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"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin":
the transnational lives of deaf Americans,
1870-1924

Joseph John Murray

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“ONE TOUCH OF NATURE MAKES THE WHOLE WORLD KIN”: THE
TRANSNATIONAL LIVES OF DEAF AMERICANS, 1870-1924.

by

Joseph John Murray

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in History
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

December 2007

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Douglas C. Baynton

ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies the transnational lives of Deaf Americans between 1870 and 1924. Deaf Americans of the time articulated a discourse of co-equality, seeking to participate in society as Deaf—and as deaf—people. Through participation in a transnational Deaf public sphere, Deaf people in the United States and Europe could exchange ideas on how to live in larger society.

Abstract Approved: _____
Thesis Supervisor

Title and Department

Date

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Graduate College
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Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Joseph John Murray

has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy
degree in History at the December 2007 graduation.

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To Claudia

When our ship reached Liverpool this morning and from her deck were seen several of your number conversing in the crowd that stood upon those wonderful docks, it recalled that line of your greatest poet which says “One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,” for though you dwell here upon an island and we upon a continent beyond the seas, yet in all essentials our experiences are probably the same. If you have troubles we can sympathize with you, for we have the same troubles; or if you have joys, those joys are ours, and we rejoice with you.

Amos Draper
Annual Report of the Columbia Institution for Deaf Mutes, 1889

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INTRODUCTION

The approximately 1,000 Deaf Americans assembled at the 1893 World's Congress of the Deaf could look back on the century with some satisfaction. In 1800, no provisions had been made in the United States for the education of Deaf people and only a few small, scattered communities of sign-language-using Deaf people existed in the young nation.¹ From the founding of the first school for Deaf children in 1817 by Laurent Clerc and Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, educational institutions where sign language was used spread across antebellum America and new bilingual Deaf communities formed in their wake. Local, regional, and national organizations of Deaf people proliferated. Over the decades American Deaf people developed a community infrastructure to rival, if not surpass, that of their European Deaf counterparts. In the 1870s and 1880s, linked by social organizations such as literary societies and periodicals distributed throughout the country, Deaf people began to consider themselves as linked by a common bond of deafness into a particular social and cultural community.² America was also the home of the National Deaf-Mutes' College in Washington D.C., founded in 1864 as the world's only institution of higher education for Deaf people. Its graduates were frequently praised (not the least by Deaf people themselves) as examples

¹ For more on these communities see Harlan Lane, Richard Pillard, and Mary French, "Origins of the American Deaf World: Assimilating and Differentiating Societies and Their Relation to Genetic Patterning," *Sign Language Studies* 1:1 (Fall 2000): 17-44.

² For information on the formation and historical development of the American Deaf community in the early and middle nineteenth century see John Vickrey Van Cleve and Barry A. Crouch, *A Place of Their Own: Creating the Deaf Community in America* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1989), 47-105.

of prosperous, intelligent, middle-class Americans, the epitome of the potential restorative power of America's progressive institutions.

Despite the great progress made in earlier decades, Deaf Americans faced a number of emerging challenges during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. As Deaf American George Dougherty, President of the 1893 World's Congress, noted in his opening address to the Congress, signed languages were rapidly losing ground in educational institutions across the United States and Europe in favor of a “pure oral” method of instruction, a method which sought to teach deaf children solely through spoken language.³ Proponents of this method sought to eliminate the use of sign

³ American Sign Language (ASL) is a fully-fledged human language used today by Deaf people in the United States and parts of Canada. The term “American Sign Language” was not used by nineteenth century Deaf Americans or Canadians when referring to the sign language they used. Neither did the nineteenth century Deaf communities of any other nation add a national modifier as a way of naming the distinctly different sign languages they used. In the period under study, the sign language Deaf Americans used was written as “the language of signs” or “the sign language.” While nineteenth century Deaf people probably understood their language as being “genuine” languages, this understanding was partially subsumed during the twentieth century by the rise of a discourse denigrating signed languages as a limited, primitive set of gestures. As such, terms such as American Sign Language and Norsk Tegnspråk (Norwegian Sign Language) are products of a particular historical context that emerged a half-century or more after the period explored in this dissertation. This naming of the language has often signaled a certain shift of consciousness in the community which uses that language, a recognition that the language they use is indeed an indigenous human language. This recognition often signals a period of Deaf activism and formal academic research into that language. Adding national modifiers when nineteenth century Deaf people did not could unnecessarily mislead readers into taking a presentist understanding of the motives of nineteenth century Deaf people. I have decided to fall back to the standard practice of historians when faced with such a dilemma between contemporary and modern terms: use the terminology of the era studied. This dissertation uses the term “sign language” (and “signed languages” as a plural form) when referring to one or another of the distinct signed languages used by the various national communities of Deaf people covered in this dissertation, reminding readers that similar descriptors do not a universal language make. Each of the world’s several hundred distinct signed languages, like any other human language, spoken or signed, developed within the historical context of a particular community of language users sited in a defined geographical space. For more on the linguistics of American Sign Language see Clayton Valli and Ceil Lucas, *Linguistics of American Sign Language: An Introduction* Second Edition. (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1995). For an account of how American Sign Language was “rediscovered” in the 1960s, see Jane Maher, *Seeing Language in Sign: The Work of William C.*

language in schools for Deaf people. Deaf people were being pushed out of teaching academic subjects at these schools, positions that had traditionally been held by their best and brightest. Political activity by Deaf people intent on maintaining sign language-based education in schools was derided by oralists as lay meddling in work better left to professionals. The claimed right of Deaf people to participate in professional discourse in education, their right to associate with one another for mutual aid and social pleasure, and even their right to choose their own marriage partners were now being called into question.

This dissertation studies the national and transnational lives of American Deaf people, how they interacted with Deaf people in Western European countries and the significance of these interactions for Deaf Americans' struggles to assert their equality in American society. Deaf Americans not only aspired to succeed in larger society as individuals, they also sought to build and maintain a cultural community of Deaf people and fully expected this community to co-exist as a part of larger society. When this ideology, which this dissertation names as "co-equality," was challenged, nineteenth century Deaf Americans could look to their Deaf counterparts in other Western nations for points of comparison they could not find at home. As Deaf American Amos Draper (quoting Shakespeare) put it, "A touch of nature makes the whole world kin." This touch

Stokoe (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1996). Maher's book is centered around William C. Stokoe, an English professor at Gallaudet University who co-authored the first dictionary of ASL based on linguistic principles. See also Jack Gannon, *Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1979), 364-367. For a thought-provoking commentary on abbreviations of the names of national or regional signed languages, see Yerker Andersson, "Is It Necessary to Create Abbreviations of Signed Languages?" *Sign Language Studies* 1:3 (Spring 2001): 214-227.

of nature Draper referred to, the physical fact of deafness, underlay decades of sustained transnational contact between Deaf people.

In the post-Civil War era, Deaf Americans consistently maintained connections with their counterparts in other nations, participating in the development of a transnational Deaf public sphere. This sphere developed via individual travels, the regular exchange of Deaf community periodicals between nations, and a series of international conferences culminating in the creation of permanent standing international organizations of Deaf people. An ongoing series of international conferences and meetings of Deaf people began in 1873. Although some Deaf Americans (either native-born or emigrants) had traveled overseas or had participated in international conferences before 1889, the participation of a delegation of some twenty Deaf Americans at the 1889 International Congress of the Deaf in Paris marks the beginning of sustained participation in transnational conferences by this generation of Deaf Americans. While these conferences were ad hoc affairs organized by individual nations, they nevertheless provided Deaf people in Western nations with regular forums to exchange ideas and strategies on issues of mutual concern. It was only with the first World Games of the Deaf in 1924 that the first international organization of Deaf people was founded and the era of standing international Deaf organizations began.⁴ This coalescence of the

⁴ The tradition of quadrennial World Games of the Deaf, today known as the Deaflympics, continues to the present day. For an analysis of the meaning of the Deaflympics, see Jordan Eickman, "The Role of Deaf Sport in Developing Deaf Identity," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Bristol, 2004. A political organization, the World Federation of the Deaf, was founded in 1951.

transnational Deaf public sphere into formal international organizations marks the end point of this dissertation.

Understanding Deaf Lives

This project originates from a deceptively simple question: what does it mean to be Deaf? Answering this question requires us to ask who determines the answer and what conditions promote one answer over another at different times and places. For deafness is not simply a physical condition which happens to affect particular individuals; it is a cultural construct, a phenomenon that is given meaning by the social and cultural context in which it is found at specific points in history. Nineteenth century Deaf people necessarily contended with the cultural constructions of deafness that influenced their lives, but they also advanced their own constructions of what it meant to be deaf—to not hear—and what it means to be Deaf, to be a person who uses sign language and participates in a community of Deaf people.⁵ These constructions, sometimes

⁵ This dissertation is mostly about the lives of American Deaf people who participated in a community of Deaf people and used what is today known as American Sign Language (ASL). First proposed by James Woodward in 1972, it is by now standard practice for researchers in a number of academic fields to capitalize the word “Deaf” when referring to people who use sign language and considers themselves to be members of a cultural community of Deaf people, reserving “deaf” to describe a larger group of people who cannot hear. James Woodward, “Implications for Sociolinguistics Research among the Deaf,” *Sign Language Studies* 1 (Silver Spring, MD.: Linstock Press, 1972): 1-7. Two recent works in the small field of Deaf History have adopted this convention. Susan Burch’s 2002 monograph, *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Culture History, 1900-1942* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), and Hannah Joyner’s 2004 work *From Pity to Pride: Growing Up Deaf In the Old South* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2004) both use the upper-case Deaf. This usage is not unproblematic, for, as other scholars have noted, it “is often difficult in practice to apply, especially when dealing with historical figures.” Douglas Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11-12. Nineteenth century Deaf people did not make the upper and lowercase distinction in their writings. Rather, they referred to themselves as “mutes” or “deaf-mutes” and audiologically deaf

competing, sometimes jibing, always intertwined in Deaf people's lives. Often, there often exists a parallel relationship between society's views of sign language and its views of Deaf people. When an era attributes a positive value to sign language, it usually accords a correspondingly positive value to the people who use this language. Likewise, when sign language is seen as something unfit for use in civilized society, those who use this language are discouraged from doing so in order that they not be seen as diminishing themselves. The meaning of deafness and the status of sign language did not usually occupy a central position in the major political or cultural debates of the period.⁶ It has often fallen to those who are most immediately touched by Deaf people or sign language to interpret their meaning in the light of the era's cultural context. In the late nineteenth century, this meant Deaf people, their acquaintances, and educators of Deaf people. This latter group has usually been the group that has had the ear of larger society and their opinions have had great consequence for the lives of Deaf people, especially those who are under their instruction at the time. Changing attitudes of educators to the place of

people who spoke as "deaf." The terms "mute" and "deaf-mute" gradually fell out of use among Deaf Americans in the twentieth century and "deaf" came to be used to encompass all deaf people, signing or speaking. To use nineteenth century terms would be anachronistic, as historians of the African American experience have long known. The Deaf people studied in this dissertation are, for the most part, advocates for their national signed languages and Deaf communities. This dissertation will use Deaf, reserving the word deaf to refer to the physical condition of not hearing or for those who did not use sign language or participate in a Deaf community. I do not, however, use the term "Deaf culture" in this dissertation, seeing it as referring specifically to a late-twentieth century historical moment, with connotations not applicable to the nineteenth century lives I explore here.

⁶ Historians have explored other periods in history when sign language and Deaf people *did* attract the attention of leading politicians and philosophers. See Sophia Rosenfeld, *A Revolution in Language: The Problem of Signs in Late Eighteenth-Century France* (France Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Silent Poetry: Deafness, Sign, and Visual Culture in Modern France*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

sign language in Deaf education are indicative of changes in larger social forces that would affect the lives of most Deaf people.⁷

American educators of deaf children were generally amenable to the use of signed languages in the early and middle nineteenth century. Educators at this time, called manualists, saw some form of their national signed language as the best means of transmitting both information on their national communities and the word of God to their deafened countrymen. The prevailing attitude to Deaf people in this period was one of “benevolent paternalism,” as one scholar of the period aptly puts it. Historians have generally found that hearing educators did not consider Deaf people their social equals.⁸ However, the antebellum era in American Deaf education was one in which sign language was used inside and outside of the classroom, by both Deaf and hearing people. The pages of the field’s periodical, *The American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*, were filled with articles elaborating on the distinctions between different types of signs; articles sometimes contributed by Deaf people themselves. Deaf men and women served as teachers in American schools in percentages that would never again be equaled, with

⁷ This is a point made by most historians in the field, and is explored in depth by Baynton, who notes methods adopted at any one time in Deaf education owed more to “the culture of the day” than any suitability or efficacy of a particular method. Douglas Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 8.

⁸ On benevolent paternalism, see Phyllis Valentine, “Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet: Benevolent Paternalism and the Origins of the American Asylum,” in *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship*, John Vickery Van Cleve, ed. Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1993), 53-73. For a historiographical overview of relations between Deaf people and educators in the antebellum era, including a contrasting viewpoint, see Joyner, *From Pity to Pride*, 165.

41% of all teachers of Deaf people in 1870 being themselves Deaf.⁹ Sign language was accorded a place in the schools because educators and others understood it as being the most “natural” language of Deaf people. In this creationist era, “natural” meant “closer to God” and thus purer and more *real* than man-made aspects of society such as spoken and written languages.¹⁰

In 1867, two events took place which foreshadowed coming changes in the field of Deaf education. The Clarke School for Deaf-Mutes was established in Northampton, Massachusetts and Edward Miner Gallaudet, youngest son of the co-founder of American Deaf education and President of the National Deaf-Mute College (later known as Gallaudet College), embarked on a voyage to Europe. The Clarke School was established out of dissatisfaction with the prevailing manualist method of the other New England school, the American Asylum for Deaf-Mutes. Its founders promoted the oral method, a method favoring educating young deaf children by drilling them into learning the correct pronunciation of selected words and training them, through experience, to recognize words spoken to them. The use of this method in schools for Deaf people can be traced back to eighteenth century Europe. Sign language, used for the past fifty years in American Deaf education, would be actively discouraged in the Clarke School. Gallaudet visited schools for Deaf people in fourteen European nations. The results of his visit would lead him to the conclusion that ”*attempts* in articulation should be made

⁹ Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 60.

¹⁰ Ibid., 108-131.

with *all* deaf-mutes.”¹¹ The Clarke school would be acknowledged as the leading school for the oral method in the United States. Gallaudet would be renowned as the era’s foremost proponent of his new method, the combined method. While an earlier generation of educators supported the use of sign language in the classroom, the late nineteenth century educational landscape was largely divided between oralists, who favored speech training and often stridently condemned sign language use, and the combinists, who supported varying combinations of speech training and sign language in educational settings. The third generation of Deaf Americans, who started to take leadership positions in the American Deaf community beginning in the 1880s, were thus educated in a profession fractured among methodological lines. Some grew up orally educated; others grew up in schools that allowed sign language use in varying degrees. All who eventually took leadership positions in the Deaf community ended up on the front lines of the struggle against pure oralism that marked the decades of their adulthood. This “methods debate” was, in the words of a contemporary observer, “a ghost that would not down at the bidding of any one” and it figures so prominently in the existing historiography precisely because it was of such importance to Deaf people of the time.¹²

Despite the image of opposite poles of sign language and oralism presented in the first generation of historiographical work on Deaf education, most Deaf people and

¹¹ Italics in original. Edward Miner Gallaudet “Report of the President on the Systems of Deaf-Mute Instruction Pursued in Europe,” *Tenth Annual Report of the Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, 1867* (Washington, D.C., 1867), 52.

¹² Amos Draper, “Notes on the Meeting of the Deaf at Paris,” *American Annals of the Deaf* 35 (1890): 31. *Annals* will be used as the shortened version of the title hereafter.

combinist educators agreed with a central point made by the oralists: speech instruction was of much value.¹³ To this they added one important modifier: “for those who could benefit from it.” Indeed, the editor of at least one Deaf community periodical generally saw much of value in spoken language instruction. Edwin Allen Hodgson, editor of the *Deaf Mutes’ Journal*, was at first pleased with reports from the 1880 International Congress on the Education of the Deaf in Milan, one of its resolutions which stated “the incontestable superiority of articulation over signs in restoring the deaf-mute to society.”¹⁴ In an editorial commenting on articulation and the Milan Congress, Hodgson said the oral method could be seen as “a valuable aid” in putting deaf people “of an almost equal social footing” with hearing people.¹⁵ The *Journal* followed its editorial with a series of articles on “successful articulators,” highlighting the lives and backgrounds of Deaf people who used spoken English.¹⁶ American Deaf leaders generally were not opposed to speech training.

Nor was the combinist movement a defense of sign language in the schools as today’s scholars would understand it. That is, combinism was not about the defense of a minority language—sign language—as the native language of Deaf children against

¹³ Richard Winefeld’s *Never the Twain Shall Meet: The Communications Debate* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1987) is the most readily accessible work in this strand.

¹⁴ Giulio Tarra, “Resolutions of the Milan Convention,” *Annals* 26 (1881): 64.

¹⁵ *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (November 4, 1880): 2. In an editorial the following year Hodgson complained the Milan Congress resolutions “had a wrong effect on our class,” saying oral deaf people wrongly linked support for articulation training with attempts to banish the use of sign language. *Deaf-Mutes Journal* (February 10, 1881): 2.

¹⁶ Two examples of these columns can be found in *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (November 4, 1880): 3 and *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (November 18, 1880): 1.

attempts by a linguistic majority to take this language away from them. The particulars of combinist method are difficult to nail down since its proponents offered different descriptions at different times and places. In its most essential form, the combinist method simply meant the use of some kind of manual communication was not disallowed in schools for Deaf people. This could mean a school that predominantly used sign language in classroom instruction and offered speech training to a few pupils. Or it could mean a school which allowed signing for extracurricular activities such as chapel services, while discouraging or forbidding its use in the classroom. Or combinism could mean any possible number of permutations in between. As the oral method, and particularly a “pure oral” variant of this method, gained ascendancy around the turn of the century, the combinists were forced into defending the use of sign language in the schools in stronger terms than they had heretofore adopted. Practitioners of the pure oral method tried to prevent deaf children from learning or using sign language, whether in or out of the classroom. Both Deaf people and the combinists adopted the utilitarian slogan of “the greatest good for the greatest number,” claiming pure oralism was only useful for a few and only under certain optimal conditions, usually in small classes and with Deaf people whose deafness was either partial or occurred after the acquisition of spoken language.

Oralists agreed with combinists and most Deaf people on a number of matters. For one, all believed Deaf people should take their place in larger society. Likewise, they all understood sign language as being distinct from spoken English. The difference, as historian Douglas Baynton points out, lay in the social context in which the oralists acted. In an environment increasingly impregnated with social Darwinist thought, sign language

was understood by the oralists to be a primitive gesture language, a throwback to earlier times. The oralists saw themselves as progressive reformers. They argued oralism would keep Deaf people from the stigma of evolutionary failure and integrate Deaf people into society on an equal basis with their hearing counterparts.¹⁷

As oralists assumed an increasingly dominant role in Deaf education and actively sought to marginalize Deaf people and sign language, Deaf people responded more sharply than they had in the past. While not opposed to speech training, they began to decry the “spirit of intolerance that is characteristic of ultra oralism.”¹⁸ Pure oralism, Deaf leaders charged, was “time, toil, and trouble lavished in...Sisyphean endeavor” of little practical value to Deaf people once they left school.¹⁹ From about 1880, Deaf men and women were increasingly pushed out of positions of influence in Deaf education. Their opinions on the education of Deaf people—as written in journals or stated at educational meetings—were disregarded by oralists, who objected to “the deaf,” of all people, presuming knowledge of the possibilities of the oral method. As Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone and a leading advocate of the oral method, put it, “the opinions of adult deaf-mutes” were not worth “the same weight as those of professional instructors of the deaf.” Those Deaf people who were “not able to speak readily and make themselves easily understood by hearing persons” were not capable of

¹⁷ On oralists considering sign language as distinct from English see Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 27-28. For more on oralism, Progressivism, and evolutionary thought, see chapter two of Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 36-55.

¹⁸ Amos Draper, “The Deaf Section of the Paris Congress of 1900,” *Annals* 46 (1901): 222.

¹⁹ Amos G. Draper, “The Attitude of the Adult Deaf to Pure Oralism,” *Annals* 40 (1895): 49.

forming “a proper opinion of the value of speech.”²⁰ Although Deaf teachers did not disappear from schools for the deaf, some were excluded from teaching academic subjects on the grounds they could not teach via oral methods.²¹ The methods debate increased in intensity over time and had real consequences for the lives of Deaf people and their standing in society.

Defining what it meant to be Deaf was not the sole privilege of educators, nor would it be defined only around the methods debate. During the Progressive Era, reformers suggested various strategies to limit marriage and reproduction among “degenerate” groups of people, as well as foster childbearing among socially acceptable groups. Some advocated restrictions on individual reproductive rights for the good of the nation.²² Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone who held a lifelong interest in Deaf education (as an oralist advocate) would solemnly declare the danger of a “deaf-mute race” to American scientists. Bell’s contention, made earlier by others, was that marriages between two Deaf people led to Deaf offspring and thus a growing number of Deaf people burdening society. His claim resonated with legislators, scientists, and the general public. Bell offered society a temptingly easy solution to the problem of “deaf-mutism”: avoid using sign language and discourage Deaf people from associating with

²⁰ Alexander Graham Bell, “The International Congresses,” *Association Review* 2 (1900): 433.

²¹ Historian Susan Burch notes Deaf teachers did not disappear from the field of Deaf education, they remained in schools as vocational education instructors. See chapter two of Burch, *Signs of Resistance*.

²² Donald K. Pickens, *Eugenics and the Progressives* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 44-45; Martin Pernick, “Public Health Then and Now,” *American Journal of Public Health* (November 1997): 1769; R.A. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 2-17.

one another. By doing this, Bell reasoned, Deaf people would choose to marry hearing people and thus avert the problem of deaf offspring of Deaf intermarriages. Society could now view deafness not as a personal misfortune whose origins lay shrouded within the mysterious will of God but as a biological anomaly whose origins could be partially traced to a particular group of people who carried hereditary defects into future generations.

Deaf people themselves could and did attempt to shape social perceptions of Deaf people and sign language. Indeed, if there is one commonality in the post-Enlightenment history of Deaf people it is that Deaf people constantly sought to shape how others saw themselves and their signed languages. Deaf Frenchman Pierre Desloges wrote a book in 1779 in an attempt to correct the “oddest paradoxes and most erroneous criticisms” an oralist educator put forth on sign language.²³ At the 1893 World’s Congress, Hodgson, the Deaf editor of the *Deaf Mutes’ Journal*, confidently claimed “the opinions of the deaf” presented before “the wisdom of an unprejudiced public” would win the day in the method debate.²⁴ Albert Ballin dedicated his 1931 book *The Deaf Mute Howls* to “that ‘humanity of man’ ...[who] should know the Deaf-Mute’s problems and what his knowledge can impart to the world.”²⁵ In short, Deaf people have often felt the need to (and ability to) convince hearing people of Deaf people’s points of view. As historian

²³ As translated in Harlan Lane, ed. *The Deaf Experience: Classics in Language and Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 30.

²⁴ *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (Chicago, 1893), 172.

²⁵ Albert Ballin, *The Deaf Mute Howls* (1931; reprint, Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1998), no page number.

Douglas Baynton notes, “hearing people had, and have, much power over the lives of most deaf people.”²⁶ Deaf people have never ignored the consequences of this fact—thus the constant attempts to “talk back” to hearing society, to explain what it means to be Deaf. This talking back is a common characteristic of any minority. Without the luxury of setting the terms of reference for normality, minorities constantly have to reassert themselves in light of the dominant social discourses—or what are perceived to be the dominant discourses—of the time.²⁷

What did it mean to be Deaf—to live as a visual minority in an auditory world? A commonality emerges across national boundaries: nineteenth century Deaf people devised a way of living that did not always jibe with what others saw as “natural” to the experience of deafness. An important aspect of hearing people’s views of being deaf emerges from what psychologist Harlan Lane calls their “extrapolative leap.” In this leap, hearing people’s attempts to understand what it would mean to be Deaf largely center on imagining what life would be like if one could not hear.²⁸ Historian Hanna Joyner describes antebellum southerners’ conception of deaf people’s lives through the

²⁶ Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 11.

²⁷ This reassertion can take various forms—resistance, co-optation, rebellion—but is nevertheless almost always necessary. Two works that explore theories of resistance in useful ways are James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) and Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and Colonized*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1991), 90-118. A historiographical overview of the themes of resistance and cooption in the intellectual history of African American thought can be found in Patrick Rael, “The New Black Intellectual History,” *Reviews in American History* 29 (2001): 357-367.

²⁸ Lane, *Mask of Benevolence*, 6. Baynton also notes “deafness is usually conceived by hearing people as merely a lack, an emptiness where hearing and sound ought to be.” Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 1.

dual images of “silence” and “darkness.”²⁹ Nineteenth century Deaf Americans acknowledged being unable to hear, or hearing in varying degrees, but stressed a way of life that also included the use of sign language and participation in a community of Deaf people. In addition, Deaf leaders also stressed their ability to equal hearing people in the “battle of life.”³⁰ Thus, the experience of being Deaf in the late nineteenth century was simultaneously represented in different, conflicting, and overlapping ways by a variety of groups with a stake in the outcome: Deaf people, educators, and scientists. The “touch of nature” of deafness created a complex set of social interactions among Deaf people and between Deaf and hearing people. At the very least, for Deaf people, the experience of being Deaf was one of constant negotiation with the societies in which they lived.

Previous works in the field of Deaf History have tended either to emphasize Deaf people’s attempts to enter mainstream American society or stress the uniqueness and separateness of Deaf people as a linguistic and cultural minority.³¹ John Vickrey Van

²⁹ Joyner, *From Pity to Pride*, 9-11.

³⁰ The term “battle of life” was a standard formulation in the late nineteenth century, and was used by Deaf people as well. See, for example, *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (June 10, 1880): 2.

³¹ Books in the “mainstream” vein would be Paul Higgins *Outsiders in a Hearing World*. (Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage Press, 1980); Beryl Lieff Benderly, *Dancing Without Music: Deafness in America* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1980); and Jerome Schein, *At Home Among Strangers* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1989). The earliest works in Deaf History also follow this “mainstream” orientation, key texts being Jack Gannon, *Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1979) and John Vickrey Van Cleve and Barry A. Crouch. *A Place of Their Own: Creating the Deaf Community in America* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1989). A number of works emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s which stressed the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of Deaf people. For a representative sample, see Harlan Lane, Robert Hoffmeister, and Ben Bahan. *A Journey Into the DEAF-WORLD* (San Diego: Dawn Sign Press, 1996); MJ Bienvenu and Betty Colonomos, *Introduction to American Deaf Culture Videotape series* (Burtonsville, MD: Sign Media, Inc, 1992-1993); Sherman Wilcox, ed. *American Deaf Culture: An Anthology* (Burtonsville, MD: Linstock Press, 1989); Carol Padden and Tom

Cleve and Barry Crouch's excellent narrative history, *A Place of Their Own: Creating the Deaf Community in America* is an example of the mainstream strand, positioning Deaf people as gathering together in their own associations for self-help and advocacy purposes, mirroring other minorities in their attempt to establish a foothold in American society. Harlan Lane's work, *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf*, was the first example of the cultural and linguistic minority model of Deaf history. Lane's history portrays nineteenth century Deaf people as multiculturalists who advanced the use of sign language in Deaf education by using the rhetoric of the rights of linguistic minorities. The cultural model of the 1980s and 1990s has offered an enhanced understanding of Deaf peoples lives missing from that of works which presented Deaf people as deficient individuals needing professional intervention.

Yet throughout much of the academic literature a dichotomy of assimilation and resistance is predominant, with hearing society presented as a hegemonic force provoking resistance among members of Deaf communities in Europe and the United States. While Lane is careful to point out complexities, the weight of his narrative is oriented to describing the oppression of the culture and language of Deaf people. The narrative of Susan Burch's *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900-1942*, while largely positive, also emphasizes resistance among Deaf Americans. Burch emphasizes the success of Deaf people in beating back attempts to restrict their right to operate automobiles, their success in gaining employment, and holding onto sign language in the

Humphries, *Deaf In America: Voices from a Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). In the field of Deaf History, Harlan Lane is the pioneer of the cultural approach in his *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf* (New York: Random House, 1984). Other books include Susan Plann, *A Silent Minority: Deaf Education in Spain, 1550-1835* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900-1942* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

face of oralism. Burch also notes sign language was still used at many schools during the oralist era: in vocational classes, through informal student-to-student transmission, and in segregated “manual departments.”³² Burch contends Deaf Americans saw “themselves as separate from mainstream society” and were able to hold onto this society in spite of oralist efforts to assimilate them.³³ Hanna Joyner’s monograph on the lives of elite antebellum Deaf Southerners also maintains the use of sign language “encouraged the development of a separate culture for American Deaf people,” a culture offering Deaf people “an escape from the struggles their deafness caused in hearing America.”³⁴ All these authors illustrate a tendency in the field of Deaf History to position Deaf people as outsiders to national communities which—consciously or not—oppress them.

The historiography to date has certainly demonstrated that most educators saw Deaf people as outsiders, as “foreigners in their own land.”³⁵ The next step for the historiography is to take the cultural view of Deaf people and tie it to a redefined understanding that shows how Deaf people saw themselves –both within their communities and as a part of larger society. This dissertation takes the view that Deaf people were not outside—whether seeking to enter or hoping to further escape—larger

³² Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 23-33.

³³ Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 2.

³⁴ Joyner *From Pity to Pride*, 100.

³⁵ Baynton notes manuals and oralists “both created images of deaf people as outsiders, with the implicit message that deaf people depended upon hearing people to rescue them from their exile.” Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 16. The term “foreigners in their own land” is taken from the title of Douglas Baynton’s doctoral dissertation, “Foreigners in their Own Land: The cultural origins of the campaign against sign language in nineteenth-century America,” Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Iowa, 1993.

society but were already active participants in their national dialogues, reshaping national discourses for their own particular needs. Deaf Americans devised a variety of responses to ideas that denigrated their abilities and their existence. They did not always attempt to sidestep national discourses of cultural and linguistic assimilation; rather, they met these discourses head on, at times challenging science with personal experience, at other times re-interpreting nationalist ideologies to find a space for sign-language-using Deaf people to exist. In a society that promoted the assimilation of difference, Deaf people asserted their difference via the use of sign language. The transnational bonds Deaf Americans formed enabled them to find sustenance and ideas for their local lives.

Co-equal Lives

The 1893 World's Congress of the Deaf at the Chicago World's Fair brought together over 1,000 Deaf people from the United States and Europe. While the Congress was an event run by Deaf people for Deaf people, it was also part of the Chicago World's Fair's Congresses Auxiliary, an assembly of 225 Congresses on topics ranging from temperance to religion to "women's progress."³⁶ The Congress organizers noted with satisfaction that the Congress of the Deaf "got recognition on a basis co-equal with all the great World's Congresses of other kinds."³⁷ Congress President George Dougherty marveled at this fact, as did other Deaf people in attendance, proud of their ability to

³⁶ David F. Burg, *Chicago's White City* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1976), 235.

³⁷ "Preliminary History of the World's Congress of the Deaf, at Chicago, in 1893," *Proceedings of the World's Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, 1893* (Chicago, 1893), 10.

“meet the hearing world in congresses.”³⁸ This assertion of being Deaf as an alternate but valid means of human existence goes to the heart of this project.

From the late nineteenth century to approximately 1900, Deaf people articulated a different understanding of their lives than one put forth by oralist educators. This discourse was made up of two distinct strands. One strand emphasized the right of Deaf people to associate with one another and to use sign language, while nonetheless participating in larger society. The other strand consisted of a belief that the abilities of individual Deaf people could equal that of their hearing counterparts. This discourse may best be understood by the term Dougherty used in 1893: “co-equal.” Co-equality conveys a sense of permanent biculturality; of Deaf people as members of both their national societies and of a particular community of people with their own language, community, and social organizations. This understanding acknowledged Deaf lives as being influenced both by Deaf-centered spaces and by larger society. At times, co-equality was an ideal expressed in the expectations Deaf leaders set for other Deaf people—that Deaf people were cosmopolitan participants in the larger world around them. Other times, co-equality was a way of naming the obvious: that Deaf people participated in and were necessarily influenced by daily contact with hearing people.

The ideas contained in the term co-equality are not unique to Deaf people; they are also reflected in historical studies of subalterns and of American minorities. Studies of the African American women’s club movement note their “bicultural voice” in which

³⁸ George Dougherty, “Opening Address,” *Proceedings of the World’s Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, 1893* (Chicago, 1893), 20.

the values of white society are represented alongside those of African American society.³⁹ The Subaltern Studies school has long explored the dynamics of power which enabled subalterns to harness dominant social discourses for their own aims, a strategy mirrored by Deaf Americans studied here.⁴⁰ Historian Nancy Isenberg has noted the use of the term “co-equality” in different ways- to mean, for instance, the joining together of parts into a new whole.⁴¹ As used here, co-equality emphasizes the biculturality of Deaf people, often placed in a subaltern position by larger society. Co-equality should not be read to mean Deaf and hearing people sought to come together in an idealized mainstream, but of Deaf spaces and non-Deaf spaces as being mutually constitutive in the lives of Deaf individuals and of Deaf-centered spaces necessarily being influenced by ideas in the societies in which these spaces existed.

³⁹ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's formulation of the “bicultural voice” of middle-class African American women mirrors the expressions of co-equality expressed by Progressive Era Deaf Americans. Anne Firor Scott writes Higginbotham's middle-class African American women's bicultural voice emerges from “a community whose collective behavior derived in part from the African American past, at the same time they shared many of the values and patterns of the dominant white society.” The latter patterns emerge most obviously in “the case of assumptions about what constituted respectable family life and about the significance of female chastity.” Anne Firor Scott, “Most Invisible of All” Black Women’s Voluntary Associations” *Journal of Southern History* 56:1 (February 1990): 20. Higginbotham's formulation of the bilingual voice of African American women can be found in Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “Beyond the Sound of Silence: Afro-American Women in History,” *Gender and History* 1 (March, 1989): 56.

⁴⁰ A book-length historiography of this entanglement of dominant and subaltern ideas can be seen in Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922-1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁴¹ Nancy Isenberg shows how antebellum women posited an idea of coequality drawn from the Biblical story of the creation of Adam and Eve. Antebellum feminists' interpreted this story as giving men and women “co-sovereignty” over the world. Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 10. Isenberg further elaborates on how coequality was seen as a means of achieving equality between men and women, using the image of the two sexes working together in a harmonious whole. Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America*, 99-101.

Co-equality emphasizes the intermingling of ideas as well as of people. While the term “co-equal” was not used widely among nineteenth century Deaf people, the use of it in the 1893 Congress proceedings points at a way of understanding the experience of being Deaf that has not been fully explored in the field of Deaf History (or, indeed, Deaf Studies) to date. Deaf people are not foreigners in their own country or solely oppressed minorities within their nation-states. For the nineteenth century Deaf people studied here, the experience of being Deaf encompassed an *expectation* of participation in a society not tailored to Deaf norms as well as the articulation of a separate space of being Deaf, a space that, at times, transcends national boundaries.

This dissertation takes the term “co-equality” as a way of describing how nineteenth century Deaf Americans saw their lives and the relationship of individual Deaf people and of the Deaf community to the larger society in which they lived. With co-equality, the traditional binaries used in Deaf Studies—of Deaf worlds and hearing worlds, of Deaf lives either segregated from or assimilated into mainstream societies—can be seen as not in opposition to one another, but as mutually formative. The preamble to the constitution of the U.S. National Association of the Deaf (NAD), as adopted at its Third Convention in 1889, illustrates the discourse of co-equality.

For the mutual assistance and encouragement in bettering their standing in society at large, and for the enjoyment of social pleasure attendant upon the periodical reunion of a widely scattered class of people, the undersigned deaf citizens of the United States agree to form themselves into a national association.⁴²

⁴² “Constitution and Bylaws,” *Proceedings of the Third Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, 1889* (New York: 1890), 40.

The NAD aimed both to promote the status of Deaf people scattered within larger society and to allow this scattered group the pleasure of coming together. This preamble neatly illustrates the fact that Deaf people live simultaneously in hearing spaces and in Deaf spaces, are part of a Deaf community and active participants in nonDeaf social settings. Co-equality presumes a distinct group acculturated to, but not dissipated into, larger society.

Dougherty and his counterparts were clearly proud of the fact that their World's Congress took place alongside other international meetings at the great World's Fair. Not only was this a triumph in that it presented Deaf people as equal to hearing people, it was also, for these Deaf Americans, the culmination of a century's worth of Deaf people being educated and working together as a distinct community. As noted in a history of the Congress, "Who would have dreamed one hundred years ago that this could ever be possible? Then the deaf were uneducated and widely scattered, unknown to each other; their influence, of course, was *nil*."⁴³ Nineteenth century Deaf people saw their consolidation into a single community through organizations and conferences as the best means to achieve not just equality, but co-equality with larger society. Deaf people sought to participate on an equal basis in the society around them, but refused to be submerged into it. In order to shape their terms of participation in non-Deaf society, it was necessary to associate with one another. Otherwise, "unknown to each other, their influence, of course, was *nil!*" Co-equality highlights the ability of Deaf people to live successful, productive lives in larger society, but as Deaf people.

⁴³Emphasis in original. "Preliminary History of the World's Congress of the Deaf," 10.

The “co” in co-equality was centered around the experience of being a minority within larger American society and highlights the existence of a community of Deaf people. The desire to enact and preserve a “co” was much more contentious than the drive to achieve “equality.” Deaf people sought equality, but in some areas they sought equality by redefining accepted notions of citizenship to fit their own circumstances as Deaf people who used sign language. Deaf people did not merely assert the right to marry, but to marry other Deaf people and specifically because these people were Deaf. Deaf people did not simply claim the rights of equal citizenship; they claimed these rights specifically for those Deaf people who used sign language, rejecting a notion of a linguistically homogeneous nation. Deaf people did not just seek to participate in civil society; they claimed such participation was equally as viable through Deaf associations and societies, without their necessarily needing to assimilate into hearing ones.

Most American educators also held out the ideal of equality—within the restrictions of race, class, and gender—as the desired result of a successful education. An important element of Deaf education’s justification for its work during the Progressive Era was its stated aim of molding national citizens able to take their place alongside hearing counterparts. This aim was harnessed to particular methodological orientations. By converting Deaf people into speaking citizens, oral educators were reinforcing the linguistic boundaries of the nation, expelling the foreignness of sign language and its Deaf users. Oralist educators’ goal was for speaking Deaf people to blend into larger society. Combinist educators did not stress linguistic conformity in the same way as oralists; their emphasis was on molding productive, tax-paying citizens able

to do their individual share for the greater national good. For both, the ultimate aim of education was assimilation into larger society.

The existence of a distinct community of Deaf people was thus contentious and Deaf people often had to justify their right to the “co” of co-equality. Many oralist educators saw little value in a community of Deaf people and, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, a number of prominent combinists were also uneasy about what they saw as the proliferation of Deaf associations and social events. Douglas Baynton situates this unease over Deaf community gatherings and associations in the context of post-Civil War nationalism in American society, which discouraged sectarian divisions.⁴⁴ Opposition to Deaf people associating with one another continued into the twentieth century, usually couched in terms of encouraging individual deaf children to interact with hearing people. Oralists spoke of Deaf children who used sign language as being submerged into a “deaf-mute world” and positioned the oral method as being the best means of ensuring individual Deaf people would want to associate more with hearing people, with “the hearing world.”⁴⁵ This positioning of sign-language-using Deaf people into a separate sphere subverted the “co” into a form of exclusion.

American Deaf leaders rejected claims that they lived in a separate Deaf world. They would not have interpreted the “co” of co-equality into a present-day paradigm of a

⁴⁴ Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 26

⁴⁵ Van Cleve and Crouch chronicle the establishment of a club composed of graduates from an oral school, the Deaf-Mutes’ Union League, in 1886 noting the “irony” of orally-schooled deaf people electing to form a club of their own instead of passing into larger society. Van Cleve and Crouch, *A Place of Their Own*, 94-97. For an example of late twentieth century oralist views that espouse a separate worlds viewpoint, see Winefeld, *Never the Twain Shall Meet*, 105-108.

separate “Deaf world” contrasted against a “hearing world.” In the nineteenth century, terms such as “the deaf-mute class” and “the society of deaf mutes” were more commonly used when referring to a community of Deaf people and the events, personalities, and sense of belonging that goes along with the idea of community. In addition to describing themselves as a class, Deaf American also used the concept of “class” as a way of describing how larger society saw them— as a distinct group of people.⁴⁶ A correspondent reporting on the first NAD Convention in 1880 opined that the convention had “raised our class considerably in the opinion of other classes” and would lead to a process wherein Deaf people would gain “the respect first and afterward the confidence of the rest of the world.”⁴⁷ These terms, as well as occasional uses of the word “world” all point to a sense of Deaf people recognizing themselves as members of a community and of having a distinct sphere of activity.⁴⁸ But this sphere of activity took place along a continuum that was part of the larger world. Deaf Americans did not consider their activities as taking place in a separate world, as isolated from ideas and trends in larger society. Deaf people segued between talking of deaf-mutes and hearing people as separate to a discussion of social and cultural norms that encompassed both deaf-mutes and hearing people. Thus Deaf American Edwin Allen Hodgson, on offering a toast to the Deaf Press at a Boston levee, could claim a separate Deaf press necessary:

⁴⁶ One example can be found in Renville [pseudonym], “Why Most Deaf Mutes Do Not Meet With Success,” *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (February 24, 1881): 2.

⁴⁷ “Convention Jottings,” *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (September 9, 1880): 3.

⁴⁸ One such reference refers to a Deaf sprinter seeking a short-distance running competition. The article notes the runner “hankers for the deaf-mute championship of our ‘wide’ world.” “New York Institution,” *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (June 17, 1880): 4.

[Deaf-mutes'] peculiar separate circumstances, which the general public cannot appreciate, make it imperative that they should possess some easy and effective way of making known their wants, of promulgating their opinions upon topics affecting their silent brethren, and of learning all the little social intelligences which go to make up life.

Hodgson continued, “every measure for the public good and benefit of civilization at large owes its success in great measure to the newspaper,” claiming this broad mandate for all newspapers as being true for the Deaf press as well.⁴⁹ Hodgson projects a sense of belonging—the values of civil society, its “little social intelligences”—were self-evidently something that encompassed Deaf people as much as it did hearing people.

Periodicals of the day frequently carried columns containing news of the doings of Deaf people encompassing a broad range of activity in both Deaf-spaces and in larger society. One Chicago periodical, *The Chicago Letter*, headed its column “Mute-Items” and asked its readers to send in items of interest about “themselves or other mutes, such as their successes, trades, etc. etc.” In one 1880 column, readers learned Henry Harah was a partner in a hardware store in Illinois, Charles Angie was an engineer at a water works in Kansas, and C. Gibson was the youngest teacher at the Georgia school for the deaf, at only 19 years of age.⁵⁰ Columns contained news ranging from updates on personal lives to accounts of happenings at schools for Deaf people. Nineteenth century Deaf Americans did not see their lives as exclusively bound into a Deaf world, nor did they see Deaf-centered activities as disconnected from activities taking place in larger society.

⁴⁹ “Banquet,” *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (January 6, 1881): 3.

⁵⁰ “Mute-Items,” *Chicago Letter* 1 (January 1880): 2. The *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* had a regular “Itemizer” section containing several columns of personal news in small type.

Nineteenth century usage of “deaf world” in periodical and literature titles was limited, and when used, did not necessarily stand in opposition to the idea of co-equality. One of the earliest uses of “world” in a periodical title seems to have been a short-lived Washington, D.C.-based literary periodical, the *Silent World*, in 1871. A Toronto-based paper later took on the same name.⁵¹ The school paper of the Pennsylvania Institution used the name *Silent World* from 1887, later using *Mt. Airy World* and *Our Little World*. An early use of “deaf world” in a monograph is found in P.A. Emery’s *Who killed Cock Robin? Or,: Crying evils in the deaf-mute world*.⁵² The book was aimed at hearing people, being subtitled, “facts for parents of mutes, ideas for the people, and suggestions for the law-makers.” The book calls for reforms in Deaf education for the benefit “of our own class...and to that of the taxpayers,” portraying the interests of the class of Deaf people as parallel with those of other citizens. Referring to injustices in the education of Deaf people, Emery declared, “it is time we should receive some relief in the rights and liberty that belong to us mutes as much as to any one else.”⁵³ In this example, and throughout much the book, Emery refers to the “class” of Deaf people in a way that positions the values of this class as being similar to those held by other citizens. The class of mutes was one which co-existed alongside larger society.

⁵¹ It was not uncommon for nineteenth century American periodicals to use the word “world” on their mastheads. A list of deaf periodical holdings at the Gallaudet University libraries can be accessed online via the Gallaudet Library homepage at library.gallaudet.edu/. Another list of American Deaf periodicals can be found in Jack Gannon, *Deaf Heritage*, 477.

⁵² P.A. Emery, *Who killed Cock Robin? Or,: Crying evils in the deaf-mute world* (Chicago: M.A. Emery and Son, 1879). Another early reference to a “world” can also be found in an 1883 book by a Deaf author, Jasper Williams, *A Silent People Dwelling in a World without Sound: All about deaf-mutes* (Detroit: Williams, 1883).

⁵³ Emery, *Who Killed Cock Robin?*, 5-6.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the use of “deaf-mute world” begins to appear in its modern sense, with connotations of a closed sphere of Deaf people. This seems largely due to the push it received from oralist rhetoric claiming sign language and Deaf people who used it could never be assimilated into national societies, a claim contested by Deaf people of the time. At his 1893 talk to the World’s Congress of the Deaf, Deaf American Thomas Fox noted the opinion of a New England superintendent that graduates of that school (presumably educated on the oral method) “were ‘lost to the so-called deaf-mute world, and have gone out to the hearing and reading world and are a part of it.’” Fox noted the effort to rescue Deaf people from the “so-called” deaf-mute world presented “a serious question whether training which makes them ashamed of the impediment...imposed on them, is the best for a useful, active life in the great world.”⁵⁴ Fox responded to the educator’s claims of a closed world with a statement of co-equality: that participation in a deaf-mute world also benefited individual Deaf people’s ability to fully participate in larger society. Fox’s deaf-mute world was not a separate closed space, but an open one that fostered involvement in larger society. Fox continued this theme in an 1896 address to the Fifth NAD Convention, contrasting Deaf people’s attempts at “bettering their standard in society at large” with the attempts of oralists to “restore the deaf to Society.”⁵⁵ As will be explored in Chapter 3, Deaf people sought co-equality while oralists sought assimilation. In his 1893 address, Fox further noted that

⁵⁴ Thomas F. Fox, “Associations of the Deaf in America,” *Proceedings of the World’s Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, 1893* (Chicago, 1893), 28.

⁵⁵ Thomas F. Fox, “President’s Address,” *Proceedings of the Fifth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, 1896* (Fulton, Mo.: 1898), 4.

Deaf people “well known in the ‘deaf-mute world’” were also “prominent members of Associations of hearing people.” Fox illustrates a tenet of co-equality here: that Deaf people could and did participate in both hearing and Deaf society and that, “when practicable,” both could interact in a single association. Hearing people could be members of associations of Deaf people and Deaf people could be members of hearing associations.⁵⁶ Deaf clubs and associations continued to grow and prosper, but nineteenth century claims of clannishness intensified, first into charges of foreignness, then into the oralist trope of a “deaf ghetto” one descended into by using sign language.

For Deaf Americans, the change from “class” and “society” to the modern sense of “deaf world” as a closed sphere of Deaf people did not occur in a sharp paradigm shift. Rather, the conceptual field Deaf people used to understand their relationship to larger society gradually shifted. The use of the term “deaf world” increasingly replaced the words “class” and “society” in self-descriptions of the Deaf community in the twentieth century.⁵⁷ A search of alphabetical listings of article titles from the online database of a leading American Deaf periodical, *The Silent Worker*, from 1888 to 1924, reveals the first use of the word “deaf world” in an article title appeared in 1896, in a column containing short accounts of the doings of Deaf people, fulfilling the same function as the *Chicago*

⁵⁶ Thomas F. Fox, “Associations of the Deaf in America,” 29-30. Fox added control over associations of Deaf people ultimately belonged to Deaf people alone.

⁵⁷ The use of “deaf world” continued among Deaf people and educators throughout the twentieth century. Deaf Studies scholar Benjamin Bahan recounts his personal experience of “having grown up in the Deaf World” and using that term “to explain many things, ranging from particular behavior of Deaf people as opposed to that of hearing people to the maintenance of societal connections with one another.” Benjamin Bahan, “Comment on Turner,” *Sign Language Studies* 84 (Fall 1994): 242.

Letter's "Mute-News" did in 1880.⁵⁸ Its next use in *Worker* article headline is in a 1909 headline of photographs of "Well-Known Women in the Deaf World." The use of "world" became more prominent in the periodical after the First World War, with the October 1919 issue seeing the inauguration of the column, "Who's Who in the Deaf World," joined by "In the World of the Deaf" in 1920 and "The Deaf World" in 1922. The column "Who's Who" was a series of short biographical sketches of Deaf people, linking these people to a particular community defined as a "world." The columns "In the World of the Deaf" and "The Deaf World" contained short news items on Deaf schools, news items on sign language or deaf people, and the doings of individual deaf people. Deaf individuals were seen as a part of larger society but the "society" of Deaf people gradually became to be portrayed as a "world" of its own; unique and separate from that of hearing people.

Deaf people continued to interact with larger society, but the way they presented these interactions changed. The "co" continued to exist, but the "equality" strand became seen as more effective for Deaf public discourse after 1900. The "equality" part of the idea of co-equality was the strand of Deaf political discourse emphasizing the abilities and skills of individual Deaf people. The idea of "equality" is of obvious importance: Deaf people have long presented themselves as equally capable workers, family members, and citizens. Historian Robert Buchanan has observed twentieth century Deaf Americans stressed individual initiative as a means of achieving equality within

⁵⁸ "In the Deaf World," *Silent Worker* 9 (October 1896): 23. This, and all subsequent citations from the *Silent Worker* are drawn from the online edition accessed at www.aladin.wrlc.org/gsdl/collect/gasw.shtml

American society. He correctly describes this discourse as heavily dependent on a “code of personal responsibility” which stressed elements such as “self-control and self-reliance.”⁵⁹ It was a discourse propagated by Deaf leaders, as seen in early twentieth-century articles in the *Silent Worker* advocating hard work and good citizenship.⁶⁰ Buchanan traces this code to the late-nineteenth century and suggests it remained in place after the Second World War. Buchanan’s study focuses narrowly on how Deaf leaders used this individualist rhetoric to gain access to the workplace but the equality strand of Deaf political discourse was used widely by Deaf people in other aspects of their lives, from family relations to civic activities.⁶¹ Whatever society stressed as an element of good citizenship, Deaf people took onto themselves. The pervasiveness of this ideology can be seen in the message the NAD’s postage meter automatically stamped out from 1965: “Deaf Workers are Good Workers—Have You Tried One?”⁶² One good Deaf worker could promote equality for other Deaf people. From a self-definition of uniqueness that nevertheless held an assumption of being a part of larger society, Deaf

⁵⁹ Buchanan’s insight into the “code of personal responsibility” is an important one, but is only briefly explicated in a few places in his monograph. Robert Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in the School and Factory: 1850-1950* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1999), 12-14, 126.

⁶⁰ Buchanan writes the *Silent Worker* “insisted all properly educated deaf individuals had the ability and moral obligation to establish themselves as self-reliant citizens and successful wage-earners.” Robert Buchanan, “The *Silent Worker* Newspaper and the Building of a Deaf Community: 1890-1929,” in *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship*, John Vickery Van Cleve, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1993), 189.

⁶¹ The first paragraph of Buchanan’s book hints at a similar tack to co-equality: “In fact, as early as the latter half of the nineteenth century, deaf people defined themselves socially as members of a distinct community with shared formative experiences and language as well as full member of hearing society.” Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, xiii.

⁶² Frederick C. Schreiber, “The NAD Home Office—1965,” *Deaf American* 18 (December 1965): 3-5.

people and those interested in their lives gradually adopted the paradigm of separate worlds.

The dimension of this change can only be appreciated when one realizes the paradigm of the separate worlds of Deaf and hearing people is now a standard part of current cultural understandings of Deaf people and is arguably a founding concept in the field of Deaf Studies. When academics in a variety of disciplines—education, history, linguistics, medicine—write of Deaf people today, the difference between worlds inevitably comes up. In much of the literature, the difference between the “Deaf world” or “Deaf community” of sign language-using Deaf people and the “hearing world” of spoken language-using hearing people is stated and restated as if it were a natural state of affairs.⁶³ The difference between these worlds is sometimes interpreted positively, as a mode of cultural diversity, and other times negatively, as shutting Deaf people away from the rest of the world.

One ramification of the loss of an idea of co-equality is that scholars currently have no language to adequately describe how Deaf people live. When scholars look at how Deaf people interacted with larger society, they are often flummoxed when their investigations don’t neatly fit a separate worlds paradigm. Scholars may claim the discrepancy to be evidence of a lack of political or cultural awareness—an “irony of acculturation”⁶⁴ Few have recognized the true irony is that an idea used in the nineteenth

⁶³ It would be redundant to point out the innumerable uses of the “worlds” metaphor in the literature. Harlan Lane, Robert Hoffmeister and Ben Bahan orient their book, *A Journey into the DEAF-WORLD*, around this metaphor.

⁶⁴ “Irony of acculturation” is the title for the first chapter in Burch, *Signs of Resistance*.

century to promote attempts to portray sign-language-using Deaf people as social outsiders ended up being incorporated a century later into the Deaf community's self-awareness and used in academic research on American Sign Language and the Deaf community. Two scholars of Deaf Studies have come close to articulating a co-equality paradigm. Christopher Krentz makes note of W.E.B. Dubois's "double consciousness" in his introductory essay to a collection of writings of antebellum Deaf people, considering the term useful in understanding how Deaf people "learned the precarious art of navigating between their own culture and the culture of the majority among whom they lived."⁶⁵ Benjamin Bahan has come up with a metaphor for Deaf people's existence that takes into account the lives of Deaf people in larger society: "In the sea of humanity, there are many harbors; one of them is the DEAF-WORLD." Deaf people, Bahan says, choose "integration with autonomy."⁶⁶ Bahan's metaphor is evocative, for Deaf people did not wall themselves off into ghettos; they persisted in participating in the world in which they lived.

This work will explore the lives of Deaf Americans on three levels: the local, the national, and the transnational. Each of the following four chapters will touch upon what it meant to be Deaf at each particular level. Chapter 1 uncovers the existence of a transnational Deaf public sphere in which Deaf people could exchange ideas of mutual

⁶⁵ Christopher Krentz, *A Mighty Change: An Anthology of Deaf American Writing, 1810-1864*. (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2000), xxii. See also Ibid, xxviii.

⁶⁶ Bahan capitalizes the words DEAF-WORLD to signify a term that has been translated from ASL into written English. My discussion of "deaf world" in this chapter largely refers to the use of this word in written English. Lane, et al., *A Journey into the DEAF-WORLD*, 209-210. Bahan discusses this metaphor in the context of the use of DEAF-WORLD in Bahan, "Comment on Turner," 241-249.

concern. This public sphere came through most clearly at international conferences from 1873 to the early twentieth century, but also manifested itself on smaller scales as well, through meetings between Deaf travelers and the lives of Deaf immigrants resettled in new Deaf communities. The next chapter explores how a series of incidents in Germany in the 1890s unfolded on a transnational plane, as Deaf Germans drew upon transnational interconnections in support of their claim that sign language allowed them to achieve full citizenship. Chapter 3 reveals how Deaf leaders advanced images of themselves as respectable middle-class citizens, creating personas of successful sign-language-using Deaf people to buttress their claims to co-equality. These leaders held their personal experiences as Deaf people gave them weight to comment on the methods debate, pitting co-equality against the oralist contention of assimilation through speech. Chapter 4 examines a transatlantic debate about Deaf people who married other Deaf people. The marriages debate led to fears of a “deaf-mute race” and became a subject of controversy involving national legislative bodies and prominent scientists in the emerging field of eugenics, thus presented a crucial challenge to the Deaf discourse of co-equality. While other historians have earlier outlined this debate, this chapter reveals the complexities which emerged when the debate moved from a political to a personal plane. Deaf people also made strategic use of the physical fact of deafness in their defense of their right to choose whom to marry.

Being Deaf meant not only being part of a community of Deaf people, it also meant bearing the brunt, individually and as a community, of cultural interpretations of physical difference imposed upon individuals who did not hear. As such, an examination of the local is also an exploration of the ways in which cultural interpretations of deaf

people and deafness manifested themselves on a small scale: in individual lives and local communities. How did the cultural realms Deaf people inhabit co-exist alongside definitions of deafness as an infirmity and what points of overlap do we see on both sides of the equation? That is, Deaf people may have incorporated dominant cultural conceptions of deafness as a physical infirmity at certain points in their lives, but likewise, perhaps the Deaf discourse of co-equality influenced the societies in which they lived or the people with whom individual Deaf people came into contact.⁶⁷ While Deaf people may not have transformed their national societies in marked ways, on the level of the local and the personal we see a much greater level of interplay between the different understandings of deafness existing at the time.

As historians and scholars of nationalism have pointed out, national identities usually create distinctions between those who lie within the nation and those who are outside its boundaries; those who are national citizens and those who are considered “Others.”⁶⁸ Yet, American history is also the history of how these Others—whether defined by race, class, gender, or disability—redefine the boundaries of citizenship. One strategy adopted by African Americans seeking to escape white conceptions of racial

⁶⁷ Histories of national Deaf communities contain concrete accounts of how Deaf people influenced the social settings of their local communities in a number of ways. See Gannon, *Deaf Heritage* and Clifton Carbin, *Deaf Heritage in Canada: A Distinct, Enduring and Diverse Culture* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1996).

⁶⁸ For an account of the formation of an American national identity that positioned white men at the center, defined in opposition to Native Americans, African Americans and women, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Dis-Covering the Subject of the ‘Great Constitutional Discussion,’ 1786-1789,” *Journal of American History* 79:3 (December 1992), 841-873. For an analysis of how otherness was instrumental in forming American national identity, see Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Takaki’s analysis extends to the otherness of bodily difference; see the second chapter for an example of how insanity is incorporated as the “other” to a republican ideal of virtue and reason.

otherness was to adopt the dominant social norms accorded to their gender. Historian Glenda E. Gilmore notes how middle-class African American men in North Carolina followed a “Best Man” philosophy which expected them to be civic leaders, responsible citizens, and good family men. Those who broke this philosophy were seen as endangering the claim of all African American men to full citizenship during the Progressive Era.⁶⁹ Anne Firor Scott writes of the bicultural voice of black women’s voluntary associations emerging from “a community whose collective behavior derived in part from the African American past, at the same time they shared many of the values and patterns of the dominant white society.” The latter patterns emerge most obviously in “the case of assumptions about what constituted respectable family life and about the significance of female chastity.”⁷⁰ These adaptations were made with modifications—that is, African Americans took dominant social understandings of the “proper” roles accorded to their gender and made them fit their own circumstances as African Americans.

The Deaf Americans whose writings and actions I explore here emphatically rejected any attempt by others to label them as either lying outside the nation’s imagined community or threatening it from within. National images and identities likewise figured prominently in the debates among educators and Deaf people during the period studied in this dissertation. As with African Americans, Deaf Americans did adopt dominant

⁶⁹ See chapter three of Glenda E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁷⁰ Anne Firor Scott, “Most Invisible of All” Black Women’s Voluntary Associations” *Journal of Southern History* 56:1 (February 1990): 20.

cultural norms in order to advance their citizenship rights, but they also made these norms conform to their own circumstances as people who did not hear and did use sign language. This dissertation incorporates evidence based on the writings of a small group of Deaf men and an even smaller group of Deaf women. All likely considered themselves to be racially within the nation's boundaries, and the majority of the men claimed the privileges accorded to American men in a patriarchal society. Deaf men usually took the lead in defining the images Deaf people presented to larger society. When Deaf women were present in public discourse, they usually conformed to dominant gender norms.⁷¹ The Deaf Americans whose writings are studied here were largely middle-class and many were employed as teachers or in other socially prestigious occupations. They were comfortable in written English and it was their signs and their pens that dominated public platforms such as international congresses and Deaf periodicals. Working class Deaf people are thus less present in this dissertation. The discourse of co-equality presented here is largely based on the writings of an elite group in the American Deaf community. It may be that working class Deaf people articulated different versions of co-equality in settings other than those studied here.

⁷¹ Elsa Barkley Brown shows Reconstruction Era African American women in Richmond, Virginia were active participants in an “internal” African American public sphere which Brown sets in contrast to what she calls the “external” public sphere, that of white American society. In the external arena, black women were disenfranchised, as were white women. Likewise, Deaf women participated fully in the Deaf public sphere, but kept their presence invisible when it came time to present the opinions of the community to outsiders. Elsa Barkley Brown, “To Catch the Vision of Freedom,” in *African American Women and the Vote, 1937-1965* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 66-99. See also Elsa Barkley Brown, and Kimball, Gregg D. “Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond,” *Journal of Urban History* 21 (1995): 296-346.

The Deaf Americans studied here claimed the economic and social privileges of whiteness, using it as a baseline for their construction of a national identity that positioned sign language-using Deaf people as fully a part of the nation.⁷² What little work has been done on the lives of African American Deaf people before the Second World War shows the majority of African American Deaf people were educationally underserved and economically disadvantaged.⁷³ Susan Burch notes segregated schools for African Americans in the South graduated few or none of their students for decades-long periods. Those who could find work were usually consigned to manual labor.⁷⁴ One study of deafness using 1920 statistics shows slightly over 43% percent of African American Deaf people worked in agriculture compared to the approximately 23% of white Deaf Americans who did so. Printing was a prestigious occupation in the Deaf community, one in which white Deaf Americans were represented in proportions

⁷² On the concept of whiteness, see Grace E. Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).

⁷³ Douglas Baynton laments the “limited and circumstantial evidence” available, but does note contemporary complaints of overcrowding in schools, the rejection of African Americans students from oralist teacher training programs, and a lack of resources dedicated to oral instruction in segregated schools. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 45-48. There is a slightly larger range of literature available covering the segregated schools and African Americans in the twentieth century. See the chapter on segregated schools in Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, *Inside Deaf Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); A. Bickley, *In Spite of Obstacles: A History of the West Virginia Schools for the Colored Deaf and Blind, 1926-1955* (West Virginia: West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts, Division of Rehabilitation Service, 2001); M. Crockett and B. Dease, *Through the Years 1867-1977: Light out of Darkness* (Raleigh, NC: Barefoot Press, 1990). E. Hairston and Linwood Smith, *Black and Deaf In America: Are We That Different?* (Silver Spring, MD: TJ Publishers, Inc., 1983); Mary Herring Wright, *Sounds Like Home: Growing Up Black and Deaf in the South* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1999).

⁷⁴ Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 37.

seventeen times greater than that of African Americans.⁷⁵ White Deaf people did not face the barrier of racial prejudice when navigating social or political spaces. To take just one example, white Deaf people were officially represented at the 1893 World's Fair through their own World's Congress, an option not available to African Americans.⁷⁶ Whiteness left doors open for Deaf people to enter, but the American agony of race also presented white Deaf people with a visible sign of what befell those who lay outside the nation's imagined community. Racial miscegenation laws, lynching, employment discrimination, and more faced those who were deemed unworthy of full citizenship. As will be seen in Chapter 4, when Deaf-Deaf marriages became a topic of public debate, out of fears of a "deaf-mute race," Deaf people had to fight back in order to avoid losing their traditional marriage privileges. Even white Deaf Americans were aware of their potential to lose full citizenship.

Deaf Americans positioned themselves squarely within the national imagined community. One reason they were able to maintain a rhetorical framework within which to do this lay in the fact of sustained contact with Deaf people from other nations. As Historian Daniel T. Rodgers writes of social politics in the Progressive Era, international

⁷⁵ 43.4% of African American Deaf people worked in agriculture while 23.3% of white Deaf people did so. These percentages are slightly lower than those of the general population, with 45.2% of African Americans and 23.8% of white Americans working in agricultural occupations. Harry Best, *Deafness and the Deaf in the United States* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1943), 229. 5.2% of white Deaf people (both native and foreign born) worked in printing while 0.3% of African Americans (and 0.2% of all "colored" people) did so. *Ibid*, 238-239

⁷⁶ The was a nearly complete exclusion of African Americans from any official representation at the 1893 World's Fair and the 1893 World's Congress Auxiliary, the organizing body for all congresses taking place at the 1893 World's Fair, a fact vigorously protested by Ida B. Wells and Frederick Douglass. Anne E. Feldman, "Women and the Press at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition," in Marian Shaw, *World's Fair Notes: A Women Journalist Views Chicago's 1893 Columbian Exposition*. (St. Paul, MN: Pogo Press, 1992), 97-99.

networks gave people a “world of imagined solutions,” ideas which could be adopted to national and local settings.⁷⁷ Transnational interaction provided American Deaf people with a larger discursive field in which to exist as Deaf people than would have otherwise been the case. This transnational field existed alongside identities framed within the boundaries of specific nation-states and the national cultures associated with those states. Through transatlantic publications, journeys, and conferences, Deaf people created transnational interconnections, belying traditional conceptions of minorities as locked into specific localities and advancing purely individual, locally-based resistance. However, transnational interaction among Deaf people did not ignore national boundaries or national identities. Nineteenth century Deaf Americans participated in a visual community stretching across national boundaries while simultaneously participating in their auditory, national communities.

⁷⁷ Daniel T. Rodgers, “An Age of Social Politics,” *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, Thomas Bender, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 263.

CHAPTER ONE

“THE WHOLE WORLD KIN”: THE TRANSNATIONAL DEAF PUBLIC SPHERE

As the Atlantic steamship *Auriana* approached the Liverpool docks on the last leg of its journey from New York, a group of approximately twenty Deaf Americans were at the railings. One of the first things to catch their eyes was a group of Deaf Britons conversing in sign language among the crowds gathered at the docks. Seeing them, Deaf American Amos Draper recalled a line from one of Shakespeare’s plays: “A touch of nature makes the whole world kin.” The Americans were delegates to the 1889 International Congress of the Deaf in Paris later that month; news of their arrival had spread among members of the British Deaf community. The Britons, led by Francis Maginn, a Deaf Belfast man who had studied at Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C., escorted their American visitors to London and a reception in their honor at St. Saviour’s Church that July evening.

Draper’s chosen quotation is an apt description of the transnational contact which took place between Deaf Americans and their European counterparts in the late nineteenth century. This sense of kinship, spurred by a sense of commonality due to the fact of being deaf, played out in the material and discursive interactions of Deaf people. The American delegation to the Paris Congress was one of many examples of transnational contact that took place among American and European Deaf people in the late nineteenth century. The degree of interaction taking place and the political nature of this interaction led to the formation of what I call a transnational Deaf public sphere. Within this alternate transnational public sphere, Deaf people refined a discourse of co-

equality, exchanging ideas on how to understand themselves in relation to the larger societies in which they lived. For Deaf people, interactions in the transnational public sphere expanded the space in which they could be Deaf. Participants in this sphere were well aware of their status as a minority in their homeland and seized the opportunity to enjoy the privileges of temporary majority status during international conferences of Deaf people. For men like Draper and Maginn, the challenges of being one of a few leaders in small national Deaf communities could be transcended via interaction with Deaf leaders elsewhere. Through interaction with their international Deaf counterparts, these leaders found mentors, peers, and ideas on living as Deaf people they could not receive from interactions with auditory citizens of their own nations. This opportunity to confer with Deaf people from other countries also served to reinforce Deaf Americans efforts to position themselves as co-equal citizens at home.

The development of a transnational public sphere depended on several preconditions: widely distributed publications, international meetings, and the formation of personal bonds and the transmission of information on one another's lives which came about when individual Deaf people traveled outside their home countries. These interconnections were formed during encounters ranging from formal Congresses of Deaf people to happenstance meetings on public streets. While elite Deaf men largely dominated the political public sphere found at international meetings or in publications, the interconnections and sense of commonality seen in political debate at these fora can also be seen in interactions among non-elites as well. Deaf laborers looking for work or Deaf immigrants seeking out local Deaf people in their new homeland also spun transnational webs of interconnections. Short and long-term migration flows also carried

Deaf people: European Deaf craftsmen traveled around Europe for employment and Deaf people were part of the nineteenth century waves of emigrants from Europe to the United States.

In contending there existed a Deaf transnational public sphere in this period I draw on recent modifications of Jurgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere and apply it to the particularities of Deaf people in this time (the late nineteenth century) and place (the United States and Western Europe). Habermas's notion of the public sphere attracted the attention of historians in the mid 1980s.¹ Habermas understood the public sphere to be a space in which rational private individuals assembled into a body for public discussion on matters of common interest, most crucially the interests of the society as a counterpoint to state institutions on the one hand and the private family on the other. This public sphere emerged, he thought, in the late eighteenth century with the transition from feudal to nation-state forms of governmental organization. The public sphere is enacted through the institutions of civil society, including voluntary associations (guaranteed by freedom of assembly), a free press, and "a practice of rational-critical discourse on political matters."²

¹ Harold Mah, "Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians," *Journal of Modern History* 72 (March 2000): 153-154.

² Craig Calhoun, "Introduction," *Habermas and the Public Sphere* ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 9. A brief description of Habermas's original concept of the public sphere in his own words can be found in Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," *New German Critique* 1:3 (1974): 49-55. Nancy Fraser offers a crisply written summary of Habermas's original conception of the public sphere in Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Habermas and the Public Sphere* ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 112-112. Calhoun's introduction to the volume also offers a slightly expanded summary of Habermas's main ideas.

A group of skeptical social and cultural historians have pointed to the limits in Habermas's model of the bourgeois public sphere. In Habermas's public sphere a particular group in society—liberal bourgeois males—used the rhetoric of universality to establish themselves as the governing social stratum.³ Historian Nancy Fraser, in an excellent summary of the revisionist argument, notes the bourgeois public sphere relied on a number of exclusions—especially of gender and class—to maintain its power. Taking this important characteristic as central to the formation and identity of the liberal public sphere, the revisionists do agree that the rhetoric of the liberal public sphere allowed a space for other competing spheres to exist. Geoff Eley notes “the broader democratic resonance” of a model of public discourse based on “the liberal desideratum of reasoned exchange.” This model “became available for...nonbourgeois subaltern groups.”⁴ Fraser invents the term “subaltern counterpublics” to describe these groups, who enact “parallel discursive arenas” in which they “invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.”⁵ The liberal bourgeois public sphere that Habermas examines, then, is just one of multiple competing public spheres existing in society at any one time and place.

The idea of subaltern counterpublics has much to offer in helping us interpret the transnational Deaf public sphere and the discourse of co-equality. The transnational Deaf public sphere was one in which Deaf people found an expanded space in which to be

³ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 114-117.

⁴ Geoff Eley, “Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere* ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 304.

⁵ Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 123.

Deaf. It can be seen as a sort of harbor—a temporary Deaf-centered site where Deaf people could come together on matters of concern primarily to themselves.⁶ Fraser notes counterpublics operate with a “dual character,” at once functioning as “spaces of withdrawal and regroupment” and as “bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.” Shedding the militaristic trappings of the above statements, it is possible to see in them the practice of co-equality as enacted in the transnational Deaf public sphere. This sphere allowed Deaf people a place in which to live as Deaf people; it allowed them a space for inspiration and a site for exchange of ideas they could use back in their national communities. Co-equality insists upon the existence of a sphere of Deaf-centered interaction while highlighting the fact that Deaf people concurrently interacted with non-Deaf people. The transnational Deaf public sphere was not inherently oppositional to the dominant public sphere. In fact, in its composition and in the political privileges accorded Deaf men at international meetings, the Deaf public sphere was very similar to the dominant one. Deaf people lived within, were influenced by, and incorporated ideas from their surrounding societies. The term co-equality refers not only to the way in which Deaf people understood their lives, but also the way in which Deaf people lived their lives. It is in the material practices of Deaf people in this sphere, as well as in the discourses that revolved around these practices, that Deaf people created a counterpublic unique to their own experience.

The transnational Deaf public sphere was enacted in three principal ways: print publications, international meetings, and individual travel, including short and long-term

⁶ The analogy of a harbor is drawn from Benjamin Bahan, “Comment on Turner,” *Sign Language Studies* 84 (Fall 1994): 247.

migration. Print publications are a crucial means of exchange for a public sphere composed of people who make up less than one percent of humanity and are dispersed across a wide geographical space.⁷ It is at international meetings of Deaf people where the idea of the transnational Deaf public sphere becomes most apparent. At these meetings, Deaf people of different nations gathered in commemoration of their history, in celebrations of their cultural vitality, and to exchange strategies on living as Deaf people within larger society. While the aggregated travels of individual Deaf people have not been studied in depth, an exploration of the experiences of Deaf travelers and immigrants show individual travel played an important role in fostering transnational awareness in local communities. Information gathered and distributed during travels by Deaf individuals further enhanced a sense of sharing similar experiences across a transnational sphere. On the micro-level, the idea of co-equality comes through in the ideas evoked and lives lived by Deaf European immigrants to the United States.

The Print Sphere

Publications by and about Deaf people played an important role in shaping the transnational Deaf public sphere, as it did most other spheres.⁸ By the late nineteenth

⁷ A common statistical measure of the population of Deaf people in any one developed country is one per 1,000, or 0.1% of a total population. For a discussion of this figure and an analysis of population statistics on one national community, see Trevor Johnston, Whi(t)her the Deaf Community: Population, Genetics, and the Future of Australian Sign Language," *Annals* 148:5 (2004): 358-375.

⁸ The rise of literate reading publics is traced as a transformative moment in the development of different forms of identities and spheres, such as Benedict Anderson's exploration of the link between print-capitalism and nationalism. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991), 37-46. Michael Warner further distinguishes the

century, many national Deaf communities in North America and Europe had one or more periodicals aimed at Deaf people. These periodicals, some edited and written by hearing people who worked as teachers or missionaries for Deaf people, chronicled community news and served as a forum for debate on matters of concern to Deaf people. The education of Deaf children was a frequent topic of discussion. Scholars have correctly noted the significance of the American Deaf press in maintaining ties among the widely scattered American Deaf community. With nearly fifty school-sponsored publications and a number of independent newspapers circulating in the United States by the late nineteenth-century, American Deaf periodicals were a vibrant part of Deaf life in that country.⁹ A leading periodical in the American Deaf community in the late nineteenth century was *The Deaf Mutes' Journal*, edited by Edwin Allan Hodgson working out of the New York School for the Deaf.¹⁰ European Deaf periodicals, while not school-sponsored to the degree of the American periodicals, likely had equal significance for their own national communities. Historians have overlooked the way in which these periodicals played a similar role across an international plane as they did a national one. The wide circulation of these periodicals created an extra-national print arena that fostered the exchange of ideas among geographically scattered groups of Deaf people. Distributed outside their national readership and containing articles on extra-national

"temporality of circulation" as a key attribute in the development of a self-reflexivity in communities. Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14 (1): 66.

⁹ Van Cleve and Crouch, *A Place of Their Own*, 98-99. Jack Gannon gives a detailed overview of the emergence of the American Deaf press in *Deaf Heritage*, 237-251.

¹⁰ Hodgson was born in Manchester, England and immigrated with his family to the United States as a youth. He became deaf from spinal meningitis at the age of 18. Jack Gannon, *Deaf Heritage*, p. 65. In 1880, the Journal had a readership of 1,000 with the editors estimating another 1,000 readers reading passed-around copies. *Deaf Mutes' Journal* (August 5, 1880): 2.

people and events, local and national periodicals played an important role in fostering and maintaining transnational interconnections among Deaf people.

Deaf people read, subscribed to, and contributed to the periodicals of other national Deaf communities. In 1892, the editor of a British Deaf periodical declared “Deaf mutes, more than any other class, ought to be cosmopolitan as regards their newspaper reading; scattered...thinly over all countries, their knowledge of each other depends largely on publications.”¹¹ Judging from letters columns, editorials, and contributors to a number of British and American periodicals, it appears Deaf leaders in these and other European countries were indeed cosmopolitan readers of other national periodicals. Editorials in a new British periodical frankly acknowledged the aim of an international readership.¹² The letters column of the British *Deaf and Dumb Times* contained letters from American artist Douglas Tilden on marriages, separate universities for Deaf people, and other topics of the day, all sent from his home in Paris. Deaf Norwegian Lars Havstad read British and American Deaf periodicals and educational journals, bringing news of British Deaf education to his local circle in Oslo.¹³ Deaf Americans translated items from European periodicals into English for wider distribution

¹¹ “Olla-Podrida,” *Deaf Chronicle* (February 1892): 38.

¹² “Introductory,” *Deaf Mute* 1:1 (June 1, 1888), 2; “Editorial Columns,” *Deaf Mute* 1:2 (August 1, 1888), 14-15; *Silent World* 2:32 (September 13, 1888): 2.

¹³ Havstad wrote a note to Arnold Farrar, an oral deaf Briton, upon reading the latter’s article in the *Quarterly Review of Deaf Mute Education*. “M. Lars Havstad and Dr Gallaudet’s Glasgow Address,” *Quarterly Review of Deaf Mute Education* (July 1892): 78-81. Havstad also wrote an article about Norwegian Deaf life for the *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* after an article appeared about him in an earlier issue. *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (April 14, 1881): 1. Havstad is profiled in *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (March 17, 1881): 3.

in American periodicals, including an educator's journal, and their own writings were reprinted overseas.¹⁴

Periodicals fostered the creation of the transnational public sphere by contributing to a common stock of knowledge among widely scattered groups of Deaf people. Events in other countries received extensive coverage and articles printed in one country could be reprinted and commented upon in the other.¹⁵ A number of European Deaf periodicals had regular sections on foreign news or feature articles on international events. Norwegian and Danish Deaf periodicals carried reports of activities among other Deaf Europeans and Americans, including items from periodicals such as the French *Journal des sourds-muets*, edited by Deaf Frenchman Henri Gaillard.¹⁶ The *Times* and other British periodicals carried extensive foreign news in a separate "Foreign Notes" section, usually carrying reports of events in North America and Australia, with the occasional report from British or American missionaries working in India or China. American periodicals covered international news as well, with the New Jersey-based

¹⁴ George Veditz, "The Convention of the Association of German Teachers of the Deaf at Hamburg, 1900." *American Annals of the Deaf* 46 (1901), 78; Amos Draper, "Gallaudet College and Technical Education," in *Papers on the Deaf: Published for the Increase and Diffusion of Knowledge Relating to the Deaf* (British Deaf and Dumb Association, undated, likely 1902), 40-45.

¹⁵ For example, "Thrift," a "story for deaf-mutes" was translated from English to German and printed in the *Taubstummen-Courier* then translated into Danish for publication in the Danish *Smaablade for døvstumme*. "Thrift," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 6:35 (April/May 1896): 553-554. In the 1890s, *Smaablade* regularly excerpted from German and French periodicals. For just one example, see a reprint from the German *Blätter für Taubstummenbildung* in "Ejendommeligheder hos de døvstumme," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 6:38 (September 1896): 604-605.

¹⁶ The Danish magazine, *Smaablade for døvstumme*, regularly summarized news from other European and U.S. Deaf periodicals in its short notices section. See "Forskellige Meddelelser," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 5:34 (March 1896): 541-542 and "Forskellige Meddelelser," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 6:36 (June 1896): 574-575.

Silent Worker utilizing international correspondents and regularly covering the more prominent international events.¹⁷ Other American periodicals, such as the *Deaf Mutes' Journal*, may have been typical in that they did not excerpt from European periodicals as frequently as Europeans did from each other or the British periodicals from American ones. The *Journal* did, however, report on missionary work, accounts of international congresses, and visits by Europeans to the United States or vice versa. Publications contained a range of articles which could be termed transnational: lectures by distinguished foreign Deaf people, letters on the methods debate, short items of interest of Deaf lives in other countries, and translations of short stories involving Deaf people. News did not have to be political or of utmost importance to be included in periodicals. Sometimes news could be relentlessly provincial. The death of a Deaf German immigrant in a summer heat wave in New York was excerpted from the German periodical *Hephata* into the Danish *Smaablade for Døvstumme*.¹⁸ All these items combined to inform local Deaf people of their lives as part of a larger group of similar people scattered across the world.

Publications also served as initiators of international contact. Distinguished foreign visitors usually received extensive coverage in the periodicals of the country they visited (with transcripts of their speeches) and wrote articles about their visit for their readership back home. The 1899 visit of Norwegian Lars Havstad to the United States

¹⁷ Historian Robert Buchanan writes the *Silent Worker* newspaper had both an international readership and international correspondents. Robert Buchanan, "The *Silent Worker* Newspaper and the Building of a Deaf Community, 1890-1929," *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship*, ed. John Vickery Van Cleve (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1993), 175.

¹⁸ "Forskellige Meddelelser," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 6: 39 (October 1896): 622.

was covered in the *Deaf Mutes' Journal*, which gave an account of his visit to a New York based Deaf club and “recommend[ed] him to the care and courtesy of the intelligent deaf” as he continued traveling further on in his travels. Upon his return home, Havstad’s lectures on his American journey to the Oslo Deaf Club were published in the Norwegian Deaf periodical, *Døves blad* and information from his travels published in the Danish *Smaablade*.¹⁹ When Maginn discovered Deaf Americans would pass through London on their way to Paris, this information was printed in the British *Deaf and Dumb Times*, without which “the American delegates would not have received such a welcome...as they had.”²⁰ Upon receiving notice, British delegates to the Paris Congress rushed to London out of “a fraternal desire to show them that strangers were welcome to these shores.”²¹ Knowledge of events and individuals were widely disseminated in the transnational Deaf public sphere.

Coverage of issues of concern in one nation could be debated in a framework that included reference to Deaf lives in other nations. To gather evidence against the oral method, the British periodical *The Deaf Chronicle*, a successor publication to the *Times*, requested “other countries which have information to impart on the subject, should do so.”²² Havstad wrote to the *Times* to offer his views on a recent British government

¹⁹ *Deaf Mutes' Journal* (April 13, 1889): 2. For Larson’s lectures, see Ragnar Zeiner, “Foredrag,” *Døves Blad* 15-18 (December 1899): 63; Ragnar Zeiner, “Foredrag,” *Døves Blad* 5-6 (March 1900): 19-20; “Helen Keller,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 9:61 (July 1899): 961-963.

²⁰ “Reminiscences of the Paris International Deaf and Dumb Congress,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (June 1890): 4.

²¹ Ibid.

²² “Olla-Podrida,” *Deaf Chronicle* (February 1892): 38.

report with a pro-oralist slant, offering the Norwegian Deaf community as an example of the successful practice of oralism. “His remarks,” the editor opined, “are well worth noting, himself being deaf.”²³ The cross-pollination of national periodicals between the United States and European countries, as well as within Europe, gave Deaf people an opportunity to see how those in other countries lived, fostering a sense of common purpose across national boundaries and expanding the rhetorical space in which they could be Deaf.

International meetings

Deaf people from different nations gathered at meetings and celebrations as far back as the first third of the nineteenth century, if not earlier.²⁴ A series of congresses aimed at bringing together political leaders in Deaf communities ran from the middle of the nineteenth century up to the Second World War. These international meetings were organized on an ad hoc basis: no permanent standing international organization for Deaf people existed before the founding of an international Deaf athletics association in

²³ “Our Notes,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (November 1889): 53.

²⁴ A series of Parisian banquets inaugurated in 1834, anniversary celebrations of the birthday of the Abbe de l’Épée, were attended by Deaf visitors from other countries right from very first meeting. The third banquet had visitors from England, Germany, and Italy. Indeed, the 1889 and 1912 Paris Congresses were both l’Épée anniversary celebrations. Bernard Mottez, “The Deaf Mute Banquets and the Birth of the Deaf Movement,” in *Looking Back: A Reader on the History of Deaf Communities and their Sign Languages*, ed. Harlan Lane and Renate Fischer, Vol. 20, International Studies on Sign Language and Communication of the Deaf. (Hamburg: Signum Press, 1993), 147.

1924.²⁵ Nevertheless, these meetings served as stable points of reference on the Deaf political itinerary, sites where Deaf leaders came together time and again to exchange views on issues of mutual concern. Congresses were extensively described in Deaf periodicals, their proceedings were often published, and the formal resolutions emanating from the Congresses were held as evidence of the “opinion of the intelligent deaf” which could be wielded in national debates.

The announcement of a congress set into motion waves of activity across the transnational Deaf public sphere. Announcements from the congress organizing committee were printed in various national periodicals. Local clubs and associations would hold meetings and deliberate whether to send delegates and if so, who and how much financial support they should be given. Funding varied according to the association and congress in question. A few delegates received government support for their travel, as did the French delegates to the 1893 Chicago Congress.²⁶ But this was rare; more commonly, delegates were backed by Deaf associations who contributed some or all of their delegate’s travel expenses. Gerhard Titze, a Deaf teacher at a school in southern Sweden, received 250 Swedish kroner in support from the Stockholm Deaf club for his travel to the 1893 Chicago Congress, paying the rest of his 1,000 kroner in expenses out

²⁵ For a history of international sports, see Eickman, “The Role of Deaf Sport in Developing Deaf Identity”; Didier Séguillon, “The Origins and Consequences of the First World Games for the Deaf: Paris, 1924,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 19:1 (March 2002): 119-136. There were occasional proposals for some sort of international structure that would keep Deaf people of different countries in contact in between congresses.

²⁶ The delegates received 6,000 francs from the Paris city council towards their expenses at the 1893 Chicago Congress. Anne T. Quartano, “Republicanism, Deaf Identity, and the Career of Henri Gaillard in Late-Nineteenth-Century France,” in *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship*, ed. John Vickery Van Cleve, (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1993), 47.

of his own pocket.²⁷ Most of the American delegates to the 1889 Paris Congress had their expenses covered by the school for the deaf or associations that nominated them. As Congress dates grew ever closer, periodicals printed updates on Congress plans and practical information on the host city or country. The Philadelphia-based *Silent Worker* alerted its readers to the fact that berths were quickly filling up on transatlantic ships for the summer of 1889 and printed advice from a Deaf American expatriate in Paris on how



Figure 1. American delegates to the 1889 Paris Congress.

Source: Gallaudet University Archives.

²⁷ Gerhard Titze, “Fra Døvstummekongressen i Chikago,” *Smaablaade for døvstumme* 3:16 (November 1893): 249-252.

to navigate the restaurants and public transportation of the French capital. Once delegates set off to the Congress, periodicals would print letters datelined from the ships or the first port of arrival on the other side of the Atlantic, bring news of the delegates voyage to readers back home.²⁸

There was considerable continuity of delegates from one meeting to the other, with gradual generational shifts across the decades. The earliest Congresses, taking place in Germany, were dominated by Deaf men from German-speaking countries such as Eduard Fürstenberg, the initiator of the first Congress in Berlin in 1873 and a member of the organizing committee for the five other Congresses which took place between 1874-1884.²⁹ At these Congresses, Fürstenberg would meet other Deaf leaders such as Deaf Swede Albert Berg, who attended the 1873 Berlin and 1874 Vienna Congresses and chaired the 1884 Stockholm Congress.³⁰ Deaf Swede Gerald Titze attended the 1881 Prague Congress, the 1884 Stockholm Congress, the 1889 and 1900 Paris Congresses, and the 1893 Congress in Chicago.³¹ By the 1900 Congress, Titze, according to a

²⁸ Douglas Tilden, “Paris, France,” *Silent World* (May 30, 1889): 4. For an intriguing look at the mindset of American travelers on transatlantic voyages, see Mark Rennella and Whitney Walton, “Planned Serendipity: American Travelers and the Transatlantic Voyage in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *Journal of Social History* 38:2 (2004): 365-383.

²⁹ “Edvard Fürstenberg,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 7:46 (September 1897): 723.

³⁰ Berg also attended other international events after Fürstenberg’s death, such as the 1889 Paris Congress. *Döfstmforeningen i Stockholm*, 1874 (Stockholm, 1874), 1-17; *Döfstmforeningen i Stockholm*, 1875 (Stockholm, 1875); *Döfstmforeningen i Stockholm, Styrelsens Årsberättelse för 1884 samt redogörelse for den Sjette Internationela Döfstmukongressen i Stockholm* (Stockholm, 1885): 11-34; “International Congress,” *Silent World* 3:28 (August 15, 1889): 4.

³¹ Biographical information on Titze can be found in Birgitta Wallvik, ...*ett folk uten land*, (Borgå: Finland: Döva och hörselskadade barns stödforening r.f. (DBHS), 1997), 92; “Mr. Gerhard Titze, of Sweden,” *Silent Worker* 8:4 (December 1895) 5. “Gerhard Titze,” *Smaablade*

Danish participant, was “a familiar face to the deaf-mutes of all nations.”³² Henri Gaillard attended the 1889 and 1893 Congresses, led a French delegation to the 1917 Centennial of American Deaf Education in Hartford, Connecticut, and served as the chair and co-chair for the 1912 and 1924 Congresses in Paris and Liege, respectively. At these Congresses he would meet old friends such as Titze and Edwin Allen Hodgson, present at the 1889, 1893, and 1912 Congresses, as well as the 1917 gathering in Hartford. As can be seen from the examples above, many countries had a few Deaf men who apparently specialized in international travel and often represented their countries at successive international meetings.³³ While the selection of the same delegates time and again was not uncontroversial, as will be seen later in this chapter, this continuity of representation across time enabled delegates to build long-term relationships with one another.

These individuals ensured the continuity of the transnational Deaf public sphere across time and promulgated knowledge of Deaf lives in other countries onto their national communities. Periodicals of the time often began a short biography of one or another Deaf leader by noting his status as one of the “most esteemed” or “most famous” Deaf men in Europe or the world. A nineteenth century Deaf leader who deserved the honorific “esteemed” was Deaf Berliner Eduard Fürstenberg. Born in 1827 to a wealthy

for døvstumme 3:17 (January 1894), 257-260. Titze’s participation at the 1881, 1884, and 1889 Congresses can be found in *Döfstumvänner* 6 (1881), 17 (partial photocopy of pp. 14-19 found in Yerker Andersson Papers (Gallaudet University Archives), Box 50 Folder 3); *Döfstumforeningen i Stockholm, Styrelsens Årsberättelse för 1884 samt redogörelse för den Sjette Internationella Döfstumkongressen i Stockholm* (Stockholm, 1885); “International Congress,” *Silent World* 3:28 (August 15, 1889): 4.

³² “Døvstummekongressen i Paris,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 10:71 (October 1900), 1129.

³³ Hearing people, usually educators or missioners also attended international meetings and some were regular attendees.

family, Fürstenberg attended the Berlin school for the deaf with his Deaf sister, Susan, and was given instruction by the school's Director and by the noted Deaf teacher Karl Wilke. Fürstenberg co-founded the first Deaf club in Germany only twelve days after the March Revolution of 1848 cleared obstacles to the founding of private associations. He also founded the first German Deaf periodical for Deaf people (as opposed to those for educators), *Der Taubstummenfreund*, in 1872. Able to write in English and French, Fürstenberg was a driving force behind the first six international congresses, the 1884 Stockholm Congress proving to be his last before his death on January 11, 1885. The following year, a monument was raised on his grave whose inscription bears witness to the transnational life he led: "This monument is erected by the grateful deaf-mutes and hearing of Germany, Austria, Sweden, Norway, and Switzerland."³⁴ Leaders like Fürstenberg had considerable personal knowledge of the peoples and languages of the transnational Deaf public sphere. The long-term efforts of Fürstenberg, Gaillard, and other Deaf leaders may have substituted for the existence of a formal international representative organization of Deaf people, which came about only with the founding of the World Federation of the Deaf in 1951.³⁵

³⁴ "Edvard Fürstenberg," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 7:46 (September 1897): 721-724; Jochen Muhs, "The 175th Birthday of Eduard Fürstenberg," Translated from German by Lois Bragg. *Deaf History International* 14 (Fall 2002): 15-18. Jochen Muhs, "Eduard Fürstenberg (1827-1885) Gründer und Vorsitzender des ersten Taubstummenvereins Berlin," Unpublished manuscript in author's possession.

³⁵ An example is a proposal advanced by Deaf Briton Francis Maginn for an "International Union" composed of two "educated deaf-mutes from each country to act as Secretaries; the Union to meet once in 3 years at various convenient places." "From Over the Ocean," *Silent World* 3:17 (May 30, 1889): 4.

As far as can be determined, Table 1, below, compiled from an examination of primary and secondary sources from seven countries, is the first effort to make a comprehensive listing of international meetings of Deaf people.³⁶ The international character of these meetings, as measured by the number of countries represented, varied from meeting to meeting. Congresses held in North America generally had less of an international presence than those held in Europe, likely due to cost and length of travel. The table also lists some national meetings that were attended by foreign delegates. The earliest Congresses in the German speaking countries were simply known as *Taubstummen Congress* (Deaf-Mute Congress).

³⁶ Table 1 is as exhaustive as this researcher's language abilities and research funds permit. It incorporates sources from periodicals, annual reports, and Congress proceedings from the United States, France, Germany, Great Britain, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland. As the first comprehensive listing of its kind, I hope this will stimulate further research on other international meetings I may have overlooked. The criteria used to determine whether or not a meeting is international (or, indeed, even a meeting as opposed to a commemoration or social event) is also open for debate. Wallvik reviews some international meetings attended by Scandinavian delegates in ...*ett folk utan land*, 250-253. Lane also lists several international congresses of Deaf people in the bibliography of *When the Mind Hears*, 476. For a list of primary sources consulted in assembling Table 1, see Appendix I.

Table 1. International Meetings of Deaf people, 1873-1924.

Year	Location	Attendance	Number of nations represented by participants.
1873	Berlin	35	3
1874	Vienna	76	6
1875	Dresden	165	5
1878	Leipzig	194	3
1881	Prague	180	6
1884	Stockholm	157	6
1889	Paris	151	10
1892	Hannover	160	4
1893	Chicago	1,000	7
1896	Geneva	180	5
1897	London	200	4
1899	Stuttgart	225	6
1900	Paris	219	11
1904	St. Louis	480	4
1905	Liege "Free Congress"	181	8
1905	Liege	600	19
1911	Hamburg	700-900	8
1911	Rome	80	6
1912	Paris	445	19
1924	Liege	330	16

Primarily attended by people from German-speaking countries or, more specifically, cities such as Vienna, Budapest and Prague, as well as Stockholm, this itself represents a wide array of nationalities (as opposed to nation-states). The earliest Congresses were styled meetings of the heads of Deaf associations or clubs and not as international meetings per se. The later German Congresses were titled “All-German Deaf-Mute Congresses” even as they welcomed participants from countries outside Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Nordic Deaf-Mute Congresses, initiated in 1907, are not included on this list since they were explicitly regionally oriented.³⁷ The 1897 London Congress, in which the deaf of all countries were invited to attend, was a national congress conducted entirely in British signs, save for the presentations of invited foreign speakers. Nevertheless, delegates came from Sweden, Norway, the United States, France, and Great Britain and Ireland with the Swedish delegate noting with approval the international character of the Congress location.³⁸ By contrast, the 1911 Rome Congress was a disappointment to some foreign delegates, being characterized by one as “a battle

³⁷ The chair of the first Nordic Congress, Dane Carl Becker, turned down a suggestion for Denmark to host the next international congress of the Deaf after the 1905 Liege Congress, afraid it would crowd out a planned Nordic Congress. Carl Becker, *Beretning om den første Nordisk Døvstummekongres I København den 18.-22. august 1907.* (København, 1909), 2. The proceedings of the first Nordic Congress in 1907 lists eight German and one Russian delegate but no delegates outside the Nordic countries are noted for the third (1924) and fourth (1929) Nordic Congresses. The second congress took place in 1912 in Stockholm, Sweden. Becker, *Beretning om den første Nordisk Døvstummekongres,* 144.

³⁸ This international character came not from delegates, but from the meeting’s location in London. Harald Berg, “Reseberättelse,” *Döfstumföreningen i Stockholm. Styrelsens Årsberättelse för 1897.* (Stockholm, 1898), 23.

between the Italian deaf-mutes and teachers of deaf-mutes.”³⁹ One self-styled World’s Congress of the Deaf in 1910 was held in the cosmopolitan city of Colorado Springs, Colorado and was attended by only two non-U.S. participants, the Chinese Consul and Vice-Consul to the United States, both hearing men. Despite its grand name, the 1910 Congress is not included in the table above. A name does not an international congress make.

Defining a meeting as “international”— or even as a “meeting”— involves weighing a variety of factors. For the most part, those international meetings understood by its delegates to offer a forum for an exchange of views on Deaf lives and can be ascertained to have been attended by foreign delegates are included in Table 1. The table has a bias to meetings self-styled as “international congresses,” to those understood by delegates as a continuation of previous Congresses which were international in character, and/or those that were expressly open to and attended by international participants.⁴⁰ It is not a comprehensive list of all international gatherings of Deaf people in the period studied. Sport tournaments, anniversary celebrations, or purely festive occasions also had international participants. Only those events that took place in the context of a forum for political deliberation (a “meeting”) are included in this table. A 1926 Madrid “fête” arranged for the unveiling of a statue of a sixteenth century Spanish educator of Deaf people, Fray Pedro Ponce de Leon, was attended by Deaf people from eight countries,

³⁹ “Två dövstumkongresser” *Tidning för dövstumma* 10:21 (October 1911). Photocopy without page number in Yerker Andersson Papers, Box 50, Folder 5.

⁴⁰ The Congresses from 1873 to 1884 were often mentioned in numerical order and were thus understood by organizers and delegates to be continuations of one another.

including the United States and Argentina, and such notables as Henri Gaillard and the Dresse family of Belgium, a member of whom figured prominently in the founding of an international Deaf sports federation in 1924.⁴¹ Although the Madrid delegates no doubt enjoyed the bullfight they attended on the last day of the fete, they were not in the type of arena commonly understood as a political public sphere.⁴²

Congresses often intentionally coincided with some other significant event- a World's Fair, a silver anniversary of a Deaf association, or some historical anniversary related to Deaf education. American delegates to the 1889 Paris Congress, taking place as a centenary celebration of the Abbe de'l'Eppe's birth, remarked Deaf Parisians considered the centenary celebrations "paramount" while foreign delegates saw the Congress primarily as a forum to "convince the public of the progress made by the deaf" and "accomplish all that they could for the future advancement of the class."⁴³ The balance between commemorative events as opposed to political forums varied from

⁴¹ Séguillon, "The Origins and Consequences of the First World Games for the Deaf," 119-136. Dresse was the head of a multi-generational Deaf family still in Belgium today. His Deaf grandson, Bernard LeMare, was a member of the board of Deaf History International in the 1990s. The Argentinean is not named but was most likely José Antonio Terry, whom French sociologist Bernard Mottez has called "the father of the Argentine Deaf movement." For a brief mention of Terry and his family, as well as the Mottez quote, see Graciela Alisedo and Carlos Skliar, "The Influence of Italian Oralism in Argentina," in *Looking Back: A Reader on the History of Deaf Communities and their Sign Languages*, eds. Harlan Lane and Renate Fischer. Vol 20, International Studies on Sign Language and Communication of the Deaf (Hamburg: Signum Press, 1993), 309.

⁴² Kelley H. Stevens, "Fete in Honor of Fray Pedro Ponce de Leon Madrid, May 14-17, 1926," *Silent Worker* 39:3 (December 1926), 42-47. However, a "special meeting" took place during the Madrid fete regarding plans for the 1928 Prague Congress. "International Congress of Deaf-Mutes," *Silent Worker* 40:1 (October 1927), 29.

⁴³ Amos Draper, "Report of Professor Draper on the International Congress of Deaf-Mutes At Paris," *Thirty Second Annual Report of the Colombia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb to the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889), 37.

meeting to meeting according to the primary goals of the organizers and their success in sticking to these aims. After their experience at the 1889 Paris Congress, American delegates vowed to hold what they considered a “proper” Congress. As promised, the Congresses held in the United States generally hewed to a traditional Congress format: a central forum for presentation of papers and discussion, with entertainments and celebrations set aside for particular days and evenings. Judging from the list of topics in Congress proceedings and reports in periodicals, the early German Congresses and most other Congresses after 1893 likewise dedicated more time to political forums than commemorations, even if the initial inspiration for inviting foreign guests came from an anniversary.

Congresses began with arrivals, with face-to-face meetings of Deaf people, mostly men, who first met up at standard spaces afforded travelers and natives alike: hotels, restaurants, railway stations, and churches. These spaces, once dominated by hearing people, began to be filled up by Deaf people during Congresses and were transformed into Deaf spaces.⁴⁴ Once Christian Holmsen and Harald Berg, respectively the delegates from Norway and Sweden to the 1897 Congress, arrived in London, they went to a designated Congress hotel where over 30 other Deaf people were staying. They spent the day with the younger Deaf hotel guests and since the next day was a Sunday,

⁴⁴ A study of the transnational Deaf public sphere as manifested at the 2001 World Games of the Deaf in Rome, Italy, also notes this spatial marking. See Hilde Haualand, “The two week village: A deaf ritual,” *Rome—A Temporary Deaf City! Deaflympics 2001* (Bergen, Norway: Rokkansentret Working Paper 2: 2002), 16-32.

attended church services at St. Saviour's Church.⁴⁵ Church services in the denomination of the pastors or priests who usually served local Deaf people at the Congress location were a standard part of most Congresses, giving Deaf people from different countries the opportunity to meet one another in a setting that was at once familiar to all (since many Western countries had designated church services for Deaf people) and open to all, not just Congress attendees. Titze was pleased to meet Norwegian and Swedish Deaf people who had previously immigrated to America attending church services in Chicago during the 1893 Congress.⁴⁶ The 1873 Berlin Congress, attended by the heads of Deaf clubs in various European cities, took place the day following an all-German church meeting, attended by nearly 1,200 Deaf Germans.⁴⁷ Congresses were geographical spaces where, for a period of time, Deaf people were not spectacles, but the norm. These Deaf spaces remained with the delegates throughout the Congress, moving along with them to Congress meeting halls, on trains embarking to commemorative ceremonies such as a trip to Versailles in 1889 or an 1893 excursion of 900 Congress-goers to a picnic in the woods outside Chicago.

It is at these international meetings that one most clearly sees the existence of a transnational Deaf public sphere. The value of Deaf-centered spaces lay in their

⁴⁵ "De døvstummes Kongres i London," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 7:48 (November/December 1897): 754-755; Harald Berg, "Reseberättelse," *Döfstmumföreningen i Stockholm. Styrelsens Årsberättelse för 1897.* (Stockholm: Antiebolaget Svanbäcks Boktryckeri, 1898), 25.

⁴⁶ Gerhard Titze, "Fra Døvstummekongressen i Chikago," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 3:16, (November 1893): 251.

⁴⁷ "Das Kirchenfest der Taustummen im Jahre 1873," *Der Taubstummenfreund* 2:9-10 (September/October 1873): 82-86.

expansion of the discursive arena in which Congress delegates operated. At these Congresses, Deaf leaders found points of comparison in one another's lives, a commonality of experience lacking in interactions with their national auditory counterparts. Congresses were also spaces where Deaf people could live as Deaf people, privileging the Deaf aspect of their identities in the here and now. Meeting at Congresses provided attendees opportunities to meet community leaders from their own and other nations and draw inspiration from one another. Finally, being in a Deaf-centered space gave Deaf leaders energy and optimism for further battles back home. They believed the time and energy they invested in Congress debate and resolutions would further their aims at home.

The transnational public sphere widened the frame of reference in which Deaf people could operate within, offering Deaf people points of comparison on matters large and small. Deaf Briton Francis Maginn wrote to *The Times of London* of his experiences at the 1889 Paris Congress in which "...circumstances were continually arising that forced a comparison between the systems in vogue in England, France, and the United States," comparisons which brought to light the efficacy of the American combined method.⁴⁸ The Danish periodical *Smaablade for døvstumme* reported on a controversy in France when the French delegates to the 1893 Chicago Congress, upon returning home, proclaimed American Deaf education to be better than that found in France.⁴⁹ At the 1900 Paris Congress Carl Becker of Denmark was astonished at the signing ability and

⁴⁸ Francis Maginn, "The Education of the Deaf," Letter to the editor, *Times of London* December 27, 1889, p. 8.

⁴⁹ "Forskellige Meddelser," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 3:18 (March 1894): 286-287.

manners of a hearing American, Reverend Dr. Thomas Gallaudet, son of the hearing co-founder of American Deaf education and a Deaf mother. “I had a hard time believing he was not a deaf-mute.” Becker exclaimed after signing with Gallaudet, adding he thought it difficult for other hearing pastors to Deaf people to “learn this art” from Gallaudet.⁵⁰ Meeting the Rev. Dr. Gallaudet gave Becker another model of a hearing pastor that he could use to draw conclusions on the signing abilities of those he was familiar with in Denmark. Deaf leaders found points of comparison in the transnational Deaf public sphere that they could not find in their auditory national settings.

The transnational public sphere served as a space where ideas from different national settings could circulate, hybridize, and reemerge. When the British decided upon the “formation of an Association on American lines,” one man’s argument for the necessity of the association drew on the impression made by the Deaf American delegation at Paris.⁵¹ For their part, American Deaf people found themselves having to “follow instead of leading” when they received reports of the first British National Conference of the Deaf, attended by representatives from different Deaf Societies, as

⁵⁰ The signing abilities of ordained ministers working with Deaf people varied from country to country. A speech by Albin Watzulik to the 1893 World’s Congress noted only five German ministers could sign. “The great majority are totally incompetent to teach the deaf.” Walzulik contrasted this with the situation in Austria where all ministers were required to know signs before they could minister to Deaf people. Waltzulik, “The Intellectual, Industrial, Social, and Moral Status of the Deaf in Germany and Austria,” *Proceedings of the World’s Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (Chicago: 1893), 77-78.

⁵¹ “The readiness with which the American delegates impressed their character and energy upon the Congress, leading its deliberations, influencing its thoughts, and even in some instances correcting its faults, is a quiet but signally effective illustration of their better preparation for and more thorough practical acquaintance with the work of deliberative assemblies.” Francis Maginn, “The Proposed National Association of the Deaf,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (January 1890): 73.

opposed to the American National Association of the Deaf conventions which were “heterogeneous gatherings of men and women who represent nothing but their individual opinions.”⁵² A British conference, emerging from a discussion among British Deaf men at the 1889 Paris Congress and following the American example, ended up influencing the Americans themselves. Sometimes, transnational ideas did not merely transmit; they ricocheted across the Deaf public sphere.

The novelty of being in the physical presence of a body of Deaf people could spur Congress participants into focusing on the Deaf aspect of their lives. British Deaf people scattered over a national space found themselves in one place at the 1889 Paris Congress and seized this opportunity to make connections that would last after they dispersed. Some of the British delegates to the 1889 Paris Congress had never met one another in Britain but at the Congresses, in a climate of extensive discussion of Deaf people’s lives, the lives of Deaf people in their home country came to the forefront. “Indeed,” exclaimed one British delegate, “during the whole time of the Congress, we were much more interested with the prospects of the future education of the British deaf than even the Congress itself.”⁵³ In a train compartment heading to Versailles for a Congress ceremony honoring a pioneering eighteenth century French educator of Deaf people, the Abbe de l’Épée, plans were made by the British delegates to establish a national

⁵² This quote is taken from an excerpt of the American periodical *Silent World* reprinted in the *Times*. “Our Notes,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (April 1890), 122.

⁵³ “Reminiscences of the Paris International Deaf and Dumb Congress,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (December 1890), 90.

organization at home.⁵⁴ The luxury of privileging the Deaf aspect of one's existence was important for delegates at these Congresses.

This widened frame of reference could obscure national identities in favor of a common Deaf identity. Deaf Americans attempted to support their British counterparts when the report of the British Royal Commission on the Education of the Blind and the Deaf was issued in 1889. *The Silent World* printed excerpts from news accounts and wrote editorials opining on various aspects of that report.⁵⁵ The American delegation to the Paris Congress convened on board their ship the first day of their transatlantic journey to draft a series of resolutions to present to the Commission. The Americans also suggested the Paris Congress appoint delegates to meet with the Commission. "We have every reason to believe that all this pressure which has been brought to bear upon the Queen and English philanthropists originating...in American societies, schools, and newspapers for the deaf, will be productive of the desired results."⁵⁶ Quite separately, twenty-seven year old Olof Hanson, a Deaf American traveling in Europe for a year, called upon C.E.D. Black, the Secretary of the Commission, and discussed the

⁵⁴ Or, as a British delegate put it, "open compartments with wooden seats under an open roof, thus enabling you to have a full view of the country ...which is very well in the summer time, if you don't mind the dust and pleasant sensation of rushing through a tunnel full of smoke and hot sulphurous atmosphere." *Ibid.*; "Our Notes," *Deaf and Dumb Times* (March, 1890), 101.

⁵⁵ The *Silent World* published an editorial inveighing against Alexander Graham Bell's influence in shaping the Commissioners' views on Deaf-Deaf marriages. See Chapter 4 for more detail on this debate. *Silent World* 3:29 (August 22, 1889): 2.

⁵⁶ *Silent World* 3:25 (July 25, 1889): 2.

Commission's conclusions with him.⁵⁷ Deaf Americans like Hanson considered it perfectly appropriate to expect representatives of the British government would pay heed to their views, irregardless of their nationality, but most certainly because they were Deaf themselves.

Peers and mentors could be found in the transnational Deaf public sphere. The personal impressions formed through "people, young and old, whom we met socially" gave Deaf leaders a mirror in which they found inspiration for their own lives.⁵⁸ A British Deaf man could "look back with great pleasure at the acquaintance formed" when meeting Deaf Americans during their visit to London before the 1889 Paris Congress.⁵⁹ Carl Becker came away from the 1900 Paris Congress having been "given much to think over" by the Deaf German delegate Albin Watzulik, who assured him that Deaf people would continue to advance if only they kept on working for their aims.⁶⁰ Congresses gave participants an expanded worldview, with new ideas, comparisons, and insights that they could not find in their home countries alone.

Finally, Congresses served, in Nancy Fraser's description of subaltern public spheres, as "spaces of withdrawal and regroupment." The opportunity to confer with

⁵⁷ Hanson found it difficult to keep Black on the subject of the Commission, finding him "disposed to light, commonplace talk than to serious discussion...when pressed he admitted that the Commission should have inquired more into the combined system." Hanson Diary, October 21, 1889, pp. 53-54, Olof Hanson Collection (Gallaudet University Archives, Washington, D.C.).

⁵⁸ Francis Maginn, "The Education of the Deaf," Letter to the editor, *Times of London* December 27, 1889, p.8.

⁵⁹ "Reminiscences of the Paris International Deaf and Dumb Congress," *Deaf and Dumb Times* 2:1 (June 1890), 5.

⁶⁰ "Døvstummekongressen i Paris," *Smaablaade for døvstumme* 11:75 (April 1901): 1193.

Deaf people from other countries gave delegates to international meetings renewed energy in which to tackle debates upon their return home. Carl Becker concluded his observations of the 1900 Paris Congress by saying the Congress gave him greater belief in the possibility of advancement, noting the Congress “enlarged my view on matters and conditions and doubled my interest in everything that concerns us deaf-mutes.”⁶¹ Becker attributed his inspiration for the establishment of the Nordic Congresses of deaf-mutes in 1907 to his attendance at the 1899 Stuttgart Congress.⁶² Some Congress goers, such as the American delegates to the 1889 Paris Congress, could be disappointed by the results of a Congress but still concede the gathering “will exert an influence for good” and see the need to host another Congress.⁶³ Congress resolutions were wielded by Deaf leaders at home and disseminated to the public in the expectation of influencing their understanding of Deaf people. Deaf American Edwin Allen Hodgson confidently remarked upon taking the chair on the second day of the 1893 Chicago Congress that while Deaf people’s “capability to form an opinion on the merits of educational methods had been openly denied” by some educators “the papers read at this congress were

⁶¹ “Døvstummekongressen i Paris,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 11:75 (April 1901), 1196.

⁶² “Den tavse Kongres,” *Politiken* August 23, 1907. Kastelsvej [Copenhagen] School Library Avisudklipp [Newspaper clippings], boxed set, scrapbook 2: 1905-1915, p. 68. Becker first got the idea for a Nordic Congress at the 1899 Stuttgart Congress, but the final push for a Congress came from “a widespread desire” articulated on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Christiania [Oslo] Deaf Club, attended by a number of Nordic Deaf people. Carl Becker, *Beretning om den første Nordisk Døvstummekongres I København den 18.-22. august 1907.* (København: Det Hoffensbergeske Etablissement, 1909), 7.

⁶³ *Silent World* 3:28 (August 15, 1889): 2.

destined to be read the world over.”⁶⁴ Delegates to international meetings returned home with renewed optimism and reinvigorated arguments. Centripetal meetings ended with centrifugal effects.

The International Language of Signs

In the teeming mass of humanity, the use of sign language is the most prominent visual marker of a Deaf person. At their nineteenth century congresses, Deaf people from different nations appear to have used a form of cross-national signed communication that is today known as “International Sign.” Sign languages are not international: any language, spoken or signed, is created by a community of users in a bounded geographical area. Yet, as a Danish participant to the 1900 Paris Congress noted, “With the help of the sign language, a deaf-mute from Karlskrona [Sweden] can converse quickly and without difficulty with a deaf-mute from Chicago even if they don’t understand a syllable of each other’s written language.”⁶⁵ Deaf people’s ability to communicate across linguistic barriers without a common shared language or trading argot made them unlike most hearing westerners of the same period and social background.⁶⁶ Several elements seem to have been in place that facilitated the ability of

⁶⁴ *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (Chicago, 1893), 172.

⁶⁵ Døvstummekongressen i Paris 1900,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 9:65 (January 1900): 1032.

⁶⁶ Women also met in at international gatherings in roughly the same time period but level of proficiency in different languages was always a barrier. See Leila J. Rupp “Constructing

Deaf people of different signed languages to understand one another at their Congresses and at face-to-face meetings. Contemporary research on signed languages offers some linguistic reasons for the intelligibility of International Sign, including the role iconicity plays in signed languages and common grammatical features across national signed languages. The historical interrelatedness of some signed languages, stemming in part from the transnational character of early Deaf education, may also have lessened the foreignness of mutually exclusive national signed languages. The same Deaf men often attended multiple Congresses, building familiarity with one another and aiding in the development of a common lexicon over time. This transnational experience assisted in individual's expertise in International Signs. A Danish participant noted "...two deaf-mutes from countries which lie far away from each other do not need many minutes together before they have received some information on each other."⁶⁷ The fact that a number of travelers were already bilingual or even multilingual in signed or spoken languages meant the pre-existence of a common written or signed language may have assisted communication.⁶⁸

The lack of common lexicon has been noted by researchers as a weakness of International Sign but the existence of a regular group of users, with gradual shifts

Internationalism: The Case of Transnational Women's Organizations, 1888-1945," *American Historical Review* 99:5 (1994): 1571-1600.

⁶⁷ "Døvstummekongressen i Stuttgart," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 9:61 (July 1899): 971.

⁶⁸ Some Deaf Americans were members of first-generation immigrant families. Olof Hanson, whose parents had immigrated to the United States from Sweden, translated works in Norwegian and Swedish into English for the *Annals*, the leading journal of deaf education at the time. George Veditz was fluent in German. Some Deaf people were fluent in several signed languages. A leading figure in the British Deaf community, Francis Maginn, learned ASL when he studied for a time at Gallaudet College.

between generations, seems to have minimized this weakness for those who most often needed to use a form of cross-national signing.⁶⁹ Despite occasional proposals to establish some sort of fixed system of signs, there existed no one language or standardized code for Deaf travelers to use.⁷⁰ After the 1889 Paris Congress, the editor of the British *Times* concurred with “Mr. Tilden’s regret at the absence of an *universal* sign language throughout the world” which “would bring the foreign deaf and dumb more together.” The *Times* suggested the establishment of an “International Board...composed of at least two experts from each of the different nationalities...[to] fix upon a special code of natural signs.” Another distinct advantage of this Board would be the elimination of vulgar signs. “In these days of refinement, we should endeavour to adopt such signs and tone down others, as shall be in harmony with the good taste of not only susceptible deaf persons but hearing people as well.” Proposals to standardize international signing were repeated throughout the decades, with a book, *Gestuno*, being published in 1975 on the initiative of the World Federation of the Deaf.⁷¹ But the book

⁶⁹ “I[nternational] S[ign] users combine a relatively rich and structured grammar with a severely impoverished lexicon.” Lorna Allsop, Bernice Woll, and Jon Martin Brauti, “International Sign: The Creation of An International Deaf Community and Sign Language,” in *Sign Language Research 1994* ed. Heleen Bos and Trude Schermer. International Studies on Sign Language and Communication of the Deaf Vol. 29. (Hamburg: Signum Press, 1995), 187.

⁷⁰ “Our Notes,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (June 1890): 2.

⁷¹ The book originated from the work of a committee charged with creating an international meeting language, as published in *Gestuno: International Sign Language of the Deaf* (Carlisle, England: British Deaf Association, 1975). The Deaf Section of the 1900 Paris Congress approved a resolution calling for national committees to document their national signs and create an International Commission which would “undertake to introduce gradually and successively an ever-growing uniformity among the national systems” “Resolutions Adopted By the Deaf Section of the Paris Congress,” *Annals* 46 (1901): 111.

was of little influence in comparison to the interactions of an evolving community of users who adopted their own signs.

Linguists studying International Sign have discovered it to be more than ad hoc gestures. Contemporary research into International Sign shows it exhibits many characteristics of full national signed languages and is more complex than spoken language pidgins, another form of communication form that emerges in language contact situations. International Sign contains grammatical structures with degrees of complexity that compare favorably to those of national signed languages.⁷² Linguists Ted Supalla and Rebecca Webb suggest “a high degree of similarity in the grammatical and morphological organization of the languages in contact” is a factor in transference of grammatical structures from national signed languages to international signs. Simply put, they believe International Signs is capable of carrying a number of functions found in full languages because of “great similarity of grammatical structure” in national signed languages. This grammatical similarity gives users of International Signs a common foundation for linguistic comprehension. One of the reasons Supalla and Webb offer for this similarity is historical contact between the languages in question.⁷³

⁷² International Signs “displays regular grammatical patterns in marking grammatical relations among arguments of the verb and in organizing the constituent structures of sentences. International signs also has a systematic set of negative structures which are similar to those found in full signed languages.” Ted Supalla and Rebecca Webb, “The Grammar of International Sign: A New Look at Pidgin Languages,” ed. Karen Emmorey and Judy S. Reilly, *Language, Gesture, and Space* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995), 334.

⁷³ Linguist Susan Fischer notes, “As far as I have been able to observe, every sign language has locus establishment, some kind of classifiers, and a form of verb agreement that utilizes the loci established by that process.” Susan Fischer, “Similarities and Differences Among Sign Languages: Some How’s and Why’s,” *Proceedings of the XI World’s Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf in Tokyo, Japan, 1991*. (Tokyo: Zaidan, 1991), 735. Supalla and Webb,

The variety of international signs used in the nineteenth century Deaf public sphere (and the contemporary version studied by linguists) was centered in Western Europe and the United States, developing from among signed languages with historical ties to one another. While signed languages research has not conclusively discovered any signed language families along those established for spoken languages, early interchange in the field of Deaf education indicates transference of signed languages from one nation to the other, with French signs playing an important role in early nineteenth century Deaf education.⁷⁴ The Parisian school Institut des Sourds Jeunes (INJS) served as a central location for the dissemination of Deaf education across Europe and overseas in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Hearing teachers came to Paris to learn how to teach Deaf children, training in method that included the use of French signs. Deaf teachers from the Parisian schools taught in the United States and Russia, bringing their sign language with them. The Swedish Deaf leader Albert Berg studied at the Paris school for a period before returning to continue his studies in Stockholm.⁷⁵ Thus, French

as well as Fischer, suggest other factors for similar grammatical structures in national signed languages are the re-creolization of sign languages in each generation (since most deaf children are supposedly first generation users of sign languages). This would mean sign languages are never far from pidgin origins. The third reason is “constraints of the modality on language typology.” Supalla et.al., “The Grammar of International Sign,” 348-349, Fischer, “Similarities and Differences,” 738. Ulrike Zeshan also notes similar linguistic features across signed languages, stating “the nonmanual polar questions occurs with great regularity in most signed languages in a very similar way.” Ulrike Zeshan, “Interrogative Constructions in Signed Languages: Crosslinguistic Perspectives,” *Language* 60:1 (2004): 36.

⁷⁴ For a brief explanation of the possible difficulties in establishing signed language families along principles established for spoken languages, see Ibid., 12-13.

⁷⁵ A sketch in a British journal gives 1839-1840 as the dates of Berg’s stay in Paris but a profile in the Swedish Deaf periodical *Dövas Tidning* gives the years 1841-1842. “Biographical Careers of Our Illustrations,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* 2:12 (May 1891): 159-161; Tomas Lagergren, “Den ensamme och havet,” *Dövas Tidning* 9 (2005): 18-19.

signs very likely influenced the development of native signed languages in a number of countries.⁷⁶ Nor was French sign language the only language to influence other national signed languages. Norwegian Deaf education began with a school started by a Deaf Norwegian who studied in Denmark and knew Danish sign language. Finnish Deaf education started when a Deaf Finnish man who had studied at the Stockholm school and learned Swedish Sign Language, Carl Oscar Malm, established the first school in Finland in 1846.⁷⁷ Both Finnish and Swedish sign language share the same sign for “yes,” among others. One study shows American Sign Language, derived in part from French Sign Language (LSF), shared approximately 60% cognates with LSF in the late nineteenth century.⁷⁸ Historical ties among European (and American) signed languages were likely a factor in the intelligibility of cross-national signing.

⁷⁶A detailed map tracing the spread of the so-called “French method” (and presumably of French signs) can be found in the back of *Bilderatlas zur Geschichte der Taubstummenbildung* (München: Taubstummendruckerei & Verlag Otta Maidl, 1927) unpaginated. William Moody says French sign language, or LSF as it is today known, was “certainly the sign language with the most influence in the world” in the late nineteenth century and theorizes the form of international signs used in this time was “probably dominated by LSF.” While a compelling theory, more research in the historical linguistics of signed languages is needed to establish this claim. William Moody, “International Sign: A Practitioners Perspective,” *Journal of Interpretation* (2002): 12-13.

⁷⁷ For a brief summary of the founding of Finnish Deaf education, see Birgitta Wallvik, ...*ett folk utan land*, 100. Wallvik also covers the life and work of Andreas Christian Moller on pp. 93-95.

⁷⁸ Woodward finds cognates ranging between 57.3 % to 61% between selected ASL and French Sign Language (LSF) signs. This study compares a list of signs compiled from an LSF dictionary and fieldwork to ASL signs used by both a sample of younger signers and an elderly man in his 80s whose teacher, John Burton Hotchkiss, attended the American School for the Deaf when Laurent Clerc, its founder and the original LSF model in the United States, was still living. Woodward considers this informant’s signs to be representative of the second generation of ASL users after Deaf education was established in the United States. If so, that would imply approximately 60% overlap between LSF and ASL in the period studied in this dissertation. James Woodward, “Historical Bases of American Sign Language,” in *Understanding Language*

Iconic elements in signed languages also contributed to mutual intelligibility across linguistic barriers.⁷⁹ Iconicity in signed languages is similar to the phenomenon of onomatopoeia in spoken languages, where a spoken word will resemble a sound from the idea it is meant to convey. Whereas spoken English uses “whap” to describe the noise made upon striking a surface, an iconic sign for the idea of “eating” would have some representation of the physical act of eating.⁸⁰ Individual signs in signed languages can be either arbitrary, meaning the sign bears no visual representation to the idea it conveys, or iconic, meaning it visually represents an idea. Iconic signs are not transparent; that is, someone without prior knowledge of sign language would not be able to immediately understand the iconic American Sign Language (ASL) sign for “boat.” Iconic signs from different signed languages are not necessarily similar in form. The sign for “eat” in several signed languages all contain the iconic element of eating, but the handshapes and motions differ. The ASL sign for EAT is made with the dominant signing hand enclosed in a clam-like shape. The Norwegian sign is made with the hand

Through Sign Language Research, ed. Patricia Siple (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 338-339. For a brief biographical sketch of Hotchkiss, see Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 43-45.

⁷⁹ A study of cognates (historical relatedness) and similarity (lexical similarity) among four unrelated European sign languages (Northern Ireland, Spain, Bulgaria, and French) finds remarkably high percentages of both when iconic signs are included. Overlap ranges from 31%-40% percent for cognates and from 23%-30% when looking at lexical similarity. Differentiating between iconic signs and non-iconic signs reveals significantly different rates of cognates. Nouns, which the authors say are more likely to be iconic, have cognate rates from 41%-60% whereas non-iconic signs have cognate rates of only 4%-18%. Thus, iconicity lends itself to what appear to be cognates, or similar signs, and the use of iconic signs in international communication could lend itself to comprehensibility. Stephen Parkhurst and Dianne Parkhurst. “Lexical Comparisons of Signed Languages and the Effects of Iconicity,” *Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session*, 47 (2003) <http://www.und.edu/dept/linguistics/wp/2003ParkhurstParkhurst.PDF>

⁸⁰ Valli and Lucas, *Linguistics of American Sign Language*, 6-7.

enclosed in a fist, excepting the thumb and index fingers, whose tips touch one another. But users of a signed language seem to have enough knowledge of iconic signs to be able to work their way through to the meaning of an iconic sign in a different signed language. Iconic signs were credited by a Danish participant at the 1899 Stuttgart Congress as assisting in comprehension. These signs, which were called “natural signs” in the nineteenth century, were “basic elements (signing in the air after reality)...common for all sign languages and with the help of one sign, one can get an explanation of another sign that one might not understand.”⁸¹ Iconic signs alone could not be sufficient to converse on the topics covered at international meetings but they may have served to fill some lexical gaps and as bridging devices for Deaf people new to international signs.

Deaf men adept at international communication were renowned and their expertise celebrated. The sign language of Deaf Frenchman Renee Hirsch was rated by one participant to the 1900 Paris Congress as “lively and masterly, especially with regard to elegant gestures.”⁸² A Danish participant at the 1900 Paris Congress saw Deaf German Watzulik speak for the first time after years of having heard of his reputation as “the best of all the Congress veterans.” Watzulik did not disappoint, his “slow and natural” signs made him “an experienced lecturer who all us deaf-mutes could easily understand.”⁸³ At the 1889 Paris Congress, Deaf American E.W. Frisbee, “said to be

⁸¹ “Døvstummekongressen i Stuttgart,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 9:61 (July 1899), 971.

⁸² Carl Becker, “Døvstummekongressen i Paris,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 10:72 (November/December 1900): 1141. The word “gestures” is a translation from the Danish word *bevægelser*.

⁸³ Ibid., 1140.

one of the best signers in natural language in America,” gave “a graphic outline account of the life and education of Laura Bridgman” one evening.⁸⁴ While historians have no way of definitively knowing what made Frisbee’s presentation “graphic,” his reputation in “natural language” suggests he used signs with iconic elements.

The ordinariness of this cross-national communication can be seen in the reaction to its absence, as in an incident Draper politely characterizes as a “curiosity” at the St. Saviour’s Church meeting between American and British Deaf people. Two hearing men were used as interpreters between two groups of Deaf people from countries with one spoken language but two very different signed languages. Draper noted, “the Americans generally felt that by ‘going slow’ in their signing they would have made themselves quite as well understood by the English as by this triangular filtering process.”⁸⁵ Deaf American Douglas Tilden, a well-traveled man, was far more blunt. In a letter to the *Deaf and Dumb Times* he complained, “No amount of calm reflection can reconcile me to the idea of such a spectacle as was prescribed last summer, when an American had to interpret for...the Americans, and an Englishman for...the English audience. You Englishmen are our own blood cousins, yet how ‘the irony of fate’ has separated us deaf-

⁸⁴ Despite careful observation, the British delegates “could only follow a part of the sign language.” “Reminiscences of the Paris International Deaf and Dumb Congress,” *The Deaf and Dumb Times* (October 1890): 70.

⁸⁵ Amos Draper “Notes on the Meeting of the Deaf at Paris,” *Annals* 35 (1890): 31. By contrast, one Deaf Briton complained, “We English could never decipher some of the American signs.” “Reminiscences of the Paris International Deaf and Dumb Congress,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (June 1890): 5. One account of the meeting also noted the Deaf Irishman Francis Maginn served as an interpreter, as well as the two hearing men. “The Paris Congress,” *Silent World* 3:25 (July 25, 1889): 3.

mutes.”⁸⁶ On one hand, both men express surprise that two English-using groups would need intermediaries, privileging the national, majority language aspect of their existence over the fact that their respective signed languages were mutually unintelligible. However, there is another aspect of their lives touched on by both men—their existence as Deaf people. Tilden’s chagrin at the spectacle of two hearing men interpreting between two groups of Deaf people lies in an assumption of what it meant to be Deaf. Being Deaf meant—despite coming from different countries and despite having different signed languages—Deaf people ought to be able to understand one another. Tilden put the blame squarely on the British, declaring, “I do not think that you have much of a sign language.”⁸⁷ At the St. Saviour’s meeting, Deaf Americans and Britons expected to find common ground through a bond they shared via larger society—the fact of being “blood cousins”—and through the shared bond of being Deaf. Yet, the insertion of two interpreters broke not one, but both bonds.

Interactions in a transnational setting demanded a different set of language skills than those found in national settings. Amos Draper complained “the ‘universal language’ of signs did not always prove itself such with me.”⁸⁸ Draper’s attributed his inability to transcend the boundaries of a single signed language to his personal inclination to spend

⁸⁶ Douglas Tilden, “Correspondence,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (April 1890): 130.

⁸⁷ Douglas Tilden, “Correspondence,” *The Deaf and Dumb Times* (April 1890): 130.

⁸⁸ Draper “Notes on the Meeting of the Deaf at Paris,” 32. Similar experiences can be seen among other Deaf people. Deaf German leader and driving force behind the earliest Congresses, Eduard Fürstenberg, was praised by a Swiss Deaf person as being “understood by everyone, and made the sign-language lectures understandable even for the most uneducated.” As cited in Jochen Muhs, “The 175th Birthday of Eduard Fürstenberg,” Translated from German by Lois Bragg. *Deaf History International* 14 (Fall 2002): 16.

his time mostly with hearing educators and educated elite Deaf people, “This was, perhaps, due to the fact that my intercourse with the deaf has been mostly with the educated; for those of our number who, like Mr. Koehler, are brought in contact with all classes and conditions, did not have the like difficulty.”⁸⁹ Jacob M. Koehler was the founder of a school for the deaf in Scranton, Pennsylvania, who was also active in religious work in the Episcopalian church (first as a missionary and later as a Reverend).⁹⁰ His ability to make himself understood internationally is explained as emanating from his interactions with a wide variety of Deaf people at home. Draper may have used a form of signing which incorporated elements of English, either grammatically or through the spelling out of English words. Koehler seems to have used what were known as “natural signs” when ministering to Deaf people; signs which incorporated a unique grammar and iconic elements. In the United States Draper found little use for this sort of sign language expertise but abroad the persona he constructed from interaction between Deaf and hearing people in a specific American, English-language context turned out to be useless. In fact, Draper ends up communicating in French with a Deaf French cloth-cutter while the Frenchman uses English to him in return.⁹¹

The difference between Koehler and Draper shows how the space afforded to be Deaf in the transnational Deaf public sphere could upturn hierarchies formed from

⁸⁹ Draper “Notes on the Meeting of the Deaf at Paris,”32.

⁹⁰ Otto B. Berg, *A Missionary Chronicle* (Hollywood, MD: St. Mary’s Press, 1984), 9.

⁹¹ Draper “Notes on the Meeting of the Deaf at Paris,”32.

ordinary day-to-day contact with larger society. The use of language in all modes—spoken, written, signed—was of foremost concern of Deaf education. Articles on the best way to teach spoken or written English were common in the profession's periodical and discussion on this topic was inevitable at their conventions. The elite Deaf males who served as American representatives to the transnational public sphere were immersed in this debate and many made it a point of pride to show themselves as masters of all modes of language. At the 1893 Chicago Congress, Deaf American men served as spoken language interpreters when it came time to interpret a fellow American's paper. Olof Hanson, Amos Draper, and Thomas Fox, then president of the American National Association of the Deaf all interpreted for others' signed presentations, but when it came time for some of them to present their own work, they chose to sign and allow another person, Deaf or hearing, to speak. D.W. George presented his paper on "Should the Deaf Marry the Deaf?" in signs while "by request, Mr. Fox...read it orally."⁹² Incidents of speaking and signing simultaneously were not recorded at this conference. That Deaf people orally interpreted other's papers but presented their own papers in sign language shows Deaf people were clearly not willing to allow themselves to be reduced to the physical fact of a voice, even if they did use this voice. Works of their own authorship would be expressed in signs, not speech, by the author. This mastery of all forms of non-signed language was a significant part of these men's conceptualization of themselves. Not only were Deaf people able to communicate with their international brethren in sign

⁹² D.W. George "Should the Deaf Marry the Deaf?" *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (Chicago, 1893), 112.

language, they were also able to communicate with their national hearing counterpart in any form language they so chose. The ability to write grammatically correct English was a skill constantly emphasized by Deaf leaders.⁹³ This emphasis comes from the individualist element in Deaf American discourse; the ability of individual Deaf people to prove themselves capable on terms set by larger society. This is a discourse common for American minorities— one must show oneself to have the ability to compete on terms established by the majority. While emancipatory to a degree, this discourse is still formed in a setting where the lodestone orients one’s internal compass to non-signed languages.

Draper’s difficulty in understanding international signs shows how a transnational setting has the potential to upend this hierarchy; true north is now sign language. Deaf people with skill in the most visual elements of sign language (iconic signs, natural signs), those who interact with all sorts of other Deaf people, found themselves at home in transnational Deaf gatherings.⁹⁴ Those Deaf people most skilled in sign language, put in a subordinate status by educators and the elite Deaf in their home countries, were more likely to be able to transcend national language boundaries and understand the signs of their Deaf counterparts in other countries. Hierarchies based on language use in a national context were reversed in transnational contexts where signed languages were

⁹³ Deaf woman wrote to a leading Deaf periodical emphasizing the importance of Deaf girls writing grammatically correct in order to avoid embarrassment, especially since hearing people would not correct their mistakes. *Deaf Mutes' Journal* (April 7, 1881): 4.

⁹⁴ In a study of international signs at an international workshop for deaf researchers, Bencie Woll notes two groups had the most difficulty making themselves understood by others— those who lived most geographically distant from Europe (the U.S. and Thailand in her study) and “those with the best command of spoken English.” Bencie Woll, “International Perspectives on Sign Language Communication,” *International Journal of Sign Linguistics* 1:2 (1990): 118.

used. Universal signs were an ideal, but the reality was a complex interplay between stressing the importance of written language expertise within larger society and visual language ability for settings where being Deaf was a dominant way of being. Ideally, Deaf people had to be well prepared for both settings.

How Public was the Public Sphere?

This expansion of a space of being Deaf through travels, publications, and Congresses created a transnational frame of reference for Deaf people to use in interpreting their own lives. Interactions in this sphere inspired the establishment of social clubs and national political organizations in different nations. Deaf people in one country felt the lives and experiences of those from other nations were of use to their own lives. Defined broadly as a space for interaction between Deaf people—including publications and individual travel—the transnational Deaf public sphere was one open to all individuals, male or female, bearing in mind the gendered form these openings and interactions took. Congresses, however, are more problematic in that they point to the composition of a public sphere dominated by a group of elites—educated Deaf males.

Congresses were attended by a wide range of Deaf people but women and working class men were rarely chosen as official delegates to these Congresses. In this, Deaf men paralleled dominant social norms of class and gender established by the bourgeois public sphere.⁹⁵ Alexander Pach, a professional photographer and regular

⁹⁵ Nancy Fraser notes the bourgeois public sphere did not “bracket inequality.” Women, racialized others, and men without property were excluded at various points, if not by formal restrictions then at least by “informal impediments.” To give one example, the bourgeois public

columnist for American Deaf periodicals, complained that positions as Congress delegates “are parceled out to those engaged in the higher callings to the total exclusion of wage earners.” The process of choosing delegates was “a good deal like a trust,” claimed Pach, using an staple image of Progressive Era attacks on robber capitalism as an analogy to the closed circle of former delegates who chose one another to attend Congresses.⁹⁶ Indeed, American delegates were usually well-educated Deaf men who worked in professional occupations. Of the American delegates to the 1900 Paris Congress, almost all of the delegates were either “a graduate of Gallaudet, or one holding an honorary degree.” Four were members of the clergy, eleven were teachers, and two were editors, with three others representing other professional occupations.⁹⁷ American delegates were clearly elite professional males. And since the same delegates often attended more than one Congress, Pach’s comparison of the selection process to the operation of a trust is understandable.

Deaf women did attend some Congresses, but proceedings and reports in periodicals seldom noted their opinions on political matters of the day, nor were they ever appointed official delegates for their local clubs. Deaf women rarely took the platform in public debate, even if they were obviously qualified to do so. Deaf American Amos Draper was astonished to meet his old schoolmate from Hartford, Matilda Dusuzeau, at

sphere was one in which discursive interaction” was governed by “protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlates and markers of status inequality.” Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 118-119.

⁹⁶ “Some of our French brethren happened to know some of our prominent deaf men, and appointed them to appoint others...” Alexander J. Pach, “The Kinetoscope and the Telephone,” *Silent Worker* 12:5 (January, 1900): 84.

⁹⁷ Alexander J. Pach, “The Kinetoscope and the Telephone,” *Silent Worker* 12:5 (January, 1900): 86.

the 1889 Paris Congress.⁹⁸ Married to the French president of the Congress, Dusuzeau was fluent in French and French Sign Language and retained her native languages of ASL and English. Nonetheless, her views are not noted in any Congress reports, nor were those of any other women present at the Congress.⁹⁹ The opportunity to serve as a delegate was highly prized, being accorded most often to existing community leaders who were almost always men.¹⁰⁰ If Deaf men dominated Deaf political life in a national setting, it would be Deaf men who would be chosen as international delegates. In fact, the earliest Congresses held in Germany were styled as meetings of the heads of Deaf Associations, not Congresses based on national delegations. Another reason for the lack of Deaf women was that Deaf men claimed debate in political forums as a male privilege.¹⁰¹ The 1878 Leipzig and 1881 Prague Congresses both briefly debated the

⁹⁸ Amos Draper, “Notes on the Meeting of the Deaf in Paris,” *Annals*, 35 (1890): 33. Dusuzeau, nee Freeman, was born in Philadelphia and moved with her family to France after spending time at both the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut and the New York School for the Deaf. “Ernest Dusuzeau,” *Silent World* 3:29 (August 22, 1889): 1.

⁹⁹ Draper called the absence of women at the Paris Congress as one of its “marked and not at all agreeable features.” Amos Draper, “Report to the President,” *Annual Report of the Columbia Institution for Deaf Mutes, 1889* (Washington, D.C. 1889), 34. A British report on the Congress, however, indicates “several foreign ladies” in the audience on the second day of Congress proceedings. “Reminiscences of the Paris International Deaf and Dumb Congress,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (October 1890): 69.

¹⁰⁰ Being chosen as a delegate was a highly prized honor and delegates faced grumbling from those not able to attend. Gaillard and the other French delegates to the 1893 Chicago Congress had to stand for election and even then “some Deaf leaders...expressed disappointment that the voting had not been divided more equitably.” Anne T. Quartano, “Republicanism, Deaf Identity, and the Career of Henri Gaillard in Late-Nineteenth-Century France,” 47.

¹⁰¹ Sara Robinson notes American Deaf women participated in Deaf political associations on the national and state levels, but “their participation in the political sphere was...limited” on the national level. Some Deaf women did rise to leadership positions on the state level. Sara Robinson, “The Extended Family: Deaf Women in Organizations,” in *Women and Deafness: Double Visions* ed. Brenda Jo Brueggemann and Susan Burch (Washington, D.C.,: Gallaudet University Press, 2006), 40-56. Susan Burch briefly touches on political activities of

status of Deaf women at the Congresses. One representative at the 1878 Congress proposed excluding women from congress deliberations. The motion did not pass. The arguments against the proposal decried it as ungentlemanly and noting women were also Deaf and also participated in Deaf association life, even to the point of having founded associations. Only at the 1881 Prague Congress was women's right to vote on Congress resolutions clarified in favor of their right to vote, a measure advanced by Jacques Loew, a Deaf Austrian who immigrated to the United States in 1876.¹⁰² Nevertheless, Deaf women did not appear to have regularly participated in public debates at the nineteenth century international congresses.

While Deaf women usually did not give papers at Congresses, they did participate in the transnational public sphere in a wide variety of ways. American Deaf women served on entertainment committees for the Congresses held in the United States and in doing so, followed their national hearing counterparts in carving out a public space for themselves through the rhetoric of "women's work." These entertainments were not negligible events. Sometimes attracting more participants than Congress sessions themselves, these entertainments showed Deaf people in public settings as dignified and

Deaf women in an article on American Deaf women and oral education, noting "few women had any political or social authority in the efforts to preserve and promote sign language or to publicly preserve and promote general Deaf culture." According to Burch, Deaf women did not get voting rights in the U.S. National Association of the Deaf until 1964. Susan Burch, "Double Jeopardy: Women, Deafness, and Deaf Education," in *Literacy and Deaf People: Cultural and Contextual Perspectives* ed. Brenda Jo Brueggemann (Washington, D.C: Gallaudet University Press, 2004), 67.

¹⁰² The Leipzig debate can be read in German in "Protocoll," *Der Taubstummenfreund* 7:17-18 (October 1878): 65-68. Naglo of Berlin, an earlier opponent of women's right to vote, eventually agreed, adding the comment that women should not be swayed by a presenter's "beautiful shape and magnificent appearance," a comment that met with much amusement from the audience. "Den femte döfstmukongressen," *Döfstmuvännen* 6 (1881): 16. For the date of Loew's immigration to the United States, see "Jacques Loew," *Silent Worker* 20:1 (October 1907): 5.

opulent as those which hearing people could organize. To use the language of the day, well-run entertainments reflected well on the deaf as a class.

The activities of the Deaf Frenchwoman Yvonne Pitrois stand out as an example of how a Deaf woman could incorporate gender and a sense of commonality with other Deaf people to carve out a crucial role for herself on a transnational level. Pitrois was an author who wrote, among other things, a biography of the Abbe de l'Épée, a prominent French educator, as part of her contribution to the 1912 Paris Congress, which was also the bicentennial celebration of the Abbe's birth. Pitrois also contributed articles to the American periodical *Silent Worker* on the histories of European schools.¹⁰³ But her most remarkable contribution was her work as the head of an international relief fund for Deaf people displaced by the First World War. The fund emerged from an international correspondence club of Deaf women Pitrois formed at the turn of the century. In 1912, after the club, mostly made up of Deaf women who wrote in French, reached 100 members, Pitrois created a periodical, *La Petite Silencieuse*, for Deaf women. After war broke out, Pitrois appealed to her readers to send aid to assist deaf refugees, an appeal which met with a generous response. Pitrois plugged into the existing transnational Deaf public sphere and became the center of a network of contributors from the United States, Australia, and other European countries. Contributions were first sent directly to refugees, but after establishing contact with the Dresse family, a wealthy Belgian Deaf family who had escaped to England, Pitrois funneled funds directly to the Mutual Help

¹⁰³ Loy E. Golladay, "Yvonne Pitrois," *Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf people and Deafness* John V. Van Cleve, Editor in Chief. Volume 2, H-R. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc., 1987), 294-295. Pitrois name is not in the list of French participants at the Congress.

Society of the Deaf in Liege, which then sent it on to similar societies in other Belgian cities. After the war ended, the fund turned to assisting Deaf people who were left behind in the war zone and helping Deaf people re-establish themselves after returning home.¹⁰⁴

Reminiscing about her motivations for establishing the fund, Pitrois expressed a gender-based argument that emphasized the traditional role of women in humanitarian efforts during times of war. Deafness, Pitrois commented, prevented her and other Deaf women from becoming nurses, but they could still contribute in other ways. Some of these contributors, such as Martha Overend Wilson from Brisbane, were Deaf women and community leaders in their own right.¹⁰⁵ Deaf contributors also wanted to be a part of this lateral aid. One Deaf Australian woman willed an amount of money “to the Belgian refugees.” Unfortunately, Pitrois noted with dismay, the Australian forgot to include the word “deaf” and her gift was instead sent to the Red Cross general fund.¹⁰⁶

Deaf women also participated in transnational interactions on a local level. Dusuzeau entertained international visitors at her palatial home outside Paris, associating with deaf royals from Belgium and Deaf artists from the United States.¹⁰⁷ On a less-exalted end of the French social scale, we find Mrs. Genis (whose first name is unknown)

¹⁰⁴ Yvonne Pitrois, *My War Work* (Shaftesbury, undated, likely 1922), 1-5.

¹⁰⁵ Wilson was actively involved in Deaf organizations in Australia and her work comes up in Breda Carty’s dissertation, “Managing Their Own Affairs: The Australian Deaf Community in the 1920s and 1930s,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Griffith University, 2004. For an example of Wilson’s activism, see a circular reproduced in Appendix E of Carty’s dissertation. For Wilson’s contribution to the relief effort see Pitrois, *My War Work*, 10.

¹⁰⁶ Pitrois, *My War Work*, 6.

¹⁰⁷ “Two American Deaf-Mutes Meet in France,” *Silent Worker* (January 31, 1889): 4; Douglas Tilden, “Paris,” *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (December 27, 1888): 2.

serving a seven-course meal to Deaf Americans Olof Hanson and Douglas Tilden as well as several other Deaf men invited by her husband, Henri Genis, a notable in the Parisian Deaf community. Mrs. Genis endured what Hanson called “exceedingly musty” stories shared by the Deaf men and politely “pronounced them good.”¹⁰⁸ Genis is an example of the reach of transnational interactions into otherwise local lives. While conforming to the role of a good French wife, Genis transcended her physical locality through conversations with foreign Deaf men. Transnational interaction does not need to be explicitly political or transformative to be worthy of the name transnational; sometimes it can be as simple as an after-dinner conversation.

Nonetheless, the existence of the transnational public sphere contains an assumption of political significance and, upon first glance, such a closed public sphere at Congresses seems hardly seems deserving of the name “public.” The public space afforded for political discussion at international meetings of Deaf people is reminiscent of the terms Mary P. Ryan uses to describe the sphere of Progressive era female reformers: “.. in some ways a private turf, a realm of one gender and one class rather than a space of civic deliberation open to all.”¹⁰⁹ The case of Deaf women’s absence from the speaker’s platform at international meetings reveals limits on the idea of the transnational Deaf public sphere as a separate, independent space. While it could reach into local lives and communities, it could not independently determine the boundaries of its own composition. Instead, in important respects the Deaf public sphere shared the norms of

¹⁰⁸ Olof Hanson Diary, December 8, 1889, p. 93.

¹⁰⁹ Mary P. Ryan, “The Public and the Private Good: Across the Great Divide in Women’s History,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15:2 (Summer 2003): 23.

the bourgeois public sphere. This is not surprising for, as Craig Calhoun points out, the very existence of a counterpublic “presupposes engagement in some larger public sphere.”¹¹⁰ Nancy Fraser points out this sphere contained gendered distinctions between the public and private; distinctions which reinterpreted women’s work as private and domestic and men’s work as public and political.¹¹¹ A rough measure of participation can be seen by looking at how many Deaf women were physically present at these Congresses. Records available show a wide variation from Congress to Congress.¹¹² It is obvious being Deaf was not a controlling factor in the presence and participation of women at these Congresses. Rather, the composition of the Deaf political arena at Congresses (or at least that part of the arena which is visible to historians, via papers given and statements made from the platform) conformed to the particular gender norms of each national society. The norms of the bourgeois public spheres in different nations determined whether Deaf women from particular countries were allowed to attend or participate in public forums. Being Deaf may have made the world into kin, as Draper

¹¹⁰ Calhoun takes this a step beyond what Fraser writes in her initial understanding of counterpublics that understand themselves “as part of a potentially wider public, that indeterminate...body we call the public at large.” Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,”¹²⁴ Calhoun seems to remove this “potentially” and makes participation a presupposition, as well as stating “individuals may participate in multiple publics.” Craig Calhoun, “Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere,” *Public Culture* 14:1 (2002): 166.

¹¹¹ Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 114-115.

¹¹² A photo of the 1904 World’s Congress in St. Louis, largely attended by Americans, as well as a list of attendees from the Congress proceedings, show a plurality of the attendees were women. Gannon, *Deaf Heritage*, 427. Birgitta Wallvik notes 27 of the 157 participants in the 1884 Stockholm Congress were women. Wallvik, ...ett folk uten land, 250. Attendance records of the 1912 Paris Congress shows 33 French women attending out of a total of 240 French participants, a small showing for a host country. It is unclear how many of these participants were hearing or Deaf. Henri Gaillard, *3e Congrès International Pour des Sourds-Muets, Compte Rendu des Travaux*. (Paris, 1912), 142-145.

felt when docking at Liverpool, but it was a kinship formed within the bounds of national gender norms. Being Deaf did not allow one to transcend these norms and Deaf-created entities such as the public sphere were also entities shaped by the national norms which delegates carried with them. Tilden and Hanson may have shared stories with Henri Genis's wife, but she still had to cook their dinner as a price of entrance to their conversation.

Nevertheless, the ideas presented at these Congresses disseminated further than the immediate circle of elite male delegates. Deaf people could participate in the transnational public sphere in more ways than mounting the speaker's platform at international meetings. By being in the audience at these meetings, through reading accounts of other travelers, or, more commonly, by viewing public lectures given by those who participated international events, Deaf women and working class Deaf people did participate in the transnational public sphere. Judging from published lists of participants it appears that many Congresses were characterized by high attendance from members of the local Deaf community, with anywhere from several hundred participants at a well-attended Congress and up to one thousand for the largest Congresses. Deaf people also attended international meetings on Deaf education. A British educator attending the 1893 World's Congress of Instructors of the Deaf in Chicago complained the meeting hall for the Congresses' opening address was "packed to the door," with "the 'audience'...largely made up of deaf people of both sexes."¹¹³ The educator, W.H.

¹¹³ The Congress of Instructors and the Congress of the Deaf were held on alternating days on the World's Fair fairgrounds; Deaf people could easily attend both if they so desired.

Addison, complained Deaf members of the audience were more engrossed in exchanging “gossip” with one another “than in drinking the words of wisdom which fell from the lips- or should it be the fingertips- of their mentors.” Addison may have missed a central point of the Congress for Deaf people—the opportunity to discuss their lives with one another was of more importance than docilely receiving “wisdom.” Discounting Addison’s grumbling on what he saw as intruders to a professional conference, what emerges is the presence of Deaf women and non-elite Deaf men at this forum at the Chicago World’s Fair. Their presence alone is evidence enough of interest in the proceedings. By attending Congresses of Deaf people and on Deaf education, non-elite Deaf people seized the opportunity to participate in public discussion of their lives.

It is important to note while delegates were elites, their participation at international meetings often depended on financial support from local communities, support reciprocated by sharing information upon their return. Financial support is one means of measuring the significance non-elite Deaf people attached to international meetings. Members of the Liverpool Adult Deaf and Dumb Society “thought advisable that the deaf and dumb of Liverpool should be represented by their worthy missionary...as well as by...the honourable secretary, and others” at the 1889 Paris Congress. To ensure this representation, the members “accordingly collected a sum of money from friends and admirers...sufficient to defray the expenses of the trip to the French capital.”¹¹⁴ Even Deaf people who could not conceivably make a long trip

W.H. Addison, “The Chicago Congress,” *Quarterly Review of Deaf Mute Education* 3 (January 1894): 259.

¹¹⁴ “News and Meetings: Liverpool,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (September 1889): 41.

overseas (or be chosen as a delegate) nonetheless supported these Congresses by paying the travel expenses of delegates from their local clubs.

This local support ensured ideas debated in the transnational Deaf public sphere broke through the immediate circle of Deaf male delegates and entered a wider range of people present in local communities. Upon their return home, these delegates published accounts of their trips in Deaf periodicals and gave talks to their sponsoring clubs and other gatherings of Deaf people. The American delegates to the Paris Congress spread out upon their return home, traveling around their home regions giving lectures to various clubs and meetings of Deaf people. One American newspaper editor joked, “The gentlemen who attended the International Congress...are paying dear for their whistle, some of them averaging two or three lectures a week on their travels before societies of the Deaf.”¹¹⁵ Deaf men from other countries did much the same after their own travels. The September after the 1889 Paris Congress, *Times* editor Charles Gorham gave “an interesting lecture on ‘Wanderings in Paris,’” to the Bradford Society for the Adult Deaf and, “illustrated it with a lime-light magic lantern.”¹¹⁶ Deaf Dane Carl Becker held a lecture at the Deaf Club in Odense, Denmark upon returning from his trip through

¹¹⁵ *Silent World* 3:39 (October 31, 1889): 2. There are numerous references to local lectures by 1889 Paris Congress delegates in the *Silent World* in the months following the Congress. Habenstab and Hill lectured to audiences in Jacksonville, Illinois and Lowell, Massachusetts respectively. “Boston, Mass” *Silent World* 3:40 Supplement to regular issue (November 7, 1889): 1; “Jacksonville, Ill.,” *Silent World* 3:40 Supplement to regular issue (November 7, 1889): 1. Habenstab’s lecture seems to have inspired its audience far too well. Several students at the Illinois school for the deaf ran away from school after listening an account of his travels to the 1889 Paris Congress. *Silent World* 3:40 (November 7, 1889): 2.

¹¹⁶ “News and Meetings: Bradford,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (October 1889): 48.

Germany in 1899.¹¹⁷ Hearing educators with close ties to the Deaf community also took part in this sharing of information. The Reverend Thomas Gallaudet lectured to large crowds of Deaf people in Philadelphia and New York, among other cities, after his return from the 1880 Milan Congress on the Education of the Deaf.¹¹⁸ Participants at international meetings were expected to share information gleaned upon their return, informing local Deaf communities what they had learned about the lives of other Deaf people. By doing this, they gave the transnational Deaf public sphere a local depth to accompany its transnational breadth.

The transnational Deaf public sphere circulated smoothly on a vertical plane, with information distributed downward from international congresses to local Deaf societies and churches, and perhaps back up again. But when physically realized at international meetings, the Deaf public sphere was hemmed in horizontally by the class and gender norms of national societies. The composition of the Deaf public sphere was predetermined by national norms accepted and enacted by Deaf people themselves.

Individual Travel

The travels of Deaf people in the middle and late nineteenth century indicate the extent and importance of meetings and impressions formed by the individual Deaf traveler in the development of the transnational Deaf public sphere. Historians have not

¹¹⁷ “Personalia,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 9:61 (July 1899): 976.

¹¹⁸ “Banquet,” *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (January 6, 1881): 3-4. Gallaudet was accompanied in his travels by his Deaf wife, Elizabeth R. Budd Gallaudet. “The Itemizer,” *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (August 5, 1880): 2.

studied the journeys of Deaf people across national boundaries to any significant degree. There are richly rewarding examples that suggest a dense web of interconnections existed among Deaf people in the late nineteenth century. While World's Congresses and other large-scale events open a view into organized political debate, smaller-scale and individual meetings show the reach of transnational interactions into individual lives. Meetings between two Deaf people of different nationalities do not in themselves compose a public sphere, but the ideas exchanged and bonds formed through an aggregation of these experiences provided Deaf people with a background of transnational knowledge that they could incorporate in their local lives. Individual travel also served as an efficient form of information distribution. The formation of some local clubs of Deaf people can be partially attributed to the information provided by Deaf travelers to local Deaf communities. For those travelers who chose to seek out other Deaf people, being Deaf could expand their social networks and even economic opportunities in new locations. The experiences of European Deaf immigrants to the United States illustrate the co-equal lives of Deaf people; lives shaped by being Deaf and by being a part of larger society.

Individual Deaf people traveled for a variety of reasons. Deaf Americans with the means to travel embarked on the traditional nineteenth century European vacation, either alone or with their families. Angela Gilbert of Oregon, previously a student at the California School for the Deaf in Berkeley, visited Paris in 1889 with her hearing family, meeting Deaf American expatriates during her stay.¹¹⁹ Other Deaf Americans traveled

¹¹⁹ Hanson diary, November 17, 1889, pp. 86-87.

to Europe for an education in the arts or other fields. A good number of American Deaf artists lived in Paris, participating in the Parisian Deaf community, including its substantial Deaf artistic milieu of over ninety artists by the turn of the century, as well as taking part in the pleasures and competition of the cosmopolitan Parisian art world.¹²⁰ Douglas Tilden, a Californian who lived in Paris for six years, would create a new home in his adopted country, integrating himself into the local Deaf community. Six months after his 1888 arrival in Europe, Tilden would give a signed address at the *Association Amicale des Sourds-Muets*'s annual banquet honoring the Abbe de l'Épée.¹²¹ Yet other Deaf people participated in short and long-term labor migration, including travel around Europe and immigration overseas to the United States.

European Deaf craftsmen traveled around the continent in the nineteenth century, maintaining ties with Deaf communities in scattered sites. August Schenck of Germany worked as a sculptor in Odessa, Constantinople, and Bucharest, as well as a teacher of Deaf children in Moscow before settling down to an illustrious career as a Deaf leader in his home country.¹²² Danish carpenter Carl Laursen, keeping his countrymen updated on his whereabouts via regular letters to the Danish Deaf periodical *Smaablaade for*

¹²⁰ On some occasions, Deaf Americans' artistic productions were reviewed in French Deaf periodicals. Mirzoef, *Silent Poetry*, 215-216. Mirzoeff explores the work of French Deaf artists in *Silent Poetry* and contends this work expressed a political goal: "to demonstrate to the hearing majority that deafness was no hindrance to the intelligent perception and representation of exterior reality." *Ibid.*, 90. See Chapter 3, "The Mimicry of Mimesis" and pages 210-218 for more on the political implications of these artists and their work.

¹²¹ For more on Tilden's time in Paris, see Mildred Albronda, *Douglas Tilden: Portrait of a Deaf Sculptor*. (Silver Spring, MD.:T.J. Publishers, Inc., 1980), 13-25. For a mention of the speech, see Mildred Albronda, *Douglas Tilden: The Man and His Legacy* (Seattle: Emerald Point Press, 1994), 27.

¹²² Dødsfald," *Smaablaade for døvstumme* 2:11 (January 1893): 168-169.

døvstumme, lived in a number of European countries in the late 1890s. In 1896, Laursen apparently worked in a piano factory in Berlin for a time, helping another Deaf Dane (an old school classmate he had not seen since confirmation) find a job at the same factory. Laursen next sent notice of his moving on from Munich at the beginning of August 1896, traveling through Vienna, Budapest, and Tyrol onto Zurich, where he found a job in another piano factory. While in Switzerland, he related an account of his boss catching a hearing beggar pretending to be deaf. Laursen's international knowledge was useful for other members of the Danish Deaf community. The members of a travel club of Deaf Danes wishing to attend the 1900 World's Exposition and International Congress of the Deaf in Paris printed notice of their club in *Smaablade* after Laursen spread word of its existence. Club members warned readers they were waiting for more information from Laursen before any concrete plans could be made. Laursen's travels thus occurred in a context of regular contact with his home Deaf community and Deaf people in other nations.¹²³ Another Deaf craftsman, sculptor Heinrich Hansik of Prague, worked for a time in Gothenburg, Sweden, his wife and child remaining behind in Prague. While passing through Copenhagen on his return from a visit home, Hansik visited with Deaf

¹²³ The account of Laursen's time in Berlin is attributed to an N.C. Laursen, most likely a typographical error. All other accounts refer to Snedker ("carpenter") Carl Laursen. "Forskellige Meddelelser," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 6:35 (April/May 1896): 554-557; "Personalia," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 6:38 (September 1896): 605; "Forskellige Meddelelser," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 6:40 (November/December 1896): 639; "Verdensudstillingen I Paris Aar 1900," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 7:49 (January 1898): 777; "Personalia," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 9:61 (July 1899): 976.

Copenhagener, demonstrating his artistic skills and sharing information on his work situation.¹²⁴

Deaf travelers around Europe could and did maintain ties with other Deaf people via navigation of a social landscape enabling them to discover Deaf people in foreign cities. A Deaf man from Bergen, Norway, known only by the initials A.R., sailed to Copenhagen with a group of 12 men in the spring of 1897. Even before he ate breakfast on his first morning in Denmark, A.R. tried to find the Copenhagen Deaf Club.¹²⁵ Not finding anyone who knew the location, he ate breakfast then enlisted a boy to show him the way to the Deaf school, where he met a Deaf man who was a member of the club and brought him home to meet other Deaf Copenhagener. This process of discovery was likely the same for many Deaf travelers. In the absence of any local contacts or knowledge of any regular gatherings of Deaf people, they would first go to the school for the deaf and then be introduced to a Deaf person who could bring them into contact with local Deaf people. The companionship of other Deaf people was not purely social in nature, but also useful for information on local life and the latest news on employment opportunities. A.R. sought work as a tailor but had the misfortune to arrive in Copenhagen during a strike. He resolved to travel onto Hamburg but changed his mind after receiving advice from Deaf Copenhagener that the strike would soon be over and he would be worse off in a similar situation in Hamburg. A.R. managed to find work

¹²⁴ “Forskellige Meddelelser,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 7:45 (July/August 1897): 720.

¹²⁵ “Rejse til København,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 8:52 (May 1898): 826-828.

after a few weeks and remained in Copenhagen until January 1898.¹²⁶ From 1898, Deaf travelers could also make use of a “directory for deaf-mutes” published by the president of the Deaf Club in Brunswick, Germany. Containing an overview of all Deaf clubs in Germany, Austria, and the United States, as well as schools for the Deaf in Germany, this guide must have come in handy for the wide-ranging Deaf traveler.¹²⁷

Via face-to-face meetings, Deaf people enhanced their knowledge of each other’s lives and communities, knowledge which directly inspired activities in other nations. The formation of the Copenhagen Deaf club, the *Døvstumme Foreningen af 18. November 1866*, which is still in existence today, is attributed to the visit of a Norwegian carpenter to Copenhagen. The carpenter, who had spent 11 years in Austria-Hungary and Germany and lacked funds to return home to Norway, regaled a group of Deaf Danish craftsmen of accounts of Deaf life in Germany, including stories of German Deaf clubs. The establishment of a club had been debated by Deaf Copenhagener earlier but had been rejected as impractical by some. The Norwegian carpenter apparently showed otherwise. The Danish craftsmen gathered some time later at a birthday party and collected funds, first thinking to give it to the carpenter to aid in his journey home, but then deciding to use it for the establishment of the Copenhagen Deaf club.¹²⁸ The Stockholm club for Deaf people, the first of its kind in Sweden, was inspired by the 1868 visit of a Deaf

¹²⁶ Three of his travel companions returned home after not finding any work for a month. “Rejse til København,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 8:52 (May 1898): 826-828.

¹²⁷ “Forskellige Meddelelser,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 8:51 (April 1898): 815.

¹²⁸ Schultz, F., Bech. Fr., Jørgensen Johs., Jarlnæs, H.J., Westphall, I.C., *Døvstumme Foreningen af 18. November 1866: 1866-1916, Et Festschrift* (Copenhagen: 1916), 5; Wallvik, ...ett folk utan land, 229.

teacher from Stockholm with Deaf German Eduard Fürstenberg, the founder of the first German club for the Deaf Berlin in 1848. The existence of the Stockholm club also served to inspire the establishment of a club in Finland.¹²⁹ Information carried by Deaf travelers brought transnational influences to local settings.

An example of the denseness of these connections much later in the nineteenth century can be seen in a six-line account in *Smaablade* of two Deaf Danes who were disappointed not to meet a Deaf Norwegian at an 1899 Stuttgart Congress of Deaf-Mutes. They knew the Norwegian was traveling home to Norway after visiting his brother in Spain, but were informed by a Frenchman at the Congress that the Norwegian had passed through Paris some time before the Congress.¹³⁰ Just this simple account required a pre-existing tri-national web of relationships and communications. The Danes and Norwegians knew each other and the Danes had to know of the Norwegian's visit to Spain and his journey home. The Frenchman needed to have known of the Norwegian, the Norwegian would have known the Frenchman and how to visit him (or other Deaf French people) in Paris, and the Danes would have to have known and met the Frenchman and vice versa. Individual Deaf travelers could navigate a pre-existing web of interconnectedness across transnational space. Each new journey developed new connections and reinforced older ones. A meeting between individual Deaf people did not compose a public sphere in itself, but the aggregate of these meetings served to reinforce the transnational space in which these Deaf men operated.

¹²⁹ Wallvik,*ett folk utan land*, 232-234. A brief biography, including a photo, of the Deaf teacher, Fritjof Carlbom, can be found in Wallvik, ...*ett folk utan land*, 90-92.

¹³⁰ "Forskellige Meddelelser," *Smaablade for døvstumme* 9:61 (July 1899), 974.

On the other side of the Atlantic, another form of transnational contact involved longer-term, even permanent stays abroad. Deaf Europeans rode the great waves of nineteenth-century European emigration to America, seeking new lives in the United States. The weekly newspaper of the American Deaf community, the *Deaf-Mutes' Journal*, contained references to Deaf immigrants making their way into American society and participating in the American Deaf community. The lives of Deaf immigrants were surely governed by larger trends in American immigration history and existing American cultural attitudes towards deafness and disability.¹³¹ But they were also shaped by the existing Deaf social landscape, which gave them a ready-made group of people with whom to interact. In this, Deaf immigrants illustrate the co-equal lives of Deaf people. They participated in American life both as immigrants and as Deaf people.

These immigrants also brought the transnational to the local, introducing extra-national ideas to local communities. Just as World's Congresses expanded Deaf leaders' frames of reference beyond that of their national auditory societies, so could Deaf immigrants give Deaf Americans the opportunity to see how Deaf people in other countries lived.¹³² George Legg, recently emigrated from London, England to

¹³¹ Norwegian Lars Havstad was not allowed entry to visit in 1899, even though he was on a government-funded trip and the Norwegian prime minister signed his passport. Only upon presenting a letter from "a famous American" was he allowed to enter the United States. "Foredrag," *Døves Blad* 5-6 (March 1900): 19-20. Restrictions against disabled immigrants, including Deaf immigrants, tightened after the turn of the century and Douglas Baynton notes some cases where Deaf people were denied entry into the United States. Douglas Baynton, "'The Undesirability of Admitting Deaf Mutes': U.S. Immigration Policy and Deaf Immigrants, 1882-1924," *Sign Language Studies* 4 (Summer 2006): 391-415.

¹³² To take one example, a speaker at the 1891 reunion of former students of the Wisconsin school noted the better mechanical training foreign deaf people received. "Foreign deaf mechanics are given good places and wages before deaf Americans are, for employers prefer

Massachusetts, demonstrated British signs at a private party while his host signed the same content in American signs. The exhibition “created much curiosity among the mutes” who considered Legg’s British signs “absurd” and the American signs as “more attractive and graceful.”¹³³ Deaf immigrants integrated into the American Deaf community, as seen by the example of Deaf Norwegian Louis Guttormson, who served as vice president and treasurer of a deaf club in LaCrosse, Wisconsin.¹³⁴ Immigrants such as Guttormson and Legg gave local communities a transnational flavor.

Deaf immigrants participated in American society as immigrants and as Deaf people. A Deaf Danish immigrant, Anna Lassen, wrote her Danish compatriots of Deaf life in Chicago four years after she emigrated in 1893, noting the city had 2,000 Deaf people and a “half-dozen” churches for them. Lassen, who was received in America by a brother who had emigrated earlier, wrote, “I am often with the deaf-mutes here in the city and understand them fairly well, as they do me. The sign language we use is very different from the Danish sign language.” Lassen also noted the existence of large numbers of Polish, German, English, and Irish Deaf people in Chicago. She was enamored with life in America, writing “I find America very agreeable...I can have all I want, both of clothes and other things. I have a nice little bankbook and a lot of clothes,

skillful and excellent deaf mechanics of foreign birth to the deaf Americans.” *Report of the Sixth Reunion of the Alumni Association of the Wisconsin School for the Deaf* (Devalan, Wisconsin, 1891), 56.

133 “New England Notes,” *Deaf-Mutes’ Journal* (March 10, 1881): 4.

134 “Blandede meddelelser,” *Døves Blad* 9-10 (May 1896): 40.

even a pair of silk stockings, which are not so cheap either.” Lassen found America a land of economic opportunity, as did other immigrants before and after her.¹³⁵

In contrast to the experience of hearing immigrants who found support in monolingual and uni-national immigrant communities, Lassen found in Chicago a multinational, multi-lingual community made up of Deaf people of different nationalities and spoken languages who nevertheless understood each other well. Lassen married a Deaf German tailor from Bremen six years after each had emigrated; exchanging their wedding vows before a Deaf priest, the Reverend Philip Habenstab.¹³⁶ A toast by “The Foreign Deaf-Mutes in America” at an 1880 New York banquet may well encapsulate the experiences of those Deaf immigrants who were a part of the American Deaf community. The toast noted the “risks” taken by these deaf-mutes in traveling to America “to share in the fortunes that are more lavishly visited upon Americans than any other people on earth.” America afforded “all men,” Deaf or hearing, the opportunity to succeed. The toastmaster also added that hearing parents were not ashamed of their Deaf children nor were their hearing children ashamed to have Deaf parents. After this acknowledgement of the freedoms afforded Deaf people in America, the toastmaster closed, with a flourish, by declaring all deaf-mutes in America were “sovereigns, like their fellow citizens, for we are living in the land of Washington.”¹³⁷

¹³⁵ “Personalia,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 7:45 (July-August 1897): 718; “Forskellige Meddelelser,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 7:47 (October 1897): 749.

¹³⁶ Anna M. Witte, “Brev fra Amerika,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 9:65 (January 1900): 1027-1028.

¹³⁷ “Banquet,” *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (January 6, 1881): 3-4.

The way Lassen and the toastmaster present their lives can be seen as an example of the practice of co-equality. Not all Deaf immigrants necessarily shared Lassen's early prosperity or the sentiments embedded in the toast above, but these examples demonstrate how Deaf immigrant's lives as Deaf people and their lives as new immigrants cannot be separated. Lassen sees no dissonance in commenting on her ability to afford silk stockings and her participation in the Chicago Deaf community in the same letter. The toastmaster revels in the freedoms afforded all people in America and interprets these freedoms in a way with heavy significance for Deaf people—as freedom from shame for familial deafness. America was not simply a land of economic opportunity; it was a place which could transform personal and family life in ways both common to all immigrants and unique to Deaf immigrants. Deaf immigrants were not simply Deaf nor only immigrants. They did not praise America, but an America interpreted through the experience of being a Deaf immigrant.

The other side of co-equality can be seen by understanding how Deaf immigrants' lives were also shaped by their particular gender, location, or national background. Louis Guttormson and Carrie Sandvig were both born—twenty-four days and a few farms apart—in Oier valley in the Gulbrandsdal region of southern Norway. Both attended the same school for the deaf in Oslo. A schoolmate remembered Louis as especially neat and cleanly dressed, with an all-around good attitude. Carrie, in this schoolmate's recollections, was the one who took the teacher's advice closest to her heart and was never unfriendly towards anyone. After leaving school, Sandvig spent several years on her family farm, presumably doing domestic work. Guttormson returned to his father's farm and worked on the farm and as a journeyman shoemaker, "with varying success" for

ten years.¹³⁸ Both immigrated to Wisconsin: Sandvig with her family in 1870; Guttormson with a hearing friend in 1872, immediately securing work as a shoemaker at a company he remained with for the next thirty-six years. Guttormson married Isabelle Jane Drake, a Deaf woman of English descent, in 1878, traveled extensively around the Midwest visiting family and friends, and read scripture at Sunday services for Deaf people in his hometown of LaCrosse, Wisconsin. As a “result of Mr. Guttormson’s labors,” the Guttormsons owned their own home.¹³⁹ Sandvig never married. A 1909 profile stated, “her principal vocation is housekeeping, although she has done considerable work caring for the sick.”¹⁴⁰ Sandvig also worked on sewing jobs outside the home for a period, earning fifty cents a day. She lived with her family most of her life. Even when she had a small, three-room house of her own, she shared the house with her mother for a decade, and the last decade of her life was spent at her sister’s house.

Guttormson served as a link between Sandvig and the American Deaf community. Sandvig and Guttormson regularly wrote to Conrad Svendsen, a priest for the Deaf in Norway, and some of their letters were reprinted in the Deaf periodical *Døves blad*. Sandvig’s contact with other Deaf people seems to have occurred largely through Guttormson, excepting attendance at two reunions of the Wisconsin Association of the Deaf and occasional visits from a Deaf girl whose parents lived in Sandvig’s town. Visits from Guttormson were especially prized. “Last summer L. Guttormson visited and we

¹³⁸ “The Picture Gallery,” *Wisconsin Times* (June 5, 1909): 5.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

had a good time talking,” Carrie wrote to Svendsen in 1897, adding, “I can talk about what I want” with Guttormson. Sandvig also visited with Guttormson, once staying for seven weeks, other times attending church services for Deaf people during her visit. Guttormson sent in Sandvig’s subscription renewals to *Døves blad*, passed news of Sandvig’s doings onto Svendsen, and kept up regular visits throughout the decades until Sandvig’s death in 1911. Both kept in touch with old schoolmates at home via letters and greetings in *Døves blad* decades after they emigrated. Guttormson even returned to Norway in 1892 for a visit to his childhood village and the Oslo Deaf community. 141

Being Deaf was an important factor in Guttormson and Sandvig’s lives, but their ability to participate in the American Deaf community differed due to factors other than being Deaf. It would be presumptuous to apply gendered generalizations to the experience of Deaf female immigrants based on Sandvig’s life, especially in the absence of quantitative statistics on the occupational and marital status of Deaf women in Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century. From the evidence we have, Sandvig lived a different life from Anna Lassen and their lives were likely equally influenced by the places they emigrated to—urban Chicago versus rural Wisconsin—as well as their individual views on what made a happy life. After all, both pronounced themselves satisfied with their lives in America. When we put Sandvig’s life alongside that of

141 For short biographies of Sandvig and Guttormson, see “The Picture Gallery,” *Wisconsin Times* (April 17, 1909): 5. and “The Picture Gallery,” *Wisconsin Times* (June 5, 1909): 5, respectively. For the letters they wrote and brief news on their lives, see *Døves blad* 6 (1892): 32; *Døves blad* 5-6 (March 1896): 23; *Døves blad* 9-10 (May 1896), 40; “Av modtagne breve,” *Døves blad* 13-14 (August/September 1897): 54; “Av modtagne breve,” *Døves blad* 17-18 (November 1897): 71; “Av modtagne breve,” *Døves blad* 3-4 (February 1900): 16; “Blandede meddelser,” *Døves blad* 2 (January 1907): 15; “Fra Amerika,” *Døves blad* 4 (March 1907): 81; “Av modtagne breve,” *Døves blad* 11 (November 1910): 86; “Fra Amerika,” *Døves blad* 4 (April 1911): 29; “Dødsfald,” *Døves blad* 9 (November 1911): 71.

Guttormson, both similar in national origin, educational and immigrant background, and deafness, the differences that do emerge can be partially understood in gendered ways. Guttormson's ability to travel, home ownership, marital status, and participation in the Deaf community are all presented in a matter of fact manner, as something shaped by his masculine qualities of hard labor and individual initiative. Sandvig, based on hers and Guttormson's letters printed in *Døves blad*, as well as articles in American and Norwegian Deaf periodicals, did not have the same level of interaction with other Deaf people as Guttormson or Lassen did. Her life was largely lived within a local town and circle of hearing family members, her most important link to other Deaf people being through Guttormson. She was expected to care for her elderly mother and live alongside family members. Sandvig's life was shaped by the gendered norms specific to her time and immigrant community, by her geographical location, and by the fact of her being deaf. Guttormson and Sandvig shared much, but the ways in which their lives differed point to the influence of gender, among other factors, in shaping Deaf lives. Deaf people formed a community of their own, but it was a community which co-existed alongside other communities that Deaf people necessarily lived within. The lives of Deaf people were influenced by their bonds with other Deaf people, but also by their constant daily interaction with non-Deaf people. In this respect, Guttormson and Sandvig lived co-equal lives.

From artist to seamstress to carpenter, from short-term travel to permanent emigration from one's homeland, individual travel by Deaf people encompassed the spectrum of means and motives found among travelers in larger society. Yet, the experiences they underwent were conditioned by the fact of their being Deaf and by the

opportunity to participate in a community of Deaf people. In their travels, Deaf people relied upon and further developed the transnational Deaf public sphere. This sphere gave Deaf people a space in which to discuss matters of concern to themselves. As will be seen in the next chapter, what they were concerned with was often precisely the larger societies in which they lived. Whether doing domestic work for their families or feasting at distinguished banquets, being Deaf was an important factor in lives lived alongside hearing counterparts.

CHAPTER TWO

“USEFUL MEMBERS OF HUMAN SOCIETY”: NATIONAL SETTINGS, TRANSNATIONAL INTERCONNECTIONS

In 1895, 400 representatives from many of the nearly 100 Deaf societies scattered across the German Empire met to commemorate the unveiling of a bust of Samuel Heinicke. Heinicke was an eighteenth-century educator of Deaf people widely acknowledged as the founding father of German Deaf education. He was also known as an ardent proponent of the oral method. Deaf Germans had labored for four decades to raise funds for the bust, which had been crafted by a Deaf sculptor and was now to be unveiled on the site of Heinicke’s first school.¹ At the unveiling, Schönberner, a pastor from Berlin, gave a signed address that highlighted the contradiction before him: a group of sign-language-using Deaf Germans were assembled to pay homage to a man historically associated with the oral method. “Heinicke’s whole effort was to secure speech for the deaf,” Schönberner pointed out, “Have we a right to commemorate his work? Are we the true representatives of the community of the deaf when, in addressing this assembly, we use the sign-language, which it was the work of his life to oppose?”² Schönberner thrust before his audience the fact that the man they were honoring that day was one who would probably not agree with their view that sign language was, for a Deaf

¹ A.M. Watzulik, “Associations of the Deaf in Germany,” in *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (Chicago: National Association of the Deaf, 1893): 49. The number of representatives comes from “Forskellige Meddelelser,” *Smaablade* 5:30 (August-September 1895): 479.

² “Miscellaneous,” *Annals* 40 (1895): 312.

person, “his mother tongue, and which to him will always remain the natural language, speaking directly to the heart.”³ Yet, Schönberner assured his audience, Heinicke would also disagree with contemporary German educators who advocated a pure oral approach which completely banned the use of sign language. This representation of Heinicke was an attempt to remove him from the rhetorical pedestal on which contemporary German educators had placed him, using him as a symbol from which their work was presumably derived. Schoenberger distinguished Heinicke’s oral method from the one used by present-day oralists.⁴ For while contemporary educators banned the use of signs, Heinicke, in Schönberner’s interpretation, only opposed its use “in the form in which the French school under the Abbe de l’Épée developed it; he even approved of the use of signs to a certain extent.” The implication in Schoenberger’s address was that even if Heinicke would not approve of Deaf Germans’ views on sign language neither would he approve of contemporary educators’ complete suppression of it. The ceremony that summer day in a Hamburg suburb paid homage to an eighteenth-century educator and simultaneously challenged the work of his heirs. In fact, by that time, tension between Deaf Germans and most German educators were at a high point; only three educators attended the unveiling, one of who was Johan Heidsiek, an ally of signers and a key figure in contemporary debates in German Deaf education, as will be seen later.⁵ Deaf

³ “Miscellaneous,” *Annals* 40 (1895): 312.

⁴ “Whether we agree with him in all respects or differ widely from him, there are no teachers to-day who follow his method in all respects.” *Ibid.*

⁵ “Forskellige Meddelelser,” *Smaablade* 5:30 (August-September 1895): 479.

Germans gathered not only in commemoration of Heinicke and the founding of German Deaf education but also to insert ambiguity into a potent historical symbol of oralism.

The same bust would inspire a convention of German teachers of the Deaf to make a “pilgrimage” to the same spot five years later, “to do homage before the monument of Heinicke, the great apostle of German deaf-mute education.”⁶ Heinicke was venerated by German educators of Deaf people as the founding father of their profession. These educators positioned their work as an unbroken continuation of how they saw his: a so-called “German pure oral” method that accorded no place to sign language. The dominant methodological orientation in German Deaf education at the time was the use of oral instruction without any intermediary assistance whatsoever, including written language. The assemblage of teachers, “friends and patrons,” and otologists “reiterated their allegiance to the German method, and gloried in the triumphs it had achieved abroad, especially in the land of De l’Épée [sic].”⁷ The Abbe Charles de l’Épée was an eighteenth century educator of Deaf people who used sign language. His “land” was France, where education had taken an oralist turn in the past decade. German teachers of Deaf people established themselves as the vanguard of a German method, claiming a posthumous victory for Heinicke over the noted Abbe in the latter’s homeland.

⁶ George Veditz, “The Convention of the Association of German Teachers of the Deaf at Hamburg, 1900.” *Annals* 46 (1901): 78.

⁷ Ibid.; “Friends and patrons” Ibid, 73.

Heinicke's bust was the backdrop for competing claims on the educator's legacy, with both claims framed in a language of German nationalism.⁸ Both educators and Deaf Germans portrayed Heinicke's work as a uniquely German legacy, evoking comparisons with France to cast a pedagogical debate in the small subfield of Deaf education in terms of Great Power rivalry. Educators rejoiced in the victory of a German method in the terrain of French schools. Supporters of sign language emphasized Heinicke's refusal of sign language only in its *French* version, maintaining he supported some use of signs. Schönberner's comparison of Heinicke with contemporary German educators was a comparison of an idealized German past with a diminished present. These opposing interpretations, literally carried out in the shadow cast by Heinicke's legacy, were part of a number of contestations in the decade of the 1890s between, on one side, Deaf Germans and other opponents of the pure oral method, and on the other side, German oralist educators.

This chapter sets a series of contestations which took place in Germany in the 1890s into a wider transnational framework, exploring how local struggles over the use of sign language in German schools were interpreted into a variety of settings on the national and transnational levels. These struggles reached outside their localities because of existing regional and international networks in the field of Deaf education and the existence of a transnational Deaf public sphere. The story of the Heinicke bust comes from a Danish Deaf periodical and from a translation done by a Deaf American of

⁸ For an analysis of the use of monuments and commemorations as a buttress to nationalist ideology, see Alice Freifeld, *Nationalism and the crowd in liberal Hungary, 1848-1914* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

German ancestry, George Veditz, who had grown up in a German-speaking home and school, published in the leading American periodical of Deaf education, the *American Annals of the Deaf*.⁹ Throughout the decade, Veditz's ongoing translations of these events were joined by travelers' accounts of visits to German schools, letters between educators, and articles in publications for educators and Deaf people in the United States and Western Europe. Interactions between multiple actors—Deaf and hearing people, oralists and combinists, Germans and people of other nationalities—took place in national settings, within national and international circles in the field of Deaf education and in the transnational Deaf public sphere.

The multiple frames of reference highlighted by these events show how transnational and national contexts play off one another. Due to the unique history of the methods debate, the oral method was strongly associated with Germany, which made incidents in Germany of heightened interest elsewhere. This interest needs to be seen as also contingent on the status of Germany in the late nineteenth century as a world power, a formulation of Germany which itself needs to be placed in its late nineteenth century context of the emergence of nationalism as an increasingly dominant presence in Central European political discourse. German educators and German Deaf people all offered their own interpretation of what it meant to be a part of the German nation, interpretations drawn from the larger discourses and contexts laid out above, but also with a wary—or, depending on one's view, a hopeful—eye towards the intervening power of the Prussian state. As these contestations shifted between local, national, and transnational settings,

⁹ “Samuel Heinicke,” *Smaablade* 5:29 (July 1895): 449–451.

they brought material incidents from their localities to bear on these larger discursive debates. The shunning of a dissenter at a conference, the tying of Deaf children's hands behind their back, the furtive scribbling of a word on the blackboard as a weary teacher tired of mouthing to silent ears —such local actions reverberated beyond their time and place, placing the status of sign language in German Deaf education on a global stage in the 1890s.

Nationalist ideologies are particularistic ideologies, ideologies built upon the myth of a bounded imagined community, made up of people usually found in a specific geographical area. Within particular national communities, distinctions—cultural, linguistic, ethnic—were made between those who were a part of this community—citizens—and those who lay outside—foreigners. Nineteenth-century Germans spoke of the greatness of German *Kultur*, a view of the world acquired through humanistic university training. Americans spoke of the ideal of a democracy of the common man, a democracy limited in practice to those of the correct race and gender. Deaf people in different countries subscribed to these particularistic aspects of national identity and these ideologies—the ways in which they understood themselves as Germans or Americans or Britons—were not shared. Deaf people in a particular national setting needed to attune their arguments for their rights as Deaf citizens in a language acceptable to educators and policymakers working in a national context. But even as they advanced nationally-attuned arguments, Deaf people in different Western nations shared one bedrock assertion: that the use of sign language and the existence of Deaf-centered spaces were necessary for Deaf people to secure full citizenship. This ideology came into conflict with linguistic nationalism, the ideology that citizens of particular nation-states should

speak the same language. Deaf people proposed a version of citizenship which included a space for sign language.

Working on a transnational level does not necessarily mean subverting national boundaries. There are times when the transnational can be used to reinforce the national. That is, transnational ideas and impulses can be incorporated into a national framework in such a way that the transnational sources end up reinforcing ideologies of patriotism and national exceptionalism. The work of historian Daniel Rodgers has shown how American social reformers drew heavily upon the works of European progressives, but once these ideas were incorporated, they were used to show the distinctiveness of the American example.¹⁰ This is what Deaf Germans attempted to do in the decade of the 1890s, and by looking at how incidents in this decade played out transnationally, we can, to paraphrase Shelley Fisher Fishkin's 2004 address to the American Studies Association, show how visions of citizenship are shaped by conversations outside the nation.¹¹ The lateral connections formed in the transnational Deaf public sphere played an important role in the late nineteenth century methods debate in Germany and in other countries. These transnational influences were far from hidden; Deaf leaders proudly referred to Deaf lives in other nations as examples to buttress arguments otherwise made in national

¹⁰ Daniel Rodgers, "An Age of Social Politics," *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 250-273. Rodgers traces this history in more depth in his 1998 work *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

¹¹ The original quote is explicitly American-oriented: "As the transnational takes on greater importance in American studies, we will welcome opportunities to understand how visions of American democracy and American citizenship shape and are shaped by conversations outside the United States." Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies— Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004" *American Quarterly* 57 (March 2005): 35.

settings. Later chapters will show how this assertion of citizenship through sign language and Deaf-centered spaces appears in different national contexts. This chapter's immediate aim is to explore how one particular re-inscription of national citizenship by Deaf Germans circulated across multiple frames of reference. Deaf Germans were overtly cosmopolitan as a means of becoming thoroughly national.

National Methods

Each of the major methods in Deaf education became identified with particular nations in the nineteenth century. Manualism, which used sign language as a method of instruction, was known as the “French method.” The United States was known as the home of the combined method, otherwise known as the “American system,” since the method’s originator, Edward Miner Gallaudet, proposed the method in 1867 as a means of incorporating speech instruction into what had previously been the manualist orientation in American Deaf education. Beginning with Heinicke, the oral method had been associated with Germany. The association of oralism with Germany and signing with the French was particularly potent given the stereotypes of these countries in the 1890s. Interest in German Deaf education by other national educators took place in the context of worldwide admiration of the German “scientific method” and the system of education which cultivated it in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As historian James Albisetti notes, “to many foreign observers, educational and scientific excellence was as much a part of the image of Imperial Germany as was economic and military

strength.”¹² By calling the oral method the “German method” educators associated their work with the spirit of progress and the rigor of science. By the 1890s, the historical association of Germany with oralism lent the oral method an aura of scientific prestige its proponents in other countries were eager to claim.¹³ These national identifiers formed the backdrop to the transnational reactions to challenges to the German pure oral method in the 1890s.

The historical roots of the German and French methodological identifiers can be found in an eighteenth-century debate between the French Abbe de l’Épée and the German Samuel Heinicke. The Abbe de l’Épée was the founder of the first state-supported school for Deaf children in Paris, France and used signs when teaching his pupils.¹⁴ He also supported using Deaf people as teachers and opened his school to any and all who wished to learn its methods, a tradition adopted by his successor. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, schools based on the French model of using sign language in the education of Deaf people were formed in the United States and across the European continent. Prominent among the exceptions were the states which

¹² James Alibetti, “Education,” in *Imperial Germany: A Historiographical Companion*, ed. Roger Chickering, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 244. Alan Beyerchen makes the point that German scientific excellence was supported by universities, private corporations, and the government, all participating in the German advance towards modernity. Alan Beyerchen, “On the Stimulation of Excellence in Wilhelmian Science,” in *Another Germany: A Reconsideration of the Imperial Era* ed. Jack R. Dukes and Joachim Remak, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 139-168.

¹³ For example, the leading British training school for oral teachers of Deaf children was called “The Ealing Street Society for the Promotion of the Teaching of the German Method.”

¹⁴ The Abbe de l’Épée used a signing system he called “methodological signs” in the classroom. Deaf people in the Paris used an indigenous sign language. René Bernard, “l’Epée, Abbé Charles Michel de,” in *Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness*, vol. 1, ed. John V. Van Cleve (New York: McGraw-Hill), 416-418.

would later unite into post-1871 Germany. Here, Heinicke's oralist ideology dominated the education of Deaf children. The two men corresponded for a time about their different methods and Heinicke challenged l'Épée to a debate on the proper means of educating Deaf people.¹⁵ The Abbe was judged the winner by the directors and fellows of a University Academy in Zurich in 1783, but this victory did little to change Heinicke's mind and German education would continue to take an oralist orientation. The two poles of l'Épée and Heinicke, transformed into images of a French manualist method and a German oralist method, would continue as standard points of reference in the field of Deaf education.

By the 1890s, Germany had long been acknowledged as both the historical home of oralism and the contemporary site to see the oral method in practice. Nineteenth century American educators made trips to Germany to report on the success or failure of the German method, depending on their particular stand in the methods debate.¹⁶ Germany occupied a central location in contemporary regional networks among European educators of Deaf people. These networks served to circulate pedagogical methods and philosophies around the continent. The first four Conferences of German

¹⁵ For a transcript of the letters between Heinicke and l'Épée, see Christopher B. Garnett, Jr. *The Exchange of Letters Between Samuel Heinicke and Abbe Charles Michel De l'Épée*. (New York: Vantage Press, 1968).

¹⁶ Examples of nineteenth century travel by American educators to Germany can be found in the following accounts: George E. Day, "On Institutions for the Deaf and Dumb in Holland, with an account of a visit to the class of M. Dubois, in Paris, and a statement of the results of teaching articulation in Great Britain," *Forty Second Annual Report and Documents of the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb* Albany, 1861; Edward Miner Gallaudet, "Report of the President on the Systems of Deaf-Mute Instruction Pursued in Europe," *Tenth Annual Report of the Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb* 1867 (Washington, D.C., 1867); Gallaudet, "President Gallaudet's Mission to the Deaf and Their Friends in Europe," *Annals* 42 (1897): 282-299; Olof Hanson, "Observations Abroad," *Annals* 35 (1890): 260-270.

Teachers of the Deaf and Dumb, which took place from 1884 to 1897, show the existence of Central European regional network among educators of Deaf people. Schools from Austria and the German-speaking portion of Switzerland consistently sent delegates to each conference. The Swiss school of St. Gallen sent its director to the first three conferences and the Ober Doebling school in Vienna sent different delegations to each conference. Of the 24 non-German participants at the four conferences, six were directors of their own schools for Deaf people, five were Head Teachers, and the rest, save one, were teachers.¹⁷ People who attended German Congresses of Teachers of the Deaf in the last decades of the nineteenth century were influential in their home countries and could implement ideas from these Congresses at home. Transplanted Netherlander William Van Praagh, head of the Ealing Society in London and a leading advocate of oralism in British Deaf education, may be typical of non-German conference attendees. Fluent in German, Van Praagh probably saw the two conferences he attended as a means of sharing knowledge across national boundaries and as an opportunity to meet kindred spirits and old friends. In between conferences, Van Praagh carried on an extensive correspondence with educators and medical professionals in Germany and around the world, extending ideas from conferences even further.¹⁸

The German influence extended beyond German-speaking countries. Travel reports filed by Norwegian educators who received government travel subsidies from the

¹⁷ The one exception was Fru Lehfeld, likely a relative of Director Lehfeld of the Doebling school in Vienna, both participants in the 1884 Berlin Congress.

¹⁸ The death of a Dr. Renz of Stuttgart, who was a “very intimate friend” of Van Praagh, provoked a series of articles defending Renz from a sensationalistic newspaper article on his teaching methods. “Echoes from Without,” *Quarterly Review of Deaf-Mute Education* 3 (October 1893), 221-228.

Ministry of Church Affairs from 1850 to the end of the nineteenth century show that Norwegian educators who traveled outside Scandinavia most often went to Germany. Ideas gleaned from these trips were not limited within a single school but were disseminated throughout the country. An examination of subset of travel reports (from 1888 to 1893) show a fairly equal distribution of travel stipends among the country's six schools for Deaf people.¹⁹ In the six years examined, seven teachers from four of Norway's schools for Deaf people traveled within Norway and to Denmark, Sweden, and Germany. Long-time teachers dominated travel reports in the early 1880s but by the 1890s travel was usually done by younger teachers finishing their apprenticeships. However, even in the 1890s, one of the seven travelers sponsored by the Norwegian government, Hans Bjørset, was a prominent Scandinavian educator and his report on his travels around Scandinavia was considered of sufficient import to be distributed in a *rundskriv*, a memo circulated to the heads of all schools for Deaf people in Norway.

The same schools in Scandinavia and Germany were visited time and again by Norwegian educators traveling a well-established Grand Tour. Whether novice or veteran, visits were most commonly made to long-established schools in Sweden and Denmark as well as the nearest German school in Schleswig, located in the only province in the German Empire with a compulsory education law for Deaf children.²⁰ Schleswig

¹⁹ Six schools existed in Norway in 1893, as reported in Carl Werner, "State of Deaf-Mute Education in Norway," *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf*. (Chicago, 1893), 200.

²⁰ Wilhelm Lexis, *A General View of the History and Organisation of Public Education in the German Empire*. (Berlin: A. Asher and Co., 1904), 109.

appeared on the itineraries of five of the seven travel reports.²¹ Approximately 145 kilometers from the Danish border, the German school at Schleswig offered easy access to Norwegians seeking insight and inspiration from the German method. “I must point out,” enthused Martin Krokstad of the Trondheim Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in his 1890 report, “reading proficiency was astonishingly high in both departments at Schleswig; as well, the children were so attentive and conscientious as I could scarcely believe to be possible.”²² Norwegian educators liked what they saw in their trips to the Schleswig school, and could incorporate elements of the German method when back home. Norwegian Deaf education drew inspiration from German Deaf education as well as that of Norway’s closest neighbors, Sweden and Denmark. The position of Germany and the Germans as an exemplar of the oral method reached beyond the German-speaking networks into lesser-populated regions of Western Europe.

By the late nineteenth century, the “French method” was associated, at least in the American mind, with effeminacy and aristocracy.²³ The first state-supported school for Deaf people, the National Institute of the Deaf (INJS) in Paris, France, was influential in establishing signing schools for Deaf people on the European continent and in the New World. In its heyday, the INJS was a regular stopping point for distinguished

²¹ One of the two travelers who did not go to Germany between 1888 and 1893 was Hans Bjoerset, who had been there on an earlier trip.

²² Martin Krokstad, “Indberetning til Kirkedepartementet om en i maanederene august, september og oktober 1890 foretogen stipendiæreise av Martin Krokstad.” Diverse stipendinnberetninger fra laerere i abnormskolen: Pakke 340, Stipendinnberetninger m.m. 1850-1896, Saksarkivet, Kontoret for skolevaesen D, 1866-1867, Kirke- og Undervisningsdepartementet, Oslo: Riksarkivet.

²³ Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 106. Baynton also notes the efforts made by American oralists to associate their method with Germany and sign language with France.

intellectuals and European royalty, as well as the occasionally Yankee schoolteacher. In the early years of American Deaf education educators would make pilgrimages to the INJS, the school where Laurent Clerc, one of the co-founders of American Deaf education was educated and worked and Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, the other co-founder, met Clerc and first learned how to sign. Interest in travel to France diminished among educators with the rise of oralism; the merits of articulation was the topic of the day and Germany or German-influenced schools were the place to go whether one was a supporter or an opponent of articulation. The tone of Edward Miner Gallaudet's account of his 1867 visit to the INJS suggest a change in how American educators saw French Deaf education. Gallaudet noted his warm welcome at the INJS, writing, "I was no longer a foreigner in a foreign land, but a friend among friends- a welcome visitant in the place where my father had found a congenial *home*."²⁴ Gallaudet's pleasant account of his visit, on a "bright morning in May," is a stroll in the past, whereas his report scientifically categorizes schools for Deaf people in fourteen European countries by methodological orientation. The result of his trip was a turn away from the manual method and the adoption of speech training alongside instruction through signing, setting the foundation for what was to become known as the combined method.²⁵

The American origins of the combined method could be used by its proponents to paint it as a pragmatic, practical method. A maxim repeated by supporters of the

²⁴ Italics in original. Edward Miner Gallaudet "A Day In the Imperial Institution for Deaf-Mutes At Paris," *Annals and Dumb* 15 (1870): 129-132.

²⁵ Edward Miner Gallaudet "Report of the President on the Systems of Deaf-Mute Instruction Pursued in Europe," *Tenth Annual Report of the Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb* 1867 (Washington, D.C., 1867).

combined method was the slogan, “the greatest good for the greatest number.”²⁶ While the slogan was of Utilitarian origin, it perfectly encapsulated the American self-image as a large and growing democracy of the common man. In the eyes of the combinists, the oral method was elitist and expensive, requiring tedious and lengthy training in small classes and most useful to those with some hearing or who could afford private tutors. It was also, combinists charged, a “game...not worth the candle” for the majority of Deaf pupils, being useful only to those who had retained some sense of hearing.²⁷ The combined method, by contrast, was “broad and comprehensive...afford[ing] to all the best opportunity for intellectual...development.”²⁸ It was also pragmatic: those Deaf children who could benefit from speech instruction were given it, but a single-minded

²⁶ The following resolution, proposed by George Veditz, was adopted at the 1893 World’s Congress of the Deaf in Chicago: “Resolved, That it is the sentiment of this World’s Congress of the Deaf that the combined method, giving equal recognition to the manual and oral methods, is the only system of instruction that meets all conditions and purposes and best answers the golden maxim, ‘The greatest good to the greatest number.’” *Proceedings of the World’s Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, 1893* (Chicago, 1893), 277. Francis Maginn, commenting on the methods debate at a 1890 National Deaf Conference in London, said, “I have not the least hesitation in saying that the combined method as advocated by Dr. E.M. Gallaudet...certainly confers the greatest benefit upon the greatest number.” “The National Deaf Conference,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (February 1890): 95.

²⁷ Edward Miner Gallaudet, “What is Speech Worth to the Deaf?” in *Papers on the Deaf: Published for the Increase and Diffusion of Knowledge Relating to the Deaf* (undated, likely 1902), 33. A British supporter of the combined method even asserted “the results would have been better” had the “isolated, exceptional, and comparatively successful cases” pure oralists pointed to been brought up on the combined method. *British Deaf and Dumb Association, Proceedings of the Ninth Biennial Congress, 1905* (Blackburn, 1905), 52.

²⁸ “President Smith’s Address,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Seventh Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, 1904* (St. Louis, 1904), 9. The speech makes clear the American origins of the combined method, through the person of Edward Miner Gallaudet, and its expansion internationally. The comments of a participant at a British National Deaf Conference echo this outlook, calling the combined method “the only practical one possible” for “the vast majority” of Deaf pupils. “The National Deaf Conference,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (February 1890): 96.

focus on speech instruction would not subordinate the goal of educating “the greatest number.” By way of contrast with what combinists portrayed as the rigidity of the oral method, Gallaudet adopted an ecumenical view of how to apply the combined method. The method should incorporate whatever forms of instruction necessary to fit the circumstances of particular schools and pupils.²⁹ In the eyes of its proponents, the combined method was American not only in origins but also in outlook: it was pragmatic, expansive, and adaptable.³⁰

These attributes of the combined method appear in formal resolutions and other declarations of support at national and international gatherings of Deaf people.³¹ A paper given at the second convention of the U.S. National Association of the Deaf in 1883 claimed “the combined system requires less expense, less effort and less time, in reaching and developing the understanding.”³² Deaf people from other countries could

²⁹ “Dr E.M. Gallaudet in England,” *Quarterly Review of Deaf-Mute Education* 5 (January 1887): 152. Edward Miner Gallaudet, “The Intermarriage of the Deaf, and Their Education,” *Science* 16: 408 (November 28, 1890), 299. Also reprinted in Great Britain in *Papers on the Deaf* (undated, probably 1902)), 15-25.

³⁰ References to the American origins of the combined method can be found in British Deaf periodicals. See, for example, “Report of the Royal Commission on the Deaf and Dumb,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* 4 (September, 1889): 32; “The British Deaf and Dumb Association, The Congress at Leeds,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (August, 1890): 31.

³¹ The 1889 Paris Congress resolved the sign method was the best for “many of the deaf.” S.G. Davidson, “International Congress,” *Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf, 1888-1889* (Mt. Airy, PA, 1889), 53. See also the 1893 World’s Congress resolutions, *Proceedings of the World’s Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, 1893* (Chicago, 1893), 277; “Un Congrès International de Sourds-muets,” *Revue Internationale de L’enseignement des sourds-muets* 7-8 (October-November 1896): 236; “Resolution in Favor of the Combined System,” *British Deaf and Dumb Association, Proceedings of the Eighth Biennial Congress, 1903* (Surrey, 1903), 26.

³² Jerome T. Elwell, “Some Truth About the Pure Oral System,” *Proceedings of the Second Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, 1883* (New York, 1884), 39.

emphasize the method's success in the United States, at times in comparison with the state of Deaf education in their home country. The French Deaf leader Henri Gaillard caused a stir in Paris when, upon return from the 1893 World's Congress in Chicago, he declared French Deaf education inferior to what he had seen in the United States.³³ Gaillard's positioning of a U.S. example against France was an attempt to use national signifiers of the methods debate as a prod to action towards sign language in his country. The following story of a petition made by Deaf Germans to Kaiser Wilhelm I in 1891 further shows how the national signifiers of the methods debate were harnessed transnationally.

Germany in the 1890s

As a Deaf German leader admitted to the 1,000 attendees at the 1893 World's Congress of the Deaf in Chicago, Deaf Germans had only one way to get the direct attention of government officials: by means of petitions to government ministers and, in one dramatic case, to the German emperor. 800 Deaf Germans presented a petition to Kaiser Wilhelm I in November 1891. The petition declared the pure oral method ineffective, called for the use of sign language in the schools, and decried physical violence “by application of the severest means of discipline” against Deaf children in the

³³ “Forskellige Meddelelser,” *Smaablade* 3:18 (March 1894): 286-287. For an in-depth account of Gaillard's visit, see Anne T. Quartano, “Republicanism, Deaf Identity, and the Career of Henri Gaillard in Late-Nineteenth-Century France,” in *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship*, ed. John Vickery Van Cleve, (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1993), 40-52.

German schools.³⁴ The petition was a synthesis of ideas and experiences drawn from national and transnational frames of reference, with petitioners bringing in extra-national comparisons to assert a place in the German nation for signing Deaf people. The controversy provoked by the petition played out in multiple settings: in the transnational Deaf public sphere, among educators of different nations, a domestic audience of German educators and policymakers, and in interactions between educators and Deaf Germans in German society.³⁵ The petition, following an earlier unanswered petition to the education minister, appeared in the wake of several years of international attention to controversies within German Deaf education involving Johan Heidsiek, an educator at the Breslau Institution for deaf-mutes, one of the largest in Germany.

In the late 1880s and 1890s, Heidsiek wrote a series of articles and books criticizing the application of the pure oral method in German schools and the attitude of German educators towards sign language. According to a summary in the *Annals*, Heidsiek's critique of the oral method in two works in particular, *The Deaf-Mute and His Language. Renewed Investigations concerning the Method and Fundamental Principles of Deaf-Mute Instruction*, issued in 1889, and a later work, *The Deaf-Mute's Cry of Distress* (1891), laid bare what he saw as flaws in the German oral method. The method consisted solely of “wearisome and never-ending repetition...of articulation and lip-reading, and lip-reading and articulation, and, by way of variety, articulation and lip-

³⁴ “Miscellaneous: A Petition to the German Emperor,” *Annals* 37 (1892), 173.

³⁵ The reactions German teachers gave to the petition were followed with interest, being translated and reprinted in the *Annals*. The Danish *Smaablade* carried updates on the deliberations of German Deaf people and the reception of the petition by the government. See citations throughout the chapter.

reading.”³⁶ Heidsiek’s primary charge, that German educators were inflexibly propping up a failed method, was rooted in a longstanding debates among nineteenth century educators on how Deaf children first formed an impression of language. Manualist educators had long stressed the utility of sign language as the primary means of conveying ideas to Deaf children, emphasizing the teaching of written language through sign language. Even those oralists who rejected signing in the classroom acknowledged the utility of written words as a bridge between the untutored mind and the possibility of the spoken word. The German ideal of the pure oral method took a more extreme tack: it absolutely excluded not only any use of sign language but also any intermediary symbols, such as writing, between the spoken word and the Deaf child. This ideal was not always applied in practice, but it was, in Heidsiek’s words, the “doctrine” all needed to heed. Vatter, head of the Frankfurt Institution and member of the old guard, expressed this doctrine when he claimed, “to base instruction on writing, even in the very first stages, is inimical to the success...of the oral method.”³⁷ It was within this methodological context that Heidsiek and the petitioners made their charges.

Heidsiek claimed the emperor had no clothes. He laid out a litany of charges against the profession. With all pedagogical endeavor dedicated to the “false idol” of speech, the reality of its failure to educate Deaf people went unacknowledged among

³⁶ George Veditz, “Notices of Publications,” *Annals* 35 (1890): 272. Johannes Heidsiek, *Der Taubstumme und seine Sprache* (Breslau: Verlag von Max Woywod, 1889); Johannes Heidsiek, *Ein Notschrei der Taubstummen* (Breslau: Verlag von Max Woywod, 1891).

³⁷ Veditz, “The Convention of the Association of German Teachers of the Deaf at Hamburg, 1900,” *Annals* 46 (1900): 75.

German educators.³⁸ Oralism was of little use for most Deaf people, yet a Deaf child's life was wasted in a method that prioritized speech instruction over knowledge and rejected the use of sign language. Heidsiek considered this method an affront against nature. "Attention is called to the sheer impossibility of repressing signs even in the strictest and best-disciplined school. The deaf-mute can no more repress their spontaneous use than the leopard can change his spots, or the Ethiop his skin."³⁹ Heidsiek's use of Africanist imagery played into the distinction he made between the "naturalness" of allowing Deaf people to sign versus the artificial pedagogy of oralism. This artificialness was compounded when teachers, as Heidsiek charged, had little real faith in their own method. At least one foreign observer noted, despite the belief that the German pure oral method involved training students directly in spoken language, "it didn't take long for a lazy teacher to quickly write [a new and difficult] word up on the blackboard" during speech training exercises.⁴⁰ This dissonance between purist theory and actual practice, Heidsiek charged, corroded teacher's respect in their profession. Heidsiek claimed acts of physical violence against their Deaf pupils by their frustrated teachers were common. In schools where sign language was actively repressed, "the rod, deprivation of food, and tying the hands, are the means by which the result is attained."⁴¹ Even with their hands tied behind their backs, Deaf children would apparently continue to

³⁸ "Notices of Publications," *Annals* 36 (1891): 146.

³⁹ Veditz, "Notices of Publications," *Annals* 35 (1890): 272.

⁴⁰ Martin Krokstad, "Indberetning til Kirkedepartementet om en i maanederene august, september og oktober 1890 foretagen stipendiereise av Martin Krokstad."

⁴¹ "Notices of Publications," *Annals* 36 (1891): 146.

communicate via facial gestures.⁴² The inability of teachers to communicate with their pupils “prevent[ed] sympathy between them, making the teachers harsh and cruel...so that in fact some of the schools are penal institutions in the worse sense of the word.”⁴³ The vaunted German pure oral method was, Heidsiek charged, not only a pedagogical failure, but also perpetuated physical and mental cruelty towards Deaf children.

By focusing on the “natural” need of Deaf people to use sign language, Heidsiek attempted to step outside the national identifiers of the methods debate. But members of the profession counterattacked in what Heidsiek considered nationalistic terms. He claimed his opponents accused him of “treason to the Fatherland, lack of patriotism, and an attack upon the mighty German empire.”⁴⁴ Heidsiek was shunned at meetings of German educators and faced a libel suit for purportedly defaming the head of a school in *The Deaf Mutes’ Cry of Distress*. Heidsiek characterized his opponents’ arguments as claiming sign language equaled support for the French, for “the sign method...is French, foreign, unpatriotic.”⁴⁵ Heidsiek took a different view, claiming the repression of sign language only succeeded under a teacher’s watchful eye, wryly replying in a later writing: “In the school-room they are German; at leisure, they are French.”⁴⁶ Heidsiek rejected using the methods question as “a ground for proving one’s patriotic

⁴² Veditz, “Notices of Publications,” *Annals* 35 (1890): 272.

⁴³ “Notices of Publications,” *Annals* 36 (1891): 146.

⁴⁴ Johan Heidsiek, “The Situation in Germany,” *Annals* 36 (1891): 267.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Johan Heidsiek, “Education of the Deaf in the United States,” *Annals* 44 (1899): 349.

inclinations,” preferring instead to claim sign language use was natural and inevitable among Deaf people.⁴⁷

Heidsiek’s charges isolated him within the German profession, but opened up a network of support among Deaf Germans and among foreign educators and Deaf people who supported the combined method.⁴⁸ Accounts of the debate among German educators and summaries of Heidsiek’s writings were reprinted in foreign periodicals, including the *American Annals of the Deaf*. Heidsiek corresponded with Edward Miner Gallaudet about his struggles and participated in associational life within the German Deaf community. A thousand copies of a lithograph of his image were published by a Deaf businessman and distributed throughout Germany. Wherever he went, a Danish periodical reported, “deaf-mutes assemble in flocks to praise the Defender of Signs.”⁴⁹ Gallaudet visited Heidsiek in Breslau in 1897, the first time they had met face to face after years of correspondence. Heidsiek enveloped Gallaudet in a hug and kissed him on both cheeks as they met on the train platform, his 12-year-old daughter behind him ready to present Gallaudet with a bouquet of flowers and a welcome speech in English. That evening Gallaudet was feted at a large banquet hosted by the Breslau Deaf Club and much of his two days in Breslau were spent under similar conditions of “unremitting attention” offered by Heidsiek. Gallaudet raised money for Heidsiek’s defense fund, as

⁴⁷ Heidsiek, “The Situation in Germany,” 268.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 270. During Edward Miner Gallaudet’s 1897 visit to Breslau, Heidsiek was accompanied by a delegation of “a score or more” Deaf representatives from the local association of Deaf people, who invited Gallaudet to a larger gathering that evening Edward Miner Gallaudet, “President Gallaudet’s Mission to the Deaf and Their Friends in Europe,” *Annals* 42 (1897): 286.

⁴⁹ The title “Defender of Signs” is capitalized in the original Danish as “Tegnenes Forsvarer.” “Forskellige Meddelelser,” *Smaablade* 5:30 (August-September 1895): 479.

did other leading American educators, and helped arrange a trip Heidsiek made to American schools in 1898.⁵⁰ During this trip, Heidsiek was hailed as “the Lincoln, the Emancipator of our German brethren” at a banquet given in his honor by Deaf people in New York City.⁵¹ This financial and moral support from outside Germany was important to Heidsiek.⁵²

The petition landed in the middle of the controversy stirred up by Heidsiek, interjecting the views of Deaf Germans in a dramatic way. The petition continued Heidsiek’s attack on the efficacy of German Deaf education, but in an expanded international context. The petitioners also staked out a claim for Deaf people and sign language as a part of the German nation. Ultimately, petitioners hoped not only to restore sign language to schools, but also to create a space for sign-language-using Deaf people in the nation. In the eyes of German teachers of Deaf people, the petition had an immediate and dramatic impact on them at what they perceived of as their weakest area, their status in German society, and at a point of strength, the esteem in which their method was held abroad. Educators’ reaction needs to be seen as rooted in the local

⁵⁰ Job Williams to Edward Miner Gallaudet, May 12, 1898, Box 30a, Folder 4, Letter 428, Edward Miner Gallaudet Papers (Gallaudet University Archives) [Hereafter EMG Papers]; Job Williams to Edward Miner Gallaudet, May 30, 1898, Box 30a, Folder 4, Letter 433, EMG Papers; Job Williams to Edward Miner Gallaudet, June 6, 1898, Box 30a, Folder 4, Letter 434, EMG Papers; Letter from A.L.E. Crouter to Edward Miner Gallaudet, May 26, 1898, Box 30, Folder 3, Letter 76, EMG Papers. Heidsiek’s report on his trip was translated by George Veditz and published in the *Annals*. Johannes Heidsiek, “The Education of the Deaf in the United States. Report of a Visit, and a Further Question of Methods- I,” *Annals* 44 (1899): 177-211. Parts 2 and 3 of the report appear in Ibid, 342-358, 439-455.

⁵¹ “New York,” *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (June 9, 1898), 2; Theodore Froehlich to Edward Miner Gallaudet, May 27, 1898, Box 30, Folder 6, Letter 118, EMG Papers.

⁵² Phillip Gillett to Edward Miner Gallaudet, February 8, 1893, Box 21, Folder 7, Letter 182, EMG Papers. Gillett forwarded \$10 that he had collected from a church service for Deaf people, to be added to Heidsiek’s legal defense fund.

contexts in which they operated, even as reactions to the petition played out on a transnational plane.

The petitioners situated German Deaf education in expanded frames of reference within the nation and within a transnational field. By placing German Deaf education alongside other areas of German professional and scientific life, the petitioners shifted the debate from a pedagogical dispute to a more expansive debate over German national prestige in a global context. The petition positioned Germany as “taking a commanding position” in Deaf education, “as in all departments of humanity.” Moving Germany into a global context allowed petitioners to compare the German system with Deaf education in other countries, a comparison in which German educators came out badly. The petitioners claimed German educators of Deaf people were unique in that they only used speech whereas “foreign instructors” used sign language and writing.⁵³ German educators stood isolated in their methodological rigidity, for “the results of the American schools for the deaf...contradict the assertion of the German teachers that the sign language cannot be reconciled with the oral method.”⁵⁴ While foreign schools showed sign language allowed Deaf pupils to follow the same curriculum followed by hearing pupils, German schools sacrificed knowledge for “a stress on mechanical drill” in speech, all part of a “false principle” which “enfeebled and wasted” the intellectual potential of pupils in German school for the deaf. This “repellant attitude maintained by German

⁵³ While many schools in European countries used variants of the oral method, the German version of the pure oral method was noted for its rejection of writing as a support for learning the national spoken or written language.

⁵⁴ “Miscellaneous: A Petition to the German Emperor,” *Annals* 37 (1892): 174.

instructors of the deaf” against sign language was a threat to a segment of the German people and to Germany’s global standing in the field of Deaf education.⁵⁵ This argument was an inversion of the scientific and progressive image German educators wished to promote. Deaf Germans, evoking successes in other nations, attempted to portray German educators as weakening German scientific prestige. By placing German Deaf education in a transnational framework, the petitioners could portray themselves as attempting to stem a decline in Germany’s national prestige and international standing.

Deaf Germans used the petition to assert a place for sign language in society in general and German society in particular. The petitioners requested the Kaiser give official sanction to the use of sign language in the schools and affirm the existence of a signing Deaf community. They suggested replacing the oral method with one that permitted the use of signs, an action that would promote the codification of sign language.⁵⁶ In arguing for the use of sign language in the schools, Deaf Germans advanced a claim for sign language as necessary for Deaf people to participate in society, and by implication, assume their duties as German citizens. Sign language was of utilitarian use in that it allowed for “enlarging mind[s] with all kinds of useful knowledge,” making Deaf people “useful members of human society.” The petitioners went further, claiming a space in the German nation for a community of sign-language-using Deaf Germans. The petitioners complained “communication between younger

⁵⁵ The petitioners also claimed instructors deluded members of the public into believing oral instruction was possible by portraying hard of hearing pupils as completely deaf. This misled the general public into thinking the formers’ speech was evidence of what was possible with a fully deaf person. *Ibid.*, 173-174.

⁵⁶ The petition called for “the retention and introduction of a uniform sign language,” which can be interpreted as a call to codify the language. *Ibid.*, 174.

deaf-mutes and their older companions in adversity is rendered difficult” because the younger generation was not allowed to sign.⁵⁷ Implicit here is the presumption that the Kaiser would approve of intergenerational contact between Deaf people and, by implication, the existence of a German Deaf community. The petitioners, working for change within a national setting, used extra-national points of reference to argue for the use of sign language in schools and for sign language as a vehicle to the attainment of full participation in society.

By petitioning the Kaiser, the petitioners widened the controversy to include the German state, a potential sore point for German educators. Despite the acclaim German Deaf education received abroad, the profession faced a less pleasant situation at home. Governmental support and acclaim for educators of Deaf people was not always forthcoming. The Prussian Minister of Education, Church, and Medical Affairs from 1892-1899, Robert Bosse, issued an 1896 circular stating most directors of German schools for Deaf people were inadequately trained for their jobs, claiming they lacked sufficient *Kultur*, humanistic university training.⁵⁸ While compulsory attendance laws opened up an “education for the people” for over the 90% of the school age population who attended *Volkeschulen*, a clause in the Prussian state compulsory education law exempted education for those with “mental or bodily defects.”⁵⁹ As late as the beginning

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ “Miscellaneous: Qualifications of Principals in Prussia,” *Annals* 41 (1896): 355.

⁵⁹ Stephen L. Harp, *Learning to be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850-1940*. (Deklab, IL:, Northern Illinois University Press, 1999) 8; Lexis, *A General View of the History and Organisation of Public Education in the German*

of the twentieth century, the education of Deaf children was not mandatory in any German state outside Schleswig-Holstein.⁶⁰ Funding for schools for Deaf people came from a number of sources, with 25 schools for Deaf people receiving national government funding, 42 funding at provincial or district level, and 19 funded privately.⁶¹ The indignity of occupying a lower social position, coping with recalcitrant pupils and a lack of respect among state administrators for their endeavors combined to make German educators insecure in their position and professional standing.

As primary school teachers, German educators were not considered part of the upper strata of the *Bildungsbuergerstum*, the educated middle class. While secondary and university teachers needed to matriculate at universities to attain their positions, a primary school teacher in the German *Volkeschule* only needed a stint at a teacher training seminary after the completion of a preparatory training school curriculum, actual time spent in formal training varying from province to province.⁶² Primary school teachers were members of the lower-middle classes, not the *Bildungsbuergerstum*. As such, the social status of the male primary school teaching corps was ambiguous. They claimed an innate understanding of the masses they taught by virtue of their lower social positions while simultaneously agitating for better pay, better positions, and better

Empire, 109. For statistics on school attendance circa 1900 see Lexis, *A General View of the History and Organisation of Public Education in the German Empire*, 91

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 109.

⁶² Ibid., 110-111.

status.⁶³ They were among the select few with formal educational training, yet they were not given the same privileges as the *Bildungsbuerger*.⁶⁴ Instead, they were considered lower-level bureaucrats and were paid accordingly, with the average primary school teacher in 1897 paid on a Prussian state-regulated scale from 900 to 1,800 marks monthly.⁶⁵ This was inadequate to support a family of three and many primary school teachers had to take on second or third jobs to make ends meet.⁶⁶ Typically, these extra jobs consisted of doing menial tasks for the parish priest or serving as town clerks during their lunch hour.⁶⁷ Secondary jobs offered a vital source of extra income, and teaching positions carrying secondary positions were advertised as such in teacher's journals.⁶⁸

The salary scale for teachers of Deaf children at the Schleswig school ranged from 1,800 to 3,000 marks in 1890, double the Prussian pay scale in 1897. This was

⁶³ An argument male teachers used against the entrance of female teachers from upper social classes into the profession was that these women “could never effectively relate to the children of the *Volk*.” Joanne Schneider, “Volkschulelehrerinnen: Bavarian Women Defining Themselves Through Their Profession,” in *German Professions, 1800-1950* ed. Geoffery Cocks and Konrad H. Jarausch, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 94. “Better status,” Ibid., 87.

⁶⁴ James Alibetti, “Education,” in *Imperial Germany: A Historiographical Companion*. Roger Chickering, ed. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 250.

⁶⁵ “lower level bureaucrats” in Schneider, “Volkschulelehrerinnen,” 87. Subsistence levels are discussed in Charles E. McClelland, *The German Experience of Professionalization: Modern Learned Professions and Their Organizations from the early nineteenth century to the Hitler Era*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 103-104.

⁶⁶ While teacher salaries, as compared to those for industrial occupations, increased dramatically from 1864 to the end of the century, they were still “inadequate for a comfortable standard of living.” McClelland, *The German Experience of Professionalization*, 104.

⁶⁷ The taking of outside work is noted in several secondary sources. McClelland, *The German Experience of Professionalization*, 101; Schneider, “Volkschulelehrerinnen,” 94; “selling insurance” Harp, *Learning to be Loyal*, 141.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

considered “somewhat respectable” by one outside visitor.⁶⁹ Yet, a proposal for the improvement of the condition of German education included a suggestion that the need for “compensation for teachers so high that the dissipation of their strength in outside work would not be necessary.”⁷⁰ Regardless of pay, “the demands made by the Elementary School on the bodily and mental capabilities of both pupils and teachers, are generally severe ones in Germany,” admitted a report issued by the German Pavilion at the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis.⁷¹ Elementary common school teachers worked six days a week, 230 to 240 days a year, with time off for religious festivals and summer and winter vacations. For teachers of Deaf children, working with a method in which, according to Heidsiek, few of them had real confidence, the physical, mental, and economic strain must have been at least equal to that of their *Volkschule* counterparts.⁷²

Operating within this context, German educators were indeed concerned about the petition. The petition dominated discussion at a number of regional conferences of German-speaking educators and the resolutions of one conference encapsulates their concerns:

⁶⁹ Martin Krokstad, “Indberetning til Kirkedepartementet om en i maanederene august, september og oktober 1890 foretagen stipendiereise av Martin Krokstad.”

⁷⁰ “Miscellaneous: The Third Congress of German Instructors,” *Annals* 40 (1895): 94.

⁷¹ Lexis, *A General View of the History and Organisation of Public Education in the German Empire*, 92.

⁷² Heidsiek claimed “a great number of teachers...in Germany share my views entirely,” but the ideological dominance of German Deaf education by proponents of the pure oral method stifled open debate. Heidsiek drew a parallel between his silent supporters and Nicodemus, who “came secretly to the Lord in the night, even so have reknowned [sic] members of the profession come to me with the remark, ‘You are right, but one must not say so!’” Heidsiek, “The Situation in Germany,” *Annals* 36 (1891): 269.

1. The struggle against the pure German method of deaf-mute instruction, especially the manner in which this struggle is conducted, must have the effect to bring the cause of deaf-mute education into discredit, especially with governments.
2. The personal consideration that the teacher of the deaf enjoys among his fellow-citizens is wantonly undermined by this struggle. We resolutely repel the charge that the Oral method necessarily leads to ill-treatment of the pupil.
3. Foreign countries, which have been accustomed gratefully to regard the gradual development of the Oral method as a German achievement, must become confused in their ideas of German teachers.⁷³

These conferences were covered and commented upon by American educators in the *Annals*, who followed the aftereffects of the petition on another national profession.⁷⁴ The *Annals* noted discussion at one conference confirmed some teachers did use signs with their students, which contradicted what the Americans understood as the “Pure Oral method”.⁷⁵

Deaf and hearing supporters of the combined method in other countries were quick to see the relevance of the controversies in Germany to the methods debate in their own countries. In a widely circulated speech at the turn of the century, “What is Speech Worth to the Deaf?” Gallaudet made the point that “the best-educated deaf persons in

⁷³ “Miscellaneous: The Position of German Teachers,” *Annals* 38 (1893): 88. The following German conferences on Deaf education in 1892 took up the matter of the petition: the Conference of Directors and Head Teachers in Saxony, the Conference of Teachers of Deaf-Mutes of Wurtemburg and Baden, “at which teachers from Switzerland, Alsace-Lorraine, and Bavaria were also present,” and at a Conference of Austrian Teachers of Deaf-Mutes. “Miscellaneous: The Position of German Teachers,” *Annals* 38 (1893): 87-88.

⁷⁴ “Miscellaneous: Discussion of Methods in England,” *Annals* 38 (1893): 81-82.

⁷⁵ “Miscellaneous: The Position of German Teachers,” 87.

Germany” supported the combined method.⁷⁶ A correspondent for a British Deaf publication, *The Deaf Chronicle*, chortled, “The German system, so long used as an extinguisher for us poor benighted mutes in England and America, has caught fire, and what is to be done now?”⁷⁷ The Briton’s delight was understandable. After all, the petition was a dramatic public rejection of the German method by those who had grown up under it. The controversies in Germany were used by supporters of the combined method in different nations as evidence the German method was not all it was made out to be.⁷⁸ But while Heidsiek’s and the petitioner’s battles were celebrated, the particular elements of the German situation were not always translatable to other national settings.

Extra-national events and ideas went through a filtering process when they were reinterpreted into other national settings. While Heidsiek could draw sustenance from like-minded educators across the Atlantic, the Americans interpreted Heidsiek’s charges against his profession into their own national context, diminishing the charge of physical abuse as unique to Germany. The *Annals* found such charges appalling, but comforted its readers with the fact that most German teachers were male while “no one would think of bringing charges against the gentle ladies who comprise the majority of our oral teachers in America.”⁷⁹ Sexual abuse was not unknown in American schools, and evidence of

⁷⁶ Edward Miner Gallaudet, *What is Speech Worth to the Deaf?* (Washington D.C., 1900); reprinted in Great Britain in *Papers on the Deaf: Published for the Increase and Diffusion of Knowledge Relating to the Deaf* (undated, likely 1902), 25-34.

⁷⁷ H.B.B. “Olla-Podrida,” *Deaf Chronicle* 9 (July 1892): 98.

⁷⁸ See, for example, “President’s Address,” *British Deaf and Dumb Association: Proceedings of the Eighth Biennial Congress* (Surrey, 1903) 15, 21.

⁷⁹ “Mr. Heidsiek’s Prosecution for Libel,” *Annals* 38 (1893): 85.

physical abuse in American schools that surfaced in twentieth century would later give lie to the assumption that abuse is the provenance of male teachers.⁸⁰ The gendered background for the comments was, however, accurate. Male teachers were common at German schools for Deaf people, with approximately 90% of German teachers being male.⁸¹ Male dominance of teaching positions was not unusual in the German context, with an overwhelming majority of German *Volksschule* teachers being male.⁸² The American context was different, with women composing 60% of the teaching corps in American schools for the deaf in 1890.⁸³

Eleven months after they submitted their petition, Deaf Germans received a reply from Minister Bosse. The Minister's response to the petition gave no acknowledgement whatsoever of the petitioners' concerns. His answer amounted to a rejection of every point made in the petition and a ringing reaffirmation of the pure oral method as practiced in German schools. Bosse rejection rested on three points. First, Bosse started off by referring to a transnational context. But Bosse's context was that of "other European

⁸⁰ Lawsuits have been raised in different states across the country for physical and sexual abuse committed in the twentieth century. See, for example, Martin Finucane, "Former students allege rape, abuse at school for deaf." *Boston Globe* May 11, 2004. http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2004/05/11/former_students_allege_rape_abuse_at_school_for_deaf/ (May 12, 2004). David Sexias, a principal of the Philadelphia school for the deaf in the 1820s, lost his position after accusations of sexual advances towards his female pupils. Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, *Inside Deaf Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 23-27, 29-32. Padden and Humphries also note a twentieth century case of sexual abuse at the Maine school for the deaf.

⁸¹ There were 588 male teachers and 65 female teachers of Deaf pupils throughout the German Empire in 1891. "Statistics of German Schools," *Annals* 37 (1892), 83.

⁸² In 1900, 27,056 males were students at teaching training seminaries and preparatory schools as opposed to 2,801 females. Lexis, A *General View of the History and Organisation of Public Education in the German Empire*, 113.

⁸³ Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 60.

States,” the United States (and the combined method) was conspicuously ignored. In this context, German-speaking schools for Deaf people had set an example that other nations had adopted, and German Deaf education was, far from isolated, well within the norm. Bosse refused the wider frame of reference adopted by the petitioners, choosing not only a smaller geographical space, but also a narrower network composed only of other professional educators of Deaf people. The petitioners had tried to present their claims in a more expansive contact zone which included Deaf people as equal authorities on questions of Deaf education; Bosse rejected each of petitioners’ points concerning Deaf education and sign language in the schools, emphatically removing Deaf people from the arena of debate. Second, Bosse rejected Deaf Germans’ claim for a Deaf-centered space and sign language as a vehicle of citizenship. The pure oral method, Bosse wrote the 800 petitioners, “returns the deaf child, no longer mute but speaking, to its family, and renders the adult deaf-mute capable of participating in his church communion, the affairs of state, and society at large.”⁸⁴ Not only was sign language denigrated as a means of instruction, but the oralist trope that its use would “segregate...deaf-mutes” and not allow them “connection with society at large” was restated. Deaf people’s claim to membership in the German *Volk* through the expression of a group identity was emphatically rejected. Deaf people were to be individually absorbed into German society. Third, Bosse rejected the personal experience of Deaf Germans in favor of reports generated by the regular monitoring functions of the state. “Repeated, regularly recurring, and thoroughly conducted inspections of our institutions” showed the oral method’s success and further

⁸⁴ “Miscellaneous: Reply to the Petitions of German Deaf-Mutes,” *Annals* 38 (1893): 82.

inquiry showed charges of physical abuse to be “without foundation.” Bosse’s reply was clearly influenced by German educators; the petitioners’ attempts to pass by educators and harness state support for their goals had not succeeded.

Deaf Germans were combating a larger global trend according a more prominent role to the national language in education as a means of creating national citizens. As Stephen L. Harp points out in his study of elementary education in Alsace and Lorraine, the Prussian government saw mass education, including instruction in German, as a key element in the late nineteenth century project of creating an imagined national community.⁸⁵ This was not a European phenomenon; it motivated educators in the United States and other Western nations as well, and in the field of Deaf education as well as in public school education. Oralists argued sign language was a foreign language and their method promised to make Deaf people a part of the national linguistic community.⁸⁶ Ultimately, the oralist—and assimilationist—version of nationalism would prove most convincing when it came to setting educational policy for both Deaf and hearing children in a number of Western countries.

The assertion of the utility of sign language and the endorsement of a Deaf-centered space was a significant reformulation of the premises of nineteenth century linguistic nationalism, which posited unitary language communities bounded in specific

⁸⁵ Harp, *Learning to be Loyal*, 5. Nationalist sentiment in education was not the provenance of the Germans alone; the French also embarked on projects to transmit their national language onto the German-speaking portions of Alsace and Lorraine. Simply put, “between the middle of the nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth, both France and Prussia attempted to limit and eventually eliminate non-national languages within their borders.” Ibid., 103.

⁸⁶ Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 26-29.

geographical areas as one of the aspects of modern nation-states. The Deaf argument worked from a number of disadvantages, not the least of which was the fact that Deaf people did not have access to the same institutional resources oralists did. Nevertheless, it has not been acknowledged that the Deaf counterargument to oralist ideology was itself also a sophisticated re-inscription of dominant social discourse, an attempt to weave a counter-narrative to the dominant assimilationist narratives of nationalism in order to carve a space for sign-language using Deaf people. Deaf Germans were not alone in offering a reformulated national identity. As will be seen further in this dissertation, Deaf Americans also advanced a vision of citizenship which explicitly made a space for signing Deaf people.

While transnational networks could be powerful conveyors of information and ideas, these ideas needed to fit the ideologies of particular national contexts. Nineteenth century German Deaf education followed larger nationalist ideology present in German society, advocating spoken German as the language of the true German, and the pure oral method as the best means of creating patriotic Germans. Sign language had long been associated with the French because the founder of the first state-supported school for Deaf children, the Abbe de l'Épée, used sign language as a means of instruction. Thus the eighteenth century debate between l'Épée and Heinicke, part of the historical image of German Deaf education as always, unchangingly oral, prevented the use of sign language in nineteenth century Germany. Historical myths, intersecting with nation-building efforts among nineteenth century German educators, stymied initial attempts by Deaf Germans to include sign language in Deaf education.

At first glance, the story of the methods debate in Germany in the 1890s seems to follow the traditional subaltern storyline of failed resistance. If looked at as an isolated incident, the story ends with both the petition and Deaf Germans' claims to citizenship through sign language rejected. But if we step outside both the conceptual framework of oppression and resistance and the historiographical framework of histories bounded within the nation, these twinned broadenings show a slightly different story. In the months following Bosse's reply, 147 Deaf and hearing people from Breslau and Altwasser, Heidesik's home area, petitioned Bosse to establish a special commission of investigation to be headed by Pastor Schönberner (he who had presided over the unveiling of the Heinecke bust) to further examine the charges of physical abuse against Deaf pupils. Bosse's conclusions, they argued, so directly contradicted their personal experiences and observations that they considered it essential to bring out the truth.⁸⁷ The political activism of petitioning the Kaiser stirred yet more activism; an assertion of citizenship spurred further determination and activism on the local and national levels. At a convention of German teachers two years later, German educators acknowledged, as reported in an American periodical, "the period of danger was not yet ended." Even as this 1894 convention passed a resolution reaffirming the use of the oral method, the inviolable aversion of the German pure oral method to signs softened, for the same resolution allowed a signed intermediary between the spoken word and the Deaf child, in the form of "mimicry and action."⁸⁸ By 1910, the director of the Deaf school in Essen,

⁸⁷ "Miscellaneous: Reply to the Petitions of German Deaf-Mutes," *Annals* 38 (1893): 84.

⁸⁸ "The Third Congress of German Instructors," *Annals* 40 (1895): 93.

in a speech at a regional conference of educators of Deaf people, looked back on the 1890s as the beginning of a new attitude towards sign language use, giving credit to Heidsiek for his activism in that era. The petitions were not mentioned in Herr Steppuhn's lengthy address.

But the petitions do reappear in another national context. The members of the British Deaf and Dumb Association would present their own petition to King Edward VII a decade later, referring to the German petition in their own assertion of the necessity of the combined method in allowing Deaf people to “fulfill the duties of life.” The 1902 British petition, signed by 2,671 people, also placed Deaf education in a transnational framework, made the same claim of physical cruelty of the oral method and the same assertion of the necessity of sign language in forming Deaf people into productive citizens.⁸⁹ As the German petition did earlier, the British petition refers to the American combined system as a model to be followed. It also referred to developments in Germany that pointed to an easing of pure oralism. And, in a final unfortunate parallel, the British petition’s request to consider the use of the combined method was rejected by the Education Department the following year.⁹⁰

The elements of co-equality are evident in both petitions: a Deaf-centered space is necessary to create knowledgeable citizens and “useful members of society.” But also of interest is the continued emphasis on the necessity of sign language in transforming deaf people into signing citizens. Deaf Britons, Germans, and Americans continued to

⁸⁹ “A Petition to the King,” *Annals* 48 (1903), 177-180.

⁹⁰ “President’s Address,” *British Deaf and Dumb Association: Proceedings of the Eighth Biennial Congress* (Surrey, 1903) 21.

promote a version of national identity that allowed a place for sign language, despite their lack of success in convincing policymakers that sign language should be used in the schools. The reason they did so was simple. They saw themselves as having no other choice. The generation of Deaf leaders who faced the rise of the pure oral method saw it as so detrimental to their well being that they simply could not conform to an ideology promoting a single, spoken language. As the German petition puts it, the inevitable failure of the pure oral method for most Deaf people meant its graduates left school “lacking not only in the most necessary branches of knowledge, but also in means of communication.”⁹¹ Pure oralism rendered its graduates unable to make themselves understood by hearing people and gave them no firm educational foundation on which to survive in modern society.⁹² This generation of Deaf leaders had no other choice but to support a method and formulate a discourse grounded, as will be seen in the next chapter, in their lived experiences.

Contestations in German Deaf education circulated in a transnational setting in the 1890s, as educators and Deaf leaders offered multiple interpretations of local events. The sparks set off by these clashes flew off into local settings, igniting multiple reactions on the local, national, and transnational levels. Heidsiek persevered thanks to transnational support. The actions of a core group of Deaf Germans working for change

⁹¹ “Miscellaneous: A Petition to the German Emperor,” *Annals* 37 (1892): 174.

⁹² This sentiment was echoed in the British petition, which objected to the oral method continued to be used on children who did not benefit from it, with “time...taken from the few years that should be devoted to developing the intellect, and strengthening the character of the pupil.” Those who were educated under the pure oral method leave school “imperfectly educated and merely able to speak and understand a little spoken language with more or less uncertainty, and in too many cases with a very partial development of his mental powers.” “A Petition to the King,”¹⁷⁹

inspired others to action; Heinicke's bust would be revisited time and again. The aims of the German petitioners of 1891 have still not been realized in present-day German schools for Deaf people, but their actions nevertheless reverberate beyond their time and place, across the boundaries of nation and the limits of memory, to shape another imagined community.

CHAPTER THREE

“THE DAILY BATTLE OF HIS LIFE”: THE
COUNTOURS OF CO-EQUALITY.

In October 1889, two months into a yearlong trip to Europe to study architecture, Olof Hanson traveled uncomfortably through the night by boat and train from Dover to Paris. The odor from the hold on the Channel steamer “forcibly recalled... the Black Hole of Calcutta,” precluding any hope of catching a nap on the bed he had booked. The stormy weather ensured Hanson and his fellow passengers on deck would be suitably wet upon their midnight arrival in Calais, but Hanson was fortunate to avoid the seasickness that led the other passengers to spend long periods being “fascinated” by “something just over the railing.” After passing through customs and enduring an uncomfortable all-night journey on a train, Hanson arrived in Paris and sought at once to hail a taxi to his hotel. “Passing several cabmen who seemed anxious to take me to my destination I went to a quiet looking, confidence inspiring one and by writing asked for his ‘numero.’” As Hanson wryly wrote in his diary, “to read appears not to have been included in his education, as he glanced from the paper to me and back again without attempting to read my writing.” Hanson then spoke the word “numero” and finally received the cabdriver’s rate card, but further problems arose when Hanson tried to elicit the exact rate to his hotel. Attracted by their attempts at conversation, other cabdrivers gathered around Hanson, including one who was able to read Hanson’s writing. But instead of writing back, this cabdriver “gesticulated and motioned for me to enter the cab. All efforts to get him to write were in vain.” Unwilling to enter a cab without an exact fare, Hanson stood

his ground. After much to and fro, “finally a policeman appeared on the scene and gave me the desired information, after which I was driven to my hotel.”¹

Hanson’s experience is that of a Deaf man interacting with larger society in a variety of ways: he was an educated Deaf man, a tourist, and a middle-class American. Hanson walked past the most eager taxi drivers and picked out one who— by visual cues alone— seemed to be most honest (“quiet looking, confidence inspiring”) and perhaps, by implication, most literate. The driver was most assuredly not literate and their resulting interactions made them a public spectacle. Hanson clearly sees himself as a Deaf person, and his interactions with the cab drivers are governed by his understanding of how to navigate larger society as a Deaf person. Hanson uses visual clues to decide which cabdriver would be best able to communicate with a Deaf person and uses different modes of communication— writing, speaking, gesturing— when necessary. The cabdrivers also interacted with Hanson from the understandings of disability and deafness conveyed to them by their cultural context. The first cabdriver had likely never been handed a paper by a potential customer before and the notion Hanson was deaf may not have immediately come to mind. Upon realizing Hanson was deaf, the second cabdriver seizes upon his ability to communicate (however crudely) in gestures as a means of gaining a customer without negotiating payment.² This tactic points to another layer of cultural understanding present in this encounter. The participants are Deaf and

¹ Hanson Diary, October 26, 1889, pp. 62-64.

² For thoughts on Deaf people and visuality in public and private spaces, see Benjamin Bahan, “Memoir on the Formation of a Visual Variety of the Human Race,” *Deaf Studies Today: A Kaleidoscope of Knowledge, Learning, and Understanding* eds. Bryan Eldredge, Doug Stringham, and Minne Mae Wilding-Diaz, Conference Proceedings: Utah State Valley College, Orem, Utah (2004), 17-35.

hearing, but Hanson was also a middle-class tourist who wanted to avoid being fleeced. The working-class cabdrivers saw a tourist and a moneymaking opportunity. Alongside this Deaf-hearing and tourist-cabdriver dynamic is a class dynamic. Hanson carries himself as a middle-class traveler relying on the intervening power of the state to restore order in public space. And indeed the policeman, the symbol of bourgeois law and order, steps in at the last moment and restores order in Hanson's favor; or rather, in favor of the middle-class tourist who happens to be deaf. Physical difference can influence the interactions which take place between deaf and hearing people, but how these interactions play out are governed by layers of cultural rules and multiple social roles these individuals inhabit in their time and place. Hanson's encounter shows how bodily difference and culture interact at the most localized level—the interactions of deaf and hearing individuals with one another. Being deaf is a form of difference embedded in the physical body, being Deaf is a manifestation of how this bodily difference is understood and shaped by the cultural communities in which humans live.³

Hanson navigated society as a Deaf person, utilizing techniques he had developed to interact with non-Deaf people, but this navigation was carried out with an expectation of retaining the privileges he sought as a middle-class white male. Interactions in the transnational Deaf public sphere also reveal Deaf male leaders understood the multiple social identities they carried with them as they shaped a discourse of co-equality. These

³ Such an understanding of physical difference is not necessarily particular to Deaf/deaf people. Paul Longmore offers a description of disability as “a socially constructed identity and role triggered by a stigmatized biological trait.” Paul K. Longmore, “The Life of Randolph Bourne and the Need for a History of Disabled People.” *Reviews in American History*, 13 (December 1985): 585.

leaders considered themselves participants in larger society but they acknowledged they participated in this society in ways that took into consideration the physical fact of deafness, as well as their status as sign-language-using Deaf people. Hanson and his counterparts in other countries actively sought to shape public images of Deaf people which corresponded to middle-class norms. They stressed forms of middle-class respectability and deportment that took into account the experience of living as a visual minority in societies otherwise organized by auditory principles.

Oralism presented a direct challenge to this aspect of co-equality. Oralists asserted their professional training could turn Deaf children into speaking citizens, fully-assimilated into larger society, whereas the use of sign language would isolate Deaf people. Deaf people contended the opposite: they said they were already participants in larger society. They feared a pure oral approach that excluded sign language from the schools would not succeed, resulting in a generation of poorly educated Deaf people unable to make their way in larger society. One aspect of the methods debate thus involved competing interpretations of how Deaf people should participate in larger society. It was debate between an ideology of co-equality and one of assimilation. Deaf people stressed their personal experiences as substantive proof of the necessity of sign language. The oralist ideology of assimilation had much more weight on its side due to a number of factors, including the professionalization of Deaf education. By the turn of the century, the debate between Deaf people and oralists pitted the personal experiences of Deaf people against the professional authority of oralists and other educators.

The Social Status of the Educated Deaf

The methods debate was one of two topics of abiding concern at international congresses of Deaf people between 1889-1904. The other was a topic often given the title “the social status of the deaf.” In papers given under this topic, Deaf leaders revealed the practical strategies and middle-class ideologies which underlay the discourse of co-equality. While social customs and cultural standards on proper conduct varied from nation to nation, at their international meetings Deaf men largely agreed on the basic contours of how to navigate larger society as Deaf people. Practical advice was shared on how Deaf people ought to handle social interactions with hearing people, stressing that these interactions bore the responsibility of conforming to larger social standards. In their interactions with hearing people, Deaf people needed to be seen as educated, intelligent, and respectable; if they lived otherwise uncontroversial lives, these lives could then be held as up models confirming Deaf people were able to participate in larger society. The practical strategies and middle-class respectability of Deaf lives were an important part of co-equality, and also underlay Deaf leaders’ arguments in the methods debate.

There was one crucial precondition to co-equality: the Deaf person had to be educated, and signing usually had to be a part of this education. As the pure oral method spread in the late nineteenth century, Deaf leaders deplored what they considered the lack of results under this method as risking a falling back to a previous era before education for Deaf people became widespread in the United States and Europe. State-supported education of Deaf people dates only back to late eighteenth century in Europe and the first permanent school for Deaf people was established in the United States only in 1817.

Considering the relative newness of the education of Deaf people during the final third of the nineteenth century, Deaf leaders were careful to maintain the importance of education as a vehicle of personal transformation. A British speaker noted the importance of Deaf people being educated and learning “proper knowledge of the tone and manners of good society” in order to gain equality with their hearing acquaintances.⁴ At the 1904 St. Louis Congress, Thomas Fox of the U.S likewise considered “education is the foundation of social elevation.”⁵ The debate over social status at the 1889 Paris Congress concluded “deafness, though a great bar to the mingling of those who are deaf with those who can hear, is not an insurmountable one and may be overcome by proper education and training.”⁶ If some Deaf people had an inferior status vis-à-vis their social peers, the reason lay not in themselves but in their education. The Deaf German leader Walzutik complained that it was the “defective and incomplete education” some Deaf Germans received which caused them to “shun society.”⁷ Deaf Briton Charles Gorham lamented, “our institutions are so very backward and conservative in character that...it will be generations before we can ever hope to see the deaf of our working class on a

⁴ Charles Gorham, “The Social Status of the Deaf in Great Britain and Ireland,” *Proceedings of the World’s Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, 1893* (Chicago, 1893), 93

⁵ Thomas Fox, “The Social Status of the Deaf in the United States,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Seventh Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, 1904.* (St. Louis, 1904), 134.

⁶ S.G. Davidson, “International Congress,” *Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf, 1888-1889* (Mt. Airy, PA.: Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf, 1889), 53.

⁷ A.M. Watzlik, “The Social Status of the Deaf In Germany,” *Proceedings of the World’s Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, 1893* (Chicago, 1893), 105.

better social footing.”⁸ A proper education, preferably in sign language, could shape intelligent Deaf people who could then make their way in society.

Arguments which drew from the personal observations or experiences of Deaf people often stressed the experiences or opinions being cited were those of “the intelligent deaf” or the “educated deaf.” These terms were used as a counterpoint to another term widely used during the period: “uneducated.” The trope of the uneducated deaf person was a standard image in the early days of Deaf education (paralleling the rise of the new science of anthropology in early nineteenth century France) and was constantly evoked during the nineteenth century to promote public support for Deaf education. The French Society for the Observers of Man concluded uneducated Deaf people were little better than animals or savages since they had no language with which to express themselves.⁹ This concept stuck and indeed the idea of uneducated deaf mutes out of the reach of humanity and the word of God would serve as an impetus for the establishment of schools in the United States and Europe. Nineteenth century Deaf Americans presented the uneducated Deaf person in a state of perpetual childhood, and education as a means of shaping Deaf people able to fully participate in life.¹⁰

As education became more widespread, and oralism gained ascendancy, the term “uneducated” was brought up by Deaf leaders as a bogeyman waiting in the wings of a failed oralist education. At his opening address to the 1893 World’s Congress of the

⁸ Gorham, “The Social Status of the Deaf in Great Britain and Ireland,” 98.

⁹ See Harlan Lane *When the Mind Hears*, 77; Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 48-50.

¹⁰ Douglas Tilden, “Deaf-Mutes and Their Education,” *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 5:29 (May, 1885): 504.

Deaf, Deaf American George Dougherty tied the uneducated status of Deaf people in the past with contemporary attempts by oralists to make the oral method dominant. Oralism was a danger because it could move Deaf people back to the days of the uneducated deaf person. Dougherty declared, “We all know France has not produced any more Massieus, Clercs or Berthiers since the ill-fated day when her minister of public instruction unadvisedly issued a ukase sweeping the manual system out of existence and inducting the pure oral method in all of her schools.” Massieu, Clerc, and Berthier were widely-esteemed nineteenth century Deaf Frenchmen who were both educators and members of the Deaf community. Pressing on, Dougherty noted, “a new generation, raised by the oral method since, has utterly failed to show up equally signal examples.”¹¹ The oral method, presented by its proponents as a means of bringing Deaf people into modern life, was rejected as contributing to the degeneration of Deaf people’s intellectual prowess and a return to a pre-educated state of existence. Dougherty’s purpose was to situate the Deaf people before him, mostly American and mostly “reared by the manual or combined system of instruction,” as intelligent successful participants in the world around them, thanks to the education they received in signs.¹²

¹¹ That Dougherty could give the names of all three men and assume his audience would know who they were and what they accomplished indicates the existence of a transnational historical consciousness among Deaf people in attendance. A similarly constructed reference at an international convention of Deaf people today could not be made with this assumption. George Dougherty, “Opening Address,” *Proceedings of the World’s Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, 1893* (Chicago, 1893), 17-18.

¹² Ibid., 17.

Deaf leaders rejected oralists' claims that sign language shut Deaf people away from society, giving anecdotes of sign-language-using Deaf people who interacted with hearing people on an equal social footing. They emphasized that signing did not preclude one from interacting with hearing people. One American delegate to the 1889 Congress proudly commented on the ability of his fellow delegates to interact with hearing passengers on their transatlantic voyage to Europe. "The sign-taught mingled freely with the hearing passengers. One of them, who cannot speak, made more new acquaintances probably than any other person, deaf or hearing."¹³ Other Deaf Americans "were offered and received the hospitality of one of the most aristocratic houses in one of the most aristocratic quarters of London."¹⁴ Proving the ability of Deaf people to make their way in larger society as signing, (and occasionally) non-speaking Deaf people was an important part of co-equality, and a useful response to the oralists claims that only speaking could secure assimilation. Most American Deaf leaders respected successful deaf people who chose not to sign, but emphasized that signing offered the best opportunity for all Deaf people to understand and participate in daily life.

Since interaction with larger society was accepted as beneficial, the question of the social status of Deaf people then became a practical one. How could Deaf people—signing, non-hearing, perhaps non-speaking people—best interact with hearing people? In many cases Deaf leaders counseled adoption of larger social norms while allowing for amendments to these norms to take into consideration the circumstances of living as a

¹³ Amos Draper, "Notes on the Meeting of the Deaf In Paris," *Annals* 35 (1890), 30.

¹⁴ Ibid., 30-31.

deaf person. Talks often included tips on how to live as people different from the majority as well as frank acknowledgement that this difference was sometimes a hindrance to Deaf people's participation in their local social circles. Presenters at the 1893 Congress answered the question, "how are the deaf received in society?" by focusing largely on practical techniques intended to ease one-to-one interaction with hearing people. Presenters from different nations emphasized the ability of Deaf people to communicate with hearing people in writing, with the manual alphabet, by arranging interpreters, and by speaking. Personal initiative was also an important part of the strategy counseled by these Deaf leaders. "When the deaf recognize their deprivation and make provision accordingly," an American speaker at the 1893 Congress said, "there is no reason why...they should not mingle in most forms of society, and partake in nearly all the advantages society exists to confer."¹⁵ If Deaf people were "courteous and affable," another speaker at the 1904 Congress suggested, "society...will not permit the lack of hearing to influence it unfavorably."¹⁶ A British paper presented at the 1893 Congress asserted "much depends...on the conduct and behavior of the deaf mutes themselves," and encouraged Deaf people to take charge of social interaction during visits, so as to alleviate "nervous" hosts filled with "misgivings" about Deaf people. If some hearing people shun Deaf people or discriminate against them, the British speaker

¹⁵ Fort Lewis Seliney, "The Social Status of the Deaf In America," *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (Chicago, 1893), 91.

¹⁶ Fox, "The Social Status of the Deaf in the United States," 134.

continued, the best remedy is to avoid such people altogether.¹⁷ The Deaf men who gave papers on the social status of the deaf at international congresses were matter of fact about their physical difference and its implications for everyday life. When facing a moving mouth at a social party, practical strategies become of paramount importance. These men accepted the inevitability of navigating the world differently because of a lack of hearing, but also the possibility of doing so in a fairly straightforward way.¹⁸

Sign language and Respectability

Social manners and customs designed for hearing people could be re-interpreted to fit Deaf people's status as sign-language-using people. A lighthearted debate between Americans and British over the advantages of their respective manual alphabets eventually became oriented around the themes of education and proper standards for signing and conduct in public space, demonstrating how Deaf people incorporated signing into their understanding of middle-class respectability.¹⁹ In their public remarks

¹⁷ Gorham, "The Social Status of the Deaf in Great Britain and Ireland," 94-95.

¹⁸ Rebecca Ann Edwards describes nineteenth century Deaf people's adoption of technology to "solve the problems that deafness occasionally posed in daily life..." R. A. R. Edwards, "Sound and Fury; or, Much Ado about Nothing? Cochlear Implants in Historical Perspective," *The Journal of American History* 92:3 (December 2005) <<http://www.historycooperative.org.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/journals/jah/92.3/edwards.html>> (December 19, 2005), par 22.

¹⁹ Users of American Sign Language (and other signed languages) occasionally loan words from other signed and spoken languages. One means by which signed languages loan words from spoken language is through a manual alphabet—the spelling out individual words. In the ASL manual alphabet, 26 ASL signs represent the 26 letters of the American English alphabet, which are then utilized to represent a particular English word. Words frequently spelled undergo a process of incorporation, whereby the word does not need to be spelled out letter by letter. For more on the ASL manual alphabet, see Unit 4, "Lexicalized Fingerspelling and Loan

at the reception given to them at St. Saviour's Church, the American delegates used American Sign Language (ASL) and the British their own British Sign Language (BSL). ASL, derived from French Sign Language (LSF) and a combination of regional American signed languages, used a one-handed manual alphabet in a restricted manner: to spell proper names or loan words from English. By contrast, the British Deaf community was one of the very few Deaf communities in the world to use a two-handed alphabet. The British speakers at this Oxford Street headquarters of the Royal Society in Aid of the Deaf used this manual alphabet as their primary mode of public address that July evening in 1889. Many Americans apparently had some knowledge of the two-handed British alphabet.²⁰ Nonetheless, two hearing men, Reverend Thomas Gallaudet of New York and the Reverend William Stainer of London, were appointed ad-hoc interpreters for the gathering. Should a speaker sign in ASL, Rev. Gallaudet would translate his signs to spoken English and Rev. Stainer would then translate this spoken English into "the double-handed alphabet with incredible rapidity...accompanied by emphatic nods of the head and facial expressions."²¹

Signs," in Clayton Valli and Ceil Lucas, *Linguistics of American Sign Language: A Resource Text for ASL Users* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2002), 185-191.

²⁰ A *Times* excerpt from the American periodical *Silent World* reads, "There are few educated deaf Americans who cannot use both the alphabets..." "Our Notes: The English and American Signing Compared," *Deaf and Dumb Times* (August 1890): 27. While Roman Catholic British Deaf people used the one-handed alphabet, the *Times* reported, "since our visit to Paris we have practised the one-handed alphabet more, for the sake of future congresses, but find it somewhat slower than the other. Mr. F. Maginn, who was two years in America is also of this opinion." "Our Notes: British and American Signing Compared," *Deaf and Dumb Times* (June 1890): 2.

²¹ Draper, "Notes on the Meeting of the Deaf at Paris," 31.

The meeting opened on a lighthearted note, with the honorary chairman of the Association, Arthur H. Bather, making a humorous comparison of the ASL and BSL manual alphabets and suggesting the former just might work best for the gentleman gone a-courtin.²² The Rev. Gallaudet took Bather's lighthearted comment on the differences between the two countries' manual alphabets and used it to address a central issue in the field of Deaf education. The single-handed manual alphabet, Rev. Gallaudet assured his audience of two-handed manual alphabet users, was far better for teaching English to Deaf people than the two-handed one.²³ Perhaps sensing a faux pas, Deaf American Amos Draper broached the topic in a light-hearted manner, saying the one-handed alphabet was by far more useful when he faced an unruly son: "I catch him and hold him with one hand while preaching a reformation with the other; but if your boy misbehaves, when you have caught him you must let go and preach with both hands- and where, then, will your boy be?"²⁴ The tussle over manual alphabets continued in periodicals and reports on both sides of the Atlantic. Bather's lighthearted comparison of the two countries different manual alphabets and follow-up comments by other British Deaf people had been interpreted by some Americans as a rejection of the two-handed manual alphabet and an affirmation of the one-handed American manual alphabet's practical value in education. A member of the American delegation wrote in a report to his employers, the Board of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf, that the St. Saviour's

²² Amos Draper, "Report to the President," *Annual Report of the Columbia Institution for Deaf Mutes*, 1889 (Washington, D.C., 1889), 34.

²³ "London Chit-Chat," *The Deaf-Mute* (August 1889): 93.

²⁴ Draper, "Report to the President," 34.

church meeting was “shown to have been beneficial by reports...of a movement for the substitution in the schools of the American single-handed alphabet, for the two-handed English alphabet.”²⁵ Nothing of the sort ever occurred. An exasperated editorial note in the *Times* complained “we could not help noticing how foolish some of the English speakers were to eulogize too much the one-handed alphabet, (no doubt out of a desire to please their distinguished visitors).”²⁶ One of those foolish visitors was the editor of the *Times* himself, who, at the meeting, suggested Roman Catholic Deaf mutes “were much superior in their education to those of the Protestant class” with the implication this had to do with the manual alphabet used.²⁷ While both national groups of Deaf people agreed that a sign language was the optimal means for Deaf people to learn English, they split in defense of their respective sign languages.

A discussion over the relative merits of each manual alphabet quickly segued into a discussion of proper behavior for signing in public space. The Deaf American periodical *Silent World* suggested the two-handed alphabet brought Deaf Britons into involuntary public notice “when they are promenading down the crowded Strand working their elbows, shoulders and heads with the involuntary motions that seem to be a

²⁵ Davidson, “International Congress,” 56.

²⁶ “Our Notes: British and American Signing Compared,” *The Deaf and Dumb Times* (June 1890): 2.

²⁷ Roman Catholic schools for Deaf people used the single-handed manual alphabet. “News and Meetings: London,” *The Deaf and Dumb Times* (August 1889): 23.

necessary accompaniment of the two-hand alphabet.”²⁸ In response the *Times* “remind[ed] our American friends that they have not had the opportunity of seeing deaf persons of the more respectable class converse together in public streets...in a very quiet and becoming way,” exchanging tit for tat with the acerbic remark, “when some of our British delegates were in Paris last year, they remarked that several of those who used the one-handed alphabet were extremely vulgar, giving the stranger an idea they were trying to write in the air or poke at unseen or imaginary objects.”²⁹ A debate which first started off with lighthearted comments on living as Deaf men (the delegates seeing going “a’ courting” and disciplining one’s sons as predominantly masculine functions) thus became refocused around issues of mutual concern in the transnational Deaf sphere—Deaf education, perceptions of middle-class Deaf people by larger society and Deaf people’s ability to live as signing Deaf individuals in their national societies.

²⁸ “Our Notes: The English and American Signing Compared,” *The Deaf and Dumb Times* (August 1890): 27.

²⁹ Ibid.

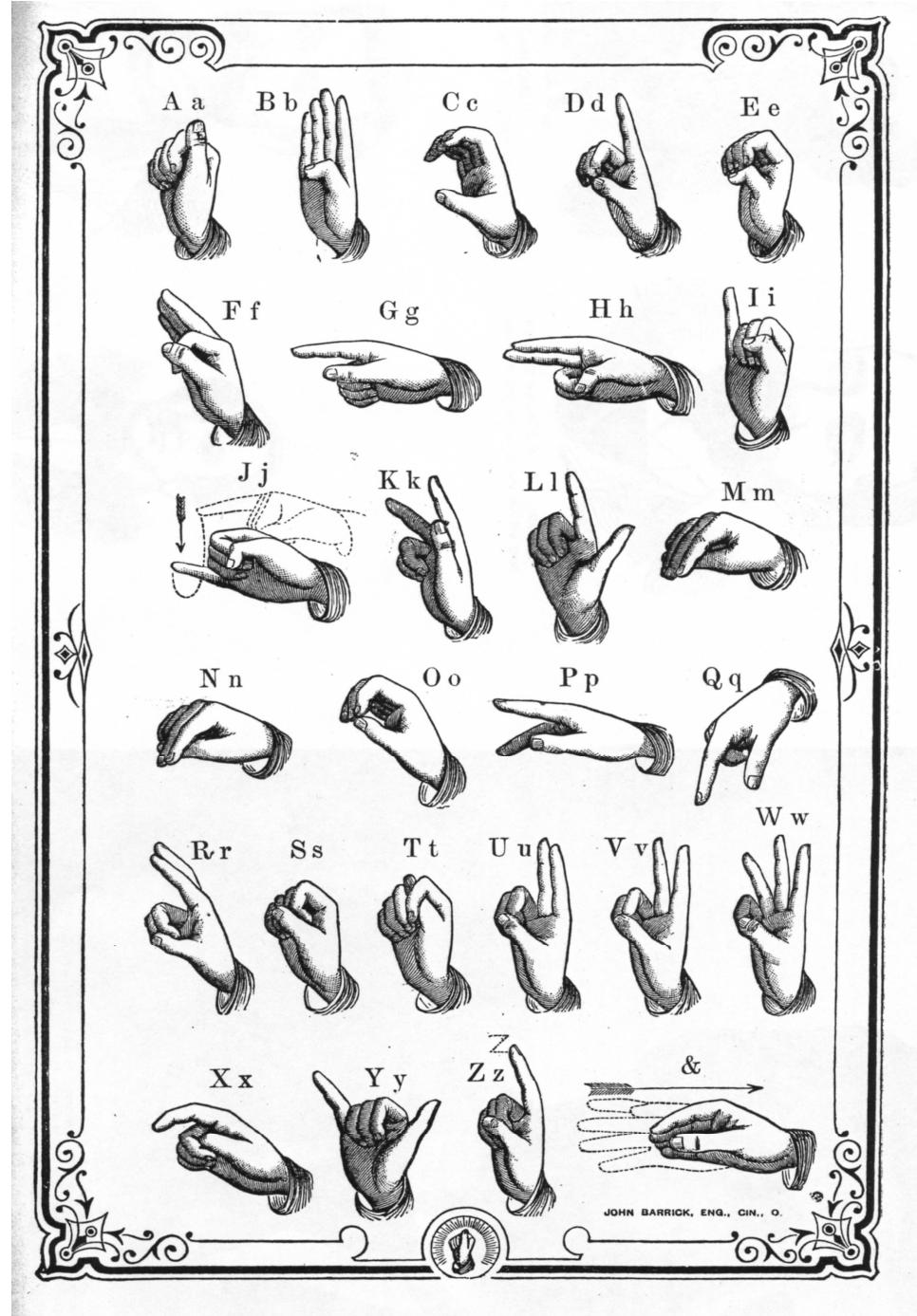


Figure 2. The American one-handed manual alphabet.

Source: *Journal and History of the Deaf-Mutes of America, Containing Sketches and Portraits of Some of the Leading and Well-Known Deaf Mutes, under the auspices of Pas-a-Pas Club.* (No place or publisher listed, likely 1891), no page number. Gallaudet University Archives.

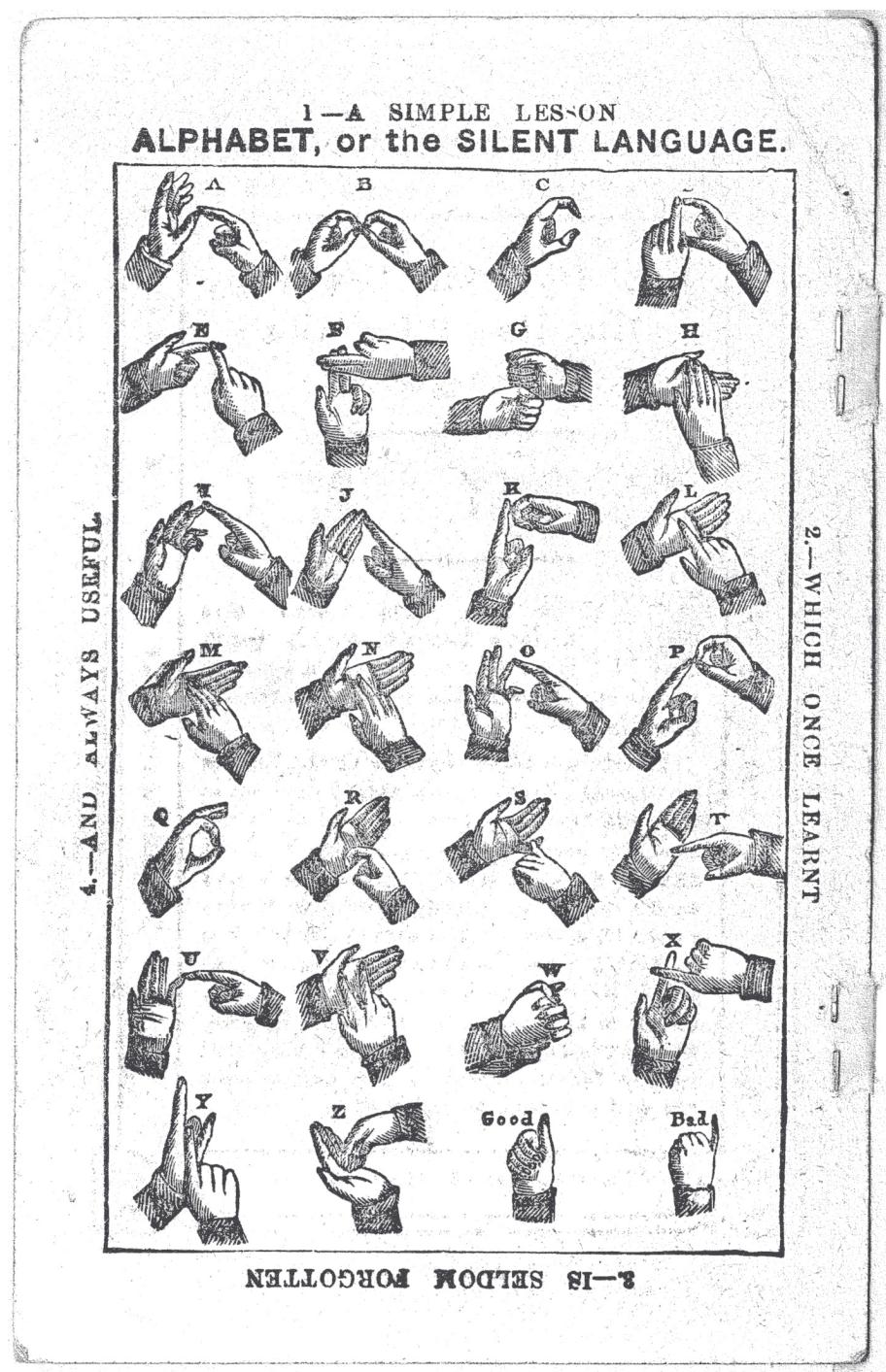


Figure 3. The British two-handed alphabet.

Source: Library of the Royal National Institute of the Deaf.

For the middle-class Britons and Americans who attended international meetings, the social interaction of Deaf people— and the use of sign language—in public space was governed by the same norms as those which governed hearing people. Middle and upper class Deaf leaders in Britain and America deplored the “fellow feeling” that working class Deaf people exhibited to them in public. These middle-class leaders did not claim a homogeneous Deaf community; they insisted upon the maintenance of class norms between Deaf people as an element of social respectability. Deaf American Thomas Fox noted, “We must not expect...to break down all social barriers, just because we happen to be deaf.”³⁰ A paper written by Briton Charles Gorham for the 1893 Congress notes it was with much “disgust” that upper-class Deaf people endured their Deaf social inferiors approaching them on public streets to “slap you on the back or arm, and greet you with the words or in the rough sign language...‘Are you deaf?’ ‘I am.’ ‘What school were you at?’” The “only possible remedy” for this “insolence to people who are above them socially,” Gorham wrote, was to ensure all Deaf children were “carefully trained at their school to cultivate good manners” and “above all show their respect to their social superiors.”³¹ Gorham’s comments show the importance some Deaf people accorded to maintaining social and class customs prevalent in society at large. Of course, read from a working class perspective, one could reach the opposite conclusion: working class Deaf people saw the fact of being Deaf as being something which should transcend class differences.

³⁰ Fox, “The Social Status of the Deaf in the United States,” 136.

³¹ Gorham, “The Social Status of the Deaf in Great Britain and Ireland,” 96.

The particular example above reflected the class norms of late imperial Britain, but standards for signing in public were also found among American Deaf leaders. S.G. Davidson made this clear in his editorials in the Philadelphia periodical *Silent World*. Davidson deplored the habit of some Deaf people of signing too vividly on the city streets, attracting public attention. “Save us,” he wrote in an 1889 editorial, “from the deaf person who, meeting another on the streets, straightaway begins to wave his arms, stamp his feet, clap his hands and deport himself generally as if a cyclone had broken loose inside him and was vainly seeking a way of escape.” Davidson made clear he was not against signing “quietly and gracefully” in public, but against “violent gesticulation” which was as “vulgar and reprehensible” as was speaking loudly in public. Davidson had little patience with those who were “shame-faced” when signed to in public, seeing “no more reason for the deaf to be ashamed of and abstaining from the use of their language in public than there is for the Frenchman, the German, or the Chinaman feeling of doing so.”³² What was important was a proper deportment.

The interpretation of proper social standards (and their breach) varied according to national contexts, but British and American Deaf leaders shared a concern with adhering to whatever these standards were. While the British Gorham considered improper signing to be a class characteristic, Davidson considered this behavior more common to Deaf men, claiming it took place among “some of the best educated and most intelligent deaf men we know” whereas Deaf women, “even among those of limited

³² *Silent World* 3:38 (October 24, 1889): 2. “We have no sympathy with the shame-facedness of those who blush and fidget and glance over their shoulders to see if any one is observing them when a deaf person speaks to them in signs.” *Silent World* 2:16 (May 24, 1888), 2.

education,” could generally be counted upon to behave properly.³³ A Briton and an American could agree on roughly similar social norms for signing in public, but interpreted breaches from these norms according to their own cultural frameworks. What Gorham and Davidson shared was not only the use of sign language, but also a cultural context where the use of sign language symbolized difference. To use sign language in an ungraceful manner on the city streets risked having the public stigma of deviance and disability applied to Deaf people.³⁴ Davidson stated the ideal held by middle-class Deaf American men: quiet and graceful, not only in signs but in deportment and organization.³⁵ Amos Draper came away from the 1889 Paris Congress impressed by the character of a “quiet, gentlemanly” French Deaf person and the “orderly, proper, and complete” ceremony honoring the Abbe de'l'Épée at Versailles.³⁶ The virtues of orderliness and good reputation extended to organizations of Deaf people as well. A publication issued on the Silver Jubilee of the Chicago Pas-a-Pas Club, hosts of the 1893 World’s Congress of the Deaf, noted, in a section titled, “The Club’s Good Reputation,”

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Rosemarie Garland Thompson makes this point marvelously in the following excerpt: “Staring is the social relationship that constitutes disability identity and gives meaning to impairment by marking it as aberrant. Even if a disability is not apparent, the threat of its erupting in some visual form is perpetually present. Disability is always ready to disclose itself, to emerge as some visually recognizable stigmata, however subtle, that will disrupt social order by its presence.” Rosemarie Garland Thompson, “Seeing the Disabled: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography,” Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky, eds. *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*. (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 347.

³⁵ Van Cleve and Crouch, *A Place of Their Own*, 100-101.

³⁶ As for the organization of the rest of the Congress, Draper spared little in his criticism. “Quiet, gentlemanly” in Draper “Notes on the Meeting of the Deaf at Paris,” 32. On the ceremony at Versailles, see Draper, “Report to the President,” 38.

the virtues of being “run in a manner that places it above criticism and thereby command the respect and good will of the better element of the deaf and of the hearing public.”³⁷

Maintaining appearances was a baseline in the promotion of Deaf people as spokespersons, and Deaf lives as models, in debates influencing Deaf people, such as the methods debate.

The Methods Debate: Theory Versus Experience

Deaf people asserted that their lived experiences qualified them to comment on the subject of methods in schools for Deaf people. Throughout the debate, Deaf leaders claimed a privileged position—grounded in their personal experiences—from which to comment on the methods debate. They claimed a position of authority that drew from their experiences as former pupils and from their portrayal of themselves as successful members of larger society. American Deaf men, even those who were not teachers, undertook personal investigations on the efficacy of the oral versus combined or manual methods when traveling abroad. Deaf Americans referred to their intimate knowledge of what it meant to live as a Deaf person and set this knowledge against what they claimed were the “unproven theories” of oralists. However, by the turn of the century, particularly among oralist educators, Deaf people were seen as having little to say on what was increasingly becoming a professional field of endeavor aligned with the field of general education.

³⁷ James E. Gallaher, *1883-1907 Silver Jubilee of the Pas-a-Pas Club of Chicago held June 29, 1907 with information about that well known organization.* (Undated, likely 1907), 5.

Deaf Americans visiting Europe often embarked on their own investigations, visiting schools, interviewing educators, and quizzing European Deaf people on their views in the methods debate. Olof Hanson was typical of these travelers in that he actively sought to visit schools for deaf people during his year in Europe. In the two months he was in Great Britain, he visited schools for Deaf people in Liverpool, Edinburgh, Doncaster, and several in London.³⁸ Douglas Tilden used his own experience in learning French as support for transferring a European method of teaching language to Deaf children to America. This was a “natural method” that exposed Deaf children to written and spoken language in everyday settings. Tilden drew upon his own experience in learning French by being constantly surrounded with written French.³⁹ Hanson and other Deaf travelers publicized the opinions of Deaf people in the countries they visited. Hanson wrote, “I frequently interrogated the intelligent deaf whom I met...as to their opinion of the oral method” while traveling around Europe.⁴⁰ Deaf Americans visited European schools to evaluate teaching methods.⁴¹ These travelers’

³⁸ Hanson Diary, Entries from September 8, 1889 to October 16, 1889, pp. 8-9, 22-23, 33-34, 45-49.

³⁹ “Notes of an Idle Morning,” *Silent World* 3:40 (November 7, 1889): 3.

⁴⁰ Olof Hanson, “Observations Abroad,” *Annals* 35 (1890): 267. Hanson’s conversations with European Deaf people were not limited to the methods debate; he discussed signs, intermarriage and other topics as well. See photocopies of articles from the Minnesota School for the Deaf periodical, *Companion*, in Olof Hanson, Papers Box 3, Envelope 10. An article dated May 7, 1890 mentions Hanson’s conversations with Italian Deaf people on “articulation and lip-reading, intermarriage of the deaf, signs, etc.”

⁴¹ The observation of S.G. Davidson of the Pennsylvania Institution is typical of the observations of Deaf American visitors in this period: “I visited the Paris Institution for the Deaf was struck with the apparent poverty of results obtained under the Pure Oral Method of Instruction, as there practiced, in comparison with what has been accomplished in our own Oral Department.” Davidson, “International Congress,” 55-56. Upon the request of the editor, Olof

personal observations of teaching methods in European schools, including judgments on oral instruction seen first-hand, were attempts to claim a space for Deaf people in the ongoing methods debate.

However, the terrain was shifting. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the field of education increasingly adopted the status of a profession, with certification, training, and heightened social status.⁴² The field of Deaf education followed the general trend. Educators of Deaf people started to align themselves more with international scientific professions and developed ties with the field of general education, a shift that took place outside the United States as well. In the manualist era, hearing people who aspired to be teachers served an apprenticeship in the classroom, but increasingly, summer institutes for oral teachers were established, and a year's training in pedagogy at a normal school, a teacher-training program, was not uncommon.⁴³ Gallaudet College established a Normal School in 1891, but Deaf people were not admitted to the school, part of a compromise reached after Alexander Graham Bell expressed his concerns about the school being used to train Deaf teachers.⁴⁴ Women also entered the field in ever-increasing numbers, becoming 66% of teachers at American schools for the deaf in 1900, their admittance spurred on by the need for cheap labor to

Hanson shared his observations on Deaf education with the readers of the *Silent World*. “European Letter,” *Silent World* 3:44 (December 5, 1889): 3. See also Amos Draper’s observations of a visit to a Brussels school for Deaf girls. “Report to the President,” 40-42.

⁴² Chapter four of Bruce A Kimball, *The “True Professional Ideal” In America*. (Cambridge, MA., 1992) explores the professionalization of education. See pages 239-251 for a discussion of certification.

⁴³ Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 94-96.

⁴⁴ For an account of the establishment of the Normal School, and Bell’s opposition to it, see Winefield, *Never Shall the Twain Meet*, 40-61.

head classrooms run on the oral method, which required smaller classes and more demanding, repetitive work in articulation training. Their emergence paralleled the decline of Deaf teachers, which fell from a high of 41% in 1870 to 26% in 1900 and continued to decline thereafter.⁴⁵ The decrease in the number of Deaf teachers (who were usually male) came about as a direct result of the shift to an oral method of education.

Some Deaf leaders attempted to straddle professionalism and personal experience. George Veditz, a prominent Deaf American leader, presented a paper at the 1893 Chicago World's Congress of Instructors of the Deaf in which he acknowledged the importance of formal training but added that the life experiences of Deaf teachers was also an important part of their abilities as teachers. Veditz noted with approval the increasing numbers of Deaf teachers who were graduates of the National Deaf-Mute College. In addition, however, Deaf teachers were “to the manner born, and come ready equipped with an intimate knowledge of the deaf, and a mastery of that language of signs...which the hearing novice only attains after long years of study...and frequently never masters at all.” Hearing “novices” were contrasted with the Deaf teacher who entered the classroom linguistically prepared to teach. Competence was seen by Veditz as self-evidently based on the experience of being Deaf and expertise in a signed language, characteristics no hearing teacher could entirely emulate.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 60-61, 70-71.

⁴⁶ George Veditz, “Deaf-Mutes as Teachers,” *Proceedings of the World’s Congress of Instructors of the Deaf and of the Thirteenth Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf*, 1893 (Washington, D.C. 1893), 81-83. Veditz’s paper was a response to a paper by J.R. Dobyns,

This positioning of personal experience against professional authority turned former students into active commentators on Deaf education. Deaf leaders claimed a privileged position as former pupils and as living models of what could be achieved by an education in signs. A resolution of the 1904 Convention of the U.S. National Association of the Deaf asserted “the educated deaf, even though they may not be in the profession, fell that it is their privilege to discuss and pass upon questions of educational methods, inasmuch as they are the results of these methods, and that their opinions therefore should have the weight of authority.”⁴⁷ This sentiment was echoed time and again in different settings. Deaf American Edwin A. Hodgson confidently remarked at the 1893 Chicago Congress that while Deaf people’s “capability to form an opinion on the merits of educational methods had been openly denied” by some educators “the papers read at this congress were destined to be read the world over.”⁴⁸ It would be “the opinions of the deaf” presented before “the wisdom of an unprejudiced public” which would win the day in the method debate.⁴⁹ Deaf people used their experiences as pupils to present themselves as experts on what was best for the next generation of Deaf children.

But as oralist thought increasingly dominated the field, Deaf people were increasingly marginalized from professional discourse in the field, including the methods debate. Educators of Deaf people started to align themselves more with educators of

superintendent of the Mississippi School for the Deaf, listing the demerits of having Deaf teachers.

⁴⁷ *Proceedings of the Ninth Convention of the National Association and the Third World's Congress of the Deaf, 1910* (Colorado Springs, 1910), 28.

⁴⁸ *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (Chicago, 1893), 172.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

hearing children in their own country. In an 1897 speech to the National Educational Association, noted oralist Alexander Graham Bell linked the oralist project of assimilating Deaf people into larger society with a corresponding assimilation of teachers of Deaf people within the larger teaching profession. With the use of sign language, “the deaf have become an isolated class, and the separation of our work from your work has led to the teachers of the deaf becoming an isolated band...there have been very few points of contact between teachers of the deaf and the hearing.”⁵⁰ An education along oral lines would change this. Bell’s plan to place Deaf children in public schools demanded closer interaction between educators of Deaf people and the hearing educators they would presumably be working alongside with in the public schools. This shift was commented on in a British journal, the *Quarterly Review of Deaf Mute Education*. The *Review* suggested the meeting of educators of Deaf people and of hearing people in America would initiate a movement “which cannot fail in time to exercise far greater pedagogical influence upon methods of instructing the deaf in America” than current heads of the profession so supposed. This coming realignment of discourse in the field of Deaf education was attributed by the *Review* to an increasing interest in “child-study, psychological research, and the science of pedagogics...among the more enlightened educators of the present age.”⁵¹ The mantle of professional authority gave educators a stronger position to make their case to policymakers and parents of Deaf children.

⁵⁰ “The National Educational Association of America, and the Teachers of the Deaf,” *Quarterly Review of Deaf-Mute Education* 4 (October 1897): 358.

⁵¹ Ibid.,353.

Deaf people positioned their personal experiences as practical knowledge and set this knowledge against what they often referred to as the mere “theories” of oralists. Amos Draper’s comparison, at the 1900 Paris Congress, between the claims of pure oralists and the hard-nosed realism of businessmen is revealing of the pragmatic, experience-based mindset Deaf people wanted to present in the methods debate. Unlike earlier meetings in the transnational Deaf public sphere, the 1900 Paris Congress was a Congress on the Education of the Deaf and involved a large number of hearing educators. The French otologist in charge of the Congress divided the Congress into separate Deaf and hearing sections out of fear, supporters of the combined method claimed, that the approximately 219 Deaf members would outvote the 180 hearing members.⁵² As expected, the Deaf section at reaffirmed the combined method, the hearing section the pure oral one. “Suppose a keen, practical man of business at Paris” should attend both sections, Draper asked. Hearing of the “wondrous things” oralism can do, “he looks about him for proof and naturally expects to see some of these wonderful deaf men pointed out to him.” None of these men are to be found in attendance at the Hearing section despite the fact that oralism has been in operation for anywhere from twenty years to a century in different countries. The businessman then enters the Deaf section and finds “with practically one voice” all condemn pure oralism. When he asks why, he is given a litany of reasons and told, “Of all this, *we* are the proof.” The businessman is told to test the claims of oralists upon all Deaf people. Draper continues, “Now this man,

⁵² Edward Miner Gallaudet disputed the attendance figures, claiming he saw “no more than 100” in the Hearing Section and “at least 200 present, and sometimes more” in the Deaf Section. Edward Miner Gallaudet, “The Paris Congress,” *Association Review 2* (1900): 478.

again, is a practical man. He looks for crops, not seeds; for products, not raw materials; for facts, not theories; for fulfillments, not promises...Will he not rather think that the ideas of the Hearing Section are on trial in the *personnel* and experiences in the life of the Deaf Section, and should stand or fall accordingly?⁵³ Deaf people portrayed themselves as pragmatic realists grounded in personal experience, while oralists were flighty theorists grasping at illusions.⁵⁴ The Deaf person who opposed pure oralism “speaks from no theory, but from the irresistible results of the daily battle of his life and of the lives of his deaf brethren and sisters around him.” The gendered overtones of Draper’s dichotomy between pragmatists and theorists are hard to miss. Oral teachers in America were largely women, and portraying oralism as an unproven theory attached an effeminate image to the efforts of the hearing men who still largely headed oralist schools, associations, and publications. The image of a hard-nosed businessman looking for results (crops, products, and facts), not theories, aligned the personal experiences of Deaf people with a rugged masculine individualism, oriented towards results in a Darwinistic struggle that was the “battle of life.” Draper’s elegant analogy was an articulation of personal experience that drew upon larger social discourses to support the Deaf point of view in the methods debate.

⁵³ Amos Draper, “The Deaf Section of the Paris Congress of 1900,” *Annals* 46 (1901): 220-221.

⁵⁴ The persistence of this image in Deaf discourse into the twentieth century can be seen in Albert Ballin’s 1931 book *The Deaf Mute Howls*. Ballin, born in 1861, entered his adulthood in the period studied here. Ballin portrays an oralist educator embarking on a wordy, jargon-filled “pompous harangue” against a policeman using signs. Albert Ballin, *The Deaf Mute Howls* (New York, 1931; reprint, Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1998), 85-86.

But arguments such as Draper's were largely unsuccessful in convincing oralist educators. Oralists countered the Deaf argument by asserted the opinions of Deaf people on current pedagogical methods meant little, since they themselves had not personally experienced the oral method and thus could not claim any knowledge of its benefits.

Alexander Graham Bell stated this point concisely after the 1900 Paris Congress:

It goes without saying that those who are themselves unable to speak are not proper judges of the value of speech to the deaf; and that those deaf persons who cannot read the lips cannot properly estimate the importance of speech reading. *In all matters within their knowledge and experience they would of course be competent to form an opinion.* But only those among the deaf who are able to speak readily and make themselves easily understood can properly estimate the importance of speech-reading as a substitute for the ear.⁵⁵

Bell ceded the personal experiences of Deaf people were valid ("all matters within their knowledge and experience") but not that these experiences rendered them fit to judge pure oralism. Deaf leaders and combinist educators countered Bell's arguments by pointing out the number of orally-taught Deaf people at their Congresses. The leading combinist educator, Edward Miner Gallaudet, noted his personal acquaintance with the fifteen "prominent" members of the Deaf section and that thirteen of them "can speak and read from the lips, and were educated in oral schools."⁵⁶ At the 1900 Paris Congress, Deaf people said they did have the personal experience necessary to refute the claims of pure oralists. But these arguments meant little to Bell. Deaf people "able to speak readily and make themselves easily understood," Bell contended, would never be found at an international meeting of deaf people, but be "lost to the deaf communities, and

⁵⁵ Italics added. Bell, "The International Congress," *Association Review* 2 (1900): 433.

⁵⁶ Edward Miner Gallaudet, "The Paris Congress," 479.

restored to the society of those who hear.”⁵⁷ This perspective meant Deaf people who asserted a discourse of co-equality (as opposed to assimilation) were thus incapable of offering personal experiences as a substantive commentary on the oral method.

Bell’s comments revealed a weakness in the reliance on personal experience that could not be resolved: the strategy largely reduced the knowledge of Deaf people to experiential knowledge. When this knowledge was put against the authoritative figure of the scientific professional educator in the methods debate, it proved to be unconvincing to many policymakers and parents of Deaf children.⁵⁸ The Deaf reliance on personal experience could be countered simply by refusing to accept Deaf people as models for Deaf children. Oralists presented their method as “new” and “progressive,” giving Deaf children a chance previous generations lacked and thus could not comment upon. Even if some Deaf leaders had grown up under oral instruction, oralists claimed the method had improved since then, or some Deaf pupils had not worked hard enough to master speech, or had not received enough support from family members, to benefit from their education.⁵⁹

Beginning in the final years of the nineteenth century, the space afforded for Deaf people to articulate a public discourse based on the idea of co-equality grew

⁵⁷ Bell, “The International Congress,” 433.

⁵⁸ See, for example, the battle over the Nebraska school for the deaf in John Vickrey Van Cleve, “Nebraska’s Oral Law of 1911 and the Deaf Community” *Nebraska History* 65 (Summer, 1984): 195-220; Van Cleve and Crouch, *A Place of Their Own*, 135-138.

⁵⁹ For an account of how mothers of deaf children were enlisted in oralist project, see Emily K. Abel, “‘Like Ordinary Hearing Children’: Mothers Raising Offspring According to Oralist Dictates,” in *Women and Deafness: Double Visions*, ed. Brenda Jo Brueggemann and Susan Burch (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2006), 130-146.

progressively smaller. Over time, the oralist paradigm of separate “worlds” of Deaf and hearing people became the dominant way to conceptualize the relationship between Deaf people and larger society. Sign language was painted as the primary culprit behind the supposed isolation of Deaf people, limiting their ability to participate in American society. The superintendent of the Illinois school for the deaf declared in 1899, “the necessary isolation of the deaf” would be “removed exactly in proportion to their mastery of alphabetic language,” by which he meant English.⁶⁰ A supporter of oralism claimed in an 1899 article, “The best friends of the sign language will not deny that it is immeasurably inferior to the English, and it follows that the culture dependent upon it must be proportionately inferior.”⁶¹ The founder of an oral school in New York City declared in 1915, “Speech and lip-reading are more valuable economic possessions than finger spelling or the sign language,” not so subtly portraying sign-language-using Deaf people as being at a disadvantage.⁶² An earlier portrayal of the class of Deaf people as being co-equal national citizens had been subsumed by the dominance of an ideology that sought assimilation into a standardized English-speaking nation. And only oral deaf people need apply.

Twentieth century oralists began to write in terms of a homogeneous world that Deaf people needed to fit into, ignoring the existence of a Deaf community as far as was

⁶⁰ Joseph Gordon, “Dr. Gordon’s Report,” *Association Review* 1 (1899), 213.

⁶¹ S.G. Davidson, “The Relation of Speech and Language to Mental Development and of Speech to the Language Teaching,” *Association Review* Vol. 1, No. 2 (December 1899): 132. Baynton notes the shift from clannishness to foreignness in *Forbidden Signs*, 26.

⁶² John Wright offered this observation in a letter that is itself a concise encapsulation of arguments for the utility of speech contra signs in functioning in larger society. John D. Wright, “Letters to the Editor,” *Volta Review* 17 (December 1915): 491.

possible. In her 1931 memoir, Catherine Yale, longstanding principal at the Clarke School, wrote, “the world is a world of hearing and speaking people...the sooner and more complete the child’s adjustment to life in that world is made, the better for him and for the world.”⁶³ References to “hearing world” also appear in publications aimed at parents of Deaf children.⁶⁴ More moderate educators acknowledged the existence of a Deaf community, but persisted with metaphors of a separate and inferior deaf world as a counterpoint to the normalcy of the “hearing world.” A 1953 British book, *The Deaf and Their Problems*, positioned a “silent world” as a counterpoint to a “normal world” or “hearing world.” The problems encountered by Deaf people would be considerably lessened, the author conceded, if not for the “fact of living in a hearing world.”⁶⁵ The nineteenth century discourse of co-equality had left little mark on twentieth century educators.

In the late nineteenth century, both advocates for pure oralism and middle-class Deaf leaders agreed on the need for Deaf people to interact with hearing society. Deaf people used their lives as evidence that they were already a part of larger society, emphasizing the practical strategies that allowed them to live as sign-language-using Deaf people. Drawing upon their experiences as former students, they decried the pure oral method as hindrance to Deaf children’s intellectual development. Oralists argued

⁶³ Catherine A. Yale, *Years of Building: Memoirs of a Pioneer in a Special Field of Education* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Dial Press, 1931), 194.

⁶⁴ An example of the use of “hearing world” in a mid-twentieth century publication aimed at parents of Deaf children can be seen in Helmer R. Myklebust, *Your Deaf Child: A Guide for Parents* 7th ed. (1950; Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1979), 97-99.

⁶⁵ Kenneth W. Hodgson, *The Deaf and Their Problems: A Study in Special Education* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 347, 355.

sign language was inherently isolating and only via spoken language could deaf children be a part of larger society. For this generation of Deaf leaders, sign language was a means to co-equality, but for oralists, it was a path to a separate world. But by refusing to use sign language in the classroom, oralists limited the most efficient form of linguistic stimulation Deaf children could have received in their early years of language development, shaping linguistic isolation in their attempt to promote social assimilation.⁶⁶ Oralism was the dominant educational philosophy in Deaf education for much of the twentieth century but each succeeding generation of Deaf people would rise up to decry the way they were educated. And each generation would offer their lives as evidence of the sacrifices made in service of an ideology of assimilation.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 151.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 161.

CHAPTER FOUR

“TRUE LOVE AND SYMPATHY”: DEAF MARRIAGES.

“I desire to draw attention to the fact that in this country *deaf-mutes marry deaf-mutes,*” said Alexander Graham Bell in his opening presentation to the November 1883 session of the American National Academy of Sciences.¹ The enormity of that fact “consumed the entire morning session” of this mid-year meeting of America’s most eminent scientists and thinkers, who were apparently fascinated by the potential implications of these marriages “in the formation of a deaf variety of the human race.”² Bell’s work provoked an intense debate within Western Deaf communities and among professionals who worked with Deaf people. British and American educators had long corresponded with one another on this topic; a leading British educator had declared in 1857: “it is...highly inexpedient that the deaf and dumb should marry with each other.”³ Within the field of Deaf education, Deaf marriages, or marriages between two Deaf people, was an occasional topic of inquiry, but it was via Bell’s 1883 paper, and his

¹ Italics in original. Alexander Graham Bell, *Memoir Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race* (Washington, D.C.: Volta Bureau, 1883), 4.

² “consumed...” in “The November Meeting of the National Academy of Sciences,” *Science* (November 23, 1883), 1. “in the formation...” Bell, *Memoir*, 4.

³ David Buxton, *On the Marriage and Intermarriage of the Deaf and Dumb*. (Liverpool: W. Pearnall and Co., 1857), 16. Discussion of the causes of “deaf-mutism” had appeared in the very first issue of the widely circulated journal of Deaf education, the *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*, in 1848. William Wolcott Turner, “Causes of Deafness,” *Annals* 1 (1848), 25-32. Bell attributed the theory of a “deaf-mute race” to Turner, somewhat disingenuously claiming he was merely passing on the latter’s ideas with his own statistical research. This ignores the fact that Turner was speaking to a narrow audience of educators while Bell ensured his ideas received maximum exposure among scientists and the general public. Alexander Graham Bell, “Professor A. Graham Bell’s Studies of the Deaf,” *Science* (September 5, 1890): 135-136.

updates at the next three annual meetings, that hereditary deafness came into wide public attention.⁴ The Deaf response in this debate utilized mainstream social discourses to present their marriages as co-equal to those of hearing people. A central point was that deafness did not negate citizenship: as citizens Deaf people should be allowed to choose whom to associate with and marry.

To decrease intermarriages of Deaf people and stem the emergence of a “deaf-mute race,” Bell proposed a number of measures aimed at discouraging Deaf people from associating with one another. Bell rejected a legal ban on marriages of Deaf people as impractical, since it would only promote “immorality” among people already associating with one another. The root of the problem of “intermarriages” was “the preference that adult deaf-mutes exhibit for the company of deaf-mutes rather than hearing persons.”⁵ This preference could be remedied by reducing contact among Deaf children. To compel Deaf children to interact more with hearing children than with one another, Bell suggested the expansion of day schools to replace residential schools for Deaf children. Bell believed sign language promoted the “segregation” of Deaf people from larger society and stressed the education of Deaf children should “entirely discard the use of sign language, and cultivate the use of the vocal organs, and the reading of the lips.”⁶

⁴ “Proceedings on the Section of Anthropology,” *Science* (October 3, 1884): 343-346; “The National Academy of Sciences,” *Scientific American* (November 21, 1885): 320; “National Academy of Sciences—Washington Meeting.” *Scientific American* (May 22, 1886): 328.

⁵ Bell, *Memoir*, 45-46.

⁶ By placing Deaf children in public schools Bell aimed to eliminate acculturation into the Deaf community that went on at Deaf schools. This would presumably foster their assimilation into their national majority culture. “The November Meeting of the National Academy of Sciences,” *Science* (November 23, 1883): 1; Bell, *Memoir*, 47.

From the start, Bell tied the prevention of Deaf marriages into his larger agenda, the promotion of the oral method in Deaf education. Bell's use of the terms *intermarriage* and *deaf-mute race* linked marriages between middle-class white Deaf people to the racial and colonial contexts from which these words emerged. These connotations fortified Bell's conclusion that the Deaf community needed to be dispersed before the specter of a deaf-mute race could be dispelled.⁷

Bell brought his views on marriages to wider public attention, including governmental bodies on both sides of the Atlantic. For his 1889 testimony to the British Royal Commission on the Education of the Deaf, Bell enlisted some of the most prominent men in American science to write statements in support of his theory, including Harvard scientist Simon Newcomb and Edward D. Cope, editor of the *American Naturalist*.⁸ In fact, the Royal Commission's final report came out with an exhortation to strongly discourage Deaf marriages, a fact attributed by two of its

⁷ The Oxford English Dictionary offers three definitions of “intermarry” or “intermarriage.” The first and most generic is a hyphenated form of the word (inter-marriage), which simply means the marriage of two people. This was superseded by the more general term “marriage” the “inter” generally being used only in legal documents after 1800. A second nineteenth century use of this word meant “marriage between persons (or interbreeding between animals) nearly related; consanguineous marriage or breeding,” [intermarriage] or, more simply, “to marry with each other.” [intermarry]. This term emerged in 1843 and 1855 to refer to marriages within a small community, such as a village, to the extent that nearly everyone was related to one another. The word was first used to refer to interbreeding of animals in 1882. Over time, and especially from 1880-1900, “intermarriage” gained its colonial connotations. Definitions and dates of usage presented below are all present in the 1989 Second Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, online at www.oed.com.

⁸ Alexander Graham Bell, *Facts and Opinions Related to the deaf from America*. (London, 1888); W.G. Jenkins, “The Scientific Testimony of ‘Facts and Opinions’,” *Science* (August 15, 1889): 85-86.

members to Bell's influence.⁹ The *Times of London's summary* of the commission's report on Deaf marriages was largely a summary of Bell's views.¹⁰ Bell also sent copies of his conclusions to members of the U.S. Congress and generally promoted his theory among scientists, governmental bodies, and the general public.¹¹ Articles in the popular press reviewed Bell's ideas and declared the possibility of Deaf marriages leading to a deaf-mute race was "a startling possibility in evolution backward in an enlightened age."¹² Promoted by Bell's energetic warnings of a "deaf-mute race," the marriages of Deaf people became an object of attention among scientists, educators, and the general public.

When the marriages debate began in the 1880s and 1890s, Deaf people had reason to be concerned. In the late nineteenth century, the idea of physical degeneration of national societies via the unchecked reproduction of hereditarily inferior classes emerged

⁹ Kenneth Lysons writes the Commission "...considered that strong discouragement should be given to the intermarriage of the congenitally deaf and also to consanguineous marriages especially where there was any family tendency to hereditary deaf mutism." Clifford Kenneth Lysons, "The Development of Social Legislation for Blind or Deaf Persons in England, 1834-1939," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Brunel, 1973): 72. The two members of the Commission who had firsthand knowledge of Deaf people protested this recommendation and attributed it to Bell's influence. Lysons, "The Development of Social Legislation for Blind or Deaf Persons in England, 1834-1939," 78-79.

¹⁰ "Report of the Royal Commission on the Blind & c.," *Times of London* July 26, 1889, p. 4. See reprint in "The Royal Commission," *Silent World* (Aug 15, 1889): 2.

¹¹ Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 140, 205. Van Cleve and Crouch, *A Place of Their Own*, 148-149. Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 358-361.

¹² "Developing a Deaf Race- The New York Tribune," *Current Literature* (April 1889), 292.

among reformers.¹³ Historian Matthew Lindsay notes between 1870-1920 both popular and judicial understanding of marriages shifted from “an intrinsically beneficial institution to a potential source of biological unfitness.”¹⁴ Reformers suggested various strategies to limit marriage and reproduction among “degenerate” groups of people, as well as foster childbearing among socially acceptable groups. No restrictions based on eugenic principles had been enacted as of the time of the marriages debate, but Deaf people may have seen their position as precarious. In most Western countries, Deaf people were viewed as recipients of charity. Deaf Americans were also the indirect recipient of public funds, via state-supported schools for Deaf people. During the period, schools for Deaf people were attempting to change their standing from “asylums” to “schools” and both Deaf people and educators commonly lamented the fact that the general public saw the schooling of Deaf children as an endeavor of charity.¹⁵ Being seen as a dependent class could potentially place Deaf people within one of the categories of people social reformers suggested should have restrictions on their reproductive rights.¹⁶ Although no reproductive restrictions specifically for Deaf people were ever

¹³ Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 219-222.

¹⁴ Matthew J. Lindsay, “Reproducing a Fit Citizenry: Dependency, Eugenics, and the Law of Marriage in the United States, 1860-1920,” *Law and Social Inquiry* 23:3 (Summer 1998): 541-585. Quotation is from Lindsay, “Reproducing a Fit Citizenry,” 578.

¹⁵ *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (November 25, 1880):3.

¹⁶ Donald K. Pickens, *Eugenics and the Progressives* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press 1968), 44-45; Martin Pernick, “Public Health Then and Now,” *American Journal of Public Health* (November 1997): 1769. For an overview of British thought at the turn of the century, see Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*, 222-231 and R.A. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 2-17. Pickens offers a

legislated in the United States, Deaf peoples' fears were not unreasonable in light of the larger social context in which the marriages debate took place.¹⁷

The arguments advanced by Deaf people in the marriages debate during the 1880s and 1890s were based on ideas exchanged transnationally and lives lived locally. The existence of a transnational Deaf public sphere allowed Deaf people to exchange ideas and form a common strategy of response in defense of their right to marry one another.¹⁸ The debate over Deaf marriages took place largely within the context of specific nation-states but the ideas informing these debates circulated across national boundaries, most prominently at the 1889 International Congress of the Deaf in Paris and the few years preceding and following that Congress. The similarity of arguments used by British and American Deaf people was especially striking. Belying conceptions of minorities as locked into specific localities and advancing purely locally based resistance, the actions of Deaf Americans illustrate both the ability of and the limits facing a small, geographically scattered minority to retain control of their own lives in the face of larger stigmatizing beliefs. The Americans' response, while fortified by transnational

good summary of American hereditarianism thought in the nineteenth century. Pickens, *Eugenics and the Progressives*, 37–46.

¹⁷ This conclusion was also reached by historians Jon Van Cleve and Barry Crouch, noted “The possibility of direct legislative interference with deaf marriages could not be dismissed” in the early years of the marriage debate. Van Cleve and Crouch, *A Place of Their Own*, 148.

¹⁸ The phrase “common strategy of response” is adopted from Ann Laura Stoler’s call for scholars to look for “common strategies of rule” when undertaking comparative projects. Stoler asks how ideas and strategies of rule may have commonalities in different geographical and historical contexts. Seeing how these instruments may have formed or operated in a transnational sphere may shed light on different facets of power and uncover previously overlooked strategies of rule and resistance. Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies,” *The Journal of American History* 88 (Dec 2001), 847.

interaction, nevertheless played out in the social and cultural landscape of late nineteenth century America. Deaf Americans did not face legal restrictions on their marriage rights but there did exist pressure in families and among Deaf people to avoid marriages which could conceivably transmit deafness. As will be seen, transnational discourses translated into individual families as this pressure operated on a micro-level. A defense of Deaf marriages was still a matter of concern for Deaf leaders in the first decades of the twentieth century, but now the debate occurred largely within national settings. By this time, traditional liberal beliefs in individual rights and autonomy were being supplemented by a vision of a collective national body regulated by professional scientists and health workers.¹⁹ Deaf people could see reproductive restrictions being placed on other stigmatized groups in their own nations. Laws restricting the marriages of those deemed a threat to the body politic were first enacted in the United States in 1896, and they proliferated across a number of states over the next decade.²⁰ The emergence of national laws and restrictions was likely a factor in refocusing Deaf peoples' attention to national settings.

Deaf people utilized the discourse of co-equality when shaping their response to the marriages debate. Central to co-equality was a portrayal of Deaf people, as

¹⁹ Donald K. Pickens states the nineteenth century ended in a superseding of traditional liberal beliefs in human rationality with a politics of the collective based on genetic considerations. Genetically inferior individuals were essentialized into potential problems for the national body. Pickens, *Eugenics and the Progressives*, 45.

²⁰ These laws typically restricted the marriages of those deemed a threat to the national body politic, usually of the feeble-minded, but also “the insane, syphilitic, alcoholic, epileptic and certain types of criminals.” Connecticut was the first, followed by Kansas (1903), New Jersey, Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana (1905), Indiana (1907) and California. Pickens, *Eugenics and the Progressives*, 88. By 1915, thirteen states had sterilization laws as well. Ibid, 90.

individuals and as a community, as being equal to hearing people, even if they lived different lives because they were Deaf. Co-equality requires Deaf people constantly to take into consideration the discourses of larger society, modify these discourses to fit their own circumstances, and then re-present their discourses to larger society. That Deaf people were able to do this is indicative of a truism: power is never absolute; in any given scenario it is not the possession of one party alone. In Ann Laura Stoler's apt formulation, historical subjects occupy not "a historical landscape of fixed identities, but one inhabited by a range of persons whose changing subjectivities respond to relations of power only partially of their own making."²¹ The marriages debate shows these shifting relations of power over time and the adaptations Deaf people made in response.

While the debate ranged over different social and institutional landscapes in different countries, the Deaf response was grounded in three basic arguments. These arguments were a critique of Bell's science based on experientially based statistics, a liberal individualist argument which stressed Deaf people's standing as citizens, and a re-inscription of the nineteenth century ideal of love marriages to fit the unique circumstances of Deaf people.²² Deaf people rejected outright the notion that a "deaf-

²¹ Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties," para. 8 [electronic version]. For a classic look at how "powerless" people negotiate power see James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). Robin Kelley takes the study of power relations in everyday life in an intriguing study of black resistance to segregation on public transportation in chapter three of Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 55-76.

²² Van Cleve and Crouch also note challenges to Bell's statistics and an argument that Deaf people were happiest married to one another. They consider these arguments as originating from educators of Deaf people. Where these arguments originated are less important to this chapter than the fact that both Deaf people and like-minded educators used them consistently throughout the debate. Van Cleve and Crouch, *A Place of Their Own*, 149.

“mute race” would result from Deaf people marrying one another. In a variation of the strategy of personal experience discussed in Chapter Two, Deaf people countered Bell’s and others’ statistics with their own data, drawing on their own lives to meet scientific objectivity with their own objective facts. This experientially based data showed that the overwhelming majority of Deaf children came from hearing parents, and a similarly large majority of Deaf couples had hearing children. Indeed, research initiated as a result of the debate would show over 90% of Deaf couples had hearing children.²³ The Deaf response was presented largely from a narrow sector of the Deaf community: well-educated, middle-class Deaf men. In response to suggestions that individual happiness ought to be submerged for the good of the nation-state, Deaf men and their supporters both denied Deaf people were a burden on the nation and advanced a liberal individualist argument of personal autonomy which defended Deaf peoples’ right to choose their own marriage partners. This latter argument took on gendered tones as Deaf men argued for their right to enter a domestic sphere of their own making.²⁴

The final argument utilized by Deaf people was a re-inscription of the ideal of true love. While others sought to marginalize their marriages and families as potentially

²³ Edward Allen Fay, *Marriages of the Deaf in America* (Washington, D.C.: Volta Bureau, 1893), 18-19.

²⁴ Historian Nancy F. Cott observes that late nineteenth century American public policy promoted the role of men as husbands and heads of household, a role rooted in the “presumed conjunction of marriage, property-owning, household headship, and male citizenship.” Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 122. Leonore Davidoff and her co-authors sketch a similar position for men in British society, noting “personal authority within the family can be linked to much broader relationships of power” dealing with individual identity and autonomy. Leonore Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, et. al. *The Family Story: Blood, Contract, and Intimacy, 1830-1860* (New York: Longman, 1999), 137.

damaging to society, Deaf people evoked contemporary standards of true love and domesticity to present marriages between two Deaf people as ordinary middle-class marriages. In response to exhortations to marry hearing people, Deaf people acknowledged physical difference—deafness—and used this difference as an argument in support of their right to marry one another. They argued Deaf marriages were successful because both parties were deaf and thus shared a “mutual respect and sympathy” lacking in Deaf-hearing marriages. This argument claimed a Deaf-centered space necessary because of physical difference but nevertheless claimed larger social values and norms as holding true in this space.

The Transnational Deaf Response

By way of the transnational Deaf public sphere, Deaf people of different nations learned one another’s views on the debate and this common transnational knowledge shaped the contours of national and local debates on the marriage question.²⁵ In his signed address to the 1889 International Congress of the Deaf in Paris, Deaf Briton R. Armour concluded his summary of British objections to restrictions on Deaf marriages by telling his audience of Deaf men from nearly a dozen countries, “It is scarcely necessary for me to enlarge on any of these [reasons for opposition] since I know that your own

²⁵ Other scholars have noted the similarity of ideas in different national contexts can indicate the influence of pre-existing knowledge of ideas from extra-national sources. For other studies of this form of transnational contact see S. Ilan Troen, “Frontier Myths and Their Application in America and Israel: A Transnational Perspective,” *Journal of American History* (December 1999): 1209-1230; Rob Kroes, “America and the European Sense of History,” *Journal of American History* (December 1999): 1135-1155.

sentiments coincide with mine.”²⁶ At international meetings Deaf people shared responses that, while originating in specific localities, were nevertheless familiar to Deaf people in other nations and other localities. The similar contours of the marriage debate allowed for what historian Ann Laura Stoler calls the “tactical mobility of concepts,” the transference of ideas and images from one national setting to another.²⁷ At the 1889 Paris Congress, one speaker exalted Deaf Frenchman Laurent Clerc as “the first deaf-mute to marry a deaf girl.”²⁸ While this speaker was likely incorrect by several centuries, his use of Clerc is an illustration of the tactical mobility of ideas in the marriage debate. Clerc, who died a decade before the 1889 Paris Congress, had co-founded Deaf education in the United States. Long prominent in Deaf American and Deaf French hagiographies, Clerc seemed to now have achieved iconic status in the transnational Deaf sphere, his image immediately transferable to other national contexts in the marriage debate. If Clerc, pioneer of Deaf education in the New World, could choose a Deaf spouse then so could Deaf men everywhere.²⁹

Transnational strategies of rule could elicit transnational strategies of response. The initial Deaf response to the marriages debate was transnational in part because Deaf people were responding to a scientific discourse that was itself also transnational.

²⁶ “Reminiscences of the Deaf and Dumb Congress in Paris,” *The Deaf and Dumb Times* (November 1890): 83.

²⁷ Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties,” 837.

²⁸ “Reminiscences of the Deaf and Dumb Congress in Paris,” 83.

²⁹ In fact, Clerc apparently faced some resistance from the hearing co-founder of the first American school for the deaf, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, to the idea of his marrying Eliza Crocker Boardman. They married May 3, 1818. Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 263. Lane bases his account on “Retirement of Mr. Clerc,” *Annals* 10 (1858): 181-183.

Eugenics was not a clearly delineated scientific field at the time of the Deaf marriage debate, Francis Galton having coined the word *eugenics* in the same year as Bell's New Haven address.³⁰ But Bell was a part of an international network of corresponding scholars and scientists interested in the transmission of hereditary traits and its impact on particular nations or groups of people. Scientists working on questions of heredity often corresponded with extra-national counterparts, the British-American nexus being particularly noteworthy.³¹ Bell was involved in the American eugenics movement from its earliest days. In 1907, Bell was offered the chair of the American Breeder's Association's newly formed Committee on Eugenics. He declined, but agreed to serve on the committee and later chaired a subcommittee on hereditary deafness.³²

Bell's personal network, his enthusiasm for the topic, and no doubt his global fame as the inventor of the telephone, was instrumental in further disseminating the concern with Deaf marriages outside of the United States and into a transnational sphere.

³⁰ Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 21.

³¹ For a comparative look at British and American eugenics see Marouf Arif Hasian, Jr., *The Rhetoric of Eugenics in Anglo-American Thought* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), and Daniel Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (New York: Knopf, 1985). For international contact among scientists, see Martin S. Pernick, *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Birth of "Defective" Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 22-23; Randall Hansen and Desmond King, "Eugenic Ideas, Political Interests, and Policy Variance: Immigration and Sterilization Policy in Britain and the U.S.," *World Politics* 53 (January 2001): 240.

³² The chairmanship of the committee was then offered to David Starr Jordan. Robert V. Bruce, *Bell: Alexander Graham Bell and the Conquest of Solitude* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1973), 417-418. Historian Brian Greenwald traces Bell's ties with the American eugenics movement in his essay "The Real "Toll" of A.G. Bell: Lessons About Eugenics," *Genetics, Disability, and Deafness* ed. John Vickrey Van Cleve (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2004), 35-41. This is also the topic of Greenwald's dissertation, "Alexander Graham Bell through the Lens of Eugenics, 1883-1922," Ph.D. Dissertation, George Washington University, 2006.

As noted earlier, Bell's testimony to the British Royal Commission on the Education of the Blind and Deaf was instrumental in its recommendations, in 1889, discouraging marriages between congenitally deaf people and advising the segregation of the sexes in schools and associations for Deaf people.³³ Whether due to Bell's prominence or to the novelty of his theory, the idea of an emerging deaf-mute race broke out of the field of Deaf education to be covered by the *Times of London* and the *British Medical Journal* in their summaries of the Commission's report.³⁴ The *British Medical Journal* also carried letters both supporting and refuting Bell's ideas. A letter from E. Symes Thompson, chair of the prominent British Ealing Street Training College for Teachers of the Deaf and Diffusion of the Pure Oral System, claimed, "By [pure oralism] alone can the deaf be taught to communicate with and diffuse themselves among the general population, whilst signing makes them clannish, and intimate association naturally leads to intermarriage."³⁵ Thompson's argument reads almost as a synopsis of Bell's *Memoirs*, illustrating the tactical mobility of ideas on both sides of the marriages debate in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

³³ Lysons, "The Development of Social Legislation for Blind or Deaf Persons in England 1834-1939," 72, 77-79.

³⁴ "Report on the Royal Commission on the Blind, & c.," *Times of London*, July 26, 1889, p. 13. "The Deaf and Dumb," *The British Medical Journal* (September 28, 1889): 726-727.

³⁵ E. Symes Thompson, "The Deaf and Dumb," *British Medical Journal* (October 26, 1889): 950. Other letters were sent in by a medical officer and an aurist affiliated with the Liverpool School for the Deaf and Dumb. *British Medical Journal*, (October 12, 1889): 842; *British Medical Journal* (November 2, 1889): 1015. For its part, the *British Medical Journal* noted, "The feeling of the medical profession has been again and again strongly expressed as to the superiority of speech over signs." "The Deaf and Dumb," *The British Medical Journal*, (September 28, 1889): 727.

Experientially-based Counterresponses

Deaf people answered Bell's contention of a growing "deaf-mute race" by providing contrary statistical evidence. While Bell was able to marshal statements of support from eminent scientists and brandish statistics compiled from years of work, Deaf people again used the strategy of personal experience, providing testimonies from their own lives which set forth experientially based counterresponses to scientific discourses. A year after the Paris Congress, one Deaf Briton enlivened deliberations on intermarriages taking place during the first National Deaf and Dumb Conference in London with a personal argument for the safety of Deaf people marrying one another, "I have married a deaf-mute wife who had also a deaf-mute sister; but though there have been six children born, they are all perfect in their faculties...now I have six unanswerable reasons for intermarriage amongst the deaf and dumb."³⁶ Deaf people collected quantitative counterevidence showing that marriages between two Deaf people only infrequently led to Deaf offspring. Statistics showing "most convincing proof of the fallacy of Professor Bell's theory" were collected by a number of local communities, with those who worked most closely with Deaf children and Deaf people—educators, ministers, and social workers—often joining Deaf people in questioning Bell's evidence.³⁷ Deaf Britons could view an 1889 lecture by Deaf American Rev. Jacob

³⁶ "National Conference of Adult Deaf and Dumb Missions and Associations," *Deaf and Dumb Times* 10:1 (March 1890): 109.

³⁷ "Most convincing" "National Conference of Adult Deaf and Dumb Missions and Associations," 111. In 1890, the superintendent of the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind reported none of their congenitally Deaf pupils had Deaf parents. *Report of the Board of Trustees*

Koehler in Leeds in which he claimed only four of the 1,000 Deaf people he ministered to had Deaf children.³⁸ Deaf Briton George Healey reported 400 deaf and dumb adults in Liverpool, of whom 118 married one another. “They have 234 children and 60 grand children [sic] and I am thankful to say they can *all* hear and speak perfectly.”³⁹ Deaf Swede Albert Berg reported to the 1889 Paris Congress of his opinion, based on his knowledge of the Deaf community in Stockholm and travels throughout Sweden, that the Bell’s theory of Deaf marriages leading to Deaf offspring was false.⁴⁰ Bell had sent advance notice of his 1883 National Academy address to selected educators, and a number were skeptical of his conclusions, publicly stating so after the *Memoir* was published.⁴¹ British missionaries (pastors and social workers who headed societies of Deaf

of the Institution for the Education of the Deaf and the Blind” Denver, 1890. For an account of other statistics collected by educators, see Van Cleve and Crouch, *A Place of their Own*, 149. Bell himself considered the statistics gathered by Deaf people to confirm his contention that Deaf-Deaf marriages had a higher rate of Deaf offspring than Deaf-hearing marriages. Bell, “Professor A. Graham Bell’s Studies of the Deaf,” 136.

³⁸ “The Intermarriage of the Deaf and Their Offspring,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (September 1889): 42.

³⁹ “National Conference of Adult Deaf and Dumb Missions and Associations,” 111.

⁴⁰ *Döfstumföreningen i Stockholm. Styrelsens Årsberättelse för 1889.* (Stockholm, 1890), 13.

⁴¹ “Advance notice” Alexander Graham Bell to Edward M. Gallaudet, October 11, 1880 [sic, letter is dated 1883] (Series: General Correspondence, Folder: Edward M. Gallaudet, 1877-1902. undated), The Alexander Graham Bell Family Papers at the Library of Congress, 1862-1939, accessed via the American Memory Project, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/bellhtml/bellhome.html> [hereafter, Bell Papers]; Alexander Graham Bell to Sarah Fuller, October 13, 1883, The Deaf, Fuller, Sarah, General Correspondence, 1883-1890, Bell Papers. Not only did heads of schools for Deaf people question Bell’s statistics, but some even agreed that Deaf-Deaf marriages were happier than Deaf-hearing marriages. Bell, *Facts and Opinions Related to the deaf from America*. (London: Spottiswoode and Co., 1888); Van Cleve and Crouch, *A Place of Their Own*, 149.

people) were also skeptical of Bell's ideas when they reached Britain, again referring to their own statistics and personal knowledge.⁴²

To resolve the issue of competing statistics, American educator Edward Allen Fay undertook a monumental research project to trace the marriages of all Deaf people in the United States. The success of this project depended on the cooperation of Deaf community networks in distributing Fay's surveys, as well as on the willingness of Deaf people themselves to reveal personal details of their lives. On both counts, Deaf people responded enthusiastically, certain that quantitative evidence would validate what they already believed from their own personal experience. Deaf periodicals were filled with requests to send in information, and one newspaper, the *Deaf Mutes' Journal*, printed lists of Deaf couples.⁴³ An editorial in another paper suggested Fay recruit local agents to make queries in person.⁴⁴ In all, Deaf Americans sent over 4,000 surveys to Fay.⁴⁵

⁴² The consensus of the 1890 British National Conference was that Bell's statistics did not correspond to attendees' personal observations. A National Conference of Missionaries affirmed by a 24-2 vote "that the intermarriage of the deaf and dumb is conducive to their happiness, and there is no reason to fear injurious results therefrom." This followed a 20-3 vote against an amendment to the resolution attempting to make an "exception of cases of congenital deaf mutes" to the overall approval of Deaf-Deaf marriages. "National Conference of Adult Deaf and Dumb Missions and Associations," 109-112. John North, hearing Superintendent of the Manchester [England] Adult Deaf and Dumb Institute went so far as to call Deaf-Deaf marriages "the best possible marriage they can contract." *The Deaf Chronicle* (July, 1892): 100. "Correspondence," *Deaf and Dumb Times* (August 1889): 27.

⁴³ Edward Allen Fay, "Marriage Records," *Deaf Mutes' Journal* (November 7, 1889): 4.

⁴⁴ The editor, S.G. Davidson, suggested agents should be "men and women who have an extensive personal acquaintance with those of the class living in the territory assigned to them." Inquiries made in person would be made "in such a way as not to wound the susceptibilities of those interrogated, and would very often be able to correct misstatements, made purposely or through ignorance of the purport of the questions." *Silent World* (April 18, 1889): 2.

⁴⁵ 4,471 surveys in all were returned to Fay. Edward Allen Fay, "An Inquiry Concerning the Results of Marriages of the Deaf in America," *Annals* 41 (1896): 79. Fay acknowledged the

The result of this outpouring of information was dissected by Fay, working with May Martin, a Deaf student at the National Deaf-Mute College, and published by Bell's Volta Bureau in 1893.⁴⁶ Ten years after Bell first presented his paper to the National Academy of Sciences, Fay's study validated the Deaf argument; showing over 90 percent of marriages between two Deaf people did not produce Deaf children.⁴⁷ Fay also presented statistics showing that the overwhelming majority of Deaf people married other Deaf people.⁴⁸ More than a decade after Bell's paper to the National Academy of Sciences, his ideas had apparently made little inroad on actual marriage practices among Deaf people in the United States. An 1890 correspondent to the *Deaf Mutes Journal* noted as much, saying marriages between Deaf people in Ohio were coming "thick and fast...Prof. Bell's theory has no effect on the Buckeye mutes, nor those of other states either."⁴⁹ But for some professionals, neither statistics nor marriages could quell the debate and they would continue to discourage marriages between two Deaf people.⁵⁰

assistance of Deaf people, "who have not only cheerfully given all desired information concerning their own marriages, but have been of great service in gathering statistics concerning the marriages of others..." Fay, *Marriages*, 10.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 11.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 18-19.

⁴⁸ Based on a compilation of 4,471 marriages between 1801-1894, Fay reported 72.5% of Deaf people married other Deaf people. Fay, *Marriages*, 123. See also Table I on page 14 and Table V on page 24.

⁴⁹ "Columbus," *Deaf Mutes' Journal* (May 1, 1890): 3.

⁵⁰ One particularly ardent opponent of Deaf-Deaf marriages wrote to the British *Church Journal* asking them not to provide their premises for gatherings of Deaf people of different sexes. Felix Rohan, "Brevities from Britain," *Silent Worker* (February, 1899): 89. A 1915 article in the *Volta Review* grouping Deaf marriages into seven categories, called marriages between those born deaf as leading to "liability" for deaf offspring. Richard O. Johnson, "Intermarriage of

Individual Autonomy, National Good

The majority of the participants in the marriage debate held to the position that the choice of a marriage partner was ultimately an individual choice. Of all the arguments made in the marriage debate, this one was the one with the most serious ramifications if it should be rejected. For it was based on a liberal individualist argument that was in itself an important element of the Deaf discourse of co-equality. Liberal individualism posited the individual human being as an autonomous rational subject with the ability to shape his or her own life. Co-equality was not just about being similar to hearing people; it was about the ability of Deaf people to be equal in a manner of their own choosing.

Legislative action against Deaf marriages would remove Deaf people from the boundaries of liberal individualism, destabilizing a central tenet of co-equality. Other scholars have traced how this liberal individualism, combined with social views of disability in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, could exclude disabled people from the boundaries of full citizenship.⁵¹ For Deaf people, adherence to the principles of

the Deaf," *Volta Review* 17 (September 1915): 351. The article was reprinted from the Illinois Institution Annual Report, of which Johnson was superintendent. Unlike Bell, some American oralists would later openly call for government measures to prohibit marriages of people "liable to transmit defects to their offspring." Mary S. Garrett, "The State of the Case," *National Educational Association: Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Thirty-Ninth Annual Meeting* (Washington, D.C., 1900), 663, as quoted in Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 30.

⁵¹ Disability Studies scholar Rosemarie Garland Thompson states the ideology of liberal individualism required "a body that is a stable, neutral instrument of the individual will." Thus the disabled body is one that "troubles" the main tenets of liberal individualism—"self-government, self-determination, autonomy and progress." Rosemarie Garland Thompson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1997), 41-44. For a historical study of how a claim to civic fitness played out in a U.S. national context "permeated" by liberal individualist ideology, see Kim Nielsen, "Helen Keller and the Politics of Civic Fitness," in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* ed. Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University

liberal individualism was an important part of their claim to co-equality. Particularly for Deaf men, the loss of control over their right to choose their own marriage partner would also be a loss of their masculinity. Conscious that their rights as citizens were potentially at stake, Deaf leaders sought a middle ground on the question of the “danger” of deaf offspring. These leaders often rejected any attempt to publicly defend the right to have Deaf children; instead they asserted deafness was surmountable in that education gave Deaf people the ability to assume the burdens of citizenship.

Deaf people in the United States and Britain held onto a belief in the primacy of individual autonomy in the domestic sphere and Deaf men participated in traditional gender norms when presenting this Deaf argument to society at large. As Deaf Briton Francis Maginn asserted at an 1890 London conference of British associations, “Should the Government dare to interfere with our private domestic life, let us rise to a man and protest—and also let us get up a monster demonstration and march four deep to Trafalgar Square.” Maginn assured his audience members Parliament would, upon seeing such a demonstration, “speedily turn in and erase the words out of the [hypothetical] Bill forbidding the intermarriages.”⁵² Maginn’s comments illustrate an important aspect of the marriage debate: that Deaf men reserved for themselves the right to represent Deaf people on the marriage debate in the general public sphere. But when it came to public discussion of the marriage issue, it was almost always Deaf men who took the lead. The

Press, 2000), 268-290. For a concise reading of liberal individualism from the standpoint of philosophy, see Jeremy Waldron, “Liberalism,” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. E. Craig, (London, 1998). Retrieved December 18, 2005, from <http://www.rep.routledge.com.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/article/S035SECT3>

52 “National Conference of Adult Deaf and Dumb Missions and Associations,” 111.

Deaf response to the marriage debate may have been performance of gendered Deaf identities for public consumption; a way of asserting traditional middle-class gender identity in a public debate that attempted to reduce both Deaf men and women to the status of hereditary disorders on the national body.⁵³ The predominantly Deaf male response to the marriage debate indicates Deaf men knew their citizenship was tied to their masculinity, and if the latter were weakened in public, the former would be also.

While Deaf leaders adamantly opposed legislative restrictions, some publicly supported self-regulation in the case of marriages likely to result in Deaf offspring. Olof Hanson considered it “self-evident” that marriages which could lead to Deaf children “should be avoided.”⁵⁴ A summary of the proceedings of the 1890 Conference of Adult Deaf and Dumb Societies in London conceded headmasters of schools should instruct Deaf pupils to “exercise more caution” when choosing marriage partners, “especially where congenitality exists in both the families.”⁵⁵ Deaf American S.G. Davidson told the delegates to the Paris Congress that Deaf people “should not marry” if they were

⁵³ Joan Scott notes politically charged events provoke “the suppression of ambiguities and opposite elements [of gender identity] in order to assure...coherence and common understanding.” Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91:5 (December 1986): 1073. Kim Nielsen’s account of Helen Keller is an intriguing study of how gender and disability served to delimit the boundaries of one disabled woman’s civic identity, see Kim Nielsen, “Helen Keller and the Politics of Civic Fitness,” 268-290.

⁵⁴ Olof Hanson, “The Tendency Among the Deaf to Exclusive Association With One Another,” *Annals* 33, (1888): 30.

⁵⁵ This conference was attended by both Deaf and hearing missioners. “Our Notes,” *The Deaf and Dumb Times* (February, 1890): 82.

liable to have Deaf children.⁵⁶ What comes through here is the ambiguity of these statements. Individual autonomy in private affairs did not necessarily mean support for Deaf parents having Deaf children, but neither did it mean formal restrictions on choice of marriage partners. By declaring something “self-evident,” Hanson was saying individual Deaf people could be counted on to make the right decision without others interfering. The use of the word *should* also implies room for maneuver. A fine line was walked in public by these Deaf men, crafting a compromise between larger society’s understanding of deafness and their own stance that Deaf people ought to be entitled to what one Deaf Briton called, “the liberty of the subject,” the same degree of rights and freedoms as that of any other individual.⁵⁷

When it came to existing Deaf children, Deaf leaders were careful to frame deafness as something which did not exclude someone from full citizenship or provide a burden to the state. Hiriam Phelps Arms wrote, “As to the offspring being deaf and mute like their parents, ‘what of that?’” saying Deaf people had the ability to accomplish as much as hearing people if they so desired.⁵⁸ In an 1889 *Silent World* editorial, S.G. Davidson wrote he saw little harm in Deaf parents having a Deaf child. Several months later, he cautioned delegates at the 1889 Paris Congress against marriages that could lead to Deaf offspring. While seemingly contradictory, Davidson’s comments illustrate the

⁵⁶ “Reminiscences of the Deaf and Dumb Congress in Paris,” *The Deaf and Dumb Times* (November, 1890): 82.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 83.

⁵⁸ Hiram Phelps Arms, *The Intermarriage of the Deaf: Its Mental, Moral, and Social Tendencies* (Philadelphia: Burk and McFetridge, 1887), 34-35.

way some nineteenth century American Deaf leaders reconciled dominant social understandings of the limitations of deafness with their own assertions of co-equality. Both Arms's and Davidson's statements take deafness for granted; not necessarily as something to be encouraged or to rejoice in, but something that could be worked around and certainly not something that would prevent Deaf people from being equal to their hearing counterparts. In the editorial, Davidson claims a Deaf child of Deaf parents "lack nothing but this one sense. They are, if anything, possessed of greater natural intelligence than the average child of hearing parents in the same station of life as theirs." Deafness may have been a lack but it was not a hindrance to intellectual accomplishment. Nor should the presence of a Deaf child be seen as being an economic burden for the state. The Deaf children of Deaf parents "are not likely, from the fact of their deafness, to become a burden upon society." Davidson pointed out the cost of educating Deaf children was

not more than is cheerfully given for the instruction of many in special branches...agricultural colleges, industrial schools, and other educational institutions of the kind cost our state many times the amount that can ever possibly be required for the education of the deaf children of a deaf species.⁵⁹

Davidson's comparisons are telling. Deaf education was not a burden but one of an array of alternative educational options the state offered, options that led to hard-working, successful citizens. Even those leaders who did not defend the right to have deaf children made it clear that once in place, these children were every bit as co-equal as any other Deaf person.

⁵⁹ Editorial. *Silent World* 3:13 (May 1, 1889): 2.

Fortunately for Deaf people, most proponents of Deaf-hearing marriages did not question the place of Deaf people in the philosophical boundaries of liberal individualism. A basic value that most participants in the marriage debate held common was a belief that educated Deaf people were autonomous rational subjects and thus due all the rights and responsibilities accorded to such subjects. Educators believed their former students were capable of making the appropriate decision on whom to marry if there was any risk of having Deaf children. In an 1889 interview, the head of the Pennsylvania school for the deaf, A.E. Crouter, explained his opposition to legal restrictions on Deaf marriages. “Special and class legislation, in my opinion, are never wise,” Crouter opined. Rather, the preventing of undesirable intermarriages was “a matter of careful instruction...the educated deaf are coming more and more to understand and appreciate the importance of this subject, and in time will contract unions with proper intelligence and prudence.”⁶⁰ Crouter’s comment reveals a belief that Deaf people were capable of rational decision making, a belief which underlay the confidence of nineteenth century educators and missionaries who supported Deaf people’s right to choose their marriage partners. Philip Gillett, the superintendent of the Illinois School for the Deaf, noted the progressive educational institutions of the United States had given Deaf people the chance to “stand upon the same plane as others, and [they] must provide for themselves as others do.” Any attempt to restrict their liberties, to treat them “as a special class who are to be looked after by others” would be a disavowal of the goals of

60 “Special Notices,” *Silent World* 3:26 (August 1, 1889): 2.

independence and self-sufficiency held by both Deaf people and educators.⁶¹ In a private letter to Edward Miner Gallaudet, Gillett wrote the tone of his public comments on the marriages debate was meant to “remove from the public mind the idea of perpetual dependence of the deaf” as well as “inspiring the deaf themselves with more of a sense of responsibility in their future life.”⁶² To instill in the deaf a sense that their deafness was a “grave misfortune,” as Gillett felt other educators (including Gallaudet himself) had done all too often, was counterproductive and instilled in them “unwillingness...to assume some of the burdens of life.”⁶³ Crouter and Gillett were both proponents of the oral method; their support for individual autonomy was not contingent on support of sign language in Deaf education.

While most opponents of Deaf marriages rarely departed from the tenets of liberal individualism, tension remained over where exactly individual autonomy ought to (voluntarily) give way to social good when Deaf people chose marital partners. One’s stance often depended on how one saw the meaning of marriage and the consequences of deafness. This tension would erupt on the pages of *Science* in an exchange of letters among the leading figures in American Deaf education in the autumn and winter of 1890 and 1891. Bell started the debate by expressing alarm that, seven years after his *Memoir*, “many of the most prominent teachers of the deaf in America advocate the intermarriage

⁶¹ Philip G. Gillett, “The Intermarriage of the Deaf, and their education,” *Science* 16 (December 26, 1890): 353-357.

⁶² Phillip G. Gillett to Edward Miner Gallaudet, February 6, 1891, Box 19, Folder 7, Letter 156, EMG Papers.

⁶³ Phillip G. Gillett to Edward Miner Gallaudet, January 29, 1891, Box 19, Folder 7, Letter 155, EMG Papers.

of deaf-mutes.”⁶⁴ Gillett, a man who had worked in the field longer than any other American teacher (and who had officiated at Deaf marriage ceremonies), was singled out as one of these leading educators. Throwing down the gauntlet to Gillett, Bell laid out a case of a young Deaf man from a large multigenerational Deaf family who wished to marry a woman who was congenitally Deaf, but had no Deaf family members. Bell wrote, “The teacher of the young lady has been consulted, and she feels her responsibility deeply. Her heart is with the young couple and she desires their happiness, and yet her judgment is opposed to such a union.” Bell stressed this was not a hypothetical scenario. “The parties are engaged, but the marriage has not yet been consummated,” and Gillett’s opinion “would have weight with the young couple.”⁶⁵ Bell framed the question in light of an individual’s ability to potentially prevent deafness from being passed on to a new generation.

Gillett reframed the question into a debate over the meaning of deafness and the purpose of marriage. He saw nothing wrong with the marriage “if the parties most interested believe, after reflection, that their own happiness will be promoted thereby.” Gillett rejected the idea of regulating marriages for reasons of heredity, seeing marriage as having “a holier and higher” purpose than “to produce human animals.” Gillett also saw little harm in deafness, saying the chance of having Deaf children was of little consequence, reasoning that deafness was neither “a crime, or a disgrace, or entailed suffering.” Rather, because the education of Deaf people enabled them to participate in

⁶⁴ Bell, “Professor A. Graham Bell’s Studies of the Deaf,” 136.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

larger society, deafness was little more than a “serious inconvenience,” comparable to baldness or near-sightedness.⁶⁶ Gillett’s response in the *Science* debate was a reaffirmation of liberal individualist ideals. But in minimizing the consequences of deafness, Gillett went a step beyond the consensus shared by other educators.

Bell and Gallaudet, the latter declaring deafness was indeed “a grave misfortune,” saw the fundamental question in the debate as the effect of Deaf marriages on society as a whole. Gallaudet declared Deaf people needed to ensure “no selfish act or course of theirs” should increase “the aggregate of this misfortune [i.e.: deafness] in the world.”⁶⁷ Bell emphasized that while the percentage of Deaf children resulting from Deaf marriages was small, the cost to the state of educating these people ran to over one million dollars a year.⁶⁸ Bell and Gallaudet considered deafness to have much more severe consequences than Gillett made out—for deaf people and for society—and emphatically recommended Deaf people ought to avoid certain kinds of marriages which could lead to Deaf offspring. Above all, “the interest of the family must take precedence over the interest of the individual,” Gallaudet declared, “for it is the family, and not the individual, that constitutes the basic unit of society.” And with such sentiments in mind, a family with at least one hearing parent would provide that family with “an essential

⁶⁶ Phillip Gillett. “Deaf-Mutes,” *Science* 16 (October 31, 1890): 248-249. Bell and Gallaudet reacted strongly to this comparison of deafness with baldness. Gillett’s response: “Would that some scientist organize a crusade against the intermarriage of the bald, for baldness is certainly hereditary. A bald variety of the human race would be dreadful.” Gillett, “Deaf Mutes: Their Intermarriage and Offspring,” *Science* (January 30, 1891): 58.

⁶⁷ Edward Miner Gallaudet, “The Intermarriage of the Deaf, and Their Education,” *Science* 16 (November 28, 1890): 295.

⁶⁸ Bell, “Deaf-Mutes,” *Science* 16 (December 26, 1890): 358-359.

advantage” in family life. Gallaudet further exhorted Deaf people to choose celibacy if there was any risk of their passing on their deafness to their offspring. “I would rank high in my esteem a deaf person [with deaf family members] who lived single,” Gallaudet wrote in *Science*.⁶⁹ While Bell did not explicitly advocate celibacy in his address to the students of Gallaudet College, he did urge his audience “to remember that children follow marriage, and I am sure that there is no one among the deaf who desires to have his affliction handed down to his children.”⁷⁰ For these two sons of deaf mothers, deafness was something to be avoided and being a good citizen meant looking beyond one’s individual interests in favor of what benefited the public body as a whole. Bell and Gallaudet reconciled their belief that Deaf people ought to avoid certain kinds of marriages with their conviction that Deaf people were largely of the same opinion. Thus, both considered Deaf people as able to exercise their individual autonomy in a way that would not threaten the national good.

This understanding of educated Deaf people as autonomous rational individuals was fundamental to the discourse of co-equality. Deaf leaders expected other Deaf people to choose wisely when there was a risk of having Deaf children; hearing people who had close professional or personal contact with Deaf people encouraged Deaf-hearing marriages as a rational answer to this risk. Deaf people defended their marriage rights by referring to statistics based on personal observation and by evoking

⁶⁹ Gallaudet, “The Intermarriage of the Deaf, and Their Education,” 295-296.

⁷⁰ Bell, *Marriage*, (1891): 4. Such exhortations could be found in Britain as well. At a national conference of missionaries in Britain, a Mr. J. Dent, likely a hearing British missioner, reminded the Deaf leaders in his audience, “You must not think only of your own convenience and happiness in this matter, but remember the children.” “National Conference of Adult Deaf and Dumb Missions and Associations,” 110.

contemporary standards of romantic love, but it was an appeal to liberal individualist values that went to the crux of what it meant to be co-equal. Crux is perhaps too mild a word; without a belief in educated Deaf people as autonomous subjects, there would be no way to *conceive* of Deaf people as possibly being able to understand and assume the burdens of citizenship. Since legislators and the general public often depended on prominent hearing educators and missionaries for advice on deaf people and deafness, it was essential for Deaf people that this latter group saw educated Deaf people were due the individual autonomy accorded other citizens. The majority of educators and missionaries did and this was in itself an important victory in the marriages debate. However, the *Science* debate exposed a split in the general consensus—Bell and Gallaudet differed from Gillett on the social impact of deafness and the meaning of marriage. American Deaf leaders showed their position was most similar to Gillett's, as can be seen when Deaf people defended their right to marry one another on the grounds that “true love” could best be found in Deaf marriages, not Deaf-hearing marriages.

True Love

Deaf people harnessed contemporary standards of love and domesticity to defend marriages between two Deaf people. Deaf people surrounded their marriages with the trappings of romantic love, defended Deaf marriages as ensuring personal happiness that Deaf-hearing marriages could not give in equal measure, and defended the co-equal status of families with two Deaf parents. Some Deaf people evoked contemporary standards of romantic love in response to exhortations to reject marriage partners for hereditary reasons. According to this argument, “true love... based on mutual respect

and sympathy” was the basis of Deaf marriages. Since Deaf couples enjoyed “genuine sympathy with each other …[and] an appreciation of each others desires and feelings,” Deaf marriages were invariably happier than Deaf-hearing marriages.⁷¹ The ideal of “true love” as a necessary condition for marital bliss drew upon contemporary notions of romantic love, setting a clear contrast to marriage on hereditary grounds. However, there is an additional element to this argument: the contention that Deaf people felt a “mutual respect and sympathy” for one another because they shared a common experience of being deaf, an experience Deaf-hearing marriages could not match. In fact, some Deaf people portrayed Deaf-hearing marriages as the antithesis of love marriages. Deaf people adopted social conventions of romantic love, adapting these conventions to fit their unique experiences as deaf people. In doing so, they claimed a privileged status for Deaf marriages over Deaf-hearing marriages.

The tropes and trappings of romantic love were a crucial tool for presenting Deaf marriages as ordinary middle-class marriages. Wedding announcements in Deaf community periodicals in the United States and Great Britain showed weddings between two Deaf people as no different from other weddings. Unlike occasional sensationalistic pieces in the mainstream press which stressed the “silence” of Deaf wedding ceremonies and the novelty of people marrying “without uttering a word,” wedding announcements in Deaf periodicals emphasized standard features of middle-class weddings, usually gushing about “the fragrance of countless blossoms” at ceremonies and the “handsome

⁷¹ “True love,” in an address given by Thomas Davidson “Reminisces of the Deaf and Dumb Congress in Paris,” *The Deaf and Dumb Times* (November, 1890): 82; “genuine sympathy,” in comments by Agnew, a British Deaf man. “National Conference of Adult Deaf and Dumb Missions and Associations,” 111.

and valuable presents” received by the happy couple.⁷² These announcements were relentlessly mainstream, differing from announcements to be found in any local periodical only in the passing mention of the presence of an interpreter or the use of sign language. More commonly, bare-bones announcements recited names and dates, named family members and friends in attendance, and wished the couple well in their new life together. By their nature, wedding announcements are particular to a time and place, of interest to a limited, usually local, set of people. In the transnational Deaf public sphere, a wedding in one locality could find new meaning across the Atlantic. The 1890 wedding of Deaf Americans Annabel Powers and Charles Kearney in Decatur, Illinois was the subject of an article in the British *Deaf and Dumb Times*.⁷³ Kearney was the head of his own school in Indiana so coverage of his marriage in the American press was perhaps to be expected. But why the British Deaf press? The interpreter at the wedding, Phillip Gillett, superintendent of the Illinois school for the Deaf, and a later president of an association Bell founded to promote oral education, was well known and respected in the

⁷² “blossoms” and “presents” from “Foreign News: America,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (September 1890): 53-54. An example of a bare bones announcement with a brief mention of an interpreter can be found in *Deaf and Dumb Times* (May, 1890): 145. An example of sensationalistic accounts in the mainstream press can be found in an 1888 Chicago Tribune article depicting a Deaf-Deaf wedding where “Nobody spoke a word. All were deaf and dumb.” The article goes on to detail the “fluttering hands” and “silent gossip” of the guests, ending with the tears of an “old colored attendant, who was crying at the door. ‘It’s the prettiest thing I ever saw,’ said he.” “Wooed and Wed by Signs- Chicago Tribune” *Current Literature* (December, 1888), 500. See also “A Remarkable Wedding,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, reprinted in *The Deaf-Mute’s Journal* (November 18, 1880): 2. For a similar example from British newspapers see “Offa Podrida,” *The Deaf Chronicle* (February, 1892): 38.

⁷³ “Foreign News: America,” *The Deaf and Dumb Times* 2:4 (September 1890): 53-54.

field of Deaf education.⁷⁴ The *Times* article shows him interpreting—and thus validating by his presence—a wedding between two Deaf people. It is impossible to know if Gillett's presence was a factor in the *Times* printing this article; Kearney's prominence and his upcoming trip to Europe could also be the main reasons. Yet, a point is made by Gillett's presence: support for oralism does not necessarily correspond to opposition to Deaf marriages. A wedding announcement in the U.S. press could take on new meaning when transplanted into a different national context.

Deaf leaders countered the proposed “ideal” of Deaf-hearing marriages by presenting these marriages as unstable, harming bonds of family and society.⁷⁵ Deaf people recounted their personal knowledge of unsuccessful Deaf-hearing marriages as warnings to those contemplating such marriages. According to this view, Deaf people who married hearing people would often find themselves taken advantage of or divorced or both. In a speech at an alumni reunion, a Deaf instructor at the Wisconsin school for the deaf claimed, “it certainly is a good thing if [deaf people] can suitably marry among the hearing,” but sadly shared with his audience discouraging stories about a Deaf man who lost his property and Deaf women abandoned with their children after their hearing

⁷⁴ An 1894 article in the British *Quarterly Review of Deaf-Mute Education* which reviewed Gillett's career shows he was known in Great Britain as someone who leant to the oral method. ‘J.F.’ “Party Spirit v. Philanthropy,” *Quarterly Review of Deaf-Mute Education* 3 (October 1894): 356-359.

⁷⁵ In an address to Gallaudet students, Bell said “I would...hold before you as the ideal marriage a marriage with a hearing person.” Bell, *Marriage*, (1891), 12.

spouses divorced them.⁷⁶ In a letter to the *Deaf and Dumb Times*, a Deaf Briton recounted his personal knowledge of Deaf-hearing marriages in which were born deaf children, or which ended in divorce, physical abuse, and the infidelity of a hearing wife which caused a Deaf husband to commit suicide.⁷⁷ Divorce, infidelity, and suicide were hardly what Bell, Gallaudet and other like-minded hearing people had in mind when they encouraged Deaf-hearing marriages. By contending Deaf-hearing marriages led to broken homes and broken lives, Deaf leaders refuted educator's positioning of these marriages as ideal for Deaf people.

From this point of view, Deaf-hearing marriages were often contracted for reasons other than that of love. "I will admit that in a business point of view a hearing partner is an advantage, but in no other," stated a British Deaf man wholeheartedly in support of Deaf-Deaf marriages.⁷⁸ Hiram Phelps Arms declared the only reasons a hearing person would marry a Deaf one were "inferiority of birth or station, benevolence, and

⁷⁶ The speaker, Warren Robinson, noted four Deaf women divorced from hearing husbands in Wisconsin, of whom one had two children and another four, the latter being "left to the care of the authorities for the poor." A Deaf man was "deprived of his farm chattels under unfair judgment against him" after his divorce from a hearing wife. *Report of the Sixth Reunion of the Alumni Association of the Wisconsin School for the Deaf* (Delavan, WI, 1891), 49.

⁷⁷ "Correspondence," *The Deaf and Dumb Times* 1:2 (June, 1890): 10-11.

⁷⁸ The speaker did not clarify what he meant as to the advantage of a hearing partner in business affairs. "National Conference of Adult Deaf and Dumb Missions and Associations," *Deaf and Dumb Times*. (March 1890): 109. It is uncertain how common this view was. An article in the British *Deaf and Dumb Times* made the claim that "well educated" British Deaf people, particularly upper and middle class Deaf people, "prefer" to marry hearing people. This comment appears, unsupported by any evidence, in a report on the Royal Commission's report. "Report of the Royal Commission on the Deaf and Dumb," *Deaf and Dumb Times*. (September, 1889): 35. This unsigned article may have been written by the editor, C. Gorham, who stated "Were I to think of marrying, I should perhaps prefer a hearing girl for several reasons, but if I fell in with a deaf girl with all the qualities necessary for a wife, I might carry her off after all." "National Conference of Adult Deaf and Dumb Missions and Associations," *Deaf and Dumb Times*. (March 1890): 111.

infatuation.” Arms grew especially heated over the situation of well-off Deaf women who were forbidden by their families from marrying lower-class Deaf men. These women were forced to marry hearing men, the men only agreeing to do so for financial reasons: “The man sacrifices himself upon the altar of mammon, the woman...to please her parents!”⁷⁹ The 1889 Paris Congress passed a resolution stating “marriages between the deaf...offer more chances of happiness than mixed marriages.”⁸⁰ The resolution passed despite the fact that a number of American and European delegates to the 1889 Paris Congress were married to hearing women.⁸¹ The marriages debate was not over individual exceptions, but what was most applicable to Deaf people as a whole.

Support for Deaf marriages over Deaf-hearing marriages extended even to those who went through some of Bell’s measures of assimilation: attending hearing schools and not learning sign language. Hiram Phelps Arms’s life fits the ideal Bell and other oralists supposed would lead Deaf people to marry hearing people. Arms grew up among hearing people and only met other Deaf people as an adult. As late as 1880, he appeared in a profile of “successful articulators,” in which he expressed his wish for Deaf children

⁷⁹ Arms, *The Intermarriage of the Deaf*, 32.

⁸⁰ “Reminiscences of the Paris International Deaf and Dumb Congress,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (January, 1891): 107.

⁸¹ One delegate, Wells L. Hill of Massachusetts, was seen as a strong proponent of Deaf-hearing marriages, claiming “from his own experience that great benefits would accrue to the deaf were the practice more common.” Well’s and the marital status of other prominent delegates to the Paris Congress can be found in short sketches of American and European delegates to the 1889 Paris Congress. “Biographical Careers of Our Illustrations,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* 2:12 (May 1891): 159-161.

to be “restored to social intercourse with the hearing.”⁸² Arms’s fiery 1887 pamphlet in support of Deaf marriages indicates this support extended beyond the circle of those who grew up using sign language and attending boarding schools with other Deaf people.⁸³ Fay’s *Marriages of the Deaf in America* noted that approximately 78% of Deaf people from either “exclusively oral schools” or day schools, (in which they returned home to their families daily) married Deaf partners. While lower than the 86% from boarding schools or schools which were not exclusively oral, the proportion of Deaf-Deaf marriages among this population was nevertheless high.⁸⁴ Deaf-Deaf marriages were the norm, even among those who were raised in ways Bell felt would decrease Deaf marriages. Fay himself considered this as support of what he termed a “...law of natural selection which attracts deaf people to one another” as based on “the deep feeling of fellowship...which has its roots in the condition of all the deaf...”⁸⁵

This “condition of all the deaf”— the physical fact of deafness—was declared to be the chief obstacle to successful Deaf-hearing marriages. “Why should anybody,” asked Dudley Webster George of Chicago, force Deaf people “to take their chances with the hearing when their deafness is already standing as a wall of separation between

⁸² Myra E. Alden, “Personal Sketches of Successful Lipreaders and Articulators,” *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (November 4, 1880): 3.

⁸³ Indeed, Arms’ rhetoric was at times more strident than those Deaf leaders who grew up using sign language. In the introduction to his pamphlet Arms wrote “It is no pleasant task I have undertaken, in writing these papers, for the very people whose own respect I am endeavoring to shield from the attacks of Professor Bell and others of his mind, not only refuse to encourage my efforts, but flatly condemn them.” Arms, *The Intermarriage of the Deaf*, 4.

⁸⁴ Fay, *Marriages of the Deaf in America*, 26-27.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 28.

them?” While all might be rosy in the early stages of “love’s young dream,” George was skeptical that a Deaf-hearing couple “which heeds not the scriptural injunction, ‘Be ye not unequally yoked together,’ could withstand the storm” of “domestic strife” inevitably following marriage.⁸⁶ An item in the *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* recounted the sad tale of a Deaf workingman’s marriage with a hearing woman. After the marriage’s first few years, “during which all was now *reality*, and that which was natural and that which was *unnatural* did not harmonize,” the hearing wife apparently “seems to have grown thoroughly tired, if not disgusted, with deaf ears,” and “deserted” her husband.⁸⁷ In a similar vein, a “practical teacher of deaf-mutes” was quoted in a newspaper interview as saying that a young hearing man attracted to “a pretty deaf and dumb girl [will] learn the language readily enough, but when the novelty wears off he is apt to weary of the constant demand of interpretation.”⁸⁸ As seen in these examples, a number of writers stressed the “natural” incompatibility of Deaf-hearing couples. In response to those who assumed Deaf-hearing marriages would make Deaf people forget their deafness, George claimed the “inexorable law of human nature” would drive hearing spouses to speak to other hearing people and forget to accommodate their Deaf spouse.⁸⁹ While love could overcome physical differences for a time, it was assumed most hearing people could not hold out in a lifelong marriage with a Deaf person. This “natural” separation between

⁸⁶ Dudley W. George, “Should the Deaf Marry the Deaf?” *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (Chicago, 1893), 113.

⁸⁷ “From Chicago,” *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (March 31, 1881): 2.

⁸⁸ “Deaf-mutes,” *Deaf Mutes’ Journal* (September 16, 1880), 1.

⁸⁹ George, “Should the Deaf Marry the Deaf?” 114.

Deaf and hearing people was framed as partially due to the different modalities of the languages each used—signing versus spoken. But the onus for separation was placed on factors outside Deaf people's control: the fact that they were deaf and their prospective hearing partners unwillingness to adjust their lives for their deaf partners.

The promotion of Deaf marriages over Deaf-hearing marriages was grounded in the personal experiences of Deaf people; experiences that told them Deaf marriages were closest to the social ideal of marriage as a loving partnership. Deaf men stressed the normalcy of Deaf-Deaf marriages; a normalcy that differed from the type of normalcy proposed by those who encouraged Deaf-hearing marriages. In place of the illusion of assimilation symbolized by the mere sharing of physical space with a hearing spouse, these speakers advanced an idea of a “normal” marriage in which Deaf people wanted the same thing from their marriages as hearing people did. As one British speaker put it, “the same feeling of affection which brings two hearing hearts together moves the deaf and dumb, and establishes the confidence between them so *necessary to insure their happiness.*”⁹⁰ If a normal marriage was a union of equals, freely entered into by two people who loved one another, then marriages of Deaf people to one another were normal marriages.

The arguments used against Deaf-hearing marriages stressed, in strikingly negative language, the disadvantages of deafness. But these comments need to be seen in the context in which they were uttered, alongside statements that emphasized the

⁹⁰ Italics in original. The statement took place during a National Conference of Adult Deaf and Dumb Missions and Associations, attended by both Deaf and hearing people. The statement quoted above comes from a Mr. Pound. “National Conference of Adult Deaf and Dumb Missions and Associations,” *Deaf and Dumb Times* (March, 1890): 110.

liberating possibilities inherent in Deaf-Deaf relationships. Hiram Phelps Arms claimed Deaf couples “are one in sympathy, one in mutual respect; no thought of their misfortune ever obtrudes, all is kindly hidden—forgotten, through an easily communicable and common language and manners that are simply the reflection of each other.”⁹¹ Sharing a common language enabled Deaf people to get beyond the physical fact of deafness and reach the ideal of a love marriage. These speakers did not naively adopt a model of deafness that emphasized isolation and inequality, they coupled this model with a binary opposite of their own making: the pleasures of Deaf-Deaf interaction. This binary stood in contrast to the one oralist rhetoric presented as the opposite of isolation: the speaking, lip-reading deaf person “restored to society.” While oralists presented sign language-using Deaf people as isolated into “clannish” groups, Deaf people stated the opposite: that they were most equal among themselves, that by being together could they be most like other members of the societies in which they lived. Physical difference was utilized to stress the incompatibility of Deaf-hearing couples, then occluded in favor of the ideal of romantic love that encapsulated marriage in late nineteenth century America.⁹² Deaf marriages were co-equal to all other marriages.

⁹¹ Arms, *The Intermarriage of the Deaf*, 14.

⁹² Karen Lystra covers the history of romantic love in the United States in Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). For a history of marriage as a public institution, see Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). Cott also writes on the late nineteenth century context in Nancy F. Cott, “Giving Character to Our Whole Civil Polity: Marriage and the Public Order in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *U.S. History as Women’s History: New Feminist Essays*, ed. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 107-121.

Deaf Families

In an 1891 speech on marriage to the students of the National Deaf-Mute College, Bell suggested “It is surely to the interests of the children, both deaf and hearing, that one at least of their parents should hear.”⁹³ Considering the high rates of Deaf marriages throughout the decades, most Deaf Americans obviously did not take this advice to heart. Instead, Deaf people’s defense of Deaf family life focused on the practical strategies employed by families with two Deaf parents. Here, as with the advantages of Deaf marriages, physical deafness is acknowledged but minimized by emphasizing how Deaf families conformed to larger cultural understandings of what constituted a proper family. Deaf people shared visual and tactile ways of navigating the home as deaf people. Acknowledging they navigated a different sensory universe, they nevertheless presented Deaf families as equally mainstream as hearing families.

Practical knowledge on how to live as Deaf people in an auditory society was likely shared between Deaf people in signed form and occasionally appears in print. In response to aspersions against Deaf people’s ability to manage their own households because of their lack of hearing, Hiram Phelps Arms noted the ability of Deaf people to “feel noises about the house” as well as the compensatory advantages of using sight, with which, “he is able to accomplish everything within the compass of a normal person’s power, except to hear.” A Deaf mother slept with her baby on her arm, “the slightest

⁹³ Bell, *Marriage* (1891), 12.

movement...wakes her up at any hour of the night.”⁹⁴ These visual and tactile adaptations were widespread among Deaf people and took many forms. Sophia Fowler Gallaudet, the Deaf mother of Edward Miner and the Reverend Dr. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, reportedly felt her babies’ cries by feeling vibrations on the wall.⁹⁵ Other Deaf people rigged alarm clocks with weights designed to drop on the floor at a certain time or doorbells that tugged at objects, the visual disturbance attracting the attention of Deaf occupants in a house.⁹⁶ These adaptations were likely known to Bell and others who encouraged Deaf-hearing marriages; Arms comments were aimed more at the general public, with its ignorance of how Deaf people lived their lives. Those most knowledgeable about Deaf people were more concerned with interaction between Deaf households and their neighbors.

Deaf leaders offered advice on how Deaf families could maintain co-equal status alongside their hearing neighbors. Deaf American Warren Robinson advised an 1891 gathering of Wisconsin school alumni how to raise their hearing children in a hearing society. First of all, Deaf parents needed to “put their heads together,” and present a unified front to their local community. “Let neighbors attend to their own affairs,”

⁹⁴ Arms, *Interrriage of the Deaf*, 13-14. Until the use of sound-activated alerting systems become increasingly common in the 1970s, in which a light flashed or a device vibrated when a baby made some noise, Deaf parents adopted a variety of strategies to attend to their infants. Anecdotal accounts known to the author include sleeping alongside infants or keeping a hand on the baby throughout the night (as the baby slept in its crib by the side of the parent’s bed). There has yet to be an ethnographic study of cultural adaptations made by Deaf people to everyday life situations in the absence of assistive technology.

⁹⁵ S.A. Woodbridge, “Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet,” *Silent Worker* (June, 1901), 147.

⁹⁶ For a description of these and other ingenious nineteenth-century devices see George S. Porter, “Alarm Clocks and Calls for the Deaf,” *Silent Worker* (October, 1898): 20.

warned Robinson, encouraging parents to ensure they kept their children under their own paternal authority. This independence was important for a well-maintained Deaf household. Deaf parents needed to avoid being dependent on “every gossip or busybody that comes along” and instead “find out the rules of the community and the school” when disciplining their children. Deaf parents should adopt mainstream cultural norms but only from authoritative sources of information. This could also mean not placing “too much confidence” in their children’s accounts of “imagined ill treatment” from teachers or neighbors.⁹⁷ With this strategic mindset, Deaf households could maintain an equal status in the eyes of the community. An American speaker at the 1893 Chicago Congress saw few problems for households headed by Deaf parents. This speaker asserted

The general fact is that the manual alphabet is soon known and used as a means of communication from neighbor to neighbor, and in all essentials of information, as well as in some of the luxuries of gossip, it is not apparent that these deaf sustain any loss.⁹⁸

This observation is almost nonchalant. Of course neighbors to Deaf people would learn the manual alphabet, and of course Deaf people could participate in community life. Such a positive view of Deaf family life may not have corresponded with the realities of every nineteenth century family with two Deaf parents, but what is of interest here is the ideal presented in the public sphere. In this ideal, succinctly stated by Arms, Deaf-headed families could ensure their “domestic affairs move on much the same as any other

⁹⁷ *Report of the Sixth Reunion of the Alumni Association of the Wisconsin School for the Deaf* (Delavan, Wisc.: W.G. Weeks, Printers, 1891), 49.

⁹⁸ Fort Lewis Seliney, “The Social Status of the Deaf In America,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (Chicago, 1893), 90.

class of society.”⁹⁹ With a little strategic awareness on the part of Deaf parents and a little adaptation from others around them, these families could live perfectly mainstream lives. While Deaf Americans lived in a different sensory universe, they navigated the same social world as their hearing neighbors. Deaf Americans admitted physical difference but refuse to accept this difference should lead to stigmatization or social inequality.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ “I have made calls on deaf-mute couples, and I never experienced any trouble in having the door-bell answered. I have always found that these people’s domestic affairs move on much the same as any other class of society.” Arms, *Intermarriage of the Deaf*, 15. The experiences of Mary Ann Booth, a Deaf mother with sole responsibility for her family while her Deaf husband was off panning gold in California gives scholars a description of the changing rhythms of daily life of a Deaf-headed family in antebellum America. See Harry G. Lang, *Edmund Booth: Deaf Pioneer* Washington, D.C., 2004. A number of hearing children of Deaf parents have written biographies of their parents or autobiographies with a central focus on everyday family life in Deaf-headed families. These memoirs should be read as the articulation of a particular point of view: the childhood memories of adults, not as the way their Deaf parents necessarily understood their own family lives. Most works are memoirs of family life in the early and middle twentieth century. Charlotte Abrams, *The Silents* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1996); Lennard J. Davis, *My Sense of Silence: Memoirs of a Childhood with Deafness* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2000), and *Shall I Say a Kiss: The Courtship Letters of a Deaf Couple, 1936-1938* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1996); Harvey L. Barash, M.D. and Eva Barash Dicker, M.S. *Our Father Abe: The Story of a Deaf Shoe Repairman* (Madison, WI: Abar Press, 1991). Bonnie Kraft shares stories of her upbringing in an American Sign Language videotape, *Tomorrow Dad Will Still Be Deaf and Other Stories* (San Diego: Dawn Sign Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁰ Catherine Kudlick uncovers similar arguments and strategies employed by blind women for doing domestic tasks at home. Catherine Kudlick, “The Outlook of *The Problem* and the problem with the *Outlook*,” *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* ed. Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky, (New York, 2000), 192-193. Deaf and disabled people have adopted similar strategies of de-emphasizing physical difference in labor force contexts. Paul Longmore shows how the League of Physically Handicapped, in their campaign to get jobs from the Works Progress Administration, “concentrated on discrimination rather than diagnosis,” emphasizing their ability to work and de-emphasizing physical difference. Paul Longmore and David Goldberger, “The League of the Physically Handicapped and the Great Depression: A Case Study in the New Disability History.” *Journal of American History* 87 (December 2000): 892. Deaf Americans also fought against the U.S. Government regulations barring them from taking Civil Service examinations. For an account of this campaign, see Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, 37-51.

When the Political Becomes Personal

Bell encouraged Deaf-hearing marriages out of genuine concern over increasing the number of Deaf people in the world. He also considered Deaf-hearing marriages as assisting in the assimilation of Deaf people into their larger societies. The Deaf response was a defense of Deaf people's individual autonomy to choose their own marriage partners for reasons of love. In the public eye, the debate played out largely along these lines and Bell apparently maintained his position on Deaf marriages through the decades, especially when there was a danger of Deaf offspring. However, when a historian looks at the personal lives of specific individuals, public statements are problematicized and individuals act with a complexity belied by their public discourse. The case of George Sanders and Lucy Swett is a study of how the marriage debate intimately influenced the lives of two generations of Deaf people and that of Bell himself. Especially in light of the sign language/oral debate of the time, this story reveals the instability of essentialized categories of dominance and resistance.

Ties of finance and friendship connected the Sanders and Bell families. George Sander's hearing father, Thomas Sanders, a prosperous New England leather merchant, was the first investor in Bell's acoustic experiments that would eventually lead to the invention of the telephone. The two had met in 1872 when Thomas Sanders asked Bell to teach his five-year-old Deaf son, George. Bell eventually moved to the third floor of Thomas Sanders' mother's home in Salem, Massachusetts, spending the next three years teaching young "Georgie" in the mornings and spending evenings conducting his

experiments.¹⁰¹ Even after the invention of the telephone and his newfound fame, Bell continued to keep close contact with the Sanders family and George in particular. In 1882, fifteen-year old George Sanders moved to Washington D.C. to continue his studies at the National Deaf-Mute College.¹⁰² Bell reassured Thomas Sanders that his son's contacts would be mostly with "semi-mutes not congenital deaf-mutes" and they would converse in English, not in sign language.¹⁰³ Despite Bell and his parent's intentions, George Sanders's time at the college enabled him to make the acquaintance of Deaf people with whom he would come in contact for the rest of his life.¹⁰⁴

In his twenties, George Sanders met and fell in love with Lucy Swett, a young Deaf woman from a multi-generational Deaf family influential in the New England Deaf community. Lucy Swett's Deaf great-uncle, Thomas Brown, was the organizer of the first large-scale gathering of American Deaf people in 1850.¹⁰⁵ Her Deaf father, William Swett, was the co-publisher of a Boston-based Deaf periodical, the *Deaf-Mute's*

¹⁰¹ Bruce, *Bell*, 90-91.

¹⁰² Bruce, *Bell*, 399. For Bell's account of his instruction of George Sanders in the 1870s see Bell's *Upon a Method of Teaching Language to a Congenitally Deaf Child* (Washington, DC: Gibson Brothers, Printers, 1891).

¹⁰³ Alexander Graham Bell to Thomas Sanders, January 4, 1883, The Deaf, Sanders, George, 1882-1913, undated, Bell Papers.

¹⁰⁴ Sanders left Gallaudet after the 1888-1889 academic year. "Boston," *Silent World* (August 29, 1889): 4; "Boston," *Silent World* (October 10, 1889): 3. Florence E. Long, "Stray Straws," *Silent Worker* (January 1920): 95. While Sanders is listed in the 1890 Report of the Colombia Institution as a student at Gallaudet College, this likely reflects his status at the beginning of the 1889-1890 academic year, which, based on the *Silent World* articles above, he seems not to have attended.

¹⁰⁵ Harlan Lane, Richard Pillard, and Mary French, "Origins of the American Deaf World: Assimilating and Differentiating Societies and Their Relation to Genetic Patterning," *Sign Language Studies* 1:1 (Fall 2000): 30-31.

Friend, and founder or leader of a number of Boston based social, literary, and educational institutions for Deaf people.¹⁰⁶ Swett herself apparently had been born hearing, but gradually became deaf at an early age. All of Lucy's aunts and uncles on both sides were Deaf, as was her paternal grandmother, her sister, and a number of cousins.¹⁰⁷ Of Lucy's hereditary deafness, there was no doubt.

Nor was there much doubt of George Sanders's love for her. When George's grandmother—she who had hosted Bell in his early inventing days—died, Bell was startled to meet Lucy Swett on the street as he went to pay his respects. After George had "pleaded with his mother," Lucy was introduced to George's grandmother before she died. George Sanders was unabashed in declaring his interest in Lucy. He visited Lucy at her home soon after the funeral and, with Bell and others watching, "kissed his lady love before them all."¹⁰⁸ Bell had earlier tried to head off their courtship, sending one of his research assistants to investigate the Swett family's deafness and personally passing this information on to George Sanders mother.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Lane, et. al., "Origins of the American Deaf World," 35.

¹⁰⁷ Lane, et. al., "Origins of the American Deaf World," 20. Swett is referred to as a hearing child in a June 1880 article on a fundraising event at her father's school. Her signing abilities were praised, her rendition of the Lord's Prayer being "prettily rendered in a way that might have converted the hardest sinner present." "The Fair of the New England Industrial School," *Deaf Mutes' Journal* (June 3, 1880): 3. In the September 9, 1880 issue, Swett is referred to as "being rather deaf." "Itemizer," *Deaf Mutes' Journal* (September 9, 1880): 2.

¹⁰⁸ Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, May 5, 1890, Series: Family Papers, Folder: Mabel Hubbard Bell, Family Correspondence, Alexander Graham Bell, 1890, Bell Papers.

¹⁰⁹ Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, October 14, 1889, Series: Family Papers, Folder: Mabel Hubbard Bell, Family Correspondence, Alexander Graham Bell, May 1889, Bell Papers.

While George Sanders was determined to marry whom he chose, Lucy Swett agonized over the disapproval of Bell and the elder Sanders. “I am keenly alive to my unfortunate position,” Swett wrote George’s mother of her hereditary deafness, “yet am utterly helpless.” Swett’s letter to Mrs. Sanders shows the very real passions the marriage debate instilled in one facing not an abstract discourse but a concrete reality. The letter is a cascade of emotion, alternating between longing, despair, and defiance. “One thing I know- it would break my heart to have a deaf child,” Lucy said, defiantly adding, “I should blame very much those persons who agitated the question of hereditary deafness for they set me to thinking so much of the subject that it naturally hurt the child.” This was an allusion to contemporary beliefs that dramatic impressions on a pregnant woman could have a formative impact on fetal development. While acknowledging she understood the family’s resistance to their marriage, Swett penned fierce statements of love for George Sanders and hopes of one day being in a “dear sweet house of my own.”¹¹⁰

The courtship of George Sanders and Lucy Swett brought the marriage debate to Bell in a way he had not anticipated. Outside the public sphere, away from debates at congresses and papers presented at scientific societies, Bell was forced to confront fundamental matters of life and love among those he considered closest to himself. Bell felt a special bond with George Sanders. Not only had Bell acted as a teacher and mentor to George for nearly two decades, but he would also later provide George with a job at his new Volta Bureau and, after Thomas Sanders fortune dribbled away in failed

¹¹⁰ Lucy M. Sanders to Mrs. Sanders, undated, *The Deaf, Sanders, George, 1882-1913*, undated, Bell Papers.

investments, send work and considerable financial support to George Sanders' printing business in Philadelphia.¹¹¹ Despite telling his wife "I will not venture to advise him," a close reading of the *Science* debate shows Bell felt very much involved in the couple's decision. For the case Bell presented to Gillett in the pages of *Science*—that of the "young man" with a congenitally deaf family about to marry a young Deaf woman from a hearing family—was the case of George Sanders and Lucy Swett, their genders reversed, but most other details of their lives otherwise the same. The "teacher of the young lady," who felt "her" responsibility deeply and whose heart was with the young couple was none other than Bell himself. ¹¹²

Feeling "desolate and alone" in his hotel room after the elder Mrs. Sanders' funeral, Bell wrote a melancholy letter to his wife. Apologizing for his long absences and feeling himself "a dead weight on your young life," Bell reminisced on their early

¹¹¹ Bruce, *Bell*, 399-400. Robert Bruce suggests Bell saw George Sanders as a surrogate son, having none of his own. Bruce, *Bell*, 399. George Sanders worked at the Volta Bureau when it first started up at a salary of \$50 a month. His primary occupation at one time was to record marriage announcements from the *Deaf Mutes' Journal*. Letter from John Hitz to Alexander Graham Bell, January 17, 1893, The Deaf, Sanders, George, 1882-1913, undated, Bell Papers. At one point Bell's wife complained, "George Sanders costs you \$2000.00 a year and what do you really get from him?" Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, May 13, 1898, Series: Family Papers, Folder: Mabel Hubbard Bell, Family Correspondence, Alexander Graham Bell, May 1898, Bell Papers.

¹¹² The family history of the "young man" in Bell's letter matches Lucy Swett's in nearly every detail. "A young man (not a deaf-mute) became deaf in childhood while attending public school. He has one brother who is a deaf-mute...[his] father was born deaf in one ear and lost the hearing of the other...[the father also] had a congenitally deaf brother who married a congenital deaf-mute and had four children (three of them congenital deaf-mutes). The mother of the young man was a congenital deaf-mute, and she also had a brother born deaf. The paternal grandmother...was a congenital deaf-mute, and she had a brother who was born deaf. This brother married a congenital deaf-mute, and had one son born deaf. The great-grandfather of this young man...was a congenital deaf-mute. Thus deafness has come down to this young man through four successive generations, and he now wants to marry a congenital deaf-mute. The young lady has seven hearing brothers and sisters, and there was no deafness in her ancestry, but she herself is believed by her family to have been born deaf." Bell, "Professor A. Graham Bell's Studies of the Deaf,"¹³⁶

courtship and ruminated on the nature of love. Writing of George and Lucy, Bell noted, “I’m afraid the attachment has become too strong for prudence to have sway. They will surely marry— but what then? Will lovers ever consider the good of those that will come after them?” While Bell admired the young man, noting “he has become a manly fellow and everyone likes him,” he felt obligated to admonish Sanders courtship as improper for hereditary reasons: “George chooses danger to his offspring— for her love.”

Immediately following this sentence, Bell concludes, “Yet I can understand it too.”¹¹³ Proud of the young man George had become, unable casually to dismiss the love of two young people he knew personally, Bell acknowledged the inevitability of their union. When the political became personal, Bell acquiesced to a central argument put forth by Deaf people against his ideas in the marriage debate: true love ought to govern over hereditary principles, even when deafness could result.

Dear! Will lovers ever consider
the good & those that will come after
them? Deafness has come down
through four generations to Miss Swett
yet prudence will not prevent her from
marrying one who was born deaf &
George chooses danger to his
offspring — for her love. — Yet
I can understand it too.

Figure 4. Section of letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Bell, wherein Bell shares his concern over the marriage of Sanders and Swett.

Source. Alexander Graham Bell Papers, Library of Congress.

¹¹³ Bell to Mabel Bell, May 5, 1890, Bell Papers. Also quoted in Bruce, *Bell*, 399.

George and Lucy Sanders would marry and have two children, Dorothy Bell and Margaret. Both were deaf. While writing of her “profound shock” upon the discovery of her daughter’s deafness, Sanders somewhat incongruously ascribed this to being “so accustomed...to the fact that most children of deaf parents are possessed of the sense of hearing.”¹¹⁴ Sanders spoke orally to her daughters, who—like their mother—became deaf only gradually after birth.¹¹⁵ She refused, however, to emphasize pure oralism, preferring instead to “[treat] them as I would any hearing child” and let them develop “naturally” in all areas of life, from education to speaking to interacting with other people.¹¹⁶ Alexander Graham Bell seems likely to have influenced the education of Dorothy Bell and Margaret. They were put in public schools and the Sanders also apparently de-emphasized sign language in favor of spoken English.¹¹⁷ For his part, Bell learned to accept a deaf intermarriage and its deaf offspring in a family of close personal acquaintance. After Thomas Sanders death in 1911, Bell sympathized in a letter to George Sanders, “It must be a great comfort to you to have your wife and children with

¹¹⁴ Lucy Sanders, “How My Children Were Educated,” *Silent Worker* (July 1911): 183.

¹¹⁵ *Proceedings of the Twelfth NAD Convention*, (Hartford, Connecticut, 1917), 68-69.

¹¹⁶ The distinction Sanders made between “pure oralism” and treating her children like “any hearing child” is not made clear in the article. Sanders perhaps meant she did not undergo intensive speech drills. Lucy Sanders, “How My Children Were Educated,” 184.

¹¹⁷ Lucy Sanders claimed “it was not until the girls were five and seven years old respectively that they learned not *all* people hear and speak, and they learned the manual alphabet and used signs in a fair way.” Lucy Sanders, “How My Children Were Educated,” 184. At the 1917 convention of the National Association of the Deaf, Sanders participated in discussion of a paper on Deaf education by elaborating in more detail on her experiences “from the viewpoint of a mother.” Both girls only gradually became deaf and Sanders stated, “For at least six years signs were wholly excluded” until after “speech habits” were “firmly fixed.” According to Sanders, her daughters both signed well and “are at home anywhere and with any one.” *Proceedings of the Twelfth NAD Convention*, 68-69.

you now. You are not alone.” Expressing the wish to one day see the two girls, Bell asked George to “please give my best love to Lucy and the children and believe me,” Bell concluded his letter, “your affectionate friend.”¹¹⁸ It is at the realm of the intimate that complexities emerge belying traditional dichotomies of domination and resistance so prevalent in public discourses.¹¹⁹

George and Lucy Sanders were hardly typical of members of the nineteenth century Deaf community. Most Deaf people were not given private instruction by the era’s most noted oral educator, nor were they descended from a prestigious multigenerational Deaf family. Nevertheless, their story illustrates the larger story of the Deaf community in this time and place. Foremost in the Deaf argument was a pragmatic ideology that emphasized Deaf people’s right to exist both as autonomous individuals in larger society and within their own communities. While educating their daughters in hearing schools, the Sanders were active in their local Deaf church and renowned for their hospitality to local, national, and international Deaf visitors at their cozy middle-class home in Mt. Airy, Pennsylvania.¹²⁰ Dorothy Bell, widowed by the First World

¹¹⁸ Alexander Graham Bell to George T. Sanders, August 14, 1911, The Deaf, Sanders, George, 1882-1913, undated, Bell Papers.

¹¹⁹ Taking her cue from Foucault, Stoler contends it at the level of intimacy and personal relationships that the workings of dominant relations of power are most apparent. See Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties,” for an elaboration of this theme as applied to comparative colonial studies.

¹²⁰ Henri Galliard, *Gaillard in Deaf America: A Portrait of the Deaf Community, 1917* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2002), 134; Dantzer, “Pennsylvania,” *Silent Worker* 21:6 (March 1909), 102; Long, “Stray Straws,” *Silent Worker* 32:4 (January 1920), 95. Dorothy and Margaret had at least one Deaf cousin and were active in their local Deaf church. Charles Dantzer, “Pennsylvania,” *The Silent Worker* 21:6 (March 1909): 102. Their Deaf cousin

War, opened a roadside café near Valley Forge to cater to thirsty participants in the modern phenomenon of the recreational automobile trip.¹²¹ After passing the requisite civil service examinations, Margaret worked for a time in the Signal Service Corps as a typist.¹²² Both continued to participate in the Philadelphia Deaf community while carving their own paths in rapidly modernizing twentieth-century America.

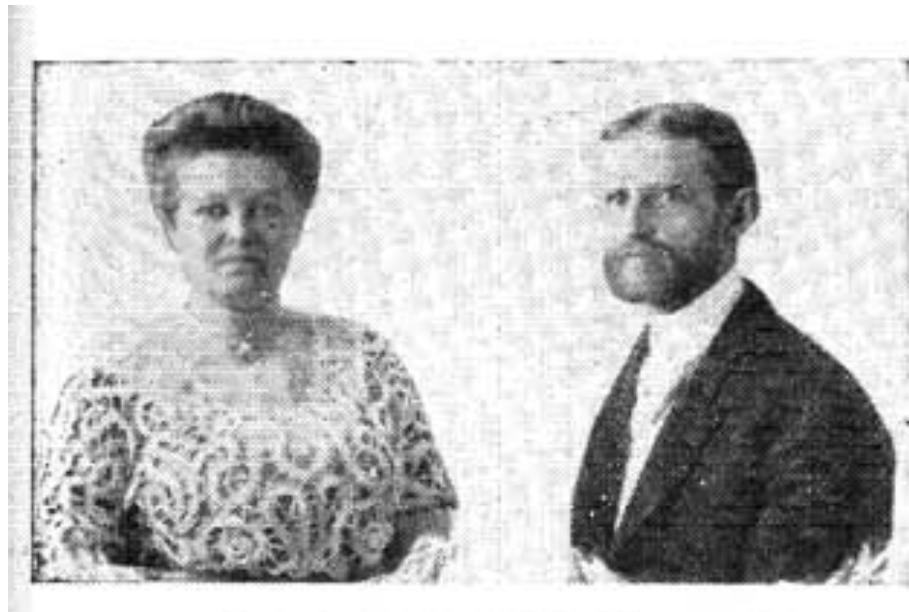


Figure 5. Lucy and George Sanders.

Source: Lucy Sanders, "How My Children Were Educated," *Silent Worker* (July 1911): 183. Silent Worker, Gallaudet University Archives.

was Helena L. Bowden, the daughter of Lucy Sanders' Deaf sister, Persis Bowden. James Reider, "Philadelphia," *Silent Worker* (July 1916), 186-187.

¹²¹ E. Florence Long, "Laurel Cabin Tea Room," *Silent Worker* (February 1921): 173.

¹²² Arsene Dozois, "Speaking of a National Magazine," *Silent Worker* (February 1919): 77.



Figure 6. Dorothy and Margaret Sanders.

Source: Lucy Sanders, “How My Children Were Educated,” *Silent Worker* (July 1911): 183. Silent Worker, Gallaudet University Archives.

The marriages debate reached its transnational high point around the time of the 1889 Paris Congress.¹²³ In the 1880s and 1890s, Deaf people met a transnational wave of debate calling Deaf marriages into suspicion. While the threat faced was potentially

¹²³ International congresses were not the only vehicles by which ideas on marriages could circulate transnationally but its presence as a separate topic only in the 1889 Congress proceedings reflects its prominence at one particular time in the transnational Deaf public sphere during the late nineteenth century.

consequential, their arguments (and those of their allies) seem to have dissipated any potential threats to their right to marry one another. Although the debate likely continued to be a factor in local lives, it reappeared as a major topic of concern among Deaf people on the national level again in the early decades of the twentieth century. When concern over the eugenic fitness of Deaf people appeared in different countries there was no one clearly identifiable person (such as that Bell represented) raising the issue of Deaf marriages or spurring widespread publicity about Deaf marriages on a transnational plane. The debate apparently remained more on the national level, as Deaf people dealt with eugenic organizations and laws that influenced people on the state and national levels. Also, the marriages question was gradually narrowing, from being about the marriages of a large number of Deaf people to focus more on hereditarily Deaf people.

This narrowing of the Deaf marriages debate is illustrated by looking at the U.S. Deaf response in the 1910s and 1920s. At its 1907 convention, the U.S. National Association of the Deaf (NAD) established a committee to correspond with the Committee on Eugenics in the American Breeders Association. David Starr Jordan, the chair of the Committee, wrote the NAD the next year that the Committee “has not recommended and has never thought of recommending the prohibition of the intermarriage of the deaf.”¹²⁴ This did not alleviate concerns for long. Less than ten years later, at the 1917 NAD Convention, Clayton L. McLaughlin called for greater attention to this issue, especially in light of ongoing eugenics research. “We must acknowledge we owe a duty to society in so far as the control of hereditary deafness is

¹²⁴ *Proceedings of the Ninth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf and the Third World's Congress of the Deaf* (Los Angeles, 1910), 69-70.

concerned. Unless we take our own initiative in this matter, society will get after us.”¹²⁵

Some members of the NAD were still concerned about possible legislation emerging from misconceptions on the causes of deafness. One popular misconception was that families with Deaf people would ‘transmit’ deafness, applying what was true for some hereditarily Deaf people to all Deaf people.¹²⁶

McLaughlin conceded eugenicists “have not trained big guns upon the deaf, having other and more weighty matters to contend with,” but considered it essential for Deaf people to publicize their voluntary restrictions on hereditarily deaf people before legislative ones were imposed upon a much wider group of deaf people. Indeed, some Deaf Americans adopted eugenic principles, usually coupling a statement of this ideology with a sense of a larger responsibility to the notion of racial strength. A member of the NAD’s Committee on Statistics on the Marriages of the Deaf, Alice Terry, stated Deaf people should be educated in the principles of eugenics, to “realize their responsibility to the race, to posterity.”¹²⁷ In a 1915 article titled “Human Tragedies,” a deaf man declared, “Deaf plus deaf very rarely equals racial safety, and one should think of

¹²⁵ *Proceedings of the Twelfth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (Hartford, Connecticut 1917), 111.

¹²⁶ Evidence of the idea of deafness being hereditarily transmitted as common knowledge comes through in memoirs of CODAs, hearing children of Deaf parents. As one CODA put it, “I was stigmatized as ‘that boy with those Deaf parents,’ genetically suspect, and therefore not prime dating material.” Miller, *Deaf Hearing Boy*, 124.

¹²⁷ Alice Terry, “Eugenics,” *Silent Worker* (March 1918), 95-96. Susan Burch notes Terry changed her position after the 1920s to oppose any “overt intervention in the private lives of Deaf adults.” Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 207. Terry is listed as a member of the committee in the proceedings of the 1917 NAD Convention. *Proceedings of the Twelfth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (Hartford, Conn., 1917), 4.

that.”¹²⁸ Facing this more dissipated disapproval, the 1920 NAD Convention passed a resolution disapproving of the marriages of congenitally deaf people with one another and congenitally deaf people “into families having deaf relatives.”¹²⁹ Historian Susan Burch’s contention that the U.S. marriages debate in the 1920s and 1930s remained “one more of words than actions” is accurate insofar as no formal legislative restrictions were enacted on Deaf people’s marital and reproductive rights specifically because they were deaf.¹³⁰

However, the spread of eugenic ideology in wider society and among Deaf people altered the terms of the debate within the Deaf community. The balance struck by Deaf leaders in the 1880s— their downplaying of the risk of having Deaf children with the assertion that Deaf people could be counted upon to make wise individual choices— was tilted towards a shriller, more condemnatory tone against a targeted group of Deaf people. In the 1880s and 1890s, Deaf Americans asserted co-equality through a focus on love marriages. In the twentieth century, Deaf Americans endeavored to show themselves as participating in the ideologies of eugenics and racial purity. The spirit of the 1920 NAD Convention’s eugenics resolution stands in direct contrast to the 1889 Paris Congress’s resolution in support of Deaf marriages as offering “more chance of happiness than mixed marriages.” Deaf families were portrayed in early twentieth

¹²⁸ Jerry Albert Pierce, “Human Tragedies,” *Volta Review* 17 (December 1915): 485.

¹²⁹ “Resolution Adopted at the Detroit Convention of the National Association of the Deaf,” *Silent Worker* (November, 1920), 68.

¹³⁰ For more information on the marriages debate in the U.S. in the early twentieth century, see Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 139-145.

century Deaf periodicals as raising eugenically fit hearing children.¹³¹ Changing social contexts spurred changed responses, indicating how intensely attuned Deaf people were to surrounding social discourses. Historians have not yet explored the extent to which these ideologies influenced individual Deaf Americans' choice of marital partners.

In at least two European countries, Deaf people faced direct marital and reproductive restrictions. In Finland, marriages between congenitally Deaf people were barred by law for a period starting in 1929. A 1935 Sterilization Act required Deaf couples undergo sterilization before they would be allowed to marry. The Act did not make a clear distinction between congenitally and hereditarily Deaf people and doctors could not necessarily confirm a person's deafness was congenital. According to one history of Finnish Deaf people, "marital issues...became increasingly more complicated" due to uncertain application of the law for individual Deaf people. After action from members of the Deaf community, the government agreed to apply the marital ban only to hereditarily Deaf people from 1944.¹³² Exceptions for this group, which were exceedingly rare, could be made only by applying directly to the president of the Finnish republic and one author writes of cases where exceptions were granted to Deaf couples expecting a child only on the condition the woman undergo voluntary sterilization after childbirth.¹³³ The marital ban remained in force until 1969.

¹³¹ Susan Burch points out a series of articles in the *Silent Worker* between 1917-1929 which emphasized the accomplishments of hearing children of Deaf parents. Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 145.

¹³² Eeva Salmi and Mikko Laakso, *Maahan Lämpimäänn: Suomen Viittomakielisten Historia* (Helsinki: Kuurojen Liitto ry, 2005), 503.

¹³³ Birgitta Wallvik ...*ett folk utan land*, 284-288.

Beginning in the 1930s, Deaf Germans faced forced sterilization laws which led to the sterilization of over 1,200 Deaf Germans and forced abortions being performed on 61 Deaf women, as well as cases of infanticide.¹³⁴ These sterilizations, carried out with the active complicity of superintendents and teachers at school for the deaf, left their mark in shattered lives. A Deaf man wrote in a letter to a retired superintendent at his former school, “For you, the word human is no longer applicable.”¹³⁵ Historians have not yet uncovered instances of Deaf Americans being sterilized specifically because they were deaf.¹³⁶ There may be other instances of marriage prohibitions, informal discouragement of marriages, or sterilizations of Deaf people that have yet to be uncovered. This is a history still largely unresearched.

The Deaf argument in the marriage debate was shaped in response to hearing constructions of Deaf people, which were themselves formed by discourses put forth in the public sphere by educators, scientists, and Deaf people. Tracing the ultimate influence of one or another strand of this discourse to specific entities may be an interesting exercise, but what is most compelling is to see how these constructions served

¹³⁴ Deaf people who underwent sterilization reported five cases of infanticide on newborn infants. In addition, at least seven of these abortions occurred in the ninth month of pregnancy. Horst Beisold, *Crying Hands: Eugenics and Deaf People in Nazi Germany* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1999), 156. Beisold gives a figure of 1,215 “forcibly sterilized deaf persons” who responded to a questionnaire. Tables 7 and 8 of the questionnaire, “Year of sterilization,” and “Age at time of sterilization,” respectively, have a total of 1171 responses with dates and ages and 44 responses with no information given to these two questions. Beisold, *Crying Hands*, 180-181.

¹³⁵ Beisold, *Crying Hands*, 135.

¹³⁶ Susan Burch points out a confluence of factors, such as race, poverty, or illiteracy, alongside deafness, could lead to such sterilization, but the evidence available is “anecdotal and ambiguous.” Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 138.

as maps for—and as blinders on—Deaf and hearing lives. While Deaf Americans were successful in preventing any formal restrictions being placed on their matrimonial practices, the first decades of the twentieth century would see the rise of a full-blown international eugenics movement, which would sterilize and kill such unwanted burdens to the nation. George and Lucy Sanders married whom they loved regardless of eugenic considerations. Facing a more invasive climate and hoping to avert unwanted attention, twentieth century Deaf leaders would adopt eugenic considerations and counsel hereditarily Deaf people not to marry one another. While Deaf political discourses could hold sway for a period, the weight of larger discourses would eventually serve to prearrange the boundaries of choices and actions of individual Deaf people. Deaf people retained their right to choose their marriage partners based on “true love and sympathy” but the rise of eugenic discourse was likely successful influencing some members of the Deaf community to adopt genetic exceptions to their assertion of individual autonomy.

More than a story of a single minority, the marriage debate illustrates overlooked mechanisms of power, shedding light on the interplay between minorities and transnational flows of ideas and ideologies. While Deaf people would successfully maintain their traditional marriage rights, the promotion of the needs of society over that of the individual, justified by seemingly objective scientific standards, would prove to be successful when applied to other stigmatized groups in the twentieth century. The Deaf marriage debate also reveals the strengths and limits of transnational minority discourses. Existing throughout the world without regard to national boundaries, Deaf people utilized similarities in their experiences to form potent counterarguments to a transnational discourse. Politically scattered into small communities and facing intense pressures from

their surrounding national societies, Deaf people could not always sustain their arguments over generations against an aggregation of discourses and ideas arrayed against them. Facing new ideologies, Deaf people devised new counterarguments, consistently interjecting themselves in discourses denigrating their claims to full citizenship. Deaf people did not stay in the latter half of a binary relationship of domination and resistance; they negotiated multiple and changing relations to power at different times and places. As the Sanders family entered the twentieth century, the next generation of Deaf people would continue to present themselves as healthy, contributing members of their nation-states.

CONCLUSION

I grew up in the final decades of the Cold War. At Deaf gatherings, I watched fearfully as my father and his friends pored over the latest news in the papers. ICBMs, mushroom clouds, nuclear winter, and the increasing strength of the Soviet Union colored their signed conversations. Communists scared me, but one day I found out not all of them wished us ill. For as my father told me, Josif Tito, the president of Yugoslavia, was a friend of Deaf people. Wounded while fighting the Nazi occupying forces in World War II, Tito stumbled to a farmhouse and sought help from the owners, a husband and wife. They faithfully fed him and nursed him back to health. As chance would have it, the couple was Deaf. Tito was, of course, shocked to find himself saved by a Deaf couple and he never forgot their act of generosity. Even after he became president of Yugoslavia, he remained a steadfast friend of Deaf people, and made sure their social and sporting associations received their fair share of state support. This story was not original to my father; he had heard it from others, and in conversations among Deaf people of my acquaintance, I have since found it to be common knowledge among my and older generations of Deaf people in the United States and Europe. I have not been able to verify which, if any, aspects of the story are historically accurate, but the lessons of the story, as well as its very existence and circulation, bring us to the twentieth century, and raises questions about the continuance of co-equality and transnational interconnections.

The 1924 International Silent Games opened a few days after the conclusion of the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris. Using, in some cases, the same facilities vacated by Olympic athletes days earlier, 140 Deaf athletes from nine countries engaged in the first international athletic games of Deaf people. In 1924, England won the soccer

competition, the Dutch dominated the swimming events, and France nearly carried off a clean sweep of the track and field events. Delegates from ten countries attended a related Congress, the Germans being reduced to observer status since they, as with their hearing counterparts days before, had not received authority from the Ministry of War to participate. The games were the inspiration of Deaf Frenchman Eugené Rubens-Alcais and Belgian Antoine Dresse, who were elected President and Secretary-Treasurer of a new Comité international sportif silencieux (CISS), the first permanent standing international organization of Deaf people. The organization, (formally founded in 1927) persists, its motto “Equality through Sports,” and its summer and winter games go under the name Deaflympics, a use of the Olympics name sanctioned by the International Olympics Committee.¹

CISS was joined by the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) in 1951, whose quadrennial Congresses continue to this day. The 15th World’s Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf was held in July 2007 in Madrid, Spain. Several thousand Deaf people from every inhabited continent congregated on Madrid. Congress attendees could choose from over 150 presentations, attend nightly theater performances by selected Deaf theater companies from around the world, or socialize at pubs in the city center packed full with Deaf people. The WFD Board (of which I am a member) announced the Congress Resolutions at the closing ceremony. Among the resolutions was one “reaffirming that multi-lingual education in sign language gives deaf and hard of hearing

¹ Séguillon, “The Origins and Consequences of the First World Games for the Deaf,” 124-129. For the motto and the Deaflympics name, see <http://www.deaflympics.com/about/index.asp?ID=1107>

people the best opportunity to achieve full citizenship and enjoyment of all human rights.”² Clearly, the transnational Deaf public sphere persisted throughout the twentieth century. Airplanes long ago replaced steamships, and websites and vlogs (video blogs in sign language) have largely displaced print publications, but desire for an expanded transnational space in which to be Deaf persists. For Deaf people are still a visual minority in an auditory world, and still feel—as Pierre Desloges did in 1779, Albert Ballin did in 1931, and others do today—the need to (and ability to) convince hearing people of Deaf people’s points of view. As the resolution above shows, sign language, education, and equality are still among the primary areas of twenty-first century Deaf political activity.

During the writing of this dissertation, I had the opportunity to present the ideas contained herein to a diverse array of audiences, Deaf and hearing, academic and lay, on four continents. During one exchange on the idea of co-equality, a workshop participant commented, “What you say is all right, but it seems to me that the idea of co-equality is more applicable to hard-of-hearing people than to Deaf people.” Her comment took me aback. Identifying someone as hard of hearing is not making a statement on his or her ability to hear: it is marking someone as outside of the Deaf community; as someone closer to hearing people than to Deaf people. There exists a continuum in the present-day Deaf community based on cultural affinity, and identifying someone as “a little hard of hearing” would mean that person identified more with the Deaf community whereas someone “very hard of hearing” would be understood as preferring contact with hearing

² <http://www.wfdeaf.org/WFDResolution.htm>

people. This is, of course, an inversion of what such terms would mean to hearing people.³ By saying the idea of co-equality was more applicable to hard of hearing people than to Deaf people, this audience member had marked co-equality as something outside the range of possibility for the twenty-first Deaf community she was a part of.

Hence my attempt to understand the context within which she made her comment. A number of possibilities came to mind. Perhaps the ideology of separate worlds was so dominant in the conceptual framework of members of the present-day Deaf community that the idea of co-equality was seen as outside the boundaries of the possible, except for those in a liminal state between Deaf and hearing worlds, such as hard of hearing people. Another possibility was that the ideology of co-equality articulated by middle-class Deaf men and women in the nineteenth century was influenced by their class position; that they were the “hard of hearing” of their day, able to transcend oppression by virtue of their class and education. Another possibility I considered was that idea of co-equality did not sufficiently make room for the concept of oppression.

Deaf people did (and do) face barriers to full participation in larger society. This dissertation has shied away from the narrative of oppression and resistance present in the historiography on the American Deaf community. The reason for this is because the twinned ideas of oppression and resistance can reify a dichotomy of Deaf versus hearing, obscuring what was actually a lively interplay between Deaf people and hearing people. To adhere to a mindset of oppression and resistance risks presenting the lives of Deaf people as purely reactive. The idea of co-equality allows a space beyond resistance to

³ Padden and Humphries, *Deaf in America*, 41.

understand the complex ways in which Deaf people participated in their societies, as well as the limitations sometimes placed on this participation. But does co-equality obscure oppression? So I returned to the nineteenth century and early twentieth century and looked at my subjects anew.

A metaphor that often comes up in both popular and academic writing on Deaf people is that of the bridge. Images of bridges and the action of bridging worlds are prevalent in the contemporary American Deaf community, in the field of Deaf Studies, and popular media accounts of the lives of Deaf people.⁴ Bridges fill in gaps, and the separate worlds of Deaf and hearing people have huge gaps to traverse. But someone must build and cross these bridges, and bridge builders can also become gatekeepers. A scene from a 1992 documentary, *In the Land of the Deaf*, illustrates the dominant role these gatekeepers can assume. A young Deaf couple looking for their first apartment enlists a hard of hearing friend to facilitate communication between the realtor and themselves. The hard of hearing person ends up dominating the scene, interjecting himself forcefully into the couple's decision making and the couple is reduced to spectators in their own apartment hunt.⁵ Others have complained those hearing people who know sign language and work with Deaf people, such as sign language interpreters,

⁴ Mel Whalen, "Bridges," *The Tactile Mind Weekly* 83, 15 December 15, 2004. E-mailed newsletter; Alan Riding, "A French Theater Where Even Those Who Can't Hear Share One Language," *New York*, February 7, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/08/theater/08deaf.html?ref=theater&pagewanted=print>

⁵ *In the Land of the Deaf (Le Pays de Sourds)* dir. Nicholas Philbert, Second Run, 1992. Motion Picture.

misuse their linguistic competence and seize the power of the bridge for their own purposes.⁶

There certainly existed people and institutions with the ability to influence the lives of Deaf people in the period studied in this dissertation. In particular, hearing people who knew sign language have historically had much power over the lives of Deaf people they come across. Historians have noted manualists and other supporters of sign language could be as paternalistic towards Deaf people as oralists were. Educators, both signers and non-signers, used their professional positions to present images of deafness and deaf people that served to maintain “the inherent authority of the hearing over the deaf,” as historian Douglas Baynton puts it.⁷ This authority manifested itself in ways large and small. Ernest Abraham, a hearing social worker and fluent signer, was a powerful figure in the early twentieth century Australian Deaf community. He allied himself with key Deaf leaders, instated them in positions of authority in Deaf clubs, and used them to maintain control over potential threats to his authority. Breda Carty has written a riveting account of his machinations within the Australian Deaf community, ranging from denying rebels job opportunities to, accounts have it, asserting sexual privileges over Deaf women.⁸ Abraham was not alone. Walking onto the quadrangle of

⁶ Elizabeth L. Broecker, “Who Speaks for the Deaf Community? Not Who You Would Think!”(1997) reprinted in *Deaf World: A Historical Reader and Sourcebook* ed. Lois Bragg, (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 43-47.

⁷ Baynton, “Foreigners in Their Own Land,” 304.

⁸ Abrahams machinations are detailed throughout the dissertation. For his skill in sign language and knowledge of Deaf culture, see Carty, “Managing Their Own Affairs,” 179-180. For his sexual advances towards Deaf women, including “preparing” engaged Deaf women for marriage, see Ibid., 109-110.

Gallaudet University from the Victorian-era buildings that dominate the university's front entrance, one will pass a statue of Edward Miner Gallaudet. Gallaudet was internationally renowned for his work as an educator and the founder of the university, named after his father. From his position of influence as the president of the (then) college, he was also a towering presence among the leaders of the American Deaf community, a good number of who had matriculated at the college.

An exchange of letters between Gallaudet and Philip Gillette, the superintendent of the Illinois school for the deaf, on the 1893 World's Congress offers a glimpse into the interplay taking place between people in their positions and members of the Deaf community. Gillett wrote to Gallaudet on May 6, 1892, in a letter marked "Personal", asking Gallaudet "set a train of influences to work" that would enable Deaf men from Washington D.C. to take charge of a proposed World's Congress of the Deaf. Gillett feared the Congress would turn into "a mere frolic or having a good time" if the wrong people should take charge. Gillett added, "You will permit me to say confidentially to you that I do not believe that the dignity of the case will be reached by leaving it to a few deaf mutes who happen to be living in the city of Chicago." Gillett considered it "of very great importance that [the Congress] be under the management of the very best, most enlightened and judicious deaf mutes that can be found in our country," and among these were the Deaf men who worked at Gallaudet College.⁹ Gillett followed up a week later in another letter also marked "personal", thanking Gallaudet for referring the matter to Amos Draper, one of the Washington men Gillett mentioned in his letter, but noted

⁹ Letter to Edward Miner Gallaudet, May 6, 1892. EMG Papers, Box 20 Folder 7, Letter 128.

worriedly that “some other parties...I learn, are already preparing a program for the proposed Convention of the Deaf.”¹⁰ The U.S. National Association of the Deaf (NAD) had earlier planned a national convention in Chicago in 1892, and a local committee consisting wholly of Chicago-based men had already been established. Desiring to be a part of the World’s Congress Auxiliary at the 1893 World’s Colombian Exposition, the NAD postponed its convention to 1893, and the Chicago-led committee became the General Committee on the Congress of the Deaf, with all five Chicagoans continuing to comprise the main organizing committee. Ironically, this committee made it a special point to “acknowledge great obligations to Dr. P.G. Gillett...for the influence he exerted on our behalf.” A Committee on Program was also established with four European members and the remaining members from seven different American cities, including Amos Draper from Washington, D.C.¹¹ While much of this story is still hidden, it seems Gillett and Gallaudet did not succeed in shifting responsibility to the people they preferred.

In other areas, their power over Deaf lives was more notable. The two men corresponded regarding students who sought admission to Gallaudet College, and in 1884, Gillett “decidedly object[ed]” to Gallaudet admitting John Mills, a student who had crossed swords with Gillett and left the Illinois Institution before completing his course of study. Prospective students needed to sit for an examination before being admitted to

¹⁰ Letter to Edward Miner Gallaudet, May 13, 1892. EMG Papers, Box 20 Folder 7, Letter 130. The letters were marked personal because Gillett was the chair of a Committee on the Education of the Deaf, part of the World’s Congress Auxiliary.

¹¹ “Preliminary History of the World’s Congress of the Deaf, at Chicago, in 1893,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (Chicago, 1893), 9-13.

the college, and Gillett must have feared Mills would be able to pass the exam for he wrote, “If you should admit Mills you would very seriously embarrass me.” Gillett planned to put Mills “on the anxious seat for a while, where it will do both him and some others good to remain for a time.” A review of Gallaudet Annual Reports over the next decade indicates Mills never attended Gallaudet College. Whether he understood why he was denied this opportunity is unknown.¹²

The ideology of co-equality presented Deaf leaders as able to maneuver in larger society. But the interventions of people such as Abraham, Gillett, and Gallaudet show how Deaf leaders needed to deal with intermediaries, hearing people in positions of power and authority over Deaf people, as they sought equality within larger society. Sometimes, their interests may have coincided, or hearing people may have been allies with Deaf people. Other times, Deaf leaders adopted different views. Gallaudet took a different stance on the marriages debate than Deaf leaders, although Deaf Americans adopted a view much like his in the early twentieth century. Gallaudet initially feared the establishment of Deaf social and political institutions, decrying what he feared was a trend to “clannishness,” but he recanted his views on clannishness by the end of the century.¹³ Carty’s dissertation shows how hearing people who worked in welfare organizations for Deaf people wielded their power in order to maintain control over individual Deaf people and prevent Deaf-led organizations from emerging. However,

¹² Philip G. Gillett. Letter to Edward Miner Gallaudet. September 27, 1884. EMG Papers, Box 17, Folder 1, Letter 25. Mills does not appear on the list of college pupils published in the annual reports of Gallaudet College between 1884 and 1894.

¹³ Edward Miner Gallaudet, “The Value of the Sign-Language to the Deaf,” *Annals* 32 (1887), 141-147.

Deaf Australians did seek assistance and support from larger society. Deaf people opted out of oppression in one state by joining a religious movement, Esteemed Brethren, which had no connection to the hearing people who controlled the Deaf Society. In another state, a breakaway association found support from a hearing organization with no connection to Deaf people. Deaf people and their allies could and did make use of resources in larger society to escape oppression.¹⁴

Deaf people, individually and as a group, responded in a variety of ways to attempts to control the use of sign language, to control their participation in public debate, and to live their lives the way they wished. The advantage of class was certainly a factor, as illustrated when upper-class British Deaf people interacted with one of the ubiquitous British missionaries to Deaf people. American Deaf people largely met at clubs and associations they established and financed themselves, but British Deaf people socialized in “societies” controlled by missionaries. Missionaries were powerful figures in the British Deaf community, controlling not only access to social services, but also access to the club, which was the main social center for local Deaf communities.¹⁵ In an 1893 paper, a British Deaf man note these missionaries condescended to upper-class Deaf people, making “hints that [upper class Deaf people] should not look too much above their similarly afflicted brethren [in the working class].” To this, the Deaf man claimed, upper class Deaf people could only respond with “contempt and pity at their ignorance,

¹⁴ See chapter five of Carty, ”Managing Their Own Affairs,” 153-176.

¹⁵ Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture*, 332-368.

or presumption that they [the missionaries] are on an equality with themselves.”¹⁶ Class privileges may have offered an escape from—or at least the pleasure of condescending to—those who sought to equate difference with inferiority.

The documents consulted in this dissertation are drawn from well-educated middle-class men and women who were fluent in one or more written languages. Working-class Deaf people, or Deaf people who preferred signing over written language, or those who were not political leaders, are largely missing from this work. How did these people understand co-equality? We still need to learn how assertions of co-equality differed according to the different social positions of different Deaf people. More needs to be done to understand how working class Deaf people, African Americans, and other Deaf minorities articulated their position vis-à-vis larger society, and how they dealt with hearing intermediaries. One Deaf man, knowing of Abraham’s irritation at being disturbed by noise, made it a point to lovingly mow a tiny patch of lawn outside Abraham’s office window for hours on end.¹⁷ Paddy Ladd has written of what he calls “1,001 victories,” numerous small actions Deaf people conducted to assert their independence in the face of attempts to control them. From Deaf pupils surreptitiously signing in their bedrooms at night to them playing dumb when confronted by hearing teachers, these small acts asserted the dignity of the individual in the face of attempts to

¹⁶ Gorham, “The Social Status of the Deaf in Great Britain and Ireland,” 96. Gorham himself worked as a missionary and the quote above can also be read as an expression of disagreement with his professional (British, hearing) colleagues to a sympathetic transnational audience of educated Deaf people.

¹⁷ Carty, “Managing Their Own Affairs,” 102.

control.¹⁸ More needs to be done to discover how non-elite Deaf people understood their relationship to larger society.

The incidents described above are largely concerned with the interplay between Deaf people and those hearing people who work with them as teachers or administrators or social workers. These are people who, by virtue of their position, their knowledge of sign language, or their professional training, adopt the role of intermediaries between Deaf people and larger society. And it is here, traversing the no-mans-land between worlds, the space occupied by these intermediaries, that the Deaf discourse of co-equality often falls short. As seen in Chapter 2, German teachers were able to convince the Prussian state that the pure oral method best restored Deaf people to society. And in Chapter 3, Deaf people could not successfully undermine the professional authority of oralists with their claim of personal experience. At the same time, the metaphors of worlds and bridges seem facile when one studies assertions of co-equality, certainly expressed in words and action to these intermediaries, but especially when directed to larger society. Deaf assertions of co-equality provoked a constant interplay between historical actors, a constant appropriation and re-inscription of the social ideologies and discourses of the day. For Deaf people were successful in other areas: they maintained, in most countries, the right to enter marriages without legal restrictions because of their deafness. On the local level, they devised and shared strategies on how to navigate

¹⁸ Illustrations of this concept are made in several chapters, most notably in chapters 7 and 8. Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture*, 310-315, 348-358.

society as deaf people. On the national level, they consistently fought for equality in everyday life, from the right to drive to access to employment.¹⁹

But the clarity of separate worlds also has the advantage of simplicity. Oralists presented parents of Deaf children with a stark choice: use signs and condemn your child to a Deaf world, or let them learn speech and let them enter the hearing world.²⁰ Oralists framed their offer as an offer of normalcy for the deaf child, and many parents eagerly took up the offer. In societies more hostile to difference, Deaf people may have made the decision to stress normalcy, diminishing the “co” from public attention and emphasizing instead the “equality” strand. While this dissertation does not reach far into the twentieth century, other historians have noted the ideology of equality that pervaded twentieth-century Deaf American discourse. Susan Burch cites various campaigns Deaf people undertook to participate in American life. Robert Buchanan notes the “code of personal responsibility” that stressed the necessity and ability of individual Deaf people to work as well as their hearing counterparts.²¹ This emphasis on equality of ability is also seen in European Deaf communities, such as in the film *Verkannte Menschen (Misjudged People)*, produced by German Deaf people and released in 1932. Its depictions of German Deaf people in images of idealized Aryans shows a stress on the normal bodies of Deaf Germans in the era before large numbers of Deaf Germans would undergo forced

¹⁹ For a brief history of campaigns to preserve Deaf American’s right to drive automobiles, see Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 155-165.

²⁰ Van Cleve and Crouch, *A Place of Their Own*, 126.

²¹ Buchanan’s monograph is a work of labor history and his first discussion of the code of personal responsibility can be found in *Illusions of Equality*, 12-14. Burch covers a number of campaigns in *Signs of Resistance*. For equality in employment, see *Signs of Resistance*, 99-128.

sterilization.²² Equality through normalcy, and not co-equality, seem to have been the main aim of early twentieth century Deaf communities.

Or is that too simple? Sign language appears in the film, as does a celebration of Deaf sporting associations and a pleasant scene of a Deaf gathering at an elderly home for Deaf people.²³ Buchanan notes the flourishing colony of Deaf workers in Akron, Ohio during World War I, and how recruitment incentives for Deaf workers by Akron-based factories (in a period when workers were sorely needed) included social and recreational activities for Deaf workers, including a Deaf football team, the *Goodyear Silents*, and college-preparatory classes taileld for those seeking admission to Gallaudet College.²⁴ Did the discourse of co-equality continue in the twentieth century? How was it modified and how, if at all, does it play out today? This dissertation does not seek to answer these questions, but offers up the concept of co-equality as a possible lens for other scholars to use when exploring Deaf communities in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The transnational Deaf public sphere expanded in the twentieth century, which saw the creation of permanent standing international organizations. The Deaflympics and the WFD are the largest, but the sphere has been enriched by the proliferation of regional and international organizations and conferences (Deaf History International, among

²² John S. Schuchman, “Misjudged People: The German Deaf Community in 1932,” *Deaf People in Hitler’s Europe* ed. Donna F. Ryan and John S. Schuchman (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2002), 98-113.

²³ Ibid., 102, 105, 106.

²⁴ Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, 79.

others) and regular transnational gatherings of Deaf people, from an array of WFD-sponsored youth camps offered to Deaf youth as young as ten to as old as thirty years of age, and regular gatherings of global Deaf youth to celebrate New Year's Eve in different world cities. White men from Western nations dominated the nineteenth century transnational Deaf public sphere. The twenty-first century brings with it a larger, more encompassing public sphere, with the involvement of a wider variety of Deaf communities from around the world. The 2007 General Assembly of the WFD, its highest decision-making body, brought together Deaf leaders, male and female, from over 70 different countries, representing a diverse array of nations, cultures, religions, and lifestyles. Historians and scholars in Deaf Studies need to explore the myriad ways in which these communities work towards equality in the societies in which they live.

The story of Josif Tito is a classic narrative of Deaf people contributing to their society and the benefits which flow from these contributions. In the story, the Deaf couple saved Tito's life out of innate goodness and a sense of shared humanity. When Tito found out they were Deaf, he revised his preconceptions of Deaf people as helpless and incapable. For had they not demonstrated their abilities in saving his life? Had he not, for a time, been utterly dependent on those who he would have otherwise seen as dependents? Without expectation of recompense, and without the intervention of intermediaries, Deaf people selflessly performed an act of heroism. In a gesture of thanks that was also recognition of their abilities and an acceptance of their right to associate with one another, Tito made sure Deaf organizations flourished when he became president. Benefits went not to the couple, but to the community; the actions of individual Deaf people could influence the lives of all Deaf people. Even in the blood-

red heart of communism, it seemed, Deaf people could live as they wished. At least these were the lessons I drew from the story, from my position as a child in the late twentieth century. And these are the precepts nineteenth century Deaf leaders tried to foster. Deaf Germans claimed a space for a Deaf community in the German nation. Amos Draper claimed the personal experiences of Deaf people rendered them fit to determine the methods to be used in education of Deaf children. Lucy and George Sanders asserted their right to marry whom they wished, and their ability to raise their children to assume an ordinary middle-class American lifestyle. To slightly paraphrase Edwin Allen Hodgson's optimistic comments at the 1893 World's Congress in Chicago, it would be the "the opinions [and abilities] of the deaf" presented directly before "the wisdom of an unprejudiced public" which would pave the path to co-equality.²⁵

Each generation of Deaf people necessarily adapts in response to changing social discourses. If nineteenth century Deaf people and twenty-first century Deaf people struggle for the same things—the recognition of sign language, the education of Deaf children, the achievement of equality for Deaf people within their societies—it is because no matter how well Deaf people of a particular generation harness the discourses of the day, or how many people they convince of their points of view, each generation of humanity confronts deafness and Deaf people in its own way. And each new generation of Deaf people begins again, continuously asserting their ability to shape a world open to all.

²⁵ *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (Chicago, 1893), 172.

APPENDIX

This Appendix presents references consulted for the information contained in Table 1, International Meetings of Deaf people, 1873-1924. This is not a full list of sources available for these meetings. Other sources are noted throughout the dissertation.

- 1873 Berlin. *Döfstmforeningen i Stockholm*, 1874 (Stockholm, 1874): 1-17; “Das Kirchenfest der Taustummen im Jahre 1873,” *Der Taubstummenfreund* 2:9-10 (September/October 1873): 82-86. 1,200 Deaf Germans attended a church festival for Deaf people, then a meeting of heads of clubs for Deaf people was held, with 35 participants from clubs in Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Sweden.
- 1874 Vienna. *Döfstmforeningen i Stockholm*, 1875 (Stockholm, 1875); J. Deutsch, “Der Taubstummen Congress,” *Organ der Taubstummen und Blindeanstalten in Deutschland* 20:11 (November 1874): 169-171; “Der Zweite Taubstummen-Kongress in Wien 1874,” *Der Taubstummenfreund* 3:7,8,9 (July, August, September 1874): 52-58.
- 1875 Dresden. “Döfstmukongressen i Dresden den 29 och 30 Augusti 1875,” *Döfstmänna* 1:1,2 (1876): 12-15; “Protokoll,” *Hephata* 1: 10 (October 1875): 74-80; *Hephata* 1: 11 (November 1875): 85-87; “Noch einmal über den Congressbeitrag!” *Hephata* 1: 12 (December 1875): 95.
- 1878 Leipzig. *Döfstmforeningen i Stockholm*, 1879 (Stockholm, 1879): 8; *Döfstmänna* 3: 1-2 (1878): 1-9; “Protocoll,” *Der Taubstummenfreund* 7:17-18 (October 1878): 65-68; *Organ der Taubstummen und Blindeanstalten in Deutschland* 24:8 (August 1878): 139.
- 1881 Prague. “Den femte döfstmukongressen,” *Döfstmänna* 6 (1881): 14-19 [partial photocopy from Box 50, Folder 3, Yerker Anderson Papers, Gallaudet University Archives]; “Der V. Taubstummen-Congress in Prag,” *Der Taubstummenfreund* 10:13-16 (July-August 1881): 34-35.
- 1884 Stockholm. *Döfstmforeningen i Stockholm, Styrelsens Årsberättelse för 1884 samt redogörelse för den Sjette Internationella Döfstmukongressen i Stockholm* (Stockholm, 1885): 11-34.
- 1889 Paris. Amos Draper, “Report of Professor Draper on the International Congress of Deaf-Mutes At Paris,” *Thirty Second Annual Report of the Colombia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb to the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889): 33-42; Amos Draper “Notes on the Meeting of the Deaf at Paris,” *Annals* 35 (1890): 30-33; S.G. Davidson, “International Congress,” *Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf, 1888-1889* (Mt. Airy, PA, 1889): 52-57. Davidson lists 5 delegates from “Sweden and Norway” and Table 1 counts them as two separate countries. A list of prominent participants can be found in “International Congress,” *Silent World* 3:28 (August 15, 1889): 4.
- 1892 Hannover. *Der Taubstummenfreund* 11: 27 (July 3, 1892): 109.

- 1893 Chicago. *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (Chicago, 1893). Attendance figures are drawn from a foreword to the official proceedings stating “the total attendance at the Congress was estimated to be nearly a thousand.” Ibid., 11. The official list of registered delegates in the proceedings number 315, including three Canadian, two Irish, six French, and two Swedish participants, as well as one participant each from Austria and Germany. However, a note prefacing the list of participants notes the list includes only registered members and “a great many failed to do so.” Ibid., 278.
- 1896 Geneva. No full list of Congress participants is contained in the following sources, but they do indicate participants from at least five countries attended. “Un Congrès International de Sourds-muets,” *Revue Internationale de L’enseignement des sourds-muets* 7-8 (October-November 1896): 235-238; “The Third International Congress of the Deaf,” *Annals* 41 (1896): 417-418.
- 1897 London Congress. Great Britain and Ireland are counted as one country. “Great Congress in London,” *Silent Messenger* 3:16 (September-October 1897): 48-53; “De døvstummes Kongres i London,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 7:48 (November/December 1897): 754-755; Harald Berg, “Reseberättelse,” *Döfstmutföreningen i Stockholm. Styrelsens Årsberättelse för 1897.* (Stockholm, 1898): 23-36.
- 1899 Stuttgart. “Døvstummekongressen i Stuttgart,” *Smaablade for døvstumme* 9:61 (July 1899): 967-972; “Stuttgart,” *Blätter für Taubstummenbildung* 12:11 (June 1899), 175-176.
- 1900 Paris. This Congress was divided into Deaf and Hearing sections, and figures given are for the Deaf Section. The figures of 219 delegates and 11 countries comes from Amos Draper, “The Deaf Section of the Paris Congress of 1900,” *Annals* 46 (1901): 218-223. Another source cites 200 participants, and sometimes more. Edward Miner Gallaudet, “The Paris Congress,” *Association Review* 2 (1900): 478-480. A third source lists “around 250” participants in the Deaf section. “Döfstmukongressen I Paris,” *Tidning för døvstumma* 10:5 (October 1900), 2.
- 1904 St. Louis. *Proceedings of the World Congress of the Deaf and the Report of the Seventh Convention of the National Association of the Deaf, 1904* (St. Louis, 1904). The 1904 Congress was attended by delegates from Germany, Switzerland, and Canada, with delegates from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Great Britain, France and Italy sending papers to be read. The official proceedings list only delegates from Germany and Canada, but a report in the *Annals* includes Switzerland. “The International Congress and the Seventh Convention of the National Association of the Deaf at St. Louis,” *Annals* 49 (1904): 343. While the list of delegates in the proceedings numbers 480, social events which took place around the Congress attracted more than official delegates. A visit to the Hall of Congresses at the St. Louis’s World’s Fair attracted an estimated 700 people.
- 1905 Leige “Free Congress.” The “Free Congress” was attended by a mix of Deaf and hearing people. Richard Brill, “International Congress on the Education of the Deaf,” *Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf people and Deafness* ed. John V. Van Cleve, Volume 2, H-R. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc., 1987), 87-89. Richard Brill, *International Congresses on Education of the Deaf: An Analytical History: 1878-1980* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet College Press, 1984), 63-65.

1905 Leige. This Congress was attended by 250 hearing people and 350 Deaf people. Richard Brill, "International Congress on the Education of the Deaf," *Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf people and Deafness* ed. John V. Van Cleve, Volume 2, H-R. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc., 1987), 87-89. Richard Brill, *International Congresses on Education of the Deaf: An Analytical History: 1878-1980* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet College Press, 1984), 63-65.

1911 Hamburg. A report from a Finnish participant lists 700 delegates from eight countries at the Hamburg Congress. "Från Hamburger-kongressen," *Tidskrift för dövstumma* 17:9 (September 1911): 101. A Swedish Deaf periodical claims an estimated 900 participants at the Hamburg Congress. "Två dövstumkongresser" *Tidning för dövstumma* 10:21 (October 1911), unpaged photocopy in Yerker Andersson Papers, Box 50, Folder 10.

1911 Rome. A report on the Hamburg Congress from a Finnish participant notes the Rome Congress had participants from four countries outside Italy: France, Belgium, Holland, and Austria-Hungary. "Från Hamburger-kongressen," *Tidskrift för dövstumma* 17:9 (September 1911), p101. A report in a Swedish Deaf periodical mentions the Rome Congress had 80 participants, nearly all Italian, with international participants from Spain, Hungary, France, Cuba, and Japan. "Två dövstumkongresser" *Tidning för dövstumma* 10:21 (October 1911). Yerker Andersson Papers, Box 50, Folder 10.

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