(IM)ATERIAL CITIZENS
Cognitive Disability, Race, and the Politics of Citizenship

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In this essay I explore the implications for citizenship and citizenship education from the standpoint of disability studies scholarship. I will begin this essay by examining the applicability of liberal theories of justice for people with severe and/or cognitive disabilities. From the standpoint of both Critical Race Theory and Materialist Disability Studies I will foreground both the possibilities and limits of Formal Justice in both liberal democratic and poststructural contexts. Then, forging a linkage between Critical Race Theory and Materialist Disability Studies, I will then advance my own argument that citizenship serves as a metaphor for control by masquerading as the protector of rights. Expanding on this analysis, I will argue that these disciplinary practices produced within the material conditions of late capitalism enact in complex and contradictory ways the "racialization of disability" and the "disabilization of race." Finally, I will discuss the implications of this critique on citizenship theory and citizenship education.

And now we are men, not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers, and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort, and advancing on Chaos and the Dark.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1894)

Cast as one of society’s ultimate "not me" figures, the disabled other absorbs disavowed elements of this cultural self, becoming an icon of all human vulnerability and enabling the "American Ideal" to appear as master of both destiny and self.

At once familiarly human but definitely other, the disabled figure in cultural discourse assures the rest of the citizenry of who they are not while arousing their suspicions about who they could become.

Rosemary Garland Thomson (1997)

Transforming individuals into citizens has historically been one of the most important functions entrusted to educational institutions supported by the Liberal State. Liberal theorists like Locke, Rousseau, Dewey, and Rawls theorized the state as a collective creation of

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diverse individual members socialized via education to work towards the common good (social contract), while, at the same time, acting as autonomous agents to freely pursue their individual interests (Levinson, 1999). On the other hand, scholars like Pateman (1988), Young (1990), Turner (1993), Mouffe (1996), among others, have challenged the universalism implicit in these formulations of citizenship by pointing out that notions of the “common good” and “equal treatment” presume a homogeneity among individuals and render difference invisible and/or unimportant. In fact, the historical struggles for the rights to citizenship by people of color, women, gays and lesbians, and disabled people have demonstrated that citizenship, rather than being a universal category, represents “a terrain of struggle over the forms of knowledge, social practices, and values that constitute the critical elements of the [liberal democratic] tradition” (Giroux, 1988, p. 5).

Giroux’s formulation is especially true in the aftermath of poststructural critiques of humanism, where identity no longer implies certain essential qualities/characteristics. Yet much of citizenship education couched in liberal discourses belies these claims by re-inscribing notions of the “good” citizen using humanist/essentialist traits of rationality, autonomy, and competence (Gutmann, 1988, Evans, 1998, Levinson, 1999). Take for example, Gutmann’s careful theorization of how democratic citizens should be educated in a liberal society. While Gutmann’s analysis envisions pedagogical possibilities for students differentiated on the basis of race, class, gender, sexuality, and (physical) disability, her argument stumbles when encountering “seriously handicapped children” (p. 149) or “children with brain damage” (p. 155). This is because, according to Gutmann, “even the best social services coupled with the best schooling may not give them [children with severe/cognitive disabilities] the capacity to deliberate and to participate effectively in democratic politics” (p. 155). Her response to this dilemma is to provide these students the kind of education that “will depend on their capacities to learn and our willingness to provide them with non-educational services as they grow older” (p. 155).

While I will not quarrel with Gutmann’s sensitivity to difference when discussing the educational needs of children with cognitive/severe disabilities, I am much more critical of the humanist assumptions regarding rationality, autonomy, and competence that she invokes in her discussion of their educational capabilities. More importantly, I will argue here that not interrogating the essentializing tendencies in these concepts locates persons with cognitive/severe disabilities outside the margins of “active” citizenship. This has occurred even within the Disability Rights Movement, that is, for the most part, dominated by persons with physical disabilities (Ferguson, 1987, Chappell, 1998, Goodley, 2001). Moreover, even though scholars in the interdisciplinary area of Disability Studies have (re)theorized disability as a social construction (Linton, 1998, Oliver, 1990, Corker and French, 1999, Francis and Silvers, 2000), these (re)theorizations continue to leave persons with cognitive/severe disabilities “out in the cold” as if to mark their biology as existing outside all modes of socialization (Goodley, 2001, Chappell, 1998). It is in this context then, that despite several legislative interventions that purport to protect the rights of disabled people, there seems to be little interest in the citizenship rights of persons with cognitive/severe disabilities except when discussing how severely disabled a fetus or a person should be before one is justified in preventing its (the fetus’) birth or allowing the person to die (Fiser, 1994). More often than not, these death-invoking discourses constitute disability as marking the outermost limits of human existence, and therefore, never engage the everyday reality of what it means to be a citizen with a cognitive/severe disability. It is in this oppressive context that persons with cognitive/severe disabilities are perceived as (ir) rational and (non) autonomous—qualities
that are then equated with non-competence, non-status, and ultimately non-citizenship.

In this essay, I explore why the above equations persist in the popular imagination, even after President George Bush Sr. signed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on July 26th, 1990. Disability rights activists have celebrated the ADA’s instrumental role in advancing disabled people “beyond confinement to a class subject(ed) to special treatment and joined them with other minorities as classes explicitly designated to command equal treatment” (Silvers, 1997, p. 4). While I concur with Silver’s position that the ADA is designed to protect the rights of disabled citizens as a social class, in this essay, I take a more critical approach regarding this celebration of formal justice for disabled people. To do so I utilize cognitive/severe disability as the central analytical category to critically interrogate both liberal and poststructural theories of citizenship and citizenship education. For example, if, persons with severe/cognitive disabilities are seen to represent inalienable otherness in ablest contexts, then what effects does such alterity have on the “dilemma of difference” (Minow, 1990) in liberal democratic society? In other words, will the application of citizenship rights and responsibilities to people with cognitive/severe disabilities further accentuate their difference or seek to ignore it? If democratic citizenship is about forging relationships between equal individuals, then, how does the difference embodied in people with cognitive/severe disabilities reconfigure notions of equality, especially when applied to the dual concepts of civil and social citizenship? If citizenship education involves teaching students to successfully negotiate the complexities of diverse identities in order to achieve the moral status of “abstract citizen” (Gordon, Holland, and Lahelma, 2000), then how do persons with cognitive/severe disabilities disrupt this idealistic conceptualization? What implications will these disruptions have for traditional notions of citizenship and citizenship education?

While both liberal and postmodern theorists have critically engaged the “dilemma of difference” in ways that have challenged traditional conceptions of citizenship, I demonstrate in this paper that these (re)theorizations continue to exclude people with cognitive/severe disabilities (Francis and Silvers, 2000, Mouffe, 1996, Minow, 1990, Young, 1990). In doing so, I will echo some of the arguments made by Critical Race Theorists who have foregrounded the limits of formal justice in the context of institutionalized racism (Delgado and Stefancic, 1999; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas, 1995). Then, forging a linkage between Critical Race Theory and Materialist Disability Studies, I advance my own argument that both liberal and postmodern theories of citizenship serve as metaphors for control by masquerading as protector of citizenship rights. Expanding on this analysis, I argue that these disciplinary practices produced within the material conditions of late capitalism enact in complex and contradictory ways the “racialization of disability” and the “dis-abilization of race.” Finally, I discuss the implications of this critique for an alternative theorization of citizenship and citizenship education that is not just inclusive of difference but is also transformative in its intent and practices.

**THE LIMITS OF FORMAL JUSTICE**

Despite the fact that contemporary theory has celebrated the advent of the new post-al society described as “post-production, post-labor, post-ideology, post-white, and post-capitalist” (Zavarzadeh, 1995, p. 1), the actual material reality of historically marginalized communities seems not to mirror these transformations. This is especially true for the nearly 49 million Americans with disabilities\(^4\) 24.1 million of whom have a severe disability (McNeil, 2000). This population has historically faced economic discrimination as is evidenced in the disparities in monthly income between the non-disabled and the disabled workforce.
(National Institute of Disability Research and Rehabilitation, 2001). For example, working-age non-disabled men (average income of $2970) and non-disabled women (average monthly income of $2775) earn more than twice the income of working-age disabled men (average monthly income of $1396) and disabled women (average monthly income of $1261). In light of these disparities, it is not surprising that 30 percent of disabled people who are employed live in poverty, a percentage that is three times higher (10.2%) than that of the non-disabled population. Among working-age people with severe disabilities who have been excluded from participation in the labor market, 38.3 percent of the population lives in poverty.

Disabled people also dominate the population of welfare recipients with nearly 30.7 percent living in subsidized housing and nearly 48.2 percent collecting food stamps (McNeil, 2000). However, even those who qualify for Social Security Disability Benefits can do little to raise themselves and their families out of poverty, because of the inadequate financial aid they receive from SSDI (men $634, women $425) and SSI (men $300, women $288) payments (National Institute of Disability Research and Rehabilitation, 2001). Additionally, 52.7 percent of the households where disabled women are the main economic providers live below the poverty line. Such statistics only highlight the grim reality that disabled people (whose material needs far exceed those of the general population on account of their disabilities) are among the poorest of the poor in U.S. society.

Additionally, dominant ideologies have utilized “the medical language of symptoms and diagnostic categories” (Linton, 1998, p. 8) to constitute disability as a pathological abnormality that has then been used to support the exclusionary, segregationist, and exploitative practices of an ableist society. Rejecting these ideological constructions of disability, disabled activists and their allies have sought to narrow “the gap between representation and reality” (Thomson, 1997, p. 12) by turning to what they have termed the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990, Linton, 1998, Thomson, 1997). The social model offers a socio-political analysis of disability that distances itself from the medical model, and instead, describes disability as an ideological construction that is used to justify not only the oppressive binary cultural constructions of normal/pathological, autonomous/dependent, and competent citizen/ward of the state, but also the social divisions of labor (Linton, 1998, Russell, 1998, Erevelles, 2000). It is in this context that the field of disability studies has gained impetus in the academy where it has begun to challenge the naturalness of these constructions in the curriculum, in popular culture, and in politics. Interdisciplinary by necessity, disability studies has produced scholarship embedded in the material reality of the everyday experiences of disabled people that deconstructs ableist ideologies and works in concert with the Disability Rights Movement to support the interests of disabled people as a social class.

Ironically, even though the Disability Rights Movement has been active since the early 1970’s, liberal and radical theorists who have generally been more responsive to conditions of alterity (e.g. race, class, gender, sexuality) have not included any sustained discussion of cognitive/severe disability in their contemporary theoretical work on citizenshi. More often than not, when liberal and radical theorists include disability in these discussions, they deploy certain concepts uncritically, that then prevent people with severe/cognitive disabilities from being perceived as citizens. Take, for example, the social contract theorist John Rawls (1998) who defined the citizen as “a fully cooperating member of society....[with] the capacity to understand, to apply, and to act from the public conception of justice....and to rationally pursue a conception of one’s rational advantage or good” (p. 60). Then, Rawls offers a caveat to this definition when he states that “for our purposes here I leave aside permanent physical disabilities or mental disorders so severe as to prevent people
from being normal and fully cooperating members of society in the usual sense" (p. 60).

Rawls can justify the exclusion of persons with disabilities from his definition, because he relies on the humanist logic that emphasizes individual potential and its associated traits of autonomy, competence, and rationality as the necessary pre-conditions for being recognized as a citizen. This logic stems from the humanist ideology of liberal individualism that perceives the autonomous, competent, and rational Self as being housed in a body that is “a stable, neutral instrument of the individual will” (Thomson, 1997, p. 42). This autonomous, competent, and rational Self is a critical component that supports the laissez-faire economic policies of capitalist societies and is based on the tenets of liberal individualism—faith in reason, belief in natural law, republican virtue, teleological progress, and individual [economic] freedom (Minow, 1990). On the other hand, Thomson describes the disabled body as representing “the self gone out of control, individualism run rampant...ungovernable, recalcitrant, flaunting in its difference, as if to refute the sameness implicit in the notion of equality” (p. 43). When brought face to face with this “unruly body” (Erevelles, 2000), humanism’s only defense is exclusion—an exclusion that can only be achieved by a strict adherence to certain normative concepts that are narrowly defined, and that, if challenged, would topple the entire edifice on which liberal individualism and capitalism is erected.

At the same time, such exclusionary practices do not sit well with liberal theorists who have historically prided themselves on their commitment to egalitarianism. Thus, when confronted with the issue of disability, philosopher Charles Taylor, for example, while once again privileging individual potential in humanist terms magnanimously proclaims that “our sense of the importance of potentiality reaches so far that we extend this protection [of liberal rights] even to people who through some circumstance that has befallen them are incapable of realizing their potential in the normal way—handicapped people...for instance” (qtd. in Silvers, 1997, p. 27). Silvers (1997) interprets Taylor’s inclusive gesture to imply that disabled people are, in fact, inherently “defective agents” and it is only by extension, or derivation, or fiction that they can enjoy equal status as citizens because given “normal” circumstances they will never be able to fulfill their potential. Silvers’ critical reading of Taylor’s position foregrounds yet another observation: liberal individualism needs the discourse of the “defective agent” embodied in the disabled Other in order to reify the humanist Self—the “normate” (Thomson, 1997, p. 8)—resplendent in his masculine, heterosexual, able-bodied, and property-endowed existence, and of course, always magnanimous in his relationship to Otherness.

I want to emphasize here the poignant contradiction that minority groups face in their struggles against the oppressive structures that restrict their lives. Conscious of the limits of liberal discourses, they are, nevertheless, forced to appeal to these same discourses that dominate legal institutions in a liberal democracy. It is by marking these contradictions in the aftermath of civil rights legislation that Critical Race Theory has gained prominence in the area of legal theory (Delgado and Stefancic, 1999; Crenshaw et al., 1995). Similar issues have also arisen in Disability Studies scholarship where its scholars are also wrestling with the best possible ways to realize the emancipatory potential of the Americans with Disabilities Act (Silvers, Wasserman, and Mahowald, 1998, Francis and Silvers, 2000). Theorists in both areas of scholarship have critically confronted the dialectical complicity of liberal democratic law in upholding both white supremacy and ableism, while, at the same time, acknowledging that it is these same laws that have, at least, opened opportunities for participation in civil society that had formerly been denied them. Recognizing these contradictions, theorists in both areas are now grappling with the ideological terms and material conditions necessary to (re)negotiate their participation in civil society without reifying
the hegemonic structures of white supremacy and ableism that they argue still persist in liberal democratic society and that support limiting definitions of citizenship.

In the context of racial equality, according to the New Right, formal equality has finally been achieved for African Americans, apparent in the tangible progress made in the legal reforms pertaining to racial inequality over the past 40 years, and, as a result, they argue that U.S. society is now ready to support color-blind politics. On the other hand, according to critical race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw (1995), the disjunction between the idealism of liberal legal reform and the actual materiality of the socio-economic living conditions of African Americans exists because of the pragmatic commitment of liberal politics to social reform rather than to social transformation. Additionally, Crenshaw argues that this tension is reflective of a similar tension in antidiscrimination legislation, between conceiving of “equality as process” and “equality as result.”

Crenshaw describes the former as a restrictive view that downplays the actual outcomes of antidiscrimination legislation, but instead, focuses on preventing future wrong doings that are primarily seen as “isolated actions against individuals, rather than as a social policy against an entire group” (p. 105). At the same time, when discrimination is identified, all efforts to redress such discrimination are meticulously careful in ensuring that the interests of the dominant group (e.g. white workers) are not to be overly burdened. Such a view, Crenshaw argues, does not recognize the historical reality that protecting the interests of the dominant class (e.g. white workers, non-disabled workers) is necessarily dependant on the creation and maintenance of oppressive practices that have required the continued subordination of the oppressed class (e.g. black workers, disabled workers).

On the other hand, according to Crenshaw, antidiscrimination law’s more expansive view of “equality as a result” recognizes the structural bases of discrimination. This expansive view calls for the eradication of the substantive conditions of oppression on the basis of race and (in this context) disability. Such a position goes beyond the removal of formal barriers to advocate for the transformation of the normative structures that continue in an unspoken form the stereotypes used to legitimate both white supremacist and ableist society. Crenshaw’s critique points to the limits of liberal citizenship that responds solely to the symbolic subordination of oppressed groups (formal denial of social and political equality through segregation) while paying scant attention to their material subordination. More specifically, Crenshaw’s distinction between “equality as process” and “equality as result” foregrounds how formal justice, while seeking “equal opportunity,” does so in a context that simultaneously naturalizes social and economic inequality.

Echoing Crenshaw, another critical race theorist Alan Freeman (1995) continues the critique of the liberal construction of formal justice. Freeman points out that the success of legal reform is more dependent on the point of view from which the legislation is written, rather than the actual legislation itself. Freeman argues that antidiscrimination legislation has traditionally taken on the perpetrator’s perspective that is much more narrowly focused on neutralizing the inappropriate behaviors of “miseducated” individuals. Here, too, discrimination is not viewed as structural, but rather, as a series of actions inflicted on the victim. Such a perspective is noticeably silent about concerns raised through the victim’s perspective that would require antidiscrimination legislation to focus on transforming the social, political, and economic structures as well as the debilitating ideologies that justify discrimination by claiming “insufficient merit.”

While Crenshaw and Freeman’s arguments focus specifically on race, I argue here that both their critiques are especially relevant to legal scholarship in disability studies. For example, philosopher Anita Silvers views the American with Disabilities Act as significant in the lives of disabled Americans, because for the first time in history, social policy has
sought to diminish their social isolation and further their equality "by removing obstructions to their social access rather than by correcting their personal flaws and failings" (Silvers et al., 1998, p. 5). She distinguishes this intervention from distributive discourses of justice as espoused by Amartya Sen, Richard Arenson, and Norman Daniels, among others, because these discourses often equate disability with incompetence in order to justify what she terms "extraordinary distributions" (p. 35). Put simply, Silvers' preference for formal justice over distributive justice lies in the distinction that while the former constructs disability as "the defective state of society [my emphasis] which disadvantages disabled people," the latter constitutes disability as a "natural deficiency" or a "personal limitation" and thereby makes it difficult for disabled people to identify as a minority group. On the pragmatic level, Silvers believes that justice for disabled people will be served, not by providing them extraordinary resources, but by ensuring social access similar to non-disabled people, not in a compensatory but in an equal opportunity fashion.

Arguing that "difference" is not synonymous with "defect," Silvers takes on the "victim's perspective" when she places her faith in Formal Justice and its legal instrument the ADA to demand structural changes in the social environment that will be responsive to the daily material reality experienced by disabled people. But herein lies the problem. The ADA, (as both Crenshaw and Freeman would argue) is formulated from the perspective of ablest society (the perpetrator) and therefore only serves as the watchdog for inappropriate behaviors that can easily be proven in a court of law. What happens, however, when discrimination is a not a series of individual acts, but is, in fact, structural, institutional, ideological, and often not visible in concrete evidentiary form? What happens when the dominant assumptions that undergird the characteristics of rationality, autonomy, and competence and that form the bulwark of liberal society contravene the very existence of the oppressed group? And more importantly, what happens when the very essence of the liberal humanist Self is necessarily predicated on the construction of the disabled other as the embodiment of inalienable difference?

The challenges posed by the above questions become especially significant when examining the meaning of citizenship for people with severe/cognitive disabilities in a liberal democracy—an issue that even Anita Silvers pays insufficient attention to in her argument. While a liberal democratic society may (if sufficiently persuaded), be willing to transform the social environment so as to accommodate wheelchair access, support more widespread use of braille, sign language, and close captioning, and provide technology that will enhance the capabilities of persons with more severe physical disabilities, there is an almost palpable hesitancy when confronted with the similar challenge when responding to the specific needs of people with cognitive/severe disabilities. This hesitancy derives from dominant ideologies that, as I mentioned earlier, privilege a humanist logic—one that I will argue, in the next section, is limited in its ability to respond to the difference embodied in people with cognitive/severe disabilities.

**Reason as (In)Alienable Difference: The Challenge of Cognitive Disability**

The limitations of formal justice as they apply to people with cognitive/severe disabilities are foregrounded in Philip Ferguson's (1987) provocative essay, *The Social Construction of Mental Retardation*. In this essay, borrowing a phrase from historian E.P. Thompson, Ferguson argues that there is "a poverty of theory" that has "increasingly shortchanged those people with the most profound combinations of mental retardation and physical impairment" (p. 52). These notions are so embedded in our ideological and material realities that even the Disability Rights Movement has sometimes excluded people with severe/cognitive disabil-
it is not because as Ferguson explains:

[To] be severely cognitively impaired is not a difference just like skin color or gender. . . It is easy to imagine a society where gender, skin color, age, nationality, and sexual preference have no social inequities attached. It seems much harder to imagine a world where it would not be preferable to be capable of abstract thought. The exclusion of people [especially those with severe/cognitive disabilities] from [even] the disability rights movement is not simply an oversight or an understandable delay in fully implementing the theoretical guidelines. The exclusion is also a logical concomitant of the conceptual base (p. 54).

The "logical concomitant of the conceptual base" that Ferguson refers to in his argument is tied to humanist ideologies that I have alluded to in this essay and that I argue need to be critically deconstructed because they continue to exclude people with cognitive/severe disabilities. This, again, is ironic, because even though poststructuralist critiques have shown Enlightenment Reason to be a fiction, the Cartesian formula—"I think therefore I am" is still used to operate as the distinguishing moment in the discussion. For example, philosopher Jeff McMahan (1996)'s article, *Cognitive Disability, Misfortune, and Justice*, foregrounds some of the challenges faced by philosophers when attempting to locate persons with cognitive/severe disabilities within humanist discourses. McMahan writes:

The common view is that the severely cognitively impaired [sic] are indeed badly off, or have lives that are deprived or below a decent minimum. . . . They are wholly dependent on others for their continued existence and for whatever other good their lives contain, and are therefore precariously vulnerable to neglect or abuse. . . . The profoundly cognitively impaired [sic] are incapable, for example, of deep personal and social relations, creativity and achievement, the attainment of higher forms of knowledge, aesthetic pleasures, and so on. (p. 8)

Though McMahan concludes his essay by arguing that even people with cognitive/severe disabilities "possess properties and capacities that give their possessor a certain worth that demands respect" (p. 30), his argument, nevertheless echoes the humanist commitment to Universal Reason that necessarily reinforces depictions of people with severe/cognitive disabilities as inherently defective.

However, even in spaces where this ideal of Universal Reason has been critiqued, people with cognitive/severe disabilities are often excluded from this discussion. Take for example, feminist theorist Iris Marion Young's (1990) commitment to pursue a theory of justice that critically responds to the unique needs of disabled people. In her book, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Young offers a rigorous critique of "the disembodied coldness of modern reason" (p. 125), exposing its complicity in generating "theories of human physical, moral, and aesthetic superiority . . . [that] made possible the objectification of other groups, and their placement under a normalizing gaze" (p. 130). Moreover, taking up the feminist standpoint, Young points out that the dichotomy maintained between the private (female) and public (male) spheres has the tendency to situate reason in opposition to desire, affectivity, and the body, and in doing so has excluded those "individuals and groups who do not fit the example of the rational citizen who is capable of transcending both body and sentiment" (p. 109). Here Young claims to be broadly referring to groups and individuals oppressively marked by race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and (physical) disability. However, even though Young exposes Reason's claim to unity as a fiction, even though she argues for an alternative form of communitarian politics that can be inclusive of all difference, and even though she gestures towards people with cognitive/severe disabilities, she does not explicitly describe how this vision would translate for this particular group. This is because as Ferguson (1987) observes:

Retarded people [sic] in general, and severely retarded people [sic] especially,
have always served as those falling beyond the pale of serious consideration. The current disability rights movement [and even Young, herself] reframes but does not remove the tendency to exclude categorically those with severe cognitive limitations (p. 54).

If, however, Young were to seriously consider people with severe/cognitive disabilities in her discussions of social justice, then her critique of humanist ideologies would also have to include a more explicit critique of how persons with cognitive/severe disabilities fare within the oppressive logic of capitalist accumulation. This is the direction that feminist legal scholar Minow (1990) takes in offering her critique of liberal legal theory, even though her argument stops just short of implicating capitalism in her critique. In her book, Making all the Difference, Minow’s analysis of legal history describes a feudal legal system that supported different legal treatments for “normal” and “abnormal” populations—a legal distinction that Minow argues continues to this day. While much has changed in how we distinguish between “normal” and “abnormal” classes since feudalism, one concept that has endured across several centuries and continues to mark the boundaries between the “normal” and “abnormal” classes is Universal Reason as is manifested in an individual’s mental competence. In legal terminology “mental competence signifies the ability to appreciate the consequences of one’s actions, to protect oneself from manipulation and coercion, and to understand and engage in transactions of property and commerce [my emphasis]” (p. 126). For those who fail to meet the stringent conditions of this definition (e.g. people with cognitive/severe disabilities), how would formal justice resolve the dilemma of difference in the specific context of liberal legal theory? Or to pose the question in Minow’s words: “How may advocates demand that law treat mentally retarded people [sic] the same as others for purposes of freedom from constraints and abuse but differently from others for the purpose of securing the attention, resources, and care that others do not need? (p. 144).

My purpose in this essay, however, is not so much to resolve the dilemma of difference as manifested in legal theory, but to foreground the historical and material conditions that are instrumental in the social construction of Universal Reason, that is then used to distinguish people with cognitive/severe disabilities from “normal” citizens. This is a position that Minow leans towards when she argues that “[n]othing inherent in the idea of rationality requires such sharp distinctions between those ‘with reason’ and those ‘without reason’.” (p. 150). In fact, Minow argues, the universally accepted definition of what constitutes “reasonable” behavior is nothing but an ableist paradigm. In the specific historical context of laissez-faire capitalism, “rational” behavior represents those behavior traits that maximize benefits, minimize costs and contribute to the efficient realization of profit. Those people who exhibit behaviors that prove to be counterproductive to the efficient logic of capitalism are marked as abnormal, and are either punished and/or segregated from the “normal” populations. In other words, I argue here that notions of autonomy and rationality are, in fact, closely tied to the historical and material conditions of capitalism where certain definitions of reason and autonomy become more plausible than others.

Though Minow avoids the materialist argument I just made, she nevertheless persists in her critique of formal justice by arguing for a “Social-Relations Approach” to law that recognizes the interdependent nature of human relationships. This notion of interdependency is critically examined by feminist philosopher, Eva Feder Kittay (1999, 1997), who centers cognitive/severe disability in her analysis. Kittay critiques contemporary liberal theory for describing society as an association of equals and its citizens as fully cooperating members of society, as exemplified in John Rawls’ characterization of social cooperation:

The main idea is that when a number of persons engage in a mutually advantageous
cooperative venture according to rules, and thus restrict their liberty in ways necessary to yield advantages for all, those who have submitted these restrictions have a right to a similar acquiescence on the part of those who have benefited from their submission (Rawls qtd. in Kittay, 1999, p. 105).

Such a theory of social cooperation assumes that those involved in the dependency relationship are free and equal persons who rationally contract with each other to work in equitable interdependent ways, and in doing so, earn the right to be regarded as equal citizens. As a mother of an adult daughter with profound physical and cognitive disabilities, Kittay is intimately aware that the dependency relationship between her daughter and herself, as well as other employed care-givers, is one that cannot meet Rawls' criteria of reciprocity that is essential in social cooperation. This is because, unlike other dependent populations (e.g. nondisabled children and the elderly) who will/have already demonstrate(d) their ability to reciprocate in kind to their care-givers, people with cognitive/severe disabilities may not be able to do so and thus, according to Rawls will remain outside the scope of citizenship.

It is in this context that Kittay (2000) is critical of Silvers' commitment to the ideal of formal justice that requires the removal of oppressive restrictions to allow disabled people to become self-sufficient, independent, and productive members of society. Kittay points out that her daughter (now thirty years old), may never become independent or self-sufficient, will always be a "burden" to any economic system, and no transformation of the social environment will ever change this reality. Then, in a theoretical move that is much more deliberate than that of any of the other theorists mentioned in this essay, Kittay points out that Reason is not what will define her daughter as "human." Rather, Kittay calls for an alternative re-theorizing of dependency that replaces autonomy as one of the fundamental characteristics of what it means to be human. To pursue this, Kittay urges us to explore discursive notions of dependency that will include not only disabled people but also other citizens who find themselves inevitably located in dependent relations during the life stages of infancy, childhood, and the frailties of old age. This broadening of definition, Kittay argues will reduce "the backlash and resistance" (p. 79) against issues of dependency because we will then "allow ourselves to learn from those who are most dependent about the frailties that come with being human dependent animals ... [and will enable us] to reappropriate our own resources and priorities so that meeting needs and granting rights are aligned in a just caring and effective manner" (p. 79).

While I will agree with Kittay's theoretical move to re-imagine dependency within the "natural" continuum of human life, I am not convinced of the radical effects this discursive move may make on the liberal theories of citizenship. I am especially critical of the voluntarism explicit in Kittay's argument because it assumes that meanings of dependency can be re-negotiated outside the material conditions within which it is situated. In saying this, I echo Silvers' ambivalence about Kittay's (re)conceptualization, when she writes:

Political rearrangements meant to make dependence more desirable neither resolve the inherent power imbalance between caregiver and care receiver nor relieve its potential as a source of repression. . . . In a framework of moral relations in which some must make themselves vulnerable so that others can be worthy of their trust—that is, in paternalistic systems, in which those viewed as incompetent are coerced into compliance "for their own good"—people with disability are typecast as subordinate (p. 100).

Despite Silvers' incisive critique, she continues to place her faith in Formal Justice that she believes may offer disabled people "real" choices in their lives. On the other hand, I argue here that neither formal justice nor discursive interventions that deconstruct reason and privilege dependency over autonomy will prove to be emancipatory for people with
severe/cognitive disabilities because both reason and dependency are historically constituted within the laissez-faire economic structures of capitalist societies. Moreover, both liberal theory and its critical reformulations discussed above continue to define citizenship as constitutive of relationships between individuals rather than as embedded in inequitable institutional structures, an argument that both Crenshaw and Freeman make in the context of Critical Race Theory. As a result, liberal theories of justice that privilege humanist discourses in their analyses limit the emancipatory possibilities for citizens with severe/cognitive disabilities.

**PERFORMATIVITY AS POSTMODERN INTERVENTION FOR CYBORG CITIZENSHIP**

My critique of the voluntaristic impulse in Kittay’s re-theorization of dependency is one that is also echoed by poststructuralists. Poststructuralists are critical of voluntarism because it presumes the willful and instrumental subject of humanist discourses—one that, as I have argued in the previous section, is clearly inhospitable to difference, especially difference embodied in people with cognitive/severe disabilities. Rejecting the troubling essentialisms embedded in liberal theories of citizenship, Laclau and Mouffe have argued for a radical democratic conception of citizenship that supports “a non-essentialist view of politics” (Mouffe, 1996, p. 24) without abandoning the symbolic resources of the liberal democratic tradition (e.g. protection of individual freedom in a pluralistic society.) Within this paradigm, identity is described as “an ensemble of subject positions that can never be totally fixed in a closed system of differences, constructed by a diversity of discourses among which there is no necessary relation, but a constant movement of overdetermination and displacement” (Mouffe, 1992, p. 372). In such a context, binaries like male/female, non-disabled/disabled, straight/queer are not boundary conditions but fluid concepts that tend to blur the defining limits of citizenship. More importantly, unlike social contract theorists who attempt to consolidate difference by using ethical principles to work towards the “common good,” Mouffe (1996), for instance, envisions:

...all forms of agreement as partial and provisional and as products of a given hegemony. Its objective is the creation of a chain of equivalence among the democratic demands found in a variety of groups—women, blacks, workers, gays, lesbians, environmentalists—around a radical democratic interpretation of the political principles of the liberal democratic regime.... For it is not a matter of establishing a mere alliance between given interests but rather of actually modifying their identity so as to bring about a new political identity” (p. 24).

Even though Mouffe’s delineation of different social groups continues to exclude disability, I will argue that her position may assist in Silver’s commitment to (re)configure disabled citizenship in more empowering ways. In fact, what is particularly appealing in Mouffe’s argument is the need to constitute alternative political identities that do not reproduce the oppressive binaries embedded in liberal theories of citizenship that continue to exclude people with severe/cognitive disabilities. In particular, I turn to poststructuralist feminist Judith Butler’s scholarship that has offered a compelling critique of gendered identity—one that could be applied to disabled identity also.

Disability Studies scholars will be especially interested in Butler’s (1993) critical treatment of the sex v. gender dichotomy—a dichotomy that treats sex as nature and gender as its associated socially constructed identity. Butler critiques feminists who support this dichotomous relationship by pointing out that their essentialization of the concept “nature” is based on the assumption that nature has no history. Arguing from the poststructuralist premise that there is nothing outside discourse, Butler critiques the notion that “nature” is an objective fact (i.e. it has no value associated with it) because it is already constituted via
discourse. In the context of the sex v. gender dichotomy, Butler argues that if gender is assumed to embody the social meanings attached to the “natural condition” of sex, it is not that gender serves as an additive property to provide social meaning to the concept “sex.” On the other hand, according to Butler, “sex” is already imbued with meaning which is exemplified in the medical interpellation that names the infant (it) as “she”—a process that Butler describes as “girling”—this naming that “is at once setting a boundary and also the repeated inculcation of a norm” (p. 8). This “girling” occurs, Butler argues, through incessant (re)iterations emerging out of a chain of foreclosures, erasures, and/or boundary conditions that “not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies [bodies that matter], but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies [those that do not matter in the same way]” (p. xi).

Butler’s argument is appealing to disability studies scholarship because it problematizes our taken-for-granted interpretation of the natural. Disability studies scholars have also struggled with the nature v. culture debate, producing their own dichotomy of impairment v. disability that mirrors in many ways the feminist debates regarding sex v. gender (Corker and French, 1999, Linton, 1998). For disabled scholars this differentiation brings with it its own unique problems. While on one hand, disabled scholars have argued that disability is, in fact, a social construction, they are, on the other hand, eager to recognize their unique phenomenological experiences of having an impairment—experiences that mark their bodies as irrevocably different from “normal” bodies and yet, at the same time, are integral to their identity as disabled people. It is in this context that disabled scholars find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place because while, on one level de-linking disability from impairment will expose the social construction of their oppression, at another level this de-linking will be unable to ade-

quately account for the complexity embedded in the formation of disabled identity.

Butler’s analysis becomes useful here. Impairment, just like sex, is associated with the medical interpellation of subjects into the semiotics of difference. In the process of this interpellation, impairment is discursively linked with defect that claims to be rooted in the “natural” terrain of the body. Just like the process of “girling,” the “impaired” body is interpellated through a chain of incessant (re)iterations that stabilizes our notion of the natural, and this forms the boundary conditions between non-disabled bodies (bodies that matter) and disabled bodies (bodies that do not matter in the same way). But these boundaries that form identity are merely unstable discursive constructions that masquerade as the norm through the action of performativity. Performativity, according to Butler, is not constituted by a single voluntaristic act, but is, in fact, a series of (re)iterations that cite authoritarian conventions of normality that are themselves social constructions. Consequently, these normative constraints that map out the limits of the “natural/normal” body are now exposed as discursive constructions/performances, and in doing so, they simultaneously also support the possibilities for transgressing those limits that constitute humanist definitions of citizenship.

With identity stripped of its oppressive essentialisms, it is possible to read the disabled body as transgressive—for example, Haraway’s theorizing of the blasphemous cyborg—“a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (Haraway, 1990, p. 191). Haraway’s conceptualization of the “cyborg citizen” offers radical possibilities for people with severe/cognitive disabilities because it opens up spaces that liberal theories of citizenship have closed out. The cyborg citizen, unlike its humanist counterpart “inhits various bodies interfaced more or less intimately with various prosthetics . . . [and is] crucial in reconstructing the boundaries and technologies of daily life and the networks of power” (Gray & Men-
In a radical reconceptualization of the humanist citizen, Haraway (1990) asks: "Why should our bodies end at the skin or include as best other beings encapsulated by skin?" (p. 220). For people with cognitive/severe disabilities, whose bodies can often only be sustained with the help of a complex network of communication technologies, bio-technologies, and human care givers, these dependencies can no longer signify a lack of autonomy, competency, and rationality, and can, therefore, no longer exclude them from rights to full citizenship.

The poststructuralist arguments of Butler and Haraway sharply contrast with liberal theories of citizenship that designate persons with cognitive/severe disabilities as dependent on extraordinary resources as well as the benevolence of their non-disabled citizens. On the other hand, Butler and Haraway's deconstruction of humanist subjectivity posits dependency as constitutive of human identity, and therefore, removes it from both the normative constraints of liberal individualism and the voluntaristic paternalism of communitarian politics. In such a context, Haraway would argue that persons with cognitive/severe disabilities could be viewed as transgressive rather than defective citizens.

However, despite the radical possibilities that poststructuralist discourses offer the disabled citizen, I will insert a word of caution here. Even transgressive acts meet their limits in the brutal material conditions of everyday life. For example, even though Butler argues that the drag queens in the film *Paris is Burning* are effective in denaturalizing the discursive limits of "sex," in the end, the materiality of compulsory heterosexuality and poverty claim its first victim through the brutal murder of one of the drag queens, Venus Extragavanza. People with severe/cognitive disabilities have had similar experiences—the one most telling being the controversy over facilitated communication. Adults and children with autism who use facilitated communication bring to mind Haraway's transgressive cyborg. Here, people with autism are dependent on the physical and emotional support of their (non-disabled) facilitators as they type or point to letters or pictures on a communication board (Biklen, 1993). Using this technique, people with cognitive/severe disabilities who had previously been perceived as severely developmentally disabled were now seen to display unusually high levels of literacy—an observation that seemed incredulous in light of the medical evidence that insisted on the impossibility of the act (Biklen, 1993, Biklen and Cardinal, 1997). Facilitated communication became especially controversial when questions were raised in legal contexts about the authenticity of the communications and the autonomy of the principal communicator (Green and Shane, 1994; Twatchman-Cullen, 1997, Spitz, 1997). When, on some occasions, proponents of facilitated communication were unable to prove the autonomy of the principal communicator, his/her communications were deemed inauthentic and the individual was not only denied a voice in a court of law, but was also denied the opportunity to communicate with the assistance of the facilitator.

I have argued elsewhere that the facilitated communication controversy arose as result of more significant political concerns rather than the simple disagreement of scientific methodologies (Erevelles, forthcoming). These significant political concerns are rooted in society's fears that the transgressive cyborg citizen may destabilize our ideological commitments to liberal individualism and its associated traits of rationality, autonomy, and competence. But, why these ideological commitments? Why are liberal theorists who espouse commitments to pluralist societies unwilling to disband these ideological barriers for persons with cognitive/severe disabilities? While poststructuralist theorists have been helpful in deconstructing humanist norms, they have not been able to explain why these normative structures persist? To respond to this "why" question I turn to historical materialist analyses that connect ideological constructions of difference to the
economic conditions and social relations supported by capitalism.

**ABILITY AS PROPERTY: TOWARDS A HISTORICAL MATERIALIST THEORY OF CITIZENSHIP**

In this section of the paper I will now elaborate on my materialist critique of citizenship. Specifically, I argue that notions of citizenship, rationality, and autonomy are ideological categories that are constituted within the historical and material conditions of capitalism. To do so, I critique theories of citizenship that continue their commitment to individualism and the associated traits of rationality, autonomy, and competence.

In the preface to *The Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx (1859) wrote:

> The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. (p. 4)

In the above quote Marx highlights the importance of political economy in the any analysis of identity. Drawing on this perspective, I argue here that a critical theory of citizenship for people with severe/cognitive disabilities would require an historical materialist analysis that re-theorizes citizenship within the historical context of U.S. capitalism. Moreover, I will point out here that Marxism does not reject the possibility of human agency, rather it theorizes agency itself as historically constituted. As Marx (1871), himself pointed out, “men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given, and transmitted from the past” (p. 595).

To demonstrate that citizenship is a historical materialist category, I will now turn to the work of critical race theorist, Cheryl Harris (1995) who maps out a critical relationship between citizenship and the economy. Engaging the dialectics of ideology and economics, Harris describes how rights in property are “contingent on, intertwined, and conflated with race” (p. 107). Property rights, she argues, are not “natural” but are, in fact, created by the law. More importantly, the notion of individual rights that emerged during the founding period of the New Republic was rooted in the protection of one’s property where property as described by John Madison “embraces every thing to which a man may attach a value and have a right” (qtd. in Harris, 1995, p. 279). According to Harris, the origins of property rights were instituted in racist institutional structures that only validated white possession and occupation of land and permitted as an extension of these rights the hyperexploitation of black people and the claiming of Native American land. It is in this context that whiteness as property became significant because it provided the ideological justification to exclude people of color from the privileges of owning property. Harris, further points out that, because liberal legal institutions were constituted in a context that enforced and reproduced a property interest in whiteness, they contributed to the reproduction of black subordination. In this context, owning white identity as property affirmed the self-identity of whites, especially the dirt poor white working class, who reveled in their privilege of racial superiority despite their exploitation at the hands of fellow whites. As a result, whiteness as property not only played a critical role in the racialization of identity, but also served as the ideological justification of the racial division of labor.

Extending this argument to the context of disability, I argue here that whiteness as property was an intrinsic part of the ensemble of discourses that upheld liberal individualism and that included the related discourses of competitive entrepreneurship, the work ethic,
productivity, efficiency, and autonomy among others. Whiteness as property was also the ideological discourse that has been used to justify the racial superiority of white people over people of color by using the logic of disability (e.g. inferior genes, low IQ) to decide who has the rights to citizenship (Erevelles, 2001). In other words, I am arguing here that whiteness as property justifies and (re)iterates the centrality of the non-disabled white heterosexual male body as the most productive and profitable citizen for the burgeoning capitalist society. As such, it became critical that, in addition to whiteness, “ability” (both cognitive and physical) would also be an important property right that had to be safeguarded, protected, and defended in the effort to decide who could or could not be a citizen.

One of the principal contexts that safeguards, protects, and defends the property interest in “ability” is Education. Just as in a market economy where property can be bartered for economic gain, in educational institutions “ability” is bartered for social and economic status in the capitalist economy. Moreover, even though dominant ideologies represent the market as ostensibly a space where free exchange takes places, in both the economic and the educational contexts, it has become increasingly evident that the market has historically always benefited the ruling class. In the specific context of public education, “cognitive ability” is constituted, validated, and exchanged in the education market place through specific practices of schooling, e.g. the national curriculum that supports the cultural capital of the white ruling class (Bourdieu, 1977); the evaluation strategies that include standardized tests that are biased against children of color and children living in poverty (Brantlinger, 2001); and the educational resources that are unequally distributed between the suburban and the “ghetto” schools (Kozol, 1991, Anyon, 1997). In each of these contexts, (cognitive) ability as property has provided the justification for segregating not only students with severe/cognitive disabilities, but also a disproportionate number of children living in poverty, children of color, and immigrant children with limited English proficiency—a segregation that has contributed to social and economic destitution of these populations (Brantlinger, 2001). Here, too, “ability” as property has played a critical role not only in constituting the disabilization of identity, but has also justified the oppressive logic of the social division of labor.

Of course, one could argue now that people of color, women, gays and lesbians, people with physical disabilities, and even some people with cognitive disabilities can enjoy the property rights accorded to all citizens, which could make Harris’ argument outdated. However, what is rendered invisible by such assertions is the paradoxical process by which these rights were attained. In other words, because liberal individualism still rules the day, albeit in a more hospitable form, almost all of the oppressed groups listed above have earned the right of recognition as citizens by demonstrating their capacity for integration at whatever level into the labor force—the minimum qualification being the “ability” to contribute in some small way to the accumulation of profit. For those who are not considered naturally “able,” liberal institutions support special education programs, rehabilitation programs, boot camps, etc. in an attempt to create “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). Those “unruly bodies” who resist such “treatments” are relegated to the philanthropic protection of the welfare state whose mission is to protect its most vulnerable citizens from the excesses of capitalism.

The welfare state, however, foregrounds the crisis of liberal ideologies when it compels a certain section of the population to seek the protection of the welfare state. In this context, those individuals whose labor power cannot efficiently contribute to surplus accumulation (e.g. people with cognitive/severe disabilities) are excluded from participating in the market, and now become the property of state. As recipients of "special services" offered through social institutions like schools, the welfare system, the health system, etc., they are labeled as
"delinquent," "physically and mentally handicapped," "problem families," etc.. Located outside the discourse of property rights, this population reduced to the singular role as consumer, is deemed parasitic; their role as autonomous agent challenged; and therefore their right to citizenship.

It could be argued that my exclusive focus on civil and political citizenship ignores one other aspect—that of social citizenship. In fact, it could be argued that people with cognitive/severe disabilities are, in fact guaranteed the rights of social citizenship that provides need-based social entitlements like social security, health care, education and so on. However, even though social welfare gets an aura of dignity when brought under the ambit of social citizenship, Fraser and Gordon (1997) argue that, within the U.S., social citizenship is emphatically denied while civil citizenship is actively encouraged. In many ways, the differential status between civil and social citizenship mirrors the differential status between the public and private spheres where the former is based on contractual property relations and the latter based on voluntary/charitable associations. For example, Fraser and Gordon point out that while "contract connoted equal exchange, mutual benefit, self-interest, rationality, and masculinity, charity took on contrasting notions of inequality, unilateral gift-giving, altruism, sentiment, and, at times, femininity" (p. 123). Thus, by once again re-investing the two categories of public/private with differential status with respect to property, it is only "natural" that people with cognitive/severe disabilities will continue to be stigmatized as non-autonomous and dependant citizens. This logic is well represented in U.S. Senator Patrick Moynihan's claims that:

the issue of welfare is an issue of dependency. It is different from poverty. To be poor is an objective condition; to be dependent, a subjective one as well...Being poor is often associated with considerable personal qualities, being dependent rarely so. [Dependency] is an incomplete state in life, normal in the child, abnormal in the adult. In a world where completed men and women stand on their own feet, persons who are dependent—as a buried imagery of the word denotes—hang (qtd. in Fraser, 1997, 21).

In a context where people with cognitive/severe disabilities seem unable to be incorporated into the discourses of property rights there is little choice left, but to hang.

It is important to note also, that if one is not worthy of owning property, it is quite possible that one can be transformed into property itself. Harris pointed to this in her argument when she described how whiteness as property was used to determine the legal status of a person as slave or free. In the current historical context, Mutua (2001) observes a similar trend in an ethnographic case study that “examine[s] the adverse effects of welfare reform policy on children and its intersections with school as a gate-keeping dispensary of identities of disability” (p. 289). In this study Mutua describes “the pathologization of children of poverty” (p. 289) that occurs when they are labeled as mentally retarded and/or emotionally disturbed in public schools contexts using evaluation tools that she argues are neither rational nor objective. Because the children in the study are from an African American family who receives welfare, food stamps and cash benefits, there already existed a presupposition of “deviancy” even before the children entered school, and therefore school officials were already predisposed to referring these children to special education. Mutua further observes that this labeling process ensures the perpetual surveillance of this population by both special education and social welfare professionals—a process that denies even the most limited rights that formal justice promises its citizens. This “pathologization of children of poverty” has become over the years a lucrative business where professionals interact with these children armed with a battery of tests, boot camps and other behavior management programs that are more profitable to the professionals than humanizing to their clients.

In the context of the welfare state, a similar trend can be recognized in the increasing
privatization of social welfare services and the move to support a more cost-effective and efficient organization of the surplus populations who are regarded as a drain on public resources. For example, sections of the prison system (public institutions that in the past year held about 2 million of the "surplus population," the majority of whom are poor and people of color) are privately owned and derive their profits from the shipment of imprisoned bodies between facilities (Schlosser, 1998, Davis, 1998). In another example, the increased cuts in public spending for people with severe/cognitive disabilities have forced them and their family members to receive services from corporate conglomerates that have transformed the provision of health care and rehabilitation services into a profitable and ruthless business. In each of these contexts, it is possible to observe how the association of citizenship rights with property rights as manifested in the material construction of whiteness and ability as property now serves to "pathologize" certain individuals under the guise of social welfare and social citizenship. And it is these practices, I argue, that simultaneously support the racialization of disability and the disabilization of race in the construction of Immaterial Citizens.

**CITIZENSHIP AS SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: A MATERIALIST DISABILITY STUDIES PERSPECTIVE**

Poststructuralist feminist, Chantal Mouffe has claimed that radical democracy is "the only viable alternative for the left today, and that it consists in trying to extend the principles of equality and liberty to an increasing number of social relations" (qtd. in Daliwal, 1996, p. 41). Yet despite her argument and the creative theorizing by other poststructuralist feminists, cognitive/severe disability still continues to hover at the limits of even radical discourses of citizenship. This is because both liberal and poststructural theories of citizenship, by ignoring political economy, conceive of citizenship as a particular form of "lifestyle politics" which strengthens the basic ethical tenets of bourgeois individuals—"the ethical construct of capitalism where one has to be free to do what one wants, free to buy and sell, to accumulate wealth or to live in poverty, to work or not, to be healthy or to be sick" (Navarro as quoted in Doyal, 1981, p. 36). For people with cognitive/severe disabilities for whom autonomy and choice are social rather than natural constructs, the freedom to choose in liberal society remains a idealistic construct rather than a material reality.

Amarpal Daliwal (1996) critiquing radical democratic politics argues that inclusion politics (notwithstanding their radicality), often "reaffirm a hegemonic core to which the margins are added without any significant destabilization of the core" or continue to valorize the very center that is problematic to begin with." (p. 44). Daliwal defines this core as the "hegemonic self [that] always needs and is often manufactured in opposition to the 'othered' (the excluded)" (p. 44). She then, locates her explanation for the construction of the 'hegemonic self' and its despised 'other' as it applies to racial oppression in the history of modernity especially as it links up with the history of colonialism and imperialism.

Pursuing a similar trajectory with respect to cognitive/severe disability, I have attempted to explain in this essay, how and why people with cognitive/severe disabilities have been constructed as the despised 'other' and how this construction relates to the larger totality of social and economic structures. Further, even while I support liberal interventions that claim to protect the rights of citizens with severe/cognitive disabilities, I argue in this essay that citizenship for these populations will only become meaningful in contexts where the material conditions of democracy are also realizable.

Feminist scholar Ruth Lister (1997) has argued that citizenship should be conceived of as a process rather than an outcome. On the other hand, I am arguing in this essay, that it
may be necessary to examine process in dialectical relationship to outcome. From the critical standpoint of a materialist disability studies, the process of beoming a citizen is not rooted in the emergence of the autonomous individual, but is instead rooted in the historical and material conditions that nurture interdependence and community. In this context, rather than defining the freedom of individual citizens in negative terms (protecting individual rights from outside intrusion), citizenship rights should be articulated as positive rights that provide access to the social and material resources necessary for the achievement of both individual and communitarian purposes and plans. Additionally, the recognition of people with cognitive/severe disabilities as material citizens would require that liberal societies support the "the de-commodification of labor" which enables the decoupling of the living standards of citizens from their "market value" so that they are not totally dependant on selling their labor power in the market (Lister, 1997, p. 16-17).

In light of this re-theorization from the standpoint of a materialist disability studies, what would citizenship education look like? In traditional citizenship classes, citizenship education calls for teaching students to both serve and support the Liberal State. However, in this essay, I have demonstrated that when cognitive/severe disability is centered in the discussion on citizenship, the undemocratic and exclusionary practices of the Liberal State are exposed. It is for this reason, that I am suggesting in this essay that an emancipatory citizenship education would have to enable students to struggle against relations of power and privilege that have historically transformed them and others into objects and/or instruments of oppression. Such an education would have to enable students to begin to critically deconstruct the classical liberal principles of individualism, rationality and autonomy. Such an education would enable students to re-imagine a world where no exploitation, no imperialism, no racism, no homophobia, no sexism, and of course no ableism is allowed to be nurtured. In such a context interdependence may not reflect unequal and oppressive relations. In such a context, even cognitive/severe disability will regarded as just another difference. And in such a context all people notwithstanding their radical differences will be recognized as material citizens.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Robert M. Young for reading the paper several times and helping me work through several difficult parts. I would also like to thank Natalie Adams, Scot Danforth, Doug McKnight, Kagedo Mutua, John Petrovic, Jerry Rosiek, and Sherry Schuller, for their invaluable comments on several drafts of this paper. However, any error I make is mine and mine alone.

2. I use the terminology "disabled people" rather than people with disabilities to foreground disability as a political category. However, at other times, I have used the terminology "people with cognitive severe/cognitive disabilities" to illustrate the social constructionist nature of these categories. Also, in the text of the essay, I included a discussion on the critical relationship between impairment and disability—and therefore refrain from pursuing the discussion in this footnote.

3. According to Minow (1990) the "dilemma of difference" raises the following question: "[W]hen does treating people differently emphasize their differences and stigmatize and hinder them on that basis? And when does treating them the same become insensitive to their difference and likely to stigmatize or hinder them on that [emphasis in text] basis? (p. 20).

4. This number does not include the nearly 2 million disabled people, many of them with the most severe disabilities who live institutions.

5. Martha Minow's work is one notable exception.

6. On pages 123-124 of her book, Making All the Difference, Minow locates the origin of liberal politics in the historical conceptual shift from notions of fixed and assigned status to notions of individual freedoms and rights. More importantly, Minow asserts that "[p]erciprocals - and non-hierarchical—obligations, freely chosen by self-defining beings, became the central
pattern underlying economic transactions and political action...[and were predicated on] the new economic order [that] rested on private property and the market." This clearly foregrounds the commitment of liberal politics to capitalism.

7. In a chapter entitled *Different Histories* (pp. 121-145), Minow argues that though scholars have depicted Western intellectual and legal histories as making the radical shift from notions of fixed and assigned status to notions of individual freedom and rights, this shift has in fact been incomplete. This is because, Minow points out that when legal theory supports what she calls the "abnormal-persons approach" (an approach that support restraints on the autonomy and rights of those populations considered "incompetent" and therefore "abnormal," e.g. persons with cognitive/severe disabilities), then legal theory has acted on the basis of social status rather than on notions of individual rights. Thus, Minow writes, "Cast in this light, doctrines about incompetence reveal areas that a liberal legal order does not reach, area where an older notion of law continues to operate [my emphasis] (p. 126). How more feudal can we get!!!!

8. Remember that in the feudal order, women, children, and the serfs did not belong to the "normal" class.

9. Here one can see how postmodernism is also committed to some of the precepts of humanism even while critiquing that position.

10. *Paris Is Burning* is a documentary on drag queens directed by Jenny Livingston.

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