

Disability & Citizenship

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Richard K. Scotch, Ph.D.

Professor of Sociology, Public Policy, and Political Economy • University of Texas, Dallas

“For What It’s Worth: Citizenship and Disability in the Twenty-first Century”

Citizenship has been a key concept in the development of the modern state. It implies the opportunity for political and civic participation, for due process, and for equitable treatment. Full citizenship rights, or at least rights comparable to those accorded to people without disabilities, have been a major goal of disability advocates for many years. Yet even when citizenship rights have been awarded by statute and/or through judicial action, these rights still may not reliably be claimed by many people with disabilities. Drawing on the experiences of the Americans with Disabilities Act and related statutes, the significance of citizenship for people with disabilities in economically advanced democracies such as the United States will be explored. In addition to the general question of whether attaining legal rights as citizens results in meaningful improvements in the lives of people with disabilities, the implications of class, gender, race, and other forms of inequality for the relationship between citizenship and disablement also will be examined.

Kim E. Nielsen, PhD.

Professor of History and Women’s & Gender Studies • University of Wisconsin, Green Bay

“Unfit for Inalienable Rights? Disability, Dependency, and Citizenship in the U.S.”

From the founding of the nation, the democratic ideals upon which the United States was built proclaimed that inalienable rights transformed peoples into citizens. Who could legitimately claim inalienable rights, however, was widely contested. Just as the colonists had sought and gained independence from Great Britain in order to create a successful and powerful country, the ideology of the new republic insisted that individual citizens seek and gain independence in order to create successful and powerful selves. In this political context, when dependency meant inequality, weakness, and reliance on others, and when disability was equated with dependency, disability became stigmatized and citizens with disabilities were stigmatized as inferior citizens. In this process, race, class, gender, and sexuality built on and became interwoven with definitions of disability. This presentation begins in the colonial period and provides a large historical sweep to the present, tracing the ideological, legislative, and policy development of ableist national ideals and citizenship ideologies. Fundamentally, this is an exploration of who, throughout U.S. history, has been considered unfit for inalienable rights.

280 Park Hall
Friday, April 27, 2012

8:30 AM–9 AM
coffee and pastries

9 AM–10 AM
welcome, David Gerber
and introduction to
disability studies, Mike Rembis

10 AM–12 PM
panel discussion

12 PM–2 PM
lunch

2 PM–4 PM
roundtable discussion with
self advocates

4 PM–5 PM
closing plenary

Allison C. Carey, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Sociology, Department of
Sociology and Anthropology, Shippensburg University

“Citizenship and the Family: The Dilemma of ‘Family Rights’”

Whereas family is typically seen as part of the “private sphere,” separate and protected from the public sphere, parents of children with disabilities are keenly aware that they exist in an often intense and troubled relationship with the public sphere as they seek both greater support and defense from it. For this reason, parents active in the early parents’ movement (1950s and 1960s) developed a relational concept of rights and supports, which posits that an individual exists in relationships and therefore rights need to address and support the network of relationships, most specifically the family. Through this history, we see that rights can be used to support and protect the family in particular ways, but cannot overcome the potential for conflict and oppression within the family itself. This paper draws on parent writings beginning in the 1940s, including parent memoirs, letters to public officials, and organizational documents, to examine the ways in which parents framed the issue of family rights and the dilemmas that emerge from that framing.