

## Municipal Library Notes July 2025

### Celebrating Disability Pride Month: A Century of Progress Toward Access and Inclusion in NYC

This July, in celebration of Disability Pride Month and the anniversary of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), we're showcasing selections from the Municipal Library that trace New York City's evolving journey toward accessibility, inclusion, and justice for people with disabilities.

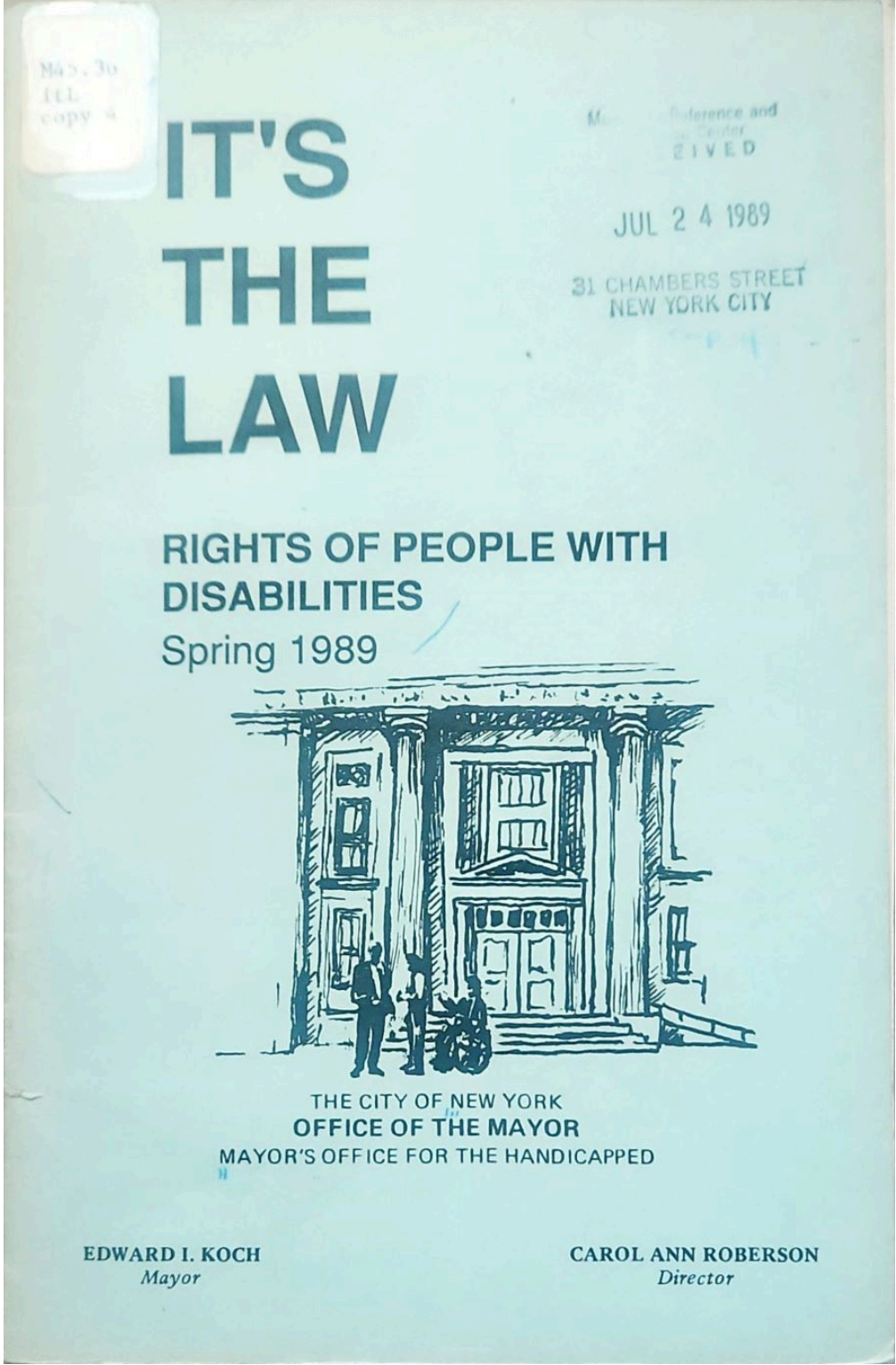
The story begins nearly a century ago, with a 1932 issue of the University of the State of New York Bulletin titled "[The Organization of Special Classes for Crippled Children](#)." While the outdated language is jarring today, the article also reflects flawed assumptions—that children with disabilities were inherently unable to thrive in standard classrooms.

By 1941, the tone had shifted. In [Physically Handicapped Children in New York City](#), the NYC Board of Education highlighted the city's pioneering work in disability education. Despite still drawing lines between "normal" and "handicapped" children, the publication promoted a more forward-thinking vision: rather than isolating students with disabilities, it advocated adapting existing programs to support their success alongside their peers.



Departments of Public Charities and Hospitals, Roosevelt Island (New York, N.Y), 1942. New York City Municipal Archives.

Momentum built in the 1970s following the passage of federal legislation like Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. These transformative laws outlawed discrimination in federally funded educational settings and demanded sweeping changes. In response, the Mayor's Office for the Handicapped (now the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities) released [The New Federal Education Laws for Handicapped Children: Promises, Programs, Problems](#) in 1978. The introduction called the implications "so vast... they will alter the lives of every one of us."

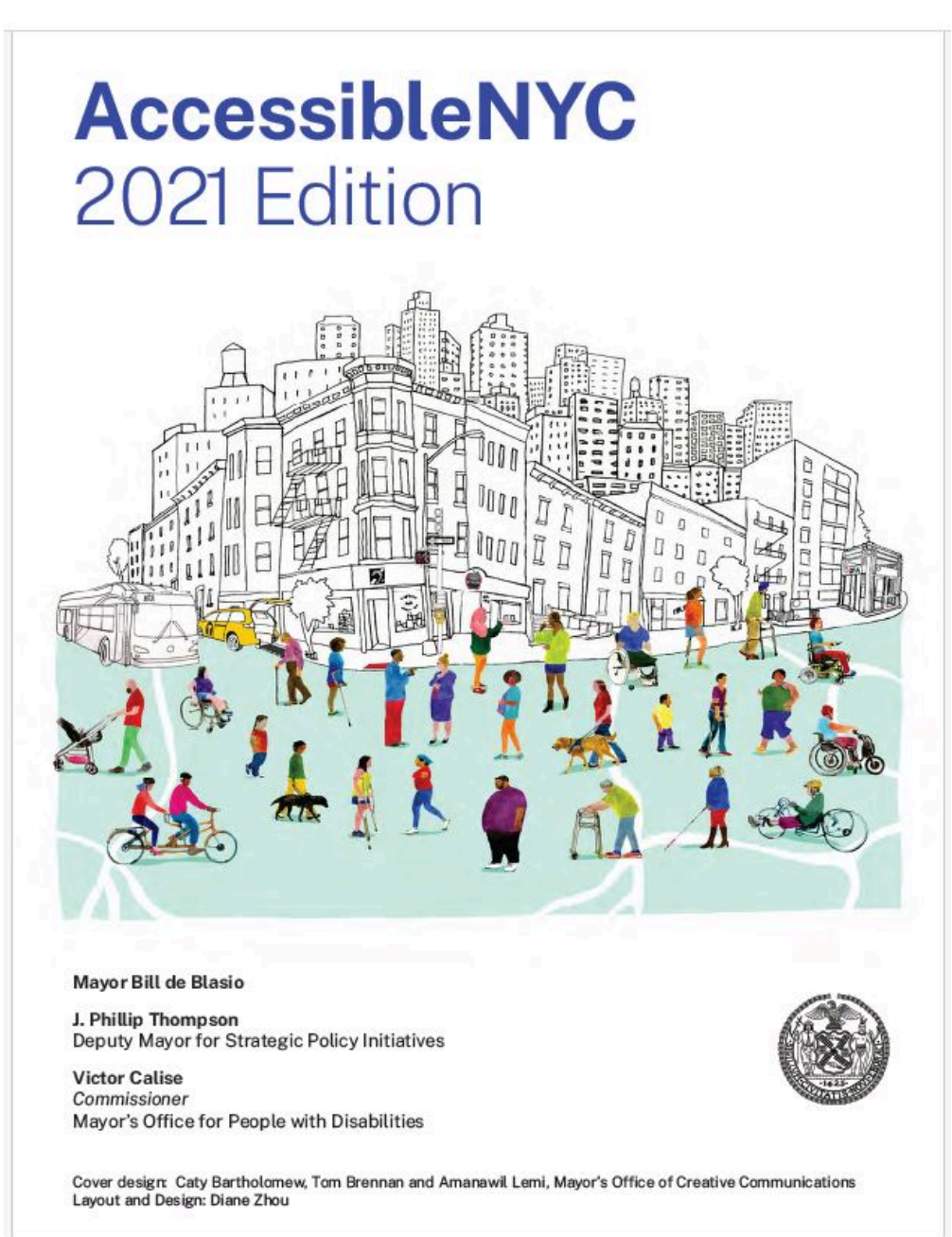


It's the Law: Rights of People with Disabilities. New York City Mayor's Office for the Handicapped, Spring 1989. Municipal Library of NYC.

One year later, the same office published [A Right and Not a Privilege](#), a bold declaration of empowerment and advocacy for what it called the "emerging handicapped minority." In 1989, just before the ADA became law, the city issued [It's the Law: Rights of People with Disabilities](#), a guide to federal, state, and local protections that armed New Yorkers with tools to fight discrimination in jobs, housing, education, and beyond.

New York City wasn't waiting for federal mandates. With Local Law 58 in 1987, the city required accessible design in all new construction and major renovations. A 1991 guide from the Department of Buildings, [How to Work with Local Law 58/87](#), laid out the blueprint for barrier-free design, work that would later be integrated into the [2014 Construction Code](#).

Following the passage of the ADA in 1990, the city continued to push forward. In 1992, the MTA and NYC Transit released their "[Key Station Plan](#)," outlining steps to make subway stations accessible. That same year, the Landmarks Preservation Commission published [Access to Preservation](#), a thoughtful approach to making historic buildings ADA-compliant without compromising their architectural integrity.

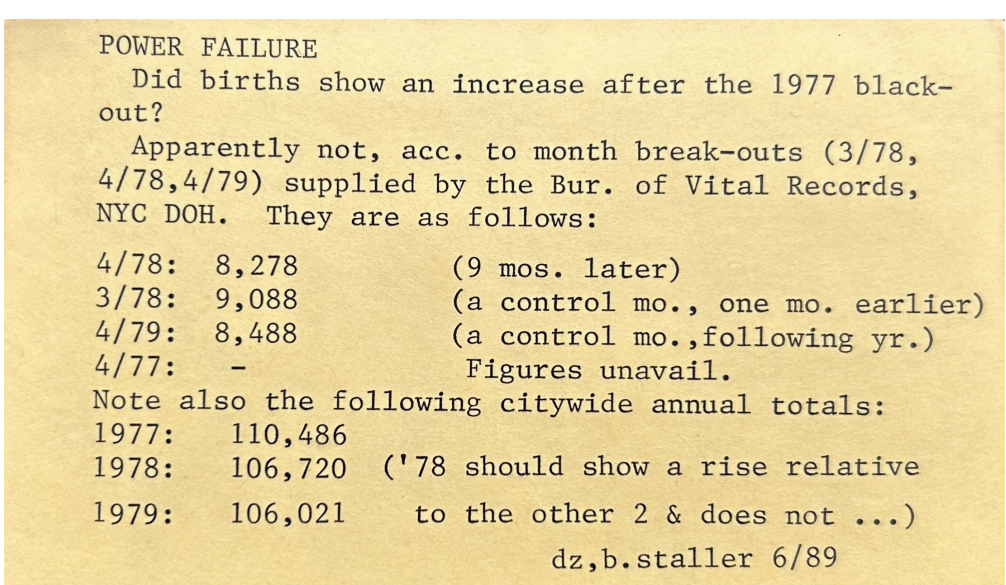


AccessibleNYC. New York City Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, 2021.

Today, progress continues. Since 2016, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities has issued [AccessibleNYC](#), an annual report tracking efforts to build a more inclusive city. The [2021 edition](#) captured the evolving mindset: "While there is still so much more work to be done... there is a greater recognition that making the city more accessible for people with disabilities benefits everyone—with disabilities and without."

From exclusion to empowerment, these documents tell a powerful story of transformation—of a city moving ever closer to equality not just in law, but in practice and spirit.

### From the Question Files: Blackout Baby Boom?



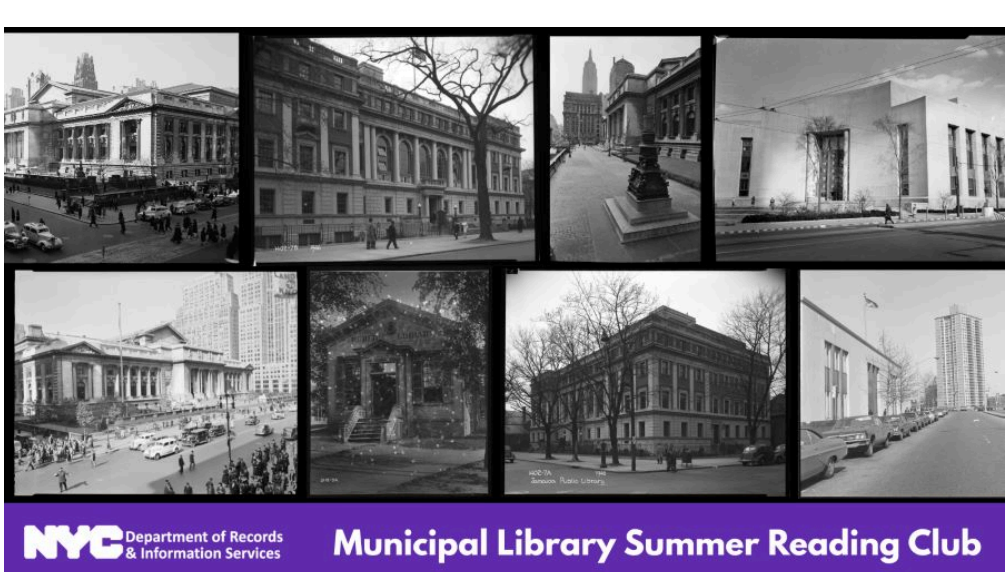
Municipal Library of NYC.

Tucked away in the card catalog in the Municipal Library are several drawers filled with a unique treasure: decades' worth of reference questions and their meticulously researched answers. Filed by subject and arranged alphabetically, these cards served as a vital tool for the reference staff, offering quick access to commonly asked (and occasionally quirky) queries, sparing librarians from duplication of effort. Compiled over nearly a century, each card featured the original question, the librarian's best answer, and a citation for the source consulted.

One card from 1989 tackles a question rooted in one of New York City's most notorious nights. On a sweltering July evening in 1977, lightning strikes triggered a massive blackout, plunging all five boroughs into darkness for more than 24 hours.

More than a decade later, a curious patron asked: "Did births show an increase after the 1977 blackout?" It's a question fueled by urban legend, but the librarian's well-sourced answer, based on NYC Board of Health statistics, puts the myth to rest: there was no noticeable baby boom.

### Read NYC: Municipal Library Virtual Summer Reading Club



Read your way through the five boroughs! This summer, the Municipal Library at the NYC Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS) invites you to fall in love with the city all over again, one book at a time. Choose any NYC-themed book—Manhattan mystery, Brooklyn biography, Harlem history—and tell us what you think! Share your NYC summer reading recommendation with the Municipal Library community, and you might see it featured on our social media.

Every entry you submit gets you a shot at fun NYC swag and eternal literary glory (well, maybe just some serious library love).

No required reading! Just you, your book, and your version of the city.

[Submit your summer reading recommendation here.](#)



### Lunch & Learn: Fear City

Join DORIS for our virtual Lunch & Learn series on Wednesday, October 9th, featuring acclaimed historian Dr. Kim Phillips-Fein.

[RSVP HERE](#)

Dr. Phillips-Fein, the Robert Gardiner-Kenneth T. Jackson Professor of History at Columbia University, will lead a conversation on her groundbreaking book, [Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics](#).

When New York City teetered on the edge of bankruptcy in the 1970s, few could believe that the nation's largest city was billions in debt. Yet the crisis was real—and its aftermath reshaped the city's government, economy, and identity. Fear City offers a compelling look at how this pivotal moment gave rise to the politics of austerity that continue to shape public discourse today.

Don't miss this opportunity to learn from one of the city's foremost historians as we explore a defining chapter in New York's past.

**About the Speaker:**  
Kim Phillips-Fein is a lifelong New Yorker and an expert in 20th-century American history. In addition to Fear City, she is the author of [Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal](#), which explores the rise of conservative economic ideology in the United States. Her writing has appeared in *The Nation*, *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, and other leading publications.

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