

# The Hidden Story Of How The Americans With Disabilities Act Gave The Largest U.S.

It was a revolution that went unnoticed by most. A silent movement that transformed the lives of millions, empowering them with rights they had long been denied. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 not only changed the physical landscape of the United States but also challenged societal norms and prejudices.

The story of how the ADA came into existence is a hidden gem whose impact cannot be overstated. It is a tale of determination, courage, and the relentless fight for equality.

## The Beginning: A Struggle for Recognition

Prior to the ADA, the lives of Americans with disabilities were marked by a constant battle for recognition and inclusion. They faced discrimination in employment, education, transportation, and public services. Basic amenities we take for granted today, such as wheelchair ramps or accessible restrooms, were rare or simply nonexistent.

ENABLING  
ACTS



LENNARD J. DAVIS

"Enabling Acts is a remarkable history of a quiet but powerful struggle, with a message that is as timely as ever. It is a story that should be read by all Americans." —American Museum of Natural History

## Enabling Acts: The Hidden Story of How the Americans with Disabilities Act Gave the Largest US Minority Its Rights by Lennard J. Davis (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5



However, a burgeoning disability rights movement had been gaining momentum since the 1960s. Activists like Ed Roberts, a quadriplegic, fought for their rights and demanded equality in all aspects of life. Their perseverance led to the establishment of organizations like the Center for Independent Living, which became the grassroots foundation for the landmark legislation that would follow.

## **The Rise of Disability Rights Activism**

Through protests, sit-ins, and advocacy, disability rights activists made their voices heard across the nation. They challenged the status quo and demanded legal protections that would grant them the same rights as their able-bodied counterparts.

One of the defining moments in the fight for disability rights came with the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This law prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability in federal programs and activities, laying the groundwork for the ADA.

As the disability rights movement grew, so did public awareness of the struggles faced by individuals with disabilities. Movies like "Coming Home" and "The Elephant Man" brought their stories to the forefront, fostering empathy and compassion.

## **The Birth of the ADA**

After years of tireless activism and lobbying, the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law on July 26, 1990, by President George H.W. Bush. It was a

historic moment, marking the first comprehensive legislation aimed at protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities.

The ADA sought to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal opportunities in employment, public accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications. It mandated the provision of reasonable accommodations and accessibility modifications, ensuring that individuals with disabilities could actively participate in all aspects of society.

### The Impact of the ADA

The passage of the ADA significantly transformed the physical infrastructure of the United States. Ramps, elevators, accessible parking spaces, and braille signage became commonplace, empowering individuals with disabilities to navigate public spaces independently.

But beyond physical modifications, the ADA ushered in a cultural shift. It shattered stereotypes and challenged societal prejudices. People with disabilities were no longer seen as helpless or incapable but as individuals with unique abilities and contributions.

Employers were now required to provide reasonable accommodations, opening up employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This led to a more diverse and inclusive workforce, with talented individuals bringing their skills and perspectives to various industries.

The ADA also played a crucial role in promoting accessible education. It ensured that students with disabilities received the necessary support and accommodations to pursue their educational aspirations. Educational institutions

were required to make reasonable modifications to their policies, practices, and procedures to accommodate students with disabilities.

Furthermore, the ADA provided a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities and gave them a voice to challenge discriminatory practices. It established the concept of "reasonable accommodations," empowering individuals to assert their rights and demand equal treatment.

## **The Legacy of the ADA**

The ADA's impact transcends its legislation. It paved the way for further advancements in disability rights and accessibility. Subsequent legislation, such as the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, further clarified and expanded the definition of disability and strengthened the ADA's original intentions.

Despite its transformative power, the need for continued advocacy and awareness remains. Accessibility in the digital realm, for instance, presents new challenges that must be addressed to ensure inclusivity for all individuals.

The hidden story of how the Americans with Disabilities Act gave the largest U.S. is one that deserves to be celebrated. It is a tale of triumph in the face of adversity, illuminating the power of unity and collective action. The ADA has become a beacon of hope, inspiring generations to fight for the rights of all individuals, regardless of their abilities.

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—Gloria Steinem, author of  
The War on Women: A Journey Beyond Reform



A behind-the-scenes account of the passing of the ADA—the moment when millions of Americans won their civil rights

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is the widest-ranging and most comprehensive piece of civil rights legislation ever passed in the United States, and it has become the model for disability-based laws around the world. Yet the surprising story behind how the bill came to be is little known.

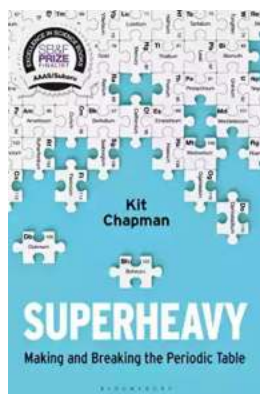
In this riveting account, acclaimed disability scholar Lennard J. Davis delivers the first on-the-ground narrative of how a band of leftist Berkeley hippies managed to make an alliance with upper-crust, conservative Republicans to bring about a truly bipartisan bill. Based on extensive interviews with all the major players involved including legislators and activists, Davis recreates the dramatic tension of a story that is anything but a dry account of bills and speeches. Rather, it's filled with one indefatigable character after another, culminating in explosive moments when the hidden army of the disability community stages scenes like the iconic “Capitol Crawl” or an event when students stormed Gallaudet University demanding a “Deaf President Now!”

From inside the offices of newly formed disability groups to secret breakfast meetings surreptitiously held outside the White House grounds, here we meet countless unsung characters, including political heavyweights and disability advocates on the front lines. “You want to fight?” an angered Ted Kennedy would shout in an upstairs room at the Capitol while negotiating the final details of the ADA. Congressman Tony Coelho, whose parents once thought him to be possessed by the devil because of his epilepsy, later became the bill’s primary sponsor. There’s Justin Dart, adorned in disability power buttons and his signature cowboy hat, who took to the road canvassing 50 states, and people like Patrisha Wright, also known as “The General,” Arlene Myerson or “the brains,” “architect” Bob Funk, and visionary Mary Lou Breslin, who left the hippie highlands of the West to pursue equal rights in the marble halls of DC.



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