Race, Ethnicity, and Disability

Using data from more than 40,000 soldiers of the Union army, this book focuses on the experience of African Americans and immigrants with disabilities, investigating their decision to seek government assistance and their resulting treatment. Pension administrators treated these ex-soldiers differently from native-born whites, but the discrimination was far from seamless—biased evaluations of worthiness intensified in response to administrators’ workload and nativists’ late-nineteenth-century campaigns. This book finds a remarkable interplay of social concepts, historical context, bureaucratic expediency, and individual initiative. Examining how African Americans and immigrants weighed their circumstances in deciding when to request a pension, employ a pension attorney, or seek institutionalization, it contends that these veterans quietly asserted their right to benefits. Shedding new light on the long history of challenges faced by veterans with disabilities, the book underscores the persistence of these challenges in spite of the recent revolution in disability rights.

Larry M. Logue is Professor of History and Political Science at Mississippi College. He won the Francis and Emily Chipman First-Book Prize for A Sermon in the Desert: Belief and Behavior in Early St. George, Utah, and is the author of To Appomattox and Beyond: The Civil War Soldier in War and Peace and co-editor of The Civil War Soldier: A Historical Reader and The Civil War Veteran: A Historical Reader.

Peter Blanck is a University Professor at Syracuse University and Chairman of the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI). He is a trustee of YAI/National Institute for People with Disabilities Network and Chairman of the Global Universal Design Commission (GUDC). Blanck’s most recent book is Disability Civil Rights Law and Policy (with Hill, Siegal, and Waterstone).
The Disability, Law and Policy series examines these topics in interdisciplinary and comparative terms. The books in the series reflect the diversity of definitions, causes, and consequences of discrimination against persons with disabilities, while illuminating fundamental themes that unite countries in their pursuit of human rights laws and policies to improve the social and economic status of persons with disabilities. The series contains historical, contemporary, and comparative scholarship crucial to identifying individual, organizational, cultural, attitudinal, and legal themes necessary for the advancement of disability law and policy.

The book topics covered in the series also are reflective of the new moral and political commitment by countries throughout the world toward equal opportunity for persons with disabilities in such areas as employment, housing, transportation, rehabilitation, and individual human rights. The series will thus play a significant role in informing policy makers, researchers, and citizens of issues central to disability rights and disability antidiscrimination policies. The series grounds the future of disability law and policy as a vehicle for ensuring that those living with disabilities participate as equal citizens of the world.
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Abbreviated Citations in Notes

**CR**
U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*

**Managers Report**
Board of Managers of National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, *Annual Reports*

**MPM Records**
Robert W. Fogel et al., *Aging of Veterans of the Union Army: Military, Pension, and Medical Records, 1820–1940*

**OR**
U.S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 1861–1865*
## Abbreviated Citations in Notes

<table>
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<th>Source</th>
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<td>Pension Files</td>
<td>Pension Files, 1861–1934, National Archives, Washington, D.C.</td>
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<td>SL</td>
<td>U.S. Congress, <em>U.S. Statutes at Large</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgeons’ Certificates</td>
<td>Robert W. Fogel et al., <em>Aging of Veterans of the Union Army: Surgeons’ Certificates, Version S-1 Standardized, 1862–1940</em></td>
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The promise of America advanced closer to reality when the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law by President George H. W. Bush in 1990. As attorney general at the time and the parent of a son with physical and intellectual disability, I knew that the law was necessary because people with disabilities had been forced into the shadows of the legal system, denied basic protections against being seen and treated as “second-class citizens.”

While advocates of the ADA were lobbying for improved opportunities, other Americans with disabilities had long been eligible for government assistance meant to improve their quality of life. This aid began with pensions for former soldiers of the Revolutionary War, was later supplemented by assisted living in soldiers’ homes, and came in the twentieth
Foreword

century to include rehabilitation of veterans with disabilities. What does the experience of this discrete group tell us about the role of disability in American society?

This book looks closely at how benefits were awarded to the men who fought for the North in the Civil War. Professors Logue and Blanck find that the federal government’s sympathy for people with disabilities came at the price of judgment calls about some veterans’ worthiness. Missing arms and legs were easy enough to verify, but a man with back pain might be suspected of faking, and another man’s headaches might be due to “vicious habits” like alcoholism. The government officials who made these judgments needed some basis upon which to proceed, especially when the applications began to pile up in the thousands and then the hundreds of thousands. Race was an easy and unfortunate basis for a snap judgment, and when some classes of immigrants were labeled as racially inferior near the turn of the twentieth century, their credibility came to be mistrusted too. Professors Logue and Blanck make a thorough investigation of these kinds of discrimination in the Civil War benefits system.

Racial and ethnic discrimination in benefits for Civil War veterans should concern those who oversee today’s benefits for veterans, because the current system seems to rely on many of the same principles. It should also concern those involved in the struggle for equal rights under the ADA. Though the ADA is not about monetary benefits, some of those who challenge its implementation make
Foreword

accusations of “gaming the system” that echo critics of nineteenth-century veterans.

Logue and Blanck alert those who care about rights for people with disabilities to be ever mindful of the motivations that may underlie government actions.

Dick Thornburgh
This book has acquired a number of benefactors. Larry Logue is grateful to Mississippi College for providing a sabbatical leave during the initial phase of the project and travel funds later on, and to the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) of Syracuse University for a fellowship at a crucial stage.

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