

The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public

By Susan Marie Schweik, New York: New York University Press, 2010. 448 pp. \$24.00.

In “Where the Streets Have No Name,” one of the most famous songs in the past 30 years, the band U2 sings of an idealistic world devoid of socioeconomic and demographic divisions. The lyrics call for having nameless streets, thus “tearing down walls” and having a place where boundaries are erased. In sharp contrast, there are the streets in America where, from the late 19th through the mid-20th century, individuals with disabilities were prohibited by law from begging or even remaining in the street. In *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*, Susan M. Schweik, Professor of English and co-director of the Disability Studies Program at the University of California, Berkeley, provides a thorough history of these ugly laws and offers the context that allowed for their creation and sustainment, including a discussion of other relevant social movements, mendicant literature, and concepts of society and class.

Starting in San Francisco in 1867 (and ending in Los Angeles in 1913), several municipalities and states passed laws making it illegal for a person with a disability to solicit alms in public places. What was determined to be a disability ranged from exhibiting “physical and mental deformities” (p 55) to having a body that is “deformed, mutilated, imperfect or has been reduced by amputations, or [being an individual] who is idiotic or imbecile” (p 56). Schweik produces a convenient appendix of these laws.

Her broad aim in this book was to discuss the American concept of disability in public from the late 19th to early 20th century and how disability was iconographic in controlling the poor and less fortunate. From a legal perspective, one of her more specific stated aims was to “illuminate the conditions of disability—and municipal law’s constitution of those conditions—in the late nineteenth century and at the century’s turn, so as to better understand law, culture, and disability in the present” (p 2). She succeeded in attaining the first half of her goal, but unfortunately, she fell short in reaching the second. She

goes into great detail about society’s previous treatment of those with disabilities—such as the role of charity organizations and institutions in using the law to control the city space and comparing mistreatment based on disability status to that based on racial and ethnic minority status; however, her discussion of the law’s role in how we are to understand disability today is lacking.

Although this book is meant for those who study the history of disability, it can be very valuable for those attempting to understand the role of law and how it can unjustly deny individuals with disabilities, not only rights, but dignity and socioeconomic mobility. For example, Schweik astutely observes that tort law (and its development at the turn of the 19th century) led to an increase in alms-seeking by redefining negligence in favor of the employer, thus providing workers with disabilities less legal recourse. In turn, a desire by localities to control their developing streets permitted the use of ordinances that prevented the unsightly (read, disabled) beggar from seeking assistance from others publicly, thus preventing those with disabilities from improving their economic status.

There is a brief discussion of the courts’ handling of the ugly laws. Schweik found no direct legal challenges to these ordinances. As she observed, this failure by the legal community to challenge the laws was probably due to the protective and benevolent nature of the laws (the thought that those with disabilities should be recipients of charity from organizations and institutions and not in the street) and the assumption at the time that only able-bodied individuals were protected by the Constitution and laws of the United States.

One of Schweik’s most shocking findings was an 1877 New York case that held that simply displaying one’s disability in public (without even speaking) constituted begging and a violation of the state’s law (p 217).¹ She does not blame the legal community for what appears to be apathy and even possible hostility toward individuals with disabilities. Yet after reading about the legal system’s consistent lack of regard for those who experience this type of invidious discrimination, one comes to realize the strength of the social factors—explained by the author in such great detail—that led to the enactment and enforcement of the ugly laws. While there is not much analysis by her as to how these factors, sentiments, and

old laws play out today in the realm of disability law and disability rights, the book provides an excellent discussion of history to aid in understanding them in their own time.

References

1. Matter of Haller, 3 Abb. N. Cas. 65 (1877)

William J. Phelan, IV, Esq.
Partner
The Gowen Group Law Office, PLLC
Washington, DC

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Violence Goes to College: An Authoritative Guide to Prevention and Intervention

By John Nicoletti, Sally Spencer-Thomas, and Christopher Bollinger. Second edition. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas, 2010. 369 pp. \$94.95.

This book, with the subtitle of an authoritative guide, does an admirable job as just such a reference and serves as a useful guide for clinicians, law enforcement personnel, and administrators. It is a handbook written for a wide audience within the academic communities of colleges and universities, as well as those professionals connected to them. Well sourced throughout the text, the book reviews various kinds of violence that pose a risk to those on campuses, describes prevention strategies, and reviews methods for dealing with the aftermath of violence. It is comprehensive in its approach, covering forms of violence that most people would readily associate with colleges and universities, as well as less common forms of violence.

As I wrote this review, in the summer and fall of 2012, bomb threats closed the campuses of the University of Texas at Austin, North Dakota State University in Fargo, and Hiram College. Soon after, another threat was made against Louisiana State University. Hiram is an outlier on this list, a liberal arts college set in farm country outside of Cleveland, Ohio, with an enrollment of just 1334 students (and the alma mater of this author). Yet the threat of a bomb in such an idyllic setting as Hiram's campus

underscores the message of the first section of the book, that leaders of educational institutions must give up the idea that such acts of violence could never happen on their campuses.

The necessary first task of a text on this subject is to set the stage for administrators and clinicians to accept that the risk of violence has the potential to touch every college and university community in the nation. The authors discuss violence in epidemiological terms, with chilling examples of fatal violence episodes from the history of higher education in America. They introduce a theoretical framework in which to understand and analyze episodes of violence. They discuss situations on campuses and in college communities that contribute to the risk, including how alcohol can be a catalyst to violence.

The second section of the book focuses on prevention strategies, highlighting the variety of ways in which an institution can work to reduce and manage the risk of violence. A chapter is dedicated to administrative efforts through developing policies and procedures to address risk factors. Another chapter details efforts to create barriers to violence through environmental protection and safety strategies, discussing both pros and cons to the options provided. This section has a chapter dedicated to the role of law enforcement on campus and finishes with a chapter on how to prepare for the aftermath of violence within the community that provides concrete examples of how to manage the trauma that a victimized community inevitably experiences.

Most of the book, 175 of the 300 pages of text, is made up of the third and final section, "Strains of Campus Violence." The chapters include expected topics such as sexual assault, hazing, rioting, and avenger violence (where the perpetrator perceives the violence as the only possible recourse for a perceived injustice, like the incident at Virginia Tech). There also are discussions of suicide, hate crimes, homicide, arson, and bombing. Each chapter details the prevalence, demographics, risk factors, prevention strategies, and appropriate responses to these forms of violence. The information is well organized and comprehensive and would be useful to any clinician with an interest in these areas.

Violence Goes to College presents a balance of theoretical discussions framing the challenges of violence within a specific population and practical advice on prevention, intervention, response, and