



The Rights of People with Mental Disabilities: The Authoritative Guide to the Rights of People with Mental Illness and Mental Retardation (ACLU Handbook)

Hon. Robert M Levy, Leonard S. Rubenstein

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In this completely revised and updated ACLU handbook, Levy and Rubenstein use a simple question-and-answer format to clearly and concisely explain the rights of people with mental disabilities.

People with mental disabilities, whether with mental illness or mental retardation, have endured a long history of degradation, stigma, fear, and even hatred. In the 1920s, they were considered a "blight on mankind." Government publications described people with mental retardation, for example, as a "parasitic, predatory class" and a "danger to the race." Writing for the Supreme Court about whether society had the right to sterilize a woman based on the allegation that she was mentally retarded, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes described people with mental retardation as a "menace" who "sap the strength of the state...It is better for all the world if, instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind." Holmes concluded, "Three generations of imbeciles are enough."

Massive changes in attitude and in legislation have occurred since that infamous Holmes dictum. The struggle has been arduous—and certainly is not over—but progress has been made. The movement to establish and protect the rights of people with mental disabilities has entailed an effort to gain fair and equal treatment and to foster the respect and dignity every human being deserves.

Levy and Rubenstein here address the recent development of a self-advocacy movement among mentally disabled persons and the corresponding new concepts in the design and provision of services for them.

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