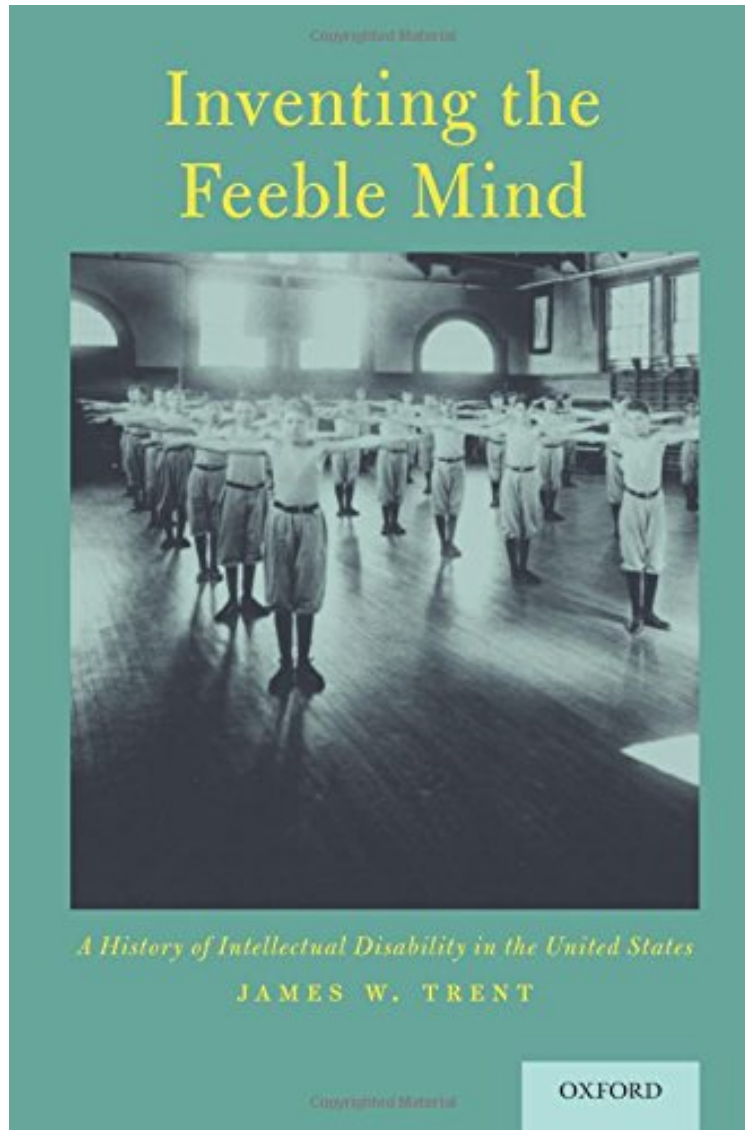


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Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Intellectual Disability in the United States

James Trent

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James Trent : Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Intellectual Disability in the United States before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Intellectual Disability in the United States:

Pity, disgust, fear, cure, and prevention--all are words that Americans have used to make sense of what today we call intellectual disability. *Inventing the Feeble Mind* explores the history of this disability from its several identifications over the past 200 years: idiocy, imbecility, feeble-mindedness, mental defect, mental deficiency, mental retardation, and most recently intellectual disability. Using institutional records, private correspondence, personal memories, and rare photographs, James Trent argues that the economic vulnerability of intellectually disabled people (and often their families), more than the claims made for their intellectual and social limitations, has shaped meaning, services, and policies in United States history.

"This well-written history of mental retardation documents our changing perceptions of the 'feeble-minded.' . . . This is must reading for anyone interested in this vital subject. Replete with shocking photographs and a 40-page reference list. A shattering document."--"Psychoanalytic Books From the Back Cover" Half-wits, dunces, dullards, and idiots: though often teased and tormented, the feeble-minded were once a part of the community, cared for and protected by family and community members. But in the decade of the 1840s, a group of American physicians and reformers began to view mental retardation as a social problem requiring public intervention. For the next century and a half, social science and medical professionals constructed meanings of mental retardation, at the same time incarcerating hundreds of thousands of Americans in institutions and "special" schools. James W. Trent uses public documents, private letters, investigative reports, and rare photographs to explore our changing perceptions of "feeble minds". From local family matter to state and social problem, constructions of mental retardation represent a history of ideas, techniques, and tools. Trent contends that the economic vulnerability of mentally retarded people and their families, more than the claims made for their intellectual or social limitations, has determined their institutional treatment. He finds that the focus on technical and usually psychomedical interpretations of mental retardation has led to a general ignorance of the maldistribution of resources, status, and power so evident in the lives of the retarded. Superintendents, social welfare agents, IQ testers, and sterilizers have utilized these psychological and medical paradigms to insure their own social privilege and professional legitimacy. Rather than simply moving "from care to control", state schools have made care an effective and integral part of control. In analyzing the current policy of deinstitutionalization, Trent concludes it has been more successful in dispersing disabled citizens than in integrating them into American communities. *Inventing the Feeble Mind* powerfully shatters conventional understandings of mental retardation. It is essential reading for social workers, psychologists, historians, sociologists, educators, and all parents and relatives of mentally retarded people. About the Author James W. Trent Jr. is author of *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (1994) that won the 1995 Hervey B. Wilbur Award of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. He coedited *Mental Retardation in America: An Historical Reader* (2004), and authored *The Manliest Man: Samuel G. Howe and the Contours of 19th Century American Reform* (2012).