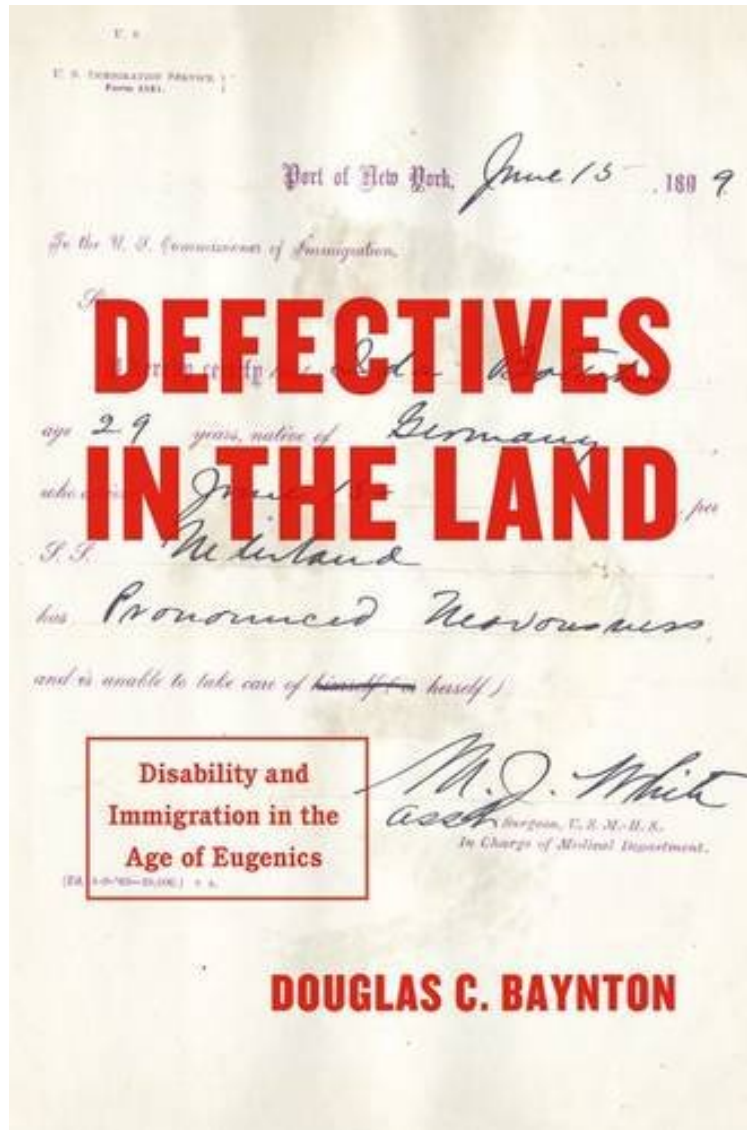


Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics

Douglas C. Baynton

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Douglas C. Baynton : Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics:

Immigration history has largely focused on the restriction of immigrants by race and ethnicity, overlooking disability as a crucial factor in the crafting of the image of the undesirable immigrant. *Defectives in the Land*, Douglas C. Baynton's groundbreaking new look at immigration and disability, aims to change this. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Baynton explains, immigration restriction in the United States was primarily intended to keep people with disabilities known as defectives out of the country. The list of those included is long: the deaf, blind, epileptic, and mobility impaired; people with curved spines, hernias, flat or club feet, missing limbs, and short limbs; those unusually short or tall; people with intellectual or psychiatric disabilities; intersexuals; men of poor physique and men diagnosed with femininity. Not only were disabled individuals excluded, but particular races and nationalities were also identified as undesirable based on their supposed susceptibility to mental, moral, and physical defects. In this transformative book, Baynton argues that early immigration laws were a cohesive whole a decades-long effort to find an effective method of excluding people considered to be defective. This effort was one aspect of a national culture that was increasingly fixated on competition and efficiency, anxious about physical appearance and difference, and haunted by a fear of hereditary defect and the degeneration of the American race.

Baynton, challenging the conventional historiography, argues that the selective phase of American immigration policy, despite its heavy reliance on the sensible-sounding public charge standard, was no less discriminatory. During those years, he demonstrates, immigration officials could and did customarily invoke this standard to rule out such defectives as women unaccompanied by male providers and members of races with supposed predispositions to criminality. Even those with objective physical impairments (as the Americans with Disabilities Act would underscore many years later) were incapable of work only if you made certain assumptions about how workplaces were to be structured. So beware reasonable justifications for immigration policies, Baynton warns.