

## Book Reviews

**Douglas C. Baynton**, *Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics* (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 192, \$35.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-226-36416-2.

*Defectives in the Land* recounts many previously unknown and revealing stories of the experiences of immigrants with disabilities. Furthermore, Douglas Baynton convincingly demonstrates that the effort to exclude disabled people from the United States played a central role in the broader histories of immigration, disability and American culture.

Baynton shows that attempts to selectively bar those with disabilities significantly helped to shape the whole of American immigration policy. Racial, ethnic and economic fears and prejudices have long been seen as the major factors in the early twentieth-century imposition of immigration restrictions. Baynton's examples show that such prejudices also influenced the treatment of immigrants with disabilities. However, he goes further, to argue that these ethnic and economic categories also were invoked when the underlying main purpose was to selectively exclude those seen as disabled. In one of many such cases, Baynton tells the story of a skilled leather worker and saddle maker from the Netherlands who was rejected in 1905 for deafness, despite evidence he had always worked and supported a family (pp. 20–2, also pp. 94–6). Dark-skinned ethnic groups were presumed to have a higher rate of physical and mental disabilities, so complexion could be a surrogate for disability, and in a sense being dark itself was seen as a disability. Furthermore, Baynton argues, the racial and ethnic group quotas enacted in 1921 and 1924 were often justified as a first step toward developing more specific individual diagnoses of disability.

In explaining the causes of this early twentieth-century effort to exclude immigrants with disabilities, the book also offers important insights into the changing definitions of disability in American culture. Baynton argues that changes in the meaning of time played a key role in reshaping early twentieth-century disability, in ways that help explain but were not limited to the exclusion of disabled immigrants. For example, industrialisation required workers to adapt to new time- and motion-based concepts of efficient labour that rendered many previously self-sufficient labourers unfit for factory work. Baynton documents these changes through a careful examination of language. The early twentieth-century use of time-based words for disability such as 'retarded' and 'handicap' combined the modern factory concern for efficient speed with a eugenic evolutionary focus on development and progress as a competitive race.

Examining immigration exclusions also can reveal the increased importance of visual conformity in defining disability. Baynton found numerous cases in which immigrants with extensive employment histories and work skills were rejected as 'likely to become a public charge' primarily because the immigration inspector thought they looked odd, or argued that their unpleasant appearance would make employers unwilling to hire them. One Italian returning to the United States in 1905 after having supported himself here previously was denied re-entry solely because he had a 'curiously shaped head', pale skin and thin ears (pp. 120–2). Immigration policy thus provides an important new window on broader changes in the meanings of disability.

Perhaps the book's main contribution is to denaturalise the exclusion of disabled immigrants. Many historians who have documented the race, gender and class biases in

American immigration policy have ignored the exclusion of those with ‘real’ disabilities, thus implying that these prohibitions were simply ‘common sense’. Baynton demonstrates that the exclusion of the disabled was neither logically necessary nor biologically determined. The book thus provides important new support for two of Baynton’s path-breaking articles that have been previously published.<sup>1</sup>

The research for this book was thorough and intensive. The many case histories that are so effective in demonstrating and personifying his arguments were extracted by difficult digging in the archival records. His discussions of policy are based on thorough examination of published primary sources, and effectively utilise current scholarship on disability, eugenics and immigration.

Baynton recognises that this research was limited largely to studying European arrivals in East Coast ports, and that Asian, African and Latin American immigrants may have had different experiences. However, this volume will provide an essential reference point for future work to examine the similarities and differences in American policy towards other immigrants with disabilities.

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**Eleanor Decamp**, *Civic and Medical Worlds in Early Modern England: Performing Barbery and Surgery* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. xii, 277, \$95, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-137-47155-0.

Students of the early modern period and its literature will be familiar with the ‘barber-surgeon’, usually glossed as a medical practitioner who performed a range of services from grooming to bloodletting. Eleanor Decamp seeks to deepen our understanding of this figure, but also to place pressure on the hyphen so that we can see that barbery and surgery were discrete if related occupations. In the process of explaining what made the barber and the surgeon recognisable to their contemporaries, she teaches us how to notice these figures on the landscape of representation. The barber wore an apron – a garment he shared with other tradesmen – but also carried recognisable equipment, linking him to ‘the visible, legible, material world of the tradesman’ (p. 46). While the surgeon might be recognised by his robe and coif, he was a ‘mobile, transient figure who emerges, both literally and figuratively, at moments of crisis’ (p. 47). Barbers were associated with a range of readily identified equipment: razor, scissors, basin, fleam (or lance), soapballs (with attendant puns), cupping glasses, ear-picker, comb. Surgeons had tools, of course, but these were less readily inventoried because they were constantly changing and were idiosyncratic, varying from practitioner to practitioner. In short, while props made the barber, they did not make the surgeon.

The barber was often depicted in his shop, announced by a basin, a pole, even strings of teeth. In contrast, surgeons went to patients, working at the site of injuries on ships and battlefields, in households and workplaces, and sometimes in hospitals or their own homes. As a consequence, on the stage, Decamp shows, the surgeon has no place and no

<sup>1</sup> Douglas C. Baynton, ‘Defectives in the Land: Disability and American Immigration Policy, 1882–1924,’ *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24 (Spring 2005), 31–44; and ‘Disability and the justification of inequality in American history’, in Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky (eds), *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 33–57.