



ADA Live! Episode 87: Veterans, Employment and Disability: A Historical Perspective

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Speakers: Larry Logue, Ph.D., Senior Fellow at BBI and former professor of history at Mississippi College

Peter Blanck Ph.D., J.D., University Professor & Chairman Burton Blatt Institute

Host: Barry Whaley, Director - Southeast ADA Center

Peter Blanck: Hi, I'm Peter Blanck.

Larry Logue: And I'm Larry Logue.

Peter Blanck: And you're listening [crosstalk 00:00:08] to ADA Live.

4 Wheel City: (rapping)

Barry Whaley:

Hi everybody. On behalf of Southeast ADA Center, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University, and the ADA National Network. Welcome to ADA Live. I'm Barry Whaley, director of the Southeast ADA Center. Listening audience, as a reminder, if you have questions about the ADA, you can use our online forum at adalive.org. Our guests today are no strangers to ADA live. I am pleased to introduce the chairman of the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University and university professor, Dr. Peter Blanck, and BBI senior fellow, Dr. Larry Logue. I want to welcome you both to ADA Live in November 2020, we celebrate the 82nd anniversary of Veterans Day.

Barry Whaley:

Peter and Larry as scholars, you've focused the lens on employment and veterans, and according to data from the most recent national census, as well as the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are 18.2 million veterans in the United States and of those 4.7 or 25% of the veteran population have a service-connected disability. You guys have recently written a paper, "Win Pensions and Live in Idleness: Disability and Employment Among Union Army Veterans" before the accommodation principle. And in the paper, you discuss a study you conducted that looks at veterans investigating recently available data on the life course and available data on union army recruits and the life course in circumstances of their civilian peers. So again, welcome. And let's begin by asking you what prompted you to conduct this research?

Larry Logue:

Okay, this is Larry Logue. I'll pick up this one. I would say that this is a case of historical curiosity meets the right venue because what I mean is that we spent a long time exploring the experience of Civil War veterans, in particular, union veterans over their life course. And the venue came up when Peter Blanck was invited to be a guest editor of the Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation. So we decided it might be the time to talk to readers about where their profession came from because many practitioners may know that occupational research, at least in the form of public policy has its roots in the mass casualties produced by World War I which led to this misfeasance act of 1918 that Landmark Law made occupational rehabilitation a federal policy for World War veterans. One thing it did was it granted a monthly allowance to veterans with a disability, which is sort of a continuation of what they'd done before in other wars but this time lawmakers added a first time restriction, for the first time ever government could decide that a veteran should undergo occupational rehabilitation or surgery.

Larry Logue:

Now they didn't invent occupational rehabilitation, and with this law, actually, it was borrowed from private charities and public hospitals. What the officials meant by

occupational rehabilitation was that veterans would work under supervision in curative workshops, like some of the borrowings they made, and there they'd learn skills and confidence to rejoin the workforce. If the veteran refused to be rehabilitated, then he, and there was an assumption that all veterans at this point were male would forfeit his allowance. That is no rehabilitation, no pension. A similar policy without the pension was extended to civilians with disability in 1920. And that's what Barry referred to as the 100th anniversary when the Civilian Law took effect. So for both civilians and veterans rehabilitation was a possibility and a strong mandate.

Larry Logue:

This story might be familiar so far, but there's a backstory behind it, which we're going to talk about the key players in this backstory, where the people we call the progressive's and this isn't to be confused with the term we use today. This group was an assortment of middle-class and upper-class highly educated men and women who crossed party lines but shared two common beliefs. One was that America was drowning in inefficiency, corruption, and injustice. The other was that governments at all levels needed to take the lead in solving these problems. Some progressive pointed to benefits for Civil War veterans was a case in point of the problems, they were disgusted by what they saw when government was paying people, not to work, to get their votes, but just behind this is that progressive's knew that pensions consumed as much as 40% of the federal budget in some years at the end of the century.

Larry Logue:

And they knew that pensions were based on the inability to perform manual labor. So they put those two realities together and made an indictment of a wildly expensive policy that encouraged waste, corruption, and unproductivity. This part of the backstory is well-known to historians, if not so much outside of it, but for even historians, the backstory stops there and it tends to leave two questions unanswered. One was, were policymakers in the 19th century unaware of occupational rehabilitation, or were they just not interested? Another question is, did pensions' for Civil War veterans discouraged working

and encourage idleness? Those questions were what we started and answering them was our project.

Barry Whaley:

What an interesting backstory, if either you or Peter could talk a little bit more about how did you carry out the study of disability and employment among union army veterans before the accommodation principle?

Peter Blanck:

This whole concept for Burton Blatt Institute is embedded in trying to understand the rise of the administrative state, which pretty much began after the Civil War with the Pension Bureau, which was the first major administrative operation focused on compensating individuals on the basis of their disabilities, the basic program of research, which Larry understated modestly a little bit we've been looking at for, I don't know how many years now, maybe a decade has spawn books and articles, which have tried to understand the relevance of this past major administrative undertaking over time, and what if any relevance it has to today?

Larry Logue:

And here's what we did specifically, in this project to answer those two questions. First off, we addressed the question about rehabilitation awareness, were the progressive's just unaware, or what were post-Civil War officials just unaware of it? The short answer is, no. 19th-century leaders were well aware of the possibility of retraining veterans for work. The longer version of the answer is that veterans advocates and politicians took steps to prepare Civil War veterans with disabilities for employment and reemployment. For one thing, philanthropists, especially the United States sanitary commission, which had emerged during the war, offered money, allowances, tools, employment bureaus to veterans with the objective of helping them to find work or finding a new type of work. For another thing, commercial colleges, such as the Illinois Soldiers College actively recruited veterans for retraining, especially for business and clerical occupations.

Larry Logue:

And for another thing, the federal government joined in at the war's end, Congress mandated preferential treatment for veterans with disabilities in hiring for federal jobs and encouraged preference in private employment. Also, when the federal government created a system of soldiers homes in the late 1860s, they included workshops and schools in each one of those homes where they could train residents in new trades or in clerical skills. And the federal government, the private sector collaborated on prosthetics for veterans. Government bought artificial limbs for amputees from late in the war to 1870, and then thereafter paid a subsidy for amputees to buy their own prosthetics. Listeners might be wondering if all this is going on, why is it not better known? The answer there starts with the subject of our second question because attempts at rehabilitation were completely overshadowed by federal pensions. We need to talk more about the pensions themselves and how they worked.

Larry Logue:

Civil War Union Army pensions took two forms. The first was an amount based on the degree of disability for manual labor, if you remember, that's what the law said. The maximum amount went from \$8 a month at the war's end to \$30 a month at the end of the century based on the amount of disability that physicians identify. And then the law also included amounts for specific impairments, such as amputation, blindness, and the like. These amounts varied by the impairment and the time we're talking about, these benefits and the number of pensioners went far beyond anything was ever done for previous wars. At the turn of the century, the union army pension role included nearly one million veterans who were receiving more than \$140 million in total monthly pensions. This was the policy that had the biggest potential to affect veterans' lives and that's the heart of our project. So we built the main part of the project around random samples of veterans and civilians.

Larry Logue:

First, we had and sampled approximately 17,000 union army veterans, that was collected at the University of Chicago as part of a project to investigate aging and health in the 19th and 20th centuries funded by the federal government. Second, we approximately 5,000 working-age men from a sample collected at the University of Minnesota, which was part of a project to create samples for all U.S. censuses. Our rule for picking the men we were going to look at was that we wanted veterans and civilians who appear in both the 1870 and 1880 censuses. So why those censuses? Most veterans were in the prime working ages then. In 1880, the government asked a unique set of disability questions, actually in the census. And in particular, we were interested in the one that asked if each person was maimed crippled, or otherwise disabled? Was a quote from ... that's the question.

Larry Logue:

So we dug into these men's occupations, looking for two things. First, were veterans more or less likely to be unemployed than non-veterans. And then flowing from that, if they are more likely to be unemployed, was that different due to pensions encouraging idleness? And so we went on from there.

Barry Whaley:

Looking at that 1870 and 1880 census. Do you have an idea of what percentage of the population would have identified as a disabled Civil War veteran?

Larry Logue:

Very low, about 2%.

Barry Whaley:

Really?

Larry Logue:

Yes. And that's an issue that Peter and I are going to look at in some more detail because it's a fascinating question and nobody's really done much with it, probably because the

Census Bureau kind of gave up on it or wasn't as interested in people in living with their families as they were in institutionalized people with disabilities. So they spent their emphasis on that and they never published the results of this survey, but it is remarkable that especially between a quarter and third of people now identify as having a disability that only roughly 2% did then, but then the question is very different.

Barry Whaley:

And yet those pensions are consuming 40% as you said, of the federal budget?

Larry Logue:

Yes,

Barry Whaley:

That's fascinating.

Larry Logue:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, even 2% of the adult male population was huge in a population, it was roughly 60 or 70 million.

Barry Whaley:

So as you note in your paper, the union pension scheme was influenced by this medical model of disability. How did that model influence the employment of veterans with disabilities?

Larry Logue:

We've got our member to the medical model was only in its infancy in the late 19th century. To refresh all our memories, the model actually rests on the judgment that a disability is a pathology that needed to be cured by expert intervention. So back to the 19th century, on the one hand, the medical profession that is the experts were gaining credibility some in the late 19th century, partly because of the experience the physicians

had in treating soldiers in the war, partly because of medical breakthroughs, like the discovery of the Germ Theory in the 1870s. And partly because Americans were becoming more and more impressed by expertise, in general, as the century went on and physicians benefited. But on the other hand, and always there's another hand in history. Physicians still faced stiff competition to really become authority figures. Lots of people still believed in faith healing, in Potions and Elixirs, and in pseudo-scientific cures like the light cure and magnets that they believed could cure people with disabilities, but still, veterans benefits in the medical model did influence each other as we note in our project.

Larry Logue:

The evidence is partly from Congress's commitment in Pension Law to use physicians in the pension program and how they used them was Pension Bureau set up panels, usually of three physicians who were supposed to examine each pension applicant and determine how disabled he was, if you recall, that's part of one of the major pillars of the pension program, but that's hardly a full-fledged medical model. We have to be very careful in interpreting that because for one thing, physicians were ordered to examine applicants, not treat them. And they were forbidden from sharing their findings with anyone who might want to try to treat disabilities. For another thing, officials gave up on a policy that they started early to conduct repeat examinations, looking for recovery, problem was they never found much recovery. And for a third thing, officials admitted that artificial arms were in their words, "Useless, and artificial legs weren't much better for amputees."

Larry Logue:

So taking all this into count, we have to conclude that any full-scale model, medical model would have to wait for further developments. And that's where the progressive's came in. They were especially attracted even beyond the attraction to the general populace, by the idea of experts addressing all sorts of issues. At the same time, that progressive's accepted the age-old presumption, that income support without a work requirement created laziness, putting these things together, progressive advocates persuaded lawmakers to create programs aimed at work preparation and to downplay pure economic

income replacement. So now with the progressive's the medical model evolved in full dominance, based on the belief that expert intervention could overcome almost any impairment, and veterans and civilians could be refitted for the modern workplace. The medical model as its own up and down, back and forth history.

Barry Whaley:

ADA Live listening audience, if you have questions about this topic or any other ADA Live topic, you can submit your question online at adalive.org, or you can call the Southeast ADA Center, our number is +1 404-541-9001. Larry and Peter let's pause for a word from our featured organization and our employer, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University.

Voice Over Commercial:

Burton Blatt Institute, BBI at Syracuse University reaches around the globe in its efforts to advance the civic, economic, and social participation of people with disabilities. BBI builds on the legacy of Burton Blatt, former Dean of the Syracuse University School of Education, and a pioneering disability rights scholar to better the lives of people with disabilities. BBI has offices in Syracuse, New York, New York City, Washington DC, Lexington, Kentucky, and Atlanta, Georgia. Given the strong ties between one's ability to earn income and fully participate in their communities. BBI's work focuses on two interconnected innovation areas, economic participation and community participation. Through program development, research, and public policy guidance in those innovation areas, BBI advances, the full inclusion of people with disabilities. For more information about the Burton Blatt Institute visit, bbi.syr.edu.

Barry Whaley:

And welcome back everybody. We're talking with Dr. Peter Blanck and Dr. Larry Logue. Before the break, we were discussing the medical model of disability and how it influenced the employment of veterans with disabilities in the 19th and early 20th century. Larry and Peter, two of your findings from this study seemed to refute assumptions about the will to work. Can you talk about that?

Larry Logue:

Again, we focused on 1880 because that's a crucial year and we found that veterans are less likely to be unemployed in 1880 than civilians were. Fewer than 3% of veterans had no occupation in 1880 versus about 8% of the general population. Now we're aware that claiming occupation is not the same as being regularly employed, but the problem was that modern unemployment statistics were just beginning to be collected in the 1880s. They emerged from, as a response to the severe depression of the 1870s, which saw extraordinary suffering and unemployment. That depression was mostly over by 1880, but occupation as mentioned in the census is the best thing we have. So we stuck with that. Given what we found, it looks like veterans were more likely to work than their peers. So that means it looks like preferential treatment, both official and unofficial outweighed the accounts that many historians have talked about with veterans begging in the streets and playing organ grinders. There's a catch to all this history. Usually, does that too.

Larry Logue:

Our findings also show that what we might call a disability gap was much bigger for veterans than it was for civilians. Veterans who reported a disability were more than four times as likely to be unemployed than those who didn't report the disability, where versus civilians when civilian said disability, they were twice as likely to be unemployed. This cut across race, affecting African-Americans as well as whites. So we also know that veterans with disabilities were also more likely to have pensions. So we're still back to that question, did pensions encourage veterans to drop out of the labor force? So what we did next was to look just at the veterans. We looked at who got pensions, how much they got, and whether they had an occupation in 1880? What we found here was that the higher the pension the veteran received the less likely he was to claim an occupation in 1880, that looks like the critics were right. It looks like pensions encouraged idleness.

Larry Logue:

Pensioners are also more likely to return to work in 1880 when they'd reported no occupation back in 1870, that wasn't supposed to happen. That shouldn't happen among

a population of loafers who are dependent on handouts. They shouldn't be returning to work. And there's another complication to the assumptions. Those who reported disability ... disability reported in the census was a better predictor of unemployment than the pension is. What all this suggests is that disability forced veterans to move in and out of the labor force more often than their peers, rather than simply out. And that suggests that pensions reflected disabilities rather than destroying the will to work. It also suggests that people with disabilities want what everyone wants, work out a meaningful occupation. So the main takeaways from what we found, I can group them into two.

Larry Logue:

For one thing, policies for disability and employment were not inevitable. They were the results of choices driven by, among other things, ideology and preconceptions. The progressive's could, for example, have spent as much energy examining the effects of pensions as they did in exploring the recent concept of normality and applying it to humans. But they didn't. For another thing, the behavior of people with disability is something to be investigated rather than assumed. It probably should have been investigated then in the early 20th century, it certainly needs to be investigated now. And we hope that our investigation gets more studies of ordinary lives of people with disabilities.

Barry Whaley:

So one question that I have, because you're looking at census data, and you're looking at employment data in 1870 and 1880. Economically, weren't we in an economic depression during those years, like 1870 to 1880. Did that influence those numbers at all?

Larry Logue:

I'm sure it did. It had to. The thing we can keep in mind is that for people then occupation was as much an identity. Even if they were out of work, they might still have reflected and claimed an occupation in the census or something different. But yes, there was a depression and it certainly did have an effect and especially on veterans with disabilities who moved in and out of the labor force, it did force people in and out of the labor force. A

major predictor of moving in and out of the workforce that is employment instability was being single. Single men were much more likely to move in and out of the labor force than married men were. The depression had disrupted the economy, but it was largely over by 1880. And the disruption seems to have affected people such as those with disabilities and those who were single more than it did the bulk of the population claimed an occupation in 1870 and claimed that occupation again in 1880. So it was a matter of identity.

Barry Whaley:

So we've been looking at the past, but let's apply this now to modern disability and civil rights movements. So how does this social model that then evolved from the medical model, what's the modern-day impact for veterans with disabilities?

Larry Logue:

They're still operating with the assumptions of the occupational rehabilitation revolution of the early 20th century. And there's veterans occupations and veterans rehabilitation is still a major issue. And there is still a disconnect between veterans and civilians, a kind of tension where veterans want to insist that they are a separate population and so they wanted in the wake of World War II, they wanted more resources to be put into prosthetics for them than for the general populations. I think what I would say would be that veterans and civilians still when they have disabilities are still operating in separate spheres. I'm not sure that there'll be much of a change in the foreseeable. So that would be my take on it.

Speaker 5:

I have a question for Larry, actually several questions. This overarching sense historically and today that people are compensated when they are "worthy" by society, which, of course, ties into, this is the second part of the question, the birth and development of Darwinism and the Eugenics Movement. How does the Civil War lay the foundation for that and that progression developed in your view?

Larry Logue:

The major drivers of Eugenics and Darwinism were really the rise of expertise and the fascination with it. Now, the war itself probably had only a minimal impact in these movements, I think other than the experience of physicians who gained a good deal of credibility after the war, otherwise the Civil War, especially with its pension program, or a kind of negative reference point for the rise of science and expertise and scientific movements, but the major drivers behind Eugenics or the fascination with Darwinism and natural selection and evolution and the rise of immigration, which sent waves of people who were judged to be inferior. So those were largely postwar developments in which the pension program became increasingly a kind of dinosaur that many, many people then, including the reformers that we call the progressives wanted to use as a kind of poster for what not to do.

Speaker 5:

So obviously today we're in the midst of a reckoning on the basis of race, Black Lives Matters, racism. But we saw that in various ways in the administration of the Civil War pension system. What were the experiences then of the so-called colored troops as you're talking about in this context, employment or otherwise, and any legacy of that thereafter?

Larry Logue:

Well, for one thing, black veterans are much more likely to be rejected for pensions for various reasons, especially since they collected information on skin color, the darker the skin color, the more likely to be rejected. So there was a built-in bias into the system that worked from top to bottom. So the black veterans are less likely to get the pension assistance they needed. The other thing we found in this study, black men were more likely to be employed in 1880 than were whites, partly because blacks' choices were much more restricted. When a black man had a job, he had to keep it. And they tended to be in jobs that were the most menial, but also fairly stable. African-Americans had experiences that were different at the margins, but they were largely the same in their

workloads other than the somewhat more likelihood of being employed in 1880. Their experience was largely similar though the biggest problem that affected them was the discrimination in the pension system.

Peter Blanck:

We've written a whole book on it, so this is a leading question as well, but we're looking at this today, the incredible stigma associated with less visible mental illness and other sorts of conditions, infectious conditions, how does that play out from an employment perspective or from a life perspective, we've looked at suicide and other sorts of traumatic issues, but from an employment perspective, we haven't thought of that too much. Any ideas on that and its progression?

Larry Logue:

Well, the census asked a different question on that. It was actually a series of questions that census takers asked in the 1880 census about disability. And it was one on blindness, one on deafness, one on insanity, and one on idiocy. So those responses would tell us a lot, except they were very much aimed at the institutional population. We really haven't looked at the employment results of people with mental illness. So what we're talking about here in this study is veterans and civilians who claimed physical disabilities. We're hoping that our research can inspire other researchers to look at mental illness and in the censuses in the 19th century and see how that related to occupation. One thing we do know just from looking at the statistics and the answer's on this is that we have a remarkable number of people who were labeled as insane or idiots who are still cared for in families. People with insanity were mostly be institutionalized, but those who were labeled as idiots that is developmentally disabled, at least half of them were still in the community.

Larry Logue:

So I don't think that we've taken into account the likelihood and the reasons why people with various disabilities were still in the community. We, we sort of identify and assume that people with disabilities were locked away in institutions and the key was thrown

away, but not exactly so. Mental disabilities and mental illness is a promising area for research. And we touched on it but didn't really focus on it in this paper.

Speaker 5:

Going forward, what's next, looking back?

Larry Logue:

Much more can be done with this disability question, and in the area of employment, I downplayed the unemployment statistics, but 1880 census did ask four months of unemployment. The problem was the Census Bureau disowned that too because there was so much inconsistent reporting. But I think based on some initial investigation that the unemployment statistics were just inconsistent. So in some places, in some enumeration districts, as they called them, some census districts, the census takers seem to be pretty diligent in collecting information. So I think our next project on unemployment and employment issues might be to look at that and to see ... one initial look at it suggest that people with disabilities were more likely to have longer periods of unemployment as you might suspect, but there's a lot more that can be investigated on that. So there's a good long plan of research going on here.

Peter Blanck:

Well, Larry, that's an amazing lead-in for me also, as we wind down a little bit. The Burton Blatt Institute was just September 1, honored to be awarded \$4 million-plus grant from the Administration on Community Living in Kneisler the National Institute for Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research to study new ways to understand inclusive disability employment policy. The new center is called the Center for Disability Employment Inclusive Policy. It's a research rehabilitation and training center. And as a result of that award, we will be looking at contemporaneously issues of social security disability insurance, which has a model similar to that pension system. We'll be looking at issues of unemployment.

Peter Blanck:

We'll be looking at issues of new ways of doing work. For example, in the 1870s, I'm sure you've talked about it and we've written about it, the rise of industrialization. Well, now we have not only a new paradigm forced by this horrific pandemic, new ways of doing work, remote work, and so forth, but new technologies, as well, which are driving a new way of thinking about work. And in terms of industrialization, Larry or changes in the structure of work, the rise of unions then, any ideas of other influencers?

Larry Logue:

I hate to sound like a broken record, but the infatuation with efficiency and measurement and investigation went hand in hand with the rise of industrialization and Darwinism and the publication of the origin of species in 1859 was extraordinarily influential on American history. So there wasn't industrial revolution, but there are also other ways of working of looking at employment, especially for people with disabilities. There's all sorts of questions about, especially, as I mentioned, the people with disabilities were often not institutionalized, and many of them reported an occupation. And there's lots of evidence from newspapers and discussions of people with disabilities and the occupations they had, blind people who were news vendors and sometimes very laudatory references to somebody who had a physical disability but was a fine gentleman. I think that there's a real possibility for putting together qualitative and quantitative evidence on disability unemployment in the past. And it's hasn't been done much, but has a lot of potential. And that's kind of where my interests are, I like to combine because people ... the people act and they make meaning, but academically we've divided those two things. It's time to remarry them.

Peter Blanck:

Thank you, Larry. Very interesting. And I always learn an amazing amount of things about stuff we've worked on together by hearing you talk about it.

Barry Whaley:

Me too. I want to thank Dr. Peter Blanck, Dr. Larry Logue for being our guests today. And I want to thank you, Our ADA Live listeners for joining us for this episode. We're always

grateful to have Larry and Peter share their time and their valuable insights on veterans' history and employment. Remember, you can submit your questions and comments on this podcast online at adalive.org. You can get access to all ADA Live episodes on our website, adalive.org. Every episode is archived with streamed audio, accessible transcripts, and resources. You can also listen to ADA Live on our SoundCloud channel. Search for soundcloud.com/adalive. And you can download ADA Live to your mobile device, search in the podcast app for ADA Live. Throughout the year, and especially on November 11th, let's celebrate veterans day and honor all who've served our country in times of both war and peace.

Barry Whaley:

We encourage you to celebrate, learn, and share in 2020, the important milestone of the 30th anniversary of the ADA, as well as the 75th anniversary of Ending and the 100th anniversary of the Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Finally, if you have questions about the ADA, you can submit your questions anytime at adalive.org or contact your regional ADA center 1 800-949-4232. And remember, those calls are always free and they're confidential. ADA Live is program of the Southeast ADA Center. Our producer is Celestia Ohrazda, with Beth Miller Harrison, Mary Morder, Emily Rueber, Marsha Schwanke, and me I'm Barry Whaley. Our music is from 4 Wheel City, the movement for improvement, happy Veterans Day, and we'll see you next episode.4
Wheel City: (rapping)

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