

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AMERICAN DISABILITY HISTORY

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Hawking, Stephen (1942–) scientist

Stephen Hawking is often referred to as the most well-known scientist in the world. Though much of his status rests on his contributions to the fields of cosmology and quantum gravity, his fame can also be attributed to his severe disability and to his success in presenting his work to the general public.

Stephen Hawking was born on January 8, 1942, in Oxford, England. He received a B.A. in physics from Oxford University in 1962 and a Ph.D. in cosmology from Cambridge University in 1965. In 1963 he was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, which is characterized by the slow destruction of the body's muscles.

Hawking began to develop his startling cosmological theories as a graduate student in the 1960s. Following the work of the Oxford mathematician Roger Penrose who showed that singularities—matter condensed to an infinitely dense state—existed at the center of black holes, Hawking proposed that the universe itself must have begun with a singularity that expanded dramatically in the big bang. Hawking's second important discovery—called Hawking radiation—was made in the 1970s when he demonstrated that black holes can radiate energy. This work is considered extremely significant since it combines elements of three fundamental theories of physics: quantum mechanics, relativity, and thermodynamics.

In the early years of his disease, Hawking could still speak, though with great difficulty. Appointed reader in the Department of Theoretical Physics and Applied Mathematics at Cambridge in 1975, he was able to dictate scientific articles and give lectures thanks to a personal secretary and student assistants. In 1979 he became Lucasian Professor of Mathematics, a chair once held by Isaac Newton. In 1980

several nurses were hired, following Cambridge University's decision to pay for certain medical expenses of the newly elected Lucasian Professor. In 1985 Hawking lost the use of his voice; to communicate he had to twitch his eyebrows when an assistant pointed to the right letter on an alphabet. In 1986 this system was replaced by a computer and a voice synthesizer that allowed him to write and to speak, albeit with an American accent. After the publication of his popular account of cosmology, *A Brief History of Time* (1988), which has sold over 10 million copies and has been translated into some 40 languages, a new assistant was recruited to take charge of his equipment and public relations.

The collective of individuals and machines on which Hawking depends enables him to work, write, communicate, and travel around the world. Nevertheless, he is often portrayed as a solitary, disembodied genius. As he himself remarks on his Web site: "People are fascinated by the contrast between my very limited physical powers, and the vast nature of the universe I deal with. I'm the archetype of... a physically challenged genius.... At least I'm obviously physically challenged. Whether I'm a genius is more open to doubt." Hawking has traveled worldwide and appeared on popular TELEVISION shows such as *The Simpsons* and *Star Trek*. Moreover, he has come to represent (literally, to act for) diverse social, political, cultural, and business interests, from people with disabilities and the British Labour Party to Microsoft and Intel. Hawking has received many honors and awards; he is fellow of the Royal Society (1974), commander of the Order of the British Empire (1982), member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (1986), companion of Honour (1989); most recently, he won the prestigious Copley Medal of the Royal Society in 2006.

Hawking's total reliance on individuals and machines has enabled him to pursue an active scientific career. On the one hand, this attests to the power and efficacy of technology. On the other, it presents something of a paradox, for it shows a model for the independence toward which so many disabled people have striven.

See also ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND ADAPTIVE DEVICES; DEPENDENT AND DEPENDENCE; FACILITATED COMMUNICATION; POPULAR CULTURE; REPRESENTATION; SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY; STEREOTYPES.

Hélène Mialet

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H-Disability

H-Disability is an online scholarly discussion group that explores the multitude of historical issues surrounding the experience and phenomenon of disability. As a listserv under the H-Net umbrella, H-Net is edited by trained volunteers (Sandy Sufian, 2001–03; Daniel Wilson, 2004 to present; Penny L. Richards, 2001 to present), and overseen by an advisory board led by Paul Longmore. Its online archives are open for public access, but subscribers can send messages for posting and receive new messages as e-mails.

The idea for H-Disability was developed at the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute on Disability, held at San Francisco State University in July 2000, under the direction of PAUL K. LONGMORE and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson. The institute provided an opportunity for scholars to consider the status and possibilities of DISABILITY STUDIES. A core of scholars at the institute realized they wanted an ongoing forum for historical conversations about disability, separate from general humanities discussions on the topic. A proposal to the H-Net board was accepted later that fall, and in January 2001 the H-Net began approving individuals as H-Disability board members and list editors. H-Disability launched on March 25, 2001, with the first posted message announcing the table of contents for Paul Longmore and Laci Umansky's anthology, *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* (New York University Press, 2000).

Since its launch, H-Disability has published book reviews (reviews are edited within a parallel H-Net system; Kim Nielsen, James Trent, and Robyn Fishman have served in the role of H-Disability book reviews editor), monthly bibliographies of current journal articles, a Web site of the Week feature, calls for papers, and other announcements of interest to historians of disability. At the five-year mark in spring 2006, H-Disability had 350 members in a dozen countries. Historians of disability in various disciplines, who may previously have found few satisfactory forums for discussion and exchange, now have access to a diverse disability history community online. In turn, H-Disability has helped to spark the creation of the Disability History Association and fostered numerous conference panels and other collaborations.

Penny L. Richards

Further Reading:

H-Net Web site. Available online. URL: <http://www.h-net.org>

head injury SEE TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY.

Head Start

Established in 1965 as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, Project Head Start is a national early childhood program promoting school readiness for CHILDREN age three to five in low-income families. Funding is provided by federal grants to local public and private nonprofit and for-profit agencies to administer Head Start programs. Enrolled children and their families receive educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services. Parents are often enlisted as Head Start volunteers and administrators of local Head Start programs. Its history thus serves to highlight vital themes in American disability history, including FAMILY LIFE, EDUCATION, policy, and economics.

Disability activism played a central role in the creation of Head Start. Of note is research funded by THE ARC in 1970. The ARC is an advocacy organization for people with cognitive and developmental disabilities. Its research demonstrated a connection between POVERTY, malnutrition, and MENTAL RETARDATION (the term then used for cognitive disabilities). In 1972 the Economic Opportunity Act Amendments of 1972 (PL 92-424) responded to research studies by The ARC and others, increasing Head Start funding to include a minimum of 10 percent of enrollments for children with disabilities. This early example of INCLUSIVE EDUCATION was initiated three years before the first federal SPECIAL EDUCATION legislation.

Early intervention and prevention of school failure have been the hallmark of Project Head Start since its inception.

"I heard about Head Start from the papers," Mrs. Zenchenko said, "and told her [the administrator] I had a child of the right age, and she said to bring him down. When she saw [Chris] was blind, [she said she] was sorry, but . . . But I guess I put up quite a plea for Chris. She let him in. And at the end of the period, she said that he'd done just fine." Telling the mother of a blind child her child can't get in a program she wants so badly that it aches isn't easy. But telling the blind mother of a blind child that same story of refusal is just that much harder."

—Chris Zenchenko's mother, describing her efforts to enroll her son in Head Start, in 1966