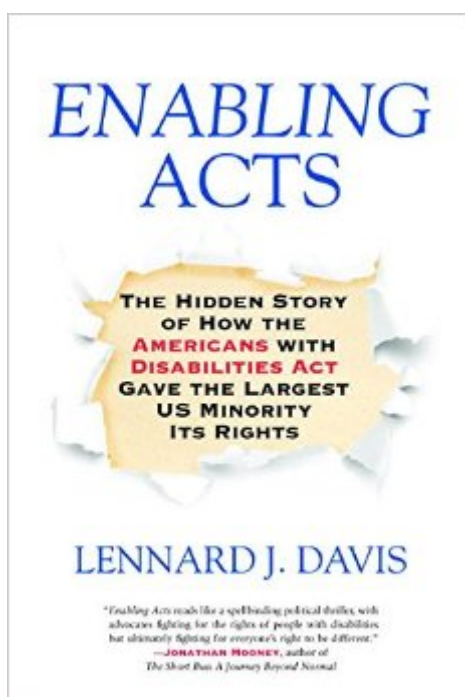


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# Enabling Acts: The Hidden Story Of How The Americans With Disabilities Act Gave The Largest US Minority Its Rights



## Synopsis

The first significant book on the history and impact of the ADA—the “eyes on the prize” moment for disability 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 behind-the-scenes and 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 some describe as “deaf Selma,” 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 fifty 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. Published for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the ADA, *Enabling Acts* promises to ignite readers in a discussion of disability rights by documenting this “eyes on the prize” moment for tens of millions of American citizens.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 296 pages

Publisher: Beacon Press (July 14, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0807071560

ISBN-13: 978-0807071564

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 1.1 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (24 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #798,495 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #79 in [Books > Law > Specialties > Disability](#) #415 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Disabled](#) #1788 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Civil Rights & Liberties](#)

## Customer Reviews

“The ADA is an excellent example of a bipartisanship no longer extant but made possible when a Republican President, George H. W. Bush, worked together with a Democratic House and Senate.” I received this book as part of the Goodreads First Reads program for an honest review. One in Five of every American is disabled, so I would venture to say that unless you are a hermit, you or someone you love is disabled. It is so easy to forget what life was like for the disabled in this country before the Americans with Disabilities Act gave people their freedom. When you look at a city bus and see the ramp, take the time to realize before the ADA people in wheelchairs had to stay home. It was difficult to get jobs or go to school with everyone else. The entire story of how this act was conceived and finally passed is in “Enabling Acts” by Lennard J. Davis a man whose parents were deaf. I enjoyed reading this book because I like to see how government works when it works, and how to make it work. I also am disabled with arthritis, my husband has epilepsy, a son is autistic and a daughter suffers from Multiple Sclerosis. I don’t get SSDI and don’t expect to but it is helpful for my son and hopefully my daughter will be able to get assistance soon. I think the most important thing to come out of the ADA was the integration of the disabled into normal life. It is less costly in the long run to accommodate and allow people to contribute to this country. This is a fascinating story of the ins and outs of selling an idea and encouraging people on both sides to work together and come up with a plan that works.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the passing of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). Author Lennard J Davis, whose own parents are deaf and who saw them be discriminated against in every facet of life, marks the history of the ADA from its first activist movements in Berkeley to the demonstration outside the Capitol and the often emotional verbal exchange of lobbyists and politicians. Davis uses a variety of sources, both primary and secondary, to describe the many small events that led to the passing of the ADA. He talks to the activists, he reads memoirs, he goes

through legislative reports, White House testimonies, legal journals and newspaper reports. While Davis' personal experiences as a hearing child of deaf parents has given him an emotional connection to the ADA, his prose lacks the emotion. He credits a bi-partisan passage of the bill and equal energy from both activists and lobbyists to get the ADA passed, and the chapters are well presented. No one alone is heralded as a hero, which may disappoint some readers who will call this book boring. It's far from boring in both narrative and message. The book's one flaw is perhaps the slow start, but this is Davis' way of giving credit to everyone. He profiles the many activists and lobbyists, many with horrific stories of discrimination because of their handicap of being wheelchair bound, being an amputee, or being deaf or blind. But there are also people with mental handicaps who are profiled. All these varied handicaps led to the broad definition of the ADA, but it took some work on all sides. The legislative fun starts half-way through the book, in Chapter 8, "A New Day, a New ADA." While there is Rep (R-TX) Steve Barlett, Chief of Staff to President George H.

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