



DEAF-DEAF MARRIAGES

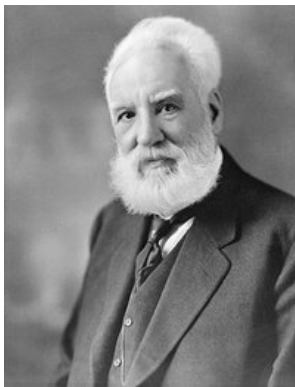
The 19th Century Deaf Response to Early Eugenics

By Joe Joseph Murray

Joe Joseph Murray was born in the United States; now he lives in Norway. Throughout his youth, Joe traversed the world, especially travelling in Europe. He was vice-president for WFDYS from 1994 to 1999, then president 1999 to 2003. He has focus on policy and legal issues. He is on the board of WFD since 2003. Currently, Joe is working on his doctorate at the University of Iowa.

Joe helped us understand Deaf Lives and about a better argumentum we can use to speak about the world of hearing and the world of Deaf: Deaf Culture. As a historian, one has to know events and their consequences. Deaf-mutes form part of the variety of the human race. But, during history, Deaf people often went against hearing ideology. Before, we were labelled as Deaf-Dumb, Deaf-mute... now Deaf. Who changed this definition? Teachers who used the oral method wanted dumb/mute removed because they believed their Deaf pupils could speak. However, many Deaf people agree with the term Deaf-mute because it is more clearer.

⇒ **Alexander Graham Bell**



Alexander Graham Bell was born in Edinburgh 1847 and died in 1922 in Canada. He was a Scottish inventor, having emigrated to Boston, Massachusetts. He was the first in 1876 to deposit the patent of the telephone and was prize winner of the Hughes Medal in 1913. Bell devoted his life to helping Deaf people learn how to speak. He was a specialist in speech therapy, one would use the term phonologist today. His parents were professors for Deaf-mute people. When his mother became deaf, Alexander Graham Bell then sought to improve speech services for deaf persons. He was a tutor for his wife and Helen Keller, as well as others. The Bell Laboratories still bear his name and focuses on oral education and improving speech therapy for deaf people.



⇒ **Before and after Bell**

Before Bell became involved with the Deaf Community, they were a very closed unit with their own schools, etc. After the invention of the telephone, Bell brought the attention of the external world into the private Deaf community. This is how oralism had a strong influence on the community.

⇒ **Deaf-Deaf marriages**

There were debates impassioned within Science between Bell and Gillett. During the end of XIXe and beginning of XXe centuries, when one was pregnant and met a Deaf-mute, it was believed that that would cause the baby to become Deaf-mute!

Gillett defended the fact of marriage between Deaf people saying it is more important that they are a happy unit. He says that the life of family is very important; it is the basis of society. There is even a written report by a Deaf-mute in 1890 criticizing marriage between Deaf and hearing persons. He observes "the marriage between one hearing and a deaf person is bad: the deaf man is considered stupid, uses his hearing wife to serve as interprets or to help him. And the deaf woman is considered subjected morally and/or physically dominated by the hearing man ".

⇒ **Appearance of eugenics**

It was 1883 when the term eugenics appeared; before, it meant "heredity". About 1890, the term changed to the concept towards perfection due to the creation of the IQ test. This intellectual measurement tends to remove mentally handicapped and other persons from the norm range. Bell's solution initially was to prevent Deaf people from one another, to enforce only oral education, remove the use of sign language and to close Deaf schools. He wanted to discourage associations between Deaf people. Bell surely initiated eugenics but the ideas were progressively built for years. The long policy of eugenics started at the beginning of the XXe century in the United States and the policy of racial cleansing continued with the Nazis. This long history launched by science and Bell continues.

These ideas have not changed; today the doctors do not accept deaf children; they have established technology to make the children "hearing" and discourage parents from signing. It is thus we refer Cochlear Implants as progressive extermination of the ethnic group of Deaf people.

Presentations

With the exit of this fantastic presentation of Joe, we composed in three groups to present three presentations on recent articles:



I - Harlan Hane, "***Ethnicity, Ethnics and Deaf world***", 2005

The Deaf world is Ethnic Group vs Disability Group:

1. Ethnic Groups have:

- Collective name
- Feeling of community
- Norms for behavior
- Values
- Knowledge
- Kinship
- Customs
- Social structure
- Language
- Art forms
- History

The Deaf-World IS an ethnic group!

It encourages people to:

- Learn our language
- Defend our heritage
- Study our ethnic history
- Accept Deaf culture

And it offers Deaf people:

- Protection and rights like any other ethnic groups under international law and treaties

2. Four reasons to reject the disability label

- Deaf people do not see themselves as disabled:

- Prefer to socialize with other Deaf
- 90% of Deaf marry other Deaf- one of the highest of any ethnic group
- Desire Deaf children like themselves

- Greater risks for the Deaf child

- **Cochlear Implant surgery** (risks, uncertain benefits, problem ethnic)

- Survival risk for the Deaf-World

- Ethnocide
- Genocide
- Medical eugenics

- Wrong solutions

- Solutions for disabled people differ from what Deaf people need
 - Language acceptance
 - Interpreting services
 - Interdependence with other Deaf
 - Deaf schools/bilingual education

3. There is HOPE:

- Society *can* adopt a different understanding of a people



- Linguists are studying sign language
- Sociologists are studying the social structure of the Deaf-World
- Historians are studying Deaf History
- And so on...

*Difference and diversity not only have evolutionary significance but, I would argue, are a major part of what gives life its richness and meaning; ethnic diversity is a basic human good, and to choose to be with one's own kind is a **fundamental right**.*

II - Douglas Baynton, "***Beyond Culture: Deaf studies and the Deaf body***", 2004

Hard to use "DEAF CULTURE" as THE explanation for the Deaf Community.

Sensory differences :

- Research: Deaf people process visual info differently to hearing = argument that we are VISUAL people / a People of the Eye.
- Have linguistic research that says Deaf children learn language differently to Hearing children.
- Means we have sensory differences.

How do we fit these explanations into "DEAF CULTURE" (The Cultural Model)? We have to **S - T - R - E - T - C - H** this model to fit this "phenomena." Deaf and Hearing cultures are different. But this is not enough. There are other ways in which we are different. **Could we use the Ethnicity model?** We fit the ethnicity model in many ways. But there are other ways in which we do not fit. Baynton thinks that the cultural model isn't enough. If we say that Deaf people NEED sign language, **how can this fit in the cultural model?** The need for sign language is more connected with deafness. Our sensory difference. Hearing people can go back to the hearing world if they want, Deaf people don't have a choice.

The "social model of disability"

In the past, the word "disability" has been compared with defects = lots of people think disability means absence of something, inability. And that we should solve this through. Lots of Deaf people have disagreed with being called "disabled" because of this label. So we say we are a culture and not a disability. We say that being Deaf is not a medical matter.

Remember Lars Ake Wikstrom saying that "it was hearing with the problem, and not us." ☺

It is not just us that have rejected this model. Disability studies scholars have rejected this too. They argue that: "**Disability is a product of oppression...**"

Ways of oppression:

- Information received via aural means
- Buildings not accommodating wheelchairs
- Education not matching needs



- Prejudices, stereotypes, discrimination

So disabled people say that the process of “disablement” refers to the social process of becoming disabled.

Our Body is important. We do not have a loss, we are just different. We cannot use the word “disability,” as this reduces the value of Deaf lives and our culture. Forgets about the “human experience of disability” meaning the experience of being disabled against society.

Negatives

- The Disability rights movement has advocated for educational inclusion.
- One size fits all approach.
- Bias towards assimilation
- Educational inclusion good, but not good for deaf.

Positives

Deaf can co-operate with disability rights groups = success, e.g. Americans with Disabilities Act.

We cannot use ONLY the CULTURAL MINORITY model

- If we tell parents about the importance of Deaf culture, Parents fear losing their children to Deaf Culture. We need to show that it is important that Deaf childrens' sensory needs are different to hearing children.
- Many mainstreamed children will never be culturally deaf. We cannot speak for them as being part of Deaf culture when some might never realise they have a community.
- Deaf people are not born with culture, we learn it. Some don't. So why do we make the cultural minority argument where it doesn't match all categories of 'deaf people'.

Deaf people are BOTH a Cultural minority AND disabled.

- 1) We have different sensory needs to hearing children.
- 2) We are disabled by social practices exclusively designed for hearing.

Why do we make the cultural ethnocide argument when not all children with cochlear implants have a culture, they don't know it. It is not robbing them of their culture.

So Baynton says we have a better way. Rather than arguing ethnic group identity: we can have an counter argument towards.

- PRESERVING SENSORY DIFFERENCES
- RECOGNISING DIVERSITY

The word disability in the past was often used to say that Deaf people couldn't access employment, not that they were retards! If we say that Deaf are a Cultural & Linguistic Group and not disabled – wrongly shows these groups as separate when we could use the disability label to help us. Cultural Minority (with beliefs,



values, history and language) versus Disability (relationship of majority with minority).

Not saying that we should ignore the cultural model. Ethnicity model still relevant for our argument. Shows our relationships with hearing people, our experiences with hearing people are that of a linguistic minority, e.g. we cannot use the disability model to say that we feel oppressed as a group.

We need the ethnicity model to assist our identity as a group.

If we use the disability rights model, it says that DEAF PEOPLE ARE NOT DISABLED BY HEARING IMPAIRMENT BUT BY THE OPPRESSION OF DIFFERENCE. This model will help us in our campaign.

III - Benjamin Bahan, "***Memoir Upon the Formation of a Visual Variety of The Human Race***", 2004

- George Veditz, in 1910: "*Deaf people are first, last and of all time the people of the eye*".
- Platon: "*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?*"
- George Veditz, in 1913: "*As long as we have deaf people on earth, we will have signs*".

We have to remember two things:

- 1 - There are people who are not deaf but are highly visual in the way they think, behave and express themselves.
 - 2 - Unlike the ears, human eyes have communicative functions, which play a role in sending and receiving information. Almost all humans are able to demonstrate this. The size of a pupil can tell a story on its own, for example: pupils can show interest, sadness, fear and tiredness!
- Abbé de l'Épée, 1776: "*The book will show, as clearly as possible, how to go about bringing in through the window what cannot come in through the door; namely, to insinuate into the minds of the deaf through the visual channel what cannot reach them through the auditory channel.*"

VISUAL SYMBOLISM IN ARTS AND LITERATURE.

What would you do if someone is knocking on the door?

Deaf: "You don't know who it could be!"

Hearing: "Who's there"

The door can also be a metaphor for oppression and barriers in the Deaf World. It can be seen in arts, such as paintings by the late Harry R. Williams.



On our second day with Joe Murray, he talked about his own theories on "Understanding Deaf Lives". Due to him using that in his PhD, we are not able to report in detail on his presentation but we will give you an idea of what he talked about with us. He began his presentation with "What does it mean to be Deaf" and asked who determined the answer? Society or the individuals themselves? He went back into history and gave us a variety of definitions of 'Deaf' in the past 200 years... "Mute" wasn't actually used until late 19th century and it was a 'hearing' idea!

A debate that has gone on for years is there really a Deaf world and a hearing world or are they just merged into one? Joe presented a good theory, that dividing them into worlds is just a natural way to try to understand the differences between Deaf and hearing people.

Three words Joe used a lot were "the cultural turn". This is defined as developments in cultural studies and the sociology of culture. Within the deaf community, the cultural turn achieved a number of things; one example would be that it enabled deaf people to contest audist ideologies.

He also went into national identities, using Germans as an example, their patriotism and the utility of sign language as well as the deaf community of Germany being a natural part of a German nation. It's funny because in education, Germans were so set on oralism although when it came to younger deaf people communicating with their elders, they encouraged sign language.

He concluded his Day Two presentation with "Visual Minority in an Auditory World" saying that deaf people constantly redefine themselves according to their current circumstances. They could be one definition in one place at one time but be a totally different person in a different place at a different time.

POLITICS AND ACTIVISM

Tomato Lichy from England spent two days with us sharing information about activism in the Deaf Community. We opened our discussion by examining political systems and how we can work with politics.

The personal is political.

We, as Deaf people, are constantly working with the government for different issues such as sign language, discrimination and disability laws, monetary support and so on. The government has power over many aspects in our life relating to education and sign language, BUT can they control our hands? Do



they have a right to decide if we want to express ourselves through sign language, the most accessible and natural language of the Deaf?

Everything we do in life CAN be political. The philosopher Foucault makes this point so beautifully:

The war between the state and the individual

is fought on the battleground of the skin.

The **state** can be the government, society or religion and constantly fights with the **individual** regarding their human or personal rights relating to their body (**skin**). That is what happens with government/society and Deaf people- we are constantly fighting for our rights to use sign language and to have fully accessible bilingual education. We are also constantly fighting organizations who are focused on “fixing our problems” relating to hearing loss.

One way for the Deaf Community to fight for more rights and protection is through activism. Activism can include protests, demonstrations, marches, blocking access to a building or street, distributing posters and flyers, etc. There are different levels of activism; it can range from a non-violent small group of people handing out flyers in a public park to a massive demonstration with hundreds of people that results in the use of violence. Tomato Lichy has had experience with activism, including working with the *Deaf Liberation Front* in England. This group focused on British Sign Language (BSL) and demanded that the government make BSL an official language of the UK. Tomato shared his experiences and showed us pictures of different marches and demonstrations in England. You can read more about the *Deaf Liberation Front* and see pictures at www.deafpowernow.org. The group was successful and England approved BSL in March 2003.

For a demonstration or protest, it is best to have 3 to 9 people so the action is more clear and there is less confusion. However, for a march, the more, the better! In preparing for a march or demonstration, the group must have a clear objective, to understand clearly and agree what their demands are. It is also important and more effective if the group is non-violent. Is it almost always unnecessary to resort to violence during a protest or demonstration and will protect the group from arrest or a court visit. It is also important that the group forms affinity groups, almost like a buddy system where two or three people watch out for each other and provide support when needed. If the group needs to split up, the affinity groups stay together. It is extremely important that no trespassing or theft happens during a protest/demonstration. If entering a building or office, it is important that nothing is touched or moved and caution is taken with photographing and the use of a video camera.

There are many different kinds of activism that the Deaf Community can participate in. It is important that we stand up for our rights and the best method



for each situation needs to be assessed. Some will be successful but others may not be; support and determination is essential.

***Never doubt that a small group of individuals can change the world,
for it's the only thing that can.***

Bhutan

FRONTRUNNERS WORKSHOP

During the weekend of November 18-20, we invited our friends from our countries and people we know from WFD camp, Nordic camp, etc. to Copenhagen for an International Frontrunners weekend. We visited Tivoli amusement park on Friday and met at the Deaf Club on Saturday. Approximately 25 people came for the weekend and we all had a great time!

On Saturday, we had a workshop for our international visitors. First, we opened with an introduction about Frontrunners and what we have been doing the past two months. We also explained about our website, the lecturers who came and the different issues that we discussed. We shared our experiences at the WFD congress in Finland and our campaign against genocide. We then had the participants answer a questionnaire with different questions about the Deaf Community and Deaf Culture. Frontrunners created this questionnaire as a tool to measure how Deaf people see, feel and think about the Deaf World and we wanted to “test” it on the workshop participants. We got some feedback from the participants and will modify the questionnaire to post on our website.

For the second part of the workshop, we split into two groups for discussion about two topics: Deaf or Disabled and Third World Countries. Both groups had very good discussions and shared experiences from our individual countries. We then reassembled and watched the Deaf or Disabled group debate, providing reasons why we should be labeled as Deaf and why we should be labeled as Disabled. The Third World Countries group also had a question and answering session about different issues relating to working with developing countries and how much the Deaf Community from developed countries (i.e. Europe) should become involved. It was fascinating and we all did not want to stop! We ended the workshop by showing the films we made for our Deaf Utopia project. Everyone loved the films and we ended a great day with much laughter! The workshop was a great success and everyone agreed that they would go back home and try to become more involved with leadership and the Deaf Community.

