

convent, Les Célestins. He died in Paris on Christmas Eve 1789, and the following year the Paris Commune installed the bereft pupils in Les Célestins. The director of the institution was Abbé Sicard, an ideologue whom Abbé de l'Épée had trained but would not have wished to see as his successor.

—*Jean-René Presneau*

*See also* Deaf, History of the; Pierre Desloges; Sign Language.

## ▣ DEAF, HISTORY OF THE

The history of deaf people has been written as a history of hearing perceptions of deaf people, as a history of the education of deaf people and as the history of the lives and communities of deaf people themselves. This history embodies some of the major strands of disability studies scholarship: the reactions of outsiders to those with a physical difference, shifting understandings of normalcy, and the existence of a community of people who create lives based on a different sensory universe than that of those around them.

### EARLY DEAF COMMUNITIES

Unique among individuals with a sensory difference in that they are also a linguistic minority, deaf people have long formed communities whenever they come together in a specific geographic location. Most scholars attribute the development of Deaf communities to the establishment of schools for the deaf and the desire of its alumni to associate with one another afterward. But there is also evidence that whenever a significant number of deaf people exist in one geographic location, they will form social relationships with one another and with hearing people who use sign language. The island of Martha's Vineyard, off the Massachusetts coast, was an example of such a community. From the seventeenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, a significant population of deaf people coexisted alongside their hearing counterparts in certain towns on the island. In these towns, nearly everyone was able to use some form of sign language and deafness was an accepted, unremarkable fact of daily life.

Communities such as that found on Martha's Vineyard are likely rare. There were few, if any, politically organized European communities of deaf people in the Early Modern era. There were, however, early small-scale attempts by European religious orders to educate the deaf children of rich noble families. Benedictine monk Pedro Ponce de Leon is the most prominent of these early teachers, and in the 1540s taught the deaf brothers Don Francisco and Don Pedro de Velasco, as well as 10 to 12 other deaf people, at his monastery. De Leon's work would be replicated in other small-scale schools throughout Europe, but state sponsorship of Deaf education would begin only in the eighteenth century.

### THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The Enlightenment brought about a new faith in reason and a new curiosity on the part of scholars on the ability of deaf people to achieve rational and abstract thought. In this period, the education of deaf people attracted prominent attention, and historians have generally pointed to Paris as the crucible of Deaf education in the modern era. In Paris, the Abbé Charles-Michel de l'Épée founded what would eventually become the first state-supported school for deaf children, today known as the Institut National des Jeunes Sourds (INJS). Beginning with a class for two deaf sisters, de l'Épée's school served as a model and source of inspiration for the establishment of other European schools. These schools generally followed the INJS's use of a signed language to teach deaf children in their national spoken and written language. A school established in Leipzig, Germany, in 1778 by Samuel Heinicke exemplified the "oral method," a method emphasizing training in speechreading and articulation as a means for deaf people to learn their national language.

#### *The Methods Debate*

The respective methods used by de l'Épée and Heinicke became touchstones in a centuries-long "methods debate" in the field of Deaf education. On one side are those who supported the use of sign language to teach deaf children in both subject matter

and their national written language. On the other side are those who saw the use of sign language as hindering deaf people's ability to learn to speechread and orally speak the national spoken language. (This claim has been disproved. Linguists today recognize the use of sign language actually enhances second-language acquisition in both deaf and hearing children.) Generally speaking, both sides supported teaching deaf people to speak; the difference lay in how much sign language would be used and how much emphasis would be given to speech training. The users of "sign method" or "manual method" decried what they felt was an overemphasis on speech training to the exclusion of academic content. De l'Épée and Heinicke entered a debate in the 1780s over the merits of their respective methods, a debate judged by the rector and fellows of the Academy of Zurich to have been won by de l'Épée. This was hardly the end of the matter, and the "methods debate" has figured prominently in nearly every history of deaf people written to date.

As with any ideological debate, the true positions taken by historical actors have varied considerably across time. Those who supported the use of sign language also sought to minimize its use, and those who supported oral teaching also used some sign language. The popularity of one or another method at different points in history has not been solely contingent on internal factors in the field of Deaf education or the wishes of deaf people themselves (which have generally been supportive of sign language), but also on the surrounding social and cultural context in which deaf people lived.

## THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Deaf education in the first part of the 1800s was largely inspired by an impulse to save deaf people's souls, to ensure they received sufficient religious training to understand the word of God. In the United States, this period is generally known as the heyday of manualism. In 1817, a deaf teacher from the INJS, Laurent Clerc, together with an American evangelist, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, established what is today known as the American School for the Deaf, the first school for deaf people in the Western Hemisphere, in

Hartford, Connecticut. Aside from a short stint as principal of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf in Philadelphia, Clerc would go on to teach at the school for the next 41 years. Clerc's influence cannot be understated: Through his interactions with his deaf students, his French Sign Language (LSF) influenced the makeup of contemporary American Sign Language (ASL). Through the apprenticeship and training of teachers at the American School, Clerc shaped an entire generation of American teachers of deaf people. A well-educated user of early ASL and written English (as well as French and LSF), a pious Christian and an upstanding citizen, Clerc was an exemplar of what Deaf education could achieve in this period.

The late nineteenth century saw a shift in public discourse on deaf people, which emphasized the need for training deaf people to become good national citizens. While there is some discussion among historians on just how much ASL was suppressed in the United States during the Progressive Era, it is generally agreed that the oralist method had the momentum in this period. The number of deaf teachers in schools declined and the oralist method was predominantly the method of choice in classroom at schools for deaf people. The reasons for its rise are complex, but can be traced back to a shift to assimilation into national spoken-language communities as the primary motivation behind educating deaf people. The influx of immigrants led to nativist fears in American society, and oralists saw speech training as the best way to assimilate deaf people into modern American society. The social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century supported an oralist discourse that portrayed sign language and its users as relics of a primitive era, now superseded by the "modern" use of spoken language and "modern" pedagogical techniques in speech training.

The portrayal of deaf people as evolutionary throwbacks resonated in an era that saw the creation of ideas of "normalcy" and "degeneracy." Deaf people were no longer seen as children of the Enlightenment, but rather as imperfections in the public body. In 1883, Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone and a prominent supporter of the oral method, posed the threat of a "deaf-mute variety of the human race" and urged measures preventing the "intermarriage" of deaf

people. Bell's ideas about educating deaf children with their hearing peers were gradually enacted, but the marriages of deaf people in the United States was never forbidden by legislative statute. In fact, deaf people have consistently married one other in high rates, feeling most at home with one another.

### *Organized Deaf Communities*

From early beginnings in urban centers or schools for deaf people, Deaf communities in the United States and Europe established formal associations at the local, state or provincial, and national levels in the nineteenth century. A number of Deaf community periodicals were established in this period and widely reprinted from their counterparts in other states and nations, thus further expanding community networks beyond local connections. In the United States, these periodicals were either independently run or part of the "Little Paper Family" of papers printed by schools for the deaf. European and Australian periodicals were commonly published by missionaries and religious workers. Through periodicals, associations, and organizations, deaf people sought both to maintain a community of their own and foster their full participation in public life. The United States National Association of the Deaf (NAD), the first organization of deaf or disabled people in the Western Hemisphere, was founded in 1880, and still exists today. Similar associations of and for deaf people were established across the world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These associations have largely been concerned with ensuring the place of sign language in the education of deaf people and securing the rights of deaf people to participate in all aspects of daily life.

## THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The twentieth century saw the twin factors of the ongoing suppression of sign language in the schools and the increasing importance of clubs and associations of deaf people as sites of cultural and linguistic interaction. International organizations were also established, the Comité International des Sports des Sourds and the World Games of the Deaf (today known as Deaflympics) being founded in 1924 and the World

Federation of the Deaf in 1951. Deaf people in the early twentieth century were largely concerned with maintaining a foothold in the new industrial age; access to blue-collar employment opportunities was a dominant concern, and the NAD led several campaigns to ensure employers and the general public saw deaf people as good workers and contributing citizens and taxpayers. Deaf Europeans did the same in their own countries. Books such as Albert Ballin's 1930 *The Deaf-Mute Howls* and the 1932 German film *Misjudged People* tried to counter popular impressions of deaf people as inferior. In their own media, deaf people represented themselves to hearing society as healthy, vigorous, and thoroughly modern individuals.

### *World War II*

World War II proved to be a boon to deaf Americans; as hearing men went to the front, employers hired deaf people to take their place. The rubber factories of Akron, Ohio, employed large numbers of deaf workers and became a Deaf Mecca of sorts during the war years. In Nazi-occupied Europe, however, deaf people became targets of Nazi persecution. During the 1930s, 17,000 deaf people were sterilized. Under Nazi rule, a number of deaf Germans were sterilized, underwent forced abortions, or were killed. Deaf Jews were also sent to concentration camps; only 34 of Berlin's prewar population of 600 deaf Jews survived the war. Altogether, an estimated 1,600 deaf people died at the hand of the Nazis.

### *The Twentieth-Century Deaf Renaissance*

The rediscovery of sign language by Dr. William Stokoe in the 1960s, together with his deaf research assistants Dorothy Casterline and Carl Croneberg, led to a renaissance within the Deaf community. This research in sign language, together with a social climate generally more amenable to difference—be it in hair length, skin color, or language use—brought about a corresponding change in how hearing people saw deaf people and deaf people saw themselves. After years of oralist strength, deaf people were able to advocate for the increased use of sign language in Deaf education. Deaf American Roy Holcomb was a leader in the 1970s total communication movement,

which advocated the use of all possible means to educate deaf children, which often panned out in practice to mean speaking and signing simultaneously. ASL was increasingly accepted for foreign language credit in colleges and universities across the country in the 1980s and 1990s. A growing body of research on sign language led deaf leaders, also inspired by research into bilingual education models with other linguistic minorities, to establish a bilingual-bicultural approach to Deaf education, which stressed the use of ASL as the native language of deaf children and the parallel acquisition of English, which would follow from this native language base.

A prominent example of the global Deaf awareness movement of the late twentieth century is the 1988 “Deaf President Now!” protest over the appointment of a hearing person, Elizabeth Zisner, to head Gallaudet University, the world’s only liberal arts university for deaf people. After a week of protest by American deaf people and generally positive coverage of their demands for a “Deaf president now” in the national media, I. King Jordan was appointed the first deaf president of the college on March 13, 1988. The “Gallaudet Revolution” was only the most prominent of a number of largely localized political activities by deaf people around the world aimed at putting deaf people in positions of control over their own lives and restoring the use of signed languages in Deaf education.

Deaf communities have prospered across the world for several centuries and are now politically organized in a myriad of organizations on all levels: local, national, and international. Deaf people have long participated both in their own cultural community and that of the larger cultural community they live in. In the twenty-first century, the increasingly widespread use of cochlear implants, an auditory enhancement device, has brought about a resurgence of the oralist philosophy and the medical/education nexus. As well, research into the genetic causes of deafness presents deaf people with, quite literally, an existential dilemma. Hearing perceptions of deafness could very well lead to the elimination of certain genetic forms of deafness and a sharp reduction in the size of Deaf communities worldwide. The history of deaf people to date, however, has been one of survival and indeed, prosperity, in the face of a

larger society that knows little of their lives and their languages.

—Joseph J. Murray

**See also** Abbé Charles-Michel de l’Épée; Alexander Graham Bell; Deafness, on Martha’s Vineyard; Edward Miner Gallaudet; Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet; Oralism.

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## ☐ DEAF CULTURE

### CULTURE DEFINED

Culture is quite possibly one of the most difficult notions to grasp at any time in recorded history. As Raymond Williams has said, *culture* is

one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. This is so partly because of its intricate historical development in several European languages, but mainly because it has come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines, and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought. (as quoted in Ladd 2003:197)

There have been a plethora of attempts to define this concept, with virtually no two reading the same. It is not the goal in this entry to attempt a redefinition of the complex notion of culture. Instead, this entry builds on the prevalent perspectives that define *culture* as a group of people's "way of life," which involves "cultural practices" that function to signify, or rather to "[produce] meaning," including practices in the United States such as pop music, soap opera, and comics (Storey 1998:2). Or in other words. "a set of control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions . . . for the governing of behavior" (Geertz 1973:44). Therefore, "by definition, cultures are highly specific systems that both explain things and constrain how things can be known" (Padden and Humphries 1988:24).

### DEAF CULTURE

However Deaf culture is approached, it is presented as having to do with this particular group of people and their way of life, their behaviors, their means of interacting, their belief systems, and their systems of knowing and knowledge.

#### *Visual Way of Being: Linguistic*

In the United States, and the world in general, the majority culture (hearing) focuses on deaf as an issue

of hearing loss, emphasizing the idea that deaf people are people who are lacking something. However, for those members of Deaf culture, hearing is not put to forefront, nor is its supposed loss a concern or factor of identity. Deaf people have a value system that reveals a different foundation—not a value of that which is heard, but instead a value of that which is seen. Edward Hall (1982) points out that "people of different cultures not only speak different languages but, what is possibly more important, inhabit different sensory worlds" (p. 2). As George Veditz (1912), a deaf leader in the early twentieth century, exhorted, deaf people are "first, last, and all the time, the people of the eye" (p. 30). The visual way of being for deaf people is inherent and present in all aspects of their lives. And the foundation of this existence is in their visual communication system. As Bahan (2004) asserts, "Deaf people, being of a human variety, have refused to be reduced to the status of things and found ways to communicate visually and developed visual languages. That is the essence of their being. All other things are constructed around this, channeled through and by vision" (p. 3).

The existence of the use of a visual gestural communication system by deaf people has been documented as far back as ancient Greece. In *Cratylus*, Socrates poses a question to Hermogenes, "Suppose that we had no voice or tongue, and wanted to communicate with one another. Should we not, like the deaf and dumb, make signs with the hands and head and the rest of the body?" (Plato 1961:457).

It has been observed that a deaf child born anywhere in the world will, as she grows up, whether surrounded by visual linguistic input or isolated from regular communication among those who hear and speak, develop home signs as means of expressing herself. This development has been shown to emulate the natural language acquisition process. It is within the being of deaf people to do so given that society does not intervene (see Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan 1996; Goldin-Meadow 1985, 2003). As Deaf schools were established, different deaf people were brought together and with them different home signs, allowing for the emergence and eventual development into a complete linguistic system. Various signed languages of the world, such as French Sign Language and Nicaraguan Sign Language, were born from such