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**CRITICAL ISSUES IN
SPECIAL EDUCATION**

Access, Diversity, and Accountability

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THE HISTORICAL CONTEXTS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

Framing Our Understanding of Contemporary Issues

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THE HISTORIES (NOT THE HISTORY) OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

This chapter focuses on what can be learned from considering selected stories of special education. These varying histories will take us on a journey through time, location, and perspective, and they are intended to be a sampling of what can be understood about disabilities and the education of people with disabilities by looking at both the past and the future.

Yoel Dayan, the daughter of the revered Israeli patriot and statesman Moshe Dayan, wrote, "Memories are not history. They are fragments of things and feelings that were tainted and sifted through varying prisms of present time and disposition" (1985, p. 1). Historical understandings, though perhaps differing from individual memories, are also constructed through "varying prisms" of perspective. Histories may, in fact, be viewed as collective memories of a group or generation.

Special education has numerous histories. These histories are collections of memories and stories that serve as a foundation for the field. They give special education as a discipline a richness and cohesion that would not otherwise exist. In Barry Lopez's (1990) story of Native American folk characters on a quest for wisdom, a sage tells his young visitors, "The

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the small villages of Martha's Vineyard, they would "sit around and wait for the mail to come in and just talk. And the deaf would be there, everyone would be there. And they would be part of the crowd, and they were accepted. They were fishermen and farmers and everything else. And they wanted to find out the news just as much as the rest of us. And oftentimes people would tell stories and make signs at the same time so everyone could follow. . . . Of course, sometimes, if there were more deaf than hearing people there, everyone would speak sign language—just to be polite, you know" (p. 60).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries about 80 percent of the deaf population on Martha's Vineyard married, about the same as the overall marriage rate on the island; in the rest of the United States, however, only 45 percent of people with deafness married. On the island only 35 percent of the residents with deafness married others with deafness. This was markedly different from the national figure. During that period, 79 percent of people in the United States with deafness married other people who could not hear. The people of Martha's Vineyard with deafness were also just as likely to have children, and large families, as were their hearing neighbors.

Groce ends her book by reflecting on a comment made by an elderly islander she interviewed: "The stories these elderly Islanders shared with me, of the deaf heritage of the Vineyard, merit careful consideration. The most striking fact about these deaf men and women is that they were not handicapped, because no one perceived their deafness as handicaps. As one woman said to me, 'You know, we didn't think anything special about them. . . . They were just like anyone else. When you think about it, the Island was an awfully nice place to live.' Indeed it was" (1985, p. 110).

SCHOOLS AND THE TRADITION OF EXCLUSION

The Martha's Vineyard experience was exceptional, of course. People with disabilities in most parts of the United States, as in most parts of the world, have more often been excluded from the usual privileges and benefits of society. This has been as true of schools as of any other social institution. Although the rhetoric of public education has often emphasized equality of opportunity, educational practice well into the twentieth century belied this rhetoric.

Institutionalized inequalities in U.S. schools are most evident in the ways through which children of racial minorities have been excluded from equitable learning opportunities. This was rationalized with the argument that they could be provided "separate but equal" schools. Less known is the history of children with disabilities being excluded through similar legal and administrative practices. In 1893, for example, the Massachusetts Supreme Court (in *Watson v. City of Cambridge*, 1893) upheld the Cambridge Public Schools' expulsion of a child because the child was "weak in mind." The wording of another court ruling illustrates the extent to which school decisions leading to the exclusion of children with disabilities were based on factors other than a child's academic ability. In 1919 the Supreme Court of Wisconsin heard the case of a child with cerebral palsy who had the academic ability and physical capacity to function well in school, but who drooled, had impaired speech, and had frequent facial-muscle contractions. The court ruled that the public school could deny the child continuation in the school because he "produces a depressing and nauseating effect upon the teachers and school children" (*Beattie v. State Board of Education, City of Antigo*, 1919).

During the first half of the twentieth century, school exclusion of children with disabilities was common and legal in every state. A striking example of the justification given for segregated education for these children is a statement made by James Van Sickle, superintendent of the Baltimore Public Schools, in 1908:

If it were not for the fact that the presence of mentally defective children in a school room interfered with the proper training of the capable children, their [separate] education would appeal less powerfully. . . . But the presence in a class of one or two mentally or morally defective children so absorbs the energies of the teacher and makes so imperative a claim upon her attention that she cannot under these circumstances properly instruct the number commonly enrolled in a class. School authorities must . . . withdraw into small classes these unfortunates who impede the regular progress of normal children. The plan of segregation is now fairly well established in large cities, and superintendents and teachers are working on the problem of classification, so that they may make the best of this imperfect material. (Van Sickle, 1908, pp. 102-103)

THE FOUNDATION FOR CHANGE: *BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION*

The beginning point for the dismantling of the "separate but equal" doctrine was the Supreme Court's landmark decision in 1954 in the case known as *Brown v. Board of Education*, in which the Court found this policy and practice to be unconstitutional. As Chief Justice Earl Warren noted in the Court's decision, "In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the State has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms. . . . We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, 1954).

It is important to note that John W. Davis, the attorney for South Carolina in *Brown v. Board of Education*, opened his argument to the Supreme Court by saying, "May it please the Court, I think if the appellants' construction of the Fourteenth Amendment should prevail here, there is no doubt in my mind that it would catch the Indian within its grasp just as much as the Negro. If it should prevail, I am unable to see why a state would have any further right to segregate its pupils on the ground of sex, or on the ground of age, or on the ground of mental capacity" (cited in Friedman, 1969, p. 1). Davis was correct, of course, in his projections of the implications of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The decision did lead the way to issues of equality for other racial groups, to gender issues in education, and to the idea that all children, regardless of disability, have the right to equal education opportunities.

Brown v. Board of Education was a profound statement of the right to equality in the schooling of all children. Its impact, however, was not as immediate as some hoped nor was it as broad in application as Davis predicted it would be. Many years would pass before the principles articulated in the case would be applied to the rights of children with disabilities. Nonetheless, through recognizing that educating African American children separately, even in supposedly "equal" circumstances, was unfair and stigmatizing, the groundwork was laid for the eventual inclusion of children with disabilities in integrated schools.

The ideas that children with disabilities are entitled to an education and should be with other children followed somewhat haltingly the school integration actions that were implemented after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Although there were increasing allocations of funds for training special education teachers and supporting special education classes during the 1960s, school districts could choose whether to participate in these incentive programs. The question of whether all children with disabilities have an unqualified right to an education was not addressed for nearly two decades after the Supreme Court's decision.

LESSONS LEARNED: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Studying the historical events and figures in special education can shed light on how the field developed and acquired its character as a discipline. It can also foster an appreciation for the context through which contemporary issues in the field have evolved. The following vignettes from the complex history of special education will help to elucidate the questions and challenges faced in the field today.

History as a Source of Insights on Contemporary Issues

Historical research sometimes reveals previously overlooked insights. Generations of undergraduate students, for example, have read Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928). Most "required reading" has likely focused on the main body of the book; however, in one of the appendices Mead describes people in Samoa who have disabilities. In addition to her accounts of the characteristics of particular individuals with disabilities in that culture, she notes that Samoans "possess more charity towards weakness than towards misdirected strength" (p. 182).

Mead returned to this theme many years later. In 1959 she spoke to a conference sponsored by the American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD). In her remarks she referred to a statement issued by a group of Catholic sisters who worked with children with mental retardation. Mead quoted the sisters as saying that they were attempting to make it possible for the children they cared for to make a "contribution in time as well as in eternity" (Mead, 1959, p. 253).

Later in her speech she again referenced the work of the Catholic Church with people with mental retardation. She gave the example of a child with Down syndrome who had been tested, diagnosed, and given every opportunity for the best skill training. When the child was in her early teens, however, she was given religious instruction, and Mead described the change that took place in the girl's life in terms of "wholeness." She said that at the same time the girl became "Catholic, she became a human being in a way that she had not been before . . . think that what happened on the secular side with this little girl was that for the first time she met a situation where people were willing to teach her the whole instead of saying 'you are defective and you can only learn a part'" (Mead, 1959, p. 260).

Mead concluded her address to the AAMD by elaborating on the concept of education for "wholeness." She distinguished between societies where everyone participates in all aspects of the culture (e.g., Samoa) and segmented, socially stratified societies that no longer attempt to teach the "whole" to all people (e.g., the United States). She emphasized that what

makes for a culture of full participation is genuine opportunities for all people to learn how to fully participate. She also warned of the "risks of complicating sections of our culture so much that we define them as things most people can't learn" (1959, pp. 258-259).

Mead's insights, unfamiliar to most special education teachers and previously overlooked by many reading her work, add new meaning to what special education teachers already know. In order for people with disabilities to be genuinely included in our culture, we must strive to make the essential "wholeness" of citizenship accessible to everyone (Smith & Johnson, 1997).

History as a Source of Comprehension and Caution

Historical research also provides the opportunity for understanding characteristics of people and events previously overlooked. Personalities and social circumstances are far too complex to fit the neat categorizations we are often drawn toward. The study of history allows us to learn from contradictions. Understanding these complexities may deepen our appreciation of the truly human and sometimes contradictory characters of even those we most admire. Consider, for example, the book *The Black Stork*, which concerns the work of a physician who openly practiced euthanasia on "defective" newborns beginning in 1915. Dr. Harry Haiselden not only allowed infants with severe disabilities to die by withholding treatment but also administered drugs to hasten the deaths of several newborns; he also campaigned for the widespread adoption of these practices. Haiselden produced and starred in a movie promoting euthanasia, *The Black Stork*, which was based on his eugenic arguments; it was shown in theaters from 1916 through the 1920s (Pernick, 1996). Helen Keller was supportive of Haiselden's eugenic campaign, and in the December 18, 1915, issue of *The New Republic* Keller expressed the following opinions:

It is the possibilities of happiness, intelligence, and power that give life its sanctity, and they are absent in the case of a poor, misshapen, paralyzed, unthinking creature. . . . The toleration of such anomalies tends to lessen the sacredness in which normal life is held.

It seems to me that the simplest, wisest thing to do would be to submit cases like that of the malformed idiot baby to a jury of expert physicians. . . . A mental defective . . . is almost sure to be a potential criminal. The evidence before a jury of physicians considering the case of an idiot would be exact and scientific. Their findings would be free from the prejudice and inaccuracy of untrained observation. They would act only in case of true idiocy, where there could be no hope of mental development. (Keller, 1915, pp. 173-174)

Burton Blatt once wrote concerning the history of mental retardation that, "virtually all histories in our field are dangerously incomplete. . . . That which is preserved may be less relevant than that which is unknown; and the 'facts,' however pertinent, are to a degree divorced from the social-psychological context of the period. . . . To understand what actually occurred (and why) requires one to know what the times were like" (Blatt, 1987, p. 17).

Keller's development as an intellectual and as an advocate took place within the context of the eugenics movement. It also occurred within the environment of political progressivism. Progressive thought held that most of the problems of society, and those of individuals, could and should be reduced to scientific terms and resolved by scientific means. Keller's trust of a "jury" of physicians is very consistent with the faith in scientific progress that characterized the cultural climate of her formative years as a social activist. Her opinion that "true idiocy"

lessens the sanctity of "normal life" reflects the eugenic principles to which she was most certainly exposed (Smith, 1997). Keller was known and revered as an advocate for people with disabilities. She also became a political activist and a spokesperson for victims of poverty, economic exploitation, gender discrimination, and other forms of oppression (Foner, 1967). Her voice of advocacy was bold for its time. It was focused, however, on the potential for social intercourse and productivity in the lives of ignored, misunderstood, and exploited people. In that regard, Keller moved beyond a social context that devalued many people with blindness, deafness, and other physical disabilities, and she crusaded for their right to earn a place in society. She did not believe, however, that this right extended to those people who might never "earn" their own way. Thus, in yet another way, Keller's story depends on our comprehension of the challenges facing special education teachers today.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE CONCEPT OF A "FIELD" OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

A third important value of historical research is that it may help to bring a new or different focus to the contemporary sense that special education is a singular field. Knowledge of Keller's position on euthanasia provides us with a different perspective on the issue of advocacy. Questions concerning the discipline of special education can be brought into even sharper focus by insights on the life of Laura Bridgman.

Laura Bridgman was born into a prominent Massachusetts family in 1829. At two years of age she was rendered deaf and blind by scarlet fever. In 1837 she went to live at the Perkins Institution for the Blind in Boston. There she was tutored by the founder, Samuel Gridley Howe. Howe devised a teaching method that built on Bridgman's ability to feel the differences in the shapes of objects. Through drill and practice in distinguishing shapes, he led her to the understanding that these objects could be given names. At first he used labels with raised print on them to assign the names that Bridgman came to comprehend. He then taught her to form these words using movable letters. He was thus teaching her by methods similar to those used for other students at Perkins who were blind. Eventually, however, he shifted to a communication method that had been developed for students who were deaf. He began teaching her words using finger spelling. He spelled words into her hand and then associated them with objects and actions. This was the method that would later become central to Anne Sullivan's teaching of Keller. Bridgman's fame and Howe's success in teaching her were later eclipsed, in fact, by the extraordinary accomplishments of Keller and Sullivan.

It is ironic that little note has been taken of the fact that Anne Sullivan, herself a student at Perkins, learned to communicate with Bridgman and then applied what she had learned in her teaching with Keller (Smith, 1987). For several decades during the nineteenth century, however, Bridgman attracted international attention, and Howe's work with her was heralded with as much admiration as the "miracle worker" would later receive. To many intellectuals in the United States she became a symbol, "exemplifying the power of enlightened educational techniques and their capacity to transform seemingly hopeless cases" (Gallaher, 1995, p. 282). She was held up as a model of Victorian womanhood because of her courage and intelligence in the face of grave challenges. Some girls reportedly admired her so much that they "poked their dolls' eyes out and named them 'Laura' while reluctant young students were

reminded to always compare their own efforts with those of the little deaf and blind girl who had accomplished so much in the face of such overwhelming obstacles" (Freeberg, 1992, p. 199).

Howe's accounts of Bridgman's education, published in the yearly reports of the Perkins Institution, attracted the attention of leading philosophers, theologians, and writers of the time. Historians who have studied Howe's reports are convinced that he recognized from the beginning of his work with Bridgman that her education would be of interest in scholarly circles. His efforts to teach her may have been motivated by the deepest and most sincere altruism, but: "Howe recognized from the start that Laura Bridgman was not just another afflicted child in need, but 'an object of particular interest.' If he could succeed in teaching her to communicate, he surely realized, this work would have far reaching religious and philosophical implications that would capture the attention of the world" (Freeberg, 1992, pp. 194-195).

For more than a century, John Locke's argument that the mind is a blank slate had dominated philosophy. The mind, according to Locke, was created by the experiential "writings" on that slate. The senses, therefore, determined the material character of the mind. If this portrait of the mind was accurate, then Howe should have found that Bridgman's mind was empty of all images, including moral or religious formulations. As Howe began to communicate with her about ideas, however, he found that her mind was not a tabula rasa. He described her internal life as a soul jailed in a body that was "active and struggling continually not only to put itself in communication with things without, but to manifest what is going on within itself" (Howe, 1893, p. 9). Howe described Bridgman's internal life, as he discovered it in its natural untouched state, as being of the highest moral character. He found that "her moral sense is remarkably acute; few children are so affectionate or so scrupulously conscientious, few are so sensible of their rights or as regardful of the rights of others" (p. 50).

To support his argument that Bridgman was innately moral, he described her behavior toward other people after she had been liberated by his teaching and learned to communicate. He reported that she was always eager to share with others and to help take care of sick people. He also said that she showed a keen sense of sympathy for people with disabilities. Howe noted, however, one exception to Laura's expressions of natural altruism. He said she showed an "unamiable" lack of respect for the children at the Perkins Institution whom she considered to be mentally inferior to herself. Interpreting this as an understandable manifestation of her Anglo-Saxon heritage, he excused the advantage she took of these children when she expected them to "wait on her" (Howe, 1893, p. 20).

One of Bridgman's most powerful and influential visitors at Perkins was Charles Dickens. His admiration for her began with his reading of Howe's accounts of her instruction. His admiration increased when he visited her in Boston. For Dickens, Bridgman was "both charming and inspirational: a merry, graceful, and intelligent young girl, she seemed also to symbolize the possibility of spiritual awakening and redemption" (Gitter, 1991, p. 163). Dickens described his visit to Bridgman at Perkins in *American Notes*. He relayed his impressions of her and he also quoted from Howe's reports. In his account he repeated Howe's observation that she had disdain for children she believed to be intellectually inferior (Dickens, 1842).

Howe is important in the history of mental retardation. In addition to his work with students with blindness and deaf-blindness, he was an early advocate for the education of stu-

dents with mental retardation. He convinced the Massachusetts legislature to fund a school for the "teaching and training of idiotic children" in October of 1848 (Howe & Hall, 1904, p. 229). The school was initially housed at the Perkins Institution. According to two of his daughters, however, Howe soon discovered that his blind students resented deeply the presence of the students with mental retardation under their roof. His daughters interpreted this resentment as an expression of fear that they might come to be associated with the retardation of these "weaker brethren" (p. 231). They quoted Bridgman's journals as evidence of this feeling of resentment. Bridgman expressed the hope that the students with mental retardation would not actually come to Perkins and the fear that if they did that they would "have our rooms . . . [and] our nice sitting room in a few days" (p. 231).

Bridgman's fears regarding the perceived association between herself and her "weaker brethren" may not have been unfounded. Indeed, a literature has developed around the very notion of the transferability of social stigma—the process by which a "normal" person is seen by others as possessing the characteristics of a stigma merely by close association with a stigmatized other. Erving Goffman (1963) has written about the acquisition of a social stigma by affiliation. There is evidence to suggest that mental retardation carries the most debilitating socially constructed stigma—more than alcoholism, depression, crime, or sexual orientation. As Edgerton (1993) has pointed out, "One might speculate that no other stigma is as . . . [devastating] . . . as mental retardation in the sense that a person so labeled is thought to be so completely lacking in basic competence" (p. 184). Gibbons (1985) contends that people with mental retardation are themselves acutely aware of this stigma and tend to react with derogation toward their own peers' social competence and physical attractiveness.

Bridgman may have been acutely aware of the very real potential of being perceived as incompetent by association and of the social consequences inherent in that perception. The threat of a devalued identity provides a powerful incentive for maintaining both physical and social distance from people more seriously stigmatized. As Goffman (1963) suggested: "In general, the tendency for a stigma to spread from the stigmatized individual . . . provides a reason why such relations tend either to be avoided or to be terminated, where existing" (p. 30). Perhaps it is this attempt to avoid stigma by association that explains the attitude of Bridgman toward mental retardation. It may also explain the phenomenon of what might be called "differential advocacy" (Smith & Anton, 1997). Recognition of this differential in the attitudes of people with varying disabilities may also help special education teachers realize that they and the people who they serve as advocates must strive to work more closely together across categorical lines to achieve the ends they wish to achieve. It may also help us to understand the importance of and the challenges to a unified "field" of special education.

SPECIAL EDUCATION: LOOKING BACKWARD, LOOKING FORWARD

A Look Backward

Edward Bellamy was a journalist and novelist; he was also a strident voice for social reform during the late 1800s. His most influential work, *Looking Backward*, was a best-seller in the years following its publication in 1888 and was very influential among American intellectuals

at the time. In 1935 the philosopher and educator John Dewey ranked *Looking Backward* as one of the most important books published in the preceding fifty years (Baer, 1992).

Bellamy's novel is the story of Julian West, who falls into a trance-like sleep in 1887 and is awakened in the year 2000. West awakes to a United States that has no wars, no political imparities, and no poverty. Each citizen is an equal shareholder in the social enterprise of the country and all have equitable and sufficient incomes. Bellamy emphasizes throughout the book that West finds in the year 2000 a society deeply committed to the equality of all of its citizens. West's guide in the new millennium world to which he has awakened is a physician, Dr. Leete. One of Leete's most profound revelations is that people with disabilities are considered equal members of his society. When West expresses surprise that "charity" has become so prevalent in the United States of 2000, an intriguing exchange takes place between the two men:

"Charity!" repeated Dr. Leete. "Did you suppose that we consider the incapable class we are talking of objects of charity?"

"Why naturally," I said, "inasmuch as they are incapable of self-support."

But here the doctor took me up quickly.

"Who is capable of self-support?" he demanded. "There is no such thing in a civilized society as self-support, . . . from the moment that men begin to live together, and constitute even the rudest sort of society, self-support becomes impossible. As men grow more civilized . . . a complex mutual dependence becomes the universal rule." (Bellamy, 1888, p. 178)

Dr. Leete continues his description of the fundamental equality of all people in his society regardless of individual needs or limitations in independence and productivity. In response West asks, "How can they who produce nothing claim a share of the product as a right?" Dr. Leete answers that each generation in a society inherits most of what it knows and possesses. He asks West:

How did you come to be possessors of this knowledge and this machinery which represents nine parts to the one contributed by yourself in the value of your product? You inherited it, did you not? And were not these others, these unfortunate and crippled brothers whom you cast out, joint inheritors, co-heirs with you? . . . What I do not understand is, setting aside all considerations of justice or brotherly feeling toward the crippled and defective, how the workers of your day could have had any heart for their work, knowing that their children, or grandchildren, if unfortunate, would be deprived of the comforts and even necessities of life. (Bellamy, 1888, p. 181)

A Look Forward

Remarkable developments in molecular biology and genetic engineering are reported in the popular press almost daily. These advances in scientific knowledge and medical technology will almost certainly change the course of human history. The eradication of many of what are considered diseases, disorders, and defects may become a reality before the end of this century. A critical question that must be asked in this pursuit, however, is how diseases, disorders, and defects are defined. Are disabilities, in this context, diseases or defects, or are they simply human differences? Are they conditions to be prevented in all circumstances or are they part of the spectrum of human variation? Depending on the answer, what does this say about the

status of people with disabilities in a democracy? What does it say about their fundamental equality as people?

The danger that people with disabilities will be further devalued as genetic intervention techniques increase is illustrated by recent remarks by James Watson. Winner of the Nobel Prize and co-discoverer of DNA, Watson was also the first director of the Human Genome Project. In his capacity as leader of the effort to map and sequence the genetic makeup of human beings, Watson also advocated careful consideration of the ethical, legal, and social implications of the project. And yet in an article titled "Looking Forward" Watson dismissed the value of people with severe disabilities when he spoke of the decisions faced by "prospective parents when they learn that their prospective child carries a gene that would block its opportunity for a meaningful life" (Watson, 1993, p. 314). In the same article he speaks disapprovingly of parents who do not undergo genetic testing. "So we must also face up to the ethical and practical dilemma, facing these individuals who could have undergone genetic diagnosis, but who for one reason or another declined the opportunity and later gave birth to children who must face up to lives of hopeless inequality" (p. 315). More recently Watson spoke to the German Congress of Molecular Medicine and condemned the eugenic philosophy that resulted in the atrocities of the Nazi era. Then, in a seemingly amazing contradiction, he advocated what might be termed "parental eugenics." He asserted that the "truly relevant question for most families is whether an obvious good will come from having a child with a major handicap." From this perspective, Watson said, "seeing the bright side of being handicapped is like praising the virtues of extreme poverty" (cited in Lee, 1998, p. 16).

HISTORIES AND FUTURES

In 1927 the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Buck v. Bell* (1927), upheld the constitutionality of a Virginia law allowing a state to sterilize people diagnosed as incompetent and deemed likely to genetically transmit physical, psychological, or social disabilities to their offspring. The case involved Carrie Buck, who was the first person to be eugenically sterilized under the authority of that law. In writing the majority opinion in *Buck v. Bell*, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes used the now-famous phrase, "three generations of imbeciles are enough." His reasoning and his language were consistent with the eugenic view that many disabilities are largely hereditary in origin. Inherent in this view was the idea that even complex human characteristics could be traced directly to genetic sources. This belief, with the credibility afforded it by being grounded in what was then accepted as "scientific fact," became a powerful force in shaping public opinion and social policy toward people with disabilities.

The eugenic evidence and the predictions in Buck's case have proven to be grossly inaccurate. Buck's child, Vivian, alleged to represent the "third generation of imbeciles," grew to be an honor-roll student. Buck, labeled as being the child of an "imbecile" herself, was discharged to a mountain village after being sterilized. There she married the deputy sheriff and lived a modest but productive and respectable life. Following her husband's death, she moved to a larger town, where she earned her living caring for elderly and chronically ill people. Friends and employers attested to the fact that Carrie was not mentally retarded, and, indeed, mental health professionals who observed her late in life found no evidence of retardation (Smith & Nelson, 1989).

Buck's story is a tragic saga of one injured life. It is also an important illustration of the allure and dangers of reductionistic and deterministic thought about human beings. The ideas that created the misfortunes of Buck—that human life can be reduced to biology and that social institutions can best be guided by the realities of biological determinism—have repeatedly produced tragic results. Individuals and groups of people, including people with disabilities, have been viewed by others as being inherently and unmodifiably inferior because of their biology. On that basis they have often been deprived of their dignity and rights.

In *Backdoor to Eugenics* Duster (1990) argues that eugenics is alive and well in our society but in a more subtle manifestation. Although it is still being presented as an economic and social issue, eugenics is also being portrayed as a matter of parental responsibility or irresponsibility. Although less overt, this new form of eugenics may be even more powerful in its impact on the lives of people with disabilities.

Eugenicists in the past looked to evolutionary theory and Mendelian genetics for moral truths. They believed that natural selection and Mendelian gene distributions could provide models for social ethics. The failure of this approach was evidenced in the needless institutionalization of people deemed to be "unfit" for the social "struggle," in the sterilization of people inaccurately assessed to be the carriers of defective genes, and in the moral horrors of the Holocaust. What truths will prevail in the current eugenic climate?

Linton (1998) has called for a conceptualization of humanity, inclusive of both those with disabilities and those without, as part of an integrated universe of people. A key to this social formulation is an understanding of the complementarity, interdependence, and equality of people with differences. Commenting on the work of Nobel geneticist Barbara McClintock, Linton wrote, "If something doesn't fit, there's a reason, and you find what it is. Rather than overlook difference, for instance, by naming an exception, an aberration, a contaminant, she worked to understand its place and function" (p. 120).

As the power of genetic science grows, so does the importance of ethical questions about the implication of that power for human diversity. The greatest challenge for people with disabilities in this century may be that of having their lives understood within the contexts of the civic values of liberty, justice, and equality. This challenge, and hope, is embodied in the 1892 address that Francis Bellamy, Edward Bellamy's cousin and author of the Pledge of Allegiance, delivered during the unveiling of the pledge. Perhaps borrowing a concept from his cousin Edward, he spoke of looking forward to a new age: "We look forward. We are conscious we are in a period of transition. Ideas in education, in political economy, in social science are undergoing revisions. . . . The coming century promises to be more than ever the age of the people; an age that shall develop a greater care for the rights of the weak, and make a more solid provision for the development of each individual" (Baer, 1992, p. 41).

Indeed, let us hope we are living at the beginning of a century that will be "more than ever the age of the people," including those with disabilities. Maybe our understanding of the past and the enlightenment it provides for the future will enable us to reach this goal. Perhaps when the history of the twenty-first century is surveyed someday, it will be evident that the genetic revolution was not solely a scientific and medical revolution. Perhaps history will find it to have been an ethical revolution as well, and that the true discovery of the "wholeness" of people with disabilities was part of that revolution. Perhaps it will be seen as a period when an increasing awareness of the critical and uncoerced choices that only individuals and families can make about the character and direction of their lives was achieved. If this proves to be the

case, then the history of special education in the twenty-first century will be a story that enhances the value of the lives of people with disabilities.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. Several examples of both the "nurturing" and "destructive" stories of disability were presented in this chapter. Identify other literary or historical examples of these kinds of stories. Do you have stories of each type from your own experiences?
2. Have schools largely overcome the "tradition of exclusion"? If not, what do teachers and other school leaders need to understand about the place of students with special needs in their schools? What can they learn from the history of special education?
3. Is special education a civil rights movement? In addition to the relationship with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, what other parallels can you think of that show the connection between the struggle for racial equality and the effort to secure the rights of people with disabilities?
4. How likely do you think it is that acceptance and respect for people with disabilities and their families will be diminished as the capacity for genetic manipulation increases? What are the implications for people with other kinds of differences? Are we moving toward expecting all people to meet a physical and mental standard of perfection?

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