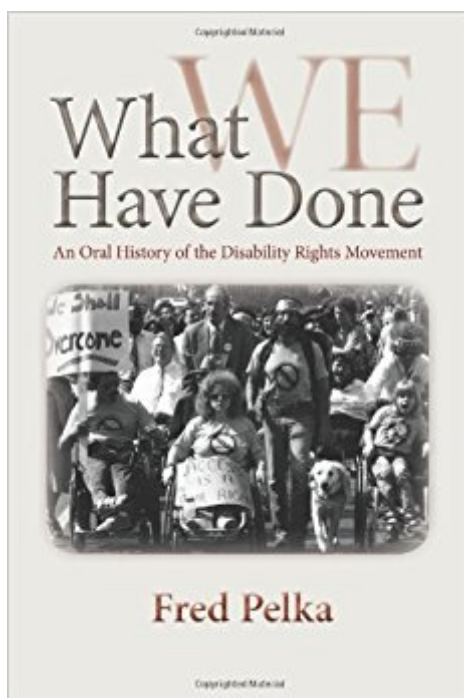


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# What We Have Done: An Oral History Of The Disability Rights Movement



## Synopsis

"Nothing about us without us" has been a core principle of American disability rights activists for more than half a century. It represents a response by people with disabilities to being treated with scorn and abuse or as objects of pity, and to having the most fundamental decisions relating to their lives—where they would live; if and how they would be educated; if they would be allowed to marry or have families; indeed, if they would be permitted to live at all—made by those who were, in the parlance of the movement, "temporarily able-bodied." In *What We Have Done: An Oral History of the Disability Rights Movement*, Fred Pelka takes that slogan at face value. He presents the voices of disability rights activists who, in the period from 1950 to 1990, transformed how society views people with disabilities, and recounts how the various streams of the movement came together to push through the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the most sweeping civil rights legislation since passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Beginning with the stories of those who grew up with disabilities in the 1940s and '50s, the book traces how disability came to be seen as a political issue, and how people with disabilities—often isolated, institutionalized, and marginalized—forged a movement analogous to the civil rights, women's rights, and gay rights movements, and fought for full and equal participation in American society.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This book makes a unique and important contribution to the field of disability movement history. Featuring the words of both activist foot soldiers and movement leaders, *What We Have Done* documents how people with diverse disabilities fought against prejudice and discrimination and won

landmark political and legal victories equivalent to those of the African American and other civil rights movements of twentieth-century America."â •Mary Lou Breslin, cofounder of the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)"Oral history is our most ancient way to talk about the events of the past. No one has worked longer or harder to make the oral history of the disability rights movement come to life than Fred Pelka. With the skill of an excellent interviewer and storyteller Pelka brings the interweaving stories of disability rights activists into the spotlight and elevates their almost overlooked struggle to its just place as a great civil rights movement."â •Eric Neudel, founder of Storyline Motion Pictures and director of Lives Worth Living"People interested in the rights of other oppressed groupsâ •women, gays, and African Americansâ •will be fascinated by the stories in which disability rights and the rights of other marginalized peoples converge. Readers with disabilities will discover that they, too, have a rich and storied legacy. In sum, so many need this account that no library or bookseller can afford to be without it."â •ForeWord"A unique and comprehensive look at the people and events surrounding the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. . . . Everyday people are profiled and given a voice. Most academic and large public libraries will want to consider purchasing this welcome addition to the works on disability matters."â •Booklist"The book truly is a story of disability rights as told by those involved in the movement. . . . This book is of interest to anyone who studies social movements, collective action, and activism, as well as those interested more specifically in disability rights. The accounts provided in the book shed important light on emotions, perceptions, and motivations behind action."â •Mobilizing Ideas"Today, most people don't think twice about the accommodations that give people with disabilities greater access to the public sphere. . . . But 50 and 60 years agoâ •or even more recentlyâ •that was hardly the case. . . . It's an epic story that Northampton writer and researcher Fred Pelka has chronicled in his new book *What We Have Done: An Oral History of the Disability Rights Movement*."â •The Amherst Bulletin"Because so many people are telling the story in their own words, the narrative has a vivid and poignant feel about it. The book is easy to read and well footnoted, and it contains an extensive, useful index. Recommended."â •Choice"The primary contribution of *What We Have Done* is as a terrific compilation of narratives that detail the complexity of the disability rights movement from many perspectives."â •H-Net Reviews"Through these voices, the reader is able to understand the frustration of disability rights advocates who endured institutional abuse and patronization, as well as their determination and pride in their accomplishment. As the title suggests, they are able to look back with some satisfaction on 'what we have done,' while making it clear there is more yet to do."â •Oral History Review

Fred Pelka is author of *The ABC-CLIO Companion to the Disability Rights Movement* (1997) and *The Civil War Letters of Charles F. Johnson, Invalid Corps* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2004). He was a 2004 Guggenheim fellow.

As Directing attorney of the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, a key player in the passage of the ADA, I want to strongly recommend Fred Pelka's "What We Have Done ". The thing I loved about Fred's book was the variety of views and memories of the events leading up to the ADA. I was surprised about how much I learned about how things happened from different viewpoints. If you want an intimate view of what it is like to conceive and then pass the most comprehensive disability rights law in the world, don't pass up "What We Have Done"!Arlene Mayerson

The book collects interviews from major figures in the disability rights movement(s), but it does not discuss themes or trends in a way that yields many deep insights. I would prefer a less encyclopedic and more analytic approach.

An excellent overview of the path to final passage of the ADA from the voices of those disabled people who fought so courageously for their rights against what often seemed like insurmountable barriers. Pelka has done a remarkable job of weaving this engaging and important story.

I can't put this book down, I am learning so much about a history that has been silenced from our textbooks and teachings. Each oral history feels vibrant. We see the making of history unfold in ways that remind us all to take the next step when injustice stands in our way. Well organized, beautifully written. We owe so much to each person who is interviewed in the book and to the author Fred Pelka whose research is impeccable. This is THE book that I will be giving as gifts to activists, lovers of history, and anyone who values the truth. By Janice Fialka. [...]

Relying on oral histories as primary sources, Fred Pelka's history of the modern Disability Rights Movement is a must read for anyone interested in social justice movements or history in general. Beautifully written and thoroughly researched, if you read nothing else on the subject, don't miss this remarkable title.

Really. I thought I knew this stuff...but I learned a lot and I have a boatload of new heroes. Read

it...several times.

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