Literature

American Sign Language has a rich literary tradition. The storyteller and the story have an important role to play in the bonding of the Deaf-World and the transmission of its heritage and accumulated wisdom. Storytelling develops early in residential schools for Deaf children, where youngsters recount in ASL the idiosyncratic mannerisms of hearing teachers and the plots of cartoons, westerns, and war movies. (Because these films and television programs were frequently uncaptioned, they used to challenge the young storyteller's craft and imagination more than they do today.) Some children soon emerge as the ones with the most loyal and sizable audiences. Those children self-identify as storytellers, a fact which is confirmed by their audiences. Their craft is perfected as they watch Deaf adults tell stories at home, at school, at the Deaf club, or at various cultural events. In later life, at the Deaf club for example, the self-identified storyteller volunteers to tell a story at some event. This later storytelling is sometimes more formal—for example, bearing witness to the acts and character of important Deaf figures or to significant events (how we founded the club) or relating part of Deaf culture (the abbé de l'Épée meets the two Deaf sisters). In order to become a storyteller, it seems one must be able to control language and nonverbal communication, react to audience response, and make suitable selections from a repertory of stories. Naturally, being a successful storyteller also requires one to be observant and feel the pulse of the Deaf-World, and what one learns is then reflected in the way one selects and relates the stories.

As in many if not all cultures, there are archetypal stories in the Deaf-World. One genre is the “success story,” with the following skeletal structure: The protagonist grows up in an exclusively hearing environment, never having met any Deaf people. Later he meets a Deaf person who teaches him signed language and instructs him in the way of Deaf people’s lives. He becomes more and more involved in the Deaf-World and leaves his past behind. Carol Padden points out that in much the same way as Americans support and propagate the “American Dream,” these Deaf success stories reinforce the belief that it is good and right to be Deaf.

Another widespread genre is the legend of origins. One such story in hearing cultures is that of the founding of Rome, in which a wolf suckles
Romulus and Remus, twins fathered by the god Mars. The Deaf story of the abbé de l’Epée, and how he founded Deaf education, has been told and retold countless times in America as well as in many other lands (the legend as told at the Deaf club in Marseilles, France, appears in this book in abridged form in chapter 3). It tells of Epée’s encounter with two Deaf sisters that led him to establish the first schools for the Deaf, which would become small Deaf communities in cities and towns all over the world, where a signed language of broader communication frequently was formed, and where young Deaf children could receive their Deaf heritage. Indeed, the long tradition in France of calling Epée “the father of the Deaf” may have its roots in calling “father” the man who presides at the moment of origin and gives rise to that origin.

There is a legend of origins unique to the Deaf-World in the U.S. It is the story of how Thomas Gallaudet met the little Deaf girl, Alice Cogswell, and was led to found the first school for the Deaf in the U.S. It is striking to notice the parallels. Both Epée and Gallaudet are humble hearing people, both are seeking a calling in life, and both are quite ignorant of the Deaf-World and its unfair exclusion from education. Both have an epiphany, thanks to young Deaf women. They must acquire the signed language, symbolically enter the Deaf-World that far, and then they are in a position to help Deaf people get access to education and, most important, to one another. Both genres, the success story and the legend of origins, move from the individual to the social, from silence to communication.

The same affirmation of community and redemption through identification with the Deaf-World can be seen in the classic American Deaf folk tale, “Sign Language Saves a Life,” recounted in Jack Gannon’s Deaf Heritage. Here is the basic story line: A teenage Southern boy, Joshua Davis, was squirrel hunting on his hearing parents’ plantation during the Civil War when he found himself surrounded by Union soldiers. Davis pointed to his ears and gestured that he was Deaf. The soldiers shoved him to a nearby house where his parents said that he was indeed Deaf. But the soldiers believed he was a spy “playing Deaf” and prepared to hang him. Then an officer arrived and, when told about the prisoner, fingerspelled to him “Are you Deaf?” The boy assured him he was and they conversed in signed language; it later came out that the officer had a Deaf brother. Davis was freed and after a while moved to Texas, where he raised seven
children, five of them Deaf, and lived to eighty-four, never forgetting how close he had come to death when he was eighteen. As Padden points out, the story tells what will save you if you’re Deaf—signed language; what will not—relying on primitive gestures or on speech; and who will save you—someone with a Deaf connection. All in all, Deaf--World knowledge can save your life.41

The list of literary forms in the Deaf--World is long. In chapter 4, we touched on ASL stories based on word play, and on ASL poetry and humor. In addition to theater, narratives, and legends, there are anecdotes, tales about the material culture of the Deaf community, such as mechanical clocks rigged with weights that fall at the appointed hour and awaken the Deaf owners with their vibrations. There are even tall tales, such as when the weights waken all the Deaf people in the town!42 There are allegories, like Ben’s Bird of a Different Feather, the ASL fable of a Deaf child born into a hearing family. The story is rich in caricatures of hearing people: the bogus doctor who confirms the baby eaglet’s defective straight beak and later recommends surgery; the priest and the faith healer; the principal of a school in straight-beak education. Straight Beak’s predicament, hovering between two different cultural “worlds,” is reified in two different settings: the eagle world on the mountain with his biological parents, and the straight-beaked bird world of the valley, where his adoptive family lives.43

In common with the literature of many other minority cultures, Deaf--World literature is recorded in part in the majority language, as well as in its own language. In the last century, at the same time as stories, legends, poetry and humor were passed down face-to-face in the Deaf--World, there began to appear a Deaf--World literature written in English. For example, John Carlin, born Deaf, attended the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf and became an accomplished draftsman and painter, a prominent spokesman in the Deaf--World, and a poet. The first stanza of an 1847 poem by Carlin:

I move—a silent exile on this earth:
As in his dreary cell one doomed for life,
My tongue is mute, and closed ear heedeth not:
No gleam of hope this darken’d mind assures
That the blest power of speech shall e’er be known.43

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A poem published by Raymond Luczak in 1992. *Learning to Speak* Part I, is also part of Deaf literature in English but, written a century and a half after Carlin’s. it speaks in a quite different voice about a quite different cultural understanding of Deaf. The Deaf narrator of the poem recounts boyhood scenes in a small town where there was only one other Deaf person. Gramps, a peddler. Resignedly, the boy’s parents hire a signed language teacher for him. The last stanza:

Mary Hoffman, didn’t you know what  
you had begun when  
you agreed to teach me my first, and then, the  
next sign until I couldn’t stop, not until  
I became Gramps, not mute but raging instead,  
hands howling volumes?  

A 1987 meeting devoted to ASL poetry in Rochester, New York, gave rise to the more encompassing ASL literature conferences, held at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in 1991 and 1996. These gatherings of poets, storytellers, playwrights, literary critics, and others, promote the creation, study and teaching of the literature of Deaf-World culture. They are contemporary counterparts of the Deaf literary societies that, in the U.S., date from the last century, and offer to their members storytelling, poetry, drama, debates and monologues, some serious, others humorous.

We have spoken about humor in ASL in chapter 4, where we focused on ways in which the visual/manual modality of ASL creates special opportunities for humorists to play with the rules of grammar and to entertain and enlighten us. Such humor, as we pointed out, also contains cultural messages and plays an important role in cementing the society. There is likely to be humor when Deaf people gather for banquets, conventions, dances and the like. Because humor is deeply embedded in culture, if it is presented in translation, readers or listeners who do not share the author’s culture are likely to find it not funny. This is no doubt what Sarah had in mind, in *Children of a Lesser God*, when she snapped at her speech therapist boyfriend, James, who had been boasting of how funny he was: “You’re funny in hearing,” she signed, “not Deaf.”  

French Deaf comedian Guy Bouchauveau makes the same point about the embedding of Deaf humor in Deaf culture. He noted that when Deaf adults laugh, a Deaf child
can laugh, but if the adult is a hearing person, the child is commonly excluded from the understanding and the laughter. 63

Deaf humor is frequently about oppression, as in this Deaf tale, translated from ASL:

Three people are on a train: one Russian, one Cuban, and one Deaf person. The Russian is drinking from a bottle of vodka. She drinks about half the bottle, then throws it out the window. The Deaf person looks at her, surprised. "Why did you throw out a bottle that was half full?" The Russian replies, "Oh, in my country we have plenty of vodka." Meanwhile, the Cuban, who is smoking a rich aromatic cigar, abruptly tosses it out the window. The Deaf person is surprised again and asks, "Why did you throw out a half-smoked cigar?" The Cuban replies, "Oh, in my country we have plenty of cigars." The Deaf person nods with interest. A little while later a hearing person walks down the aisle. The Deaf person grabs the hearing person and throws him out the window. The Russian and the Cuban look up in amazement. The Deaf person shrugs, "In my country we have plenty of hearing people!" 64

Deaf humor can be found not only in funny stories, caricatures, and absurd images, but also in cartooning. It is often said that Deaf people love comic strips. After all, their language is visual and comic strips, although they may contain some print, are a largely visual means of communication. Professor Lynn Jacobowitz of Gallaudet’s School of Communication has sifted through a great many Deaf cartoons and finds that their themes fall into seven categories: visual; can’t hear; linguistics; hearing dogs (a dog specially trained to respond to noises and alert owners); interpreters; politics; and response to oppression.6 As with the humor of other minorities, some of it is an outlet for anger over oppression. Some is self-deprecatory and some self-congratulatory. All of it evokes the cultural recognition response and the associated glow of solidarity.

For more than a century, publications have been an important force bonding the members of the Deaf World in the United States. Publications kept scattered Deaf people informed about the lives of their peers, school friends, and leaders. They informed Deaf people about social and political gatherings, about athletics and opportunities for employment.

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Since the Deaf have had limited access to the telephone, publications and gatherings were the two main ways of staying in touch. Because printing was a leading trade taught in the residential schools, numerous schools had their own newspapers that chronicled current events, reprinted stories from other newspapers and magazines, published poetry, and included items about prominent Deaf people such as "Dummy" Hoy, the baseball star. There were editorials, too, and discussions of Deaf education and signed language. In 1893, an organization of all the school newspapers was founded, the *Little Paper Family Editorial Association*. Other newspapers were established by Deaf publishers to serve the interests of the Deaf–World. *The Silent Worker* began early in the twentieth century as a newspaper, but was transformed into a magazine, taken over by the NAD, and renamed the *Deaf American* in 1964. In addition, many state associations of the Deaf and various agencies publish newspapers and newsletters. One that we particularly enjoy is the *DCARA News* from the Deaf Counseling, Advocacy and Referral Agency in San Leandro, California. Nowadays, leading Deaf–World newspapers nationally include *Silent News* and *The NAD Broadcaster*; leading magazines, *Deaf Life* and *Gallaudet Today*.

An important development in Deaf–World publishing in the U.S. no doubt a consequence of the growing acceptance of ASL and Deaf culture here in recent times, has been the advent of publishing houses that publish books, videotapes and other materials exclusively concerning the Deaf–World. Some of the longest-standing publishers include Gallaudet University Press, TJ Publishers, and the National Association of the Deaf. However, a new breed of more focused publishers has been growing since the mid 1980s, for example, DawnSignPress in San Diego, California (emphasis on ASL study, art, poetry, and literature, including Ben's *Bird of a Different Feather*), and Sign Media in Burtonsville, Maryland (ASL and Deaf culture, including an ASL version on videotape of Harlan's *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf*). To facilitate the dissemination of publications relating to Deaf culture, distributors have proliferated, among them Harris Communications and the GLAD (Greater Los Angeles Council on Deafness), DCARA, NAD, and Gallaudet University bookstores.
SHARED OPPRESSION

Four common characteristics of minorities that underpin affiliation are (1) the group shares a common physical or cultural characteristic, such as skin color or language, (2) individuals identify themselves as members of the minority and others identify them in that way, (3) there is a tendency to marry within the minority, and (4) minority members suffer oppression. The Deaf–World finds unifying force on all four counts. First, its members share a common physical characteristic: their primary source of information is vision. This is of the greatest importance as a solidifying force, for as long as human variation engenders visual people, there will be a constitutional basis for affiliation and there will be a manual-visual language. Put in other words: The Deaf–World is the one minority that can never be totally assimilated or eradicated.

To a large extent, members of the Deaf minority also share a common language (ASL in the U.S.) and, because of their common physical characteristic, that language will never die out. On the second count, Deaf people do indeed identify themselves as culturally Deaf and, third, they marry Deaf nine times out of ten. Finally, Deaf people do indeed suffer oppression. Both Carlin's and Luczak's poems, for example, reflect the oppression that members of the Deaf–World experience. On the face of it, Carlin came to see himself, living in a hearing world with hearing parents, as many hearing people saw him: isolated, limited, yearning for his "tongue to be unbound" in heaven. If so, then Carlin had internalized the oppression of the Deaf–World. Luczak, on the other hand, rages against it, "howling volumes."

Oppression is a unifying force when sufficient numbers of the oppressed minority are, like Luczak, raging, for their appeal goes forth to minimize differences within the minority in the effort to vanquish a common enemy. In some ways like the members of other language minorities that have been colonized, members of the Deaf–World frequently find themselves subjected to the wishes of outsiders pursuing an alien agenda that enhances the outsiders' economic and social standing. The Deaf person is cast in the subservient role of pupil, patient, client and employee, while the outsider, from the majority culture, takes the dominant role. The list of professions serving the Deaf is imposing and includes administra-
tors of schools for Deaf children and of training programs for Deaf adults, teachers of Deaf children and adults, interpreters, some audiologists, speech therapists, otologists, experts in schools, mental health and rehabilitation counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, librarians, researchers, social workers, and hearing-aid specialists. These interventions and services on demand are well-intentioned, and some are valued highly in the Deaf-World, but the fact remains that they are predicated on an imbalance of power that can be, and all too often is, oppressive. The point is not missed by many of the professionals involved, who individually and through their organizations have been trying to redress the balance. We will return to this theme later in our journey into the Deaf-World.

Discrimination against Deaf people in employment has been a constant part of life in the Deaf-World and has contributed to longstanding cultural customs, such as seeking jobs with the help of employed Deaf friends. This also ensures continued contact in job situations which, with the Deaf club and Deaf spouse at home, are the sequel to the Deaf school as settings for Deaf socializing and socialization.

The struggle in childhood and adolescence for language and identity is particularly keen in the Deaf-World, as we have seen, because most Deaf children, born Deaf, cannot receive from their hearing parents their Deaf language and Deaf cultural heritage. Hearing parents might well protest that their child's heritage, whether the child be Deaf or hearing, is their culture and their language, and they are quite able to pass it on. But logic and experience teach otherwise. Where there are cultures whose members have a characteristic physical constitution, all the children with that constitution are seen as the rightful recipients of that culture to some degree. As we see it, Black children, for example, however raised, have Black heritage from the day they are born. Accordingly, the National Association of Black Social Workers is opposed to trans-racial adoption on the grounds that it will deprive such children of their heritage. We need not decide at this juncture whether it is more important for these Black children to be adopted as quickly as possible or to take possession of their heritage; the relevant point is that they do have such a heritage at birth. Similarly, the Deaf child, however raised, has a Deaf heritage from birth. The child's life trajectory will normally take him or her into the Deaf-World. The Deaf child can be deprived of the opportunity to
acculturate to that world, as can the Black child, but the child's potential travels with the child. Reasonable people might, and do, reason differently on this adoption issue, but experience with regard to Deaf children is more univocal. Most children who cannot communicate well in spoken language will, when allowed to, learn signed language, become acculturated to Deaf culture, marry Deaf, and identify themselves as members of the Deaf–World.

A distinguished otologist has contended that Deaf children start out in mainstream hearing society and enter the Deaf–World in adolescence. Yet, how could Deaf children start out in hearing society when they do not speak the language of that society and have not become, through the language, acculturated to it? No, they are Deaf, even though they are frequently not allowed to take possession of their Deaf heritage until either they attend school with Deaf peers or are old enough to make their own decisions. In ethnic minorities, where culture and constitution are usually congruent, one's first loyalty may be to the family, which is the setting for acculturation as well as nurture; loyalty to the ethnic minority comes second. But most children in the Deaf–World cannot communicate with their parents who know no signed language, and while their home may be nurturing, it cannot be substantially acculturating. We speculate that those conditions engender a special measure of loyalty and commitment to the Deaf–World, where acculturation can finally take place.

The anomaly of having culturally different parents is then both a centrifugal and centripetal force in the Deaf–World. It tends to splinter and separate Deaf people in several ways. It discourages their pride in their minority identity. It delays their language acquisition. It may well lead to their education, isolated from other Deaf pupils and role models, in the local hearing school. It frequently commits them, through articulation drills and cochlear implant surgery, to values and behaviors repellent to members of the Deaf–World. At the same time, the anomaly propels Deaf people toward the Deaf–World, since identification with the Deaf–World offers pride, language, instruction, role models, a culturally compatible spouse, and more that cannot be had elsewhere.
DIVERSITY IN THE DEAF-WORLD

Since visual people are found in all ethnic groups and walks of life in the U.S., our DEAF-WORLD is extraordinarily diverse. In a nation committed to the principle that we are all created equal, it is heartening to see one community that embraces its diversity so extensively (though not utterly without bigotry). At a recent meeting of the Boston Deaf Club, for example, gathered to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary, we noted Black, Hispanic, and Asian members of the DEAF-WORLD. There were many women members (including the president), and numerous older members (some of the founders were given plaques on this occasion). There were Gay and Lesbian members. There was a table of Deaf-Blind members, each accompanied by a Deaf interpreter, and there were members with other disabilities. To some degree, then, shared language, culture, and experience attenuate the differences in the DEAF-WORLD that are so divisive outside it.

Although there are many forces that bind Deaf people together in the DEAF-WORLD, there is also discrimination when it comes to gender and sexual orientation, ethnicity, and disability. Thus, women did not gain equal standing with men in the DEAF-WORLD for a long time. It was one hundred years after the founding of the NAD when it elected its first woman president. Gertrude Galloway. Today there are distinguished Deaf women political leaders, scholars, actresses, artists, athletes, business people, teachers, and so on. There is also a social, political, and charitable organization to promote the interests of Deaf women, called Deaf Women United, Inc. (DWU). Nevertheless, stereotypes about women endure in the DEAF-WORLD, as they do in our larger society. A Massachusetts survey concerning gender roles in 1993 found, for example, views on ironing clothes particularly marked. Deaf women definitely thought it was their job. Deaf and hearing men agreed that it was women’s work, but to a lesser degree than the Deaf women. Hearing women were much less convinced that ironing was women’s work, though they, too, rated it slightly more a female task than a gender-neutral task.

Black Deaf Americans have a triple heritage. Their lives are shaped historically by Black culture in America. The U.S. Black community is highly diverse, embracing people with French, Spanish and African heritages. Then there is the Deaf heritage that Blacks share with other mem-
bers of the DEAF-WORLD, to which this chapter is addressed. In addition, there is a long Black Deaf tradition in America's Deaf community, which reaches back to the special residential schools for "colored" children that were founded in the mid-nineteenth century and abolished about a century later. A distinct Black dialect of ASL arose in that setting, as we mentioned in chapter 3, and continues in use. It is only partly intelligible to most white Deaf speakers of ASL. "In the early 1950s, thirteen states were operating separate and segregated schools for Black Deaf children, where the emphasis was on vocational training. As late as 1963, eight states still had separate schools for these children. Many of these schools had close and valuable ties to historically Black colleges, from which vocational and academic teachers were often recruited; those ties were broken when desegregation closed the schools and sent the pupils into formerly all-white schools for the Deaf. Numerous Black clubs have been founded over the years, most recently by and for Black women, an outgrowth of the women's rights movement of the 1970s. "Studies of Black people in the Chicago and Washington, DC Deaf communities in the 1980s reported that clubs and congregations were segregated, and the races rarely intermingled. "The history of Black Deaf culture cries out for scholarly investigation, but it has received very little indeed.

Today, the National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA), along with several regional programs, pursues the agenda of their double minority. "NBDA, founded in 1982, now has nineteen chapters serving over 700 members. There is much to do. There are low expectations of Black Deaf children. There are too few Black Deaf teachers and other professionals. There is a lack of Black interpreters (the National Alliance of Black Interpreters counts sixty-eight members). There is little awareness of Black Deaf history and culture and of the achievements of Black Deaf leaders, such as rehabilitation expert Glenn Anderson, chair of the Gallaudet University Board of Trustees. "

Earlier we emphasized the common bonds in the DEAF-WORLD that unite minorities within the minority. However, the continuing segregation of some Deaf clubs, and the decision of Black Deaf people to form their own national organization, remind us of some of the tensions on those bonds. "A sampling of the Black Deaf community in Washington, DC, found that eighty-seven percent identify themselves as Black before they
identity themselves as Deaf. (Of those who identified themselves as Deaf first, the majority had Deaf parents and had attended a residential school for the Deaf.) Black Deaf leaders point to facts such as these: Gallaudet University admitted its first Black Deaf student, Andrew Foster (of whom more later, when we examine the world Deaf scene) only in 1951, nearly a century after Gallaudet opened its doors. In 1964, there was only a handful of Black students on campus. Twenty-five years later, one hundred fifty of Gallaudet’s two thousand students were Black. There were no Black members of the National Association of the Deaf until 1965. In short, practices in the Deaf-World, as in other minorities, have reflected the massive discrimination against Black people in the larger hearing society.

Black and Hispanic children comprise a disproportionate one-third of Deaf children in the United States. In the South over half the Deaf students surveyed in a 1989 study were Black. In the West, nearly half were Hispanic. In California, sixty-one percent were from minorities. Thus, minority Deaf children are actually in the majority in some regions and their numbers are growing rapidly.

Double minority children may face double prejudice in education. Deaf children from non-English speaking families are three to four times more likely to be labeled learning disabled, mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed. It is impossible to say to what extent this labeling reflects faulty means of evaluation or downright prejudice, and to what extent it reflects real differences in prevalence of disabilities. However, as we shall show in chapter 11, Deaf students are seriously disadvantaged in psychological and achievement testing because of the English-language and cultural bias of the tests; Hispanic Deaf students are doubly disadvantaged. Likewise, Black and Hispanic Deaf children score well below white peers on achievement tests. They are more likely to drop out of high school or to be tracked into vocational rather than academic programs. Those who finish high school are less likely to go on to college. Minorities comprise thirty-seven percent of all Deaf schoolchildren but only seven percent of their teachers. Hence there is a near absence of role models for many of the children, who find little in their curriculum that relates clearly to their identity and their lives. These educational handicaps of minorities within the Deaf-World take their toll on life fulfillment, economic success, and minority leadership in the subsequent years.
Black and Hispanic Deaf children are less likely than white Deaf children to have a signed language used at home. Therefore, as a group, they have less than average opportunities for communication, and this may contribute to their academic disadvantage. Perhaps they are less likely to have Deaf family members, or perhaps their parents are less able to find signed language classes that suit their schedules and neighborhood. Language plays a central role in Hispanic culture, yet Hispanic parents will have great difficulty in teaching Spanish to their Deaf children, and their efforts will not be seconded by the school. Roberto Rivera, at the Metro Silent Club, reported that his mother spoke no English, his father only a little, and neither knew ASL. But Roberto’s best languages were ASL and English. Spanish can be a barrier not only within the family, but also between the family and the school. The Hispanic Deaf pupil in the U.S. is inevitably engaged in an effort to master three languages and their expressive forms: the language of the home and the language of the school (neither of which is fully accessible), and the language of the Deaf–World. Hispanic children who are immigrants to the U.S. will arrive with a significant disadvantage if they come from countries in which education is not available to many Deaf children or in which it is conducted orally. Although hearing Hispanic children nationwide receive bilingual and bicultural education, they are usually deprived of that opportunity if they are Deaf, which is all the more regrettable since bilingual/bicultural education has much to offer ASL-speaking children (as we will argue in chapter 10). Hispanic Deaf adults are also disadvantaged: interpreters, relay services, and appropriate captioning are very rare. The National Hispanic Council of the Deaf, founded in 1992, has been laboring to promote the interests of this minority.

Terms like Black and Hispanic can mask the enormous diversity of the adults and children so designated. The term Hispanic, for example, includes individuals whose ancestors were born in the U.S. together with those who have immigrated recently. It combines people from homes where only English is spoken, and homes where one or another variety of Spanish is spoken. It pools people with cultural backgrounds as different as those of mainland Spain, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela. The category Asian and Pacific Island also exists more for bureaucratic reasons than by any logic. The Census Bureau acknowledges some seventeen different
groups in this category: some are refugees from the Vietnam War; others come from centuries-old U.S. families. There has been a large influx of this disparate group in recent decades. In 1991, forty percent of immigrants were from Latin American countries and another forty percent from Asian/Pacific Island countries. Many Deaf immigrants arriving on U.S. shores find that their signed language is utterly unknown in the U.S. Deaf–World. Still others arrive without any signed language. Approximately four percent of Deaf schoolchildren in the U.S. come from the Asian and Pacific Island group. The first-ever Asian Deaf conference in the U.S. was held in San Francisco in 1994. There, participants voted to form a national organization, the Asian Association of Deaf Americans.

Native American children are also a diverse and disadantaged group. Half of them reside in rural areas. There are 278 reservations in the U.S. and 209 Alaska villages, but no two tribes have the same cultural characteristics, and many native languages are still in use. Nearly half of the children live at or below federal poverty levels. The difficulties in making language-appropriate and valid assessments of abilities and achievement, and in providing culturally sensitive educational practices, are enormous. Native American Deaf children who leave home to attend a residential school, as most do, must make difficult decisions about where and how they establish themselves after graduation: on the reservation with hearing Native American families and friends, in urban areas with the Deaf–World, or in border towns with limited access to both groups. Native Americans have the highest birth rate of the groups discussed, while their numbers in Deaf education are still small (an estimated percent), they are projected to grow. An organization of Native American Deaf people was founded in 1994 and held its first convention that year.

Gay and Lesbian Deaf people face several particular challenges within the Deaf–World. Because the community is small, and because of the premium on plain talk in ASL, it may be more difficult for Deaf than for hearing Gays and Lesbians to keep their sexual orientation private if they choose to do so. If they openly seek a partner, they may find only a small number of people within the Deaf–World eligible. This may make it more likely for Gay and Lesbian Deaf people than for other Deaf minorities to seek a partner outside the Deaf–World. Nevertheless, at least one student of Deaf Gay culture contends that Deaf Gay males are Deaf first.
and Gay second. In the wake of Gay liberation following the Stonewall riot of 1969 (initiated by an unprovoked police raid on the Stonewall, a New York City bar frequented by Gays), an international organization of Deaf Gays and Lesbians, the Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf, was founded: it has chapters in many states and provinces in North America. Deaf Gay and Lesbian people have been empowered in recent decades as never before. The first social service program in the U.S. to focus on the needs of Gay and Lesbian Deaf people opened in 1992 in San Francisco. The Deaf Gay and Lesbian Coalition (DGLC) provides peer counseling, support groups, community education, a hotline, workshops and more. Its clientele has grown exponentially.\textsuperscript{48} In the words of a recent anthology of Deaf Gay and Lesbian literature: “Oh, it is such a joy to be able to see each other’s faces without having to strain our eyes in the dark.”\textsuperscript{49}

Estimates of the number of people in the U.S. who are both Deaf and Blind vary widely: a medical source gives 16,000; a Department of Education survey estimates 42,000 by the most exclusive definition. 425,000 with a criterion of severely limited use of one sense and no use of the other.\textsuperscript{50} The number of Deaf-Blind people in the DEAF-WORLD has not been estimated. Many of these started life as sighted Deaf people, learned ASL, became acculturated to the DEAF-WORLD, and then gradually lost some or all vision. There are numerous systems of communication in use among people with severely limited sight and hearing, but signed language is favored by those in the DEAF-WORLD. When conversing in ASL, persons with restricted visual fields (tunnel vision) prefer to stand back from their interlocutor in order to see more of the signer’s face and hands and may ask the signer to restrict the signing space. For the same purpose, they may rest their hands lightly on the signer’s wrists, guiding them (this is called \textit{tracking}). With more restricted vision, Deaf-Blind people will commonly use touch to “read” the ASL, placing their hands over those of their interlocutor. The change in ASL modality, from visual to tactile sign, affects its production, since information on the face and subtle differences in the use of space are not accessible, while tension in the speaker’s hands can be detected. Modifications when producing tactial ASL include choosing one sign rather than another based on its tactile properties, and elaborating the production of a sign so that it is more readily perceived.

Interpreters serving Deaf-Blind clients provide different kinds of
information than those serving Deaf clients. For example, they will
describe who is present, what of significance is happening in the room,
the speaker’s facial expressions, and so forth. Support service providers
(SSPs) also play an important role in the lives of Deaf-Blind people, serv-
ing as guides, reading mail and other text, and in various ways facilitating
their clients’ participation in community life.

The capacity of Deaf-Blind people for education and professional
careers is more recognized today than ever before, but they are still
excluded needlessly from many kinds of employment. More than one
hundred Deaf-Blind Americans have earned college degrees and several
have gone on to obtain doctorates. The American Association of the
Deaf-Blind (600 members) promotes the interests of this minority. At the
last biennial convention of the association in 1994, there were some 250
Deaf-Blind people and 400 people working as interpreters and SSPs.

As with the other “double minorities” within the Deaf-World, this
one has several unique features. Deaf-Blind people, like Deaf people, do
not need interpreters in one-to-one conversations if both parties know
ASL. However, in a group setting, communication among Deaf-Blind
people requires several interpreters. For example, at a recent meeting of
the Boston Deaf-Blind club Contact, the club president spoke from the
stage while a score of interpreters, mostly Deaf, “relayed” her signing to
their Deaf-Blind clients, who sat beside them. This reliance on inter-
preters means that Deaf-Blind people must take special measures not to
miss out on incidental information more readily accessible to others.
Sadly, many Deaf-Blind people report that as their vision diminished, so
did their contact with Deaf people, who turned away, even at the Deaf
club. Of course, transportation and employment also pose special obsta-
cles. Nevertheless, wherever there are sizable numbers of Deaf-Blind peo-
ple and support services such as transportation and SSPs, Deaf-Blind peo-
ple commonly lead rich and rewarding lives. Computer technology, elec-
tronic bulletin boards and the Internet are also connecting Deaf-Blind
people to one another and to the rest of society as never before.

Another minority within the Deaf community is that comprised
of people with disabilities. A 1982 survey of Deaf schoolchildren found
that thirty percent had at least one such disability. However, available
estimates of prevalence are untrustworthy, because they include not only
criterion-based disabilities such as motor impairment and mental retardation, but also several categories of disability for which there are no objective criteria for membership. These categories that are not criterion-based include learning disabled and emotionally disturbed: they accounted for fourteen percent in the survey. In the years 1964–1965, a worldwide rubella epidemic caused the birth rate of Deaf infants to double and also brought about a marked increase in the number of Deaf children born with impairments such as blindness and mental retardation. The "rubella bulge" reached the schools toward the end of the decade, resulting in expanded programming to meet the needs of this special population. Mental retardation and visual and motor impairments may interfere with the Deaf child’s ability to acquire signed language and they pose additional educational challenges. Such children perform well below their Deaf peers without disabilities." At the end of their schooling, Deaf students with disabilities face limited employment opportunities. On a more positive note, the disability rights movement in the U.S. and around the world has contributed to improving conditions for people with disabilities.

Members of the Deaf–World are living longer in the U.S. while, as we have mentioned, the younger generations take less of an interest in the Deaf club. In other words, many Deaf clubs are "graying." This creates some stresses. For example, the classic flight of stairs leading up to the Deaf club, once a symbol of the club’s special status as "a place apart," has become, in Boston in any event, an obstacle to the older members. Younger and older members of the club may have somewhat different priorities when it comes to, for example, athletics. They also tend to have different backgrounds. Most older Deaf men learned trades in school and had difficulty finding jobs other than in areas such as printing and carpentry. Many older Deaf women were primarily homemakers, although some took jobs related to work like sewing. Life in industry with few or no Deaf co-workers put a premium on the easy sociability of the Deaf club. Younger Deaf men and women, however, frequently have had more educational opportunity: there is, indeed, a Deaf professional middle class in the United States. In addition to the impact of the simple changing of generations, these social differences are associated with differences in interests, resources, and language use.

Nevertheless, the bonds of membership in the Deaf–World are
much stronger than these age differences. Friendships maintained at the
club reduce social isolation for elderly Deaf people and such friendships
may also help them cope with practical problems such as transportation.
Then, too, the culture has always accorded special respect to its older
members. They frequently have the longest records of activism in behalf
of the community and they are repositories of its history. At the centenni-
al convention of the National Association of the Deaf in 1980, a Deaf
senior citizens section was formed. It was not until 1992, however, that the
first national conference of Deaf senior citizens was convened. Following
the second such conference, two years later, the National Association of
Deaf Senior Citizens was established.

Another important minority group within the Deaf-World are
codas, hearing people who are children of Deaf adults. When they are
quite young, codas in the U.S. commonly learn two languages and two
cultures: those of the Deaf-World and those of the larger hearing soci-
ety that surrounds it. Thus they commonly become signed language inter-
preters and cultural mediators while they are still children. However, per-
haps an equal number of codas do not learn ASL, many because their Deaf
parents were falsely told that using ASL inhibits learning English.

Birth order and gender play a large role in the learning of ASL by
hearing family members. Typically, the oldest child will learn ASL. If the
oldest child is a female, she almost assuredly will, for she will be assigned
many duties mediating between Deaf and hearing cultures. However,
sometimes her siblings do not learn ASL very well. In some ways, they
are like a Deaf child in a hearing family, because they grow up without
fully understanding their parents’ culture, and they must rely on others to
communicate with their parents substantively. As adults, such codas func-
tion almost totally like hearing people, even though they come from a
Deaf family. Many lead lives completely separate from their parents, and
they never share in the culture of the Deaf-World.

Most codas who learn ASL when quite young spend some time
every day mediating issues between Deaf and hearing cultures. Most of
these issues arise from the mutual ignorance of hearing and Deaf people
concerning one another’s cultures.6 Unfortunately, most Deaf parents
have nowhere to turn to learn all the rules of the hearing culture that they
sometimes need to know, and there is no place hearing people can com-


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monly turn to get accurate information regarding the Deaf–World. Codas are recurrently put in the position of explaining both worlds to members of each. Almost all codas perform this function without any training except life’s experiences. Those experiences of cross-cultural mediation can be rewarding, but frequently they are hurtful because of the prevailing negative views about Deaf people, the coda’s parents, which are held by hearing people.

Deaf parents may ask their hearing children about the hearing world, how hearing people live, about sounds, and about English. Hearing friends will ask corresponding questions about the Deaf–World. How do Deaf people use the phone? Can they drive? Since codas commonly serve, then, as a critical link to the alien hearing culture, a source of information for making decisions, and a spokesperson for the family, some grow up feeling they have been deprived of their childhood. On the other hand, they grow up with a command of the languages and cultural knowledge of two worlds, as Bob has done, and they frequently choose careers that build on those strengths.  

In a sense, the coda is “almost Deaf.” Codas possess the cultural part of being Deaf, including Deaf–World Knowledge, but they lack the physical difference and hence the experiences associated with it, experiences such as being stigmatized as deviant and attending a school for the Deaf. In effect, they are positioned between two cultures with behaviors learned from both. Deaf people’s ambivalence on codas’ standing in the Deaf–World (and codas’ own ambivalence, for that matter) seems to reflect this ambiguity in many codas’ life situations: they’ve got the culture, but they do not have the constitution. Some codas say they feel shut out from the Deaf–World, while at the same time feeling somewhat alien in hearing society. Recent decades seem to have been empowering for codas, as for other minorities in the Deaf–World. They have written a spate of autobiographies to explain their unique situation to themselves and others. In 1983, codas founded a national organization, called CODA, that brings them together for mutual reflection and support; about six years ago, the organization opened its ranks to codas around the world.

We have been examining what might be called horizontal diversity in the Deaf–World. There is stratification as well. Individuals and groups differ in their standing. As we have seen, the Deaf–World is not immune
to racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination. Deaf people have accused their own culture, which values unity and sees Deaf people as members of a family, of operating according to a "crab" theory, in which the group pulls down any of its members who crawl too high. Be that as it may, there are several ways in which members of the Deaf–World can distinguish themselves and earn the respect and appreciation of their peers: we have spoken about the storyteller and Miss Deaf America; now let’s turn to Deaf leaders.

Whether the minority leader be Martin Luther King, Caesar Chavez or Fred Schreiber, the late revered executive director of the National Association of the Deaf, the leader’s traits throw much light on how the minority culture evaluates its members. A review of contemporary Deaf leaders in America would reveal that two relatively small groups within the Deaf–World play a disproportionately large role in leading it. The first of these are leaders who were born hearing to hearing parents and became Deaf after learning to speak English. Such leaders are particularly to be found in roles and organizations that have extensive contact with the larger hearing society; we might call them *inter-cultural leaders*. Inference suggests that one of the goals of evaluation in the Deaf–World has been to select Deaf leaders who will be effective advocates for Deaf people vis-à-vis hearing people, and so it places weight on the leader’s ability to speak and write English.

A second group in the Deaf–World that is extensively represented in leadership roles are members with Deaf parents. These leaders are predominantly to be found in positions in which cultural knowledge of the Deaf–World and fluency in ASL are particularly valuable. For example, they may work in a residential school for Deaf children, hold office in a Deaf club, or manage a Deaf athletic organization. We will call them *culturally centered* Deaf leaders; they are sometimes called *grass roots leaders*. The training ground for many of them has been positions of responsibility in the residential schools, like manager of the softball team. Their skills were further honed in the Deaf club, where they were identified as having the knowledge and skills to be leaders.

This schematic picture of leadership in the Deaf–World focuses on cultural forces and thus leaves out what is most important about leaders, namely their individual traits such as charisma, skill in managing people.
physical appearance, motivation and so forth. And of course, all kinds of Deaf leaders are found in all kinds of settings. Indeed, the distinction we have made between inter-cultural leaders and culturally centered leaders appears to be breaking down. Ever since the Gallaudet Revolution (though perhaps the forces were already in play before then), the culturally centered leaders have increasingly assumed responsibilities in both inter- and intra-cultural roles.

Considering all the powerful forces that bind Deaf people together in the Deaf–World, from language, schools and sports, to organizations, arts and oppression, it is no surprise that well-acculturated Deaf men and women find great strength in their Deaf identity. As we examine the growing body of knowledge concerning Deaf people all around the globe, we find that they vary widely from one nation to the next in their ability to find that strength, to acquire a full language, a proud identity, a knowledge of Deaf heritage, and thus a gratifying place in Deaf as well as hearing society. Comparing conditions for Deaf people in a wide variety of hearing societies can help us to discover which conditions favor and which oppose the growth of strong Deaf–Worlds and strong Deaf people. We turn to that comparison in the next chapter.