pool as well. This is the legacy of the disability civil rights movement.

Source: “CommonLit Library: Browse Content by Theme, Grade Level and More,” CommonLit, [commonlit.org/en/texts/on-disability-rights-highlights-from-speeches-by-ed-roberts](https://commonlit.org/en/texts/on-disability-rights-highlights-from-speeches-by-ed-roberts)

**IMPORTANT PHRASES**

Name

Period

Date

**4. “On Disability Rights: Highlights from Speeches by Ed Roberts”**

Which phrases or sentences in these excerpts from “On Disability Rights” are the most important or powerful? Choose three and give the reason for your choice.

Phrase 1:

Why is this phrase  
important or powerful?

Phrase 2:

Why is this phrase  
important or powerful?

Phrase 3:

Why is this phrase  
important or powerful?

**CRITICAL THINKING**

Name

Period

Date

**3 and 4: Critical Thinking Questions for “A Discussion with Judy Heumann” and “On Disability Rights”**

Cite evidence from the text in your answers.

**Critical Thinking Question 1**

1. To what extent were their educations important in generating activism for both Heumann and Roberts?

**Critical Thinking Question 2**

2. What did Ed Roberts say he learned from the women’s movement?

**Critical Thinking Question 3**

3. Roberts mentions several other individuals and movements for civil rights. What other civil rights leaders does he mention? Why does he mention them as he is discussing disability rights?

**CRITICAL THINKING**

Name

Period

Date

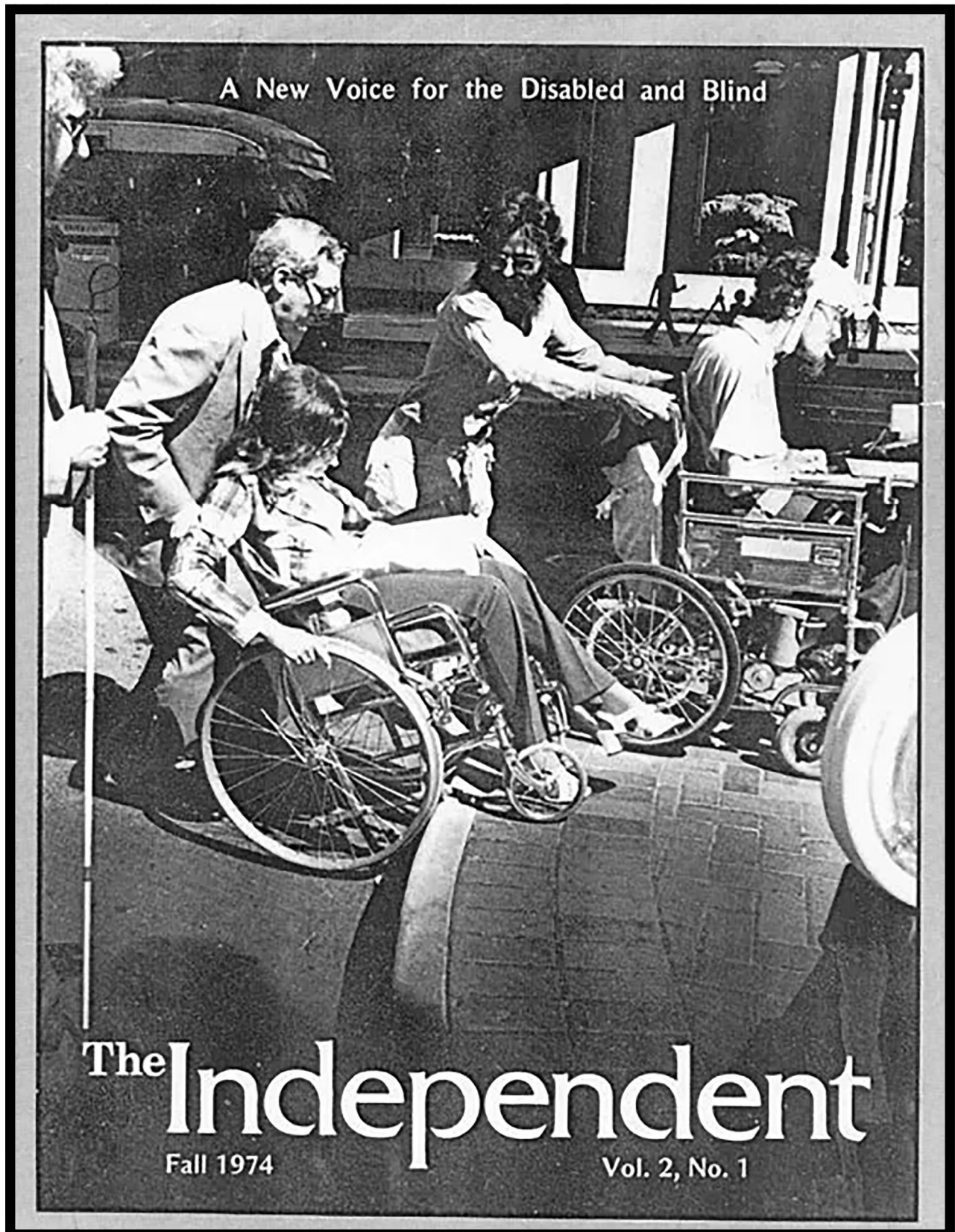
**3 and 4: Critical Thinking Questions for “A Discussion with Judy Heumann” and “On Disability Rights”****Critical Thinking Question 4**

4. To what extent were both Heumann and Roberts interested in changing the status quo? What specifically did they want to change? Provide specific examples of the language that each uses to emphasize change.

**Critical Thinking Question 5**

5. What did Roberts mean when he said, “We can only really be free and take our place in this society if we have economic freedom, which means careers”? Cite specific examples from this essay that illustrate what he means by “economic freedom.”

Source 5. *The Independent*, 1974



*(The Center for Independent Living)*


**DETAILS, DESCRIPTION, AND DECISION**

Name

Period

Date

**5. Details, Description, and Decision for *The Independent***

Give this image a title:

**PEOPLE****Details About:**

Identify the person/people in this image.

**OBJECTS****Details About:**

Identify the object(s) in this image.

Descriptive Summary Sentence:

Descriptive Summary Sentence:

**ACTION/ACTIVITY****Details About:**

Identify the action/activity in this image.

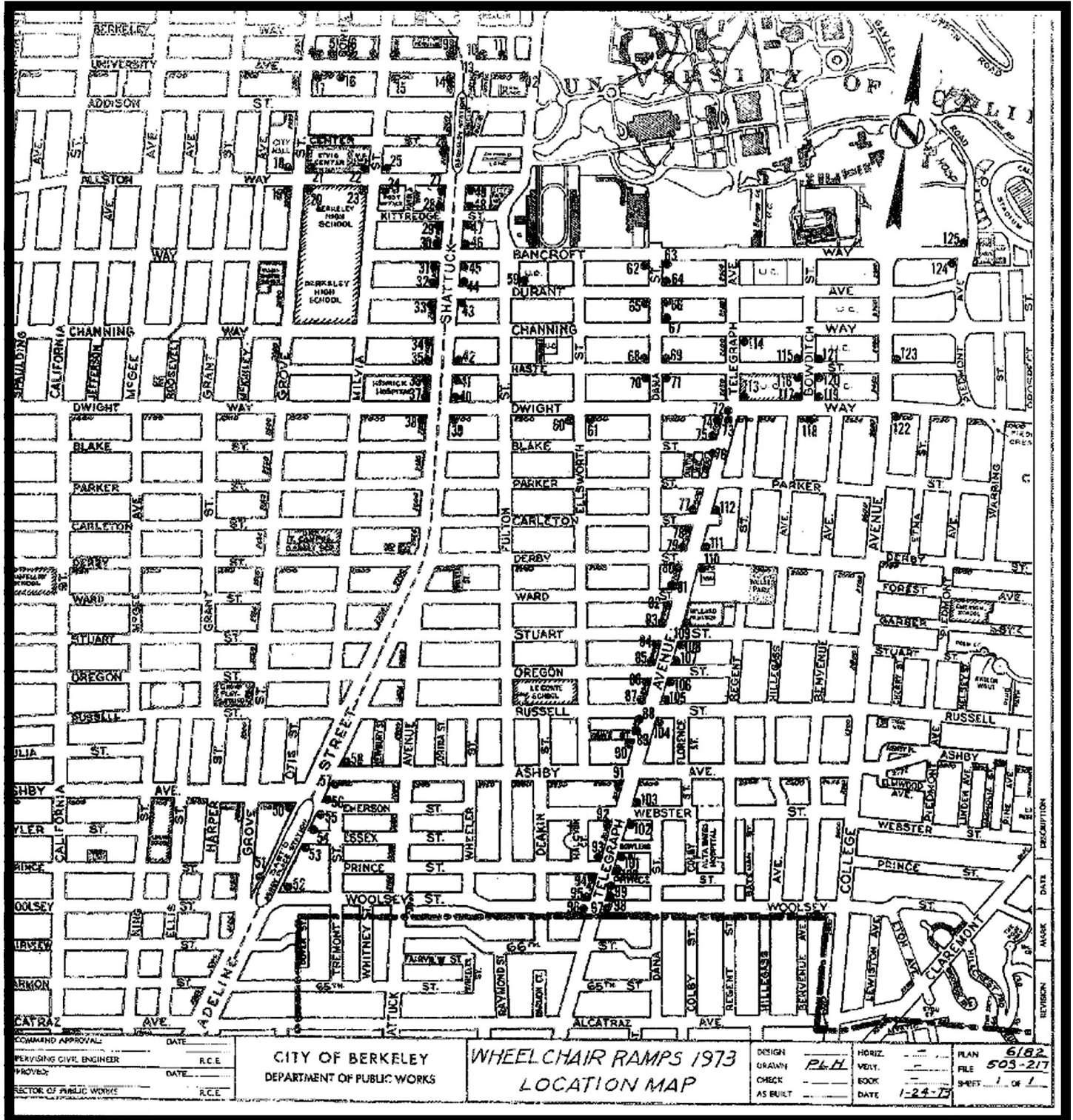
**OVERALL ASSESSMENT****Decision:**

What have I learned from this image about disability rights in the United States during the mid-twentieth century?

Descriptive Summary Sentence:

Source 6. "Wheelchair Ramps 1973 Location Map," Council of the City of Berkeley

The black dots on this map indicate wheelchair ramps (curb cuts) proposed by the city of Berkeley.



(The Berkeley Revolution, June 5, 2018, revolution.berkeley.edu/ruths-wheel-chair-route/#menu-main-nav)


**DETAILS, DESCRIPTION, AND DECISION**

Name

Period

Date

### 6. Details, Description, and Decision for “Wheelchair Ramps 1973 Location Map”

Give this image a title:

**PEOPLE****Details About:**

Identify the person/people in this image.

**OBJECTS****Details About:**

Identify the object(s) in this image.

Descriptive Summary Sentence:

Descriptive Summary Sentence:

**ACTION/ACTIVITY****Details About:**

Identify the action/activity in this image.

**OVERALL ASSESSMENT****Decision:**

What have I learned from this image about disability rights in the United States during the mid-twentieth century?

Descriptive Summary Sentence:



**CRITICAL THINKING**

Name

Period

Date

**6. Critical Thinking Questions for “Wheelchair Ramps 1973 Location Map”****Critical Thinking Question 1**

1. What short-term effects might wheelchair ramps (curb cuts) have on individuals with disabilities as they navigate their wheelchairs on sidewalks, such as those along Telegraph Avenue?

**Critical Thinking Question 2**

2. What long-term effects might curb cuts have on the lives of people with disabilities?

**Critical Thinking Question 3**

3. How might curb cuts, such as those along Telegraph Avenue, affect the lives of people without disabilities?

## LESSON 3

Ratifying Section 504  
In Context

## WATCH:

A Brief Recounting of the 504 Sit-In, [youtube.com/watch?v=z3Swx-FNQVI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3Swx-FNQVI) (8:42 mins)

1. Before you watch the video, what do you already know about the 504 Sit-In?
2. What do you wonder about the 504 Sit-In?
3. After you watch the video, what did you learn about the 504 Sit-In after watching this video?

## READ:

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibited employment discrimination based on disability, but while libraries, schools, and other public buildings were available, they were not necessarily accessible to individuals with disabilities. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act focused on changing the environment, rather than the individual who would access the environment:

The cost to meet the new standards, which required retrofitting and fixing the many federally funded buildings around the country, would have been enormous, and as administrations changed, action was delayed for years.

By 1977 — after years of letter writing, lobbying and pleading with lawmakers — disability activists were tired of waiting. The American Coalition of Citizens With Disabilities said that if Joseph A. Califano Jr., the secretary of Health, Education and Welfare under President Jimmy Carter, did not take action by April 4, there would be national protests.<sup>1</sup>

Califano did not take action and disability rights activists made good on their pledge—protests erupted in cities across the nation. The most significant and longest-lasting of these was the occupation of the Health, Employment and Welfare Building in San Francisco where more than one hundred protesters maintained their presence for about a month.

<sup>1</sup> Julia Carmel, “Before the A.D.A., There Was Section 504,” *New York Times*, July 22, 2020, [nytimes.com/2020/07/22/us/504-sit-in-disability-rights.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/22/us/504-sit-in-disability-rights.html).

**IN YOUR OWN WORDS**

Name

Period

Date

**Source 7. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in section 705 (20) of this title, shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency or by the United States Postal Service.

Source: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, "Civil Rights Center," US Department of Labor, [dol.gov/agencies/oasam/centers-offices](https://dol.gov/agencies/oasam/centers-offices).

**Directions**

1. Underline or highlight five to ten keywords from this provision of Section 504.
2. Put Section 504 into your own words.

**GUIDED LISTENING**

Name

Period

Date

**Source 8. Guided Listening for “Patient No More” Speech by Kitty Cone, 1977**

Source: Longmore Institute, “Patient No More: Kitty Cone Victory Speech,” YouTube, posted July 16, 2015, [youtube.com/watch?v=HQ3kcSgAX-w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQ3kcSgAX-w).

**MINUTES 0 TO 1:24:**

1. Who is speaking?
2. Who is the intended audience?
3. When and where is this speech being given?

**MINUTES 1:24 TO 3:30:**

4. What is the purpose of this speech?
5. What is the theme of this speech?
6. What is the tone of this speech?
7. What is the mood of the speaker? What is the mood of the audience?

**MINUTES 3:30 TO END:**

8. What are two claims that the speaker makes? What evidence does the speaker use to support their claims?

**DISCUSSION:**

9. Where does the speaker use the language of the Civil Rights Movement? Why might this be effective?
10. Where do you hear examples of other specific civil rights movements? Why might the speaker mention other civil rights movements?

Source 9. "Handicapped Win Demands," *The Black Panther*, May 7, 1977 (transcript follows)

Dellums Blasts Carter On Jobs For Youth SEE CENTERFOLD

THE BLACK PANTHER

INTERCOMMUNAL NEWS SERVICE

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

VOL. XVII NO. 25 SATURDAY, MAY 7, 1977 **25¢**



Pressure Forces Califano To Sign 504 Regulations

# HANDICAPPED WIN DEMANDS— END H.E.W. OCCUPATION



(San Francisco, Calif.) - "We Have Overcome — can you hear it — We Have Overcome," said the final group of handicapped and disabled people returning from Washington, some with wide smiles, others with lingering tears, bunched together in the airport lobby.

"We Have Overcome," they sang to the depths of their hearts, just as their counterparts had sung that same tune before ending their triumphant 26-day sit-in.

It was their unofficial theme song, once a source of hope and inspiration, now transformed to coincide with their tremendous victory, just as their powerful protest will soon transform the face of America.

In truth, the wheelchair-confined and disabled people who successfully took on the federal government — occupying the Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) offices in San Francisco for nearly four weeks, while sending a delegation to Washington, D.C., to directly confront their oppressors — had overcome, and, indeed, their message was heard across the land.

On Thursday, April 28, HEW Secretary Joseph Califano, signed into law the far-reaching Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, thus barring discrimination against disabled people in all buildings and facilities receiving federal funds.

The signing of the long-delayed implementation regulations was the significant victory the handicapped and disabled had sought in

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



Blind demonstrator DENNIS BILLUPS (left) and other protesters triumphantly ended their 26-day sit-in at San Francisco's HEW offices last week. Black Panther Party members CHUCK JACKSON and BRAD LOMAX (top, photo) played an integral role in this strategic struggle for human rights.

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 4501 E. 14TH STREET  
 OAKLAND, CALIF. 94621

(Disability Social History Project, [disabilityhistory.org/2021/12/19/the-504-protests-and-the-black-panther-party/](https://disabilityhistory.org/2021/12/19/the-504-protests-and-the-black-panther-party/))

Source 9. "Handicapped Win Demands," *The Black Panther*, May 7, 1977 (transcript follows)

4 THE BLACK PANTHER, SATURDAY, MAY 7, 1977

## HANDICAPPED WIN

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

nationwide demonstrations on April 5, resulting in building occupations at HEW offices in New York and Los Angeles.

But there was another victory, a triumph of the human will, actually, achieved here in the Bay Area. It is the type of victory that can't be pinpointed by any one single act, but in the long run is as significant as Califano's signing of Section 504.

Its expression came in many ways: for instance, when protest leader Cece Weeks, a frail, blond-haired young woman confined to a wheelchair, suddenly explained the night before the HEW occupation ended, "You know, for the first time in my life, I'm proud to be handicapped"; Or when a young Black woman came up to Brad Lomax, a Black Panther Party member victimized

not just people shut-in in convalescence homes, but everyone in this country has learned that disabled people have a tremendous amount of strength, that we are capable of leading a struggle that has won major gains from the government.

"There's a great deal of self-confidence, a great deal of pride, that we have given to ourselves and to disabled people all over the country. But we've also shown that if you wage a

really effective struggle and you don't give up, you can win a victory."

In a very real sense, ending the HEW occupation was like breaking up a family — a farewell to the tightly knit, caring, human community the disabled demonstrators and their aides formed among themselves.

It was this feeling of happiness in victory, combined with a hint of remorse, that Ron Washington expressed when asked how he felt



One woman jokingly accused the Party of undermining her fast of close to two weeks: "I couldn't stand it when I saw those bar-be-qued ribs," she commented.

Thus, when Ericka Huggins, a leading BPP member and director of the model Oakland Community School, addressed the crowd at the Saturday victory rally, she received a tremendous ovation.

"I've been thinking since I've been here this morning that the United States has always had its niggers," Ericka said. "And they come in all sizes, shapes, colors, classes, and disabilities."

"The signing of 504, this demonstration, the sit-in, this beautiful thing that has happened these past weeks, is all to say that the niggers are going to be set free..."

Over and over the significant themes were repeated at the rally — "human rights," "equal access," "an end to segregation," "finally feeling like a human being" — all summed up by Kitty Cone when she simply yelled into the microphone the one thought behind all the smiling emotions, "WE WON, WE WON, WE WON!"



about leaving:

"Well, there's some hesitancy because of the relationship that was developed here — the comradeship around political needs and working together to get those needs taken care of. It's just an incredible feeling."

During the course of the 26-day sit-in, the Black Panther Party played a leading support role in providing food for the demonstrators. Over and over again, the disabled protesters credited the BPP with literally sustaining their struggle, "keeping us alive body and soul," as one person put it.



ERICKA HUGGINS, speaking to disabled demonstrators, commented, "The signing of 504 . . . the beautiful thing that has happened these past few weeks, is all to say 'the niggers' are going to be set free.'"

by multiple sclerosis, upon his return from Washington, and embracing him in his wheelchair, remarked, "Thank you for setting an example for all of us"; Or when Dennis Billups, a 24-year-old Black man blind from birth and in many ways the spiritual leader of the San Francisco demonstrators, marched joyfully out of the Old Federal Building holding a sign he instructed to be made, "You don't have to see it to know."

As Kitty Cone pointed out at the group's final press conference — at which they announced they intended to leave the building at 12:00 noon on Saturday, April 30, and would spend the night before cleaning up:

"Second to the signing of the regulations the way we wanted them to be signed, the most important thing that came out of this is the public birth of a disabled movement.

"People all over the country,

### 504: Civil Rights For The Disabled

(HEW) Secretary Joseph Califano signed a 47-page document of sweeping regulations implementing Section 504. The regulations signed by Califano provide that:

- Alcoholics and drug addicts are included in the definition of handicapped persons, one of the major goals of the demonstrators.

**HANDICAPPED CHILD**

- Every handicapped child is entitled to be educated in regular public school classrooms with nonhandicapped children, unless placement in a special residential setting is necessary. In that case, public authorities will be financially responsible for providing all necessary facilities, including tuition, room and board.
- All new buildings and facilities must be readily accessible to and usable by the handicapped, free of architectural barriers. This apparently includes buildings in

the blueprint stage, another key goal of the demonstrators.

- Programs and activities in existing buildings must be made accessible to the handicapped within 60 days. If the buildings are inaccessible, they must be made accessible within three years without exception.
- Employees not discriminate against the handicapped provided that the disability does not prevent them from performing the work if reasonable accommodation is provided to meet their specific needs.

These regulations apply to institutions or programs receiving HEW funds, therefore covering virtually all public schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, social welfare agencies, offices of doctors receiving Medicare funds, as well as many private businesses. □

(Disability Social History Project, [disabilityhistory.org/2021/12/19/the-504-protests-and-the-black-panther-party/](http://disabilityhistory.org/2021/12/19/the-504-protests-and-the-black-panther-party/))

## Transcript

### HANDICAPPED WIN DEMANDS – END H.E.W. OCCUPATION

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It was their unofficial theme song, once a source of hope and inspiration, now transformed to coincide with their tremendous victory, just as their powerful protest will soon transform the face of America.

In truth, the wheelchair-confined and disabled people who successfully took on the federal government – occupying the Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) offices in San Francisco for nearly four weeks, while sending a delegation to Washington, D.C., to directly confront their oppressors – had overcome, and, indeed, their message was heard across the land.

On Thursday, April 28, HEW Secretary Joseph Califano, signed into law the far-reaching Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, thus barring discrimination against disabled people in all buildings and facilities receiving federal funds.

The signing of the long-delayed implementation regulations was the significant victory the handicapped and disabled had sought in nationwide demonstrations on April 5, resulting in building occupations at HEW offices in New York and Los Angeles. . . .

Its expression came in many ways; for instance, when protest leader Cece Weeks, a frail, blond-haired young woman confined to a wheelchair, suddenly explained the night before the HEW occupation ended, “You know, for the first time in my life, I’m proud to be handicapped”;

Or when a young Black woman came up to Brad Lomax, a Black Panther Party member victimized by multiple sclerosis, upon his return from Washington, and embracing him in his wheelchair, remarked, “Thank you for setting an example for all of us”:

Or when Dennis Billups, a 24-year-old Black man blind from birth and in many ways the spiritual leader of the San Francisco demonstrators, marched joyfully out of the Old Federal Building holding a sign he instructed to be made, “You don’t have to see it to know.”

As Kitty Cone pointed out at the group’s final press conference – at which they announced they intended to leave the building at 12:00 noon on Saturday, April 30, and would spend the night before cleaning up:

“Second to the signing of the regulations the way we wanted them to be signed, the most important thing that came out of this is the public birth of a disabled movement.

“People all over the country, not just people shut-in convalescence homes, but everyone in this country has learned that disabled people have a tremendous amount of strength, that we are capable of leading a struggle that has won major gains from the government. . . .”

It was this feeling of happiness in victory, combined with a hint of remorse, that Ron Washington expressed when asked how he felt about leaving:

“Well, there’s some hesitancy because of the relationship that was developed here – the comradeship around political needs and working together to get those needs taken care of. It’s just an incredible feeling.”

During the course of the 26-day sit-in, the Black Panther Party played a leading support role in providing food for the demonstrators. Over and over again, the disabled protesters credited the BPP with literally sustaining their struggle, “keeping us alive body and soul,” as one person put it. . . .

Over and over the significant themes were repeated at the rally – “human rights,” “equal access,” “and end to segregation,” “finally feeling like a human being” – all summed up by Kitty Cone when she simply yelled into the microphone the one thought behind all the smiling emotions, “WE WON, WE WON, WE WON!”

Source: “The 504 Protests and the Black Panther Party,” Disability Social History Project, [disabilityhistory.org/2021/12/19/the-504-protests-and-the-black-panther-party/](https://disabilityhistory.org/2021/12/19/the-504-protests-and-the-black-panther-party/).



**ANALYZING A NEWS ARTICLE**

Name

Period

Date

**9. Analyzing a News Article: “Handicapped Win Demands”**

Source (name of newspaper/magazine/website):

Date published:

Article Title:

1. What did you already know about the topic?

**2. Basic Information Presented**

Who?

What?

Where?

When?


 CLOSE READING

Name

Period

Date

### 9. Close Reading of “Handicapped Win Demands”

- For each individual, briefly describe their role in the 504 Sit-in at the Department of Health, Education and Welfare offices in San Francisco. Or provide a quote that summarizes each individual’s experience during the protest.

Individual	Role in or quote about the 504 Sit-in
Joseph Califano	
Cece Weeks	
Brad Lomax	
Dennis Billups	
Kitty Cone	
Ron Washington	

- Star or highlight all examples in the May 7, 1977, article from *The Black Panther* newspaper where you see the disability rights movement intersecting with other movements for civil rights.

Source 10. Ken Stein's "Sign 504 Now" Picket Sign, 1977



*(Smithsonian National Museum of American History, [everybody.si.edu/media/745](http://everybody.si.edu/media/745))*

**Discussion Questions for Section 504 Sign**

1. What is the first thing that you notice about this sign?
2. What was Ken Stein demanding?
3. Why might this sign be considered effective in sending its intended message?

### Source 11. Ken Stein Oral History, 2014

In an interview given at StoryCorps San Francisco in 2014, Ken Stein said the following:

I was not inside. I was outside the building the whole time, carrying around a picket sign singing, “We Shall Not Be Moved” with other people. My picket sign that I made it was part of the Smithsonian disability rights history collection. I was very proud that was next to the Greensboro lunch counter as far as the importance of 504, I think for me, and I think for a lot of people, participation in the 504 demonstration was a focal point in our lives, something that where everything before then came into a clear point and everything spread out from that, after. I think a lot of ways the independent disability rights movement can be seen in the same way that was the first time there was a mass, organized cross-disability demonstration.

Source: Alice Wong, “Ingrid Tischer and Ken Stein, Berkeley, CA,” Disability Visibility Project, December 27, 2014, [disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2014/08/02/disability-visibility-project-ingrid-and-ken-berkeley-ca/](https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2014/08/02/disability-visibility-project-ingrid-and-ken-berkeley-ca/).

**CRITICAL THINKING**

Name

Period

Date

**Critical Thinking Questions for Ken Stein Oral History, 2014****Critical Thinking Question 1**

1. Why does Ken Stein consider the 504 demonstration to be a “focal point” in his life?

**Critical Thinking Question 2**

2. What do you think he means when he refers to the 504 demonstration as a “cross-disability” demonstration?

**Critical Thinking Question 3**

3. What intersections do you notice between Ken Stein’s statement and the Civil Rights Movement?

## LESSON 4

### The Americans With Disabilities Act In Context

“The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 is the best-known civil rights legislation for those with disabilities—impacting an estimated 43 million people at the time of its passage. The ADA built on the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975. It also built on the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which banned discrimination based on sex and race in employment and public places. Most importantly, the ADA built on centuries of activism on the part of people with disabilities, and centuries of public debate over rights, citizenship, and engagement in civic life.

“When the ADA was first introduced in Congress in 1988, people with disabilities, advocates, and family members from all over the country shared their stories of discrimination, harassment, and inaccessibility. They also shared their dreams of what a truly accessible democracy could mean. Those with HIV/AIDS shared their stories of how homophobia and ableism often combined in fiercely destructive ways. The ADA’s eventual passage required tremendous labor and sacrifice from activists such as Justin Dart and Evan Kemp of the George H. W. Bush administration, as well as from street-level activists and protestors. The ADA prohibits employment, access, housing, and educational discrimination against people with disabilities.”

Source: Kim E. Nielsen, *A Disability History of the United States* (Strawberry Hills, New South Wales, Australia: Read How You Want, 2012), 180–181.

## Source 12. Comparing the ADA and Section 504

### What is the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990?

“The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday activities. The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability just as other civil rights laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion. The ADA guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to enjoy employment opportunities, purchase goods and services, and participate in state and local government programs.”

Source: “Introduction to the Americans with Disabilities Act,” ADA.gov, [ada.gov/topics/intro-to-ada/](https://ada.gov/topics/intro-to-ada/).

### What is the difference between the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act?

“Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794 (“Section 504”) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by recipients of Federal financial assistance. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq. (“ADA”), prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by both public and private entities, whether or not they receive Federal financial assistance. Providers covered by Section 504 and/or the ADA may not deny benefits or services to qualified individuals with disabilities or provide lesser benefits than they provide to others. In general, an individual with a disability is “qualified” if that person meets the essential eligibility requirements for receipt of services or participation in the program or activity with or without reasonable modification to rules, policies or practices. The purpose of these laws is to ensure that covered programs are as accessible to persons with disabilities as they are to nondisabled individuals.”

Source: Office for Civil Rights (OCR), “Civil Rights Requirements-Applicable to Persons with Disabilities,” HHS.gov, [hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/special-topics/needy-families/persons-with-disabilities/index.html](https://hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/special-topics/needy-families/persons-with-disabilities/index.html).

**VENN DIAGRAM**

Name

Period

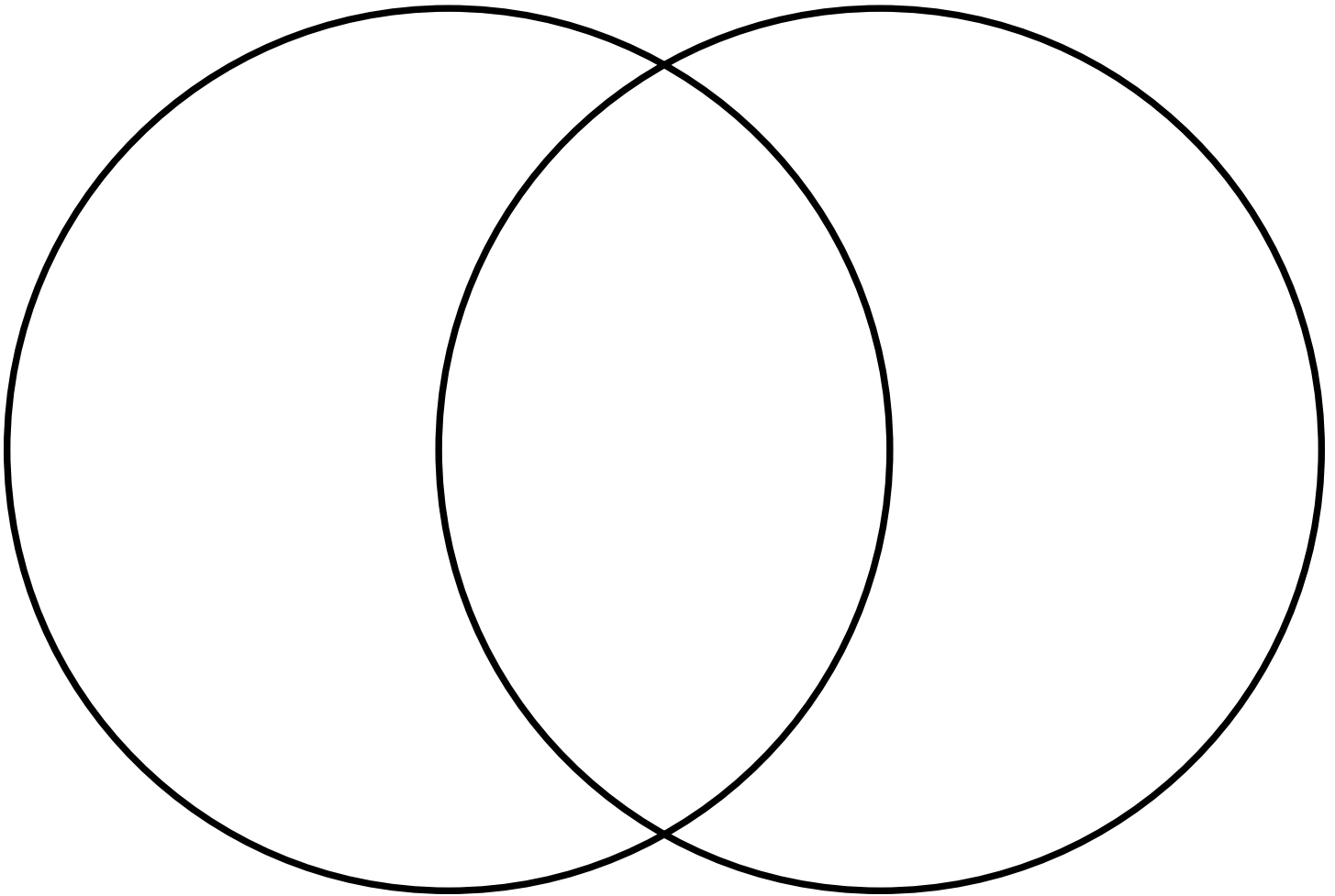
Date

12: Create a Venn Diagram that compares the ADA and Section 504

**ADA**

**Both**

**Section 504**





Source 13. "Capitol Crawl," by Anders Norén, Washington, DC, Monday, March 12, 1990



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**DETAILS, DESCRIPTION, AND DECISION**

Name

Period

Date

### 13. Details, Description, and Decision for *Capitol Crawl*

Title:

**PEOPLE****Details About:**

Identify the person/people in this image.

**OBJECTS****Details About:**

Identify the object(s) in this image.

Descriptive Summary Sentence:

Descriptive Summary Sentence:

**ACTION/ACTIVITY****Details About:**

Identify the action/activity in this image.

**OVERALL ASSESSMENT****Decision:**

What have I learned from this image about disability rights in the United States during the late-twentieth century?

Descriptive Summary Sentence:

### Source 14. Transcript of President George H. W. Bush's Statement on ADA, 1990

Today, I am signing S. 933, the "Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990." In this extraordinary year, we have seen our own Declaration of Independence inspire the march of freedom throughout Eastern Europe. It is altogether fitting that the American people have once again given clear expression to our most basic ideals of freedom and equality. The Americans with Disabilities Act represents the full flowering of our democratic principles, and it gives me great pleasure to sign it into law today.

In 1986, on behalf of President Reagan, I personally accepted a report from the National Council on Disability entitled "Toward Independence." In that report, the National Council recommended the enactment of comprehensive legislation to ban discrimination against persons with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is such legislation. It promises to open up all aspects of American life to individuals with disabilities -- employment opportunities, government services, public accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications.

This legislation is comprehensive because the barriers faced by individuals with disabilities are wide-ranging. Existing laws and regulations under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 have been effective with respect to the Federal Government, its contractors, and the recipients of Federal funds. However, they have left broad areas of American life untouched or inadequately addressed. Many of our young people, who have benefited from the equal education opportunity guaranteed under the Rehabilitation Act and the Education of the Handicapped Act, have found themselves on graduation day still shut out of the mainstream of American life. They have faced persistent discrimination in the workplace and barriers posed by inaccessible public transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications. . . .

The Administration and the Congress have carefully crafted the ADA to give the business community the flexibility to meet the requirements of the Act without incurring undue costs. Cost may be taken into account in determining how an employee is "reasonably accommodated," whether the removal of a barrier is "readily achievable," or whether the provision of a particular auxiliary aid would result in an "undue burden." The ADA's most rigorous access requirements are reserved for new construction where the added costs of accessible features are minimal in relation to overall construction costs. . . .

The ADA recognizes the necessity of educating the public about its rights and responsibilities under the Act. Under the ADA, the Attorney General will oversee Government-wide technical assistance activities. The Department of Justice will consult with the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Department of Transportation, the Federal Communications Commission, the National Council on Disability, and the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, among others, in effort. We will involve trade associations, advocacy groups, and other similar organizations that have existing lines of communications with covered entities and persons with disabilities. The participation of these organizations is a key element in assuring the success of the technical assistance effort.

In signing this landmark bill, I pledge the full support of my Administration for the Americans with Disabilities Act. . . . I pledge that we will fulfill those responsibilities efficiently and vigorously.

The Americans with Disabilities Act presents us all with an historic opportunity. It signals the end to the unjustified segregation and exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream of

American life. As the Declaration of Independence has been a beacon for people all over the world seeking freedom, it is my hope that the Americans with Disabilities Act will likewise come to be a model for the choices and opportunities of future generations around the world.

GEORGE BUSH

THE WHITE HOUSE,  
July 26, 1990.

Source: "Transcript of Statement by the President, July 26, 1990," National Archives and Records Administration, [archives.gov/research/americans-with-disabilities/transcriptions/naid-6037493-statement-by-the-president-americans-with-disabilities-act-of-1990.html](https://www.archives.gov/research/americans-with-disabilities/transcriptions/naid-6037493-statement-by-the-president-americans-with-disabilities-act-of-1990.html).

**IMPORTANT PHRASES**

Name

Period

Date

**14. Important Phrases for President George H. W. Bush's Statement on ADA**

Which phrases or sentences in these excerpts from President George Bush's Statement on ADA are the most important or powerful?

Choose three and give the reason for your choice.

Phrase 1:

Why is this phrase  
important or powerful?

Phrase 2:

Why is this phrase  
important or powerful?

Phrase 3:

Why is this phrase  
important or powerful?

**CRITICAL THINKING**

Name

Period

Date

**14. Critical Thinking Questions for President George H. W. Bush's Statement on ADA****Critical Thinking Question 1**

1. What are President Bush's arguments in support of the Americans with Disabilities Act?

**Critical Thinking Question 2**

2. Why do you think President Bush used language associated with civil rights in this address?

**Critical Thinking Question 3**

3. Are there any words or phrases that are reminiscent of other important documents in American history? What are they?

Source 15. ADAPT and People First members protest Atlanta nursing homes, October 2, 1990



*ADAPT and People First members protest Atlanta nursing homes, October 2, 1990. Used by permission.*

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**DETAILS, DESCRIPTION, AND DECISION**

Name

Period

Date

### 15. Details, Description, and Decision for Nursing Home Protest

Give this image a title:

#### PEOPLE

##### Details About:

Identify the person/people in this image.

#### OBJECTS

##### Details About:

Identify the object(s) in this image.

Descriptive Summary Sentence:

Descriptive Summary Sentence:

#### ACTION/ACTIVITY

##### Details About:

Identify the action/activity in this image.

#### OVERALL ASSESSMENT

##### Decision:

What have I learned from this image about disability rights in the United States during the late twentieth century?

Descriptive Summary Sentence: