

**The Disabled Proletariat and Ableist Bourgeoisie:**

Tracking the Dialectic through Political Action

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**Abstract**

Passed in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is landmark legislation in the progress of disabled Americans' civil rights. Despite this, disabled people remain an underclass oppressed by an ableist population. This study examines the political actions of both groups through Marxist Social Conflict Theory. Using content analysis of news media since the passage of the ADA, we examine the dialectic between the Disabled Proletariat (DP) and Ableist Bourgeoisie (AB) by tracking the political actions of both parties and finding trends throughout the 30-year legacy of the affirmative ADA. This research sheds light on an active but uneven dialectic where the AB serves as an oppressive, managing force for a DP that has never wanted to be a poorly dignified underclass.

## Introduction

People of all ethnicities, classes, ages, genders, religions, and races can face regular discrimination. It is often neglected, however, that disability can cut across all of the typical categories in which people are placed. This intersection goes unnoticed sometimes, despite common wisdom that, provided a long enough timeline, everyone reaches infirmity. Even further than this, everyone can be considered disabled given the right environment (Ben-Moshe and Magana 2014). In a just society that acknowledges the different ways people access their daily lives, it might be expected that a government would protect the civil rights of people with disabilities. Instead, the Supreme Court of the United States recently ruled that discrimination could be legal, if occurring within certain institutional contexts<sup>1</sup> (see *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru* 2020).

Political actions such as the aforementioned court case serve as perfect examples of the back-and-forth dialectic in which the disabled proletariat (DP) engages with the ableist bourgeoisie (AB). A derivative of the struggle between “[f]reeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman,” (Marx and Engles 1969 [1848], p. 14) this struggle has seen triumphs for both sides. Arguably the greatest victory for disabled people in recent history, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 serves as a foundation for rightfully expanded civil rights for up to twenty-six percent of Americans (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020). Another victory for disabled Americans, achieved in the intervening 30 years, was the passing of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010, where some disabled Americans were able to access healthcare not managed by the government. In the latter

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<sup>1</sup> This case, argued in 2019, ruled that age and disability discrimination laws couldn't be enforced at a Catholic primary school because of the religious nature of the institution. A teacher's age and related disability were direct factors in the termination of their position. The termination was ruled to be constitutional.

decade of the ADA, however, victories seem to have declined. The present research investigates this decline.

“What has the dialectic looked like between the disabled proletariat and ableist bourgeoisie since the passing of the ADA in 1990?” This is the question this research asks. Since the struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie is a political one (Marx and Engels 1969 [1848]), political action regarding disability rights will be the measure of the dialectic. Using Marxist conflict theory and the ideal that disabled rights are civil rights, political action will be examined. Acts of legislation and the rulings of the judiciary are political acts just as strong as protests and instances of civil disobedience. Over the span of the 30 years of the ADA, it should be possible to detect the general activity of the dialectic by examining the records of the news media.

The United States has a rich history of political action, both for good and for ill. The emerging dialectic of the DP and AB will see victories for both sides. Laws supporting access and civil rights will be upheld, just as protesters will be dragged from public buildings and the halls of government. Sometimes, these political actions are less conspicuous. The political movements of the AB are the norm in America, so the victories of the DP are sometimes hard to recognize and identify. Nonetheless, the dialectic will be tracked and analyzed. No final victor will be declared, however. Such an evaluation is beyond the scope of this research, just as such a victory is beyond the scope of mere political action. It’s expected that such an auspicious end would be bitterly achieved, as equality seems like oppression when viewed from a place of privilege (Leonard 2015).

This research examines an America with the ADA, covering more than 30 years of history. The archives of *The New York Times* will be used to identify articles reporting political

activity that impacts the DP. These articles will be grouped, coded, and scored, resulting in data that will paint a picture of the state of the dialectic. The aim is to observe the dynamic of the dialectic rather than to determine where the dialectic lies on the path to full revolution.

It is expected that the dialectic will have remained lively over the course of the intervening years between the passing of the ADA and now. The achievement of the ADA was hard-won, and its progress has been challenged regularly in social discourse. Budgets have been cut, protests have been organized, and administrations have changed. All of this should indicate the state of the dialectic. In just the last five years of the ADA, former President Donald Trump aligned himself against the ACA (Stolberg 2020) with many different groups fighting against him (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2020). This is clear evidence that the dialectic can be detected and examined. All that remains is to scrutinize the legacy of the ADA and how it has shaped the part of the dialectic following it.

### **Literature Review**

Disability, as a concept, requires a definition, especially within the context of this research. A few models of disability exist, each of which should be given consideration. The first, the medical model, describes disability as a lack of function in a person's body that requires a remedy (Goering 2015). In other words, this model views disability as an impairment. The second, the social model, views disability as disadvantages imposed by society through a lack of access, whether physical or otherwise. This model does not preclude impairments; it includes them within a disability. The impairment is the physical or internal component to disability's societal or external component (Anastasiou and Kauffman 2013). The final model considered is the neutral model, a solution suggesting a rejection of the inherent assumption of harm, or

reduced wellbeing, in both the medical and social models (Brown 2016). By not assuming reduced wellbeing in a disabled person's life, one can respect the right of people with disabilities to be included and to determine the quality of their own lives, agreed upon politically by bodies such as the United Nations (United Nations 2006). The ADA uses both the medical model and the social model. The ACA, being legislation focused on healthcare, largely uses the medical model. This research takes in all three models, preferring to understand disability in any way the DP chooses to identify. The goal is to respect rights by way of the medical and neutral models, and jurisprudence by way of the medical model.

To many, the term 'ableism,' especially as applied to the ableist bourgeoisie, is foreign and misunderstood. Often, it is not even recognized outside of the bounds of its suffix. Defined recently in the *Journal of Social Issues* as "stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and social oppression toward people with disabilities" (Bogart and Dunn 2019: 651), ableism is the driving force behind the denial of access that disabled people experience in their daily lives. This ranges from benevolent condescension to hostile exclusion and avoidance (Nario-Redmond, Kemerling, and Silverman 2019). In terms of political actions, the fact that legislation like the ADA was absent until 1990 stands as evidence of the presumed ableist attitude of the class in conflict with the disabled proletariat.

A dialectic between classes requires more than just the existence of two distinct groups. In *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels detail these requirements: class antagonism, the reality of the managing role of the bourgeoisie, and the large-scale exploitation of the proletariat (Marx and Engels 1969 [1848]). These authors elaborate on further points, but some of them are difficult to relate to the disabled population because Marx and Engels relegated the disabled and elderly to a segment of the proletariat that cannot fit into the equation of value

by labor (Brown 2008). In the struggle of the proletariat, disability was seen as a symptom of the capitalist system (Bengtsson 2017). It was understood almost entirely through the medical model; deprivation of civil rights does not seem to be considered. Despite this, the dialectic between the AB and DP can still be detected, lying parallel to the superordinate struggle of Marx's proletariat against the labor-controlling bourgeoisie.

As one looks at the history of disability rights in America and across the world, it becomes clear that there is a further, very important difference between the struggle of the DP and AB and the classic dialectic of the proletariat and bourgeoisie as identified by Marx and Engels. That is, resolution between the two dialectics looks very different. For Marx, the implementation of Communism was the goal (Marx and Engels 1969 [1848]). It would be, by necessity, a violent, revolutionary affair. For the DP, however, the goal is integration, recognition, and access (Heumann 2020). Passage of the ADA in the United States is an example. In countries like Sweden and Norway, this resolution is equally political and much more detailed, though the struggle does still remain (Hagelund and Bryngelson 2014). The struggle of disabled people across the world to obtain a more accessible world requires revolutionary thought, but this is not the Communist Revolution that Marx saw as the logical apotheosis near the end of the dialectic.

Political resolution of the dialectic is not the only path, however. Social inclusion is given as an alternative, using what one researcher calls the Axes of Inclusion, a system of material social interactions, individual value orientations, and group value relations (O'Reilly 2005). Other researchers have suggested resolution of the dialectic by recognizing and combating ableism directly (Nario-Redmond 2020). Both of the approaches can inform the dialectic and do not necessarily stand as incompatible with each other.

A simplified class antagonism can be easily visualized as a widening gulf between two groups, the DP and AB in this case. A researcher from Cornell University, Andrew Houtenville, found great economic inequality between the DP and AB (2000). In his research, Houtenville discovered that the DP's median household size-adjusted income was, in 1998, "at its lowest level in two decades" (Houtenville 2000, p. 8). Over the course of those two decades, men without a disability saw their incomes grow by more than \$5000, while men with a disability saw an increase of less than half that (Houtenville 2000, Table 1). Women with a disability were even more disadvantaged, seeing a change in income of only \$646 (Houtenville 2000, Table 1). A recent book written by Rebekah Taussig (2020) keenly observes similar struggles in the author's own life. It also references a report that indicated similar differences in 2017 (Erickson, Lee, and von Schrader 2019). This report highlights the growing economic gulf between the DP and AB, finding that the DP makes \$25,000 less per year than the AB and experiences more than twice the rate of unemployment (Erickson, Lee, and von Schrader 2019). This economic deprivation is likely due, at least in part, to the ways that society has created a labor market in which the DP cannot compete, even with legislation like the ADA (Mitchell and Snyder 2010). This economic deprivation is not a uniquely American phenomenon. Research in Australia found that adult-equivalent disposable income available to the disabled was about half of that of the Australian AB (Vu et al. 2020).

When considering the managing role of the AB, the ADA could stand alone as evidence. Impetus for the legislation was provided by the DP, but its necessity shows how much power the AB had amassed over the DP. Much like a bill of patients' rights at a hospital, the ADA might be taken as assumed in other contexts. Unfortunately, the AB's potency has extended so far into American politics that even disabled representation in government is disproportionate. Despite



advanced age in a significant portion of government leaders, the DP is represented at one-sixth the rate of the AB, occurring across all levels of government, from municipal positions to Congress (National Council on Independent Living 2020). This same source lists hearing impairment as the most common disability among elected officials at 5.4%. Someone with a hearing impairment might not even identify as disabled. Such a concealable disability would be convenient in overcoming the stigma otherwise associated with disability, as one could present the social identity of the in-group AB (Goffman 1963). It is unclear how many people in government may have a disability and have chosen to present themselves as the AB despite having difficulties in access.

There is hope in government, however. While the rate of disability in the population grew only slightly (15.2% to 15.7%) from 2008 to 2012, the representation of the DP in politics grew significantly across all represented levels (8.5% to 10.3%) (National Council on Independent Living 2020). Stoic figures of the Legislative Branch such as Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) are exemplars in kind. Senator Duckworth has a vibrant history of supporting the ACA (Healthcarereformvotes.org 2020), sometimes even doing so from her wheelchair, other times using prosthetic limbs to stand behind the lectern. Having lost her lower extremities in military service to the United States, she remains the strongest voice for disabled Americans in Congress. She also sets an example for what overcoming the onslaught of the AB can look like in government.

In terms of political action, large-scale exploitation of the DP is most clearly evidenced by the provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act, where the presence of certain significant impairments is grounds for the denial of federal minimum wage for labor (Fair Labor Standards Act 1938). This legislation provides some necessary protections for Americans with disabilities,

such as prohibitions against working crews, but still stands in opposition to the presumed rights of Americans to equal protection under the law as granted by the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (U.S. Constitution, Amendment XIV, Section 1).

Political edifices are not the only manner of exploitation, though there is reason to remain hopeful. Researcher St. Pierre suggests that a cultural hegemony exists to oppress the DP (2017). They go further to explain that a ‘dysfluency’ can be obtained by the DP to fight against this particular oppression. It extends past the scope of the present research, but such dysfluency could be a powerful tool in the class struggle of the DP. In this struggle, perception of the fight is also important, as the way one views disability as exclusion and deprivation may feed into the cultural hegemony (Barnes 2014). This includes the stance that the aforementioned neutral model takes, where one’s views on a good life shouldn’t be put upon another, as it is the right of every person to determine this independently (Bognar 2015). Where the cultural hegemony seeks to remove disabled voices from social participation and inclusion, the social dysfluency can broaden the audiences that a disabled person can reach. The neutral model enables this dysfluency by setting a positive stage on which conversations about a good life and a more accessible world can occur.

If the struggle of the proletariat and bourgeoisie is a political one (Marx and Engels 1969 [1848]), then the erosion of political power would be a powerful tool, as exploitation is easier when oppression is rampant. A government report concerning the 2016 American General Election found that 42% of polling places were inaccessible by wheelchair users, with 28% of accessible locations providing less privacy to users (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2017). Disabled Americans sometimes have accessibility problems because the AB assumes an atypical appearance of the DP, leaving the disabled in an invisible intersection of discrimination

(Harris 2019). This bites particularly deep when one considers that 40 million Americans have a disability (Stevens et al. 2016).

The AB serving as a managing force has historical roots in America. Disabled veterans from The Great War had some support from the U.S. Government, but were often told what they could do with their benefits, limiting their vocational opportunities to that which external forces decided were appropriate (Gelber 2005). Anecdotal evidence provided by Judith Heumann, a disability rights activist, supports this later in the same century, where she was often told that someone impaired the way she was couldn't succeed as a teacher (Heumann 2020). While not a directly American institution, the United Nations was founded between the Great War and Ms. Heumann's experience and did not affirm the right of persons with disabilities to manage their own lives until 2006 (United Nations 2006, Section 19).

## **Methodology**

This research is a content analysis of over 30 years of news articles. *The New York Times* was selected for its history of journalism and strong archival functions. Exploratory tests on the archival search yielded a few thousand articles, both in recent searches and searches closer to the passage of the ADA. The present research explores the years following the passage of the ADA on July 26, 1990. This date was chosen as the passage of the ADA remains a pivotal moment in the history of disability rights in America.

Data for the content analysis was gathered from the *New York Times* archival search function on their website *www.archive.nytimes.com*. Exploratory tests of the system used the search term "disability disabled" without quotation or additional logic and algebra. The same terms were used for the research proper. From January 1, 2003 to the end date, these articles

were featured in HTML text. Prior to January 1, 2003, the archive transcribed articles into digital text from scans of printed issues. For both time periods, the search included only articles from tagged 'U.S.' and excluded tags such as 'Opinion.' The earlier time period lacked some functionality, but otherwise provided no problems.

Each article produced by the search term was recorded and coded by a single coder. A previously established and recognized coding procedure was not utilized. The article's author(s) and URL were noted if either was available or applicable. The article was then coded for content. Five coded variables were used for analysis. They are 'Explicit Involvement of the DP,' 'Political Action,' 'Type of Political Action,' 'Initiator,' and 'Direct Response.' The first two variables were used to determine if the search terms produced applicable results. Involvement of the DP was categorized by self-identification of a disability, social, civil, medical, or otherwise, or by recognition of such a disability by the coder. Political action was determined by evaluating the actions or reported parties in an article as they related to the title of the article.

The final three variables provide insight into the character of the ongoing dialectic. 'Type of Political Action' could be coded for one of fifteen different responses (Appendix A). A response was always chosen. No cases were left uncoded for any variable. 'Initiator' and 'Direct Response' determined the direction of the dialectic. It was possible for the DP or AB to respond to itself; such interactions were still relevant to the research question. Membership in either party was taken in a combination of the medical, social, and neutral models. Self-identification and exclusion were also accepted. If an initiating or responding party was not identified as disabled, then they were presumed to be a part of the AB. In exploratory searches, it became clear that designated and appointed representatives needed to be considered as well. Anyone speaking in direct official capacity of either party was presumed to be a part of that party for the purposes of

this research. This includes lawyers but excludes elected political representatives unless the latter is identified, personally or externally, as disabled.

The final dataset was not analyzed to determine who might have the upper hand in the dialectic. Rather, the articles were analyzed to determine a total amount of activity after the cases were coded. A tally was taken against the number of months in the timeframe to determine the level of activity. A monthly proportion was taken as minimal activity. Semi-monthly activity was taken as mild activity. Demi-monthly activity was taken as moderate activity. Finally, semiweekly activity was taken as elevated or lively.

## **Results**

The search results yielded 929 total cases across the entirety of the desired years. A total of 99.2% of these cases involved the DP either directly or indirectly ( $n = 921$ ). 74.3% of the total cases involved political action ( $n = 690$ ). The variables that were coded as “inapplicable” correlated directly to the rate of cases that did not involve political action. All of this suggests that the search results yielded the desired data that was consistently coded.

Apropos of the research question, the dialectic has seen mild activity since the passage of the ADA, though the activity has declined over the total timespan. The mean number of cases per year was 29.0125, indicating more than semi-monthly activity. When the partial years of study were excluded (1990 and 2021), this mean increased to 30.5333 monthly cases. Linear regression of the latter measure of monthly activity was both significant at  $< 5\%$  (F-significance = 0.0071) and mild (x-coefficient = -0.6376).

During coding, it became apparent that the coded variables “Initiator” and “Direct Response” would bring greater depth to this research’s examination of the dialectic between the

DP and AB. When the former variable was controlled for just the DP and AB, excluding other coded responses, it was found that the participation of the DP as initiator increased over the course of research (Appendix B, Table 1). This linear regression was mild ( $x$ -coefficient = 0.1726) and statistically insignificant (F-significance = 0.4792). While this would otherwise not be worth discussing, this statistical insignificance indicates that there might be room for further investigation.

While the data for both parties' acts as initiator were insignificant, the results of the linear regression for their acts as responders were significant (Appendix B, Table 2). The linear regression for "Direct Response," when controlled for just the DP and AB, found that the DP's participation as responders declined over the total timespan ( $x$ -coefficient = -0.4910, F-significance = 0.0426).

Other data gathered in the research and coding were equally instructive. The types of political action ran nearly the entire span of possible codings (Appendix B, Table 3). Of the 16 possible forms of political action (including 'Undetermined' and 'inapplicable (IAP)'), only one coding was absent, that of 'Countersuit.' 'Proposed Legislation/Petition/Hearing' comprised the greatest share of responses at 15.1% ( $n = 140$ ). The least common response was 'Terrorist Activity' at 0.2% of responses ( $n = 2$ ).

While greater activity was expected during the lifespan of the ADA, it seems that the dialectic still has life, though it may be declining for the DP. Individual cases were certainly missed by the search terms, though this was by design. Initial exploratory searches found several thousands of cases in the *New York Times*' digital archive. This was greatly reduced when the final research only considered articles tagged 'U.S.' and excluded the Op Ed section in its

entirety. The Op Ed section holds a wealth of personal opinions and data but was considered too subjective and repetitive for analysis in this research.

Coding did evolve over the course of the data gathering. It became evident that new categories were necessary for a few outliers ('Terrorist Activity' being the best example) and that existing categories needed additional qualifiers (such as for 'Proposed Legislation' becoming 'Proposed Legislation/Petition/Hearing'). The latter category could have been summed up as 'Congressional Action' but this would have simplified the data and reduced the quality of the entries. There were also, in theory, other Congressional actions that belonged to other categories, such as 'Arrest/Detainment/Detention/Imprisonment,' 'Failed Legislation,' and 'Passed Legislation.' Had these other categories been combined, it would have made the proposed 'Congressional Action' too broad and would have necessitated the creation of other categories to include the legislation of individual states.

The evolution of the coded responses occurred mostly within the beginning several years of articles. When a response needed to be expanded or added, all of the responses were recoded. For some, this was as simple as navigating the data spreadsheet for highlighted errors. For others, such as the inclusion of "Terrorist Activity," the entire history of articles to that point was re-evaluated.

The most difficult cases to code were those of the regularly occurring cycles of the Federal Budget. Depending on the perspective of the article, a discussion on such a topic could be coded as one of possibly seven different categories, though it was most often a decision based on a delineation between 'Executive Action' and 'Proposed Legislation.' In such cases, weight was given to each category based on the title of the article and where the majority of reporting

lied. Sometimes, the weight was even, and the case was coded as ‘Multiple Actions’ (such as case 390: “Senators Question Adequacy of Bush Budget for Veterans”).

## **Discussion**

It became apparent, over the course of data gathering and coding, that one particular issue could run nearly the entire length of the ‘Type of Political Action’ variable. A topic could begin its life as ‘Demonstration, Protest, Riot,’ proceed to ‘Arrest/Detainment/Detention/Imprisonment,’ become a ‘Lawsuit’ that faced a ‘Countersuit’ that led to an ‘Investigation’ after an ‘Other Court Ruling or Deliberation’ that reached the attention of a Governor or the President and become ‘Executive Action Non-POTUS’ or ‘Executive Action.’ It could then go through the gamut of lawmaking in Congress, only to become ‘Terrorist Activity’ at the end of its life. No such case made this entire lengthy run, but some did see several cycles through categories, particularly cases bridging the ADA, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and Rehabilitation ACT. Case 926 did so, beginning as a lawsuit that led to discussion in Congress (Case 907), with a President's action (Case 914) in between. Such cases were not necessarily epochs in their own right but indicate the continuing struggles of disabled Americans. Case 926 is an excellent example of perseverance leading to a victory for the DP.

The cycles of annual preparation of the Federal Budget were the most common pattern found in the research. No two were exactly the same, but they often involved arguments over how much money the government could afford to cut out of Medicare and Medicaid. Articles usually portrayed both sides of the argument, but very often, the conversation surrounding it was initiated and responded to by the AB. Outside of these cycles of government, other patterns were



termed ‘epochs.’ These epochs were considered to be three or more coded articles spanning more than a week covering the same specific political action. This action may have changed over the course of the epoch, or it may have remained a single political action.

The earliest epoch was a series of court challenges to the recent provisions of the ADA. Initially, it seemed like the cases were testing the bounds of the recently passed ADA. The cases expanded to include school issues related to both the ADA and the IDEA. There were other challenges to the ADA, such as those surrounding Case 914, where the federal government was struggling to provide rights to workers guaranteed by the ADA. It is unsurprising that legislation as large and groundbreaking as the ADA would have early, repeated challenges. These challenges have persisted through the life of the ADA, but no direct epochs emerged in the same way.

Quick to follow the direct challenges to the ADA was an epoch of cases, conversations, and struggles to define AIDS as a disability, beginning with Case 892 in 1991 and ending near Case 831 in 1993. The courts presented mixed rulings on the matter, with Federal action enforcing a strict medical interpretation of disability during the end of George H.W. Bush’s presidency. In the early days of Bill Clinton’s presidency, however, this interpretation was relaxed. It still used a viewpoint of disability from the medical model, but it was an advancement for Americans with disabilities. In actions involving the Federal government, the medical model continues to be used almost exclusively, at least as evidenced by the data of this research. Some states, such as Oregon, have used a social model intermittently, but the use of the medical model remains the norm in governmental affairs. This epoch didn’t technically end until the issue made it to the Supreme Court (Case 648), where an HIV positive person could be officially considered disabled.

The next epoch was not about a specific issue or action. Instead, it was about a person. Bob Dole's bid for the presidency in 1996 put a disabled American in the spotlight in a way previously unseen in the life of the ADA. Some remarks were neutral or made in passing (Case 739). Others were positive, identifying him as a part of the DP that was not a threat to the AB (Case 742). Following such articles were a couple of articles decrying Dole's comparison of his disability to the struggles of the Jewish people in Europe around the Holocaust (Cases 731 and 727). To be clear, Dole expressed that he, too, felt discrimination, not that he was being persecuted in the same manner. Though one could say that the epoch ended when Clinton won his second term, Bob Dole's disability was mentioned again later when George H.W. Bush died in 2018 (Case 64).

Changes to H.M.O.s surrounding George W. Bush's tax plan on his election to the presidency began the next epoch. The epoch was fairly short lived, but it shared many parallels with a later struggle, that of the ACA. In both, Americans were afraid that changes to the status quo of medical care would leave disabled Americans on Medicare and Medicaid without sufficient care. These epochs were punctuated by the return of Americans disabled by war in Afghanistan and Iraq. All three of them together form a long, more than 10-year span of continuing issues where disabled Americans were asking for help and not receiving it. The tax cut didn't provide much of a boon to disabled Americans and the ACA didn't collapse the American medical industry, but both were still reviled by opponents. This being said, the lives of disabled Americans are still economically deprived when compared to the rest of the country (Erickson, Lee, and Von Schrader 2019 & Houtenville 2000).

The final two epochs were either about Donald J. Trump or occurred under his general leadership as the 45th president of the United States. In the lead-up to the 2016 election, Trump

was regularly criticized for his mocking depiction of a disabled *New York Times* reporter (Cases 121, 115, 113, and 110.) The last epoch overlapped this period of cases. It was about the execution of death row inmates with intellectual disabilities. This extended from 2016 (Case 116) to 2021 (Case 1). There were other notable events that did not quite constitute epochs, such as the sexual assault of a comatose disabled woman in an assisted living facility (Cases 61, 60, 59, 56, 55, and 54). This particular issue didn't qualify as an epoch because it occurred over a very brief time, with some articles occurring on the same day.

Overall, the epochs do not match the increase of DP initiated events or decrease in responses. The dialectic was persistent, to which the epochs and cases bear witness. While proximity to passing of the ADA can logically explain the decrease in responses, the same explanation does not illuminate the increase in initiations. One might say the inverse, that the ADA encouraged the DP. This explains the initiations but not the responses. It is difficult to assume both positions to explain both phenomena. Rather, the phenomena might be better understood by the way that the AB has to maintain control. To maintain control of the DP, the AB would need to stifle responses. A fiery takedown of ableism in the opening statements of a lawsuit are powerful, but not as powerful as the reinforcement ableism receives when the court rules in favor of the AB.

A strong, bold, empowering action such as a lawsuit might bring about some social change, or buy some social or political capital, but the response is where the change happens. If a lawsuit is brought by the DP and the AB strikes it down through the Supreme Court, the AB has effectively maintained their position of power. The same is technically true of the AB bringing a lawsuit against the DP. Unfortunately for the DP, however, is that the courts belong to the ruling class, the AB. Even without such a systemic advantage, this research highlights the difference in

actions. The AB initiated 73% of actions involving only the AB and DP. They were the direct responders in 73% of those actions. At best, the AB engaged itself on behalf of the DP. At worst, the AB maintained their oppression of the DP in a strong majority of cases.

### **Future Research**

This research tracked the dialectic of disability over the course of a short portion of the fight for disability rights in America. The entire fight leading up to the ADA, the impetus for this research, was left untouched. Fortunately, the same archives used for the present research could be used for further research tracking the dialectic as it developed over the course of the 20th century. One might even be able to go as far back as the Civil War with such publications. This dialectic has presumably existed in perpetuity, but one might be able to track direct political action in America directly to the founding of the nation and its first war. The Revolutionary War disabled Americans just like every other American conflict.

If the more recent time frame were to be selected, one could expand the scope of political action into the social sphere. Social magazines and publications could be analyzed for content to track the dialectic through society. This could extend to advertisements and books of both fiction and non-fiction. If Michelle Nario-Redmond is correct about the existential nature of ableism (2020), then one could conceivably track the dialectic as far back as written history extends.

### **Conclusion**

The theme of Marx's conflict theory is that a revolution will result from the struggles of a subordinated class against another managing class. It is a back-and-forth dialectic that more closely resembles the frontline of battle than the question and response of Socratic dialogue. In

America, this warfare can be tracked through news reports of political action. The disabled proletariat uses revolutionary thought not to overthrow the Ableist Bourgeoisie but to create an accessible world where everyone is recognized.

The dialectic of disability in America is active, but uneven. The ableist bourgeoisie maintains economic control of the disabled proletariat, as both a managing force and economic over-class. Despite this, victories have been won by the disabled proletariat, for civil rights, accessibility, equality, and equity. The ableist bourgeoisie still fights viciously and nefariously to undermine the rights of disabled Americans. The idealism behind mottos like “Nothing About Us Without Us” (Charleton 1998) stand in stark contrast to a ruling class that wants to manage the care that disabled Americans receive through Federal programs like Medicare and Medicaid. The upward trend of the disabled proletariat as initiators of political action is promising though. It is a powerful movement towards parity in action with the ableist bourgeoisie. Parity in action may lead to equity in standing. It is the goal of the disabled proletariat and should be the aim of all Americans.

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## Appendix A:

## Variables and Coded Responses

Variable 1: Explicit Involvement of DP

Coded Responses: No, Yes, Indirect Involvement, Undetermined, Inapplicable

Variable 2: Political Action

Coded Responses: No, Yes, Undetermined, Inapplicable

Variable 3: Type of Political Action

Coded Responses: Lawsuit, Countersuit, Proposed Legislation/Petition/Hearing, Passed Legislation, Failed Legislation, Demonstration/Protest/Riot, Arrest/Detainment/Detention/Imprisonment, Undetermined, Investigation, Other Court Ruling or Deliberation, Executive Action, Executive Action Non-POTUS, Political Campaign Activity/Voting, Terrorist Activity, Multiple Action, Inapplicable

Variable 4: Initiator

Coded Responses: Disabled Proletariat, Ableist Bourgeoisie, Other, Undetermined, Inapplicable

Variable 5: Direct Response

Coded Responses: AB Response, DP Response, No Response, Other Response, Undetermined, Inapplicable

Appendix B:

Charts

Table 1: Percent of Disabled Proletariat as Initiator, with Line of Best Fit

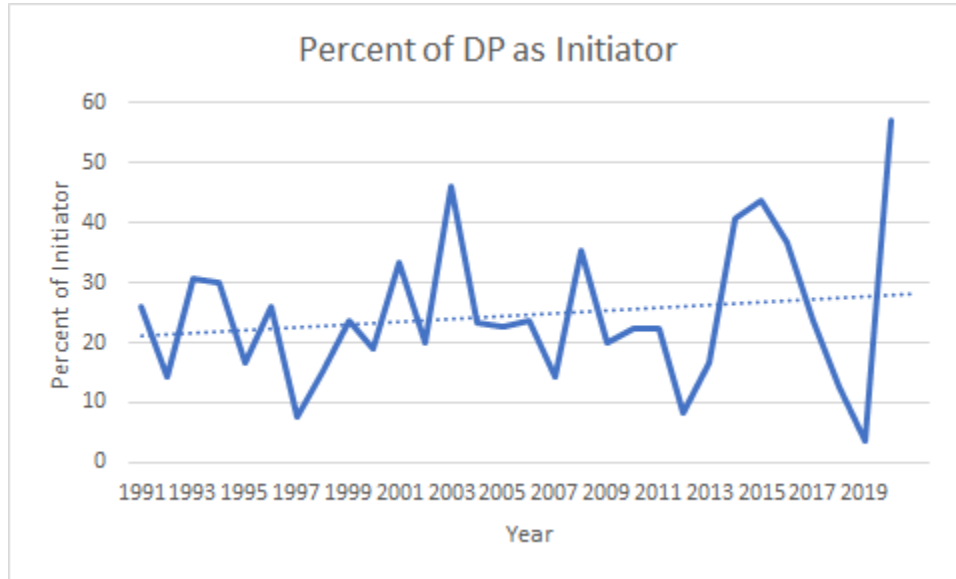


Table 2: Percent of Disabled Proletariat as Responder, with Line of Best Fit

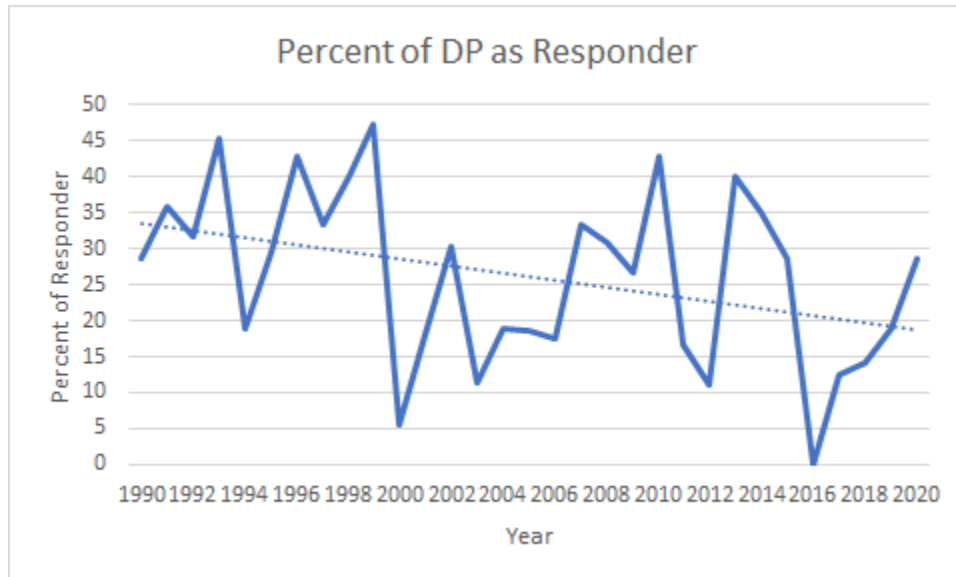


Table 3: Type of Political Action

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