

Paul K. Longmore. Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2003), 288 pp.

This wide-ranging book shows why Paul Longmore is one of the most respected figures in disability studies today. Understanding disability as a major variety of human experience, he urges us to establish it as a category of social, political, and historical analysis in much the same way that race, gender, and class already have been. The essays here search for the often hidden pattern of systemic prejudice and probe into the institutionalized discrimination that affects the one in five Americans with disabilities.

Whether writing about the social critic Randolph Bourne, contemporary political activists, or media representations of people with disabilities, Longmore demonstrates that the search for heroes is a key part of the continuing struggle of disabled people to gain a voice and to shape their destinies. His essays on bioethics and public policy examine the conflict of agendas between disability rights activists and non-disabled policy makers, healthcare professionals, euthanasia advocates, and corporate medical bureaucracies. The title essay, which concludes the book, demonstrates the necessity of activism for any disabled person who wants access to the American dream.

“Paul Longmore’s sharp and cogent criticism has always sought and found the soul of the disability rights movement. But these essays go far beyond activism and constitute a cultural document for a people adrift. Longmore’s refreshing views represent an intellectual Ellis Island for people with disabilities, hampered by bureaucracy, myth and sentiment, trying to find a place in America.”

– John Hockenberry
NBC News

“Paul Longmore is simply the best historian now writing about disabilities. This volume collects a series of major essays that have shaped the academic and public discourse about disabilities inside of and beyond the university. From the unwritten history of disabled people to questions of assisted suicide, and the public face of disability culture, Longmore writes intelligently, compassionately, and readably. Read these essays and learn!”

– Sander Gilman
Distinguished Professor of the Liberal Arts and Sciences and of Medicine
University of Illinois at Chicago

Paul K. Longmore is Professor of History at San Francisco State University. He is the author of The Invention of George Washington and the co-editor (with Lauri Umansky) of The New Disability History: American Perspectives.

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Why I Burned My Book

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