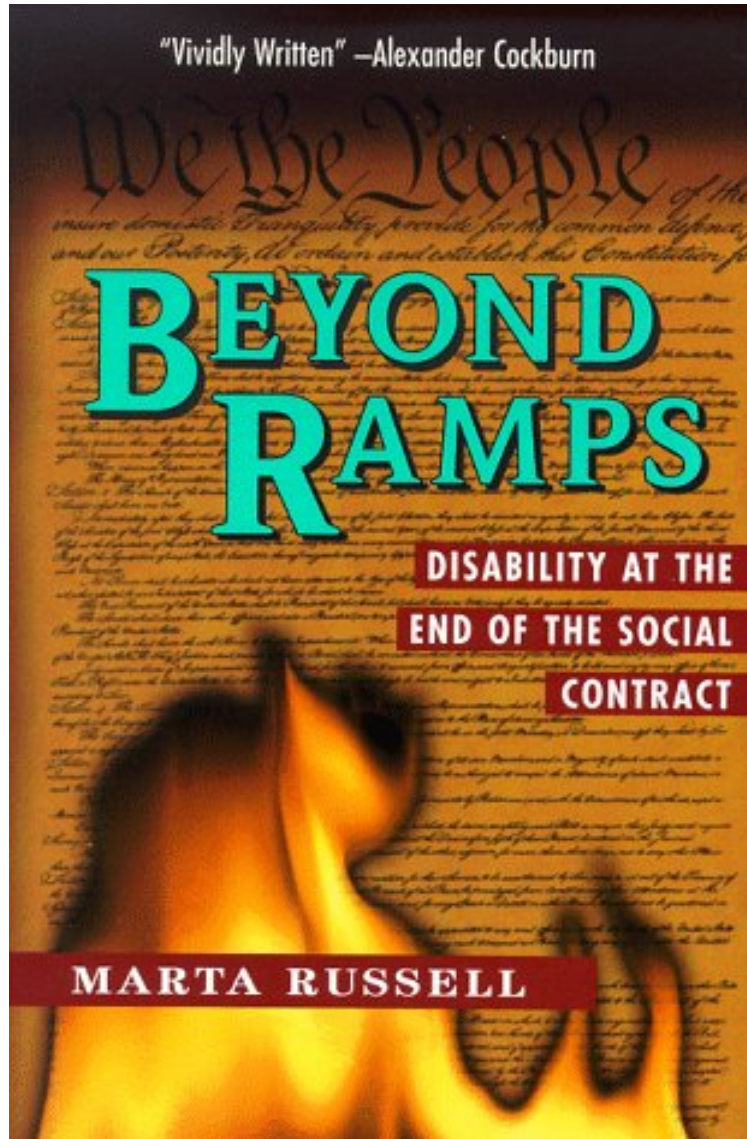


(Free and download) Beyond Ramps: Disability at the End of the Social Contract

## Beyond Ramps: Disability at the End of the Social Contract

*Marta Russell*

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**Marta Russell : Beyond Ramps: Disability at the End of the Social Contract** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Beyond Ramps: Disability at the End of the Social Contract:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. In the Budget Battles, Whose Priorities Win? By William Cooke The biggest problem with social Darwinism is that reality bites. Basically, how dare you call me "unfit?" "Beyond Ramps" unapologetically attacks a health policy based solely upon economic imperatives. Russell presents strikingly sound arguments and her outrage is a good thing. As a descendent of a Founding Father, and a disabled individual, she brings

home the sad absurdity that mainstream society is all too ready, willing, and able to legitimize not only neglect, but the most horrific treatment of those with developmental disabilities. By reading "Beyond Ramps," anyone in the healthcare field is provoked to ask questions. Why does the most advanced nation in the history of mankind still dole out healthcare on the basis of one's financial ability? Why must an American become destitute in order to receive supports and services? Moreover, why should ignorant, degenerate sloths who happen to be born to parents who inherited their fortunes receive supports and services, while others who happen to be born into poor families are left to die? The fact is that you cannot whisk away injustice and rapacious greed with a magic wand. Even the well-intentioned can be pressed into thinking that there are limits to American altruism, when generosity is not the point. The battle over resources is always one of priorities; whose will win? Can you legitimately keep supports and services from those who need them while subsidizing corporate profit, over-funding the military industrial complex, and extending tax breaks to multi-millionaires? The fact is that you must always fight for your rights. After they have been won, you must fight to keep them. The social contract used to mean that those who have would pay more, so that those who do not have would have enough. In today's climate of polarizing politics and entertainment news, have we become a nation of social Darwinists -- are we at the end of the social contract? I continue to believe that a market economy can and should lead the way for economic growth and expansion, but it is important to note that the sustaining power of capitalism is that it brings with it a moral authority that cannot be matched by any other system. If it is to work, and work well, it is up to each and every one of us to be the conscience of capitalism. Russell's "Beyond Ramps" is a well researched, well documented, highly footnoted apoplectic assault on the "economic and undemocratic dynamics" that have created entrenched social class inequities. Saying that "America is now what Jefferson warned against, a plutocracy: government by and for the wealthy," it is a call for The People to correct these inequities -- while a remnant of the middle class still remains who can afford the time and resources to make it happen. "Beyond Ramps" is a must read for policymakers who believe that social standing is directly related to social responsibility. It is a must read for anyone who cares about making a positive difference in the lives of people with developmental disabilities at a time when the popular position is to say the coffers are empty. Of course, they are not. 12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. A must read for those with disabilities. By K. L. Sadler Geez, and my parents thought I was too much of an activist. Marta Russell writes a thought provoking and scary book on where we 'differently abled' people fit in a capitalist society. She is well-read and writes well, bringing to her book her passion that in the midst of politics and the drive to make money, we, the disabled, become easy targets for people like Kervorkian, who try to convince others that the world is better off without us. Perhaps the most scary part of the book is the lack of medical ethics with which many in the medical world view us, and as Ms. Russell supports with facts that medical journals themselves have found, medical personnel seem to place meager value on our lives. Since this is a big issue in medical ethics, as I know from medical school, this book should be required reading for medical students, nurses, and those in public health. The need for more active involvement by the disabled in their own care and their own lives, and the need for political momentum to protect ourselves has been nicely elucidated by Ms. Russell. Well done. Karen Sadler University of Pittsburgh 27 of 35 people found the following review helpful. Keen Social Commentary Blunted by Demagoguery By Michael Muehe Ms. Russell's book contains sharp and useful insight into how America's 54 million people with disabilities are viewed (or ignored) by our larger society. But her message is often compromised by frequent forays into political ideology. She uses her valid perspective as a disability-rights activist as a jumping-off point to espouse her far-left (veering into Marxism) political views. For example, by depicting "big business" as the bogeyman relentlessly trampling on the backs of Americans with disabilities, Ms. Russell ignores the positive effects capitalism has had on improving the quality of life for millions of individuals living with a disability. As one who has traveled by wheelchair in formerly communist eastern Europe, I can testify that the U.S. is light-years ahead in terms of accessibility and opportunity. Ms. Russell would also have us believe that the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 is a paper tiger which has done nothing to increase opportunity for people with disabilities. On the contrary, polls conducted by Harris and others have shown that millions of Americans with disabilities (and many business leaders, for that matter) think the ADA has had a very positive impact. Ms. Russell's demagoguery risks alienating the political moderates among her readership and lessens the impact of her otherwise valid message that people with disabilities still have a ways to go before we can become full participants in our society. Readers looking for a primer on the disability rights movement in the U.S. would fare better choosing No Pity by Joseph Shapiro.

**A WARNING FROM AN UPPITY CRIP.** Marta Russell exposes the neoliberal drive to shrink social services with the Reinventing Government mantra. "We are dangerously close to a Jerry Lewis democracy where middlemen beggars and corporate CEOs getting huge paychecks may replace entitlements with charity," reveals Russell in her devastating analysis of the "reform" of the social safety net.

"The kind of analysis that virtually no one has done--to the peril of everyone in this nation." -- Mary Johnson "Vividly written... goes to the heart of many matters, starting with the profound desire of 'normal' people, many of them supposedly broad-minded types squarely within the liberal tradition, to reach for the sterilizing knife, or the medicine

cabinet of Doctor Kevorkian when confronted with an affront to their sense of the 'normal.'" -- Alexander Cockburn

What Ralph Nader did for the consumer movement in his book *Unsafe at Any Speed*, Marta Russell has accomplished in her riveting *BEYOND RAMPS*. No one, left, right, or center, who reads this book about the role of the 'disabled' and the 'terminally ill' and the way they are treated will come away unchanged. Russell has centered our attitude in a historical stream of thought, which will at first make people stunned and ashamed, and then cause us hopefully to change the way we behave." -- Marcus Raskin

About the Author: Marta Russell is a writer/producer whose investigative reporting earned her a 1994 Golden Mike Award for the best documentary from the Radio and Television News Association of Southern California. Disabled from birth, Russell began writing when her disability progressed and she had to navigate the disability policy netherworld to survive. She has been published in numerous newspapers and magazines, including the Los Angeles Times, Z Magazine and the San Diego Union Tribune. She has a seventeen-year-old daughter and lives in Los Angeles.

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### INTRODUCTION

Wisdom comes by disillusionment.-George Santayana

In one of his better moments, Thomas Jefferson wrote, "The care of human life and happiness, and not destruction, is the first and only legitimate object of good government." That is the social contract a government has with its people...in a democracy, with all the people. Yet anti-government forces attacking "big bad government" would have us believe that government is unworkable when it is vital, as the Constitution calls for, to "promote the general welfare." Hypocritically, those same forces tolerate a "big" government that perpetuates an ostentatious military-industrial complex and a deep-pocket corporate welfare system of subsidies and tax loopholes, but would have us believe that social programs that support "the care of human life and happiness" are no longer "sustainable." The social contract encompasses a wide arena. It includes hard-won popular entitlements serving the entire citizenry like Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, and it includes the promise of freedom from discrimination as directed by our civil rights laws. It includes democratic gains made at the voting booth and the right for labor to bargain with capital. But the social contract, which has never been fully fleshed out (for example, we lack universal health care in America), has only somewhat curbed the power of capital. The immediate environs in which I find myself writing this book is one of extreme corporate domination, where "the people" are conformed into corporate identities: consumers, clients, target populations, or potential consumers. Any significant difference between Republicans and Democrats is certainly elusive. Former President Bush's New World Order is revealed to be a McNew-World-Order while President Clinton proudly eats Big Macs in public-a walking advertisement for it. The spoken word rarely means what it says, so we live in a world in need of constant decoding. Deciphering "kindler, gentler nation," one finds that in practice "kinder, gentler" means leaner, meaner "tough love," where Social Security offices in the Midwest beef up security forces in anticipation of hostile reaction to welfare cuts, and lethal weapons are unabashedly our number one profit-making export. "Devolution" translates into undoing our national standards on welfare and health care; welfare "reform" means undoing entitlements; "balancing the budget" means redistributing wealth upwards, more corporate welfare, and tax cuts for the rich; "downsizing" means massive firings, increased job insecurity, and record corporate profits; and HMO "managed care" means managed-for-profit, lucky-if-you-survive-it care. Not even the planet is free of the ill effects of current trends. No-vision short-term business profiteers are stripping the earth of its finite resources. The idea that we can have infinite growth on this finite planet is preposterous, yet corporate plunder is still viewed as the right to live the American dream; no one is immune from the consequences. Most people are in deep economic pain in this country regardless of what the business pages and Washington politicians say. That is the nonpolitical truth. At the heart of the ills of our times is an economic oppression that is not only pervasive, but planned. The austerity forces, intent on undoing the social contract, are globalized; people are experiencing similar pain all over the world. The power of global capital via the corporate state is busily rolling back the rights of workers, and the right of citizens to access the benefits of common government, and in the process threatens democracy itself. Many more than those who recognize the faceless enemy are affected. Americans seem to have lost sight of the fact that policies are social decisions and that these decisions can result in the de-valuation and even loss of human life. I am often asked why I write so much about disability. Other topics are far more "sellable"(that is certainly true). But the past years have made it insidiously apparent that the plight of disabled people, like canaries released into the coal mines to detect whether there was enough oxygen in the air to survive, is a barometer for the "progress" or lack of it in our over-capitalized civilization. Disability and disability policy-past, present and future-is a tool for all to rate our present socio/economic order.

Part One, *The Nature of Oppression*, explores how concepts of "normalcy" can be used for social control, to demean and de-value. It covers the extermination of "lives not worth living" in Nazi Germany, underscoring the connection between capitalism and social Darwinism. In our brave-new-world genetic future that maps "defects" and marks those carrying "bad" genes, asks Chapter 4, who won't be tainted as "disabled"? Who is "safe" from discrimination... or worse?

Part Two, *The Mechanics of Oppression*, details how social policies, which are social decisions, underlie economic oppression. It exposes the vested interests that have shaped social policy and the resulting institutional bias. Since work, the ability to do it or not, is central to the capitalist/labor paradigm, this section questions the wisdom of using work as the measure of human worth. It analyzes the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the age of public relations politics: what the movement hoped the ADA to do, what it may or may not be able to achieve in an era of corporate downsizing,

shrinking wages, and growing inequalities. In a broad context, this section poses whether civil rights, alone, can create the economic equality we seek. Part Three, Ending the Social Contract, outlines the immediate threat where whole categories of people are being severed from entitlements. It explores the relationship between deficit reduction and paring disabled people from the rolls (\$720 million to Social Security designated for such purposes). Chapter 12-the tie-it-all-together chapter-explains what Mother Teresa and corporate America have in common. It unmasks the GOP "revolutionaries' " real intent behind the "efficiency" rhetoric, by detailing the dangers of devolving federal public programs to the states, busts the myth that charity is a realistic substitute for entitlements, and proposes that military and corporate welfare be cut instead of social services. The last two chapters ask, what does excessive "free market" ideology bring into our lives? What are the consequences when corporations control government policies-not the people-and the economy is raised to highest esteem? The danger is that all may fall victim to the austerity forces if we do not recognize their existence and take direct action to stop them, as people in France, Canada, Spain, Italy, and Belgium have organized in protest over attempts to roll back the social contract in their countries. Collective action is vital to obtaining individual security. I outline some guides for social reorganization, but as we all know, any road map for change must be backed up by solid support from people with whom we share the democracy. The greatest challenge is organizing beyond our separate identities to achieve worthy universal goals like full employment, universal health care, and livable incomes. During the French resistance to Hitler, Camus recognized the importance of becoming neither victim nor executioner, and this is unequivocally the challenge of our times, witnessed by genocide in Bosnia, the Middle East, East Timor, to name a few-that we all may survive without becoming oppressors or killers, that we may find the solutions that will arrest the callous and inequitable current path. We the people, including people with disabilities, must change the economic paradigms which greatly benefit the few, marginally benefit some, but leave others to some twisted, capitalist, social Darwinist end.