

Reviewing Historical Texts on Institutions

Three documents are included with this lesson. One, “Ceremonies on Laying the Cornerstone of the New York State Institution for the Blind,” was written in 1866, by S.G. Howe, founder of the first institution in the United States opened specifically for children with intellectual disabilities. Given almost two decades after the institution was founded, Howe’s speech reflects his growing concern about the unintended consequences of institutions and the need for more inclusive approaches.

An excerpt from “The Burden of Feeble-mindedness” by W.E. Fernald was written in 1912 at the height of what is sometimes called the negative eugenics movement. The essay presents the rationale for both institutions and sterilization.

A 1978 article from the Rutland Herald, a Vermont paper, reports on the closing of the Brandon Training School, explaining the historical importance of the closing using language that was common at that time. The article, written by Kevin Duffy, is titled, “At St. Joseph the Provider, Retarded Students Enrolled in ‘Mainstreaming’ Program.”