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William P. MCrone
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Book Review

Significant Disability: Issues Affecting People with Significant Disabilities from a Historical, Policy, Leadership, and Systems Perspective.

E. Davis Martin, Editor (2001)

**Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Springfield, Illinois
Isbn: 0-398-07193--4**

Anyone who may have gone off course on an uphill, stormy voyage will know the benefits of taking a step back to review where you have been before you set a new compass heading to reach your destination. Such a review and new compass heading are very much in order these days for deaf people and their advocates.

Rehabilitation and mental health professionals have worked hand in hand with deaf and hard of hearing people to advance the full citizenship interests of people with hearing loss. Sign language is flourishing. We have seen a quantum leap in telecommunications progress, surgical procedures, and assistive devices for deaf people. Employers are more receptive than ever to qualified deaf and hard of hearing job seekers. Deaf and hard of hearing professionals are increasingly taking on the most important leadership roles in the rehabilitation and mental health services for deaf people.

At the same time, Vocational Rehabilitation is in disarray in many states. The U.S. Department of Education Annual Report on Special Education (2000) says that fewer than 30 percent of deaf and hard of hearing students are leaving high school with "real" high school diplomas, 27 years after P.L. 94-142 [now IDEA] became law. How many of these failing students will become job "qualified" so they can benefit from Americans with Disabilities Act protections? The National Council on Disability (2001) reports a 70 percent unemployment rate among working age adults with disabilities twelve years after the Americans with Disabilities Act became law. The unemployment rate among working age people without disabilities is between 4-6 percent. The "welfare safety net" is vanishing. The U.S. Supreme Court has trashed the interests of people with disabilities in every ADA case it has heard in the last five years. The current Congress, far more conservative than the Congress that overwhelmingly passed the ADA in 1990, has no stomach for correcting those Supreme Court decisions.

So the timing is right for authors like Davis Martin to encourage us and help us set a new course for 2002 and beyond. Dr. Martin is professor of rehabilitation counseling at Virginia Commonwealth University. Martin's Significant Disability: Issues Affecting People with Significant Disabilities from a Historical, Policy, Leadership, and Systems Perspective is a very useful edited compilation that provides (1) a broad view of where the disability rights movement has been; (2) leadership portraits that inspire; (3) a political primer on effective advocacy; and (4) strategies for systems change. Unlike so many edited books in our field, this book has clarity and continuity. Notice that the "severe disability" terminology of two decades ago now gives way to "significant disability," a term that may well shape disability policy in the future. At the very least, the term "significant disability" will stimulate the debate about whether deafness is a disability and/or a culture.

In Part 1 of the book, Drs. Davis Martin, Steven Taylor, and Stanford Searl chronicle the history of issues that have impeded the independence, productivity, and civil rights of people with disabilities. For my money, the Fleischer & Zames (2001) book, The Disability Rights Movement: From Charity to Confrontation provides the most detailed and insightful analysis of the same topic.

In Part 2, eleven authors with disabilities and parents of people with disabilities offer inspiring "portraits of leadership," as well as recommendations from the front lines about new compass readings, course corrections, and strategies for taking the disability movement to the next levels. In Part 3 of the book, Dr. Martin focuses on guiding principles for changing the infrastructures of human services to better serve people with disabilities. If the book has a weakness, it is only that Part 3 does not go far enough and is not specific enough about redesigning a results oriented human services systems infrastructure.

In summary, I recommend Significant Disabilities: Issues Affecting People with Significant Disabilities from a Historical, Policy, Leadership, and Systems Perspective to rehabilitation and mental health "course setters" serving deaf and hard of hearing people.

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William P. McCrone, Ed.D., J.D.
Professor of Counseling
Gallaudet University
800 Florida Avenue, NE
Washington, D.C. 20002