

The Deaf Do Not Beg: Making the Case for Citizenship, 1880-1956

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation examines deaf people's anxieties about their place in American society and the political economy from 1880 to 1956. My study highlights how deaf people sought to place themselves within mainstream society through their activism to protect and advance their status as citizen-workers. Their activism centered on campaigns against peddling. Those campaigns sought to protect the public image of deaf people as worker-citizens while protecting their language and cultural community.

The rhetoric surrounding impostorism and peddling reveals ableist attitudes; anxieties about the oral method supplanting sign language based education for the deaf; fears and insecurities about deaf people's place in the American economy; class consciousness; and efforts to achieve full social citizenship. Deaf people's notion of equal citizenship was that of white male citizenship with full access to economic opportunities. Their idea of citizenship extended to the *legal and social right* to employment and economic self-sufficiency.

This is a historical account of the deaf community's campaign during the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century to promote deaf people within American society as equal citizens and to improve their access to economic opportunities.

I dedicate this dissertation to my deaf brethren.

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- “Agatha Tiegel Hanson,” in *Encyclopedia of American Disability History*, New York: Facts on File Press, 2009.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation examines deaf people's anxieties about their place in American society and the political economy from 1880 to 1956. My study highlights how deaf people sought to place themselves within mainstream society through their activism to protect and advance their status as citizen-workers. Their activism centered on campaigns against public perception of deaf people as objects of charity while protecting their language and cultural community. The eradication of impostors and peddlers was a primary focus of these campaigns. The deaf community defined impostors as peddlers who posed as deaf-mutes in order to elicit sympathy and swindle an unsuspecting public. An example of an impostor in the view of the deaf community was William A. Rockefeller, father of famous oil titan and founder of Standard Oil, John D. Rockefeller, who was reputed to be an itinerant peddler who pretended to be deaf and dumb.¹ Contrary to popular imagination of peddling, for the purpose of this dissertation, I use the deaf community's definition of peddling. For deaf people, peddling referred to the practice of selling items of little value and inducing sales by capitalizing on the public's view of deaf people as objects of charity.

Building upon previous scholarship in deaf history by Robert Buchanan and Susan Burch, this dissertation focuses on these campaigns to eradicate impostors and deaf peddling. The rhetoric surrounding impostorism and peddling reveals ableist attitudes; anxieties about the oral method supplanting sign language based education for the deaf;

¹ Ron Chernow, *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* (New York: Random House Press, 1998), 5-6.

fears and insecurities about deaf people's place in the American economy; class consciousness; and efforts to achieve full social citizenship. Deaf people's notion of equal citizenship was that of white male citizenship with full access to economic opportunities. They did not agitate for deaf women's suffrage or equal access to citizenship for deaf African-Americans. Deaf men, and as of 1920, deaf women, had the right to vote and obliged with their duty to pay taxes. Their idea of citizenship extended to the *legal and social right* to employment and economic self-sufficiency. When deaf leaders spoke of economic self-sufficiency and equal citizenship for deaf people, they primarily meant that for deaf white men and on occasion for white deaf women as well.

My study examines the attitudes and rhetoric of the leadership of the deaf community through their addresses delivered at meetings of deaf organizations and published articles in the silent press. The silent press denotes newspapers produced by the deaf community, often at schools for the deaf, intended for consumption by the American deaf community.² The American deaf community does not include all deaf people living in the United States. Rather, this dissertation applies the social construction of deafness as established by historians John Van Cleve and Barry Crouch in *A Place of Their Own: Creating A Deaf Community in America*. This phrase refers to deaf people who identified themselves as members of a social group connected to one another through the common characteristic of deafness; the use of American Sign Language as a primary mode of communication; and shared social connections through schools for the deaf, deaf social clubs, and deaf political organizations. This definition of community excludes those who were deaf but did not associate with other deaf people beyond the scope of their

² For more information on the silent press, see Barry Crouch and John Van Cleve, *A Place of Their Own: Creating A Deaf Community in America*, (Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press), 1989.

education. The deaf community also excluded deaf African-Americans by virtue of race and segregated educational institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Many deaf political and social organizations implemented policies that prohibited deaf African-Americans from membership. In the South, deaf African-American children attended segregated schools for the deaf, which led to the development of a sign language distinct from American Sign Language. The exclusion of deaf African-Americans has led to a very limited record of the deaf African-American experience within the silent press and deaf community publications. Consequently, this study, with its focus on deaf community organizations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well as the silent press, speaks to the experience and campaigns of white deaf Americans.

Articles in the silent press and published addresses in convention proceedings provide the richest sources of information available about and by deaf people in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The authors of those articles and addresses were often white deaf men who were recognized and respected within the American deaf community as leaders and represented the ‘voice’ of Deaf America.³ This methodology is most effective for the aims of this project due to the

³ The Deaf Studies field has advocated using a capitalized ‘D’ in the term ‘Deaf’ to signify deaf people who identify themselves as culturally deaf and claim membership in the American deaf community. This usage was intended to emphasize the cultural identity of deaf people and remove attention from their audiological condition. By contrast, a small ‘d’ in the term ‘deaf’ represents all deaf people who have experienced hearing loss but may or may not identify themselves as a member of this socio-cultural minority. However, academic thought on this subject has recently changed. While ‘Deaf’ may be used to denote a cultural identity, I do not presume that all deaf individuals or organizations represent a universal cultural identity. Rather, that there are varying experiences that create this identity and community. Also, the use of the term ‘Deaf’ is fairly recent and is anachronistic for the time frame covered in this project. For the sake of consistency, for the benefit of a general audience, and in keeping with use of historical terms as they appear throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, I have decided to use a lowercase ‘d’ when writing about the American deaf community. On occasion, I choose to use the capitalized term, ‘Deaf,’ and when I do so, it refers explicitly to the definition of the American Deaf Community as I have defined in my introduction--deaf people who identify themselves as members of a unique socio-cultural minority group. My choice of not capitalizing the ‘d’ in deaf throughout this work does not mean that I reject the cultural and social model of the deaf experience.

paucity of sources in existence produced by rank and file deaf people and by necessity provides a top-down approach to the discussion and questions surrounding deaf people's ideas about citizenship and efforts to secure their place in American society.

This project adds to the historiography in several fields: to U.S. social history by placing deaf people into mainstream American history narratives; to Deaf history by expanding our understanding of deaf people's political activism in the context of economic anxieties; to policy history by exploring anti-vagrancy legislation that explicitly targeted impostors; and to disability history by exploring how and why deaf leaders expressed ableist attitudes toward fellow deaf people and other disabled people. Such attitudes contributed not only to the schism between the deaf and disabled communities but also to a similar schism between the fields of deaf and disability histories.⁴

The previous work of academically trained historians who developed the historiography of the field of deaf history informs this study. *A Place of Their Own: Creating the Deaf Community in America*, written by John Van Cleve and Barry Crouch and published in 1989, was the first academic study of the deaf community and its history. Van Cleve and Crouch established the historical parameters of the American deaf community by examining the formation of deaf people as a social and cultural group through their associations formed by schools for the deaf and through deaf socio-political organizations. I borrow their parameters to establish the definition of the deaf community in this work.

⁴ Ableism is the discrimination or prejudice against people with disabilities and a favorable attitude toward able-bodiedness.

The works of Susan Burch and Robert Buchanan form the essential framework for this study. Burch's work, *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900 to World War II*, is a social and cultural history of the deaf community. *Signs of Resistance* informed my understanding of how deaf people viewed themselves as citizens within American society, their efforts to claim their place in public life, and their development of a collective deaf consciousness during the first half of the twentieth century.

Robert Buchanan's monograph, *Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in School and Factory, 1850-1950*, is an extensive labor history that examines the relationship between defending sign language in schools and deaf people's efforts to obtain equal access to employment in the workplace during the era of industrialization. Buchanan's work examined the relationship that deaf adults created between sign language, schools, and the workplace, a relationship that features prominently in my study on the activism against peddling and impostorism. *Illusions of Equality* also offers essential economic context for my work about deaf people's activism in gaining employment opportunities and equality.

This study expands on Burch's and Buchanan's works by examining the specific example of campaigns to eradicate impostors and peddling. This sharper focus reveals subtle nuances in both works by highlighting explicit connections between ableism, pedagogical debates, economic self-sufficiency, and citizenship in deaf community activism. Whereas Burch's and Buchanan's works focus on the interactions between the deaf community and mainstream society as deaf people negotiated their place and preserved their cultural communities, my work uses the campaigns against peddling and impostorism to reveal the interrelationships within the deaf community as deaf people

policed and passed judgment on other deaf people as they negotiated deaf people's relationship with the state.

Relying on the work of historians Barry Crouch and John Van Cleve, most deaf history scholars locate the genesis of the American deaf community in the founding of the American School for the Deaf (ASD) in Hartford, Connecticut in 1817. This school was founded by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, a hearing Episcopalian minister; Laurent Clerc, a deaf teacher imported from France; and Mason Cogswell, a wealthy doctor, donor, and father of one of the first pupils at the school, Alice Cogswell. ASD was the first permanent school for the deaf in the United States. The founding of ASD led to the formation of the American deaf community because it generated the development of a systematic common sign language rooted in French Sign Language that later evolved into American Sign Language (ASL). Moreover, the school brought together deaf pupils across a large geographic area and connected them with one another, where previously deaf people had largely been isolated from each other. It provided an environment where they were largely insulated from mainstream society and able to develop their own cultural norms and intimate networks. Finally, the school nurtured a nucleus for an adult deaf community that evolved from the graduates of the school who either returned to the school to teach or chose to remain close to other deaf adults. The founding of ASD quickly led to the founding of state schools for the deaf across the country. Such schools also produced community newspapers known as little paper families (lpfs), social and political organizations for deaf adults, and by the mid-nineteenth century, Gallaudet College, a higher education institution for deaf people. These factors led to a close-knit network of deaf adults across the country and a mass identity as a unified deaf

community despite the low incidence of deafness among the general population spread across a large geographic area.

Deaf adults began to form local and regional associations for the deaf in the mid-nineteenth century as a result of the founding of schools for the deaf and subsequent intimate networks formed by deaf graduates. By the turn of the century, two national organizations took shape that claimed to serve the interests of all deaf people and defined the political agenda and activism of the American deaf community. These two organizations and their activism are at the core of my study: the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) and the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf (NFSD). The NFSD is also known by its colloquial term, “the Frat.” These two organizations took the lead in the community’s campaign against deaf peddling and impostorism beginning with rhetoric in the 1880s. This rhetoric evolved into organized publicity, legislative, enforcement, and policing efforts during the early twentieth century that eventually led to aggressive efforts to eliminate peddling rings operated by deaf peddlers in the era after World War II.

Founded in 1880 in Cincinnati, Ohio, the NAD started as a national organization unaffiliated with the state associations of the deaf. The NAD was comprised primarily of white, middle-class, educated deaf men and women. Deaf women were welcome as members but were given little voice in political matters until the apex of the Progressive era. The organization also explicitly prohibited deaf African-Americans from membership.

The NAD became a federation of state associations of the deaf in 1910 when the membership adopted a resolution to become a federation. In the organization’s early

years, national conventions were held triennially. At these conventions, delegates from the state associations of the deaf proposed mandates such as addressing impostors or oral education methods. These mandates served to unify the agendas of the individual state associations and promote more organized efforts in securing access to full citizenship. The NAD provided a forum where ideas were exchanged, where committees investigated the main issues of the day, and where leaders from across the country met, mingled, and networked. The officers of the NAD had little actual political power and could dictate very little, if anything, to the leadership of the state associations. State and local associations of the deaf possessed more political potency than the national organization. Although the national organization had little actual political power and control of state and local organizations, it was able to set a unified national agenda and chart the strategies used by state and local organizations. This political structure and power is reflected in how the NAD conducted the campaign against impostors and peddling.

The rank and file of the NAD and state associations were usually elites within the deaf community. These elites were white, educated, non-disabled deaf people who presented themselves as heterosexual middle-class citizens and who often “passed” for hearing because of their ability to speak and lip-read. The leadership of the NAD, in theory, represented all rank and file deaf people through its delegates from state and local associations. However, those who served in leadership positions within the NAD often did so on a voluntary basis, thus ensuring that leaders were relatively privileged. Moreover, the expense of traveling, lodging, and convention registration meant that attending NAD conventions required a certain socioeconomic standing and economic self-sufficiency. Despite the self-selecting nature of the NAD leadership, the mandates

proposed and approved at NAD conventions were assumed to be the will of the rank and file members of the American deaf community. NAD leaders shared a common belief that they were working to advance the cause of all deaf people with the implicit assumption that they were representing the broader deaf community.

The NFSD was established in 1901 in Flint, Michigan.⁵ The society served as an insurance company, mutual aid organization, and fraternal society whose membership was limited to white males. Its racial politics were exclusionary, limiting membership to white men; but the charter suggests a relatively expansive view of race, implying that as long one was not black, one was white. The deaf community appeared to make little, if any, distinctions amongst various ethnic groups. Both the NAD and NFSD explicitly banned African-Americans from membership but remained silent regarding ethnic whites from Southern and Eastern Europe, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans, who were often ostracized in mainstream society. I theorize that deaf people had a different understanding of race: unified by a common deaf identity, they overlooked many distinctions that hearing Americans used to delineate people according to ethnicity, race, and religion.

The purpose of the NFSD was rooted in the recruiting ideology that men who joined the NFSD were providing for and protecting their families from depending on welfare and charity in cases of sickness, accident, injury, disability (other than deafness), and death. Insurance, at this time, was not available elsewhere for deaf people because they were considered a high-risk population. Although its main mission was to provide disability, sickness, and unemployment insurance to deaf men, it functioned much like an advocacy organization. The NFSD saw itself as the counterpart of the NAD when it came

⁵ The NFSD was dismantled in 1999.

to political advocacy. Buchanan claims in *Illusions of Equality* that Arthur Roberts, long-time president of the NFSD, “kept the powerful organization centered upon its traditional fiduciary responsibilities and turned away any proposals to expand its mission.”⁶ Yet when examining the NFSD’s activities against peddlers, it is apparent that the NFSD was involved in a number of political campaigns and cooperated with the NAD in its political objectives.⁷ Additionally, the NFSD assisted the NAD in the campaign to preserve citizenship rights and privileges for deaf people, such as the right to operate automobiles, and supported the NAD’s movement for labor bureaus for the deaf to improve deaf people’s economic opportunities.⁸ In fact, the NFSD encouraged local divisions to initiate such movements for labor bureaus as necessary.⁹

The NAD welcomed a relationship with the NFSD and sought the NFSD’s assistance in accomplishing its political objectives. The NFSD, in some ways, provided a more effective framework for the deaf community’s political activism because of its centralized organizational structure. The NFSD national headquarters established and enforced policies along with shaping the political agenda. Unlike the NAD, in the NFSD local divisions were required to follow through and act on the political agenda established by national headquarters. In addition to providing a centralized organizational structure, the officers of the NFSD were paid, full time employees and thus could devote their working days to advocacy and politicking whereas the officers of the NAD were volunteers who devoted what spare time they could to the NAD’s objectives.

⁶ Robert Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in School and Factory, 1850-1950* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1999), 91.

⁷ Harry C. Anderson to Francis Gibson, April 3, 1926, box 16, Collection of National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Papers, MSS 163, Gallaudet University Archives, Washington DC.

⁸ Marcus Kenner, “President’s Address,” in *Proceedings of the Eighteenth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf*, (1937), 14.

⁹ Minutes of the Meeting of the Financial and Executive Committee of the Grand Division of the NFSD, January 20, 1938, box 7, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

Additionally, the NFSD had greater reach because it had a local division in every city in the United States that had a significant deaf population and allowed the central office to have a built in local network on the ground to carry out local and state activities.

On the one hand, the NFSD represented working-class deaf people; on the other hand, the NFSD leadership constituted of the same elites that led the NAD. The NFSD was consistently active throughout the years whereas the NAD worked intermittently. In other words, the NAD was the mouthpiece of the elite deaf community and the NFSD took on the day-to-day work of advocacy especially during and after the Great Depression. The NAD and NFSD collaborated on their major political objectives and the leaders in both organizations were intimately familiar with each other. Officers of the NFSD frequently served as officers of the NAD and, conversely, officers of the NAD were often members of the NFSD. For example, Arthur Roberts served as President of the NAD before he became the Grand President of the NFSD. The NFSD was familiar with most deaf individuals across the United States by maximizing its local networks of rank and file deaf people.

In order to understand a number of elements that shaped the NAD and NFSD's campaigns against impostors and peddling, it is important to understand how deaf people function as a group. The deaf community is close-knit in nature and commonly uses a language that emphasizes familialism.¹⁰ Deaf people from across the country were able to become familiar with each other and develop intimate connections as a consequence of several factors.

¹⁰ Sara Robinson, "The Extended Family, Deaf Organizations 1880-1950," in *Double Visions: Women and Deafness* ed. Susan Burch and Brenda Brueggemann, (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2004).

The low incidence of deafness in the population meant that deaf people, brought together by residential schools, were able to develop intensive community networks and a familiarity with virtually all educated deaf people across the country as well as with both educated and uneducated deaf people who were geographically close. This enabled deaf people to track suspected peddlers and impostors from coast to coast.

Deaf education was structured in a way that deaf children developed intimate, family-like bonds from an early age that carried over to their adult lives as they worked within state organizations. By 1880, most states had a state supported school for deaf children. State schools for the deaf brought all deaf children within a state to a central location. This, coupled with the schools' roles in serving as central employment loci for their state's deaf population, allowed for the early formation of state associations of the deaf. The existence of state schools for the deaf also offered frequent opportunities for educated deaf leaders to communicate and formulate agendas for the advancement of deaf people as a class. Schools for the deaf also often produced their own newspapers, often referred to as "little paper families (lpfs)." Those newspapers covered news of interest for the state's deaf community and were often exchanged across the nation with other lpfs. Those lpfs served as a crucial networking tool for deaf communities across the country and provided them with a national sense of community.

In addition to newspapers, intensive national networks and a national organization of educated deaf adults were made possible by Gallaudet College. Gallaudet was the only choice for higher education for deaf people prior to the 1960s. Gallaudet served as a locus for highly educated elite deaf men and women, bringing them together from all over the country, where they met, mingled, developed networks, and then spread across the

country. Those networks amongst educated deaf men and women translated into nationwide networks for the NAD and NFSD. Many of the leaders in the deaf community were also graduates of Gallaudet College.

All of these conditions enabled the extensive networks and intimacy within the deaf community that likened it to an extended family. While leaders pointed to language and auditory conditions as unifying features of deaf culture, internal boundaries delineated deaf membership according to perceived and real economic and physical abilities. Enforcing these boundaries often transformed political action into physical action as demonstrated by the anti-peddling and impostor campaigns. Rank and file members were called upon to actively participate in identifying, detaining, or chasing off peddlers and impostors.¹¹ These extensive networks were what enabled the NAD and NFSD to effectively pursue impostors and peddlers across seemingly wide and disconnected geographic spaces.

This study weaves the experiences of deaf people into the narrative of U.S. social history by providing a more complete understanding of how deaf people in the United States, long overlooked in U.S. history narratives, agitated for full access to citizenship during the twentieth century. It examines a population that has just recently begun to claim the attention of scholars, explaining how deaf people perceived themselves and their place in U.S. society and how they mobilized to improve their status as economic and political citizens. My work, then, contributes to important questions about minorities, social movements, and policy formation in the areas of disability, deaf, and modern U.S. history.

¹¹ Jimmy F. Meagher, "War on Impostors," *Mississippi Voice* 30 no. 10 (March 1, 1915): 2.

One overarching theme in American history is the expansion of citizenship. Throughout U.S. history various minority groups such as women and African-Americans have worked toward greater access to full citizenship, including the right to vote, protection from discrimination, access to education and employment, and full integration into American society. Historians have endeavored to celebrate and include the voices of long neglected populations within the narrative of American history. The disabled population has recently come to the attention of social historians who have sought to add their voice to those of African-Americans, women, and other minority groups.

Deaf people were marginalized within American society based on bodily difference, just as women, African-Americans, and ethnic groups were, and based on cultural differences, just as with many immigrant groups. Deaf people saw their political power limited, their economic opportunities scarce, and their community and culture under attack by Americanization advocates. This project asks the reader and historians to understand deaf people as an ethnic population.

Deaf people have their own language, American Sign Language, which often seems foreign to hearing Americans. This language allowed for the formation of a distinct community that viewed itself as separate, yet, a part of American society. Deaf people commonly did not have mastery of written English, an issue belabored by oral education proponents, which led people to view deaf people as a foreign, separate population, especially during the postbellum period. American Sign Language based educational methods also separated deaf people from mainstream American society as deaf people were educated in schools for the deaf that isolated them from hearing Americans. Those schools allowed for the development of a separate, distinct community

with its own cultural norms, mutual aid societies, schools and college, religious institutions, and social clubs. Deaf people tended to marry other deaf people and carried on social lives that were, more or less, separate from the social spheres of hearing Americans.

The one place where deaf Americans mingled and associated with hearing Americans on a regular basis was the workplace. Deaf people acquired ideas about citizenship in schools for the deaf where great emphasis was placed on economic self-sufficiency as a means to gaining full citizenship. Employment was the most pressing issue for deaf people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Consequently, the workplace was the site where deaf people most commonly asserted their place as citizens. Deaf people saw that economic success presented the most potential for advancement against discrimination and true integration with American society and its ideal of the worker-citizen.

While economic self-sufficiency entailed integration into a diverse workplace, such advancement was necessary to protect their cultural community, which they valued above all else. In order to preserve their language, their culture, and their community, they had to acquiesce to American society's expectations of citizens educated at the expense of the state. In order to remain "other", they had to become American in a crucial way through economic self-sufficiency. Thus, they created their own Americanism and defined their place within American society. Examining deaf people's efforts to eradicate peddling reveals in detail how this was accomplished.

This project, in treating disability, like race and gender, as a social construction, allows us to understand the historical basis of the social construction of disability and

specific sites of disability through the lens of the deaf community and deaf activism. This work is not only a story of citizenship and access but also a story of resisting the disability label. The history of anti-peddling activism reveals how and why deaf people defined themselves as able-bodied and distinct from other disabled people.

This project also allows us to study the movement of power by studying deaf people as an ethnic group and as a disabled population. Deaf people were a marginalized group as a result of where power lay. Studying their efforts to obtain greater access to citizenship allows historians to understand how a disempowered population attempted to influence and control the movement of power.¹²

In chapter one, I introduce the deaf community's activism in the late nineteenth century that centered on community uplift and self-help. Deaf leaders condemned peddling but did little beyond rhetoric to act against peddlers. Chapter two reveals the deaf community's call to action as they responded to the threat of impostors and embarked upon a push for legislation, undertaking a campaign organized on the national level directing state and local action targeting impostorism. Chapter three discusses the emergence of bona fide deaf peddlers in the deaf community's consciousness as they understood their anti-impostor campaigns would not succeed if they were not also aggressive in eradicating real deaf peddlers from the scene. The 1920s also witnessed a failed push for labor bureaus for the deaf that would place deaf people on improved economic footing. Chapter four outlines the deaf community's silence regarding peddling as the Depression struck and their response to the premise that the government was responsible for its citizens' economic well-being. Chapter five turns to the deaf

¹² Bill Hughes, "What Can a Foucauldian Analysis Contribute to Disability Theory?" in *Foucault and the Government of Disability* ed, Shelley Tremain (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan press, 2005), 81-82.

community's response to organized peddling rings in the wake of World War II and persistent employment discrimination despite overall economic prosperity in the United States.

With the rise and spread of the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century, the success of a nation was measured by productivity. Disabled people were not considered to be contributors to this productivity, so as non-producers, they lacked the characteristics of ideal citizens. Deaf people combated this idea by emphasizing their productivity and by rejecting any perception, including beggary and vagrancy, that they were not productive members of society. At the end, this project aims to provide a better understanding of what citizenship meant to a marginalized group and their strategies to achieve full citizenship.

Chapter 1: From Outcasts to American Citizens

During the late nineteenth century, native minority groups were confronted with mainstream American societal pressures to acculturate to obtain the benefits, privileges, and rights of American citizenship. It was a period of assimilation for native minorities such as deaf people, Native Americans, and Mormons. Along with immigrants, native minorities confronted an era of anti-alien sentiment, nativism, and resistance to foreign ways that included language, cultural values, and religious practices.¹

Historian Douglas Baynton states that in the late nineteenth century, deaf people were viewed with suspicion as outsiders because of their clannish behavior and the foreign nature of their language.² As historian Frederick Hoxie explains, postbellum America was a time of “growing social diversity and shrinking social space [that] threatened many Americans’ sense of national identity.”³ There was a push for a national identity that included efforts to assimilate and normalize minority groups with the intent of advancing those populations toward full citizenship, an American civilization ideal.

¹ Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 34. See also, Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Modern Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 54.

² Douglas Baynton, “A Silent Exile on This Earth: The Metaphorical Construction of Deafness in the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Disability Studies Reader* ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge Press, 1997), 127-128. Also see Robert Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in School and Factory, 1850-1950* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1999), 21.

³ Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 12-13.

The late nineteenth century was an era of intense Americanization as the nation dealt with the aftermath of the Civil War and an influx of immigrants.⁴ During this era, as immigration and urbanization shrunk social space and exposed Americans to cultural diversity, a new way of thinking about membership in the nation emerged.⁵ Hoxie claims that in the early nineteenth century people were seen as either citizens or savages, but by the late nineteenth century, these categories were expanded as partial membership materialized as a new category. Hoxie argues that partial membership allowed “minorities to serve the dominant majority/culture without qualifying for political and social equality.”⁶ Within the old framework, deaf people understood themselves as full citizens. However, by the late nineteenth century as they sustained a community identity as a distinct cultural minority within the context of a nation seeking a unified identity, deaf people found themselves subjugated to the category of partial membership in the nation. Sensitive to their status as second-class citizens in this new framework, deaf people believed they did not have social and political equality.⁷ Understanding their place in American society, the deaf community realized the need to agitate for full membership in the nation and to secure their place as equal citizens. They sought to dictate the terms of their assimilation. They wanted full, equal citizenship without sacrificing their culture and language.

In addition to cultural tensions, deaf people also confronted economic pressures, which all Americans dealt with in the context of a changing economic order. Historian Robert H. Wiebe describes the late nineteenth century as an era of a swiftly changing

⁴ Baynton, *A Silent Exile on This Earth*, 4.

⁵ Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, xii.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ George Veditz, “The Genesis of the National Association,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 62 no.22, (June 1, 1933): 1.

economy that resulted in a sense of dislocation and bewilderment for all Americans.⁸ Although some Americans benefited from the new economic order, native minority groups, such as African-Americans and Native-Americans, were sidelined by the changing economy.⁹ Historians have recognized economic distinctions between various groups such as skilled and unskilled labors, men and women, and whites and ethnic or racial minorities.¹⁰ In addition to those previously recognized categories, deaf and disabled workers also experienced similar disparities and distinctions in contrast to their able-bodied counterparts and are among those native minority groups who did not share equally in the benefits of the new economy.

For deaf people, job discrimination, rapid industrialization, immigration, and recurring economic crises threatened the material security they had accumulated as a community earlier in the century as a result of the expansion of state-supported education for deaf children that began in 1817. Deaf people were especially vulnerable as industrialization undercut the advantages that deaf children had gained from vocational training provided in residential schools. Jobs in new industries often did not require specialized skills as the American economy shifted away from small shops toward larger mechanized factories that relied upon unskilled labor.¹¹ This shift from small shops to large factories resulted in the fading of paternalism in the workplace as employers

⁸ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Modern Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 12-13.

⁹ Glenn Porter, "Industrialization and the Rise of Big Business," in *The Gilded Age: Essays on the Origins of Modern America*, ed. Charles W. Calhoun (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2007), 4. I argue that historians have omitted deaf Americans as a segment of the population that did not share equally in the benefits of the economic expansion. Along with women, African-Americans, and Native-Americans, deaf people "stood at the margins of the emerging industrial United States."

¹⁰ Eric Arnesen, "American Workers and the Labor Movement in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *The Gilded Age: Essays on the Origins of Modern America*, ed. Charles W. Calhoun (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2007), 43.

¹¹ Arnesen, "American Workers and the Labor Movement in the Late Nineteenth Century," 41-42.

relinquished control of the hiring and firing process to their foremen.¹² Deaf workers were subjected to greater vulnerability as the hiring process became more impersonal and deaf people could no longer rely upon paternalism or skill to obtain or retain jobs. As the economy expanded, “increasingly people were judged in the public arena by dollars, raw not defined. A man rose or fell in common parlance according to the slice of his bank balance.”¹³ The deaf community felt this pressure as they were measured by their economic worth, acutely aware of the connection between power and economic production. Deaf leaders blamed employment discrimination on the insufficiency of vocational training, deficient education in schools for the deaf, oral education methods, and poor public image. Economic pressures were the motivating force behind their drive for citizenship, which emphasized industrial training in education, access to education, adherence to work ethic, and economic advancement.

The deaf community also had to deal with the rising popularity of eugenics. The premise of improving the nation’s stock through eugenics was part of the drive for a national identity in response to the cultural and economic pressures of the Gilded Age in the United States. People believed that high achievers would uplift society while the weak simply disappeared.¹⁴ Eugenics, deriving from Social Darwinism, sought to improve society by using science and public policy to eradicate what many believed to be tainted or inferior stock, such as congenitally deaf people.¹⁵

¹² Wiebe, *The Search for Modern Order*, 20-21.

¹³ Wiebe, *The Search for Modern Order*, 40-41.

¹⁴ Wiebe, *The Search for Modern Order*, 135.

¹⁵ For in-depth discussion of eugenics and its applications during the early 20th century, see Elof Axel Carlson, *The Unfit: A History of a Bad Idea* (Cold Spring Harbor: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 2001).

Historian Susan Burch argues that the eugenics movement created numerous problems specific to deaf people. Eugenics presented deaf people as inferior stock and shaped public perception of deaf people as defectives. Such public perception and eugenic thinking shaped social attitudes that included calls for banning or limiting deaf people's right to marry other deaf people and promoted the oral method in schools for the deaf in order to limit socialization among deaf people and thereby reduce deaf intermarriage. Deaf intermarriages were discouraged because eugenicists theorized that those marriages led to deaf offspring and further isolated deaf people from mainstream society. A number of eugenicists also advocated the sterilization of deaf people although there was no scientific evidence to suggest that deaf couples were more likely than hearing couples to bear deaf children. Eugenic ideas also shaped the attitudes of employers that likely further curtailed deaf people's employment opportunities.¹⁶ Burch, in *Signs of Resistance*, suggested "from the oralist perspective, the residential schools that educated deaf people had given rise to a separate, distinct Deaf culture built upon the foundation of sign language."¹⁷ Eugenicists such as Alexander Graham Bell, a leading scientist and inventor of the late nineteenth century, believed this to be true and were determined that those schools were in part responsible for the formation of the deaf variety of the human race.¹⁸ Bell believed that if deaf people married hearing people, they would be better integrated into mainstream society and less likely to have deaf offspring.

In 1883 Bell suggested oral co-education as a solution, integrating deaf people with hearing Americans and compelling them to abandon sign language for spoken

¹⁶ Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900-1945* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 103.

¹⁷ Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 8.

¹⁸ This phrase is derived from Alexander Graham Bell's work, Alexander Graham Bell, *Memoir upon the formation of a deaf variety of the human race* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1884).

English, the language of the dominant majority. Bell believed that the oral method would encourage deaf people to mingle in mainstream society and choose hearing spouses once they reached adulthood.¹⁹ The objectives of oral co-education advocates was to integrate deaf people into American society, thus affording them the privileges of American citizenship, as well as to develop superior stock by eradicating congenital deafness from the gene pool.²⁰

The oral coeducation method movement was and continues to be one of the most pressing political issues confronting deaf people. Debates over the oral method in deaf education intensified after the 1880 International Conference of Educators of the Deaf held in Milan, Italy. At this conference, all attendees, with one sole exception, were hearing educators of the deaf. Out of all the attendees, only four, including the sole deaf individual in attendance, disagreed with the conclusion of the Milan Conference, which declared the oral method as the best pedagogical method for deaf children. The conference's impact was experienced worldwide as schools switched to the oral method and created a divisive debate that continues to this day.²¹

Oral versus manual method debates dominated conversations at National Association of the Deaf conventions and in the silent press throughout the late nineteenth and all of the twentieth century. Leaders in the deaf community advocated for the

¹⁹ This is the basic premise of Bell's argument in his work, *Memoir upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race*, (1884).

²⁰ Frederick Hoxie writes that schools were institutions of the majority culture, which served to surround and absorb-- to incorporate people into larger society and raise them to a common standard of civilization. While Hoxie applies this argument to Native Americans, I argue that this same premise served the intent behind the oral co-education movement for deaf children. Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 67.

²¹ The majority of the literature in Deaf History focuses on the history of deaf education and the oralism vs. manualism debate that stemmed from the Milan Conference. These same scholars have argued that the Milan Conference was what prompted the founding of the National Association of the Deaf in 1880. There has been some recent disagreement among historians of the American Deaf Community over whether or not the Milan Conference and the year 1880 should be treated as a watershed or as a starting point in Deaf History.

manual method, the use of sign language in deaf schools, as a primary means of instruction, insisting that deaf children would receive better industrial training and better fulfill their obligations as citizens if they were instructed in sign language rather than through the oral method. Deaf leaders believed deaf children could not learn effectively through the oral method because the majority of auditory information was inaccessible and lip-reading was guesswork at best. The oral method's rising popularity as schools for the deaf across the country changed pedagogical methods in accordance with the Milan Conference referendum and the eugenics movement pressures fueled fears of deaf adults that deaf children, without full access to knowledge in the classroom, would receive inadequate industrial and academic training.²² Thus, exclusive oralism, they argued, would limit future employment opportunities thereby encouraging the growth of vagrancy among the deaf population and creating a class of deaf citizens dependent upon the state.²³ Also fueling the anti-oralism sentiment was the deaf community's desire to retain a common deaf culture.

In an attempt to protect deaf people's place in the American economy and preserve the deaf cultural community, the effort to remove the defective stigma became a salient political issue for the NAD and shaped their campaigns against eugenics, oral education, and peddling. Believing that increased economic opportunities and fewer attacks on sign language based deaf education would follow once the defective stigma was removed, deaf leaders urged deaf people to present themselves as normal by

²² For an in-depth history of the debate surrounding the use of sign language in deaf education see, Douglas Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996).

²³ Jerome Elwell, "Some Truth About the Pure Oral System," *Proceedings of the Second Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (1883), 36-39 [hereafter NAD Proceedings (1883)].

governing their behavior and personal appearance.²⁴ In other words, deaf people were to avoid public embarrassment. Deaf leaders blamed peddlers for bringing deaf people into the public spotlight and enabling eugenicists, along with mainstream society, to imagine deaf people as defectives and offer deaf peddlers as an example of the failures of the manual method.

In response to economic pressures and employment discrimination, leaders in the deaf community advocated for the manual method, the use of sign language in deaf schools as a primary means of instruction, insisting that deaf children would receive better industrial training and better fulfill their obligations as citizens.²⁵ Resisting the advent of the oral method, leaders argued that the state should direct its efforts to improving industrial training in schools for the deaf rather than changing pedagogical methods. Those efforts were a part of the larger nationwide push for increased and improved industrial training as the new economic order saw greater distinctions between skilled and unskilled labor and recognized that specialized skills served as an entry point into the middle class.²⁶ Safeguarding the manual method, while pushing for improved industrial training, deaf adults argued that their schools were successful.²⁷

Deaf peddlers were blamed for giving mainstream society the impression that the manual method was a failure and were charged with being responsible for both the

²⁴ James L. Smith, "Some Hints on Manners and Morals," *Proceedings of the Third Convention of the Minnesota Association of the Deaf* (1894), 11-13 [hereafter MAD Proceedings (1894)].

²⁵ Elwell, "Some Truth About the Pure Oral System," 36-39.

²⁶ Wiebe, *The Search for Modern Order*, 113.

²⁷ Historian Robert H. Wiebe describes public education in his work, *The Search for Modern Order*, as a battleground in American culture during the late nineteenth century. Threatened communities viewed public education as a means of strengthening and adding cohesion to their communities in response to cultural and ethnic pressures from immigrants. As part of the resistance to what they viewed as cultural attacks, Americans used schools to emphasize what they defined as American cultural values such as Protestantism and the English language. We see similar parallels in the oral-manual debates as the majority culture attempted to push back against the foreign nature of sign language and the deaf community by championing oral co-education. See Wiebe, *The Search for Modern Order*, 57-58.

increasing popularity of oralism and the employment discrimination deaf people confronted.²⁸ Jay Cooke Howard, a local activist in Minnesota, claimed in a 1903 speech, “if a peddler is discovered to be actually deaf, he is not a graduate of our school at Faribault but is from some other State and has no business here. Among the graduates of our school there is not a single beggar.”²⁹ There were fears amongst the deaf leadership that if the public believed that schools for the deaf were not successful in their aims of producing self-supporting citizens, the state would either endorse the oral method or reduce appropriations for schools for the deaf. These fears are neatly summarized in a 1912 editorial declaring: “beggars and impostors also defame the schools for the deaf and dumb.”³⁰

In accordance with the belief that deaf people were responsible for the uplift of the deaf community as a class, deaf leaders urged deaf people to make the most of the education they received at the state schools for the deaf.³¹ Deaf people were reminded that self-sufficiency depended on education and total independence depended on themselves.³² All deaf people who were otherwise able-bodied were expected to contribute to the uplift of the deaf as a class.

²⁸ This attitude toward peddlers was part of deaf people’s effort to preserve the community that had given their lives meaning. Wiebe states that many Americans struck back at outsiders because there was “a widespread loss of confidence in the powers of the community...they responded by striking out at whatever enemies their view of the world allowed them to see. They fought, in other words, to preserve the society that had given their lives meaning.” Deaf people felt this pressure too, on their community, language, and way of life. They struck out at perceived threats to protect themselves and thus targeted peddlers as their enemy. See Wiebe, *The Search for Modern Order*, 44.

²⁹ Jay Cooke Howard, “Address,” *Proceedings of the Seventh Convention of the Minnesota Association of the Deaf* (1903), 19-26 [hereafter MAD Proceedings (1903)].

³⁰ “Impostors,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 41, no. 16 (April 18, 1912): 1.

³¹ This was part of the general attitude of this era that the highest, best, strongest citizens uplifted society as the remainder reorganized. See Wiebe, *The Search for Modern Order*, 135.

³² F.L. Seliney, “The Social Status of the Deaf in America,” *Proceedings of the First World’s Congress of Deaf Mutes* (1893), 30-32 [hereafter WCDM Proceedings (1893)].

Employment was naturally paired with successful education as a means to citizenship. Deaf leaders understood that citizenship depended on being viewed as participants in the American economy through work and paying taxes. Deaf labor advocates and workers commonly asserted that deaf people were intelligent, physically able-bodied citizens who had excellent work ethic. They often argued that deaf people needed to work in order to fulfill their obligation to be self-supporting tax payers in return for the state's investment in their education.³³

Trade unions also threatened deaf people's employment opportunities.³⁴ Deaf people became caught in the struggle between labor and capital. Between 1881 and 1905, there were 36,757 strikes involving six million workers; deaf leaders complained loudly about the frequent strikes and work stoppage.³⁵ Deaf workers were beset with two options during periods of labor unrest, both with dissatisfying consequences. One option was to break strikes in desperation for employment and earn the enmity of fellow workers. The alternative was to participate in labor unrest and hence limit future opportunities for employment once the strikes and work stoppages were over, further eroding an already a vulnerable position. Deaf leaders feared that participation in labor unrest would portray deaf workers as un-industrious and unappreciative as economic depressions affected job availability.³⁶

Keeping in line with the capitalist citizen ideology of the United States during the late nineteenth century, deaf advocates sought to prove their worth as citizens by

³³ Henry C. White, "Don't" *Proceedings of the Third Convention of the National Association of the Deaf*, (1889), 45-58 [hereafter NAD Proceedings (1889)].

³⁴ Amos G. Draper, "The Future of the Deaf in America," *Proceedings of the Fifth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (1896), 15-16 [hereafter NAD Proceedings 1896].

³⁵ W.G. Shanks, "Manual Training of the Deaf," *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Convention of the Empire State Association of the Deaf* (1890), 19-25 [hereafter ESAD Proceedings (1890)].

³⁶ Howard, "War on Impostors," *Mississippi Voice* 30, no. 10 (March 1, 1915): 2; See also Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, 73-74.

demonstrating their exceptional value as workers. By the late nineteenth century, due to industrial training received at state schools for the deaf, most deaf people worked in trades such as printing, shoemaking, and carpentry while many educated elite deaf adults often worked as educators and printers.³⁷ Deaf people were urged to take joy in labor and show the hearing public that they were willing workers.³⁸ In short, any type of labor was acceptable as long it was honest work.

By working, paying taxes, and owning property, deaf people were due the rights and privileges of citizenship and the respect of their fellow citizens.³⁹ Deaf community leaders were proud that deaf people paid taxes and *insisted* that they pay taxes. In fact, deaf people protested a 1915 Connecticut exemption from taxes because they “did not want to be considered in any sense on a level with paupers or other indigent persons, but wanted to pay their taxes and share the burdens of supporting the state on equal footing with all its other citizens.”⁴⁰

Concerns about the rights and privileges of citizenship were a fundamental aspect of the deaf community’s campaigns against peddling throughout the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. Deaf leaders accepted the logic that work was the best way to measure a citizen’s worth. Deaf people’s growing political consciousness within this context encouraged leaders to focus their attention on peddlers as a means of challenging the entrenched public perception of deaf people as defectives who were unable to participate as workers in a capitalist society. For deaf people, equal

³⁷ Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, 17-18.

³⁸ Edwin A. Hodgson, “President’s Address,” *NAD Proceedings* (1889), 7.

³⁹ W.S. Runde, “California Association of the Deaf,” *California News* 30, no. 3 (October 15, 1914): 35. According to historian Frederick Hoxie, one important ideal of social advancement was private ownership of property. Property ownership was an indicator of “economic prosperity and social sophistication.” See Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 19. Deaf people bought into this idea as they emphasized their role as taxpayers and property owners.

⁴⁰ “Sparks from the LPF,” *Mississippi Bulletin* 30, no. 13 (April 15, 1915): 7.

citizenship meant deaf children's right to a state-supported education using the manual method and deaf people's right to self-sufficient employment.⁴¹

In 1893, Thomas F. Fox, president of the NAD, stated that, despite the progress that had been made over the previous half-century, the deaf community still had much to accomplish before it reached the point where its members were acknowledged as self-sufficient citizens entitled to all the duties and rights of American citizenship.⁴²

Fox was born in 1859 in New York. At age 10, he was deafened by spinal meningitis and subsequently enrolled at the New York School for the Deaf at Fanwood. Upon graduation from Fanwood, Fox attended Gallaudet College where he began his political activism and attended the first NAD convention in 1880. After earning his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1883, Fox returned to Fanwood where he taught and served as Principal of the Academic Department. In addition to teaching and serving as president of the NAD from 1893 to 1896, Fox was a printer and editor of *The New York Journal of the Deaf*, an important publication in the deaf community.⁴³

Leaders like Fox were careful to emphasize that deaf people were taxpaying citizens of average [i.e., normal] intelligence who wished to have nothing to do with charity and objected to the association between deaf people and charity. Fox emphasized this point in an 1888 speech: "They are not paupers, and above all things wish to avoid becoming such, and therefore do not ask for an almshouse...they are free born American

⁴¹ The manual method refers to the use of sign language in deaf education as opposed to the oral method which relied on speech and lip-reading. For more information on the manual and oral methods debate, see Douglas Baynton's *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁴² Thomas F. Fox, "President's Address," *Proceedings of the Fifth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (1893), 4-5 [hereafter NAD Proceedings (1893)].

⁴³ Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 8.

citizens of average intelligence.”⁴⁴ At this time, leaders argued that deaf people were themselves responsible for educating the hearing public that deaf people were self-sufficient citizens.⁴⁵ Fox suggested courses of action subsequently used in the deaf community’s concerted campaign against beggars, peddlers, and impostors.⁴⁶ In the anti-peddling campaign, deaf leaders took the position that the inability or refusal to work justified the marginalization of deaf peddlers. Attacking peddlers and impostors was a central component of the deaf community’s empowerment strategies for changing mainstream society’s misperceptions and position deaf people as deserving citizens. The efforts served three overlapping goals: to convince non-disabled people to accept deaf Americans as equals, thus eliminating common employment barriers; to instill in deaf people common American values of work and civic responsibility; and to promote a positive identity as deaf in the face of an ableist society.

It was believed that peddlers created poor impressions on potential employers because of the charity stigma associated with peddling and by the implication that deaf people were disabled and unable to work. As one man claimed in 1912:

“All [we] ask is a fair chance. It is much to be regretted that in some places discrimination has been thrown against the deaf for no other reason than some of the hearing business men [seem] to have peculiar ideas that their deafness would necessarily render them incapable of doing anything. How ridiculous.”⁴⁷

Because equal citizenship for deaf people meant deaf children’s right to a state-supported education using the manual method, leading to deaf people’s right to self-

⁴⁴ Fox, “Popular Misconceptions Concerning the Deaf,” *Proceedings of the Twelfth Convention of the Empire State Association of the Deaf* (1889), 35-41 [hereafter ESAD Proceedings (1889)].

⁴⁵ Fox, “The Federation of the Deaf,” *NAD Proceedings* (1889), 14-17.

⁴⁶ For an in-depth analysis of deaf people’s economic condition and employment discrimination directed toward deaf people see Robert Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in School and Factory, 1850-1950*, (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1999).

⁴⁷ “Aid Deaf to Get Work,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 41, no. 10 (March 7, 1912): 1.

sufficient employment without discrimination, the leadership attacked those who didn't conform to this paradigm. Peddlers, who included hearing people who pretended to be deaf, served as convenient scapegoats for deaf people's inability to secure employment and for the rising popularity of the oral method in deaf education. Deaf leaders presented the existence of deaf peddlers as evidence that there was a real need for the educational and economic reforms that they had advocated for since the mid-nineteenth century.

Arguments within the deaf community against peddling centered on criminality, exploitation, and most importantly, the damage to the public perception of deaf people. For example, it was feared the increased visibility of deaf vagrancy might encourage the state to abandon the manual method in favor of the oral method, which, in turn, would further increase vagrancy due to lack of employment. In addition, deaf leaders feared that vagrancy might encourage the state to reduce the overall appropriations for deaf schools. Such rhetoric surrounding peddling remained static throughout the campaign against peddlers that took place from 1880 to the 1950s, but campaigns ebbed and intensified with the changes in the economic and political landscape over time.

During the 1880s and 1890s, the leadership's strategies centered on the theme of community uplift and self-help, believed to be best accomplished through education, work, and mutual aid. This focus was intended to secure economic opportunities and citizenship rights for the American deaf population. Leaders argued that education was an important means for deaf people to assert their rights and ensure their place in American society. Deaf advocates had argued since the early 1800s that education provided deaf people with the resources to be politically active and engaged citizens.⁴⁸ Fox cast schooling as a partial "cure" for deafness, which he viewed as a comparatively minor

⁴⁸ Fox, "Social Status of the Deaf," *NAD Proceedings* (1883), 13-16.

affliction. “With the favoring circumstances of an education and good manners,” he asserted in 1880, “the misfortune of deafness diminishes in its magnitude, till it takes its place among the many ills of life, which, since they cannot be remedied, must be borne with patience and fortitude.” Good character accrued through good education, Fox implied, dissolved the differences between deaf and non-deaf people, and in the process normalized deafness.

Throughout the discourse within the deaf community regarding deafness, the attitude was often that deafness in itself was minor and should not serve as a barrier to access, employment, full citizenship, and hence “normalcy.” The leadership within the deaf community carefully crafted arguments that the state had an obligation to its deaf citizens, as it did for its hearing citizens, to provide a free public education for all deaf children. They argued not only that education was a right due all citizens but also that the state would best benefit from creating a class of good citizen-workers and urged the state to make education compulsory for all deaf children.⁴⁹

Educational reformers since the mid-1800s promoted industrial training for deaf students, hoping that graduates would find gainful employment and thus be responsible and independent citizens.⁵⁰ Leaders emerging in the deaf community during this time echoed the rhetoric of their deaf and hearing allies as they declared that the state had a duty to educate them, but in return for that education they had a duty to the state to be self-supporting citizens.⁵¹ As a class, deaf people would be best uplifted because of a

⁴⁹ Smith, “Compulsory Education for the Deaf,” *NAD Proceedings* (1889), 52-55.

⁵⁰ For an in-depth study of the relationship between educational reform and economic opportunities for deaf people, see Robert Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in School and Factory, 1850-1950*, (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1999).

⁵¹ Fox, “Social Status of the Deaf,” 13-16.

sense of pride and self-reliance as well as an understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship; qualities instilled in deaf children through education.⁵²

Deaf leaders and educators stressed that deaf education had been successful in its objective of producing self-sufficient, productive members of society.⁵³ They were careful to highlight the fact that graduates of deaf schools did not become wards of the state, either in prisons or in almshouses. In 1901, Anson Spear, an anti-peddling activist in Minnesota, proudly declared that the Reverend H.H. Hart, the secretary of the state board of charities had toured the state prisons and almshouses and did not find any deaf people amongst any of these institutions.⁵⁴ Olof Hanson, a leader in the Minnesota and Washington Associations of the Deaf and onetime president of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), furthered this point, claiming that if there were any deaf people found dependent on charity or in almshouses, they were either uneducated or partly educated.⁵⁵ Hanson's statement served two purposes: to argue for compulsory education and to further the argument that the existing educational system [manual method] did not fail in its objectives.

In addition to defending deaf education and portraying deaf people as self-sufficient citizens, the leadership sought to emphasize that the majority of deaf people were law-abiding. Deaf leaders often emphasized that there were no deaf people in prisons.⁵⁶ James Smith, president of the NAD in 1896, argued that the low representation of deaf people in the criminal justice system occurred not because of any laxity in the

⁵² Elwell, "Some Truth About the Pure Oral System," 36-39.

⁵³ Anson Spear, "The Deaf as Members of Society and Citizens," *Proceedings of the Sixth Convention of the Minnesota Association of the Deaf* (1901), 18-21 [hereafter MAD Proceedings (1901)].

⁵⁴ Spear, "The Deaf as Members of Society and Citizens," 18-21.

⁵⁵ Olof Hanson, "The Industrial Problem Among the American Deaf," *Proceedings of the Seventh Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (1904), 141 [hereafter NAD Proceedings (1904)].

⁵⁶ Howard, "Editorial," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 39, no. 35 (September 1, 1910): 3.

justice system but because deaf people, due to the nature of their education, tended to be honest, law-abiding citizens.⁵⁷ This emphasis was crucial as the leadership employed strategies that linked peddling with criminality. Deaf leaders stressed that deaf people were equally answerable to the law and should not be given reduced punishments on account of deafness and this included violating vagrancy statutes. With this rhetoric, deaf leaders rejected pity and charity in any form, including within the legal system. Donnelly, an attendee at the 1883 NAD convention argued:

“There is one thing that the public dispense too freely. This is ‘pity’ or ‘charity,’ as it may be called. For instance, take a deaf mute criminal who is brought up before the court. The clever and wily lawyer, in words of touching eloquence tries to show the presiding justice that the deaf mute is a being to be pitied. He is deaf and dumb. The crime should not be noticed, as the deaf mute did not know better. Often the justice thus gets a mistaken idea of his duty.... One bad deaf mute must not be allowed to hurt the standing of a hundred of his brethren.”⁵⁸

Deaf leaders also promoted a good work ethic by appealing to deaf men’s sense of masculinity. They linked labor with manhood. P.A. Emery, a speaker at the first NAD convention in 1880, exhorted his audience to have a love for labor, calling labor a blessing and idleness a disgrace. Emery appealed to deaf men’s masculinity by claiming that “laziness or dislike of work tends to lower one in manhood...and the *dunce of a fool* who thinks it manly when it is really very *unmanly* to live by genteel laziness and snobbish rascality.”⁵⁹ Leaders challenged deaf men’s masculinity by telling them that they were themselves to blame for their low regard among mainstream society because

⁵⁷ Smith, “Where Are We At?” *NAD Proceedings* (1896), 60-64.

⁵⁸ Donnelly, “Response to Fox’s paper “Social Status of the Deaf,”” *NAD Proceedings* (1883), 22.

⁵⁹ P.A. Emery, “Love of Labor,” *Proceedings of the First Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (1880), 29-34 [hereafter *NAD Proceedings* (1880)].

“instead of cultivating a spirit of true manliness and self-reliance, they are willing to be treated as inferiors.”⁶⁰

Deaf women were not exempt from self-help rhetoric and were expected to contribute to the community uplift. Emery also asserted “laziness or dislike of work tends to lower one in...womanhood...roll up your sleeves and wash the dishes like a lady.”⁶¹

Emery’s speech was followed with a resolution at the first NAD convention that “we deaf mutes... in no manner throw discredit upon labor or make fun of our laboring brother, be he or his toil ever so humble...to go forth to battle with stern realities of life with a manly spirit and an honest endeavor to be faithful and cheerful workers in all walks of life.”⁶²

In 1896, Amos G. Draper, a graduate of Gallaudet and a mathematics professor at Gallaudet, cautioned

“it will be fatal to forget how thin is the partition that separates poverty from sin, and lack or incapacity for employment from the shame of dependence. We read with a shudder that in Denmark 46 percent of the adult deaf are pensioners upon their friends.”⁶³

Leaders of state associations often touted the fact that deaf people represented the smallest portion of the population classified as paupers.⁶⁴ Deaf leaders explained away the few cases of deaf paupers by claiming that those deaf individuals who were classified as paupers “are probably uneducated, and never having been instructed, have no trade to depend upon for self-support.”⁶⁵ Deaf community leaders also stressed that the few deaf people who were paupers and required assistance should look no further than to their own

⁶⁰ Thomas Francis Fox, “Trades and Occupations of the Deaf in America,” *NAD Proceedings* (1883), 13.

⁶¹ Emery, “Love of Labor,” *NAD Proceedings* (1880), 29-34.

⁶² “Resolutions,” *NAD Proceedings* (1880), 34.

⁶³ Draper, “The Future of the Deaf in America,” *NAD Proceedings* (1896), 15-16.

⁶⁴ Fox, “President’s Address,” *Proceedings of the 14th Convention of the Empire State Association of Deaf-Mutes* (1891), 8 [hereafter *ESAD Proceedings* (1891)].

⁶⁵ Fox, “President’s Address,” *ESAD Proceedings* (1891), 8.

brethren for aid. The deaf community should and would take care of their own people and thus, as a class, would not be burdens on mainstream society-“still it is hardly creditable to us that we should permit even a few deaf mutes to be dependent upon public charity.”⁶⁶ Educated and well-to-do deaf people were responsible for their poorer and less intelligent brethren.⁶⁷ Deaf leaders frequently emphasized the community’s efforts to provide for impoverished deaf people. For example, they provided homes for aged deaf adults and promoted mutual-aid societies.⁶⁸ Fox argued that deaf people were themselves responsible for educating the hearing public that deaf people were self-sufficient citizens.⁶⁹ Among Fox’s suggestions was that the NAD establish a publicity campaign consisting of an information bureau to disseminate information about deaf people to the press and legislatures. In addition to publicity, Fox also suggested that deaf people become more proactive in preventing legislation that would otherwise circumscribe their rights, particularly legislation governing deaf education.⁷⁰

Ableist rhetoric had an active role in this discourse. F.L. Seliney, an educator, boasted in 1893 that “while poverty and dependence are the lot of a portion of mankind, and it is the privilege of the other portion to relieve, there is less call for charity to the aid of the deaf than to almost any other of what may be described as the handicapped classes.”⁷¹ Fox employed this ableist rhetoric by claiming that deaf people must help those who cannot help themselves and shield them from mainstream society in order to advance the agenda of able-bodied, intelligent, and educated deaf people. In 1889, Fox

⁶⁶ Fox, “President’s Address,” *ESAD Proceedings* (1891), 8.

⁶⁷ Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, 10.

⁶⁸ Fox, “Associations of the Deaf in America,” *WCDM Proceedings* (1893), 30.

⁶⁹ Fox, “The Federation of the Deaf,” 14-17.

⁷⁰ Fox, “The Federation of the Deaf,” 14-17.

⁷¹ Seliney, “The Social Status of the Deaf in America,” 30-32.

told his audience at the NAD convention that he believed “every educated deaf mute should aid those who are not so fortunate in mental attainments.”⁷²

Beyond mutual aid, the well educated and well to do deaf were expected to be role models of a higher standard of thought and conduct. Deaf leaders condemned deaf people who chose not to work lest they perpetuate the public’s impression that deafness was indeed a hardship that required alms and public charity. The NAD chided deaf people to engage in fruitful labor and otherwise portray themselves as moral and hard working citizens.⁷³ The leadership admonished their constituency to encourage good work ethic and speak out forcefully against the evil of sloth and dependency.

“It is, very seldom indeed do we hear the voice of a man of intelligence and influence raised in condemnation of manifest evil. As a result of this absence of a well-defined standard, too many deaf men degenerate into shiftless loafers, knowing that they in no wise sacrifice thereby their privilege of mingling with the honest and industrious. Others become peddlers—a convenient expression for tramps. Many whose habits and associations are most reprehensible are doubtless encouraged to persevere by the knowledge that if their conduct is not wholly approved it is at least not very strongly condemned, and that it is regarded by many as an evidence of not entirely discreditable hardihood.”⁷⁴

The leadership emphasized that deaf people fulfilled their duties and obligations of citizenship when possible. “The laws of this country are good to the deaf. They are educated at public expense; they are exempted from all civil duties where their deafness would be a disability, but they are accountable the same in other respects as are the

⁷² Fox, “The Federation of the Deaf,” 14-17.

⁷³ Deaf community publications frequently referred to impostors, who pretended to be deaf in order to acquire charity or money. For a detailed discussion of beggars, impostors, economic citizenship, and the Deaf community’s response to beggaring, see chapters 4 and 5 of Susan Burch’s *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900-1942* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

⁷⁴ Henry Van Allen, “My Brother’s Keeper,” *Proceedings of the Seventeenth Convention of the Empire State Association of the Deaf*, (1893), 58-60 [hereafter ESAD Proceedings (1893)].

hearing.”⁷⁵ It was important to the leadership that deaf people were accountable to the same laws that other people were accountable to and also that they enjoyed the same rights as citizens as those who could hear.⁷⁶ Peddlers were the antithesis to this portrayal of deaf people as ideal citizens in late nineteenth century America.

With the advent of the NAD in 1880, the leadership of the American deaf community began to articulate anxieties about deaf beggars and peddlers. Deaf leaders believed that peddling and begging were for the disabled, not able-bodied and educated deaf people. Fox was among the first to voice such concerns, when he delivered a paper, “Social Status of the Deaf,” at the 1883 convention of the NAD. In this address, Fox suggested that the American deaf community undertake a campaign to outcast deaf beggars and peddlers who exploited public sympathy for deaf people. This early rhetoric suggested that these campaigns sought to protect the image of deaf people as hardworking, self-sufficient citizens.

Fox was keenly aware of the economic discrimination that deaf people experienced and believed that deaf beggars and peddlers were, in part, responsible for this discrimination because they portrayed deaf people as objects of charity and burdens on the state rather than as fellow worker-citizens. This perception threatened the deaf community’s efforts to gain equal access to citizenship for deaf people. He particularly disdained deaf people who were otherwise able-bodied but refused to work and instead chose to peddle or beg for a living.

His caution in 1883, founded in ableist rhetoric, which was a driving force in the campaigns to eradicate peddling, begging, and impostorism, stated that

⁷⁵ Seliney, “The Social Status of the Deaf in America,” 30-32.

⁷⁶ Henri Genis, “The Duties of Society with Regard to Deaf Mutes and Reciprocally of Deaf Mutes With Regard to Society,” *WCDM Proceedings* (1893), 101-103.

“still there are a few, who, through [*sic*] blessed with bodily health and an education, prefer to rely on their deafness as a pretext for seeking charity. People generally know so little of the disabilities under which we labor that it is an easy matter to impose upon their generosity. What a strange sight is an able-bodied, fairly educated man who made his deafness as a means of subsistence. The sooner the hearing world understands that we, who are educated, can support ourselves, the better it will be for the community.”⁷⁷

The anti-peddling rhetoric was steeped in class ideology and bias. The leadership of the deaf community objected to peddling not only because it promoted a negative image of deaf people within mainstream society, but also because peddling defeated the community’s attempts to portray deaf people as able-bodied, self-sufficient citizens capable of integrating themselves into mainstream society. This type of ableist discourse was a driving force in the campaigns to eradicate peddling, begging, and impostorism. The deaf community’s campaigns against beggars-- the symbolic opposite of successful workers--especially highlight ableist assumptions. Deaf leaders believed that beggary was acceptable for people with disabilities and deaf people with multiple disabilities but not for able-bodied deaf people.

Many deaf people believed that begging diminished their status as independent and able-bodied; they, like most non-disabled people, explicitly equated economic self-sufficiency with bodily and mental wholeness. Leaders often blamed beggars and peddlers for undermining the community’s ability to gain equal status with able-bodied citizens by creating the impression on the public that deaf people were disabled objects of charity.⁷⁸

“No one claims that *all* the deaf in every line of work have proved competent. Some have been lamentable failures...Unfortunately, it

⁷⁷ Fox, “Social Status of the Deaf,” 12-22.

⁷⁸ Fox, “Social Status of the Deaf,” 13.

seems that the average man in business judges the deaf by a single failure...the deaf beggar or impostor, or botch in workmanship prejudices the public against all of the class of people whom the world calls "deaf and dumb."⁷⁹

Within the ableist discourse, the leadership of the deaf community, when pursuing peddlers and impostors, assumed that they were going after able-bodied people who were simply too lazy to work.⁸⁰ Many people within the deaf community explicitly excused deaf beggars and peddlers who had other disabilities. This ableist assumption was first uttered in 1880 by E.P. Holmes of Nebraska who said, in his criticism of deaf beggars and peddlers, "of course this refers to such as are strong and able bodied, for I would not be willing to cast the shadow of censure on those who in spite of their infirmities and physical disabilities, do what they can, be it ever so trifling."⁸¹

Able-bodiedness corresponded with citizenship status and economic opportunities for deaf people. This could be accomplished only by separating deaf people from other disabled people. Deaf leaders protested the classification of deaf children with non-deaf children who possessed other disabilities. Deaf leaders such as Anson Spear of Minnesota argued that classifying deaf children with disabled children carried "a taint of pauperism."⁸²

The deaf community believed it was important that mainstream society viewed deaf people as able-bodied, self-sufficient citizens. The leadership conducted campaigns throughout the late nineteenth and most of the twentieth century to portray deaf people as able-bodied citizens, even at the expense of other deaf people who did not fit in with their

⁷⁹ "The Deaf As Workmen," *Silent Worker* 29 no. 8 (May 1917): 140.

⁸⁰ Jimmy Frederick Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 49, no. 34 (August 19, 1920): 2.

⁸¹ E.P. Holmes, "Plea for a deaf-mute colony," *NAD Proceedings* (1880), 36-39.

⁸² Spear, "Legislation for the Deaf," *MAD Proceedings* (1901), 27-31.

portrayal of able-bodied deaf people. Explicit efforts to represent deaf people according to ableist ideas strongly defined this period and grew out of earlier advocacy campaigns.

Elite deaf people, on the other hand, viewed deafness as an affliction, not as a disability, and strove to portray deaf people as able-bodied.⁸³ Early discourse within the deaf community about peddling and impostorism reveals efforts to remove the disabled stigma. In 1903, Jay Cooke Howard, a prominent figure in the deaf community, challenged mainstream society to reconsider their view of deaf people in an address to a hearing audience in Red Wing:

“We want you to take a good look at us. If it will aid you in your inspection we will take off our coats so you can see us better. Make up your minds if we are subjects to be classified with the idiotic, the insane, and the criminal. If you think we are, then act on your conviction. If you think we are not, then act upon your conviction also and help us to our rights.”⁸⁴

Elite deaf people disparaged deaf workers as weak, dependent, and disabled if they did not do all they could to prove their worth as employees. “Of course, those who have weak lungs or kidney trouble should not work there [Goodyear]. For the average able-bodied deaf, there is no better work elsewhere.”⁸⁵ The term ‘disabled’ was used not only to distinguish deaf people from other disabled people but also to distinguish the ‘worthy’ deaf from the ‘unworthy’ deaf. Deaf leaders themselves associated non-deaf disabilities with poverty. They also believed that mainstream society closely associated disability, including deafness, with poverty; thus peddling implied that deaf people were disabled. It was this stigma that the leadership wanted to remove from deaf people, which meant summary rejection of any work that hinted at pauperism, such as peddling,

⁸³ “Personal Remarks Made in the Presence of the Deaf,” *Silent Worker* 9, no.2 (October 1896): 20.

⁸⁴ Howard, “Address,” *MAD Proceedings* (1903), 25.

⁸⁵ “Deaf Workers Wanted,” *Silent Worker* 30, no.10 (July 1918): 183.

even if the goods sold were legitimate. The leadership did not undertake campaigns against peddling and begging solely to separate deaf people from poverty but also to carefully craft a public image of deaf people as able-bodied.⁸⁶

Deaf people were so successful in their campaign to ‘pass for normal’ (i.e., able-bodied) that they ultimately contributed to the rise of impostors pretending to be deaf. An impostor once alleged that posing as a deaf beggar was easy because deaf people looked like hearing people.

“Any lame or blind person can easily be distinguished by his appearance, but the deaf cannot so be, because he looks just like any other hearing person. That is why the pretense of being deaf and dumb is popularly adopted as an easy means of getting money from the public.”⁸⁷

This argument reveals an irony in deaf leaders’ strategies to cast deaf people as “normal.” That deaf people appeared indistinguishable from the non-deaf meant that it was easy for able-bodied hearing people to pose as deaf beggars, further perpetuating the belief that deaf people were incapable of economic self-sufficiency.

During the late nineteenth century, deaf people felt vulnerable in the midst of economic and cultural change demanding conformation to new ideals of American citizenship. They were confronted by specific pressures ranging from the eugenics movement that challenged deaf cultural community roots from sign language and deaf schools to legislative attempts aimed at narrowing deaf rights such as prohibitions on allowing deaf people to operate automobiles, obtain insurance, and freely choose their

⁸⁶ For more information on other ableist rhetoric and efforts undertaken by the American deaf community see Octavian Robinson, “We Are of a Different Class: Ableist Rhetoric in Deaf America, 1880-1920,” in *Deaf and Disability Studies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Susan Burch and Alison Kafer (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2010).

⁸⁷ “NAD Bulletin,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 39, no. 35 (September 1, 1910): 2.

spouses.⁸⁸ Broader pressures also contributed to their vulnerability, including industrialization and urbanization, increased immigration, and nation building. The deaf community blamed lazy and dependent deaf peddlers for deaf people's poor public image that drove the eugenics movement and prompted mainstream society to view deaf people as disabled subjects of charity. Peddlers were blamed for the problems confronting the deaf community, especially the attacks on the manual method, the rise of oral deaf schools, employment discrimination, all which led to the narrowing of rights and access to citizenship.

To protect their place in society and to claim citizenship, deaf leaders understood that they needed to present deaf people as independent self-sufficient worker-citizens. They conducted general campaigns to uplift the deaf community through self-help, self-sufficiency, education, and community uplift rhetoric. Eventually, as the century turned, campaigns narrowed to target peddlers. Those anti-peddler campaigns worked through promoting deaf people as able-bodied and equal. In the minds of deaf leaders, the campaigns justified the marginalization of deaf peddlers so as to advance the deaf community as whole. Anti-peddling crusades showcased deaf people as equal and able-bodied to mainstream society, not deserving or in need of pity, help, or assistance; and they associated peddling with criminality, exploitation, and poor public image. As convenient scapegoats, peddlers were used as part of the platform for educational and economic reform. The anti-peddling campaigns revealed deaf people's ideas about citizenship and their anxieties about their place in American society as they confronted larger changes within American society and pressures specific to deaf people. The deaf

⁸⁸ For further discussion on the narrowing of deaf people's legal rights see Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900-1945* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

community's anti-peddling campaign became part of the larger tapestry of American social reform efforts during the Progressive Era.

Chapter 2: Ramping Up the Campaign Against Peddlers

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the United States embarked on a new path later termed the Progressive Era. Historian Richard Hofstadter characterizes the Progressive Era, which took place between 1900 and 1918, as one of three main episodes of the age of reform that took place from 1890 to the New Deal in the 1930s.¹ Hofstadter describes the era as a widespread reform effort to achieve a general sense of restoration to economic individualism and political democracy, and with this restoration, “to bring back a kind of morality and civic purity that was also believed to have been lost.”² This work highlights the self-conception and thinking among the deaf segment of the American reform movement much in the vein of Hofstadter’s analysis of the work and political thought of Progressive Era reformers and their place in “the larger stream of our history.”³ Deaf leaders were politically conscious citizens who participated in this thinking within the progressive movement and sought their own reforms within the deaf community with the belief that such reforms would benefit American society at large.

During the Progressive Era, the middle class agitated for social and political change that would improve the lives of common Americans. Progressive Era reformers were educated elites and experts who recommended and measured social reforms. The anti-peddling campaign, believed to be a social reform effort that would benefit both deaf and hearing people alike, is one example of the deaf community elite and experts’

¹ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR: Populism, Progressivism, and the New Deal- a stimulating new analysis from the perspective of our own time*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1981), 3.

² Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 5.

³ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 6.

participation in this era of reform. Deaf community leaders viewed the anti-peddling crusade as an attempt to restore economic self-sufficiency to the deaf community at large and as a means of protecting deaf people's participation in American democracy. The anti-peddling movement also sought to preserve the sense of morality and civic purity within the deaf community by emphasizing the value of honest labor and protecting mainstream society from exploitation by unscrupulous people.

During the Progressive Era, the deaf community presented their leaders as experts in the uplift of American deaf people. Much like Progressive Era leaders, deaf leaders were professionals and educated men of the middle-class.⁴ They were typically men, educated in schools for the deaf and graduates of Gallaudet College, who often worked as educators and printers, and led deaf organizations such as the NAD, NFSD, and state associations. As middle class intellectuals, they "threw their weight on the side of what they [felt] is progress and reform," as is typical of the intellectual and professional classes whenever the tides of change arise.⁵ This generation of leaders in the deaf community were relatively young, most in their twenties, thirties, and forties; they were part of the "generation that went Progressive," as Hofstadter characterized reformers of the Progressive Era who came of age in the 1890s.⁶

By the early 1900s, deaf leaders expanded their strategies for improving inclusion of deaf people in mainstream society. Rather than espousing that deaf people were wholly responsible for their community uplift, the leadership decided to enlist the aid of mainstream society in addressing prejudice. The deaf community looked to government and non-deaf citizens for cooperation in the anti-peddling campaign and in combating

⁴ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 133.

⁵ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 148.

⁶ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 168.

employment discrimination. Those cooperative strategies included legislative changes, more stringent enforcement of existing legislation, and a publicity campaign against impostors aimed at the hearing public.

Jay Cooke Howard, a prominent anti-peddling activist in Minnesota, exemplified this shift in approach in a 1903 appeal to the citizens of Red Wing, Minnesota:

“We are after something. We are after our rights. We are after justice. While we are ready to put up with our deafness because we can not help it, we are not ready to put up with unwarranted prejudice... We want you to take a good look at us. If it will aid you in your inspection we will take off our coats so you can see us better. Make up your minds if we are subjects to be classified with the idiotic, the insane, and the criminal. If you think we are, then act on your conviction. If you think we are not, then act upon your conviction also and help us to our rights.”⁷

During the early twentieth century, in addition to enlisting the aid of the hearing public in combating peddling, the deaf community also shifted the focus of their campaign to impostors. Despite the previous century's community uplift strategies, deaf peddlers still appeared on the streets. Also, a new problem had emerged in the deaf community's consciousness. Deaf people were now recognizing the problem of deaf impostors, hearing people pretending to be deaf in order to exploit sympathy for their affliction and collect money from the unsuspecting public. Deaf impostors had contact with many more people from mainstream society than did self-sufficient deaf workers. Due to this circumstance, deaf impostors played an influential role in shaping public perception of deaf people. Impostorism portrayed deaf people as objects of charity threatening the deaf community's efforts to depict deaf people as self-sufficient citizens. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the deaf community formed an

⁷ Jay Cooke Howard, “Address,” *Proceedings of the Seventh Convention of the Minnesota Association of the Deaf* (1903), 23-25 [hereafter MAD Proceedings (1903)].

organized campaign on a national scale, built on local and state action models from the late 19th century, against peddling that focused on impostors.

Early action against peddlers and impostors took place on the local and state level from 1880 to 1910 through tramp and vagrancy statutes. The earliest anti-vagrancy laws were on the books in New York in 1885 and Pennsylvania in 1897.⁸ These laws were used as the basis of the deaf community's efforts to keep peddlers and impostors off the streets and later served as the basis for legislation aimed specifically at impostors.

Initially, individuals and state associations assumed responsibility for campaigns against impostors. The Ohio Association of the Deaf started as early as 1893.⁹ By 1905, numerous lpf's in various states were reporting weekly arrests and punishments of impostors.¹⁰ By 1908, a number of state associations had passed resolutions denouncing impostors with calls for legislative and community action in response to the impostor problem.¹¹ At this time, the Minnesota Association of the Deaf began lobbying for anti-impostor legislation, a movement spearheaded by three prominent leaders within the Minnesota community, including Jay Cooke Howard.

Howard was born in Superior, Wisconsin and named after the famous financier, Jay Cooke. He became deaf from spinal meningitis when he was eight years old. After graduating from the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf in 1889, he enrolled at Gallaudet College and graduated with a B.A. in 1895. He worked as a banker and became

⁸ Jimmy F. Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 49, no. 34 (August 19, 1920): 2.

⁹ Thomas Francis Fox, "Associations of the Deaf in America," *Proceedings of the First World's Congress of Deaf Mutes* (1893), 30 [hereafter WCDM Proceedings 1893].

¹⁰ Theophilus d'Estrella, "The Itemizer," *California News* 20, no. 28 (March 18, 1905): 5.

¹¹ "Colorado," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 37, no. 35. (August 27, 1908): 1.

prolific in the anti-peddling crusade, serving as the chief of the NAD's Impostor Bureau from 1910-1915. Howard also served as president of the NAD from 1913 to 1917.¹²

The NAD discussed national action as early as 1901. President Thomas F. Fox suggested that the NAD undertake a propaganda campaign. He believed that the NAD should have a publicity bureau responsible for collecting and disseminating information to the public that revealed the truth about impostors. This was in line with much of the work of the progressive movement, which rested upon journalism as Hofstadter argues, "the fundamental critical achievement of American Progressivism was the business of exposure... before there could be action, there must be information and exhortation."¹³

During President James Smith's tenure in 1904, he suggested forming a committee to stamp out the vagabond evil among the deaf. He alluded to internal community policing by promoting the idea of vigilance committees in larger cities. These committees were to network with each other and warn local deaf communities of vagrants and impostors.¹⁴ At its national 1904 convention, the NAD recommended and resolved that deaf people should take upon themselves to guard the public against impostors and to promote enforcement and punishment for impostors.¹⁵ The resolution emphasized that deaf people were responsible for *guarding the public*. Resolution language framed anti-impostor activism as an effort to protect the public from exploitation rather than as an effort to safeguard the reputation of deaf people as citizen-workers. The resolution implied that it was the impetus for each *individual* deaf person to take action against impostors. Because this official act targeted only impostors,

¹² Petra Fandrem Howard, "Jay Cooke Howard," *Silent Worker* 26, no. 5 (March 1914): 106.

¹³ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 185.

¹⁴ James L. Smith, "President's Address," *Proceedings of the Seventh Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (1904), 50-51 [hereafter NAD Proceedings (1904)].

¹⁵ "Resolutions," *NAD Proceedings* (1904), 178.

neglecting the real deaf peddlers issue, it was the moment where the national deaf community's leadership shifted its focus from deaf peddlers to impostors.

The impetus for such an organized response to impostors may have been due to increasing pressure from the eugenics and oral method movements. These movements had persisted despite the deaf community's ongoing efforts to preserve their autonomy and rights to using to sign language and the manual/combined methods in education. The eugenics movement, in particular, became a more imminent threat when a national association of eugenicists, the American Breeders Association, was established in 1910. The NAD and manual method advocates had also experienced a crushing defeat when the Nebraska legislature passed legislation that converted the Nebraska School for the Deaf into an oral institution.¹⁶

In 1910, the NAD expanded its role to formalize the deaf community's campaigns against vagrancy. It did this by reshaping national strategies to include cooperative efforts between various state and local organizations, as well as between the deaf community and mainstream society.

At the NAD's 1910 Colorado Springs convention, the membership passed a resolution mandating the organization to undertake an organized campaign for suppressing impostors and deaf beggars. The resolution also specified that the NAD demand more stringent legislation governing impostors. The attitude of the Progressives during this time was that if society had the right laws and were well enforced, society would change for the better.¹⁷

¹⁶ Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900 to 1945* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 25-26.

¹⁷ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 203.

Olof Hanson, Committee on Resolutions chair, had his initial doubts about the anti-impostor proposals.¹⁸ After some convincing from committee members, he agreed to the proposals. When he was elevated to the NAD presidency in 1911, Hanson took on the anti-impostor campaign with vigor.¹⁹

An organized crusade against impostors became one of Hanson's priorities, propelled by increased interest among the deaf community in an anti-impostor campaign. He established the Impostor Bureau and appointed Jay Cooke Howard as bureau chief.²⁰ The Impostor Bureau's purpose was to investigate peddling causes and impostorism. The bureau was also to recommend strategies for local, state, and national actions in the anti-impostor campaign.²¹ Howard had proven success by his work in Minnesota anti-impostor campaigns.²² In fact, Hanson described Howard as a modern day St. Patrick who would drive "those snakes-deaf impostors-out of the country."²³

Initially reluctant to accept Hanson's offer, Howard protested that his Minnesota anti-impostor efforts were overwhelming him. The job, he said, was "scrubbing work."²⁴ Hanson, nonetheless persisted, and went as far as to promise Howard a free hand in running the Impostor Bureau. Taking advantage of Howard's quarrel with George Veditz, a former NAD president, Hanson told Howard that he had no choice but to believe

¹⁸ Hanson was born in Fjalkinge, Sweden in 1862 and migrated to the United States in 1875 with his family. He, like many other deaf leaders of the late 19th and early 20th century, was late deafened. Hanson graduated from the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf in 1881 and went on to Gallaudet College where he graduated in 1886. In 1889, Hanson earned his Master of Arts degree. After graduation, he studied architecture in Europe for one year and returned to the United States, where he became a prolific architect and clergyman. Hanson served as President of the National Association of the Deaf from 1910-1913.

¹⁹ Oscar Regensburg, "Impostor Bureau: A Report from Mr. Regensburg," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 42, no. 13 (March 27, 1913): 2.

²⁰ This chapter features two Howards: Jay Cooke Howard and Petra Fandrem Howard also known as Mrs. Jay Cooke Howard.

²¹ Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 150.

²² Jay Cooke Howard to Olof Hanson, November 13, 1911, box 3, Olof Hanson Collection

²³ "Editorial," *The Companion* 36, no. 13 (March 22, 1911): 8.

²⁴ Jay Cooke Howard to Olof Hanson, January 25, 1911, box 3, Olof Hanson Collection

Veditz's characterization of Howard as an obstructionist who liked to "throw bricks at others out of ennui."²⁵ Howard, intent on proving his detractors wrong, responded defiantly. He agreed to accept the appointment on the condition that he be given broad authority to outline the bureau's work without excessive committee interference. Hanson agreed, giving Howard full decision-making authority in the NAD's Impostor Bureau and removing bureaucratic processes that accompanied committee work.²⁶ Such defiance drove Howard's zeal in managing the organized campaign against impostors and earned him great praise.

Howard firmly believed that the only way the Impostor Bureau could work effectively was to have "a cooperative committee with a national chairman, with a state chairman in each state and with a committee man in every town and city- then educate the police and the public."²⁷ He also believed that publicity and education were the best possible strategies in an anti- impostor campaign, boasting they had been very effective in Minnesota,

"the imposter business is so well settled in Duluth that one of these fellows can ply his trade about 20 minutes before either the police have him or I am summoned. I accomplished this by talking to the police and the police justices and by joshing the public for being so gullible. This latter I did through the daily papers and have not lost an opportunity to educate them through ridicule. That sort of thing sticks."²⁸

Howard also suggested internal community policing as well as rank and file enlistment for assisting law enforcement to enforce existing anti- impostor legislation and

²⁵ Olof Hanson to Jay Cooke Howard. January 22, 1911, box 3, Olof Hanson Collection.

²⁶ Howard, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 41, no. 7 (February 15, 1912): 2.

²⁷ Jay Cooke Howard to Olof Hanson, January 25, 1911, box 3, Olof Hanson Collection

²⁸ Jay Cooke Howard to Olof Hanson, January 25, 1911, box 3, Olof Hanson Collection

statutes. Howard was so effective in his work that Hanson personally recommended Howard as his successor for the presidency of the NAD in 1915.

Howard followed in Fox's footsteps by using a nation-wide publicity campaign as the most effective means of ousting impostors. He believed convincing legislators of necessary legislation for ousting impostors preying on a sympathetic public would not be enough.²⁹ Fox and Howard, much like Progressive Era activists, believed in using the "active powers of exposing evil through the spreading of information and the exhortation of the citizenry."³⁰ The publicity campaign was designed to convince the public what the deaf people were really like: hard working self-sufficient citizens who did not beg. Howard believed sympathetic hearing people would not give money to deaf beggars and impostors and thus make the enterprise unprofitable.³¹

One means of disseminating publicity was through the press. One of Howard's first tasks was to engage the silent press that served to unify and involve the deaf communities. Their audience was primarily deaf who were recruited in suppressing impostorism and rejecting deaf peddlers.³² The silent press published extensively about the impostor evil and recruited the rank and file to actively engage in the anti-impostor campaign.

Howard Terry, NAD's publicity and information bureau chair, agreed with Howard's perspective. Eager to take advantage of new mass media beyond the press to reach a broader audience, Terry offered his assistance to the Impostor Bureau. He wrote a

²⁹ Fox, "The Primitive Status of Our Association," *Proceedings of the Sixth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (1901): 76 [hereafter NAD Proceedings (1901)].

³⁰ Richard Hofstadter, ed., *The Progressive Movement, 1900-1915* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Press, 1963), 5.

³¹ "NAD Official Bulletin: Mr. Howard's Good Work," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 41, no. 2 (January 11, 1912): 1.

³² Howard, "Keep it up! Keep it up!," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 40, no. 15 (April 13, 1911): 3.

brief photoplay (screenplay) about impostors, titled “The Deaf-Mute Impostor: His Exposure and Capture.”³³ No film company picked up Terry’s screenplay, but NAD and Impostor bureau officials also wrote to local mainstream newspapers asking that the editors write up anti-impostor legislation articles or give facts stating that deaf people did not beg.

Howard was careful to emphasize that the police should be educated first, because they came in contact with impostors more often than any other group of people.³⁴ The bureau directed its publicity efforts to educating law enforcement officials about existing legislation and the need for enforcement. In 1911, Howard proposed that the committee publish and mail a circular letter to police chiefs of every city in the United States with a population of over 3,000. This effort was similar to one of Howard’s strategies employed with the Minnesota Association of the Deaf.³⁵ The NAD could not fund this strategy, so Howard had to settle for submitting an article to *The Detective*, a popular police journal in hopes that would be sufficient.³⁶

Howard advocated using existing anti-vagrancy legislation in local municipalities and on the state level. Whenever possible, deaf leaders attempted to use existing local laws and law enforcement agencies to imprison, fine, and investigate impostors. If such legislation were not present, the NAD urged local state associations to proactively pursue legislation, presenting model legislation, petitions, and securing the support of lawmakers in presenting and passing legislation.

³³ Howard Terry, “Report from Mr. Terry, Chair of the Literary Bureau,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 43, no. 24 (June 11, 1914): 1.

³⁴ Jay Cooke Howard to Olof Hanson, January 1, 1912, box 3, Olof Hanson Collection.

³⁵ Jay Cooke Howard to Olof Hanson, November 13, 1911, box 3, Olof Hanson Collection.

³⁶ “NAD Official Bulletin: Mr. Howard’s Good Work,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 41, no. 2 (January 11, 1912): 1.

In 1911, Minnesota secured legislation against impostors largely due to the efforts of Howard and his colleagues in the Minnesota Association of the Deaf on behalf of the Minnesota deaf community.³⁷ The Minnesota legislation included punishments of either 90 days in jail or a \$100 fine.³⁸ In 1913, bills aimed at suppressing impostorism were before the legislatures in Illinois, Kansas, and Washington.³⁹ The Illinois legislature voiced nearly unanimous support for the bill, voting 32-0 in the Senate and 90-1 in the House to pass the anti-impostor legislation.⁴⁰ Washington's law imposed the possibility of six months in jail or a \$100 fine, taking effect in June of 1915.⁴¹

These legislative efforts took place on the local and state level because the leadership of the NAD, particularly Howard himself, believed that local and state associations were better equipped to lobby local and state politicians. Understanding that the needs and requirements for legislation varied from state to state, Howard was lukewarm about introducing universal legislation. He believed that there was not "any law can be passed that will do the trick for 'class legislation...and is a bugaboo to every lawmaker. This is a matter having to do with each individual state.'"⁴²

Hanson and Howard agreed that educating the public was essential.⁴³ Both men believed that in order to secure the support of lawmakers, the bureau needed to present convincing evidence of the need for anti-impostor legislation. Hanson hoped that the NAD circular, *The Deaf Do Not Beg*, would also demonstrate to lawmakers that existing

³⁷ "Resolutions," *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Meeting of the Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf* (1911), 46-47 [hereafter PSAD Proceedings (1911)].

³⁸ Smith, "Editorial," *The Companion* 36, no. 11 (February 22, 1911): 8.

³⁹ Howard, "National Association of the Deaf. Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 42, no. 9 (February 27, 1913): 4.

⁴⁰ Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 44, no. 28 (July 15, 1915): 1.

⁴¹ d'Estrella, "Itemizer," *California News* 30, no.15 (April 15, 1915): 245.

⁴² Jay Cooke Howard to Olof Hanson, January 25, 1911, box 3, Olof Hanson Collection

⁴³ Olof Hanson to Jay Cooke Howard, February 6, 1911, box 3, Olof Hanson Collection.

statutes on vagrancy were insufficient. The case would be made that legislation was needed to specifically address soliciting funds under the pretense of deafness or other disabilities. Howard and his Impostor Bureau wanted to revise legislation to make punishments more severe. Hanson also wanted revisions to legislation requiring that offenders present evidence that they were actually deaf. He argued that the burden of proof should be on the offender, even though he personally believed that if a person was really deaf, it would not be difficult to prove.⁴⁴ Hanson also claimed that:

“while it is practically impossible to prove that a man claiming to be deaf can hear, so long as he can keep up the game; it would be a very simple matter for the man, if he is really deaf, to prove it by reference to some reputable person who can vouch for him. A deaf man would readily furnish such proof, while a faker, of course, could not. To hope to have a law passed that will place the burden of proof on the person claiming to be deaf. We should be glad to have your assistance in securing the passage of such a law.”⁴⁵

In order to justify anti-impostor legislation, deaf leaders portrayed impostors as criminals. Deaf leaders urged deaf citizens to contact specific legislators and ask them to introduce anti-impostor bills and support them in the legislature. Hanson and Howard suggested the dissemination of a circular containing information about impostors, linking them to criminal behavior, and stressing the damage impostorism did to deaf people's reputation. The leadership believed that peddling encouraged and was explicitly tied to criminality. They hoped that by portraying peddlers and impostors as criminals who committed other real and violent crimes, legislators would be convinced that anti-impostor legislation would also target potential criminals.

⁴⁴ Olof Hanson, “National Association of the Deaf,” *Deaf Mute's Journal* 41, no. 8 (February 22, 1912): 2.

⁴⁵ Hanson, “John Brown,” box 3, Olof Hanson Collection.

Deaf newspapers often cited examples of peddlers and impostors who either had criminal histories or were caught in the act of committing a crime while peddling. For example, a person who was shot during a robbery was found to have cards on his person that proved he impersonated deaf people and solicited alms.⁴⁶ This argument was used to prevent leniency in the judicial system. For example, a judge who let an impostor go instead of imprisoning him later discovered that the impostor was wanted in another jurisdiction for breaking out of jail.⁴⁷ Howard claimed that one impostor arrested in Minnesota was discovered to have a criminal record and was working with a gang of thieves in casing joints and robbing them.

There was a common belief that many thieves used their deafness as a pretense to gaining access to homes and using that opportunity to case the joint.⁴⁸ The public's image of deaf people as disabled subjects of charity enabled these impostors to exploit public trust. Howard argued that impostors took advantage of and robbed an unsuspecting public and that this exploitation amounted to a tax, using this as an argument for improved enforcement against impostors.⁴⁹

By advocating for such legislation and linking criminality with impostorism, Hanson and Howard portrayed deaf people as citizen-police who were protecting the community by pursuing impostors who were, in all likelihood, criminals.

The bureau also suggested preventive measures by taking away potential tools used by impostors. One common prop used by impostors was alphabet cards showing the alphabet in sign language or plain cards explaining how the bearer became deaf. These

⁴⁶ "Editorial," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 34, no. 10 (March 9, 1905): 2.

⁴⁷ "A Deaf Sleuth," *Mississippi Voice* 28, no. 4 (December 1, 1912): 4.

⁴⁸ Olof Hanson to the editor of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and Times, February 17, 1912, box 3, Olof Hanson Collection

⁴⁹ Howard, "Letter to the Editor," *Mississippi Voice* 27, no. 9 (February 15, 1912): 7.

cards often included a plea for donations. Deaf leaders suggested seizing these cards from suspected impostors and deaf beggars. Card printers were tracked down and asked to refuse to print such cards in the future.⁵⁰ It should be noted that while their focus was on impostors, the deaf leadership continued to object to deaf peddlers and from time to time caught them up in its various attacks on impostorism.

In addition to securing such promises from local printers, deaf leaders proposed a resolution to the International Typographical Union (ITU) to prohibit all printers belonging to the union from printing such cards and associated appeals and circulars. They believed that the ITU was one of the most influential and powerful printing organizations in existence. If the ITU embargoed the publication of such cards, it would not only remove one method from the impostors but also serve as a means of educating thousands of printers across the country on the evils of impostorism as well as serving as a recruiting tool for hearing allies.⁵¹

The ITU declined the embargo request, stating that only subordinate unions of the ITU or their delegates to the convention could bring such a resolution but would not bring a resolution on the behalf of the NAD.⁵² While aimed against impostors, the campaign against these cards also revealed the continuing interest of deaf leaders in eliminating deaf peddling as well.

Howard wanted to remain the leader of the NAD's anti-impostor effort but found that with obligations of the presidency, he needed to pass on the responsibilities to someone else.⁵³ He appointed Jimmy Frederick Meagher, a publisher at the Washington

⁵⁰ Meagher, "Impostors," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 44, no. 6 (February 11, 1915): 4.

⁵¹ Meagher, "Impostors," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 44, no. 6 (February 11, 1915): 4.

⁵² Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 44, no. 36 (September 9, 1915): 4.

⁵³ "Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 44, no. 47 (November 25, 1915): 4.

School for the Deaf, to succeed him in 1915. Meagher was described by the deaf artist, Douglas Tilden, as a “pugilist, tramp, poet, the Jack London type.”⁵⁴ Meagher was well known in the deaf community as an author in the silent press and as a promoter of deaf sports events. Born in 1886, Meagher became deaf at seven years old and attended the Cincinnati Oral School and the Rochester School for the Deaf. Meagher went on to a diverse career that included service as a teacher and athletic director at the Washington State School for the Deaf. Meagher became so deeply invested in the anti-impostor campaign that he declined the 1917 nomination for NAD treasurer, continuing his anti-impostor activism well after stepping down from the Bureau in 1920.⁵⁵ He ended his career as an ad compositor for a newspaper in Chicago where he subsequently died of a heart attack in 1951.⁵⁶

The two men differed in their approach to the impostor problem. Howard preferred to work with law enforcement personnel, educating them about impostors and urging them to enforce existing vagrancy statutes. Meagher was more active in securing passage of new legislation that specifically targeted impostorism, educating both the public and law enforcement officials while emphasizing the role of the rank and file deaf people as assistants in enforcing anti-impostor statutes.

A flurry of legislation began when Meagher took the reins of the Impostor Bureau in 1915. He was of the opinion that many existing anti-vagrancy statutes were simply insufficient. He wanted the statutes to mandate more severe punishments and to target the use of deafness as a pretense for securing funds. Most legislation did not ban real deaf

⁵⁴ W.J. Bodin, “How the Deaf Uphold the Law,” *California News* 31, no. 17 (May 15, 1916): 294.

⁵⁵ Meagher, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 49, no. 34 (August 19, 1920): 2.

⁵⁶ Jack Gannon, *Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America*, (Silver Spring, MD: National Association of the Deaf Press, 1981), 299.

people from begging or peddling, but only targeted those who were soliciting money under false pretenses.⁵⁷

The deaf community leadership argued that legislation against impostors would advance the goal of ending employment discrimination against real deaf people by eliminating attitudes generated by impostors who “give false impression of the deaf as a class.”⁵⁸

Six states passed legislation in 1915 upon Meagher’s ascendancy to the bureau. By 1917, eleven more states passed impostor legislation. The new laws specifically prohibited the use of deafness or other disabilities for the purpose of soliciting alms from the public.⁵⁹ In 1917, alone, there were 91 cases of impostors, out of which 76 were arrested and 55 convicted.⁶⁰ Crediting the legislative successes, Meagher reported an annual average of 159 impostors arrested in the United States.

Anti-impostor legislation efforts failed in other states. Some state legislatures declined to pass such legislation believing existing vagrancy statutes were sufficient.⁶¹ Other state legislatures simply did not see such legislation as priority.⁶² When legislation failed, Meagher urged his state chiefs to keep track of all caught impostors and the punishments levied against them. If these offenders were not punished or existing vagrant laws were not enforced, Meagher used these cases to support his campaign. Redoubling

⁵⁷ “Impostor Gets 63 Days on Rock Pile,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 41, no. 8 (February 22, 1912): 2.

⁵⁸ “Legislative Protection for “Real” deaf Mutes Sought By State Chief,” *The Silent Observer* 38, no. 14 (March 27, 1915): 1.

⁵⁹ Meagher, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 49, no. 34 (August 19, 1920): 2.; Meagher, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 46, no. 21 (May 24, 1917): 1.

⁶⁰ Meagher, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 46, no. 26 (June 28, 1917): 2.

⁶¹ Meagher, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 46, no. 11 (March 15, 1917): 2.

⁶² Meagher, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 44, no. 18 (May 6, 1915): 2.

efforts to secure revised and more stringent legislation, Meagher asked the chiefs to present this evidence of insufficient measures to legislators.⁶³

On the national front, Meagher appointed Melville John Matheis, a local deaf leader in Utah, to attend the American Institute for Criminal Laws and Criminology at the American Bar Association convention in Salt Lake City in 1915. Matheis' task was to lobby the members of ABA to help draft and promote federal anti-impostor legislation. Matheis was poorly prepared for the convention and was unable to secure support, blaming Meagher for giving such short notice and inadequate material.⁶⁴

Still the NAD leadership attempted to secure passage of House Resolution 354, a national law establishing a labor bureau for deaf people. The labor bureau would promote employment opportunities and prevent job discrimination for deaf people. The NAD asked that the bill also embrace NAD's campaign against impostors by requiring that the new labor bureau chief be tasked with educating the public about impostors.⁶⁵ California Representative John E. Raker, of California's 2nd Congressional district, first introduced HR 354 in the House on December 6, 1915.

In 1917, Meagher wrote to President Woodrow Wilson asking him to support this federal legislation but received a response from Representative Albert Johnson, the U.S. Representative from his home district in Washington, stating that the current Congressional session was behind on its customary legislative business and was unable to consider the NAD's petition at the time. Johnson promised that the bill would be taken into consideration in the next Congressional session. While disheartened by this failure, Meagher reminded his readers that Europe was at war and Congress clearly had more

⁶³ Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 44, no. 18 (May 6, 1915): 2.

⁶⁴ Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 44, no. 36 (September 9, 1915): 4.

⁶⁵ Meagher, "Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 46, no. 9 (March 1, 1917): 4.

pressing priorities. Meanwhile, deaf citizens should continue to petition their Congressional representatives to push the bill forward during the next Congressional session.

Meagher also claimed that while it was not difficult to get a bill introduced, it would be difficult to secure passage. He urged deaf people to circulate petitions and engage in letter writing campaigns to convince lawmakers to pass the legislation.⁶⁶ In 1917, Meagher sent talking points to his state chiefs for distributing to rank and file for the letter writing campaigns..⁶⁷

Anti-impostor legislation efforts at the state level were more successful. In Missouri, Reverend James H. Cloud, a leader in the Missouri deaf community and a columnist for the *Silent Worker*, circulated a petition among the deaf community and hearing allies urging the Missouri legislature to pass legislation banning impostorism.⁶⁸ The *Deaf Mutes' Journal* printed a copy of the bill going before the Missouri legislature, asking rank and file deaf people copy or clip the paper, sign it, and send it in to their legislators and/or to show to other voters.⁶⁹ The emphasis was to remind legislators that deaf people, too, were voters; that deaf people had the support of other voters; and that the legislators' decision could affect their political futures. The same *Silent Worker* article also asked deaf readers to write early and often to their congressmen for passing the national anti-impostor legislation.

⁶⁶ Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 44, no. 2 (January 14, 1915): 1.

⁶⁷ Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 46, no. 9 (March 1, 1917): 4.

⁶⁸ Meagher, "Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 44, no. 8 (February 25, 1915): 2.

⁶⁹ "St. Louis Briefs," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 44, no. 4 (February 4, 1915): 2.

For other states, the Missouri bill, along with bills in Washington and Minnesota became the model of anti-impostor legislation.⁷⁰ Michigan, Wisconsin, and Mississippi anti-impostor modeled legislation on Washington's laws.⁷¹ Capitalizing on this effort, the anti-impostor bureau recruited Howard and the Minnesota Attorney General to advise other states drafting model anti-impostor legislation. The bureau was especially keen to secure passage of anti-impostor legislation in California due to its large number of impostors, suggesting that its existing anti-vagrancy legislation was insufficient. The California legislation failed in 1915 because Progressive Governor Hiram Johnson pocket vetoed the bill. He must have not been persuaded as he was known for not signing any bills until fully convinced of the desirability of the statute.⁷² Two years later, in 1917, the deaf community continued to grumble about Johnson's veto, noting that due to the lack of legislation in California, out of multiple arrests of impostors, only two were adequately punished under California's existing anti-vagrancy legislation.⁷³

By 1920, fourteen states had legislation specifically targeting those who used deafness for peddling or begging. Eleven additional states had legislation that served the impostor bureau's anti-impostor purpose, but did not specifically prohibit peddling under false pretenses of being deaf. Meagher believed those twenty-five states had effective legislation for impostor suppression. However, Meagher believed laws in an additional fourteen states were ineffective or needed strengthening.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 44, no. 2 (January 14, 1915): 1.

⁷¹ Untitled, *Mississippi Voice* 29, no. 11 (March 16, 1914): 5.; Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 46, no. 21 (May 24, 1917): 1.

⁷² "News Review- State and Local: Effects of the Pocket Veto," *California Outlook* 18, no. 25 (June 9, 1915): 10.

⁷³ Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 46, no. 26 (June 28, 1917): 2.

⁷⁴ Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 49, no. 24 (August 19, 1920): 2.

There were criticisms from activists within the deaf community, arguing that the legislative campaign should broaden its scope beyond impostors to criminalize peddling among the deaf themselves. E. Clayton Wyand, an activist with the Maryland Association of the Deaf, criticized the Impostor Bureau for advocating legislation that focused on impostors instead of targeting real deaf peddlers. By not legislating against real deaf peddlers along with impostors, Wyand argued, mainstream society might conclude the deaf community was undertaking this legislative campaign only to protect deaf people's peddling turf and their potential income. He urged the bureau to present bills that included both impostors and real deaf beggars.⁷⁵

Wyand was not alone. In 1911, Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf (PSAD) sought revisions to the states' existing vagrancy laws. The PSAD believed that the state's existing tramp law, which addressed beggaring by fraudulent means, should also include real deaf vagrants. The Society had decided at its first meeting in 1881 that the tramp law should not exempt deaf people from punishment. It resolved that "the educated and self supporting deaf mutes of Pennsylvania regard the exemption of deaf and dumb persons from the operation of the Tramp Law as a slight and insult to the deaf as a class."⁷⁶

Deaf leaders reasoned that law enforcement officials often had difficulties in identifying whether or not the beggar was really deaf. The law needed to be simple enough to enforce, meaning that deaf tramps should not be exempt from punishment. Leaders argued that by including both real deaf beggars and impostors, police would be better able to enforce the tramp law against impostors. The deaf community recognized

⁷⁵ E. Clayton Wyand, "Impostor Wrecking, Etc," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 44, no. 23 (June 10, 1915): 4.

⁷⁶ J.M. Koehler, "President's Address," in *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Meeting of the Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf*, (1911), 49-50.

the importance of uniform legal enforcement and worked on this issue for thirty years.

Yet three decades later, PSAD members lamented that their efforts to include deaf people in Pennsylvania's tramp law had failed.

In another effort to target real deaf peddlers, the national organization undertook a campaign to use licensing of peddlers as a way to eradicate deaf peddling that too closely resembled beggary. Peddling was recognized as a legitimate enterprise, but deaf leaders opposed it because they believed that most deaf peddlers exploited public sympathy by selling wares that hearing people did not want, but bought only out of pity for the seller. Impostor Bureau head Jimmy Meagher explicitly stated that there was no difference between a beggar and a peddler but that they were the one and the same. Meagher and other leaders hoped that by promoting licensure requirements and fees, they could make peddling unprofitable.⁷⁷ From Impostor Bureau reports, this campaign was not successful. Peddlers simply moved from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, taking advantage of uneven enforcement of anti-peddling laws and licensure efforts.

The NAD urged local communities to advocate not only for anti-impostor legislation but also for better police enforcement. Correspondence amongst the deaf community had complaints about lax enforcement of local vagrancy and peddling laws. Many leaders believed the real problem was not lack of regulations, but that the laws were either not stringent enough or simply not enforced "to the letter by many officers of the law."⁷⁸

Adopting the role of "citizen-police," deaf individuals cast out deaf peers who peddled from the community, asserting their own integrity and worth. The "citizen-

⁷⁷ Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 45, no. 48 (November 30, 1915): 2.

⁷⁸ "Executive Committee's Report of the Mississippi Association of the Deaf," *Mississippi Bulletin* 30, no.16 (June 1, 1915): 14.

police" used a common strategy, reestablishing links to the dominant social model of middle class non-disabled Americans.

Local community leaders also established relationships with the police. Some went as far as to refer to themselves as agents of the law, even labeling themselves "police." Both Howard and Meagher referred to their state chiefs as "chiefs of police," assigning others enforcement titles such as "chief," "marshal," and "deputy." Meagher was often referred to as "National Chief of Police."⁷⁹ This language shows that they saw themselves as a citizen police force, granting members of the bureau a degree of legitimacy.

When Howard was appointed the chief of the Impostor Bureau, Isadore Selig, a leader in the San Francisco area deaf community, suggested that Howard furnish silver badges to members of the bureau with the inscription "Society for the Suppression of Deaf Impostors, Special Officer." Selig proposed that in addition to these badges and cards of credentials from the Impostor Bureau, deaf people could seek legal appointment as a special officer with the local police, acquiring the power to make arrests.⁸⁰

Selig's proposal wasn't fully supported. An editorial in the *Deaf Mute's Journal* responded to Selig's suggestion to distribute badges, cautioning against issuing real badges for those who worked with the Impostor Bureau. The author feared that some states might have legislation that would result in impostor bureau officials being sent to jail for impersonating an officer. There were also concerns that some might abuse their power. Howard declined Selig's proposal, stating that such badges were unnecessary and

⁷⁹ Bodin, "How the Deaf Uphold the Law," 294.

⁸⁰ Isadore Selig, "Refreshing to Chief Howard," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 40, no.19 (May 11, 1911): 2.

undesirable.⁸¹ He emphasized that the kind of people he wanted to work with him should be the sort who used their power wisely and possessed common sense and an education.⁸²

Members of the bureau also attempted to claim legitimacy by contacting local law enforcement and requesting actual police powers and badges. In 1915, after lobbying the Chief of the Vancouver police and the Mayor, Meagher was given a regular police badge by the Vancouver police department along with municipal-wide authority to make arrests.⁸³ He was considered a part of the police force but without pay and a “regular beat.”⁸⁴ Meagher claimed that he wanted a police badge, not to make actual arrests, but for the “moral effect with its resultant publicity...”⁸⁵ He extracted a tremendous amount of pride from possessing a real badge, describing it as “a nicked badge inscribed with the phrase, “Special Police.””⁸⁶ In 1917, Howard also received a real police badge from the Duluth police force.⁸⁷

Meagher and Howard saw themselves and their deputies as agents of law and order, helping law enforcement officials uphold the law and preserving the reputation of deaf people as law-abiding citizens. Meagher also issued credential cards, produced by the NAD Impostor Bureau, instructing the card bearer to arrest all deaf beggars in his vicinity, ensure that they were convicted, work with the local press, and secure the cooperation of local judicial and law enforcement authorities.⁸⁸ Meagher cautioned deaf people to be careful in their approach. They could not make citizen’s arrests as they pleased. Deaf people needed to check with local police regarding policies for arresting

⁸¹ Howard, “Impostors,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 40, no. 22 (June 1, 1911): 3.

⁸² “Editorial,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 40, no. 19 (May 11, 1911): 2.

⁸³ Meagher, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 44, no. 46 (November 18, 1915): 4.

⁸⁴ “Editorial,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 44, no. 38 (September 23, 1915): 2.

⁸⁵ Meagher, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 44, no. 46 (November 18, 1915): 4.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Meagher, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 46, no. 3 (January 18, 1917): 2.

⁸⁸ Meagher, “Official Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 44, no. 18 (May 6, 1915): 4.

people, to use their power wisely, and to be able to prove that the arrestee *did* commit a crime. Unlike Howard, Meagher urged restraint and prohibited the use of force unless necessary. In fact, Meagher believed that deaf people volunteering as citizen police would bring good publicity to the deaf community by portraying deaf people as law-abiding citizens.⁸⁹

To improve enforcement of anti-vagrancy and impostor legislation, rank and file deaf people were called to actively participate in identifying, detaining, or chasing off beggars and impostors.⁹⁰ In 1904, the NAD passed a resolution declaring that it was the duty of deaf people themselves to guard the public against impostors and to engage in every effort to the end that impostors be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.⁹¹ One of the main and perhaps most effective strategies employed by the leadership was internal community policing.

Prominent deaf leaders in various communities corresponded with each other, tracking suspected peddlers. For example, John Amos Todd, the State Impostor Marshal of Tennessee, identified a deaf beggar, Ed Sullivan, who was guilty of larceny. Todd tracked him to Jackson, Mississippi but the Mississippi locals were unable to apprehend him. Then, through community networking by sending telegrams and letters between local deaf organizations and leaders in various localities, Todd tracked him to Hot Springs, Arkansas and telegraphed the Arkansas local deaf leaders. They were able to

⁸⁹ Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 44, no. 46 (November 18, 1915): 4.

⁹⁰ "War on Impostors," *Mississippi Voice* 30, no. 10 (March 1, 1915): 2.

⁹¹ "Resolutions," *NAD Proceedings* (1904), 178.

apprehend Sullivan in Little Rock, Arkansas and turned him over to Todd for prosecution in Memphis.⁹²

Deaf leaders often published notices and physical descriptions in the deaf press cautioning deaf readers of suspected beggars and impostors and asked that the readers communicate with local deaf leaders or the *Deaf Mute's Journal* if they saw these individuals appear in their area.⁹³ The press and deaf leaders encouraged local deaf social clubs and divisions of the NFSD to expel peddlers as well as turn these peddlers in to local authorities where local anti-vagrancy or anti-peddling laws existed.

As Impostor Bureau chief, Howard approved of vigilante action and even suggested that the rank and file chase down impostors with violent and physical action when necessary. For example, Howard commended the vigilante action of Oscar Regensburg, a leading Los Angeles deaf citizen, who was reported to have chased down an impostor with the aid of his neighbors, one of whom bore an ax.⁹⁴ Howard exhorted his readers, “if there is no law in Texas that will permit legally hanging them, then lynch them.”⁹⁵

Deaf people also helped enforce impostor laws by assisting police in interrogation of suspected impostors. Their task was to determine if the impostors were really deaf as was claimed. Early in his tenure as Impostor Bureau chief, Howard suggested that deaf people could help the police determine if a beggar was faking deafness because “the deaf not only instinctively know their kind but they are so closely associated that they know of

⁹² John Amos Todd, “Letter from John Amos Todd,” *Mississippi Bulletin* 30, no.12 (April 1, 1915): 9-10; Meagher, “Report of Impostor Bureau,” *Deaf Mute's Journal* 45, no. 48 (November 30, 1915): 2.

⁹³ “Warning,” *California News* 30, no. 10 (February 15, 1915): 168; Untitled, *Deaf Mute's Journal* 9, no. 23 (June 3, 1880): 2.

⁹⁴ “Editorial,” *Deaf Mute's Journal* 41, no. 4 (January 25, 1912): 2.

⁹⁵ Howard, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *Deaf Mutes Journal* 40, no.11 (March 16, 1911): 2.

their people all over the country.”⁹⁶ This intimate knowledge also assisted deaf people in their efforts to network and to engage in internal community policing.

As Impostor Bureau chief, Meagher admonished the rank and file that once anti-vagrancy and anti-impostor laws were passed, deaf people were responsible for helping law enforcement in enforcing them.⁹⁷ Rank and file deaf people were urged to write to their local law enforcement and judicial officials to remind them of the new laws and urge enforcement. The hope was to encourage and stress enforcement in local communities.⁹⁸

Local anti-impostor chiefs also secured promises from local law enforcement and mayors of large cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and Philadelphia to aggressively enforce anti-impostor legislation by arresting *all* persons caught in the act of begging, deaf or not.⁹⁹ Despite all of this support, deaf leaders felt that enforcement was lax and urged deaf people to take it upon themselves to call attention of the police to the matter. They believed that if deaf people themselves took action and engaged the public, they would be able to have at least a deterrent effect in the particular locality of the arrest.¹⁰⁰ As Meagher traveled across the country to assist in anti impostor legislation enforcement, he discovered that there was a Cincinnati school for the training of men and women in

⁹⁶ Howard, “Letter to *The Vicksburg Post*,” *Mississippi Voice* 27, no. 8 (Feb 15, 1912): 7.

⁹⁷ “Anti-Impostor Bill,” *Mississippi Voice* 29, no. 11 (March 16, 1914): 5.

⁹⁸ Howard, “The New Law,” *The Companion* 36, no. 15 (April 19, 1911): 3; “Report of McIlvaine,” *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Meeting of the Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf*, (1912), 32-34 [hereafter PSAD Proceedings (1912)].

⁹⁹ “Report of McIlvaine,” *PSAD Proceedings* (1912), 32-34; d’Estrella, “Itemizer,” *California News* 27, no. 5 (January 1912): 5.

¹⁰⁰ McIlvaine, “Report of Impostor Chief,” *PSAD Proceedings* (1912), 32-34.

impostorism. Meagher, working with the Cincinnati police, had the institution charter revoked and the faculty placed in jail.¹⁰¹

The primary task of the deaf community's citizen police was to assist law enforcement in detecting impostors. Suggestions for detecting impostors were frequently made in the deaf press. Hearing tests were suggested, such as making loud noises behind the alleged deaf person. If one did not respond to certain noises, they were surely impostors because deaf people, although unable to hear these sounds, would be able to feel the vibrations made.¹⁰² If someone claimed they were begging in order to secure funds for an education, they surely were faking because schools for the deaf were free.¹⁰³ The silent press articles suggested that conversations be carried out near the alleged impostor, letting certain threats drop that might scare the impostor into confession such as the threat of physical harm and violence.¹⁰⁴

One common method of detecting impostors was to test their knowledge of sign language. Many impostors claimed that they did not know sign language because they had not been educated in schools for the deaf. When these claims were made, deaf leaders would cite that since they could communicate by writing back and forth with their deaf interrogators, it was clear they indeed had received an education and if they had, they would surely have learned sign language.¹⁰⁵

Claims of not knowing sign language due to late deafness were often rejected, because deaf people believed that it was extremely unusual to lose both hearing and

¹⁰¹ Bodin, "How the Deaf Uphold the Law," 294; Meagher, "Impostors Again," *Mississippi Bulletin* 31, no.7 (January 15, 1916): 9.

¹⁰² Melville Davidson, "Reprinted from *The Kansas Star*," *Mississippi Voice* 27, no. 8 (February 15, 1912): 5.

¹⁰³ "Frauds Denounced," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 41, no.12 (March 21, 1912): 4.

¹⁰⁴ William A. Caldwell, "Editorial," *The California News* 33, no. 5 (December 1917): 60-61.

¹⁰⁵ Meagher, "Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 43, no. 23 (June 4, 1914): 3.

speech at a later age. Deaf leaders had argued for a long time that deafness and mutism were two separate afflictions and that most deaf people did not lack speech due to a physical defect but rather because they had never heard speech.¹⁰⁶ Howard also argued that even if those impostors hadn't learned sign language, if they were really deaf, they would intuitively understand basic gestures.¹⁰⁷

Howard suggested examination of both an alleged impostor's written language and use of sign language. He believed that hearing people and deaf people differed in how they wrote and how they signed. He claimed that a hearing person, no matter how proficient in signs, would never "attain that facility, lucidity, and grace in the use of the sign language that comes naturally to the deaf themselves, that the hearing persons invariably show some peculiarity in their sign expressions that stamp them as belonging to the hearing class."¹⁰⁸

Using standard sign language modes to detect impostors could be problematic. For example, Howard neglected to consider regional and racial sign language variations in his networking campaigns. For example, Mississippi state chief EV Peters recounted a tale of catching an African-American impostor, where the authorities could easily have erred in detecting whether or not the person was really deaf.¹⁰⁹ Although Peters did not report if the individual was really deaf, he asserted the sign language test would have been useless in this case. African Americans had developed their own dialect of

¹⁰⁶ For more information on the deaf-mute debate, see Octavian Robinson, "We Are of a Different Class: Ableist Rhetoric in Deaf America, 1880-1920," in *Deaf and Disability Studies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Susan Burch and Alison Kafer (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2010).

¹⁰⁷ Howard, "Sixty Days in Jail. A Friend of Superintendent Bangs," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 41, no. 5 (February 1, 1915): 2.

¹⁰⁸ Elwell, "Jay Cooke Howard's Lecture," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 41, no. 17 (April 25, 1912): 1.

¹⁰⁹ Meagher, "Report from EV Peters, State Chief for Mississippi," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 46, no. 45 (November 8, 1917): 4.

American Sign Language that white deaf people were unable to understand due to segregation from white deaf and from the white American deaf community.¹¹⁰

Deaf people were instructed to assist in the enforcement of impostor laws against both male and female impostors, stating that impostorism was no longer confined to the male sex. Howard alleged that male impostors were recruiting women and instructing them in the “racket.” He also worried that law enforcement authorities would not punish female impostors in the same way they punished male impostors.¹¹¹

In 1912, Howard urged deaf people to pursue both male and female impostors with equal passion, saying “if it is a woman, report her just the same. A fraud is a fraud whether in pants or petticoats.”¹¹² This equality in enforcement wasn’t always the case. Some local impostor chiefs showed leniency to female impostors. Deaf people more commonly lamented the leniency shown female impostors by law enforcement authorities.¹¹³ For example, one of NAD’s “marshals,” Ellis Jennings of Tulare, California apprehended a female impostor. Although he doubted she was really deaf, he let her go as long she left town against the wishes of Howard and Meagher who did not want any suspected impostors let go because they would simply move on and continue to ply their trade elsewhere.¹¹⁴ As a deaf activist, Jennings’ leniency was uncommon. The leadership did not see or consider female impostors as being exploited. Instead, they argued that deaf men and women bore equal responsibility in preserving their status and

¹¹⁰ For a discussion on the development of a separate dialect of sign language by African-Americans and regional variations in sign language, see Susan Burch and Hannah Joyner, *Unspeakable: The Story of Junius Wilson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹¹¹ “Editorial,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 41, no. 6 (February 8, 1912): 2.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ “Imposter is Detected by Local Mutes,” *Mississippi Bulletin* 31, no. 10 (March 1, 1916): 13.

¹¹⁴ “Reprint from Tulare, California,” *The California News* 32, no. 9 (May 1917): 221.

image as self-sufficient citizens, so both male and female impostors should be pursued with equal vigor.

Leaders in the deaf community declared their enforcement efforts had been successful and the community was close to victory in their campaign against impostors. In 1915, Meagher declared that the bureau was doing good work and that impostorism was on the wane in a poem.

“We have fake beggars on the run
Throughout the blooming nation,
We’ll get each State to legislate
Against thy vain vocation“;
The “deef an’ dum,” oh I dum their kids
Will have to go in hiding,
And mend their ways,
Else ninety days
They’ll spend in jail abiding.”¹¹⁵

As of 1916, the impostor bureau published fewer reports but this didn’t mean the committee was any less active. Meagher claimed that the bureau was so successful in its work that arrests and convictions of impostors were no longer out of the ordinary and no longer newsworthy. He believed that impostors were having a harder time soliciting a living through impostorism and that their demise was approaching.¹¹⁶ By 1920, the Impostor Bureau had disseminated 10,000 circulars and 25,000 stickers. It had sent newsletters to 400 daily newspapers and secured the passage of legislation in a number of states. Meagher declared victory in a 1920 report: “Impostors seem to be practically extinct.” He truly believed that the campaign had been successful because although the economic climate was difficult, impostorism was on the wane.

¹¹⁵ Meagher, “Official Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 44, no. 18 (May 6, 1915): 2.

¹¹⁶ Meagher, “Impostor Bureau,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 45, no. 6 (February 10, 1916): 2.

The deaf community was active during the Progressive Era, having identified their own arena of social concern. The problem of the deaf peddler and impostor, they believed, affected deaf and hearing people alike. Through strategies such as publicity, legislation, and enforcement, deaf leaders reached out to mainstream society to partner with the deaf community in their efforts to eradicate the new social evil of impostorism while simultaneously attacking an age-old concern: the deaf peddler. Those efforts evolved from state and local action in the late nineteenth century into national action by the early twentieth century. By the end of the 1920s, the deaf community had achieved anti-impostor legislation in half of the United States and inserted themselves in American public life by participating in the broader wave of American reforms. Although Meagher celebrated the decline in impostorism, the anti-peddling crusader was far from finished. He and his cohorts now confronted a new task, combating alphabet card peddlers and bona fide deaf peddlers, who seemed to proliferate after World War I.

Chapter 3: Shifting the Focus To Bona Fide Deaf Peddlers

“We labor long, we rant and rail,
To put card-peddlers into jail;
And when we do—those pesky critters
Work “the sympathy racket” and
them soft-hearted saps in blue coats likely let ‘em out,
which makes us so
Mad and disgusted it takes all the
Poetry out o’ life and hence I can’t
Finish this consarn jingle, nohow!”¹

By 1920, forty years of campaigns to improve trade instruction, eradicate impostors, and educate employers about the capabilities of deaf workers, and deaf people’s job performance during the war had proven insufficient in cementing deaf people’s status as equal economic citizens. Keen awareness of such vulnerability drove the leadership’s crusade against employment discrimination through anti-impostor activism, publicity campaigns, and continued efforts to improve trade instruction in schools for the deaf.

Despite a brief economic downturn in the period immediately after World War I, deaf people enjoyed prosperity and high employment rates in the early 1920s. The silent press attributed improved employment conditions to successful anti-impostor legislation passed during the preceding decade, anti-impostor activism, and the performance of deaf workers in meeting wartime labor demands. Despite the promising employment outlook during World War I and the early 1920s, deaf leaders remained conscious of deaf

¹ Jimmy F. Meagher, “Chicago,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 52, no. 8 (February 22, 1923): 2.

people's economic vulnerability, reminded by the periodical downturns in the economy throughout the interwar period and by persistent employment discrimination.

During the 1920s, deaf workers confronted new challenges in securing employment due to the increased use of machinery in factories and employment discrimination driven by employers' concerns about workmen's compensation and liability requirements. Those requirements served as justification for employers' refusal to hire workers, blaming insurance companies' denial of insurance coverage for businesses that employed deaf people.²

In addition to these workplace challenges, the deaf community also had to contend with new threats to their image as a class of self-sufficient, capable citizen-workers. Those new threats were the bona fide deaf peddler and alphabet cards. The preceding four decades of anti-impostor activism had operated on the premise that the majority of deaf-mute peddlers and beggars who solicited alms from the public in exchange for inexpensive products were impostors. This claim supported deaf leaders' assertions that deaf people did not seek charity and were a class of hard-working, self-sufficient citizens. This effort was meant to compel employers to view deaf people as a category of excellent prospective employees. This claim was upturned by the emergence of bona fide deaf peddlers- peddlers who were actually deaf. Bona fide deaf peddlers further threatened the deaf community's efforts at portraying deaf people as self-sufficient citizens by peddling sign language alphabet cards, which closely linked peddling to the deaf community. Bona fide deaf peddlers were largely ignored prior to the 1920s, perhaps because leaders saw them as the exception rather than the rule. With the emergence of alphabet cards, deaf peddlers became more visible and they could no

² "Don't Weaken," *The Frat* 41, no. 5 (December 1943): 4-5.

longer be ignored. In 1920, the National Association of the Deaf formally redefined the anti-peddling crusade to include bona fide deaf peddlers.³

Deaf leaders determined that the anti-impostor legislation and activism of the 1910s along with the decline in impostors was insufficient to secure deaf people's reputations as self-sufficient citizens and thus their material security. They then turned to a state solution to address persistent employment discrimination against deaf people.

During World War I, deaf leaders joined the wave of progressive activists who pioneered the welfare state by pushing for a state solution in the form of state and federal labor bureaus for the deaf. They, like progressive activists, sought "not to foster big government for its own sake but to address the most pressing and dangerous social ills of industrial society...to use the power of the administrative state to achieve their ends."⁴ Deaf community leaders, by the mid-1910s, believed that the government was no longer merely responsible for policing and enforcement. The government was now being asked to accept responsibility for the welfare of its deaf citizens by establishing, funding, and staffing state run labor bureaus, which included the task of educating the public about impostors.

During the war, deaf people enjoyed greater employment opportunities as able-bodied men departed for war, and factories ramped up production. In 1918, the silent press touted the fact that no capable man or woman who wanted to work would be found unemployed.⁵ There was hope that wartime demand would allow deaf workers to

³ "Resolutions," *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (1920), 97 [hereafter NAD Proceedings (1920)].

⁴ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform, From Bryan to FDR: Populism, Progressivism, and the New Deal- a stimulating new analysis from the perspective of our own time*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1981), 15.

⁵ "Like Others," *The Frat* 17, no. 3 (December, 1918): 2.

demonstrate their abilities, and that if they did well, prejudice would wholly disappear and improve future chances for deaf workers.⁶ NAD president James H. Cloud declared in the president's address at the 1920 NAD convention, "in the industrial field the deaf have held their own and made advances. The war helped them somewhat by increasing the demand for workers thereby opening positions which previously had been made impossible or needlessly difficult for the deaf to obtain."⁷

According to historian Robert Buchanan, there was a national migration of deaf adults to industrial centers during the war as the "culmination of nearly forty years of disparate and loosely organized responses by deaf people as the nation evolved from a rural, artisan-based economy to an urbanized, mass-based industrial setting."⁸ Although deaf people conceded that the war broadened employment opportunities and economic benefits for deaf people, they did not want to appear as if they were benefiting from others' misfortunes. On the defensive about their inability to serve in the armed forces, they were careful to emphasize their patriotism, insisting that they were good citizens by contributing to the war effort on the domestic front. As much as the deaf people celebrated the economic benefits they gained from American involvement in the war, they also emphasized their contributions and sacrifices.⁹

"I am now working for America; I am working for the flag that has given me freedom and opportunity; I am working for the men in khaki and navy blue who are fighting for me at the front. I will not shrink from new burdens. I will endeavor to push myself beyond the average. I will crowd more into the hours than I ever did before. If I save ten minutes, I may save ten lives. My own convenience, my own profit matter nothing as compared with the emergency in which men are giving their lives for me."¹⁰

⁶ "Opportunity Knocks," *The Frat* 16, no. 3 (November, 1917): 13.

⁷ James H. Cloud, "President's Address," *NAD Proceedings* (1920), 10.

⁸ Robert Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in School and Factory, 1850-1950*, (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1999): 69.

⁹ "The Deaf Benefited By The War," *The Frat* 18, no. 2 (December, 1919): 13.

¹⁰ "The Deaf Worker's Creed," *The Frat* 17, no. 3 (December, 1918): 5.

This creed was composed by the NFSD and targeted at its membership, which were primarily deaf male workers. The creed exhorted the membership to work hard and efficiently, proving their place as citizen-workers who contributed to the war effort.

Deaf workers were keenly aware that at the end of the war with the return of American soldiers, there would be reduced demand for manufactured goods, and deaf people were less likely to remain employed. For some, the employment outlook was bleak. Others remained hopeful that deaf workers had acquired desirable skills, experience, and positive references from their employers and would keep employment discrimination at bay.¹¹ In 1920 Petra Fandrem Howard, a social worker with the Minnesota labor bureau for the deaf and wife of NAD leader Jay Cooke Howard, asserted that the majority of educated deaf people in the United States were self-supporting because the war had showcased the ability of deaf people as skilled workmen.¹²

After the war ended, deaf leaders continued to emphasize that deaf people made good workers. They appealed to employers by citing Henry Ford's practice of hiring handicapped workers and proudly quoted Ford who said, "no particular consideration has to be given to deaf and dumb employees. They do their work one hundred per cent."¹³

Others were not as optimistic and urged deaf people to remain in their jobs and try to hold onto their hard won gains.¹⁴ The end of the war restored economic anxieties for deaf people as employment opportunities changed. These anxieties were manifested in the downsizing of deaf workforces at plants that employed large numbers of deaf

¹¹ "Industrial Prospects of the Deaf," *The Frat* 17, no. 7 (May, 1919): 4.

¹² Mrs. Jay Cooke Howard [Petra Fandrem Howard], "The Division for the Deaf in the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry," *Silent Worker* 33, no. 3 (December 1920): 89.

¹³ "Editorial," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 51, no. 50 (December 14, 1922): 2.

¹⁴ "Sit Tight," *The Frat* 17, no. 5 (March, 1919): 2.

workers, such as Goodyear and Firestone. By the mid-1920s the Goodyear plant in Akron, Ohio had downsized its force of 750 deaf workers to 100 deaf workers, turning this World War I deaf industrial workers' mecca into a no-man's land.¹⁵ The silent press strongly discouraged hopeful deaf workers from traveling to Akron, particularly when they could not secure jobs elsewhere.¹⁶

By the mid-1920s, it was apparent that the gains from World War I had been lost. Madison J. Lee, the principal of the Kentucky School for the Deaf, announced that the supreme issue confronting the deaf at this time was the problem of unemployment, despite education and trade training in schools for the deaf. Prominent educators such as Lee and James H. Cloud agreed that the paramount issues for the average deaf person at this time were vocational training and employment.¹⁷

Deaf educators and political leaders attributed unemployment to the emergence of liability and compensation requirements. Many employers cited these requirements as a reason for their refusal to hire deaf workers, falsely claiming that insurance companies would refuse to issue compensation insurance to plants that employed deaf workmen because deaf workers were considered at high risk for injury.¹⁸ Some deaf people accepted this explanation.¹⁹ However, Cloud and other deaf leaders charged that employers were unfairly applying liability and compensation laws to justify their prejudice against deaf workers.²⁰ They did not accept the argument that workmen's compensation and liability legislation allowed such discrimination against deaf workers.

¹⁵ "Chicago," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 56, no. 34 (August 25, 1927): 2.

¹⁶ "Akron," *The Frat* 18, no. 10 (September, 1920): 12.

¹⁷ Tom L. Anderson, "What is the Paramount Issue Before the Deaf Today?" *The Deaf Carolinian* 32, no. 6 (October, 1926): 1.

¹⁸ Anderson, "No Discrimination Evident," *The Frat* 27, no. 2 (August 1929): 8.

¹⁹ J.C. Nash, "The Deaf of San Diego, Cal.," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 54, no. 7 (February 12, 1925): 2.

²⁰ Cloud, "President's Address," *NAD Proceedings* (1920), 10.

One potential factor in the prejudice toward deaf workers is the view that deaf people were foreign and clannish due to their use of sign language, not English, as their primary language and often clustered into insular communities. This view of deaf people became widespread in the late nineteenth century because of the national climate after the Civil War. This period was where much reform emphasized

“the creation of national unity and social order through homogeneity of language and culture. Much reform of the time, oralism included, reflected widespread fears of unchecked immigration and expanding, multiethnic cities. Deaf people in both eras served as convenient, and not always willing, projection screens for the anxieties of their times. The history of deaf education is as much, or more, about concerns over national identity and selfhood as it is about pedagogical technique or theory.”²¹

During times of national crisis, such as wartime, those views of deaf people may have reemerged or become more apparent. Those attitudes and fears may explain deaf people’s efforts to emphasize their patriotism and contributions to the war effort.

Tom L. Anderson, an educator and leader in the deaf community, launched a two-year investigation in response to complaints about the unjust application of liability and compensation regulations. Anderson’s study clarified that employers did not claim that the law specifically prohibited deaf workers but rather that it was the insurance companies who refused to underwrite the insurance policies. Such clarification was necessary because deaf leaders had expended energy on efforts to condemn and repeal legislation instead of addressing the true source of employment discrimination.²²

Anderson’s study was motivated by his desire to protect schools for the deaf because

²¹ Douglas Baynton, “A Silent Exile on This Earth: The Metaphorical Construction of Deafness in the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Disability Studies Reader* ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge Press, 1997), 35.

²² “New England Gallaudet Association,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 55, no. 38 (September 23, 1926): 1.

these schools would be declared a failure if deaf people continued to be subjected to persistent employment discrimination and were viewed as unable to be self-sufficient. He surveyed a number of insurance companies including Indemnity Company, Aetna Life Insurance Company, Travelers Indemnity Company, and the Ford Motor Company. Each company responded to Anderson's survey and denied that there was any such policy barring employers from hiring deaf workers or that they refused to insure employers if they employed deaf workers. Anderson concluded that neither discrimination in liability laws nor denial of compensation insurance were real. It seemed that employers were simply using these excuses as justification for their own prejudices. He urged deaf people to report cases of discrimination to the insurance company, collect evidence, and report all cases to the National Research Council as well as deaf organizations for action.²³

Although deaf leaders accepted that the discriminatory application of workmen's compensation and liability laws explained some of the barriers that deaf people faced in gaining work during the 1920s, they also attributed persistent employment discrimination to the oral method and impostorism.²⁴ An explicit connection between oralism and employment difficulties was emphasized. Helen Hanson, the hearing daughter of prominent deaf figures Olof and Agatha Hanson, argued that the deaf who received their education through signs were more likely to be self-supporting citizens. She implied that the oral method led to a class of deaf people incapable of self-sufficiency, which then gave the public the impression that deaf people were objects of charity rather than capable workers.²⁵

²³ Anderson, "No Discrimination Evident," *The Frat* 27, no. 2 (August 1929): 8.

²⁴ Michael Lapidès, "National Association of the Deaf," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 55, no. 13 (April 1, 1926): 1.

²⁵ Helen Hanson, "The Deaf," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 53, no. 20 (May 15, 1924): 1.

In 1928, a committee investigating the education of the deaf met in Los Angeles. Supporters of oralism suggested that they were not interested in economic opportunities for deaf people and were content to see deaf people work as fruit harvesters or in seasonal occupations as cheap factory labor. In response, opponents of the oral method declared that the aim of education was to provide students with the ability to support themselves. So, they argued, the committee should focus on deaf people's ability to master a trade instead of recommending that deaf people settle for unskilled labor.²⁶

Deaf leaders believed that oralism was responsible for deaf people's bleak employment outlook as well as for the prevalence of impostorism, vagrancy, beggary, and peddling. They contended that the focus on oral skills detracted from time spent learning a trade, understanding how machinery worked, and developing general intelligence. They claimed that the oral method did not provide sufficient time or instruction in the trades, which subsequently led to an unskilled pool of laborers, peddlers, and beggars. By this argument, oralism became explicitly linked to impostorism, which was then linked to persistent employment discrimination. Self-sufficiency provided by an industrial education rendered in sign language was more important than speech and lip-reading.²⁷ Given this sentiment, deaf leaders urged educators of the deaf to focus on preparing deaf students to be self-sufficient workers.

Throughout the four decades preceding World War I, deaf leaders had created and defended connections between the manual mode of education and successful employment. Unemployment, peddling, and beggary contributed to the perception that

²⁶ "Investigation Committee Holds Meeting in Los Angeles: Pure Oralists Have Their Say, Which isn't Much, According to Best Informed, They Renege When Requested to Produce Pupils for Demonstration," *The Deaf* 1, no. 6 (April 1928): 1-2.

²⁷ "Ohio," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 56, no. 28 (July 14, 1927): 4.

deaf education was a failure. Deaf leaders were determined to combat this perception by outlining the success of trade instruction in schools for the deaf that used sign language, while also blaming the oral method for failing to provide an adequate industrial education.²⁸

Another action that deaf leaders condemned was the League of Hard of Hearing's acceptance of public monies. Deaf leaders pointed to the fact that employers often referred deaf applicants to the community chest rather than hire them as an example of how oral deaf and hard of hearing people represented the deaf as a class and thus contributed to the view that deaf people were objects of charity rather than self-sufficient and capable workers.²⁹

Tension between oralists and manualists is illustrated by the exchange between the *Deaf Mute's Journal* and the Volta Bureau regarding door-to-door peddling amongst deaf and hard of hearing people. The Volta Bureau was Alexander Graham Bell's private research laboratory, advocating for oral and auditory based pedagogical methods for deaf children, lobbying for public support for auditory-verbal therapy. The Volta Bureau's argument implied that the hard of hearing (oral deaf) should not be peddling but that it was a natural profession for the deaf as they were inferior and incapable.³⁰ Countering this implication, deaf leaders charged that because the Volta Bureau and oral proponents believed that deaf people should settle for unskilled labor, they were responsible for

²⁸ Hanson, "The Deaf," 1.

²⁹ Walter Pittman Valiant, "Methods Used in Financing The League of the Hard of Hearing Protested: Suggestion Made that the League Work Toward Independence for Its members and Confine Its Activities Exclusively to the Hard of Hearing," *The Deaf* 1, no. 5 (March, 1928): 1.

³⁰ "Editorial," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 56, no. 43 (October 27, 1927): 2.

employment discrimination against deaf people by encouraging public viewpoint of deaf people as objects of charity.³¹

Oralism was only one of the scapegoats for persistent employment discrimination. Petra Howard cautioned that employment discrimination against deaf workers had yet to be vanquished and placed the responsibility for this discrimination upon impostors.³² Referring to employers and their prejudice toward deaf workers, Howard claimed “possibly they have had so many of that now nearly extinct species, the “deaf impostor,” come into their places begging that they have come to the conclusion that all deaf people are beggars and good for nothing else.”³³ Howard urged deaf leaders to combat employment discrimination by educating employers as “to the nefarious work of the “deaf imposter” and have it impressed upon them that all supposedly deaf beggars should be jailed on sight.”³⁴

Impostors remained a political priority for the NAD during the 1920s in their quest to protect and advance deaf people’s standing in American society although the association expanded its focus to include real deaf peddlers and labor bureaus as a means of combating the idea of deaf people as dependents on public charity. In his address at the 1920 convention NAD President James H. Cloud declared that the organization was continuing its work in promoting the welfare of the deaf and claimed that threats to deaf people’s welfare and advancement in society remained--“the medical faddist, otologicist wiseacre, the oral extremists, civil service autocrats, traffic blunderhead, the classification

³¹ “Editorial,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 56, no. 43 (October 27, 1927): 2.

³² In this dissertation, I have two figures that share the same last name, Jay Cooke Howard and Petra Fandrem Howard. For clarity, Jay Cooke Howard is referred to as Howard and Petra Fandrem Howard is referred to as Petra Howard.

³³ P. Howard, “The Division for the Deaf in the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry,” *Silent Worker* 33, no. 3 (December 1920): 89.

³⁴ Ibid.

idiot, impostors, and fakirs.”³⁵ Those terms characterize the NAD’s top political priorities of the previous decade: the ongoing battle over educational methods in schools for the deaf; combating medical quackery that promised false cures for deafness; overturning bans on deaf people from employment in the civil service; protecting deaf people’s right to operate automobiles; resisting legislation directed toward deaf people inspired by the eugenics movement such as marriage bans and sterilization; and eliminating impostors.

Despite this declaration, the NAD appeared to be less active in the campaign against impostors during the 1920s as compared to previous decades. The silent press in the 1920s did not have the regular, frequent reports from the Impostor Bureau that had been published on a regular basis by former Impostor Bureau chiefs Jay Cooke Howard and Jimmy F. Meagher during the 1910s. The silence from the impostor bureau along with other pressing unaddressed issues of the day led to charges from the deaf community that the organization was not pursuing peddling as actively as it had in the past.³⁶

Nonetheless, the deaf leadership in the 1920s celebrated the success of the previous decade’s passage of anti-impostor legislation. Deaf leaders interpreted the passage of anti-impostor legislation as the government’s affirmation of deaf people’s legal right to “be secure in their reputation as law-abiding, self-supporting citizens --and so on.”³⁷ Meagher cautioned in his Impostor Bureau report at the 1920 convention that although impostorism had waned during the late 1910s, in part due to the Impostor Bureau’s successful efforts and in part due to wartime economic conditions, future hard

³⁵ Cloud, “President’s Address,” *NAD Proceedings* (1920), 9-10.

³⁶ “National Association of the Deaf: Official: What’s the Matter with the N.A.D.?” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 53, no. 49 (December 4, 1924): 2.

³⁷ Lapidès, “National Association of the Deaf,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 55, no. 13 (April 1, 1926): 1.

times would lead to a resumption of “this pernicious practice.”³⁸ Howard and Meagher urged the deaf community to remain vigilant in their fight against impostorism and the portrayal of deaf people as vagrants, beggars, and objects of charity.

During the war, there was little written about impostors in the silent press. Leaders claimed to have heard of few incidents of impostors around the country. Deaf leaders surmised that the wartime draft had gotten most of the people who otherwise would have engaged in the impostor trade.³⁹

When World War I ended, stories about impostors began to appear again in the silent press.⁴⁰ Typical stories tended to briefly describe impostors being exposed and then subsequently sentenced to an appropriate punishment as determined by the legal system.⁴¹ By 1924, 11 states made impostorism a misdemeanor for securing money under false pretenses. Penalties ranged from fines of \$10 to \$500 and anywhere from one to six months in jail.⁴²

The leadership lamented that impostors were once again making an appearance in greater numbers. In 1923, Meagher continued to celebrate the earlier successes of the Impostor Bureau, declaring that back in 1913, “the deaf were whining and whimpering at “employers’ discrimination;” but today every deaf man who hunts work finds it readily.” He implied this was due to NAD’s anti-impostor work, stating that over half of the U.S. has been protected against this evil [impostors] due to reduced employment

³⁸ Meagher, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *NAD Proceedings* (1920), 46.

³⁹ “Reenter the Imposter,” *Silent Worker* 31, no. 5 (February 1919): 73.

⁴⁰ The silent press refers to newspapers produced by schools for the deaf for the deaf community. For more information on the silent press, see Barry Crouch and John Van Cleve, *A Place of their Own: Creating A Deaf Community in America*, (Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1989).

⁴¹ “Reenter the Imposter,” 73.

⁴² “National Association of the Deaf: Suppression of Impostors,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 53, no. 23 (June 5, 1924): 4.

discrimination to the dwindling numbers of impostors and the success of anti-impostor legislation.⁴³

Although there was less reporting or apparent activism by the NAD's Impostor Bureau, deaf leaders leaped to the defense of the NAD and its activities. Jimmy F. Meagher, former chief of the Impostor Bureau, claimed in 1923 that even though there had been much less publicity about the work of John Purdum, the current bureau chief, he had done wonders just as the others who headed the bureau before him. Meagher urged the community to continue to providing the bureau with strong support.⁴⁴

During the 1920s, two new concerns confronted the Impostor Bureau. Although deaf peddlers and beggars had been present since Thomas F. Fox first aired his concerns at the 1880 convention of the NAD, the issue now had a newfound urgency in the aftermath of deaf people's economic successes during World War I. First, there was now a proliferation of real deaf peddlers that the Impostor Bureau needed to broaden its scope of authority to deal with and, second, there was an increase in the peddling of alphabet cards.

Until the end of World War I, the Impostor Bureau had focused efforts on eliminating impostors but hadn't dealt aggressively with real deaf peddlers. Prior to 1920, Meagher and the Impostor Bureau had maintained "a non-committal attitude on the question" of real deaf peddlers because real deaf peddlers relied upon "the fact that the NAD has never gone on record as condemning the practice, and as the objects of this

⁴³ The Meaghers, "Chicago," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 52, no. 30 (July 26, 1923): 1.

⁴⁴ The Meaghers, "Chicago," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 52, no. 32 (August 9, 1923): 2.

association, as defined in the articles of incorporation, are ‘the intellectual, professional, and industrial improvement’ of the deaf.”⁴⁵

Meagher brought the NAD’s attention to the rising popularity of alphabet card peddling in the Chicago area in his 1920 report at the NAD convention.⁴⁶ He believed the Impostor Bureau could not address the question of real deaf peddlers without a definite condemnation and directive from the NAD. There was umbrage at alphabet card peddlers who sold printed booklets showcasing the manual alphabet at prices ranging from ten cents to twenty-five cents.⁴⁷ Meagher declared that these cards were not worth this amount and that the sole value of these cards was determined by charity rather than perceived value.⁴⁸ “If a deaf-mute begs or sells manual alphabet cards, the public pities and patronizes him because he can not hear or speak. Incidentally, most of these alphabet card peddlers are impostors, and can hear and speak.”⁴⁹ He urged the NAD to make a definite statement on peddling by deaf people, especially in regard to alphabet card peddling because the cards portrayed sign language, which was intimately associated with deaf people. He argued that with the increasing prevalence of real deaf peddlers, it was incumbent for the NAD to address the issue. Meagher then tendered his resignation as chief of the Impostor Bureau, suggesting that the Bureau needed to appoint someone who would bring fresh enthusiasm and a renewed sense of mission.⁵⁰

At the 1920 national convention, the NAD responded by expanding the mission of the Impostor Bureau, redefining impostors to include deaf peddlers who sold items that

⁴⁵ Meagher, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *NAD Proceedings* (1920), 46.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ The Meaghers, “Chicago,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 52, no. 8 (February 22, 1923): 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “Editorial,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 56, no. 41 (October 13, 1927): 2.

⁵⁰ Meagher, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *NAD Proceedings* (1920), 46.

were overvalued. This directive especially targeted sign language alphabet card peddling.⁵¹ NAD's resolution to classify real deaf peddlers with impostors did little to stem the proliferation of alphabet card peddlers. Although deaf leaders acknowledged that peddling was not illegal, they, including Meagher, looked upon deaf peddlers with condescension, stating in 1921: "Chicago's deaf card-peddlers are so low in principle that they have to climb on a soap-box to look a caterpillar in the eye."⁵²

During the 1920s, the deaf community leaders attempted to navigate the gray area between legitimate salesmanship of articles and using deafness as a pretext to make a sale. Acknowledging the increasing popularity of alphabet card peddling and attempting to make a distinction between salesmen and peddlers, an editorial in the *Deaf Mute's Journal* said,

"this brings to mind that there are a few beggars who are really deaf. They get a supply of manual alphabet cards and peddle them from household to household, from factory to business office, and retail them for a price that is one-hundred percent more than they cost, to people who have no use for them and only purchase from motives of charity. The vendors of these alphabet cards are usually able-bodied, which makes the resultant impression upon the purchaser a dire injury upon the deaf in general. There is no law against peddling, and it is quite honorable to peddle articles of value. But there is a law, or city ordinance, that a license must first be obtained. Then a deaf man or a hearing man can legally make sales of useful articles; but to make money by exciting sympathy is debasing and otherwise injurious."⁵³

Bona fide deaf peddlers could not be prosecuted for obtaining money under false premises as impostors could be. Arthur Roberts suggested that bona fide deaf peddlers be pursued and penalized for peddling without licensure and suffer from community

⁵¹ The Meaghers, "Chicago," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 52, no. 8 (February 22, 1923): 2.

⁵² "Nad-Frat "facts" You Don't Know and Which You Don't Need to Know," *Silent Worker* 33, no. 9 (June 1921): 339.

⁵³ "Fakirs and Peddlers," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 60, no. 18 (April 30, 1931): 2.

ostracism.⁵⁴ To this end, legislation was used to target deaf card peddlers by charging them with peddling without a license.⁵⁵

After his resignation from the Impostor Bureau, Meagher remained vocal about peddlers and impostors in the silent press throughout the 1920s. Anton Schroeder briefly succeeded him until 1922 but the Impostor Bureau was silent during his tenure. Schroeder's resignation was, too, greeted with silence. John Purdum succeeded Schroeder, who enjoyed Meagher's support and enthusiastic endorsement. Meagher likened Purdum to former Impostor Bureau chief Jay Cooke Howard by describing him as a high achiever. Indeed, Meagher heaped high praise on Purdum, stating that Purdum had been more successful than Meagher himself in driving impostorism out of Chicago, a task that was the most difficult work on NAD's agenda.⁵⁶

In 1922, the *Deaf Mute's Journal* declared that a new NAD Impostor Bureau chief, John E. Purdum, had started a war to the finish on card-peddlers. Purdum had concentrated his efforts in the Chicago area because the city had been labeled the hotbed of alphabet card peddling. He believed that if peddling could be eradicated from the Chicago area, it would be an easier task to eradicate it across the country.⁵⁷

Purdum suggested that the city require peddlers to obtain permits to sell alphabet cards within the city. Although Meagher had stressed that card peddlers were deaf, Purdum believed that most card peddlers were, in fact, impostors, asking Chicago police chief Charles Fitzmorris to crack down on issuing permits. Most applicants, said Purdum, were not real deaf people, and that in any case, peddling, especially card

⁵⁴ Arthur Roberts, "National Association of the Deaf: Official," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 53, no. 6 (February 5, 1925): 2.

⁵⁵ The Meaghers, "Chicago," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 52, no. 8 (February 22, 1923): 2.

⁵⁶ The Meaghers, "Chicago," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 52, no. 33 (August 16, 1923): 3.

⁵⁷ "Chicago," *Deaf Mute's Journal*, 51 no. 20 (May 18, 1922): 2.

peddling, made it more difficult for law-abiding deaf people to earn a livelihood. After some initial reluctance, Fitzmorris agreed to cancel and call in all permits issued for peddling regardless of the peddler's hearing ability.⁵⁸

Purdum expressed concerns that although the anti-impostor campaigns had been vigorous, impostorism continued to thrive because of existing real deaf peddlers and beggars.⁵⁹ It was hard for law enforcement to differentiate between impostors and bona fide deaf peddlers. Including real deaf peddlers with the anti-impostor campaigns made it easier for the deaf community and law enforcement to police impostorism.⁶⁰

In conjunction with working with local law enforcement authorities, Purdum also called upon the United Charities of Chicago to support the Impostor Bureau's efforts to eradicate impostorism, asking it to participate in publicizing the beggar situation in Chicago. Purdum believed that although the deaf community had invested significant efforts in combating impostors, successfully enacting anti-impostor legislation in a number of states, their efforts needed support from mainstream society. He asked the organization to publicize the impostor situation and for the public to inform police officers of suspected impostors.⁶¹

Deaf people were especially bothered by card peddlers because of the public stigma in viewing deaf people as objects of charity and the sign language alphabet cards only served to emphasize the relationship between deafness and beggary. Meagher described card peddling's stigma in a 1923 article in the *Deaf Mute's Journal*, claiming

⁵⁸ "Chicago," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 51, no. 20 (May 18, 1922): 2.

⁵⁹ "National Association of the Deaf: Suppression of Impostors," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 53, no. 23 (June 5, 1924): 4.

⁶⁰ Arthur Roberts, "National Association of the Deaf Official Report: Impostors," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 54, no. 6 (February 5, 1925): 2.

⁶¹ "National Association of the Deaf: Suppression of Impostors," 4.

that nearly every deaf person in Chicago had confronted a benevolent neighborhood shopkeeper who would flash the cards at them and remark that they had gotten it from a “poor dummy.”⁶² Along with their other grievances against impostors, deaf citizens did not welcome the pity of the hearing public. But the alphabet cards did something that other peddled items did not: they emphasized their deafness, co-opted their unique language, and brought their deafness into sharper focus in the mainstream.

While impostors had brought unwelcome attention to deaf people as objects of charity by introducing greater numbers of hearing people to supposedly dependent deaf people, these cards left a lasting impression, explicitly tying peddling and beggary to real deaf people who used sign language. This association between beggary, peddling, and sign language did not bode well for the deaf community that had so ardently battled the encroachment of the oral method in deaf education.

Deaf people were also bothered by the fact that those bona fide deaf peddlers were helping impostors by legitimizing the sale of alphabet cards and explicitly using deafness, thus pity, as a means of soliciting sales. In 1929, the *Deaf Mute's Journal* contained an editorial vilifying the peddling of alphabet cards by suggesting that real deaf peddlers were helping impostors ply their trade on an unsuspecting public. The editorial's author also suggested that impostors were taking advantage of alphabet cards to scam the public.⁶³

Public stigma was not the sole explanation of why deaf people were so concerned about bona fide deaf peddlers. Jealousy at how well some peddlers lived and earned an easy living was also a prominent feature in deaf people's accounts of bona fide deaf

⁶² Meagher, “Chicago,” *Deaf Mute's Journal* 52, no. 8 (February 22, 1923): 2.

⁶³ “Editorial,” *Deaf Mute's Journal* 58, no. 2 (January 10, 1929): 2.

peddlers. There are numerous newspaper stories of deaf peddlers living the high life: attending the opera and theater; driving around in fancy automobiles; living in luxury accommodations. An article in the *Deaf Mute's Journal* described bona fide deaf peddlers' easy living as a "brazen affrontage" with their boasting of earning \$9-\$15 a day selling cheap soap and enjoyed the luxury of sporting around in high-powered cars. The author questioned why others should work for \$15 a week when peddling would bring in the same amount in a single day.⁶⁴

Similar complaints were echoed in other news stories about impostors who earned as much as \$45 a day and were able to afford automobiles. There was a certain degree of anger about impostors who could take advantage of charitable sentiments to live the high-life and earn an easy living while "so many honest men are out of work and lacking the necessities of life."⁶⁵

Although many derided deaf peddlers, some people defended them as individuals simply selling goods in competition with hearing peddlers without the intent of soliciting pity or charity. The peddlers also defended themselves, citing that they were not being paid what they were worth and that peddling was a legitimate means of earning a living.⁶⁶ One such peddler, W.C. Burgess, wrote to Dr. Percival Hall, the president of Gallaudet College in 1928, explaining that he and his boys sold legitimate items such as Japanese pens and raincoats and were completely aboveboard. Burgess wanted to make sure that Hall understood his peddlers were not using the excuse of fundraising for Gallaudet College to shame the public into buying their goods as others had accused them of doing. While Hall was not active in policing peddling, he did receive correspondence from the

⁶⁴ "In Dixieland," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 55, no. 47 (November 25, 1926): 1.

⁶⁵ "Ill-Advised Charity," *The Frat* 21, no. 5 (September, 1923): 1.

⁶⁶ "In Dixieland," 1.

deaf community from time to time complaining about peddlers exploiting Gallaudet College as a charitable cause. Hall, from time to time, corresponded with concerned complainants to clarify that Gallaudet College funded by Congress and, like schools for the deaf, was not a charitable institution. Perhaps Burgess, as a self respecting deaf individual, did not want others to think that he was harming the reputation of or support for Gallaudet College by portraying the school as a charitable institution. Burgess characterized his work as a profession and resented deaf people for incorrectly portraying his work as exploitation.⁶⁷

Leaders responded that regardless of intent, it was a matter of how the public perceived deaf peddlers and that this misperception was the problem.⁶⁸ As in the previous four decades, the deaf community leadership of the 1920s continued to encourage community self-policing as a primary strategy for discouraging impostorism and peddling. Deaf people, as community police, drove deaf beggars out of their localities and assisted law enforcement authorities in detecting impostors.⁶⁹ Using the language of citizenship, deaf leadership exhorted deaf people to contribute to community self-policing by reporting any suspicions of fakery, not only of fake impostors/peddlers but also of faith healers who claimed they could cure deafness. “If you see a fake being enacted, it is your privilege and duty as a citizen to call the attention of the authorities to it.”⁷⁰

In addition to turning impostors and peddlers in to law enforcement authorities, the deaf community socially ostracized deaf peddlers, barring them from social and

⁶⁷ W.C. Burgess to Dr. Percival Hall, June 24, 1928, Presidential Papers of Dr. Percival Hall, Gallaudet University Archives, Washington, DC.

⁶⁸ James W. Howson, “The Deaf in Business,” *The Jewish Deaf* 6, no. 1 (February, 1920): 20-21.

⁶⁹ Hanson, “The Deaf,” 1.

⁷⁰ “Editorial,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 52, no. 28 (July 12, 1923): 2.

political membership. Arthur Roberts, in a 1925 *Deaf Mute's Journal* report, admonished that the self-respecting deaf should completely ostracize the bona fide deaf peddlers.⁷¹ The NFSD established a policy in 1920 that denied membership to applicants who were known to peddle. With this policy, the NFSD became visible in the anti-peddling crusade. Bona fide deaf peddlers combined with the emergence of alphabet cards as a peddling tool posed a significant threat to deaf workers who composed the membership of the NFSD. This became an issue of interest to the NFSD where deaf peddlers, as NFSD members, were harming other NFSD members and allowing peddlers to remain as members would serve as tacit acceptance of such harm being perpetuated by deaf people against their deaf peers. The NFSD also punished its members who were discovered peddling. On one occasion, a division imposed a fine of fifty dollars and a three-month suspension on one of its members caught peddling alphabet cards.⁷² The organization also supported the actions of division members criticized by the public for driving deaf peddlers and impostors out of town.⁷³

Community self-policing and social ostracism demonstrated that no one was harder on deaf peddlers and beggars than the deaf themselves. One author in *The Frat* proudly proclaimed: "They [deaf people] are law-abiding people with the occasional black sheep, as is the case with the hearing, ...they are self-respecting, independent and industrious, with an occasional panhandler; and no one is more severe in judgment of these black sheep than the deaf themselves."⁷⁴

The leadership emphasized during the 1920s as they had in the previous decades

⁷¹ Roberts, "National Association of the Deaf: Official," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 54, no. 6 (February 5, 1925): 2.

⁷² Meagher, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 49, no. 34 (August 19, 1920): 2.

⁷³ No author, No Title. *The Frat* 21, no. 9 (January, 1924): 8.

⁷⁴ "What the Deaf Can Do," *The Frat* 26, no. 11 (May, 1929): 12.

that in addition to self-policing, deaf citizens had obligations to the community and to their fellow deaf citizens. Deaf people had responsibilities: paying taxes, being patriotic, demonstrating good work ethic, being self-sufficient, and so on forth.⁷⁵ Their conduct supplemented the leadership's crusade against employment discrimination. Beyond their obligations as citizens, deaf people as workers were expected to do their part by learning well on the job and making a due effort to prove themselves as good workers to employers. Each deaf worker represented not only themselves, but also the deaf community as a whole.⁷⁶

There had been exceptions granted in the past to bona fide deaf peddlers and beggars. Previously, deaf leaders averted their eyes when certain categories of deaf people peddled and begged. Deaf leaders granted compassion (or pity) to deaf people who had additional disabilities or were deemed to have insufficient mental faculties to be able to obtain employment. This attitude changed in the 1920s. Rather than grant exemptions, leaders suggested that if deaf people were unable to support themselves aside from peddling and beggary due to mental faculties or additional disabilities that they be referred to institutional care.⁷⁷ This attitude was certainly a turnabout from prior decades, when the focus was on impostors. Still, the deaf community did not condemn deaf people with additional disabilities as harshly as they did able-bodied deaf peddlers.

Deaf leaders showed venomous disdain for able-bodied deaf people who had chosen to leave school early in favor of becoming peddlers.⁷⁸ Newspaper editorials also urged deaf people to enforce compulsory school attendance laws by having younger deaf

⁷⁵ Robert C. Miller, "The Voice of the Deaf," *The Deaf Carolinian* 33, no. 31 (May 5, 1928): 2.

⁷⁶ "Editorial," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 52, no. 31 (August 2, 1923): 2.

⁷⁷ "Wisconsin," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 52, no. 31 (August 2, 1923): 2.

⁷⁸ "In Dixieland," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 55, no. 47 (November 25, 1926): 1.

peddlers sent back to school.⁷⁹ Beyond legislation such as compulsory school attendance laws and anti-impostor laws, the leadership in the deaf community believed it was time for the state to expand its role and become actively involved in the crusade against peddlers. Suggestions for state intervention in employment discrimination against deaf workers were voiced as early as 1900 when deaf activist George Sawyer proposed protective federal legislation that prohibited employment discrimination.⁸⁰ Calls for a federal labor bureau came in 1905 and 1908 at the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf.⁸¹ Those early suggestions were mere whispers by solitary individuals that became a chorus by the 1920s after efforts by deaf leaders managed only to chip away at employment discrimination through community-led measures.

The anti-impostor legislation of the 1910s was viewed as generally successful but deaf leaders believed that they needed the state's help and a more organized effort to educate the public about impostors while handling employment discrimination so they looked to labor bureaus as a state solution to employment discrimination against deaf workers. Deaf leaders suggested that the state become involved not only in supporting deaf education but also in following through with graduates of deaf schools by establishing employment bureaus for the deaf within state departments of labor. The involvement of the state would carry greater weight with employers in persuading them to employ deaf workers and to combat prejudice by publicizing the abilities of deaf people while combating impostors and discriminatory applications of liability laws.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 112.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Anxieties about liability and compensation laws, unemployment, employer prejudices, and impostors were manifested in the NAD's Industrial and Civil Service Bureau, which lobbied Congress to establish a labor bureau for the deaf. The NAD's new objective was to urge the state to establish employment bureaus for the deaf in state departments of labor and in the U.S. Department of Labor. These bureaus would be responsible for opposing unjust applications of liability laws, combating discrimination against deaf workers, and enacting and enforcing legislation against impostorism.⁸²

Labor bureaus were to serve as information clearinghouses, publicizing the abilities of deaf workers to employers and informing the public that deaf people were capable of earning a livelihood. This publicity was to include disseminating information about industrial successes by deaf people, clarifying misconceptions and misstatements about them, and eliminating wrong impressions of the deaf, including the fact that they were objects of charity who depended on beggary, peddling, and the sympathy of the public. State and federal labor bureaus were expected to gather statistics and information about deaf employment, assist in employment placement, publicize the deaf as capable workers, and educate the public about impostors.

Deaf organizations including the NAD and the Society for the Welfare of Jewish Deaf (SWJD) believed that publicity was important in securing deaf people's industrial and social progress- a role that the labor bureaus were to assume.⁸³ Labor bureaus had existed prior to the 1910s but as informal, individual efforts on part of social workers, churches, and individuals. SWJD established the first formally organized labor bureau in

⁸² "National Association of the Deaf—An Organization for The Welfare of All the Deaf," *The Frat* 19, no. 5 (May 1921): 11; Cloud, "President's Address," *NAD Proceedings* (1920), 11.

⁸³ "More Publicity for the Deaf," *The Jewish Deaf* 5, no. 10 (January, 1920): 4.

New York City in 1910.⁸⁴ Their labor bureau affirmed that although many deaf people were able to obtain jobs on their own, especially during times of economic prosperity, it was often helpful to have the mediation of the bureau, especially when introducing deaf workers to new trades.⁸⁵ The SWJD suggested that the deaf community agitate for government-sponsored bureaus, recognizing the need for state intervention.⁸⁶

A few states, including Minnesota and North Carolina, established state bureaus of labor for the deaf or divisions for the deaf within existing labor departments. Minnesota established the first labor bureau for the deaf in 1913 after local activism by the Minnesota deaf community. This bureau was created within the state department of labor but did not receive appropriations to begin its work until 1915. Petra Fandrem Howard, Jay Cooke Howard's wife, was one of the bureau's early directors.⁸⁷ There was limited success in creating labor bureaus for the deaf on the state level during the 1920s and early 1930s. By the mid 1930s, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Michigan had labor bureaus for the deaf and Pennsylvania had expanded its vocational rehabilitation services to include deaf adults.⁸⁸ The bureaus had broad authority, which included assisting deaf people in securing employment as well as educating employers about the impostor evil.

The Minnesota and North Carolina bureaus of labor for the deaf were so successful that deaf leaders in Washington, South Dakota, and California suggested in 1923, 1925, and 1928, respectively, that similar bureaus be established but such bureaus never came into fruition.⁸⁹ Some states did not make an effort to establish a state bureau

⁸⁴ Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 113.

⁸⁵ "Executive Message," *The Jewish Deaf* 6, no. 1 (February, 1920): 61.

⁸⁶ Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 115.

⁸⁷ Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 116-117.

⁸⁸ Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 117-120.

⁸⁹ "Editorial," *The Deaf* 1, no. 6 (April, 1928): 2.

of labor for the deaf, preferring to depend on the existing state rehabilitation bureau, such as was the case in Pennsylvania.⁹⁰ Some deaf activists touted such integrated efforts as wrong because they believed that an intimate understanding of the deaf experience, sign language, and abilities of the deaf was necessary for effective advocacy of deaf people as workers and that this had to be manifested in the form of separate labor bureaus for and by the deaf with government funding.⁹¹

Rather than depend on departments of labor or rehabilitation, some deaf leaders, including Robert C. Miller, the head of the North Carolina Labor Bureau for the Deaf, instead argued that specialized bureaus for the deaf operated by the deaf would be best suited for securing employment for deaf workers. Such bureaus would be best able to understand the abilities and unique needs of deaf workers. Miller claimed that previous efforts by the state's department of labor had been unsuccessful because of the inability of the hearing labor department staff to understand the abilities and needs of deaf workers.⁹² He extolled the successes of his bureau and urged other states to establish similar deaf-operated state bureaus. Yet, Miller also supported the establishment of a similar bureau within the Labor Department on the federal level as deaf people who were intimately familiar with the issues confronted by deaf workers staffed the bureau.⁹³ Deaf leaders were apparently convinced by Miller's arguments as other state associations of the deaf called for establishing bureaus similar to the North Carolina model where such bureaus were staffed by deaf people.⁹⁴ In 1926, the NAD went on record endorsing the

⁹⁰ Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, 99.

⁹¹ "In Dixieland," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 57, no. 44 (November 1, 1928): 3.

⁹² "North Carolina Bureau of Labor for the Deaf," *The Deaf Carolinian* 33, no. 18 (February 4, 1928): 4.

⁹³ Miller, "The Labor Bureau for the Deaf in North Carolina," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 54, no. 13 (March 26, 1925): 2.

⁹⁴ "South Dakota State Convention," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 54, no. 31 (July 30, 1925): 2.

Minnesota and North Carolina labor bureaus and favored the establishment of labor bureaus for the deaf in all states.⁹⁵

Efforts to secure a federal bureau of labor for the deaf on the national level were more challenging. From 1913 to 1915, Senator Moses Clapp from Minnesota under pressure from his deaf constituents, introduced resolutions in the Senate Committee on Education and Labor to establish a federal bureau of labor for the deaf.⁹⁶ These resolutions all died in committee. In 1917, anticipating the end of the war and a contraction of labor demand, deaf people urged the NAD to lobby Congress to pass a bill establishing a national labor bureau for the deaf.⁹⁷

U.S. Representative John Raker, a representative from California who also served on the board of directors for the Columbia Institute for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb (now Gallaudet College), along with Representative Clarence Miller, Representative James Mahan, and Senator Clapp, adopted the cause, proposing resolutions in the House Committee on Labor and Education for creating a national labor bureau for the deaf every year between 1919 and 1924.⁹⁸ Raker's resolutions proposed that the national labor bureau for the deaf be responsible for studying the labor conditions of deaf people; promoting employment opportunities for deaf people; and promoting deaf people as capable workers to employers and industrial leaders. Another function of the proposed bureau was to "warn the public against unscrupulous people who impose upon

⁹⁵ "NAD- Report of Meeting Held August 9th to 14th," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 55, no. 34 (August 26, 1926): 2.

⁹⁶ John Van Cleve and Barry Crouch, *A Place of Their Own, Creating the Deaf Community in America* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 1989), 163.

⁹⁷ "Labor Bureau for the Deaf," *The Florida School Herald* 17, no. 4 (January, 1917): 51.

⁹⁸ John E. Raker to CIDD, to the President, Directors, and other officers of said institute, President Percival C. Hall Papers; Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, 63-64. John Raker was appointed as a director for the CIDD.

the public as deaf for the purpose of obtaining charity.”⁹⁹ The inclusion of anti-impostorism in the mission of labor bureaus demonstrated that leaders believed impostors to be a significant threat to deaf people’s ability to secure employment. The resolutions also included prohibitions on discrimination against deaf people in employment matters. There was no discussion as to how this was to be enforced. The Department of Labor refused to endorse the bureau and suggested a national study of the status of deaf workers be undertaken before making a decision as to the establishment of the bureau.¹⁰⁰ Due to the delays and lack of endorsement from the Department of Labor, the resolutions never made it out of committee and by 1927, the NAD accepted defeat.¹⁰¹

Although efforts on the federal level and in many states failed, deaf leaders claimed that the successful establishment of such bureaus in some states secured deaf people’s *legal right* to earn a living in the eyes of the state.¹⁰² Such bureaus granted legitimacy to deaf employment and their right to work. These bureaus also affirmed that deaf people were to be free from discrimination and prejudice on part of employers, both in the private and public sectors.

Deaf leaders in some states argued that labor bureaus, state or federal, for the deaf were not necessary. In response to the NAD promotion of labor bureaus, the president of the Florida Association of the Deaf declared in 1926 that there was no such need in Florida for there was plenty of work in the state. All a deaf person needed, he asserted, was to learn a trade, but without a trade, no bureau could help. He also proudly proclaimed that Florida was particularly free of beggars and impostors because Florida’s

⁹⁹ U.S. Congress. House Committee on Education. *House Resolution 1109*. 66th Cong., 1st sess., May 20, 1919.

¹⁰⁰ Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, 64.

¹⁰¹ “Chicago,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 56, no. 30 (July 28, 1927): 2.

¹⁰² Lapides, “National Association of the Deaf,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 55, no. 13 (April 1, 1926): 1.

anti-impostor legislation had been very effective.¹⁰³ Overall, the campaigns for national and state bureaus of labor for the deaf were unsuccessful. Other than the divisions of the deaf in Michigan, Minnesota, and North Carolina, along with limited inclusion of deaf adults in vocational rehabilitation departments, most state initiatives for a labor bureau devoted to the deaf population had failed along with the federal effort. Buchanan argued that Congress would not have “accorded deaf workers open-ended “rights to employment” not available to workers in mainstream society.”¹⁰⁴

The deaf community’s efforts to expand and protect deaf people’s employment opportunities in the 1920s were centered in continued campaigns against impostors, which was expanded to include real deaf peddlers. Those efforts also included the creation of labor bureaus on the state and national level, which also served as an extension of the campaign against impostors and peddlers. All together, those efforts continued to focus on protecting the image of deaf people as industrious citizens rather than as objects of charity. Those efforts realized the responsibility to protect the poor and weak lay not only with deaf leaders but also with the state. At the end of the 1920s, deaf people continued to confront barriers to employment as a result of compensation and liability legislation as well as employer discrimination and the increased use of machinery in the workplace.¹⁰⁵ Deaf people disagreed with President Herbert Hoover’s claim in 1929 that standards of living had increased because they as deaf people did not enjoy the prosperity of the late 1920s and still experienced such a gap in wealth. Almost

¹⁰³ A.W. Pope, “The President’s Address to the F.A.D. Convention,” *The Florida School Herald*, 27, no. 1 (October, 1926): 3.

¹⁰⁴ Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, 66.

¹⁰⁵ James F. Brady, “Passing Comments,” *The Frat* 26, no. 7 (January, 1929): 2.

predicting the future, they cautioned that deaf people would suffer first and most in labor reverses and would be the last to be re-employed.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ “How It Affects Us,” *The Frat* 26, no. 10 (April, 1929): 8.

Chapter 4: Averting Their Eyes

Prior to the Great Depression, deaf people tended to be politically conservative and bought into Hooverian progressivism. Historian David Kennedy characterized Hooverian progressivism as “actively managing social change through informed, though scrupulously limited, government action.”¹ This attitude shaped their response when the economy crashed in October of 1929, after three decades of economic growth with seven years of economic prosperity.² Kennedy claimed that the hardest hit were African American workers who were traditionally last hired and first fired.³ Deaf people complained of similar discrimination where they, too, were the ones last hired and first fired.⁴

During the Depression, deaf people confronted tremendous challenges as they encountered a massive economic downturn affecting all Americans and continued employment discrimination. Buchanan portrays the deaf community’s struggles during the Depression as follows, “Deaf people engaged in frustrating and often unsuccessful negotiations to secure work from either increasingly disinterested private employers or the recalcitrant state and federal officials who managed the era’s governmental work programs.”⁵ Deaf people complained of discrimination in the very programs that were designed to help the unemployed. They wanted access to “self-respecting work on Federal projects.”⁶ The operative word was *work* where the focus was on earned wages,

¹ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11.

² Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 11.

³ Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 87.

⁴ Royal Brown, “Are the Deaf Indifferent?” *N.A.D. Bulletin* 1, no. 5 (March, 1935): 3.

⁵ Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, 85.

⁶ “The Deaf and National Legislation,” *N.A.D. Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (October 1935): 1.

much like how many others felt about federal relief programs.⁷ They charged that New Deal programs such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Civil Works Administration (CWA) prevented them from obtaining honest relief and pointed out the irony in which the state provided for vocational and educational training of deaf children only to be denied employment in government relief projects. Logically, the hard times would predict a resurgence in bona fide deaf peddlers, impostors and beggars. However, the silent press of the era recounts very little of this phenomenon. Throughout the Depression, the NAD focused on gaining access to employment in addition to monitoring discrimination in government-funded work projects rather than on obtaining relief for able-bodied deaf people.

In 1930, about a year after the stock market crash in autumn of 1929, thousands of deaf people were out of work. According to historian Robert Buchanan, the Great Depression brought widespread unemployment to forty thousand deaf adults, and 40 percent of deaf people surveyed in Maryland were unemployed in 1932.⁸ In contrast, Historian David Kennedy's statistics indicate that 20% of the general labor force was out of work by 1932.⁹ By 1937, NAD statistics showed that while 10-15% of Americans were unemployed, unemployment among deaf people was at 46.3%, overall, and as high as 55% in Pennsylvania.¹⁰

Despite staggering unemployment statistics, deaf people maintained their conservative stance during the Great Depression, wary about the implications of including deaf people in certain New Deal programs. Deaf people were not the only

⁷ Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 176.

⁸ Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, 85 and 92.

⁹ Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 86-87.

¹⁰ Warren Smaltz, "The Deaf in Modern Industry," *Proceedings of the 18th Triennial Convention of the National Association of the Deaf*, (1937): 63 [hereafter NAD Proceedings (1937)].

population to be cautious about the implications of the New Deal. Kennedy argues that the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and other organizations opposed New Deal initiatives such as unemployment insurance because of their socialist overtones.¹¹ For deaf people, early opposition to New Deal relief programs was a means of maintaining their identity as able-bodied Americans. For deaf people to accept direct relief was to sacrifice their identity as able-bodied worker-citizens and categorize deafness as a disability rather than as a minor affliction.¹² Ableist attitudes are revealed in the deaf community's discourse about the participation of deaf people in New Deal projects and federal relief benefits. In 1934, the NAD claimed that the Depression had not affected the deaf more than it affected mainstream society, though the organization predicted that there would be some difficulties because with such plentiful labor available, employers would prefer hearing workers.¹³ But others had a bleaker outlook. Charles F. Schneider wrote in *Deaf Mute's Journal* that the outlook for deaf employment was bad because of discrimination and predicted that there would be more difficulties in the future, especially with the development of machinery and labor saving devices.¹⁴

Deaf leaders agreed to honest "self-respecting work" on federal projects for deaf people but objected to outright charity or relief, like many other Americans during this era who resisted outright relief but accepted work based relief. The deaf community also wanted the federal government to intervene on behalf of deaf people and forbid discrimination against deaf people on federal work projects; they also insisted on federal

¹¹ Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 25.

¹² "Do We Need a Special W.P.A. Project?," *N.A.D. Bulletin* 4, no. 3 (November 1938); 2.

¹³ "Report of the Industrial Committee of the N.A.D." *Deaf Mute's Journal* 63, no. 36 (September 6, 1934): 2.

¹⁴ Charles F. Schneider, "Outlook for Deaf Employment," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 63, no. 29 (July 19, 1934): 4.

investigations into allegations of discrimination.¹⁵ Although deaf people accepted the premise of federal work-based relief, they objected to provisions and projects that might serve to stigmatize deaf people as disabled.

For example, the Dunn-McNary Bill proposed that any deaf man, otherwise physically sound, would be eligible for work on Federal projects, regardless of being on relief, but would be segregated into a separate project staffed by deaf workers and supervised by a hearing person who knew sign language. Deaf people approved of the provision pertaining to eligibility regardless of relief status but objected to segregation on federal projects. Although the intent was to establish separate projects for deaf workers in order to provide them with supervisors who could communicate with them, deaf people felt that segregation would only serve to stigmatize their disability.¹⁶ Segregation made the deaf seem abnormal; abnormal people were not viewed as self-supporting.¹⁷ They preferred that the deaf work on government projects on an equal, competitive basis with the hearing population.¹⁸

Representative Dunn of the Dunn-McNary bill defended his suggestion of segregating the deaf on the basis that the government also segregated other projects according to nationality. The NAD protested his rationale, arguing that deaf education fit deaf children for a “*hearing* world; not segregate them as a class apart.”¹⁹ This sentiment has two meanings. First, deaf people wanted to fit in, in terms of being able-bodied, and this reveals their ableist thinking. Second, deaf people seemed to still be sensitive to post-Civil War perceptions of deaf people as foreign and clannish. They wanted to be viewed

¹⁵ “Federal Plans on Behalf of the Deaf,” *N.A.D. Bulletin* 2, no. 4 (November, 1936): 1.

¹⁶ “The Dunn-McNary Bill,” 2.

¹⁷ “More about the Dunn-McNary Plan,” *N.A.D. Bulletin* 2 no.2, (January, 1936):1.

¹⁸ “Do We Need a Special W.P.A. Project?,” 2.

¹⁹ “More About the Dunn-McNary Plan,” 1.

as American first and foremost, and by emphasizing this, they ensured their continued entitlement to public education and civil rights.

Two years after the Dunn-McNary bill was first proposed, the President of the NAD, Marcus Kenner, emphasized that otherwise able-bodied deaf people should continue to object to special WPA projects set aside for the deaf because segregation in work projects would be interpreted as charity rather than as work relief.²⁰ The Dunn-McNary bill was viewed as an attempt not only to separate the deaf but to subsidize them as well. The deaf were convinced that such a move would only serve to label the deaf as handicapped and send them in the direction of accepting direct federal relief.²¹ Instead, they advocated for a division of deaf in the Department of Labor to prevent employment discrimination and ensure equality of opportunity.²² In 1935, Congress passed the Social Security bill, signed into law by Franklin D. Roosevelt. This bill included public assistance for widows, orphans, and the blind. Deaf leaders wondered how the SSA bill made deaf people seem equal by excluding them as a class earmarked for social assistance but pointed out that the deaf still struggled with discrimination.²³ Deaf leaders were proud that they were not included in the SSA as a recipient of direct relief but they did not resist the idea of some sort of remedial legislation that would remedy discrimination against deaf workers.²⁴ The deaf boasted that they were the “only class of badly handicapped people (as it appears) that do not seek financial aid from individuals

²⁰ “Do We Need a Special W.P.A. Project?,” 2.

²¹ “Tom Anderson’s Message,” *N.A.D. Bulletin* 2 no.3. (April, 1936): 2.

²² “The Deaf and National Legislation,” *N.A.D. Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (October, 1935):1.

²³ “The Deaf and National Legislation,” 1.

²⁴ “The Deaf and National Legislation,” 1.

or societies.”²⁵ Even as late as 1939, after a decade of a brutal economic downturn, they were proud to be self-sufficient and resisted direct relief.

Deaf leaders had long objected to deaf people, not otherwise disabled, being classified with those who had lost limbs, were blind, or had epilepsy, venereal and mental diseases, or extensive paralysis. To suggest able-bodied deaf people needed federal relief was to imply that they needed to be cared for rather than recognized as able-bodied and self-sufficient, hence given real work.²⁶ Kenner’s 1938 speech suggested that deaf leaders continued to see deaf people with additional disabilities as a class apart. As Thomas F. Fox had suggested, it was acceptable for the doubly handicapped deaf to peddle in the late nineteenth century, Kenner publicly supported social assistance benefits for the doubly handicapped deaf in the late 1930s.²⁷ By 1938, deaf leaders refined their attitudes about classifying deaf people as recipients of federal relief benefits; it was appropriate for deaf people with additional disabilities beyond deafness, such as physical, emotional, or mental handicaps, to receive social assistance.²⁸

Although deaf leaders in the 1930s objected to segregation and social assistance for the singularly deaf, they did support certain remedies to compensate for employment discrimination. In 1935, once again, as deaf people had done in the 1920s, the deaf community suggested a National Labor Bureau under the direction of the Department of Labor, which would focus on preventing discrimination against deaf workers.²⁹ In 1938, NAD President Marcus Kenner argued that a certain number of government jobs should

²⁵ Howard L. Terry, “The Deaf: Their Education and Place in Society,” *Digest of the Deaf* 1 no.7 (August, 1939): 1.

²⁶ “Operations Bulletin No.38,” *N.A.D. Bulletin* 3 no.2 (May, 1938): 1.

²⁷ “Do We Need a Special W.P.A. Project?,” 2.

²⁸ “Social Security,” *N.A.D. Bulletin* 4 no. 3, (November, 1938): 1.

²⁹ “The Deaf and National Legislation,” 1.

be allocated to the handicapped just as jobs were allocated to war veterans on the basis that the handicapped were excluded from military service on account of their disability. The deaf community believed that this allotment of positions for the deaf was appropriate, as they were not getting social assistance benefits under the SSA.³⁰ This implies the idea that equalizing the field for their disability, as opposed to charity, was acceptable. It also marked a shift in acceptance for direct state intervention with employers on behalf of deaf people, as opposed to education and advocacy. All the while, the silent press behooved schools for the deaf to survey their systems of education, address problems within deaf education, and do everything possible to help pupils be able to compete for jobs.³¹

Some deaf people claimed they did not bother to sign up for CWA jobs because they had the impression those jobs were not open to the deaf.³² CWA officials in Pennsylvania turned away deaf applicants from a roadwork project on the assumption that the work would be too hazardous for the deaf. The local deaf community in Pennsylvania appealed the decision, winning their case along with an apology from the CWA official who initially denied the applications of deaf jobseekers.³³

Following this victory, NFSD's Washington, DC division, No. 46, investigated discrimination by government employment bureaus and the CWA. The committee found ten deaf people out of work but decided to proceed slowly and carefully in the investigation.³⁴ Despite the victory in Pennsylvania, deaf people continued to confront

³⁰ "Labor Bureaus," *NAD Proceedings* (1937): 13.

³¹ "Timely Words," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 59, no. 48 (November 27, 1930): 4.

³² "Pennsylvania," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 63, no. 6 (February 8, 1934): 2.

³³ "Pennsylvania," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 63, no. 4 (January 25, 1934): 6.

³⁴ "The Capital City," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 63, no. 5 (February 1, 1934): 2.

discrimination on federal projects.³⁵ That discrimination continued despite President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order No. 7046, signed on May 20, 1935, that explicitly prohibited discrimination against physically handicapped persons in work projects.³⁶ Deaf leaders, along with other disability rights advocates, continued to press for employment on federal works projects for people with disabilities, including the deaf.

The NAD monitored employment discrimination through its Committee on Workmen's Compensation and Employer's Liability Insurance. The committee was tasked to investigate allegations of discrimination on part of private and government employers who denied employment to deaf people on public works projects. Deaf people believed that these discriminatory practices by hiring managers stemmed from exclusionary insurance policies established by liability companies. The committee found that there were no discriminatory practices on part of the insurance companies but still prevalent discrimination among employers.³⁷

Without assistance and access to government work projects and in the face of persistent employment discrimination, deaf people were driven to peddling out of desperation. One particular case was Frank Thompson, an unemployed printer. Thompson wrote a ten-page letter to General Hugh Johnson, the head of the National Recovery Administration, that described his unsuccessful efforts to obtain work and

³⁵ For example, "deaf applicants were uniformly refused admission to the CCC. Between 1933 and 1942, more than two million American men labored in the nation's forests and parks, but not one tree was felled or one mile of trail cleared by a deaf man," Buchanan, 93.

³⁶ "Federal Plans on Behalf of the Deaf," 1.

³⁷ Arthur Roberts, "President's Address," *Proceedings of the 16th Triennial Convention of the National Association of the Deaf*, 1930: 10-11 [hereafter NAD Proceedings (1930)]. Also, Michael Lapides, "Report on the Workmen's Compensation Law as it Affects the Deaf in Connecticut," *NAD Proceedings* (1930): 54-55.; Also, "Report of Committee on Workmen's Compensation and Employer's Liability Insurance," *Proceedings of the 17th Triennial Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (1934): 41-43 [hereafter NAD Proceedings (1934)].

conceded that he had recently been forced to become a street peddler.”³⁸ Deaf people, like Thompson, were asking Johnson and other New Deal administrators to regulate private employers and act on their behalf to combat employment discrimination.³⁹ Thompson was not alone. During the early 1930s, the NAD reported an uptick in reports of peddler/impostors being discovered in communities around the country. “During the present depression...it is not astonishing that a few fakirs⁴⁰ should ply their nefarious line of outwitting the sympathetic public. The old story of the “deaf and dumb” man collecting funds...is again being worked.”⁴¹

During the first two years of the Great Depression, the silent press continued its barrage against beggars, peddlers, and impostors by publishing anecdotes about how deaf people did—or should-- not beg and reports of impostors being arrested. After 1931, the silent press quieted on the issue of peddling and impostorism for the remainder of the Great Depression. There was little, if anything, published directly pertaining to peddling, impostorism, and begging until Reverend Arthur G. Leisman published an article attacking peddling in the *New York Journal of the Deaf* in April of 1940.⁴²

The silent press’s decade long silence reflected a number of considerations. Editors wanted to avoid attracting attention to the increase in deaf beggary and vagrancy. Editors, along with deaf political leaders, were sensitive to the economic situation confronting deaf people during the Depression. One editorial lamented that the regular daily presses were already casting deaf people in a negative light; such publicity from the deaf press would only further harm deaf people’s employability. They also worried about

³⁸ Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, 92.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ During the early 20th century, the term faker was also spelled fakir.

⁴¹ “Impostors,” *Deaf Mute’s Journal* 61, no. 5 (February 4, 1932): 2.

⁴² “Wisconsin,” *New York Journal of the Deaf* 69, no. 14 (April 4, 1940): 5.

navigating the boundaries between condemning desperate deaf people and condemning predatory impostors.⁴³

The deaf community tolerated peddling during the 1930s, tacitly acknowledging that the economic situation precluded many otherwise capable deaf people from participating in the workforce. In 1931, an editorial in the *Deaf Mute's Journal* carefully delineated the difference between peddlers, fakirs, and legitimate salesmen. "It is quite honorable to peddle articles of value," the journal insisted, and such employment was acceptable as long as the items were legitimate and the peddler was licensed.⁴⁴

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the deaf press continued to make this careful distinction between legitimate selling and those using the deaf and dumb ploy to obtain funds. While maintaining support for legitimate selling, the deaf press also cautioned that peddling could also help the spread of impostors by popularizing the idea of the deaf and dumb beggar.⁴⁵

In defense of the deaf, a 1934 article in the *Deaf Mute's Journal* blamed employment discrimination and stated: "as a last resort, numbers of them have been driven to peddling as a means of livelihood. If given other employment, they will unquestionably prefer regular work to the uncertainties of selling small household articles."⁴⁶

The Depression also limited the activities of the Impostor Bureau. The Impostor Bureau, continuing from the 1920s, continued to concern itself with both impostors and

⁴³ "Editorial," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 63, no. 27 (July 5, 1934): 4.

⁴⁴ "Editorial," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 59, no. 47 (November 20, 1930): 2; and "Editorial," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 60, no. 18 (April 30, 1931): 2.

⁴⁵ "An Imposition on the Hear- An Insult to the Deaf," *The American Deaf Citizen* 3, no. 25 (April 1, 1932): 3.

⁴⁶ "Pennsylvania," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 63, no. 2 (January 11, 1934): 2.

real deaf peddlers. The Bureau decided not to aggressively pursue peddling activity due to the severity of the economic crisis and the more pressing question of improving employment opportunities for deaf people.⁴⁷ Bureau Chief Kreigh B. Ayers reported at the 1930 NAD convention that a lack of funds prevented the Bureau from effectively carrying out the NAD's objective to combat the increasing number of bona fide deaf-mute beggars, panhandlers, alphabet card sellers, and impostors.⁴⁸ He suggested that the bureau's activities be limited to sponsoring uniform legislation against impostors to be passed in every state and standardizing procedures to make prosecution more effective.⁴⁹ As of 1934, the NAD's Impostor Bureau was minimally active, its role limited to serving as a medium of publicity.

Careful not to condemn desperate deaf people who were engaging in door-to-door sales, the bureau sponsored a resolution at the 1934 NAD convention that vigorously condemned peddlers who did not sell items at an honest value for the money received rather than deliver a wholesale condemnation of peddling.⁵⁰ Most of the peddlers the bureau heard about were not impostors but "those deaf either unfortunate enough to have no other means of support than the peddling of small articles from door to door, or unambitious enough to be satisfied with that or with out-and-out panhandling, for a living."⁵¹ In 1934, Ayers, the Chief of the Impostor Bureau, excused peddling due to economic conditions. He claimed that many "otherwise honest and able deaf" were left

⁴⁷ Kreigh B. Ayers, "Report of Impostor Bureau," *NAD Proceedings* (1930): 40.

⁴⁸ Ayers, "Report of Impostor Bureau," 76.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ "Resolutions Adopted at the Seventeenth Triennial Convention of the National Association of the Deaf at the Hotel Pennsylvania, New York City, July 27, 1934," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 63, no. 33 (August 16, 1934): 2.

⁵¹ C. Allan Dunham, "Report of Impostor Bureau," *NAD Proceedings* (1937): 30.

with no choice but to resort to peddling.⁵² Ayers felt that it was not just to pursue deaf peddlers in those economic conditions, describing such persecution as robbing the deaf of their living by “taking the bread and butter out of their mouth.”⁵³ Although peddling hurt the image of deaf people, he believed that most honest deaf would cease peddling once the economy improved. The Impostor Bureau was still concerned about deaf peddlers who made a profession of peddling and characterized them as being worse than an imposter as Impostor Bureau Chief C. Allan Dunham did in 1937.

In 1937, Dunham complained that the Bureau had to deal with deaf people who had no means of support other than the peddling of small articles from door to door. Acknowledging the economic climate, Dunham realized that the crisis drove some deaf people to resort to peddling, but he nonetheless emphasized that the deaf who were satisfied with peddling as a means of earning a living with no greater ambition were as great a menace, if not as widespread, as the impostor.⁵⁴ Other than this proclamation, the Impostor Bureau remained largely inactive.

An example of this non-pursuance is illustrated by an Impostor Bureau report to the NAD convention in 1940, which recounted catching two bona fide deaf peddlers but excusing them because they had fallen on unfortunate times. Although there was sympathy for deaf people caught up in economic difficulties, deaf leaders did not come to a general agreement about charity, private relief, and public assistance.⁵⁵

Gallaudet University professor Jim Hughes responded to suggestions for accepting charity relief in a 1932 letter to the *Washington Star*. He argued that the

⁵² Ayers, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” 40.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Dunham, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” 30.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

District of Columbia had no charitable agencies to take care of deaf people and defended the deaf as self-supporting, self respecting citizens.⁵⁶ Seven years later, attitudes about charitable relief had not changed. In a 1939 address, Tom L. Anderson, an active leader, vocational teacher, and one time president of the NAD from Iowa, argued vehemently against deaf people depending on the government or charitable agencies. He believed that although the times were difficult and many welcomed government aid, the deaf should not be dependents on the Government or anyone else.⁵⁷

While some leaders protested direct relief and work relief that may serve to stigmatize deaf people, others justified such assistance for deaf people. Outright relief, as much as it would stigmatize deaf people as disabled, was still a better alternative than beggary. President Marcus Kenner made a motion at the 1937 NAD convention proposing that the deaf should follow along with members of mainstream society and accept government-supported jobs such as segregated work projects under the Dunn-McNary bill. Kenner rationalized that work relief would bring deaf people publicity and help them gain jobs. In his motion, he recognized the limits of private and community funds in alleviating the pressures of the Depression. For Kenner, the benefits of work relief outweighed the potentially stigmatizing effects of segregation. The failure of the motion shows that deaf people, despite the economic reality, were still set on preserving their image as self-sufficient, fully integrated citizens. In tandem with Kenner's suggestion, another deaf leader, JM Vestal, suggested in 1937 that deaf people, like hearing people, should accept rehabilitation money. Vestal's tone was defensive as he explained that not all deaf people needed rehabilitation but if the government was

⁵⁶ "Impostors," *Deaf Mute's Journal* 61 no. 5 (February 4, 1932): 2.

⁵⁷ Tom L. Anderson, "The Shirt of a Happy Man," *The Wisconsin Times* 61, no. 5 (February 1939): 4.

offering such an option, deaf people should take advantage of the opportunity.⁵⁸ The deaf did not want social assistance or work relief unless it served to place deaf people on equal footing with hearing able-bodied people. Although leaders had mixed sentiments about direct relief and public charity, the deaf did not have qualms about relying upon their own mutual aid societies for relief.⁵⁹

Acknowledging the economic difficulties of the time, Arthur Leisman, the president of the Wisconsin Association of the Deaf, suggested alternatives to peddling, declaring:

“money obtained by panhandlers, deaf or posing as deaf, is blood money. It saps public confidence in us, preys on the virtues of those of us who ever strive to abide by all that is decent and honorable...In any case there is no excuse for panhandling. A man in need has recourse to county relief. No deaf person willingly risks his self respect and that of his comrades by stooping to vagrancy.”⁶⁰

If given a choice between the lesser of two evils, Leisman encouraged deaf people to apply for outright relief rather than engage in vagrancy or peddling. Despite Leisman’s suggestion to apply for social assistance instead of resorting to peddling, the general sentiment of the deaf community in the early 1930s was to reject charitable relief. Anderson put it most forcefully, using ableist rhetoric to exhort the deaf into refraining from pursuing federal relief.

"This is no time to be running around in circles, from one political bureau to another, seeking the political Moses who thinks he can promise us favored treatment, at the expense of the public treasury. If blind are given pensions- the blind are a helpless class and need pensions. Shall the deaf come down to their level... Shall we start

⁵⁸ JM Vestal, “Employment Adjustments of the Deaf,” *NAD Proceedings* (1937): 70.

⁵⁹ William Schaub, “President’s Address,” *NAD Proceedings* (1934): 9.

⁶⁰ Arthur G. Leisman, “Deaf Do Not Beg!,” *Digest of the Deaf* 2 no. 4 (January 1940): 30.

just because others beg? Do not give up our independence- other normal citizens are out of work too.”⁶¹

He argued that if deaf people wanted equality of opportunity, they had the responsibility of independent citizens to take the bad with the good. This responsibility means that the deaf could not seek financial assistance; to do so was to deny the responsibilities of citizenship.

During the 1930s, the deaf community had contradictory ideas about peddling: that it was the cause of unemployment *and* that it was a solution to unemployment. During World War II, this perception changed because deaf people experienced an uptick in employment and believed that they were now on equal economic terms as their able-bodied counterparts. In the 1940s, when looking back at the Depression era, the silent press acknowledged “there have been times during the depression when peddling was a dire necessity for some.”⁶² There were now no longer acceptable reasons to continue to engage in peddling. Leaders characterized those who chose to continue peddling as shiftless and unemployable. This view was reinforced by employers’ attitudes where they were reluctant to hire or interview deaf people for positions. In the 1940s, deaf leaders ramped up their criticism of peddling. While they had grudgingly accepted peddling as a last resort, while remaining largely silent on this in the 1930s, as soon the economic crisis passed, they became more vocal in their judgment of those who chose to peddle as a last resort. Leaders defined deaf peddlers as “some men and women of weak moral courage should turn to this device in despair.”⁶³

⁶¹ Tom L. Anderson, “Steady, Deaf, Steady,” *N.A.D. Bulletin* 2 no.3. (April, 1936): 1.

⁶² “To Be Cast Out,” *The Cavalier* 6, no. 9 (May, 1946): 2.

⁶³ “Peddlers,” *Frat* 43, no. 11 (June 1946): 5.

With American entry in World War II and increased demand for wartime labor, deaf people's economic woes were temporarily relieved. The NAD, the NFSD, and the silent press resumed their campaign against peddlers after a decade of silently tolerating peddling and of rejecting charity. The resumption of the anti-peddling campaign was driven by concerns outlined in correspondence between Anderson and Kenneth Murphy that deaf people might be left out of the defense workforce due to bad press from peddlers.⁶⁴ Deaf people's fears about employment discrimination and economic stability reflected the fact that during the Great Depression and potentially in the years after World War II, deaf unemployment increased at an alarming rate. Deaf people had enjoyed employment opportunities in factories during the war but the economic boom for deaf employment had not survived postwar economic climates. Anderson declared in 1941, "there is work enough everywhere today so that the choice certainly is not to peddle or starve."⁶⁵ Nearly a decade later, Anderson, blamed deaf people themselves for their postwar economic woes, "the deaf have thrown away their big opportunity through their inability to follow through after the end of the war...none of these war workers learned a trade."⁶⁶

While the deaf community blamed the unemployment trend due to employment discrimination and insufficient governmental support in the New Deal employment programs during the 1930s, Anderson blamed deaf people who had failed to learn a trade in the 1940s. Now that economic conditions had improved, the silent press was calling on

⁶⁴ Tom L. Anderson to Kenneth Murphy, December 26, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

⁶⁵ Anderson, "What Shall We Do with Deaf Peddlers," 2.

⁶⁶ Tom L. Anderson to Arthur Roberts, July 25, 1949, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

the deaf community to cast out peddlers and especially target those who organized and exploited crews of deaf peddlers.⁶⁷

A new concern emerged in the World War II era as the deaf community centered their anti-peddling campaign on protecting vulnerable deaf people from organized peddling rings run by beggar kings. Addressing the emergence of peddling rings operated by beggar kings disguised as door to door sales as the Depression wound down, Nathan Lahn, the chief of the Impostor Bureau cautioned the attendees at the 1940 NAD convention that:

“it might be well here to call attention to the difference between selling small wares and begging. It would seem that house to house canvassing or selling of useful articles should be considered a legitimate occupation, a branch of salesmanship, and we should be slow to condemn a person in such occupation as long as his method is honest. On the other hand, outright begging, or the selling of alphabet cards or worthless trinkets, is to be condemned and discouraged, whether it is done by a deaf person or by an impostor imposing as deaf. We must continue our vigilance against the impostors.”⁶⁸

In times of economic downturn such as the Great Depression, the leadership believed that lack of economic opportunities drove deaf peddlers to join peddling rings. Peddlers were also blamed for other forms of discrimination against deaf people, such as in hotels’ refusal to rent rooms to deaf people. Such discrimination was a result of the reputation of peddlers who often booked hotels for peddling rings members, but then left without paying the bill. As a result of this practice, hotels were wary of renting out rooms

⁶⁷ “To Be Cast Out,” 2.

⁶⁸ Nathan Lahn, “Report of the Impostor Bureau,” *NAD Proceedings* (1940), 37.

to deaf people.⁶⁹ Because this practice was commonly tied to peddling rings, a new concern for the leadership emerged: exploitative peddling rings led by beggar kings.

During the late 1930s, the deaf community leadership had become increasingly aware that the widespread unemployment during the Great Depression coupled with defective educational systems for deaf children across the country contributed to the exploitation of scores of undereducated, underemployed deaf people by other deaf people that became stark in the 1940s. The silent press dubbed the bona-fide deaf peddlers operators of peddling rings ‘beggar kings.’

The deaf community believed that the beggar kings took advantage of desperate deaf people who did not have the skills or literacy to succeed during times of economic downturn. The silent press described the ringleaders as educated persons who recruited their crews from “among the ranks of the poorly educated young deaf men and women...the more illiterate the young people are, the more the big boss likes it because they will be less likely to oppose him under periods of duress.”⁷⁰ They considered the leader’s powers to be so great that their underlings were often forced to commit degrading and immoral acts.⁷¹ Those beggar kings, were the targets of this revived activism against deaf peddlers. A January 29, 1942 article echoes this stance:

“Our ire is not directed at the young members of the crews. They really do not know any better and they entered agreement to work all in good faith, thinking they would be earning an honest living. We are hitting at the big shot, the boss, who gets at the expense of the poor souls he robs and often degrades. His proper place is behind the bars of some uncomfortable jail!”⁷²

⁶⁹ “The Why of Anti Peddling,” *The Cavalier*, 7 no. 8 (April 1948): 2.

⁷⁰ “A Racket That Must Be Stopped,” *Western Pennsylvanian* 50, no. 9 (January 29, 1942): 67.

⁷¹ “A Racket That Must Be Stopped,” 67.

⁷² *Ibid.*

There were concerns that the ringleaders were denying those youths work experience and job training and placement into legitimate wage-paying jobs such as those in automobile plants, lamented Stahl Butler, supervisor of the deaf and hard of hearing division of Michigan department of Vocational Rehabilitation.⁷³

Anderson, who became president of the NAD in 1940, had initially assigned the deaf peddler exploitation issue to the Impostor Bureau because he believed that the increase in exploitation of vulnerable deaf people by deaf peddlers would pave the way for an increase in impostors. Consequently, the exploitation of vulnerable deaf people fell under the jurisdiction of the Impostor Bureau who also handled the issue of bona fide deaf peddlers.⁷⁴ Anderson asked Wesley Lauritsen, the head of the NAD's publicity committee, to collaborate with the Impostor Bureau to help "actively in the suppression of the exploitation of the young and ignorant deaf. Put them [the publicity committee] to work."⁷⁵

Anderson declared at the 1941 Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf that it was "our joint responsibility to prevent such heartless exploitation."⁷⁶ Anderson wanted to prevent "individuals of low intelligence to be led into and encouraged in activities symptomatic of begging."⁷⁷ This was a rising concern and the focus centered on bona fide deaf peddlers-specifically, the beggar kings who exploited fellow deaf people. Deaf leaders believed that "the more ignorant and pliable of the deaf of both sexes are recruited from country districts and small towns, many of them from the South and West,

⁷³ Stahl Butler, "Stalling Along," *The Cavalier* 8, no. 11 (July, 1948): 4.

⁷⁴ "National Association of the Deaf: Official Announcement," *New York Journal of the Deaf* 70, no. 24 (June 12, 1941): 5.

⁷⁵ Tom L. Anderson to Wesley Lauritsen, June 13, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

⁷⁶ Tom L. Anderson, "The Challenge to Leadership: An Address Delivered before the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf," *NADIC* 1, no. 4 (August 1941): 5-7.

⁷⁷ Tom L. Anderson, "N.A.D. on the Trail of Impostors," *NADIC* 1, no. 3 (May 1941): 1.

and a few from the East and the North.”⁷⁸ Anderson, in an address before the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf in August of 1941, cautioned that there was evidence that deaf peddling rings were composed primarily of rejects, dropouts, and that girls in such gangs “live rather a sordid life.”⁷⁹

Young deaf peddlers working in peddling rings were often given cards such as this one pictured below:

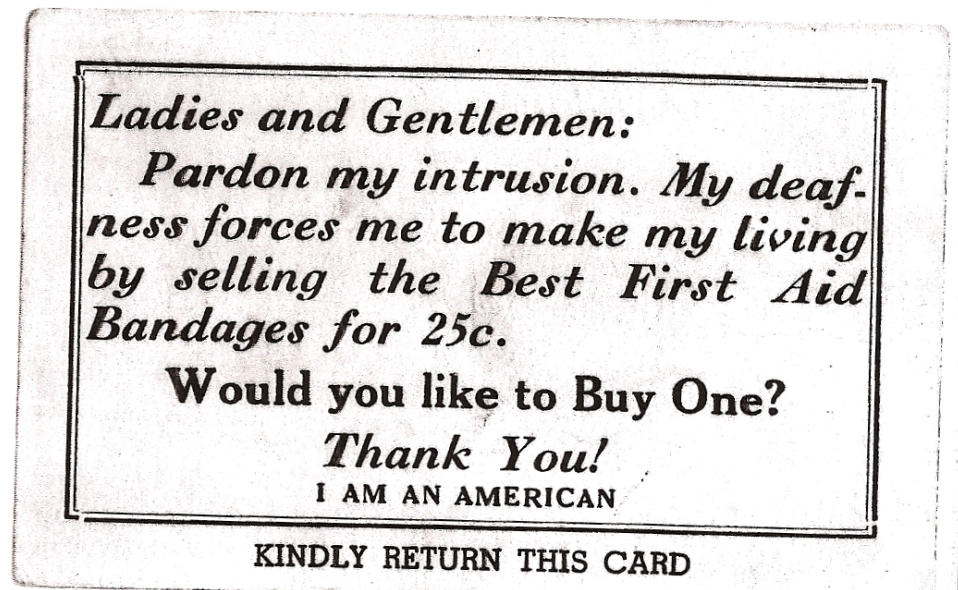


Figure 1: Peddler's Card, Circa 1940s. Gallaudet University Archives.

Peddlers working for peddling gangs were given cheap trinkets and alphabet cards to sell, usually for either ten or twenty-five cents. The peddlers who worked within these operations were also encouraged to solicit alms, often called “tips,” in addition to the

⁷⁸ “The How of It,” *Frat* 45, no. 10 (May 1948): 4-5.

⁷⁹ Anderson, “The Challenge to Leadership: An Address delivered before the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf,” 5-7.

wares they sold. Some peddlers went from door to door, posing as families. Other peddlers staked out high traffic areas in large cities such as San Francisco and Chicago, selling their wares to passersby.

As of 1942, according to Rodgers's article in the *Western Pennsylvanian*, there were three large organizations made up of deaf men and women working out of several eastern states under the supervision of a leader who is like a "czar to the workers."⁸⁰ The peddlers often carried cards with a doleful tale, canvassed towns marked by gangs, and kept a small percentage of their earnings while turning over the remainder of their earnings to their bosses, the beggar kings.⁸¹ Beyond keeping a small portion of their earnings, peddlers were compensated with rundown housing, promises of returns on their 'savings,' and exclusive peddling turf. Those who were uncooperative with their bosses or did not turn over enough earnings for the day were subject to physical assault by the gang's enforcers.⁸²

The youths were required to submit all receipts from each day, could only keep about 20% of the proceeds, suffered hardships such as confrontations with law enforcement, had no time to do laundry, were made to work long hours and were forced to move frequently.⁸³ Deaf leaders cited examples of exploitation by beggar kings and tied them to criminality. One example of this is the court case involving Henry Pescia, a beggar king who was wanted in Detroit for larceny. Viola Puthoff, a peddler in Pescia's gang, accused him of taking \$105 of her earnings. Pescia defended his actions claiming

⁸⁰ H. Rodgers, "Let's Abolish The Deaf Racketeers," *Western Pennsylvanian* 50, no. 9 (January 29, 1942): 65-66.

⁸¹ Rodgers, "Let's Abolish The Deaf Racketeers," 65-66.

⁸² Catherine Castera to Arthur Roberts, December 9, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁸³ Ben M. Schowe, "Fagin," *Frat* 46, no. 5 (December 1948): 4-5.

that he had used the girls' earnings to support them and he would happily return the remaining amount that had not yet been spent.⁸⁴

This exploitation of undereducated deaf people led the leadership of the deaf community to compare peddling rings to white slavery;⁸⁵ a NAD pamphlet circulated in the 1940s reinforced this view: "These innocent boys and girls accept these promises at face value only to wind up as virtual slaves."⁸⁶ This pamphlet accused the gang bosses of starving the peddlers, beating them up for not giving over enough of their take, and forcing them to live in shabby rooms.⁸⁷ Deaf leaders believed that the majority of peddlers were deaf people of low intellect or limited education and that "gang bosses" like John Pedersen and the Krakover brothers, Leon and Hyman, were exploiting those peddlers.

For example, the story of John Pedersen, a peddler king in San Francisco convicted for forgery and passing stolen government bonds, outlined the exploitation of deaf peddlers and characterized his peddlers as dependent upon him with no recourse. Pederson, nicknamed "The Deaf Beggar King," required his peddlers to pay him a large portion of their earnings and to pay fees in exchange for assigned turf on the streets of San Francisco during the 1940s. This same article alleged that his fifty "employees" had hoped that these criminal charges against Pederson would "conclude their dependency on the boss."⁸⁸

⁸⁴ "Court Hears Row Among Peddlers," *The Cavalier*, 6, no. 9 (May, 1947): 1.

⁸⁵ Arthur Roberts to Joe (no last name given), July 12, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁸⁶ NAD Pamphlet, "The National Association of the Deaf: A Non-Profit Organization Representing All The Deaf Presents STOP THIS RACKET! An Educational Pamphlet of Interest to Everyone Concerned with Deafness," box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ "Beggar King Jailed in San Francisco," *The Cavalier* v. 7-8 (September 1946-August 1948), (no page number given).

During the Depression, deaf people remained consistent in their attitudes regarding state and charitable assistance for deaf people. They accepted government funding for deaf education and charity for deaf people with additional disabilities but remained resistant to outright relief for deaf people. They believed in reasonable, equal opportunities for employment and protection against arbitrary discrimination, both in government work and in the private sector. Deaf people accepted certain forms of assistance that served to level the playing field for deaf workers that did not come with the stigma of charity such as education, vocational rehabilitation, labor bureaus, and the provision of interpreters for Civil Service examinations. While there was increased willingness to accept government assistance within certain parameters, the Depression era reveals the deaf community's view of the government as a partner that publicized the deaf as able workers, protected the deaf from discrimination, and provided tools that enabled the deaf to participate in the workforce. However, the Depression bred a new problem for the deaf community. Deaf leaders, as concerned as they were about deaf people's being second class citizens within mainstream society, had come to the realization that there was a underclass of deaf people within the deaf community that undermined the advancement of deaf people in American society.

Chapter 5: After World War II: Anti-Peddling Focus Centers on The Exploited

After World War II ended, deaf community leadership acknowledged the rampant growth of peddling gangs during the 1940s. Leonard M. Elstad, respected educator of the deaf, suggested that the deaf should “pause and take notice.”¹ One commentator mentioned the “ironic twist of fate”-- that in 1913, the problem was impostors and now it was the real deaf “addlepated deaf nit-wits are begging and peddling...while their ‘crew captains’ loll at their lazy length.”²

Some theorized that peddling rings became rampant after World War II because so many youths had left school early to take advantage of wartime employment but were mentally, intellectually, and emotionally immature and therefore unprepared for the postwar workforce.³ Such concerns were also magnified by anxiety about the postwar economy. Historian James T. Patterson highlights the postwar economic climate in *Grand Expectations*. Government spending in response to World War II had brought the nation out of the Depression but with the end of the war, return of military personnel, and reductions in government spending, economists predicted an unemployment rate of approximately 13 percent by 1946.⁴ In 1946, an author in the *Frat* attributed the resurgence of peddlers to the sudden end of high wages and increasing unemployment among deaf people due to the end of World War II; the economy was still booming for

¹ “Jacksonville,” *Frat* 46, no. 12 (July 1949): 4-5.

² J. Frederick Meagher, “The Spotlight,” *Frat* 46, no. 2 (September 1948): 2.

³ “Peddlers,” *Frat* 43, no. 11 (June 1946): 5.

⁴ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4-5.

mainstream society so it was easy for deaf peddlers to get “dimes and quarters from the public.”⁵

The Impostor Bureau, originally established in 1911, evolved into the Committee on the Suppression of Peddling in the mid-1940s when the NAD merged the Impostor Bureau, the Information and Research Committee, and the Publicity Committee into a single committee.⁶ This merger came after the 1946 NAD convention passed a motion to establish a committee to organize a nationwide, intensive, and concrete drive to eradicate and suppress peddling by deaf persons.⁷ The new deaf peddling committee was tasked to investigate the causes of peddling and recommend strategies for local, state, and national associations of the deaf in their campaigns against peddling.⁸ The intention of the committee was to regroup the organization’s efforts in eradicating peddling; in order to do so, the committee was to be a large main committee with a subcommittee of one member from each state. Each member was to keep a file index that tracked peddlers, racketeers, and their methods. Members were to reach out to law enforcement for assistance as well as work toward licensure requirements in their localities, share information with the FBI, and work toward enacting legislation that prohibited the sale of manual alphabet cards.⁹

Jimmy Meagher, former chief of the Impostor Bureau, criticized this plan stating that half of those suggestions would not work, that the other half would be too expensive

⁵ “Panhandlers,” *Frat* 43, no. 11 (June 1946): 4.

⁶ “Committees,” *NADIC* 1, no. 1 (November 1948): 1.

⁷ John O’ Brien, “Report of the National Association of the Deaf Peddling Committee,” *Frat* 44, no. 10 (May 1947): 5.

⁸ Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900-1942* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2002), 150.

⁹ O’ Brien, “Report of the National Association of the Deaf Peddling Committee,” 5.

for the NAD, and that it would be difficult to mount a national campaign.¹⁰ This echoed the earlier sentiments of Nathan Lahn, the Impostor Bureau chief in 1940, who reported that local action would be more effective than working through the NAD.¹¹ Both would eventually be proven correct a decade later.

In 1949, the Committee for the Suppression of Peddling, formerly the NAD Impostor Bureau, suggested that peddling increased amongst the deaf due in part to the unemployment situation.¹² It was clear by then that deaf people were no longer benefiting from the high labor demand that accompanied World War II.

With reduced labor demand after the war, deaf leaders, as they had in the 1930s, took care to insist that there was a difference between peddling and legitimate direct selling and that the community's activism was directed toward peddlers, not legitimate salesmen. To further this distinction in response to beggar kings' defense of their business practices, Tom L. Anderson's letter to Eric Malzkuhn on May 8, 1952, addressing Malzkuhn's concerns about the apparent attacks on legitimate door to door salesmen, claimed that he was not against all peddling by the deaf but that there was a careful distinction between legitimate salesmanship and soliciting tips, overpayment on merchandise, or obtaining funds without merchandise changing hands. The latter was begging dressed up as selling and a common practice of the peddling rings.¹³ The correspondence echoes the earlier attitudes of the Great Depression as deaf leaders tried to remain sensitive to the plight of deaf people affected by limited employment opportunities.

¹⁰ J. Frederick Meagher, "Spotlight," *Frat* 44, no. 12 (July 1947): 2.

¹¹ Lahn, "Report of the Impostor Bureau," *NAD Proceedings* (1940), 37.

¹² "Report of Committee for the Suppression of Peddling," *Proceedings of the Twenty-First Convention of the National Association of the Deaf*, (1949):32-33 [hereafter *NAD Proceedings* (1949)].

¹³ Tom L. Anderson to Eric Malzkuhn, May 8, 1952, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

In the post-World War II period, the anti-peddling focus expanded to protect the public from exploitation and prevent the exploitation of undereducated deaf youths of both sexes.¹⁴ Ben Schowe, a labor leader in the deaf community, emphasized that the new campaign wasn't just about peddling and protecting the reputation of the deaf community, but was also about exploitation. He maintained that the peddling was "engineered by slick Fagins who teach inexperienced deaf youths the tricks of the trade then collect the lion's share of the profits for themselves."¹⁵

Exploitation was double-pronged. In addition to long standing concerns on part of deaf leaders that peddlers were exploiting the unsuspecting, sympathetic public, there were also concerns about gang bosses were also exploiting the peddlers who worked for them. The anti-peddling campaign characterized beggar kings as people of weak moral character whose exploitive tactics were fueled by the lure of easy money.

Fred Murphy, an activist in the Missouri deaf community and the NAD's anti-peddling chief, charged that these peddling bosses exploited peddlers who were

"as low a mentality as it is possible to find—it is a well known and established fact that the most fertile ground for hirelings of sub normal intelligence is found in the backward classes of each and every school for the deaf in the country."¹⁶

The exploitation theme was also taken up in a letter from Dan H. McNeil, a rank and file member of the NFSD, to Arthur Roberts in 1948. McNeil recounted the case of a Mr. Paxton, a peddling gang leader, who got "two limited in Education boys" to peddle

¹⁴ Tom L. Anderson "What Shall We Do with Deaf Peddlers," *Silent Cavalier* 2, no. 7 (December 15, 1941): 2.

¹⁵ Ben M. Schowe, "Fagin," *Frat* 46, no. 5 (December 1948): 4-5.

¹⁶ Fred Murphy, "The Curse of Deafdom: A Guidebook containing hints and suggestions for use by those who would like to see the PEDDLING RACKET suppressed," 1950, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

band aids while Paxton sat in the car and did not pay wages to the boys who peddled for him.¹⁷

Roberts also charged that another peddling gang leader, Leon Krakover, compelled his peddlers to turn over all of their earnings from peddling to him, including the “tips” they earned which ranged anywhere from \$10 to \$30 a day.¹⁸ Many agreed that most peddlers were of low intelligence and were masterminded by smart gang leaders who took most of what the peddlers collected from the public.¹⁹

Exploitation of people for sexual purposes was also an undercurrent of these campaigns. Not only were peddlers tagged as criminals but also, as Roberts often portrayed them, as sexual deviants who molested women or used women in their peddling rings for immoral purposes. Roberts reported in a letter to Brother Cohen of the NFSD in 1946 that a gang of peddlers had molested women at a deaf basketball tournament in Chicago, stressing the peddlers’ connections to criminality and sexually deviant behavior.²⁰

The deaf community was very conservative when it came to gender ideology and public perception of deaf women.²¹ Eradicating peddling rings, especially those that employed women, may have been driven by motivation to protect the virtues of deaf womanhood. The leadership implied that deaf women who participated in the peddling

¹⁷ Dan H. McNeil to Arthur Roberts, December 27, 1948, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁸ Arthur Roberts to Alan B. Crammatte, June 1, 1948, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁹ Arthur Roberts to Joseph Grant, March 24, 1948, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

²⁰ Arthur Roberts to Brother Cohen, April 21, 1946, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

²¹ Sara Robinson, “The Extended Family: Deaf Organizations from 1880-1950,” in *Double Visions: Women and Deafness*, ed. Susan Burch and Brenda Brueggemann (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2004).

racket were women of loose morals and feared that mainstream society would view deaf women as sexual deviants and not as respectable women.

Roberts suggested that Krakover's use of young women in his peddling rings were for immoral purposes and prostitution, often referring to Krakover's employment of female peddlers as immoral. He believed that Krakover's travels across state lines with young deaf women in his peddling ring constituted violations of the Mann Act. Roberts did not distinguish between female peddling and prostitution; if a woman was selling something, she must be selling everything. Independent female peddlers were also subject to suspicions that if they were selling items, they must surely be selling their bodies as well. A columnist in the *Frat* suggested such in a 1948 editorial, describing "one comely young deaf girl, in this racket on her own, ...she was peddling alphabet cards, and perhaps herself on the side."²²

There were also concerns that the ringleaders of the peddling rings were themselves sexually exploiting their female peddlers. There were rumors that beggar kings such as Krakover and the Paxton brothers were sexually involved with their female peddlers.²³ Anderson cast doubts as to whether or not the sexual involvement was voluntary on part of the women.²⁴ Female peddlers were not the only ones vulnerable to sexual exploitation by beggar kings. Anderson had also aired concerns about a peddler, Arthur Cox, who attempted to engage in "moral perversion" with a young boy in 1941.²⁵

Although sympathetic to the exploited peddlers in peddling gangs, the leadership in the deaf community often did not differentiate between the exploited peddlers and the

²² "We Can Do It," *Frat* 45, no. 8 (March 1948): 4.

²³ Anderson "What Shall We Do with Deaf Peddlers," 2.

²⁴ Tom L. Anderson to E. Ivan Curtis, October 28, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

²⁵ Tom L. Anderson to Louis B. Orrill, November 11, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

exploiters in their publicity campaigns against peddling. They may have believed that the public did not understand that many of those deaf peddlers were being exploited and that the public could not differentiate between individual peddlers, impostors, and the exploited peddlers working for peddling rings.

In fact, the public's characterization of deaf people as disabled subjects of charity enabled these peddler kings to exploit undereducated and underemployed deaf people. The anxiety of deaf leaders seemed to focus on the fact that there was one class of morally delinquent and criminal deaf people exploiting another class of undereducated deaf people and that as a whole, peddlers were exploiting the sympathies of the hearing public who continued to view deaf people as objects of charity. The leadership's concerns about the exploitation of deaf people seemed to be secondary to their anxiety about the public's perception of deaf people because their rhetoric often centered on image and portrayal.

Exploitation was not the sole concern in the leadership's pursuit of peddling gangs. Public perception was also a factor. Deaf leaders continued to be concerned, as they had been since the 1880s, that if there were too many deaf peddlers, the deaf would "come to be regarded as a dependent class and no confidence will be reposed in them by the public."²⁶

In the postwar period, despite deaf people having demonstrated themselves as an invaluable part of the wartime work force, deaf people found themselves once again defending their public image as hard-working, contributing taxpaying citizens. As the deaf community had done since the 1880s, deaf people continued to vigorously defend

²⁶ "Jacksonville," *Frat* 46, no. 12 (July 1949): 4-5.

their reputation and blamed peddlers for the public's perception of deaf people as subjects of charity.

Byron B. Burnes, president of the NAD from 1946 to 1964, said that peddling, in the eyes of the public has been "an activity traditionally associated with tramps, paupers, and others of the indigent classes."²⁷ Burnes shared an anecdote with Roberts of the time when one of his pupils' parents bought a pin with an image of the Irish flag. Burnes characterized this pin as a "worthless trinket" and maintained that the driving force behind such purchases was sympathy for deaf people. "We still do not want deaf persons living on public sympathy," Burnes insisted.²⁸ He believed that regardless of how respectable or legitimate selling might be, it created an impression that the deaf community "has always endeavored to avoid insofar as the deaf are concerned."²⁹

In 1950, Fred Murphy, the NAD's anti-peddling chief, wrote a guidebook for the anti-peddling campaign. He argued the reasons why the deaf community needed to collectively support the leadership's campaign against peddlers:

"The high esteem attained by the deaf in the eyes of their fellow citizens crumbles almost instantaneously with the advent of the peddler. Everyone approached by those begging mendicants invariably judges all the deaf to be of the same stature and it is then necessary to start all over again to regain lost prestige. It is unfortunate that the character and reputation of the majority of honest, law abiding deaf citizens must suffer because people are prone to judge the whole by the actions of few."³⁰

Murphy argued that peddlers had tremendous sway over shaping public perceptions of the deaf because they, by virtue of their profession, met hundreds of

²⁷ Byron B. Burnes to Arthur Roberts, March 14, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Murphy, "The Curse of Deafdom: A Guidebook containing hints and suggestions for use by those who would like to see the PEDDLING RACKET suppressed."

people daily and lent to the impression that all deaf people were of the same type and occupation. Mainstream society was not otherwise afforded the opportunity to interact with and meet “real deaf people”—presumably those who earned “a honest living.”³¹ This phenomenon also speaks to the invisibility of deafness: Deaf people often passed for normal unless they brought attention to their deafness, which peddlers did by handing out their peddling cards.

Deaf people also continued to believe that the widespread peddling directly contributed to the difficulties of the deaf in obtaining employment. An editorial in the *Frat* recounted an incident where a prospective employer told a deaf applicant for a job: “We do not employ deaf people. Why don’t you go out and peddle like the rest of you do?”³² The leadership of local associations of the deaf, the NAD and the NFSD, agreed that peddling got in the way of the ability of deaf people to be hired in gainful employment because peddlers created bad impressions on potential employers. There was a tremendous fear of employment discrimination. Arthur Roberts, the president of the NFSD, believed that if deaf people did not put effort into banishing peddling, then deaf people would have difficulties in getting a job “because some establishments which have been exposed repeatedly to this racket will not give a decent interview to a deaf applicant for a position.”³³ In 1950, Murphy argued that the deaf community needed to take action against peddling because “in recent years the social and economic stability of the deaf has

³¹ Ibid.

³² “Mendicants,” *Frat* 49, no. 7 (February 1952): 8.

³³ Tom L. Anderson to Arthur Roberts, July 25, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

been subject to strong pressure by exploitation as practiced by itinerant bands of deaf peddlers.”³⁴

In addition to employment concerns, deaf leaders were also concerned that peddling would interfere with deaf people’s access to citizenship by limiting employment and educational opportunities, which were tied to citizenship. J. Frederick Meagher, former chief of the Impostor Bureau, suggested in 1947 that peddling “is a racket which can cause us deaf to lose our full citizenship rights, and be treated as imbeciles—like the deaf are treated in Europe.”³⁵

Deaf leaders were convinced that peddlers contributed to the public’s attitude that deaf people were disabled. Deaf people themselves viewed their deafness as an affliction, not as a disability and strove to portray deaf people as able-bodied.³⁶ They believed that peddling was a business for the disabled, not able-bodied deaf people. Wilbur Wells, a self-employed direct seller who sold services and goods at actual value, associated the trinkets and cards sold by deaf peddlers with the items sold by blind, crippled, and disabled persons in their door-to-door peddling.³⁷ He was disgusted that able-bodied deaf people would associate themselves with a profession strongly connected to other disabled people. As a result, Wells believed deaf peddlers who portrayed

³⁴ Murphy, “The Curse of Deafdom: A Guidebook containing hints and suggestions for use by those who would like to see the PEDDLING RACKET suppressed.”

³⁵ J. Frederick Meagher, “Spotlight,” *Frat* 45, no. 2 (September 1947): 2.

³⁶ “Personal Remarks Made in the Presence of the Deaf,” *Silent Worker* 9, no.2 (October 1896): 20.

³⁷ The deaf community differentiated between direct selling and peddling- direct sellers sold services or wares at a ‘honest’ value and did not rely upon their deafness or sympathy to achieve their sales goals whereas peddlers sold cheap, valueless items for much more than the items’ worth and often accompanied their sales pitches with pleas for sympathy based on their deafness.

themselves as disabled were perceived as objects of charity, even if only by association through the objects which they sold.³⁸

Deaf organizations did not object to peddling by deaf people with multiple disabilities. Their focus was on peddling by deaf people who were otherwise able-bodied. As an article in *Frat* insisted, “The majority of these beggars [referring to the exploited youth] are able-bodied men and women.”³⁹ The deaf community held the attitude that peddling was fine for other able-bodied people with disabilities but not for deaf people themselves. There was the opinion that most of the time, those able-bodied deaf peddlers were people who were too lazy or too inept to pursue the trades they learned in school and fell into the “clutches of a peddling operator.”⁴⁰

However, for the deaf who had other disabilities, peddling was acceptable. In the deaf community’s agitation for anti-peddling ordinances in Kansas City, deaf leaders said that the proposed anti-peddling ordinance would help eliminate racketeering peddling groups, but emphasized that the law was not “aimed at those among the resident deaf who may be physically unfit for gainful employment and who must depend for a livelihood on the sale of worthwhile goods to the public.”⁴¹

In the 1940s, the leadership sought to link deaf peddling activity to organized criminal behavior. They viewed organized peddling rings as a form of racketeering. They were characterized as con men and impostors since the late nineteenth century, but deaf peddlers were not explicitly linked to criminality until the 1940s. Throughout the

³⁸ Wilbur Wells to Arthur Roberts, October 19, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

³⁹ “The How of It,” *Frat* 45, no. 10 (May 1948): 4-5.

⁴⁰ “Beggars Symposium: What They Are Doing Over the Country Highlights on the Racket,” *Frat* 46, no. 10 (May 1949): 5.

⁴¹ “K.C. Law,” *Frat* 47, no. 8 (March 1950): 4.

1940s and early 1950s, deaf peddlers were described as criminals and troublemakers. Fred Murphy, a leader at the forefront of the anti-peddling campaigns in the post war period, characterized peddling as “exploitation in its largest and worst scale. Other crimes stem from peddling-tax evasion, fraud, delinquency of minors, bribery, mayhem, thievery, immoral acts.”⁴²

Murphy wrote a story for *The Frat* that recounted the stabbing of a member of the Los Angeles Club of the Deaf who was trying to break up a fight between peddlers.⁴³ He implied that peddlers were violent, unstable criminals who brought nothing but trouble for good upstanding deaf people.

Occasionally, Arthur Roberts would write to leaders of local clubs to inform them of potential troublemakers who might make an appearance at local deaf events. These stories often portrayed peddlers as hoodlums, thieves, and troublemakers. In fact, Roberts once wrote to Leisman, describing a number of individuals in Chicago who were engaged in peddling and characterized them as:

“a rogue’s gallery here...Mandrillo is a notorious crook...is a thief and all around con man...Korczak is a plug-ugly who has been causing trouble...it is clear this gang drifted up into Wisconsin after the tourney and all are no good.”⁴⁴

Peddling gangs were also linked to criminality: panhandling; skipping out on bills; forgery; reckless driving that resulted in deaths thus infringing on deaf people’s battle to retain driving rights; selling obscene pictures; violations of the Mann act; and

⁴² Murphy, “The Curse of Deafdom: A Guidebook containing hints and suggestions for use by those who would like to see the PEDDLING RACKET suppressed.”

⁴³ Fred Murphy to Arthur Roberts, undated, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁴⁴ Arthur Roberts to Arthur Leisman, April 16, 1946, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

even one example of a young child being molested by a peddler.⁴⁵ Peddling rings were viewed as an epicenter of immoral activity due to traveling in mixed groups of unmarried women and men; selling items beyond their true value; and the exploitation of peddlers by beggar kings. Peddling rings were described as “a vile racket, destroys morality, breeds crime.”⁴⁶

The evolution from peddling to racketeering took place in the 1940s when peddling rings were described as rackets and the leaders, beggar kings, referred to as racketeers.⁴⁷ The *Frat*, the official newspaper of the NFSD, described this racketeering as organized gangs operating over wide territories in fleets of cars, using theft and confidence games, and incorporating immorality in their gangs.⁴⁸ A part of the con was that the peddlers were arranged into fake families and taught pressure tactics.⁴⁹

The deaf community was determined to connect peddling to organized crime. One way of making this connection was citing the use of physical violence that was common in organized crime. In 1946, the *Frat* mentioned that peddlers who had used threats of bodily harm against anti-peddling activists were using “gangland’s weapon to silence criticism.”⁵⁰ At a NAD rally in Newark, NJ, in 1952, peddlers characterized as a “band of ruffians intent upon creating a disturbance” who threatened NAD officials with “bodily harm; accused them of dishonest practice; and dared them to make any move that would give the hoodlums an opportunity to engage in physical combat.”⁵¹

⁴⁵ “Beggars’ Progress: The Record and a Remedy,” *Frat* 47, no. 3 (October 1949): 5-6.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ H. Rodgers, “Let’s Abolish The Deaf Racketeers,” *Western Pennsylvanian* 50, no. 9 (January 29, 1942): 65-66.

⁴⁸ “Racketeers,” *Frat* 43, no. 10 (May 1946): 4-5.

⁴⁹ Ben M. Schowe, “Fagins,” *Frat* 46, no. 5 (December 1948): 4-5.

⁵⁰ “Card Peddlers,” *Frat* 44, no. 5 (December 1946): 4.

⁵¹ “The Editor’s Page: Hoodlums at Large,” *Silent Worker* 4, no. 11 (July 1952): 2.

The deaf press also compared the beggar kings to Al Capone, the most infamous Mafioso of the time. “They turn into Al Capones- on a very small scale.”⁵² Newspaper editorials and community leaders also linked peddling rings to organized crime by referring to beggar kings as “mob leaders” and “gangsters.”⁵³

The NFSD’s portrayal of peddling as exploitation was employed as a strategy to convince mainstream society and rank and file deaf people that peddling rings were a criminal enterprise conducted by gang bosses. Characterizing exploitation and thus peddling as a crime in itself went beyond the earlier campaigns that characterized peddling as an imposition as was the case during most of the early 20th century. In their campaigns against peddling, the leadership equated exploitation with criminality and often emphasized the criminal behavior of gang bosses and beggar kings.

During the 1940s the leadership of the deaf community urged action on the local and national levels to organize against racketeering operations; their focus was on eliminating peddling gangs rather than individual peddlers. Correspondence between Arthur Roberts of the NFSD and other leaders in the deaf community reveals internal community policing. The correspondents encouraged the use of local statutes against peddling and vagrancy and launched character attacks on individuals suspected to be peddlers.⁵⁴ The correspondence reveals that the emphasis of anti-peddling campaigns was to protect the image of deaf people as hardworking, self-sufficient citizens while protecting vulnerable deaf people from exploitation.

⁵² “On the Run,” *Frat* 45, no. 5 (December 1947): 5.

⁵³ “Educate Public,” *Frat* 46, no. 9 (April 1949): 5.; “Beggars Symposium: What They Are Doing Over the Country Highlights on the Racket,” 5

⁵⁴ For examples on correspondence between local leaders on potential peddlers and troublemakers, see correspondence collections in NFSD and NAD manuscript collections, particularly amongst Fred Murphy, Arthur Leisman, Arthur Roberts, Byron Burnes, and local division presidents of the NFSD.

The story of Leon Krakover, the most infamous of Beggar Kings in the 1940s, serves as an example of how the leadership in the deaf community employed its rhetoric and efforts to oust peddling and beggar kings. The Krakover case illustrates the leadership's efforts to eradicate peddling. The major outcome of the case was the establishment in 1953 of a national board to regulate peddling.

Krakover was the most successful beggar king in the 1940s, whose reach stretched from Philadelphia to the West Coast. He owned and operated one of the largest deaf sales companies in the country during the 1940s, the National Deaf-Mute Sales Company. He also owned the Krakover Deaf Mute Sales People's Legion of Oakland. Both were successful businesses that had made him quite wealthy by the early 1950s.⁵⁵

During the Depression, before Krakover became the King of Beggar Kings, he was a respected member of the deaf community. The silent press often referred to him as a traveling salesman and published stories about his cross-country road trips with his associates.⁵⁶ Krakover and his brother Hyman were both members of the local Philadelphia branch, No. 38, of the NFSD. Leon joined on March 1, 1928. His brother had joined three years earlier on April 1, 1925. Leon was known as "the Jew."⁵⁷ NFSD membership cards often noted the occupations of its members—Leon was listed as a "Peddler" and "Racketeer" and his brother, Hyman, was listed as a shoemaker.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ "Three Deaf Mutes in L.A. Trial Argue Over Theft, Oakland Firm," *Oakland Tribune*, (7 March 1952): 12 DD.

⁵⁶ "Philadelphia," *Deaf Mutes' Journal* 63, no. 7 (February 15, 1934): 3; "Philadelphia," *Deaf Mutes' Journal* 63, no. 11 (March 15, 1934): 5; "Philadelphia," *Deaf Mutes' Journal* 63, no. 39 (September 27, 1934): 5.

⁵⁷ This aside, there is no evidence of anti-Semitism within the deaf community. Harry Long to Arthur Roberts, June 24, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁵⁸ Leon Krakover was indeed listed as Peddler and Racketeer on his membership card.

NAME PAID-UP KRAKOVER Leon		NO. 6397	CLASS D	AMOUNTS 172.00 M 2.00 D 5	RATES M .44 D .30 E .36	DIV. NO. 30
DATE 3-1-1928	CERTF.	AGE 24	OCCUPATION Peddler & Racketeer			
	CONV.	TO Resigned Under charges, December, 1941				
	EXIT	MODE OF EXIT BLACKLISTED				
	PAID-UP	HOW PAID-UP Dec 5-2-41				
ADDRESS: 334 Putnam St, Phila, Pa.						
12-20-33	2117	9th St.	same			
2-12-34	1236	N. 6th St	same			
10-24-34	976	N. Lawrence St.	same			
7-9-35	1014	N. 6th St	same			
2-10-37	1813	N. Franklin St	same			
7-20-38	5527	Landed down	same			

Figure 2: Leon Krakover's Membership Card.

As the economy recovered from America's involvement in World War II, the deaf community turned its back on Krakover, branding him as an exploiter, racketeer, and criminal.

Krakover's fall from grace began in 1941. In Denver, the police caught a gang of 13 peddlers and arrested them for peddling without a license. When Reverend Homer Grace and Thomas Northern, local leaders of the deaf community in the Denver area, were called down to the police station to verify the identities of the peddlers, the police informed the gang that they had a choice: pay a \$100 fine each or get out of town by noon. Krakover, one of the 13 peddlers, appealed to Grace as a fellow member of the Frat for help. Grace was unhappy with his appeal and complained to Anderson, "the frat should do something about those bums if they are really Frats."⁵⁹ This letter prompted Anderson to write a strong letter to Roberts urging the NFSD to take action.

⁵⁹ Rev. Homer Grace to Tom L. Anderson, October 29, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

The NFSD did not act on the Krakovers or the campaign against deaf peddlers until prompted by Anderson's letter, which threatened to involve the FBI in the NFSD's activities if the organization did not act on potential violators of the Mann Act. Anderson wanted Roberts to expel Krakover from the NFSD in order to diminish the credibility of his gang.⁶⁰ Acknowledging that the NFSD would be more effective on the ground than the NAD due to its infrastructure and membership, Anderson pleaded with Roberts for the NFSD's effective cooperation in its campaign against peddling rings. Anderson especially wanted Roberts to take action against the Krakovers because of the involvement of women in his gang who were suspected to be involved in immoral activities beyond peddling wares.⁶¹ Anderson also argued that the NFSD should act because the gang's leader and his brother, Leon Krakover and Hyman, were members of the Society. Anderson did suggest that the NFSD might suffer from the fallout of the FBI investigation into Krakover's group for possible Mann Act violations if the NFSD did not act to remove the brothers. He implied that "it will not be good publicity for the Frat to have its members taken up for Mann Act violations...the Federal Government is not apt to sit idly by and permit the deaf to transport women around the country, as this Krakover gang is doing."⁶²

In response, Roberts pledged the Society's assistance in the campaign against exploiters and to work with the NAD in raising the consciousness among the rank and file.⁶³ Roberts also instructed the Philadelphia division of the NFSD to promptly bring charges against the Krakover brothers in order to have them convicted and expelled from

⁶⁰ Tom L. Anderson to James K. Laughlin, October 28, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

⁶¹ Tom L. Anderson to Louis B. Orrill, November 11, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

⁶² Tom L. Anderson to Arthur Roberts, October 26, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

⁶³ Tom L. Anderson to Arthur Roberts, November 12, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

the Society.⁶⁴ After complying with Anderson's 1941 plea, Roberts and the NFSD carried the brunt of the anti-peddling campaign through the 1940s and early 1950s. The ongoing involvement of the NFSD in the anti-peddling campaign after the Krakovers' expulsion from the Society in 1941 may be attributed to Roberts' personal interest in the anti-peddling campaign and his desire to not simply expel the Krakovers but to eradicate their gang.

Roberts painted Krakover not as a salesman or operator of a large sales company but as a peddling gangster who operated in Chicago, the Midwest, and the Northwest. The NFSD and NAD concentrated their efforts against Krakover because they believed that he was the operator of the largest peddling ring in the United States and if they could bring him down, they could go after the smaller operators more easily.⁶⁵

After the Denver incident and Anderson's threatening letter to Roberts, both brothers were blacklisted from the NFSD and forced to resign in December 1941. During the expulsion process, Krakover accused Hugh Cusack, the president of the No. 38 division, of persecution. He believed that the membership were prejudiced against the Krakover brothers because of ill founded and unjustified rumors. They offered their resignation contingent upon receiving a refund of the monies they had paid into the NFSD for insurance. Both brothers had been members of the No. 38 for more than a decade before the organization decided that peddlers as members were no longer acceptable.

The NFSD may have tolerated peddlers as members during the 1930s because they needed as many members on the rolls as possible to ensure continued fiscal health.

⁶⁴ Arthur Roberts to Tom L. Anderson, November 10, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

⁶⁵ Byron Burnes to Arthur Roberts, March 14, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

The organization paid out unemployment and sick benefits to members who were unable to work during the Depression. Moreover, peddling likely expanded during this time as deaf people faced even greater economic crisis and limited employment opportunities. Peddlers often earned a comfortable living and thus were able to afford the monthly premiums, which kept the NFSD afloat. Moreover, the deaf community was far more tolerant of peddling during the 1930s, tacitly acknowledging that the economic situation precluded many otherwise capable deaf people from participating in the workforce.

Once the NFSD membership returned to the factories during World War II, there was no longer a need to keep on peddlers as members. In addition, by going after peddling, the NFSD could shore up the image of its members as hard working citizens capable of contributing to wartime production by rejecting those who chose to continue to live off what was viewed as charity. Roberts and Cusack proceeded in their efforts to expel the Krakovers from the society for peddling and troublemaking. Krakover's fall from grace was sealed when Secretary Bradbury of NFSD's Seattle division wrote a letter to Roberts in August of 1941. Bradbury told Roberts that the Krakovers of the Philadelphia division had caused trouble in Seattle among the younger deaf community. They had attempted to attack young ladies, and one of the members of their peddling gang had been jailed for larceny. Bradbury alleged that the local deaf community in Spokane convinced the police to drive the Krakovers out of town.⁶⁶

Roberts was furious that the Krakovers had given the Society a bad reputation in Washington. He wrote to Cusack in Philadelphia and asked him to investigate the Krakover brothers locally and to use section 217 of the NFSD's bylaws to decide what to

⁶⁶ Arthur Roberts to Hugh Cusack, August 22, 1941, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

do with the brothers. Roberts followed up with Cusack one week later and called the Krakovers “part of that growing army of roving deaf-mute peddlers, con-men, and pimps who are a disgrace to the deaf.”⁶⁷ Yet, Frank Bright, the secretary of the Spokane division of the NFSD wrote to Cusack in September of 1941, and said there had been no evidence of trouble with the Krakovers in Spokane and that the Spokane police had no record of complaints regarding the Krakovers.⁶⁸ Roberts admitted to Cusack that the NFSD had a thin case regarding the Krakovers’ expulsion. He told Cusack in October that although it is “pretty evident to anybody that these fellows are peddlers, pimps, and racketeers, the evidence so far collected would of course not be sufficient in a law court.”⁶⁹

In November, Roberts instructed Cusack to refund all premiums paid by the Krakover brothers so as to speed along the expulsion proceedings.⁷⁰ Leon sent a telegram to Roberts on November 27, 1941 defending himself and his brother, arguing that all complaints against him and his brother were lies. Krakover pleaded with Roberts for a chance to defend against the charges, asserting that business rivals and managers who were jealous of his success as a businessman started these rumors.⁷¹ Roberts refused to hear Krakover’s appeal, telling him that the Philadelphia division filed the charges and that the national headquarters would not intervene in a local matter. He would review the decision only after the Philadelphia division completed its expulsion trial of the Krakover

⁶⁷ Arthur Roberts to Hugh Cusack, August 29, 1941, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁶⁸ Frank Bright to Hugh Cusack, September 15, 1941, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁶⁹ Arthur Roberts to Hugh Cusack, October 14, 1941, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁷⁰ Arthur Roberts to Hugh Cusack, November 11, 1941 box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁷¹ Leon Krakover to Arthur Roberts, November 27, 1941, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

brothers.⁷² Krakover, disheartened by the charges and stubbornness of those who desired to see him out of the Society, tendered his resignation on December 3, 1941 but not without delivering a parting shot. He resigned to save himself the trouble of a trial but pledged to see an attorney about this case and ensure the monies due him and his brother were refunded. Roberts wrote to Cusack congratulating him on getting rid of the Krakovers, who, he said, “did not dare stand the music.”⁷³ In 1942, Krakover was so thoroughly disgusted with how he had been treated in Philadelphia by the local deaf community that he decided to move to Chicago and set up the headquarters of his sales company there.⁷⁴ Once the Krakovers had been expelled from the No. 38, the Society took no further steps against Krakover until 1948.

In 1948, after Leon Krakover had settled in Chicago, operated a number of apartment houses and continued his direct selling business, he crossed paths with Roberts once again. Krakover had become a member of the Chicago Club of the Deaf (CCD), a social organization. Roberts, furious that Krakover had joined the club, posted a notice on the CCD's announcement board. This notice was a photocopy of the reports of Krakover's activities in Seattle and Spokane that had resulted in their expulsion from the Philadelphia No. 38 division. Krakover was subsequently expelled from the CCD on basis that he violated one of their bylaws that explicitly prohibited peddlers from membership in the club. Krakover retaliated by filing a lawsuit on May 13, 1948 against the CCD for \$100,000.00 and the NFSD for \$2.5 million, charging the officials of the

⁷² Arthur Roberts to Leon Krakover, November 27, 1941 box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁷³ Arthur Roberts to Hugh Cusack, December 29, 1941, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁷⁴ Hugh Cusack to Charles Kemp, February 12, 1942, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

NFSD with libel and slander. Krakover alleged that the NFSD's publication, *The Frat*, had repeatedly published defamatory statements in regard to his business including allegations that his employees preyed upon public sympathy.⁷⁵

Krakover complained to Roberts about the falsehoods posted about him. He accused Roberts of libel and threatened to sue the NFSD for harming his character, harassment, and the persecution that lasted a decade in their efforts to make him an outcast.⁷⁶ In response to Krakover's threat, Roberts considered two courses of action that were commonly used by deaf leaders against alleged peddlers. One was to report Krakover to the Internal Revenue Service for possible tax evasion and the other was to persuade the Federal Bureau of Investigation to investigate Krakover for violating the Mann Act by transporting women across state lines for immoral purposes. Roberts reported allegations that Krakover ran prostitution dives and that he had drugged and kidnapped male and female pupils from schools for the deaf in the South, using the boys as peddlers and the girls as prostitutes.⁷⁷ Roberts had received a letter from the superintendent of the Georgia School for the Deaf, Clayton Hollingsworth, alleging that Krakover had kidnapped two male pupils. Hollingsworth accused Krakover for wanting "young and pliable deaf persons of both sexes for begging and probably immoral use."⁷⁸

Hollingsworth's accusations were confirmed when Roberts received a visit from the FBI's Chicago office. The visit was precipitated by a phone call from Roberts asking the FBI to investigate Krakover for racketeering. The FBI agents informed Roberts that

⁷⁵ Untitled, *The Sentinel* article, undated "Carrie West Papers," Gallaudet University Archives, Washington, DC.

⁷⁶ Arthur Roberts notes, undated, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁷⁷ Arthur Roberts to Nathaniel C. Garrison, April 10, 1948, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁷⁸ Arthur Roberts to Hugh Cusack, April 26, 1948, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

the Krakovers had been accused of kidnapping a 17-year-old male pupil from the Georgia School for the Deaf. The pupil had alleged that Krakover had drugged and kidnapped him and brought him to Tennessee to work as a peddler. After learning of the kidnapping allegations, the FBI then began an investigation into Krakover for transporting girls across state lines for immoral purposes, tax evasion, and racketeering.

Krakover was not the only individual against whom Roberts attempted to invoke the Mann Act. He recommended a similar course of action to Leisman who was engaged in an anti-peddling crusade in Milwaukee. Roberts suggested that if Wisconsin's anti-peddling statutes weren't doing enough to drive peddlers out of Milwaukee, that Leisman should use vagrancy laws if available in Wisconsin. Involving the FBI in cases where peddlers were taking women around the country with them posing as family members was also another suggested course of action. "The FBI may be interested in any women they may be taking around the country with them—Mann Act, you know."⁷⁹

As a result of Krakover's lawsuit against the CCD and the NFSD, Roberts, as the Grand President of the NFSD, pursued witnesses and evidence to support his allegations against Krakover published in *The Frat*. Roberts found Catherine Castera of Los Angeles, a woman who had worked for Krakover for five years and who charged that Krakover had exploited her. She claimed she had turned over all of her wages to Krakover, because he had promised to put all of her money into a savings account and to pay her after she left his employ. However, she never received the money. Additionally, Castera alleged that his assistant, Hilda Robinson, physically abused her by slapping her and scratching her arms. Castera claimed that Krakover also slapped and hit other deaf women who

⁷⁹ Arthur Roberts to Arthur Leisman, April 16, 1946, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

worked for him. She also recounted other incidents of abuse, such as forcing sick deaf crewmembers to peddle outdoors in bad weather. Furthermore, Castera accused Krakover of adultery, claiming that he had sexual relations with various deaf women who worked for him as peddlers while his wife stayed at home in Chicago.⁸⁰ Although Castera shared her experience in detail with Roberts through their correspondence, she declined to travel to Chicago to testify against Krakover.

Roberts' actions in ferreting out "witnesses" and publishing their allegations led Krakover to petition the court for an injunction to stop the NFSD from continuing to publish its editorials criticizing peddling and himself, in addition to asking for damages. Other individuals also shared their experiences working with Krakover but declined to testify at the trial citing domestic obligations. Roberts interpreted this reluctance to testify against Krakover as fear of reprisal. The only witnesses that Roberts could gather for the NFSD's defense were Jimmy Meagher, the former peddling racket buster for the NAD, Truman Ingle, the superintendent of the Missouri School for the Deaf who had had trouble with peddling gangs, and officials of the NFSD divisions in Seattle and Philadelphia who had accused Krakover of engaging in criminal behavior.⁸¹ Despite having only witnesses who had a stake in vilifying Krakover based on gossip, Roberts continued to press his case against Krakover.

Krakover defended himself by arguing that he was devoted to the interests of deaf persons; that his methods of operation showed that his practices were ethical and proper; and that the abuses and practices objected to by the NFSD did not exist in his company. He had argued upon his initial expulsion from the Philadelphia division of the NFSD, that

⁸⁰ Catherine Castera to Arthur Roberts, December 9, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁸¹ Arthur Roberts to Joseph Grant, April 1, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

because deaf people had been restricted in business and unable to earn a decent living, he had provided economic opportunities to deaf people in his company. It was in this same spirit of advancing the cause of the deaf that he had joined the NFSD. He believed that he, like the NFSD, was helping provide deaf people with economic opportunities and enabled underprivileged deaf people to become self-supporting. Krakover emphasized that his crew sold legitimate merchandise in a legitimate manner but lamented that unscrupulous crew managers had marred his reputation. He accused these same crew managers who had left his company to start their own selling businesses of starting untrue rumors about him including his traffic in and treatment of women. He contended that the women he employed were legitimate salespeople supervised by his wife and that he was not guilty of violating the Mann Act, or of any other forms of sexual misconduct.⁸² In fact, after filing his lawsuit, Krakover wrote a letter to his sales crew warning that if they caught other peddlers traveling with women for immoral purposes that they were in violation of the Mann Act and urged them to report these violators to federal authorities or to his own attorney, Francis Heisler.⁸³

To further his lawsuit against the NFSD, Krakover's company published cards for its peddling workforce. The cards stated that peddling provided a livelihood for deaf people and resulted in reducing the effects of unemployment on deaf people. Peddling provided deaf people with a self-sufficient livelihood, one which they had a right to given America was a free country that encouraged free enterprise for all--handicapped or not.

⁸² Leon Krakover to Hugh Cusack, December 3, 1941, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁸³ Leon Krakover to peddling crew, July 7, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

Krakover felt that there should be no restrictions on the solicitation by deaf mutes just as there were none placed upon those direct sellers who were not handicapped.⁸⁴

Throughout the lawsuit, Krakover refused to cease his peddling business. “My conscience is clear in this matter—my crews will continue work so that may not be deprived of a livelihood and their leaders may themselves become independent.”⁸⁵ In this spirit, Krakover argued that peddling was a legitimate American strategy against discrimination and charity in his letter entitled “Dear Americans:”

“Since it is a hearing world and the deaf people being a small percent of it, we always have to struggle for our living, all just because the lack of realization on the part of hearing people in how capable of work, we the Deaf are whereas only if we were given a chance to prove our varied ability, we could astonish the world... Thus betterment of conditions in favor of us may be under way. The way we are treated, we are really ranked with Negroes for whom the world had done very little; some employers; different agencies discriminating against us. Also insurance companies, compensation laws, and lack of respect for equal rights have contributed unemployment to a large percent of us, the Deaf salespeople and distributors; therefore we turn to salesmanship as means of earning our honest living rather than depend on welfare-selling nice and useful necessities of American needs... our sales people are not beggars.”⁸⁶

The deaf community leadership argued that although peddlers defended their livelihood by stating that there were no laws against peddling, there was one such law against peddling- that of self-respect.⁸⁷

In April of 1949, Roberts complained to James O’Leary, who was supposed to testify against Krakover that Judge Lupe of the Cook County Superior Court was not

⁸⁴ Card, “No More Deaf Unemployment Problem... Justice For The Deaf,” National Deaf Mute Sales People, undated, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁸⁵ Leon Krakover to Hugh Cusack, December 3, 1941, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁸⁶ Leon Krakover, “Dear American,” undated, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁸⁷ Thesis, undated, “Carrie West Papers,” Gallaudet University Archives, Washington, DC.

satisfied that there was really a case to be tried and had postponed the case. The judge however, had not granted Krakover's request for an injunction to prevent *The Frat* from continuing its editorials against peddling and his business.⁸⁸

Grant, the NFSD attorney, reminded Roberts that the trial would be a long, drawn out affair and that Krakover and his attorneys had proposed settling instead of going to trial. Krakover and his attorney, Heisler, proposed a code of standards that would regulate peddling (and in the process make his business legitimate) and prevent the issues that the deaf community leadership had been so concerned about, including exploitation and the portrayal of deaf people as subjects of charity. Roberts was open to the idea although he doubted it would be effective.⁸⁹ He wrote to a number of colleagues including Fred Murphy, the chair of the NAD's Anti-Peddling committee, N.C. Garrison, and Byron Burnes, outlining suggestions for the proposed regulatory code. His suggestions included prohibiting granting licenses to peddlers who had been found guilty of racketeering and trafficking in women, requiring the use of the phrase "no pity wanted" on cards, and banning "I am deaf cards." He also proposed that no monies be accepted beyond the actual cost of wares and that peddlers make no explicit or implicit pleas for sympathy. Roberts suggested banning alphabet cards and lewd pictures and allowing only the sale of wares that had actual value.⁹⁰

Roberts was unenthusiastic about the idea of a regulatory code, referring to it as a "gun to our head" but agreeing to the code was a way to extract the NFSD from Krakover's lawsuit and from the risk of having to pay damages. Grant reassured Roberts

⁸⁸ Arthur Roberts to James O'Leary, April 15, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁸⁹ Arthur Roberts to Joseph Grant, May 23, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁹⁰ Arthur Roberts notes, undated, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

that the code would actually be valuable because settling the case would result in the dismissal of both lawsuits against the CCD and the NFSD as well as force Krakover to acknowledge that some peddling practices were “vicious” and to agree that he would not engage in such practices anymore.⁹¹ Grant also believed that this code would serve as an “excellent propaganda weapon” for the NFSD.

Roberts was not the only one who had doubts about the effectiveness of such a code or regulatory commission. Krakover had originally suggested the regulatory code and commission in 1941, saying that he was “more than willing to aid the NFSD in regulating this business from within and in seeing that irresponsible persons are not allowed to work harm to the cause of the deaf. I protest strenuously however against the narrow minded viewpoint which condemns all direct selling as improper.”⁹² However, this code and commission did not emerge until 1953 as a result of the lawsuit and countersuit between NFSD and Krakover.

Grant informed Roberts on November 12, 1952 that the Krakover lawsuits against the CCD and NFSD would be dismissed and that NFSD would file a counter complaint against Krakover. This counter complaint was intended to force Krakover to abide by the code and to have the court enter a decree on the Code of Regulation of Peddling.

After an eleven-year pursuit of Leon Krakover that culminated in a lawsuit and countersuit, the peddling crusade faded away when Krakover and the NFSD agreed on a code of regulations governing peddlers. In 1953, the Krakover-NFSD lawsuits were resolved when both parties agreed to establish and abide by a code for the regulation of

⁹¹ Joseph Grant to Arthur Roberts, June 20, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁹² Leon Krakover to Hugh Cusack, December 3, 1941, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

itinerant sellers (peddlers). Roberts had proposed that peddlers be called itinerant sellers in the code, because it seemed less provocative.⁹³ NFSD attorney Joseph Grant believed that the NFSD's agenda in limiting the exploitative practices of peddling would be better served by conceding the lawsuit in favor of a code.⁹⁴ He convinced Roberts that it was impossible to fully bar selling by deaf people and that the only viable alternative was to attempt to control the business by establishing a code of regulations that employers would agree to abide by. By accepting the code, Roberts would have to agree that door to door selling by deaf people was a legitimate and honorable vocation.⁹⁵ He did so only because Krakover had agreed to accept and abide by the code as well. Once agreed upon, Grant encouraged Roberts to publicize the code and its enforcement commission aggressively.⁹⁶

Judge Haas of the Superior Court of Cook County dismissed the lawsuits on January 9, 1953 and issued a decree entered on the counter complaint filed by the NFSD. The decree, filed in Cook County, Illinois, acknowledged the role of the NFSD in the deaf community as an organization “designed to promote the welfare of deaf persons and to facilitate their acceptance by hearing members of the community in business and social activities...and has by all possible legitimate means fostered educational programs and legislation designed to benefit the status of deaf persons.”⁹⁷ This decree declared that the NFSD was acting in the interest of *both* preventing the abuse of peddlers and protecting

⁹³ Arthur Roberts to Byron Burnes, March 17, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁹⁴ Joseph Grant to Arthur Roberts, February 24, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁹⁵ Joseph Grant to Arthur Roberts, September 17, 1952, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁹⁶ Joseph Grant to Arthur Roberts, January 9, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

⁹⁷ Decree filed in Superior Court of Cook County in Krakover vs. the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf, January 9, 1953.

the hearing members of the community from such practices. The court also decreed that Krakover had provided many deaf persons with a means of livelihood and that he had the right to pursue a livelihood in any manner he chose. Furthermore, the court agreed the proposed code served the general public interest and ordered all parties to subscribe, abide, and assist in enforcing the code. The court retained jurisdiction of the cause and would enforce Krakover's participation in the Code with post-decree orders if needed.⁹⁸ Grant considered the decree a victory, although Roberts still believed that this code would not eliminate peddling and in fact would be difficult to enforce at first.⁹⁹ On January 23, 1953, the Krakover lawsuit against the Chicago Club of the Deaf was dismissed by the Cook County Circuit Court without costs.¹⁰⁰ The development of a code of regulations for peddlers signaled the end of the deaf community's organized campaign against peddling.

The focus of the code was that the handicap of deafness must not be exploited to obtain the sympathy of the public. Recurring themes within the code were a prohibition of using deafness as a means of garnering pity, sympathy, or charity; a prohibition of the peddling of alphabet cards; prohibition on behaving in unrespectable ways, particularly traveling in mixed sex groups; prohibition on discouraging deaf children to stay in school in order to be able to obtain respectable and self-sufficient employment; and prohibition of exploiting others for profit. The court recognized that this code was designed to protect the right of deaf people to earn their livelihoods as salespersons while preventing the abuses and improper practices that were objected to by both the NFSD and Krakover.

⁹⁸ Decree filed in Superior Court of Cook County in Krakover vs. the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf, January 9, 1953.

⁹⁹ Joseph Grant to Arthur Roberts, November 12, 1952 and Arthur Roberts to Joseph Grant, November 17, 1952, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁰⁰ Court Order of January 23, 1953 in Cook County Circuit Court Case No. 48 C 4373.

The NAD and NFSD cooperated in the development of the code in 1953. The NFSD's lawyers, Joseph Grant and Harry Kenoe, through collaboration with Krakover's attorney, Francis Heisler, originally developed the code. They consulted other organizations including the Good Housekeeping Institute, the Arbitration Procedure of the Textile Trade, the supervisory and control organizations of the chiropractic, optometric, and dental professions.¹⁰¹ The code provided for a regulatory enforcement commission composed of five members. For his part, Roberts wanted the regulatory commission to prevent racketeering, provide licensure, and ban traffic in women, the sale of both alphabet cards and lewd pictures, and the use of pleas for sympathy.¹⁰²

Burnes and Roberts agreed that the NFSD and NAD would each contribute two members to the regulatory commission and that itinerant sellers would be allowed to appoint one representative. The commission would be self-sustained through fees charged to "boss sellers"-- the peddler kings.¹⁰³ Once the code was established, Murphy, the most ardent of anti-peddlers, conceded that "selling is one of the oldest professions in the world and that any one who desires to engage in this means of earning a livelihood has a right to do so as long as he does so honorably."¹⁰⁴

There was some resistance though, on the part of the NAD. The NAD threatened not to agree with the code or participate in the commission if Krakover did not consent to the code, join the commission, and promise to help bring other sellers into line.¹⁰⁵ After

¹⁰¹ Joseph Grant to Arthur Roberts, February 24, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁰² Notes of Arthur Roberts, undated, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁰³ Arthur Roberts to Byron B. Burnes, March 6, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁰⁴ Fred Murphy to Arthur Roberts, March 10, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Roberts to Joseph Grant, April 21, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

assurances from Grant that Krakover was bound to the code as per their legal settlement, Burnes promised Roberts that the NAD would cooperate in the enforcement of the code.¹⁰⁶

Burnes also expressed some concerns that the adoption of the code would signal that the NAD and NFSD were sanctioning door-to-door salesmanship. Burnes believed that the code would afford the NAD and NFSD some control over the industry and was hopeful that the Krakover organization would be disbanded. He insisted that the code include provisions for the education of deaf children and ensure that these deaf pupils were not encouraged nor taught how to peddle.¹⁰⁷

Roberts told Grant that there was no enthusiasm about the code among the deaf community and that it would take time for the rank and file to get behind the code and its regulatory commission. He stated that the prejudice against itinerant sellers was too deeply rooted and that it would take a generation to change the attitudes of the self-respecting deaf.¹⁰⁸

Despite their misgivings, the NAD and NFSD proceeded with the establishment of the regulatory commission to oversee the enforcement of the code. However, Krakover did not join until December of 1953 after pressure from his attorney and the NFSD attorneys. Krakover had resisted joining the commission because he had not been invited to represent itinerant sellers on the commission and because none of his suggestions had been included in the regulations including a minimum wage, workmen's compensation, and insurance. He complained that the code neglected the employees and was more about

¹⁰⁶ Byron Burnes to Arthur Roberts, May 2, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁰⁷ Byron Burnes to Arthur Roberts, March 14, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁰⁸ Arthur Roberts to Joseph Grant, June 4, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

the NFSD's desire to destroy Krakover's business.¹⁰⁹ Such insistence appears to be an attempt by Krakover to portray his business as a legitimate endeavor rather than as a criminal organization that served to exploit vulnerable deaf people. However, the NFSD responded to such suggestions that they did not want to give Krakover any status or stature in the deaf community and they would be doing so if they had appointed him to the commission. They also argued that a labor union for deaf peddlers or a labor management contract for deaf people was not their interest in establishing the code but was more about controlling the employers of peddlers. They believed that the peddlers who worked for the kings wouldn't be subjected to abuses and indignities if the kings had to abide by the code in the first place.¹¹⁰ But, if Krakover wanted to offer workmen's compensation and insurance, he was welcome to do so.¹¹¹ Krakover's delay in joining the commission led Roberts to allege that Krakover was attempting to circumvent the code.¹¹²

As Krakover delayed, Roberts' tone changed. In November of 1953, he told Murphy to keep up his campaign against peddlers and beggars, urging him to tell beggars that if they were tired of being pursued, that they should 'reform' and agree to abide by the code. If not, "otherwise we will give them merry hell..."¹¹³

Aside from the NFSD's national campaign, personified in the Krakover case, the deaf community's anti-peddling campaign in the 1940s conducted by the NAD returned

¹⁰⁹ Francis Heisler to Harry Kenoe, September 15, 1950, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹¹⁰ Harry Kenoe to Francis Heisler, September 27, 1950, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹¹¹ Arthur Roberts to Joseph Grant, September 30, 1950, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹¹² Arthur Roberts to Joseph Grant, September 7, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹¹³ Arthur Roberts to Fred Murphy, November 5, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

to local and state action. Meagher and Lahn's initial doubts in the 1930s regarding the NAD restructuring of the Impostor Bureau were right. The NAD Committee for the Suppression of Peddling reported in 1949 that the committee was an ineffective strategy and recommended that the NAD was not the proper channel to work through in the deaf community's fight against peddling.¹¹⁴ Now, the committee suggested that other strategies, such as publicity and education, would be more effective and recommended that action be taken on the local level through internal community policing and assisting local authorities in the enforcement of existing legislation.¹¹⁵

Its new emphasis on local action and encouragement of state associations to accept the burden of the anti-peddling campaign demonstrated that the NAD acknowledged it did not have the resources to tackle this as a national issue.¹¹⁶ At this juncture, the NFSD appeared to be the ideal organization to take the lead in the anti-peddling campaign on the national level. In contrast to the NAD, the NFSD was well funded and had an extensive network of local divisions that were managed by central headquarters, which allowed for efficient management of local efforts.

The perception of the NFSD's organizational efficiency and resources may be the reason why the NAD leadership pressured the NFSD's leadership to join the campaign back in 1941 and especially pursue the Krakovers. This was acknowledged as much in Burnes' presidential address in 1949. While the NAD committee had struggled with its mission, it praised the NFSD's efforts, stating that the "true constant of battle waged

¹¹⁴ "Report of the Committee on Resolutions," in *NAD Proceedings* (1949), 51.

¹¹⁵ Byron B. Burnes, "President's Address," *NAD Proceedings* (1949), 13-14.

¹¹⁶ "Report of Committee on Resolutions," *Proceedings of the Twentieth Convention of the National Association of the Deaf* (1946), 62 [hereafter *NAD Proceedings* (1946)].

against peddlers is through the *Frat* and Arthur Roberts' efforts."¹¹⁷ Burnes also commended the NFSD and Arthur Roberts in his President's Address for their work on the anti-peddling campaign.¹¹⁸

Although the NFSD became the primary actor on the national level in anti-peddling campaigns from 1941 on, the NAD's Committee for the Suppression of Peddling remained on the task by pursuing an aggressive publicity strategy to educate the public about the evils of organized peddling. Roberts and Burnes, along with the silent press, attacked the character of peddlers, their bosses, and the deaf people who tolerated peddling in virulent editorials published in deaf newspapers such as the *Frat* and the *Cavalier*.

In addition to editorials, the silent press also monitored cases of peddling in various states and reported on the successes and failures of local organizations to suppress peddling throughout the 1940s and early 1950s.

Fred Murphy, as the anti-peddling chief of the NAD in the late 1940s, took charge of the publicity campaign. Murphy was one of Arthur Roberts' closest and hardest working allies. As part of the publicity campaign, Murphy suggested that the NAD distribute to the public free alphabet cards or matchbooks with the alphabet printed on them with a clear indicator that those items were not for sale and the message not to buy them from peddlers trying to sell them.¹¹⁹

Such a saturation of free alphabet cards meant deaf peddlers could not use them as a means of luring hearing customers.¹²⁰ Murphy also suggested publishing editorials

¹¹⁷ "Report of Committee for the Suppression of Peddling," *NAD Proceedings* (1949), 32-33.

¹¹⁸ Burnes, "President's Address," 13-14.

¹¹⁹ "Murphy Lights Up Anti-Peddler Torch," *The Cavalier* 11, no. 4 (February 1951): 1.

¹²⁰ "Cards Free" *Frat* 44, no. 8 (March 1947): 4.

railing against peddling in large city newspapers to target hearing people, those who were likely to be potential customers of the peddling gangs. Despite Murphy's enthusiasm for the publicity strategy, he did concede that deaf organizations could not afford such an advertising offensive.¹²¹

Murphy was able to secure assistance from the Better Business Bureaus (BBB) and the National Restaurant Association (NRA) in publicizing the NAD's fight against peddlers. Better Business Bureaus agreed to publish warnings about deaf peddlers and asked member businesses to keep deaf peddlers out of their establishments.¹²² The NRA also published a press release authored by Murphy in the August 1951 issue of its news bulletin. Apparently, the deaf community took advantage of their relationship with the NRA's Public Relations director who was the son-in-law of a deaf woman to get the NRA to publish the press release.

The NRA press release led to a similar article published in *Law Enforcement*, a magazine for law enforcement officials, after an officer read the news release in the NRA news bulletin.¹²³ Other than these two publications, publicity was limited due to the meager resources of the deaf community's premier political organization.

Beyond publicity, the national leadership asked state and local leaders to continue to work toward passing new anti-peddling legislation or enforcing existing statutes that had been passed in the 1910s. Wisconsin had passed an anti-peddling statute in 1941 that targeted the sale of finger alphabet cards and prohibited the use of finger alphabet cards in inducing sale of merchandise. Citing the Wisconsin example, Murphy believed that it

¹²¹ Murphy, "The Curse of Deafdom: A Guidebook containing hints and suggestions for use by those who would like to see the PEDDLING RACKET suppressed."

¹²² "Remove Profit," *Frat* 46, no. 2 (September 1948): 4.; "The Editor's Page: Hoodlums at Large," *Silent Worker* 4, no. 11 (July 1952): 2.

¹²³ "Anti-Peddling Committee Attracts Attention," *Silent Worker* 4, no. 3 (November 1951): 30.

was better to have local laws rather than state or federal laws, because local laws were easier to enforce.¹²⁴

The largest, most sweeping anti-peddling law targeting peddlers, that of the territory of Hawaii and enacted in 1945, was not born of the deaf community's anti-peddling efforts. Yet, deaf leaders appreciated the comprehensiveness of the legislation and claimed in the *Cavalier* that this was the only law of its kind that covered a political unit comparable to a state.¹²⁵ The legislation covered every form of peddling, including prohibitions on soliciting alms, impostors, over-pricing the value of the goods, and any other action that made the sale a solicitation rather than a business transaction. It also included penalties of \$10-500 in fines and up to one year in prison.¹²⁶ While exciting news for anti-peddling activists, deaf leaders did not seek similar legislation in other states. They believed that local statutes or limited legislation that targeted more specific aspects of peddling linked to deaf people would be a better use of their limited resources.

In 1949, the NAD's Committee for the Suppression of Peddling recommended that the state associations push for state legislation like Wisconsin's law that specifically prohibited the peddling of alphabet cards.¹²⁷ The NAD promised to cooperate fully with state associations that took such steps to enact statewide anti-peddling legislation.¹²⁸

Why would the NAD suggest that state associations attempt to mirror Wisconsin's limited legislative approach rather than Hawaii's more comprehensive legislation? It may have been simply a matter of expediency. By narrowing the focus of

¹²⁴ Murphy, "The Curse of Deafdom: A Guidebook containing hints and suggestions for use by those who would like to see the PEDDLING RACKET suppressed."

¹²⁵ "Hawaii Bans Many Phases of Peddling," *The Cavalier* 9, no. 9 (April 1949): 1; "One State, Hawaii Ban Deaf Peddlers," *The Cavalier* 9, no. 7 (March 1949): 1.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ "Report of Committee for the Suppression of Peddling," 32-33.

¹²⁸ "Report of the Committee on Resolutions," *NAD Proceedings* (1949), 51.

legislative attempts, it would have been easier to persuade legislators to pass laws limiting the use of alphabet cards in peddling rather than promote comprehensive legislation that might have complicated the lobbying process. Also, depriving peddlers of alphabet cards would remove from the hearing public's attention a powerful symbol that associated dependency and charity with deaf people. Getting rid of alphabet card peddling would help to protect the reputation of hard-working, self-sufficient deaf citizens. That narrow focus served to protect the public image of deaf people rather than stopping all forms of peddling and exploitation.¹²⁹

In 1950, a year after the deaf community in Missouri mounted efforts for anti-peddling measures, Kansas City passed a law restricting peddlers. Deaf leaders believed that this particular law was successful and should serve as a model of peddler restricting law.¹³⁰ The ordinance required that all peddlers must be approved for a license by the division of welfare, the chief of police, and a representative of the deaf. The law prohibited peddling, regardless of handicap status, unless a license was obtained. If the peddler was indigent, physically handicapped, and could prove he or she could not obtain or hold gainful employment, that person could peddle without a license but first had to get a permit from the Director of Welfare.

Such indigent peddlers were allowed to pay the reduced permit fee of \$1 instead of the usual \$50 fee for an annual permit. They were also required to sell their merchandise at fair market prices.¹³¹ The idea was to make obtaining a license so difficult

¹²⁹ In Minnesota, the state attorney general's office drew up a bill to make it a criminal offense to use alphabet cards for peddling purposes in 1951. The law was ultimately passed in 1969. <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/data/revisor/law/1969/0/1969-406.pdf>; "Minnesota Bill Aims to Bar Alphabet Card Peddlers," *The Cavalier* 11, no. 5 (March, 1951): 1.

¹³⁰ "Murphy Lights Up Anti-Peddler Torch," 1.

¹³¹ "An Ordinance: Amending Chapter 26 of the Revised Ordinances of Kansas City, Missouri, 1946, by repealing Section 26-201, relating to peddlers, and enacting in lieu thereof four new sections to be known

and unprofitable that peddlers would simply stay away from Kansas City. Those caught peddling without a license faced a misdemeanor and punishment under existing licensure laws. Mirroring the endorsement of Wisconsin's law prohibiting the use of alphabet cards in peddling, the Missouri Association of the Deaf also sought legislation banning the sale of alphabet cards and asked the NAD to distribute information on how they could fight the racket locally.¹³² The ordinance in Kansas City was also aimed at breaking down gangs rather than targeting individuals or impostors.¹³³

While the NAD allowed local deaf communities to work on their own to advocate for local anti-peddling legislation and more stringent enforcement of existing state and local laws, the NAD's efforts on the national level were limited to seeking federal legislation and enforcement in addition to a general publicity strategy. In 1946, Byron Burnes, the president of the NAD, wrote to J. Edgar Hoover, suggesting that the Federal Bureau of Investigation prepare a bill for the next session of Congress to make "it a criminal offense for groups of peddlers to travel from one state to another for the purpose of peddling."¹³⁴ Burnes pledged the full support of the NAD for such a bill and described the exploitation of peddlers by their gang bosses. He urged Hoover to persuade Congress to pass federal legislation because local laws were either nonexistent or ineffective. In fact, Burnes invoked potential violations of the Mann Act by implying that peddling gangs often had young women who were probably involved in immorality and prostitution.¹³⁵ Although Hoover did not endorse Burnes' suggestion for federal

as Sections 26-201, 26-201.1, 26-201.2, and 26-201.3, relating to the same subject," *Frat* 47, no. 8 (March 1950): 5.

¹³² "The Editor's Page," *Silent Worker* 2, no. 3 (November 1949): 31.

¹³³ "Beggars' Progress: The Record and a Remedy," 5-6.

¹³⁴ Byron Burnes to J. Edgar Hoover, September 26, 1946, box 34, Collection of the National Association of the Deaf, MSS 178, Gallaudet University Archives, Washington, DC.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

legislation regarding peddling, he expressed interest in the potential violations of the Federal White Slave Traffic Act where young women were being moved interstate and subjected to immorality and prostitution. The FBI ultimately investigated Krakover for potential violations of the Mann Act in 1949 but determined there was insufficient evidence.¹³⁶

Burnes was not the only one who implied that the bosses of peddling rings were potentially in violation of the Mann Act. Arthur Roberts had suggested the same when he corresponded with local leaders who caught peddling rings crossing state lines with young women.¹³⁷ Despite some local and state measures and Burnes' entreaties to Hoover, new legislation was not a primary focus of anti-peddling efforts in the postwar period. Leaders stressed the importance of taking advantage of existing legislation and urging better enforcement by law enforcement authorities. Anti-peddling activists took to heart the NAD Committee on Deaf Peddling's suggestion that local communities advocate for legislation *and* for better police enforcement of such legislation.¹³⁸ This recommendation was not unique. Throughout the correspondence amongst the leaders in the deaf community, there were complaints as to lax enforcement of laws against vagrancy and peddling.

In 1941, Superintendent John Gough of the Oklahoma School for the Deaf had collected written statements from local deaf leaders about the Paxton brothers who were operating a peddling ring and had gone too far with the girls. Convinced that he had evidence for violations of federal statutes, Gough provided these statements to the local

¹³⁶ Perry Seely to Arthur Roberts, June 6, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹³⁷ Arthur Roberts to Arthur Leisman, April 16, 1946, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹³⁸ "Report of the Committee on Resolutions," *NAD* (1949), 51.

FBI office.¹³⁹ While the FBI expressed an interest in the Paxtons, the U.S. District Attorney refused to prosecute the cases for the time being because the government had more pressing concerns during the war and the peddling ring did not represent “a real threat to our national safety.”¹⁴⁰ Moreover, it was difficult to prosecute peddlers because there was usually no evidence of actual violations of the law. Authorities argued that if the girls, who leaders claimed were being exploited, were over 21 years of age, they couldn’t take action against beggar kings for kidnapping. If the girls were mentally incompetent, it was the responsibility of their parents to take action. If deaf leaders wanted to take action under the Mann Act or narcotic laws, they needed to have definite and concrete evidence, which they usually didn’t have. And under the Mann Act, the girls would have to testify but it was doubtful that many would be willing to do so.¹⁴¹

Deaf community members tried to convince the FBI that peddling rings should be investigated for possible federal violations. They argued that the peddling rings came under FBI jurisdiction because of the interstate nature of their business, their evasion of local licensure, and the presence of two women in Krakover’s group who were allegedly 16 and 17 years old, who were not peddling and “obviously they were being used for immoral purposes.”¹⁴² With Krakover’s gang, there were claims that Krakover received 70% of the peddlers’ earnings.¹⁴³ In response, the FBI investigated the allegations of Mann Act violations by peddling gang bosses but prosecutors did not take further action because of the paucity of evidence.

¹³⁹ Wesley Lauristen to Tom L. Anderson, October 15, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Wesley Lauristen to John A. Gough, October 5, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

¹⁴² E. Ivan Curtis to Werner Hanni, October 30, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

¹⁴³ E. Ivan Curtis to Werner Hanni of the FBI, October 27, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

The committee on suppression of peddling explored other ways to bring federal and local pressure to bear on peddlers. Roberts believed that using IRS agents to uncover tax evasion would be one of the more effective strategies in ousting peddling.¹⁴⁴

At the 1949 NAD convention, playing off of the anger of deaf people who resented peddlers' boasts that they paid no income tax on their earnings, President Burnes reiterated the possibility of getting the IRS to go after peddlers for tax evasion.¹⁴⁵ He suggested reporting peddlers to the IRS for tax evasion because requiring them to pay sales and income taxes would be an effective means of dealing with the peddling problem.¹⁴⁶ The Committee on Suppression of Peddling in 1949 followed up with Burnes' suggestion that peddling might be discouraged through the threat of taxation. Since peddlers were required to report sales taxes and income taxes but likely didn't, reporting and evasion investigation was encouraged. If taxation was not threatening enough, they believed that fines and imprisonment would discourage and punish peddlers.¹⁴⁷

Very much as deaf leaders had targeted printers for printing alphabet cards for deaf peddlers in the 1920s, the NAD considered pursuing the manufacturers and suppliers of peddlers' wares in hopes of cutting off supplies for peddlers. In 1941, the NAD asked for help from its members in cracking down on distributors of goods to peddlers.¹⁴⁸ In June, Wesley Lauritsen, one of Anderson's staunchest lieutenants, started an investigation into the S. Heiner Sales Service for fraud. The company supplied pins to

¹⁴⁴ Arthur Roberts to Joseph Grant, March 24, 1948, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁴⁵ "Beggars Symposium: What They Are Doing Over The Country Highlights on the Racket," 5.

¹⁴⁶ Burnes, "President's Address," 13-14.

¹⁴⁷ Gustav Anderson to Arthur Roberts, May 20, 1948, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁴⁸ "National Association of the Deaf: Official Announcement," *New York Journal of the Deaf* 70, no. 24 (June 12, 1941): 5.

peddlers and advertised them as high quality goods. Lauritsen claimed that the company was fraudently advertising pins for sale by deaf people, soliciting deaf peddlers, and promising them earnings of \$5-\$15 a day to sell pins that were appraised at a value of 5 cents for being so poorly made.¹⁴⁹

Lauritsen also lobbied Anderson to build a case of fraud against Heiner Sales and to convince the company to cease and desist in their production of pins. In addition, Lauritsen pursued relentless publicity against the company in the Philadelphia papers, radio, and the silent press.¹⁵⁰ Anderson agreed with Lauritsen's publicity campaign, but he believed that there was insufficient evidence of fraud to put Heiner out of business. He had Lauritsen drop his case, believing that shutting down suppliers would not be the most effective use of their resources in eliminating peddling gangs.¹⁵¹

Instead of cutting off access to wares, deaf leaders wanted to limit access to young recruits for beggar kings. Leaders turned to superintendents of schools for the deaf, asking them to assist in preventing deaf youths from dropping out of school to join peddling gangs. The superintendents then wrote letters to the parents of their pupils, urging them to help prevent peddling and to report to the schools any names of people who tried to solicit their children to participate in the peddling racket. The letters also cautioned the parents that although their children would get board, room, and transportation, most of their earnings would be turned over to the group's leader.¹⁵²

One of the main and perhaps most effective strategies employed by the leadership was internal community policing, with the goal of tracking peddlers and banishing them

¹⁴⁹ Wesley Lauritsen to Tom L. Anderson, April 30, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

¹⁵⁰ Wesley Lauritsen to Tom L. Anderson, May 5, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

¹⁵¹ Tom L. Anderson to Wesley Lauritsen, June 13, 1941, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

¹⁵² "Faginism Rampant," *Frat* 46, no. 8 (March 1949): 4.

from deaf society. Anderson once blasted his fellow deaf community members stating, “we admit known peddlers to our clubs, we give them the glad hand at our sports events, and by doing so we encourage them in their nefarious racket.”¹⁵³ Prominent deaf leaders in various communities corresponded with each other, tracking suspected peddlers. They encouraged local deaf social clubs and divisions of the NFSD to expel peddlers as well as turn these peddlers in to local authorities where local anti-vagrancy or anti-peddling laws existed.

An effective strategy in the social ostracism of deaf peddlers was to prohibit them from membership in the premier mutual aid society that was widely respected by many and provided a crucial service in a time of prevalent insurance discrimination: the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf. In order for a deaf man to become a member of the NFSD, he had to be nominated and voted in by the existing members of the local division. There were members of the NFSD who believed that able-bodied deaf people who chose to peddle rather than engage in a trade should not be allowed as members in line with the NFSD’s capitalist-worker ideology. One such case in Philadelphia had infuriated NFSD member Joe Simon. Simon opposed the nomination of a George Rushton because he “is able bodied and can work and in fact, has a trade as a shoemaker but didn’t want to work so became a peddler.” The members of the Philadelphia division of the NFSD overruled Simon’s objections and he subsequently appealed to Roberts in the hopes that Roberts would order the Philadelphia division to revoke Rushton’s membership. Simon pressed Roberts: “does the Frat allow any able bodied peddler join

¹⁵³ “The Editor’s Page: Hoodlums at Large,” *Silent Worker* 4, no. 11 (July 1952): 2.

frat? Mr. Rushton never will look for another job...”¹⁵⁴ As of 1946, the society had eliminated several such men.¹⁵⁵

Beyond the NFSD, Roberts, along with other leaders in the deaf community, pleaded with local deaf social clubs to prohibit peddlers. One strategy to discourage clubs from admitting peddlers was to publish cautionary tales and anecdotes in deaf newspapers about peddlers who caused trouble at local deaf clubs and social events. In 1948, the NFSD implemented “Operation Bum,” which required all divisions to establish a vigilance committee to pursue peddlers who appeared in local deaf communities. This operation was modeled after the Old West where such committees were created to go after horse thieves.¹⁵⁶

Character attacks on peddlers were common in deaf newspapers and in correspondence among deaf leaders, indicating the extent of internal community policing. Local leaders often wrote to each other cautioning them of peddlers who might be headed their way and suggested the use of local anti-vagrancy and anti-peddling laws to drive these peddlers out of town. If trouble happened in a local community, the local leaders often wrote to Roberts asking him if that particular troublemaker had a record with the NFSD or if Roberts knew of any previous trouble concerning that individual. This was an effective means of taking advantage of NFSD’s national network of divisions in various localities to keep track of peddlers as they traveled across the country. For example, Charles Billings, the president of the Denver division of the NFSD informed Roberts that he had caught a peddler, took his name and age from his social security card, searched his

¹⁵⁴ Joe Simon to Arthur L. Roberts, June 21, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁵⁵ “Racketeers,” *Frat* 43, no. 10 (May 1946): 4-5.

¹⁵⁶ “Operation Bum,” *Frat* 45, no. 9 (April 1948): 4.

body for peddling permits, and couldn't find any. Billings gave the peddler four hours to get out of the state then called the police.¹⁵⁷ Roberts kept records of suspected peddlers and shared information with other leaders who corresponded with him. For example, Reverend Arthur Leisman, the prominent Milwaukee deaf leader and clergyman, wrote to Roberts in 1946 requesting information on Frank Mandrillo and John Korczak because they had been arrested in Milwaukee for violating Wisconsin's anti-peddling statutes. Deaf communities across the nation were expected to be vigilant and take action whenever peddlers appeared in their localities. Anti-peddling chief Fred Murphy exhorted deaf people into action by comparing peddling to Communism, the major concern of the day and appealed to deaf people's desire to protect their material security. "Peddling may be likened unto Communism which infiltrates and saturates every democratic nation with the sole objective in mind—to destroy that nation. Peddling, spreading out from one end of the country to the other, while we sit back and do nothing, gnaws at the very foundation of our economic security like termites."¹⁵⁸

One form of internal community policing was to expel beggar kings from deaf society. Anderson chided members of the deaf community for cordially treating the leaders of the peddling rings.

"As for the "big shots" who are exploiting those boys and girls—we might, at least, take down the 'Welcome' sign when they come to town. Reports reaching me indicate that they are being cordially treated, and even entertained at the homes of some of our leading deaf citizens."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Charles Billings to Arthur Roberts, November 1, 1948, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁵⁸ Murphy, "The Curse of Deafdom: A Guidebook containing hints and suggestions for use by those who would like to see the PEDDLING RACKET suppressed."

¹⁵⁹ Clipping from Tom L. Anderson Collection, box 2, MSS 57, Gallaudet University Archives, Washington, DC: a published letter in *The American Era*, p. 89, 1941 (no date or volume or number). "Open Sore of the Deaf World—Peddlers."

There were complaints that deaf people viewed those beggar kings as prosperous business men and were admired for their ingenuity and finesse.¹⁶⁰ There were some who believed that social ostracism was the most effective weapon in combating peddling.¹⁶¹

However, not all deaf people were against peddling or considered it an evil. Prior to the 1930s, deaf people did not come to the defense of deaf peddlers because the campaigns were framed as being primarily directed against impostors. The campaigns against deaf alphabet card peddlers in the 1920s were framed as an effort to limit or eliminate avenues for hearing impostors. By the 1940s, as campaigns narrowed their focus on deaf peddlers, deaf people expressed either discomfort or indifference toward such campaigns. Roberts conceded to Joseph Grant, the Society's lawyer, that not all members of the NFSD were on board with the organization's efforts to stamp out peddling and, in fact, that some members believed that Roberts and the executive board had overstepped the bounds of the mission of the NFSD. There was a large body of members in the NFSD who believed that the society's lawsuit against Krakover was beyond the province of the Society's operations.

Roberts characterized this segment of the NFSD membership as indifferent or tolerant of peddlers. He believed that those members simply did not realize "harm done to the honest deaf until they are confronted with the fact in their quest for honest employment."¹⁶² Although there were internal disagreements regarding the Krakover lawsuit and peddling in general, Roberts claimed his campaigns on behalf of the NFSD were justified.

¹⁶⁰ "On the Run," *Frat* 45, no. 5 (December 1947): 4.

¹⁶¹ "Beggars' Progress: The Record and a Remedy," 5-6.

¹⁶² Arthur Roberts to Joseph Grant, March 15, 1953, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

Many deaf people identified with deaf peddlers as part of the larger deaf community and urged solidarity among deaf people above all other concerns. The leadership was frustrated with deaf people who advocated deaf solidarity and who refused to acknowledge the damage peddling did to the deaf community. N.C. Garrison, a NFSD officer in Seattle, wrote to Roberts that deaf people who did not object to peddlers “often say well, they are deaf like the rest of us and take them in as if nothing was wrong with peddling.”¹⁶³ Krakover had argued that his business practices were legitimate and that peddling was simply a means of providing deaf people with the opportunity to earn more than the average deaf person if they worked hard.¹⁶⁴ He employed men as salesmen and women as waitresses, maids, and rent collectors in the apartment buildings he owned.¹⁶⁵

In fact some deaf people accused the leadership of inducing “fear-hysteria” by invoking negative sentiments against peddlers in their campaigns. In 1948, Altor Sedlow wrote a letter to the editor in response to anti-peddling editorials in *The Cavalier*, a leading deaf newspaper of the day. Sedlow argued that the duty of the deaf community was not to demonize peddlers but rather to advocate for alternative means of livelihood and offer more opportunities for those who turned to peddling to earn a living.¹⁶⁶

Anderson echoed Sedlow’s sentiment and argued that the leadership needed to promote

¹⁶³ Nathaniel C. Garrison to Arthur Roberts, April 4, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁶⁴ Joseph Grant to Arthur Roberts, November 14, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁶⁵ “Three Couples of Mutes Are Married,” *The Morning Herald*, v. 55 (15 December 1951): 1.

¹⁶⁶ Altor L. Sedlow, “Rehabilitate the Peddlers,” *The Cavalier*, 7 no. 8 (May 1948): 2.

educational reforms that would provide deaf people with the skills necessary to succeed in the postwar economy.¹⁶⁷

Peddlers attempted to defend themselves in the silent press. They argued that selling goods was decent work and perfectly legitimate. They used patriotic language, referring to “this great free country of ours—a land of free enterprises for all.” They argued that by undertaking peddling, they were relieving the deaf community of the burden of supporting them.¹⁶⁸

Some peddlers, in self-defense, went as far as to threaten legal action if the attacks on their reputations did not cease. Krakover wrote a letter to the Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf and objected to their description of his business as a “nefarious racket.” Krakover generously claimed that he didn’t want to damage the deaf community’s reputation with bad publicity so would not take action but threatened to prosecute if the publicity campaigns against him persisted.¹⁶⁹

Deaf community members who did not peddle also came to the defense of peddlers. Eric Malzkuhn, a well-known figure and actor in the deaf community, wrote to Tom L. Anderson in 1952 arguing that deaf people did not ask to be deaf or to be discriminated against. Why, he asked, censure deaf people for making the best they can by peddling as a “partial recompense” for their disability?¹⁷⁰ In 1950, a woman from Arkansas wrote to Emerson Romero, columnist and compiler of “The Open Forum” section of the *Silent Worker* inviting the anti-peddling committee to come to her state

¹⁶⁷ Tom L. Anderson to Arthur Roberts, July 25, 1949, box 16, National Fraternal Society of the Deaf Collection.

¹⁶⁸ “Peddlers Selling Pencils Now,” *The Cavalier* 11, no. 11 (September 1951): 1.

¹⁶⁹ Clipping from Tom L. Anderson Collection, box 2, MSS 57, Gallaudet University Archives, Washington, DC:: “We Are Threatened”, dated December 26, 1941- addressed to PSAD and published in *Pennsylvania Society News*, 5.

¹⁷⁰ Eric Malzkuhn to Tom L. Anderson, undated, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection. (undated but TLA responds to this letter on May 8, 1952 and the response was attached to Malz’s original letter).

and see how many people were unemployed. The writer didn't have it in her "heart to condemn these men when, after months of struggling with their conscience, they take to peddling." ¹⁷¹ Romero responded that peddling was not the cause of employment difficulties in the deaf community but rather a consequence of a lack of employment available to deaf people. He argued that the focus of the anti-peddling activism of the post-war period was on legitimate peddlers, not beggars, as illustrated by their focus on peddling gangs rather than on individuals.

Beyond defense, some even went as far as to laud those who peddled. An anonymous author in the *Frat* said that the peddlers claimed that they should be respected for their sharp wit and ability to make a good living and should be viewed as benefactors of mankind by teaching hearing people the alphabet [fingerspelled]. ¹⁷² In response to defenses of peddling, Anderson recommended that the NAD not respond. Anderson believed that by responding to peddlers who defended themselves, the NAD would only affirm the legitimacy of peddling as a livelihood. ¹⁷³

After passage of the regulatory code in 1953 at the culmination of the Krakover case, there was still some activity against peddling but that activity was on the wane and rarely mentioned on the leadership level after 1956. President Burnes touched on the topic of anti-peddling in his address at the 1954 NAD convention in Texas, but it was not deemed worthy of reprinting in the *Silent Worker* (now taking place of convention proceedings). At this same convention, Fred Murphy reported for the Committee for the Suppression of Peddling, stating that it was still conducting a publicity campaign via matchbooks and pamphlets. He urged the establishment of a permanent headquarters for

¹⁷¹ Emerson Romero, "The Open Forum," *Silent Worker* 2, no. 9 (May 1950): 31.

¹⁷² "Panhandlers," 4.

¹⁷³ Thomas Northern to Tom L. Anderson, February 17, 1942, box 2, Tom L. Anderson Collection.

the NAD as the most effective means to exercise control over the peddling racket.¹⁷⁴ In 1955, the NAD resolved that state associations continue the anti-peddling work, after which the anti-peddling crusade faded from the national political scene in the deaf community.¹⁷⁵

After World War II, deaf leaders identified the growth of peddling gangs as a new threat. While deaf leaders continued to identify peddlers as a threat to deaf people's image as tax-paying self-sufficient citizens, they recognized that peddling gangs served to not only exploit the sympathies of the hearing public but also to exploit vulnerable deaf people. Peddling rings then added new layers of criminality to peddling activities by suggesting elements of racketeering, sexual exploitation, tax evasion, and physical violence.

The NAD reorganized its efforts but the majority of anti-peddling campaigns in this period took place on the local and state level and the NFSD became the primary actor in the anti-peddling crusade although the NAD and the silent press continued to participate.

During the anti-peddling crusade in the postwar period, peddlers emerged to actively defend themselves within the deaf community and in the silent press. Defenders among the rank and file deaf community joined the peddlers and showed that not all deaf people agreed with the drive to remove peddlers from the deaf community.

In 1953, after a court had decreed that peddlers had a right to pursue their livelihood in any manner they chose, resulting in the development of a code of

¹⁷⁴ "National Association of the Deaf: Condensed Proceedings of the 22nd Triennial Convention: Austin, Texas, June 30-July 6, 1954," *Silent Worker* 7, no. 10-11 (June-July 1955): 24-25.

¹⁷⁵ "National Association of the Deaf: Report of the Committee on Resolutions: Triennial Convention, Cincinnati, Ohio, July 8, 1955," *Silent Worker* 8, 1 (September 1955): 30-31.

regulations for deaf peddlers, the deaf community's organized campaign against peddling dwindled to an end.

The end of anti-peddling campaigns cannot be attributed to a single event but was the culmination of a number of factors. The campaigns had come to be driven by individual personalities rather than by consensus within the deaf community. Other than individual leaders who drove the anti-peddling campaigns, deaf leaders shifted their focus to combating employment discrimination and other avenues to combat underemployment in the deaf community including accepting government assistance. They had reached an understanding that challenging public perception of deaf people would accomplish little and anti-peddling campaigns no longer held promise for breaking down barriers to employment.

Conclusion

Deaf people believed that full first class citizenship depended on access to employment. They joined African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and other people of color who had concluded that full access to employment was a requisite of first class citizenship and full inclusion in American democracy.¹ Deaf people resisted behaviors such as peddling that threatened their place in American democracy. Deaf people saw an inseparable relationship between citizenship and employment, which depended on state supported education provided by schools for the deaf.

In the late nineteenth century, deaf leaders identified peddling as a significant threat to schools for the deaf and thus deaf people's economic access because the existence of peddlers suggested to the public that those schools were not accomplishing their objectives of producing a class of self-sufficient worker-citizens. Deaf people were also self-conscious of the public's perception of their community as foreign and clannish. In an era of Nativist sentiment, desperate to preserve schools for the deaf and improve deaf people's economic opportunities in midst of a changing economy, deaf community leaders embarked on campaigns of self-preservation which included anti-peddling campaigns.

Deaf leaders exhorted all able-bodied deaf adults, using gendered ableist rhetoric, to invest themselves fully in their education, employment, and the uplift of the deaf as a class. Chief among their responsibilities was to present themselves as taxpaying, self-sufficient, industrious citizens. Deaf people could not engage in peddling and were expected to actively participate in anti-peddling campaigns. The handicapped deaf,

¹ Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Boston: Harvard University Press), 2006.

defined by deaf leaders as deaf people with additional disabilities, were excused from those obligations and granted permission to peddle in order to earn a living. As the decades wore on, deaf leaders welcomed institutional and government assistance for the “doubly-handicapped deaf” including direct relief in the New Deal state.

As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth century, deaf leaders narrowed their campaigns to elevate the deaf as a class by zeroing in their focus on peddling, portraying it as the province of impostors. They joined in the larger chorus of progressive reformers, believing that their campaigns to rid America of impostors would benefit deaf people and mainstream society alike. Presenting deaf leaders as experts in the uplift of deaf people and the anti-peddling crusade as a social reform benefiting all, deaf people called upon mainstream society to aid them in their anti-peddling campaign. They asked the public to support legislation aimed at the eradication of impostorism, enforcement of anti-impostor legislation, and aid in combating employment discrimination. Their activism shifted from independent local and state action to a national campaign organized by the National Association of the Deaf that directed state and local action. The NAD was able to achieve legislation serving their purpose in twenty-five states but failed to achieve national anti-impostor legislation by the end of the Progressive Era.

After World War I, deaf community leaders suggested that a new problem had emerged, a proliferation of bona fide deaf peddlers who were using alphabet cards to ply their trade. This, coupled with ongoing employment discrimination, reminded deaf leaders of the economic vulnerability of deaf people. The NAD shifted gears and expanded its anti-impostor campaign to formally include bona fide deaf peddlers and to combat the sale of alphabet cards. Despite this shift in focus, the NAD’s campaign

against impostors and deaf peddlers was not as vigorous as its campaigns had been in preceding decades. The NAD had embarked on a crusade to establish labor bureaus for the deaf in hopes that they would improve deaf people's access to jobs and assist in combating the harm caused by deaf peddlers. This shift in focus demonstrated how deaf leaders were beginning to see the government as an active partner in improving deaf people's economic status by actively combating employment discrimination. Their campaign to establish state and federal labor bureaus for the deaf was overall a failure. The public and the government were not yet ready to be responsible for deaf people's economic wellbeing.

During the 1930s and into the World War II era, deaf people were swept up in the reforms that transformed American government and its participation in the economy. Prior to the 1930s, deaf people believed in a government of Jeffersonian ideals where self-sufficiency was preached as a virtue. After the implementation of the New Deal welfare state, deaf people increasingly looked to government to intervene on their behalf to ensure equal economic opportunities, prevent employment discrimination, and provide tools to equalize the economic playing field. Like many other Americans, there was an increased willingness to call upon the state for intervention in order to ensure a higher standard of living.² While they resisted outright welfare, they accepted work-based relief that was also available to able-bodied American citizens and accommodations that recognized inherent economic inequalities such as lack of access to benefits offered to military veterans. During the Depression, the deaf community ignored peddling by deaf people, tacitly acknowledging the difficult economic climate and high unemployment

² James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States 1945-1974*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 55.

rates among the deaf. The Impostor Bureau and the NAD's campaigns against peddling turned silent.

With American entry in the World War II and improved economic opportunities for deaf Americans, the deaf community resumed its anti-peddling activities. The deaf community had identified a new threat and once again redefined their anti-peddling campaign. The prevalent concern now was the situation of exploited vulnerable deaf people who worked for organized peddling rings. Deaf leaders acknowledged that peddlers no longer represented a direct threat to the deaf cultural community, sign language, or schools for the deaf that used sign language based pedagogical methods, although debates surrounding deaf pedagogy continued well into the 21st century.

Education and integration in education became a province of the larger minority rights movement that emerged from World War II. Framing education as a civil right rather than a privilege bestowed upon deaf children by the state allowed deaf leaders to move away from a defensive position. Deaf leaders, while still heavily invested in the quality of deaf education and its pedagogical methods, no longer saw the need to *justify* the existence or support of education for deaf children. With this need set aside, there was simply no longer the need to assign scapegoats for the perceived failures of deaf education. Peddlers also no longer represented a clear threat to sign language, deaf education, deaf people's rights to marry, operate automobiles, or other practices that sustained an autonomous deaf community. Deaf people, by then, were secure in those rights. Although deaf peddlers were no longer a looming threat to the survival of deaf schools, deaf education, and the deaf community, deaf leaders felt obligated to combat

exploitation of the vulnerable segment of their community. They undertook a vigorous campaign against organized peddling rings and beggar kings.

In the mid-1950s, the anti-peddling campaigns faded away with nary a whimper. There is not a specific event that suddenly brought the anti-peddling campaign to a halt. Several factors coalesced in the postwar period that shifted the focus of deaf community activism elsewhere. First, the anti-peddling campaigns of the postwar period had become increasingly personal for leaders such as Arthur Roberts, Tom L. Anderson, and Byron B. Burnes. The activism against peddling gangs was driven by individual personalities that appeared to have little to do with the will of the rank and file members of the deaf community. Roberts, Anderson, and Burnes won their ideological battle against peddling gangs with the implementation of the code for the regulation of itinerant sellers in 1953. After such lengthy and vigorous efforts in pursuing and finally putting a damper on the Krakover gang, there simply were no more demons to battle, no more figureheads to represent this “peddling evil.” In order to justify such a lengthy battle against the Krakovers that spanned more than a decade, community leaders had to settle for a shallow promise held by the code and declare the code as representative of their victory against peddlers.

In the 1940s and 1950s, deaf leaders centered their activism on combating underemployment and unemployment rather than public perceptions via peddling. Their concern was to focus on eradicating discrimination in employment rather than on proving deaf people as worthy or capable of employment. Deaf leaders understood that the problem of discrimination would persist regardless of what they did to challenge public perception of deaf people. Deaf workers had proved their abilities through two world

wars and yet continued to face pervasive unemployment and underemployment in the periods following each war. The solution became clear that in order for deaf people to be successfully integrated in the workforce and to achieve equal economic opportunities, the government would have to become involved.

The meaning of citizenship also changed in the post-World War II period. “The prominent emergence of civil rights activism in particular has expanded the very meaning of American citizenship. The civil rights revolution has changed what it means to be an American. It has also challenged what it means to be a Deaf person.”³ Upon the premise that all people, by virtue of their presence in the United States, were entitled to all rights of citizenship such as education and work, deaf people were no longer pressed to prove their worth as citizens in order to obtain those privileges and rights of citizenship. This also meant that deaf people could now direct their attention to combating unemployment and discrimination in employment hiring practices without diverting their energy to pursue what they once saw as the cause of discriminatory hiring practices. Peddlers and other deaf people who were unable to or did not wish to work were also availed of the newly implemented Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) as of 1956. The deaf community’s response to SSDI was double pronged. With federal assistance available to combat the underemployment and unemployment of deaf people, the deaf community was able to hide away the more obvious symbols of deaf vagrancy and preserve the public perception of deaf people as able workers as they had demonstrated in the factories during World War II. Although SSDI cushioned deaf people’s economic status and hid deaf vagrancy from public view, deaf community leaders continued to feel the stigma of

³ Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900-1942*, (New York: New York University Press, 2002): 171-174.

disability and pauperism associated with the need for the provision of SSDI and Vocational Rehabilitation.

Recognizing that discrimination in employment practices was too deeply entrenched, deaf community activists could no longer rely on education or voluntary approaches as they had for so long.⁴ Deaf leaders began lobbying for expanded higher education opportunities for deaf people and moved toward the establishment of a technical college for the deaf. Deaf leaders also invested their efforts in establishing access to federal and state vocational rehabilitation agencies. Leaders were careful to frame the purposes of rehabilitation agencies, as they had framed the purposes of labor bureaus in the early 20th century. Leaders like Tom L. Anderson stressed that those rehabilitation agencies, like earlier labor bureaus, were designed to enable deaf people to be self-sufficient and did not constitute government handouts or charity.⁵ The leadership combined efforts in arenas that they believed would better serve the economic advancement of deaf people: increased access to rehabilitation agencies, the expansion of higher education, and continued improvement in the provision of education to deaf children. Eventually, the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 accomplished what deaf people had hoped for when they advocated for a federal and state bureaus of labor for the deaf in the 1920s, by protecting deaf workers from employment discrimination and providing state support that assisted deaf adults in obtaining employment.

By the 1970s, combating peddling was no longer an essential question of protecting deaf people's access to citizenship. By then, deaf immigrants had largely taken

⁴ Robert Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality: Deaf Americans in School and Factory, 1850-1950*, (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press), 1999: 125.

⁵ Buchanan, *Illusions of Equality*, 125.

over the peddling racket.⁶ “But even as access to better schooling and better jobs has led more and more deaf Americans to mark their distance from the ranks of the disabled, the flood of new immigrants from Latin America, Asia, and Eastern Europe in the last three decades has replenished the pool of deaf people living in isolation and need.”⁷ With immigrants at the forefront of peddling, perhaps deaf leaders saw that combating peddling was no longer a means of preserving deaf people’s status as citizens. The existence of immigrants as peddlers also underscored the problem of deaf education and discrimination against deaf people in employment venues in other parts of the world-- a problem that was beyond the scope or concern of the American deaf community.

⁶ Tim Golden and Ian Fisher, “For Deaf Peddlers, Both Opportunity and Exploitation,” *New York Times*, July 27, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/27/nyregion/for-deaf-peddlers-both-opportunity-and-exploitation.html?scp=1&sq=&st=nyt> (accessed February 16, 2009).

⁷ Ibid.

Epilogue: Deaf Slavery in America

Deaf peddlers continue to ply their trade in the United States. The deafhood movement of the twenty-first century urges deaf people to reject notions of class, race, gender, multiple disabilities, and other divisive ideas to embrace the ideology that all deaf people have a common shared experience and a common goal: that all deaf people are one people, one community with one common enemy: audism.¹ In addressing the shunning of deaf peddlers, deafhood movement leaders urge deaf people to embrace peddlers and refrain from judging their choices in how they earn their living. In fact, deaf people are urged to abandon their historic and deep-rooted prejudice against peddlers and support deaf peddlers by buying their wares out of a sense of deaf solidarity. While noble, this neglects an important aspect of twenty-first century deaf peddling.

Many deaf peddlers in the United States are slaves. Some are American citizens exploited by operators of peddling rings also known as peddler kings. Peddler kings are often deaf themselves, much like the beggar kings of the postwar period. They stand accused of exploiting their deaf brethren, just as the beggar kings, Leon Krakover and the Paxton brothers, of the 1940s were accused of doing.² Although a number of peddlers in peddling rings are citizens or legal immigrants, the majority of deaf peddlers are

¹ Tom Humphries first defined the term ‘audism’ in his dissertation in the 1970s: “Audism is the notion that one is superior based on one’s ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears.” Tom Humphries, “Communicating Across Cultures (deaf-/hearing) and Language Learning” (PhD diss., Union Institute and University, 1977), 12.

² Golden and Fisher, “For Deaf Peddlers, Both Opportunity and Exploitation.”

immigrants smuggled into the United States.³ This problem is not limited to the United States. Similar cases of peddling rings holding deaf immigrants as virtual slaves have also been discovered in Western Europe.⁴ Authorities have compared peddling rings of deaf people to prostitution rings that exploit vulnerable immigrants in developed countries.⁵ Like their hearing counterparts, deaf immigrants make the trip across borders in search of better lives for themselves and their children. Authorities believe deaf immigrants are more vulnerable to exploitation due to limited familial and social networks in the United States in addition to linguistic barriers, disability, and limited access to education available to disabled children in developing countries.⁶ Furthermore, deaf immigrants share some challenges with deaf Americans. For example, immigrant or not, deaf people confront persistent difficulties in finding employment in the United States. While deaf Americans can fall back on Social Security Administration benefit entitlements, immigrants have no such recourse. Deaf immigrants are then placed in a situation where they have little choice but to resort to peddling to make a living.⁷

Although economic opportunities and access to education are problematic for deaf people in the United States, the prospects are far brighter in America than in most parts of the world. Deaf immigrants hold onto hope that their lives will improve as deaf people in the United States and hold the view that regardless of how difficult their lives are in America, their prospects are far worse in their native lands. “It’s a horrible life for them

³ Hector Tobar and Patrick J. McDonnell, “Deaf Mexicans Were Moved Through L.A. to New York,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1997, <http://articles.latimes.com/1997/jul23/local/me-15517> (accessed February 18, 2009).

⁴ John Lichfield, “French police stop deaf-mute begging swindle,” *The Independent*, May 1, 2000, <http://license.icopyright.net/user/viewFreeUse.act?fuid=MjcwNzM> (accessed February 16, 2009).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Tobar and McDonnell, “Deaf Mexicans Were Moved Through L.A. to New York.”

⁷ Hector Tobar and Patrick J. McDonnell, “Deaf L.A. Peddlers Say They Know N.Y. Sellers,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 1997, <http://articles.latimes.com/1997/july/25/local/me-16247> (accessed February 16, 2009).

there [in the United States], but it's even more horrible here [Mexico].”⁸ In developing countries, education for deaf children is limited, underfunded, and available only to a scant percentage of deaf children due to governments that do not have the will or resources to enforce school attendance.⁹

The lack of education and employment opportunities in developing countries for deaf people has created a bonanza for human traffickers and exploiters. Operators of peddling rings travel to Mexico and recruit vulnerable deaf people, promising them jobs and better lives in the United States.¹⁰ Peddler kings also recruit immigrants already in the United States who are unable to find other work. After immigrants are smuggled into the United States or recruited in large immigrant centers in the American southwest, they are transported east to large cities such as Chicago and New York. Peddler kings enslave the immigrants and put them to work as peddlers selling pens, key-chains, and other trinkets, usually for \$1 each.¹¹ Echoing the peddlers of the postwar period, modern day peddlers also carry cards with messages stating: “I am deaf”, or “please pardon my intrusion, but I am a deaf person trying to earn for college expenses.”¹² Regardless of circumstances, some degree of coercion is often a basic part of the arrangements between the peddler kings and their peddlers.¹³

Modern day peddler kings and deaf slavery came to light when, in 1997, four deaf peddlers entered a police station in New York City and beseeched the police to help

⁸ Mark Fineman, “Home Holds Little Hope for Migrants,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1997, <http://articles.latimes.com/1997/jul/26/news/mn-16502> (accessed February 16, 2009).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Tobar and McDonnell, “Deaf Mexicans Were Moved Through L.A. to New York.”

¹¹ Tobar and McDonnell, “Deaf L.A. Peddlers Say They Know N.Y. Sellers.”

¹² Golden and Fisher, “For Deaf Peddlers, Both Opportunity and Exploitation.”

¹³ Ibid.

them.¹⁴ They revealed stories of regular abuse such as being chained to a bed for a week, beatings, torture by stun guns, rape, exploitation, and 18-hour workdays.¹⁵ They were not allowed to go ‘home’ unless they had earned \$100 for the day.¹⁶ Ringleaders of peddling rings threatened to turn the peddlers over to immigration officials or kill them as a means of keeping them under their power.¹⁷ New York City police then raided a two-bedroom apartment in Queens and discovered 62 terrified men, women, and children imprisoned in crowded, filthy quarters; 44 people crammed into one apartment and 18 others in a second apartment.¹⁸ These peddlers were employed as part of a coast-to-coast peddling ring operated by the Paoletti family. The Paoletti ring existed as early as 1988 and remained undetected by authorities until the 1997 New York raid. The estimated earnings of the Paoletti ring ranged from \$200,000 to \$1 million per year.¹⁹

The Paoletti ring bust revealed the lives of deaf peddlers who were being exploited and subject to beatings, torture, rape, unwanted sexual advances, false imprisonment, and forced to live in inhumane conditions. As illegal immigrants, those peddlers were disenfranchised and living in fear. They also confronted tremendous linguistic barriers because many came from countries where deaf education is scarce, many lacked fluency in their native languages and in the languages of their adopted country-both written and signed, did not know the sign language of their native countries,

¹⁴ Deborah Sontag, “Dozens of Deaf Immigrants Discovered in Forced Labor,” *New York Times*, July 20, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/20/nyregion/dozens-of-deaf-immigrants-discovered-in-forced-labor.html?scp=1&sq=&st=nyt> (accessed February 16, 2009).

¹⁵ Ian Fisher, “U.S. Indictment Describes Abuses of Deaf Mexican Trinket Sellers,” *New York Times*, August 21, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/08/21/nyregion/us-indictment-describes-abuses-of-deaf-mexican-trinket-sellers.html?scp=1&sq=&st=nyt> (accessed February 18, 2009).

¹⁶ Sontag, “Dozens of Deaf Immigrants Discovered in Forced Labor.”

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¹⁸ “62 Deaf Mexicans Freed From ‘Virtual Slavery’ in N.Y.” *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1997, <http://articles.latimes.com/1997/jul/20/news/mn-14629> (accessed February 16, 2009).

¹⁹ Fisher, “U.S. Indictment Describes Abuses of Deaf Mexican Trinket Sellers.”; “2 Held for Exploiting Deaf Immigrants in Chicago,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 1997, <http://articles.latimes.com/1997/jul/27/news/mn-16832> (accessed February 16, 2009).

and were often illiterate.²⁰ Due to linguistic barriers and fears of deportation, many felt unable to seek assistance from law enforcement authorities.²¹ Many also lived under the threat of bodily harm being committed against their loved ones, both in the United States and abroad, if they broke ranks and turned against the peddler kings.

Authorities later uncovered peddling rings in Chicago, Los Angeles, and even smaller towns like Sanford, North Carolina. In addition to those rings, the deaf immigrant community in Los Angeles alluded to the existence of at least 30 smaller rings of deaf peddlers in the Los Angeles area alone.²² After the grisly details of deaf enslavement by human traffickers were revealed in 1997, the Department of Justice established the National Immigration and Naturalization Service Anti-Exploitation Task Force. The Task Force was responsible for investigating “similar cases of ‘abuse, coercion and extortion of immigrants’ nationwide.”²³

Deaf peddlers, natives and immigrants alike, represent the problem of exploitation in the United States and Western Europe. They are symbolic of the underlying problems of limited access to education for children with disabilities, pervasive underemployment and unemployment of people with disabilities, and ineffective protection from social, legal, and economic discrimination based on disability. The existence of deaf peddlers reminds us, as a society and as a global community, to continue our work in improving access and rights for people with disabilities. In 2006, the United Nations passed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in an effort to urge all countries to work toward full integration of disabled people and to make progress toward preventing

²⁰ Tobar and McDonnell, “Deaf L.A. Peddlers Say They Know N.Y. Sellers.”

²¹ Deborah Sontag, “Dozens of Deaf Immigrants Discovered in Forced Labor.”

²² Golden and Fisher, “For Deaf Peddlers, Both Opportunity and Exploitation.”

²³ Tobar and McDonnell, “Deaf L.A. Peddlers Say They Know N.Y. Sellers.”

the exclusion and exploitation of disabled people across the globe. As long as illiteracy, underemployment, limited access to education, and ineffective protective legislation exists then the exploitation and marginalization of our global community's most vulnerable populations, such as the deaf and disabled, persist.

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Percival Hall Presidential Papers

Robert O. Lankenau Collection

Tom L. Anderson Collection

ASSOCIATION PROCEEDINGS AND PAPERS, 1880-1956

Empire State Association of the Deaf

Minnesota Association of the Deaf

National Association of the Deaf

Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf

World's Congress of Deaf Mutes

NEWSPAPERS, PERIODICALS, AND ANNUALS

The American Deaf Citizen

California News

California Outlook

The Cavalier

The Companion

The Deaf

The Deaf Carolinian

Deaf Mute's Journal

Digest of the Deaf

The Florida School Herald

The Frat

The Independent

The Jewish Deaf

Los Angeles Times

Mississippi Bulletin

Mississippi Voice

The Morning Herald

N.A.D. Bulletin

NADIC

New York Journal of the Deaf

New York Times

Oakland Tribune

Pennsylvania Society News

Silent Cavalier

The Silent Observer

Silent Worker

Western Pennsylvanian

The Wisconsin Times

GOVERNMENT RECORDS AND PUBLICATIONS

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