

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Justin Dart Jr.

Human and disability rights activist

“Civil rights are not a guarantee of the good life, but an equal opportunity and responsibility to participate in producing the good life for oneself and for all.”

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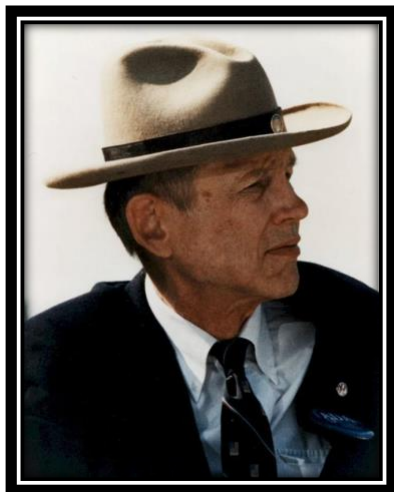


FIGURE 1 COURTESY OF ALCHETRON.COM

Background Information

Born: August 29, 1930; Died: June 22, 2002

Justin Dart Jr. was born in Chicago, Illinois, on August 29, 1930, into a wealthy family. In 1948 Justin contracted polio, which at that time was a deadly illness. Although he survived, the disease left Justin reliant on a wheelchair for the rest of his life. In 1953, Dart graduated with a Political Science degree from the University of Houston. He earned a Master’s degree in History from the university in 1954.

Dart’s Resistance

When Justin traveled to a rehabilitation center in Vietnam, he was horrified at what he saw. Children left paralyzed by polio, and other illnesses were mistreated and often lived in horrible conditions. Upon returning to the U.S., Dart’s activism within the disability rights movement began. He worked in a private program to help people with physical disabilities live independently. As a businessman, he also provided job opportunities to people with disabilities in Mexico and Japan.ⁱ Justin wanted laws that did not exclude people based on physical ability. Dart served as chairperson for the Texas Governor’s Committee for Persons with Disabilities. In 1981 President Ronald Reagan selected Justin to co-lead the National Council on Disability. The group wanted to address discrimination against people with disabilities in America. Justin began a national tour to interview and collect stories from various people living with disabilities. As he traveled, he built a network of supporters in the battle for a national disability policy. Dart and other council members prepared a national policy for equal rights. The collective efforts of disability rights activists paid off. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law on July 26, 1990. The civil rights law forbids discrimination against differently-abled people. The law protects individuals with physical and mental differences from discrimination in jobs, schools, transportation, and any place open to the public.ⁱⁱ For the remainder of his life, Justin Dart, Jr. continued to travel the country as an advocate for human and disability rights.

Achievements

For his civil rights efforts, Justin Dart Jr. is acknowledged as the “Father” of the ADA. Dart received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1998.

Essential Questions

1. How did Dart's experience in the Vietnam rehabilitation center impact him?
2. What did Justin Dart Jr. do to end discrimination against people living with disabilities legislatively?
 - a. How did he resist against the unfair treatment people living with disabilities encountered?
3. Why is the ADA an important piece of legislation?
4. ***“Civil rights are not a guarantee of the good life, but an equal opportunity and responsibility to participate in producing the good life for oneself and for all.”***
 - a. What does this quote mean to you?
 - b. Why is having an equal opportunity important?

ⁱ <https://www.paleyrothman.com/legal-blog/the-father-of-the-ada-justin-whitlock-dart-jr>

ⁱⁱ <https://adata.org/learn-about-ada>