



Models of Disability:

Historical Context, Oppressive
Frameworks, and New Narratives

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What to Expect

Prioritize Access

Incomplete

We Are All Here
To Learn

Neurodivergent-
Led

Content
Warning

“People with
Disabilities”
or
“Disabled
People?”

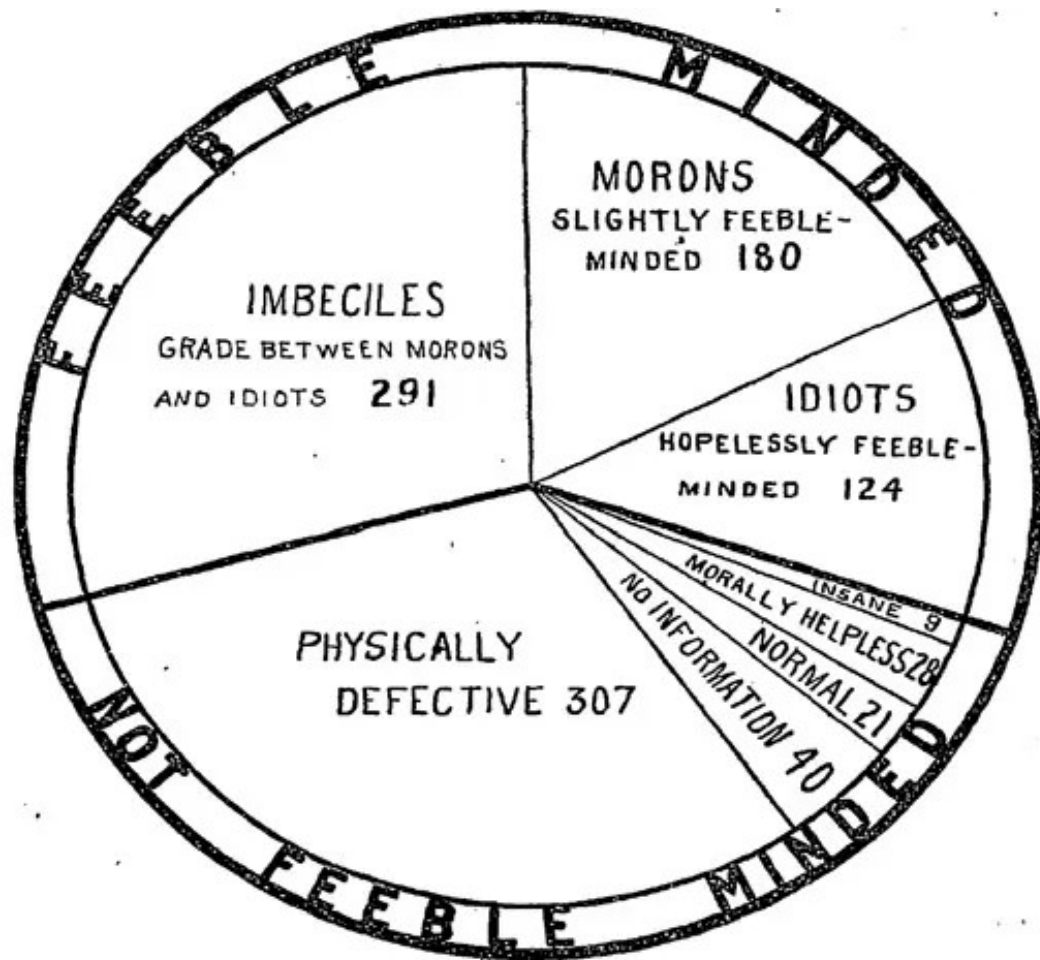
Language is a part of people's culture, identity, and pride. Disability is not a bad word. Much of the language people with disabilities use is rooted in different social movements.

People-First Language

The People-First movement began in the 1970's. It literally puts the person first

“person with a disability”

“employee who is bipolar”

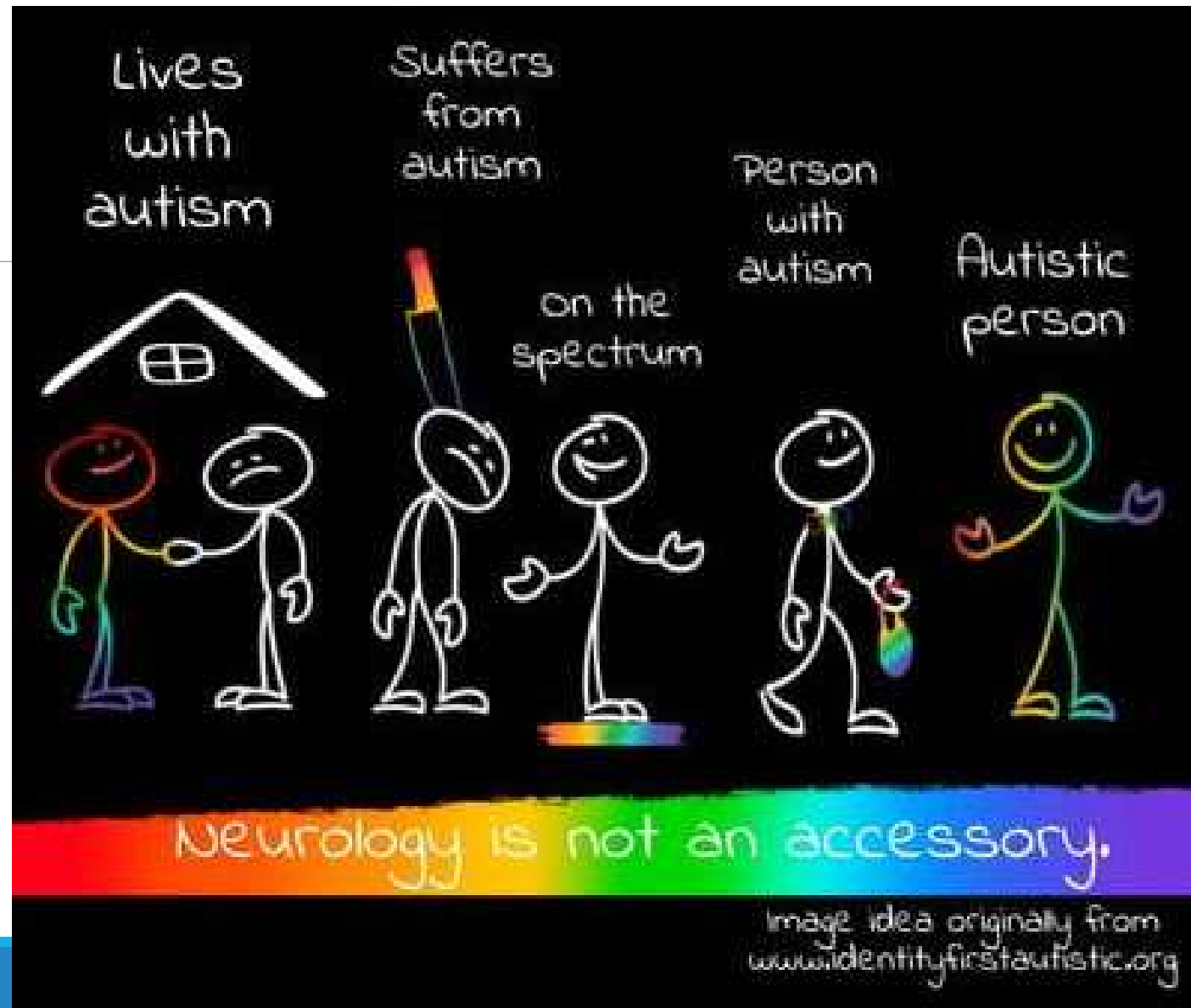


Identity-First Language

Rooted in the social model of disability.

It uses the term “Disabled” to mean disabled by society.

Identity-First language is a political term, and a way disabled people express pride.



Examine Basis

What images come to mind when you hear the word disability?

When you see “abnormal” or “a-typical” behavior, what do you feel?

When someone communicates differently, what assumptions do you make about them?

If someone takes longer to do something than you do, what do you feel or think about them?

Ableism is...

“A system that places value on people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normality, intelligence, excellence, desirability, and productivity. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy based on a person’s language, appearance, religion and/or their ability to satisfactorily [re]produce, excel, and ‘behave’” (T.L. Lewis).



These systems
of oppression
are all
interconnected.



Addressing ableism...

Must go beyond legal compliance and involve collaborating with those most impacted to root out ableist practices in all planning, program design and implementation, services, service delivery, and facilities.

Artwork by Liberal Jane

Models of Disability



Early Civilizations

- People who acquired disabilities still worked and were integrated in society.
- Some communities viewed people with disabilities as “visionaries” or having special abilities.
- In many cultures, disability was believed to be caused by God’s displeasure, being out of harmony with the universe or natural order, or personal and/or familial sin. Children born with disabilities were often abandoned and left to die.





Middle Ages

Some societies began to fear divine retribution of overt acts against disabled people (i.e., drowning or burning, if presumed to be objects of evil).

Beginnings of Institutions - people with leprosy were segregated from society.

Nondisabled religious people began to see poor and disabled people as opportunities to practice charity.

Faith/Charity Model

Non-disabled people make themselves feel good by comparing themselves to “those less fortunate” or feel “inspired” by people with disabilities doing things that non-disabled people do with ease.

This culture of “care” is potentially dangerous as it leads to othering, segregating, and institutionalizing people with disabilities.



Inspiration Porn

“And I use the term porn deliberately, because they objectify one group of people for the benefit of another group of people. So in this case, we're objectifying disabled people for the benefit of nondisabled people. The purpose of these images is to inspire you, to motivate you, so that we can look at them and think, "Well, however bad my life is, it could be worse. I could be that person.”

ITV Charity Telethon

“We hated what we saw — a pity-fest, and were engulfed in rage and shame each time it was broadcast. Held bi-annually, the programme was peopled by ‘celebrities’ who wanted to make themselves feel good, regardless of the fact that the spotlight made us— disabled people — feel so bad.”

(1992)



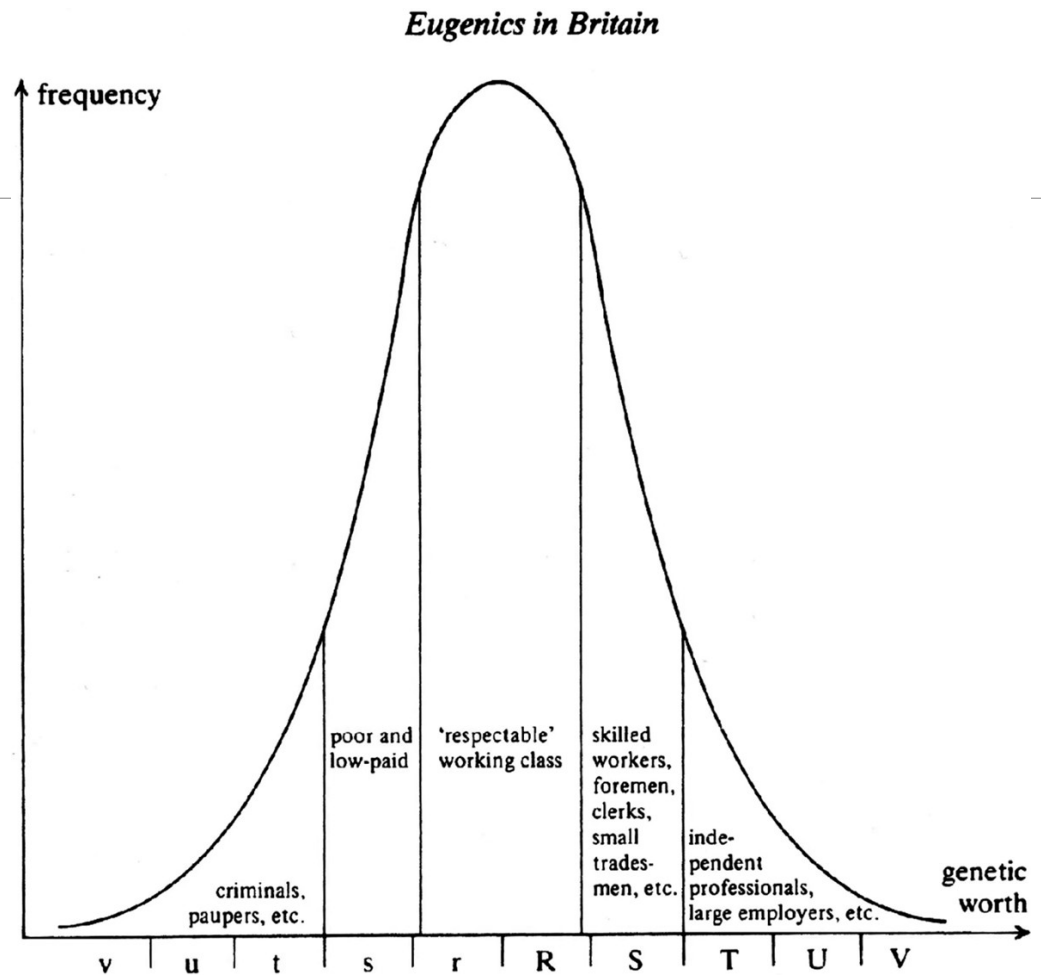
Enlightenment,
Industry, and
Science



Eugenics

“As it is easy... to obtain by careful selection a permanent breed of dogs or horses gifted with particular powers.. so it would be practicable [sic] to produce a highly-gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations”

– Francis Galton



Medical Model

Rooted in Eugenics ideology.

Views disability as a problem located in the person with the disability that needs to be “fixed” or “cured”.

Often equates quality of life with normalization.



Eugenics Strategies

Campaigning for the elimination of the “poor, non-productive, and undesirable”

Laws prohibiting interracial marriage

Forced sterilizations

Institutionalization

“humane disposal of mentally defective or insane persons and other undesirables”

The light bulb is on 10 seconds



Every 10 seconds 100 of your money goes to the care of people with health issues such as the insane, the feeble-minded, criminals & other delinquents.

Some people are born to be a burden on the rest.

The light bulb is on 16 seconds



Every 16 seconds a person is born in the United States.

The light bulb is on 20 seconds



Every 20 seconds a high grade person is born in the United States with the ability to do creative work & be in his leadership. About 4% of all Americans come within this class.

The light bulb is on 25 seconds



Every 25 seconds a high grade person is born in the United States with the ability to do creative work & be in his leadership. About 4% of all Americans come within this class.

Industrial Revolution and Ugly Laws





Buck v. Bell 1927

“She came from a family of feebleminded people, he said, and, absent surgery, likely would give birth to ‘middle grade morons’ like herself. Those children, including her child, Vivian Buck, would burden the state by requiring institutional care. But with surgery, Priddy said, Buck could be released into society, where with some supervision she could work and even marry, all without the danger of reproducing again.” –[*Buck v. Bell \(1927\)*](#)



Forced Sterilizations

- North Carolina's Eugenics Commission sterilized approximately 8,000 people during the 1930s and 1940s. 5,000 were African American.
- Sterilization laws were repealed in the 1950s and 1960s, however African Americans continued to be targeted for sterilization.
- Between 1970 and 1980, sterilizations rose from 200,000 to 700,000.
- **The Black Politics of Eugenics**

New Narratives: Reproductive Justice

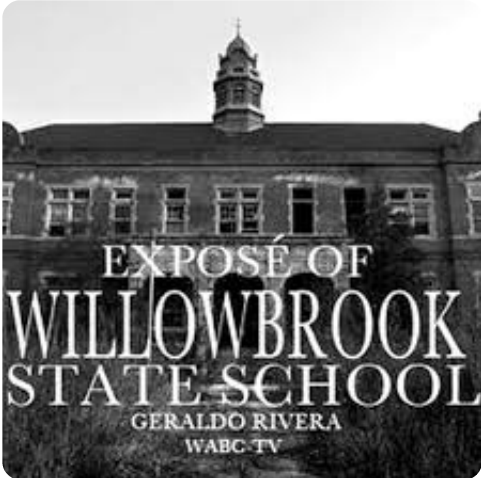
“Reproductive and disability justice are both human rights-based frameworks that, at their core, share fundamental similarities: They both prioritize the right to bodily autonomy and self-determination; the right to raise children—if one chooses to have them—with dignity and in a safe environment; the right to access the health care one needs, free from political interference or stigmatization; and the right to community care.”

**Reproductive Justice for Disabled Women:
Ending Systemic Discrimination**





Reproductive
Justice Is
Disability
Justice



Willowbrook State School 1948 - 1987

“What I witnessed personally when visiting Dougie over the years was beyond comprehension ... I’ve never seen anything even close to this kind of abuse at any scale, absent the Holocaust.”

– Cousin of Douglas W. Desterdick

Mass Incarceration

50% of Black people with disabilities are arrested by age 28, double the rate of their white disabled counterparts.

Disabled people make up about 50% of people killed by law enforcement

In many cases, a person's disability is used to justify their death at the hands of police, with little media attention.

Subjected to neglect, misuse of force, and a lack of accommodations.

[The Criminal Legal System Fails to Address Black Disabled People's Intersectional Identities](#)



Illustration by Jhon G

Slide 27

CD1 The same uneven alignment on this slide as previous.

Collingwood, Donna, 2026-04-02T21:24:37.398

CD2 when a number starts a sentence, it should be spelled out ... Fifty percent of Black people

Collingwood, Donna, 2026-04-02T21:25:23.071

CD3 The last point is not a complete sentence like the other three.

Collingwood, Donna, 2026-04-02T21:26:27.368

Medicaid Cuts

Loss of Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS)

Shift the cost of care to families and caregivers.

Push more people into institutional settings

Likely to result in lower quality of care, fewer available beds, and closure of some facilities.

Abuse, neglect, and death.



Economic Model

Rooted in capitalist ideology.

Disability is defined by a person's ability to work and contribute to the economy.

Views Disabled people as drains on society.

Places value on people by what they can produce.

African American Slavery and Disability



Causes of Disability

- Violence and Punishment
- Dangerous Labor
- Inadequate Conditions

Economic Value

- Discipline and Control
- "Sound" and "Unsound" Labels

Resistance and Community Building

- Autonomy and Agency
- Community Caregivers
- Keepers of Memory



Sheltered Workshops

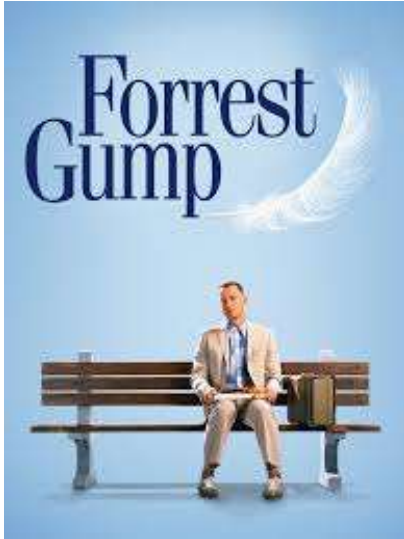
Under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, it is legal for an employer:

- To pay workers with disabilities less than the federal minimum wage, and
- Segregate workers with disabilities

This practice is still legal in many states.



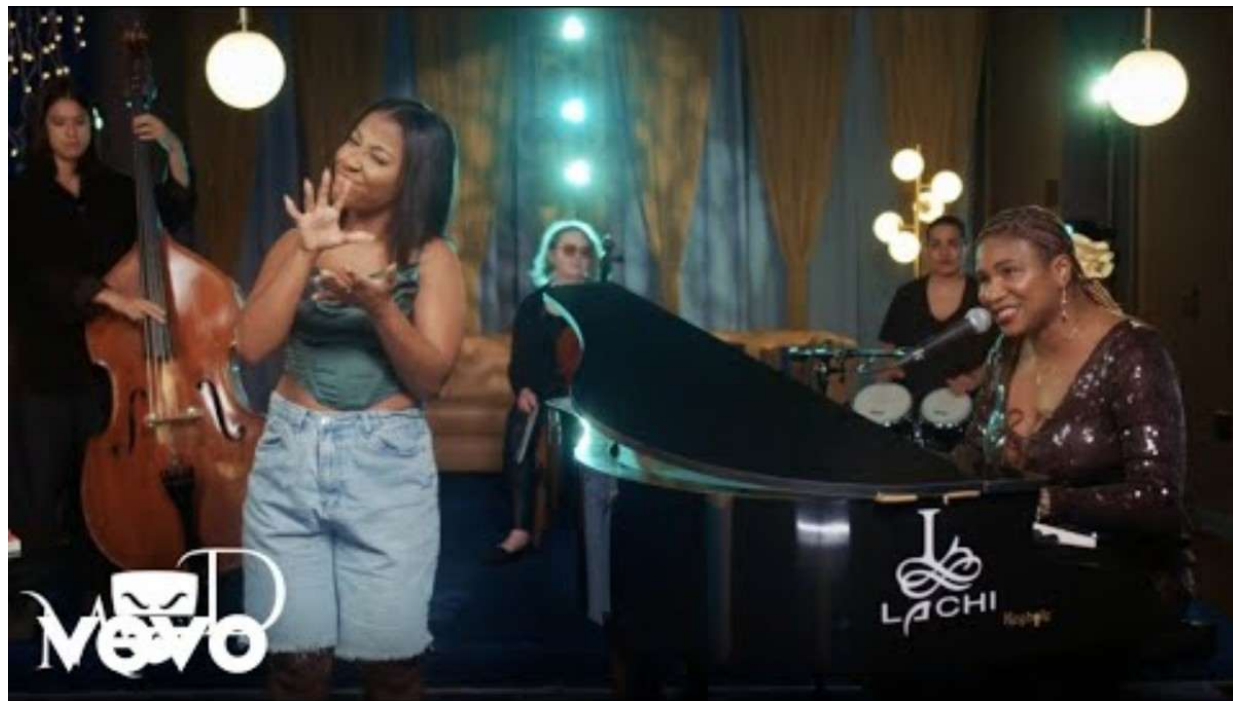
Freaks



Oddity as Commodity



5 Minute Break



**TAKE IT FROM ME, BROTHER—
WE'VE STILL GOT A BIG JOB TO DO!**

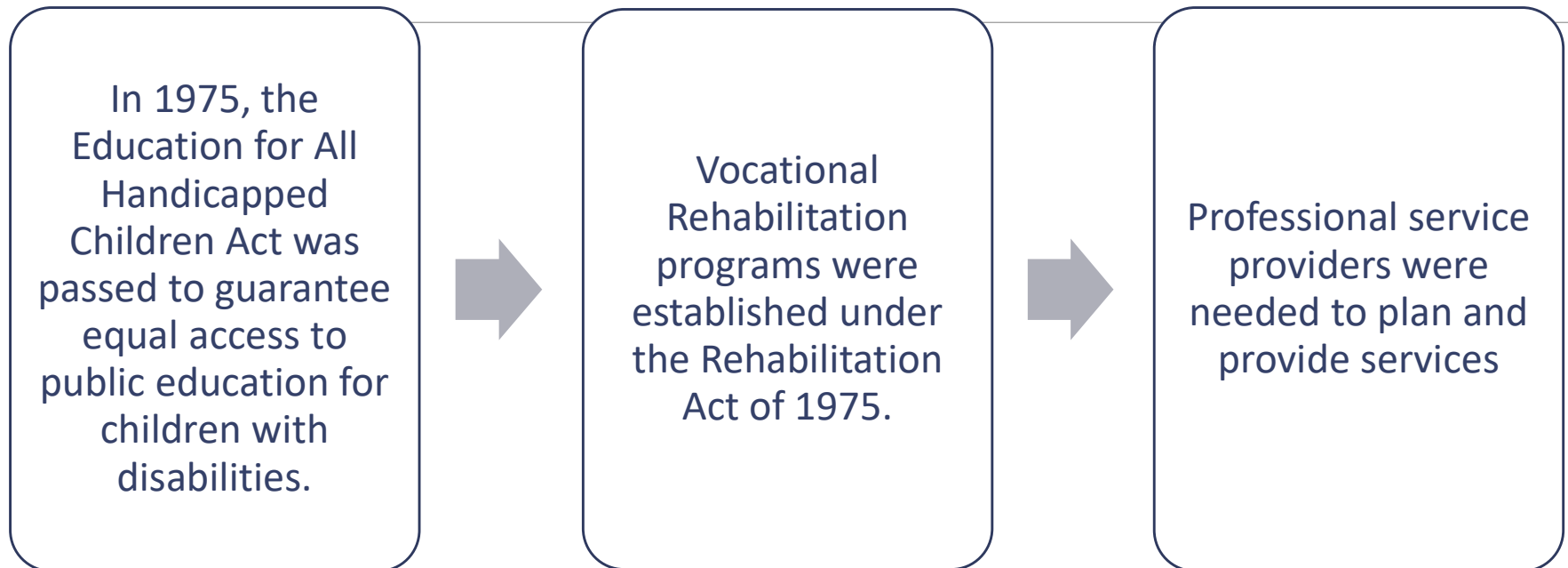


World War II Veterans

In the 1940s and 1950s, returning Disabled veterans challenged some socially held ideas about people with disabilities being able to work.

It was more palatable for the government to design programs to support veterans with disabilities to work than other communities of people with disabilities.

Programs and Services for People with Disabilities



Consumer Model

Maternal/Paternal ideology.

The “expert” is the service provider. The “consumer of good and services” is the person with the disability. Service providers decide and select what service(s) are best for the consumer.

Views people with disabilities as perpetual children that cannot make decisions for themselves and need to be protected.

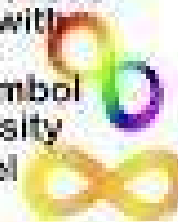


REMINDER FOR EVERYONE AS APRIL APPROACHES

- ✗ Don't support Autism Speaks
- ✗ Don't use the puzzle piece symbol as it's offensive to most of the Autistic Community
- ✗ Don't 'Light it up blue'



- ✔ Listen to Autistic people's voices #ActuallyAutistic
- ✔ Celebrate Neurodiversity
- ✔ Share posts about or by Autistic people
- ✔ We need Autism acceptance NOT Autism Awareness #AutismAcceptance
- ✔ Majority of autistic people prefer to be classed as 'Autistic' or 'Autistic person' rather than 'person with Autism' (Ask them what they prefer)
- ✔ Use the rainbow infinity symbol that represents neurodiversity
- ✔ Or use the gold infinity symbol for Autism Acceptance



- ★ As an Autistic or as an ally do these colours instead:

🟡 #ActuallyAutistic
 🟡 #LightUpGold #AutismAcceptance



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  FORD FOUNDATION

The Washington Post | LIVE



Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

Author & Activist

 @thellpx

Disability Justice:
Mutual Aid and
Community Care
'Disabled people
keep each other
alive all the time'



Rights-based model: Disability is viewed as a social-political construct within a rights based dialogue. Emphasis shifted from dependence to independence as people with disabilities have sought a political voice and led social movements.



Disability Rights Movement

The Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and other laws affirm the rights of people with disabilities in public places and prohibit discrimination.

learn more @ janetjay.com



brad lomax

The story of the Black Panther Party member & founder of the East Oakland Center for Independent Living who was crucial to the early disability justice movement.



The Social Model of Disability



The Social Model of Disability states that the oppression and exclusion people with impairments face is caused by the way society is run and organised.



Disability & Intersectional Identities



Accommodations and Modifications vs. Access and Equity

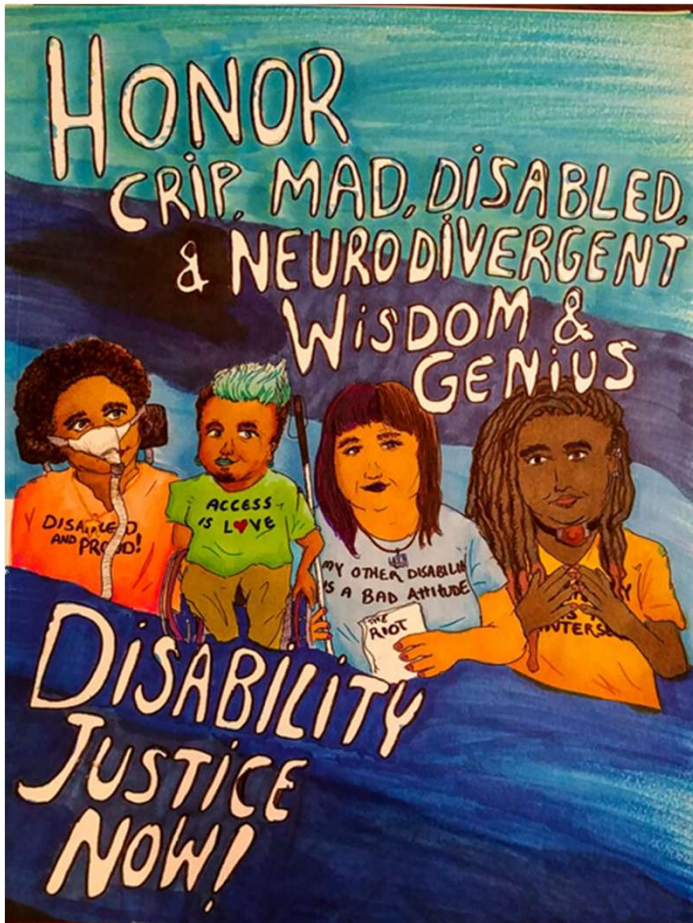
Accommodations and Modifications = A rights-based approach driven by the complaint processes.

Access and Equity = Working to foster a barrier-free, inclusive, and thriving organization by implementing innovative approaches to access, inclusion, and justice both internally and in programs, services, and facilities.



My Body Doesn't
Oppress Me,
Society Does

Patti Burn and
Stacy Park
Milbern



DJ Wisdom Tarot

A Disability Justice Framework

All bodies are unique and essential.

All bodies have strengths and needs that must be met.

We are powerful, not despite the complexities of our bodies, but because of them.

All bodies are confined by ability, race, gender, sexuality, class, nation state, religion, and more, and we cannot separate them.

- Sins Invalid

**Disability Justice:
An Audit Tool**

Written by Leah Lakshmi
Piepzna-Samarsasinha, envisioned by
Stacey Park Milbern and
Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha



Tools and Resources



Before you go...

“Hope flows from knowing that we are not bound by the rigid and relative confines of legislatures, courtrooms, or oval offices—that outer limits exist only if we accept them as real. Love is our relentless pursuit of real-life dreams. Freedom first takes root in our visions for a radically just space-time continuum; and triumph is earned when others slip into our envisioned realm of justice and stay awhile—at least until time, space, or both catch up. Liberation is conceived by our imagination, carried in our hearts, and birthed through our revolutionary madness.” – TL Lewis

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