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## **DEAF WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN HISTORICAL MONOGRAPHS WRITTEN BY HEARING AUTHORS**

This paper investigates the historical representation of Deaf women in both general and specialized historical texts. Despite their significant contributions, Deaf women are often overlooked, leading to a perception of their identities primarily as Deaf individuals rather than as women. This dual marginalization within both the Deaf community and broader society underscores systemic issues in historical scholarship. Major works by authors such as Sachs, Lane, and Baynton, although pivotal in documenting Deaf culture, frequently neglect the unique experiences and achievements of Deaf women. Key milestones, like the election of Gertrude Galloway as the first woman president of the National Association of the Deaf in the U.S. and the founding of Deaf Women United Inc. (DWU), are minimally explored, reflecting broader societal gender biases. This paper highlights the critical need for inclusive historical narratives that fully integrate the experiences of Deaf women. By documenting and acknowledging their unique challenges and contributions, we can foster a more comprehensive and equitable understanding of history, empowering Deaf women by validating their identities and achievements.

**Keywords:** Deaf women, historical representation, marginalization, Deaf Studies, gender bias.

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## Introduction

For centuries, women have been conscious of their deprivation, as Christine de Pizan highlighted in 1404 (trans. 1986). She believed that women unaware of their history were defenseless, whereas knowledge of their experiences made them resilient. In the mid-nineteenth century, American women began documenting their history, with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony publishing six volumes of *History of Woman Suffrage* from 1881 to 1922 (Stanton et al. 1969). However, it was not until 1933 that historian Mary Beard called for a thorough analysis of women's historical experiences.

Five decades later, Gerda Lerner (1975) proposed four stages in writing women's history, progressing from individual contributions to a deeper, structural rethinking of history. Women's Studies evolved to enhance women's lives and address systemic denials of opportunity.

It is noteworthy that the field of Deaf Women's Studies emerged after developing a sense of historical consciousness. While women have long been aware of their societal position, exemplified by the 1848 Women's Suffrage Convention, the field of Women's Studies only began in San Diego in 1960. Similarly, Deaf people have long been aware of their historical experiences, but it was not until 1965, when Stokoe, Casterline, and Croneberg recognized American Sign Language (ASL) as a legitimate language, that a new sense of awareness emerged. Understanding the intricacies of ASL brought pride in their language, leading to a heightened historical consciousness among Deaf people and eventually the field of Deaf Studies (Katz 1996).

Deaf people, especially Deaf women, are rarely mentioned in history texts. This neglect prompts us to examine how marginalized groups are overlooked. Black Studies scholar Maulana Karenga asserts that "history is the struggle and record of humans in the process of humanizing the world, i.e., shaping it in their own image and interests" (2002).

While influential works on Deaf history and culture exist, they predominantly originate from the United States, and their perspectives are shaped largely by hearing male authors. This has resulted in a limited representation of Deaf women's unique experiences (Lane, Hoffmeister and Bahan 1996; Van Cleve and Crouch 1989; Baynton 1996). Comparable works focused specifically on the histories of Deaf women remain scarce outside the United States, particularly in Europe and other parts of the world (Monaghan et al. 2003; Ladd 2003). This gap in international Deaf historiography reinforces a U.S.-centric and male-oriented narrative that restricts a holistic understanding of Deaf women's roles in Deaf culture glo-

bally. Deaf Studies, as a discipline, is largely rooted in American scholarship, with seminal works like *Journey into the Deaf-World* (Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan 1996) and *A Place of Their Own* (Van Cleve and Crouch 1989) influencing how Deaf history is framed worldwide. This U.S.-centric influence has contributed to a lack of comparable works on Deaf women in Europe and elsewhere, further marginalizing their experiences.

This paper aims to address the persistent absence of Deaf women in both general and Deaf historiographies, a gap stemming from systemic biases that overlook their unique experiences at the intersection of gender and disability. By critically examining key American works—such as *Journey into the Deaf-World* (Lane, Hoffmeister and Bahan 1996), *A Place of Their Own* (Van Cleve and Crouch 1989), and *When the Mind Hears* (Lane 1984)—which represent the most influential yet male-dominated and U.S.-centric narratives in Deaf history—this study will highlight how these perspectives contribute to the marginalization of Deaf women’s stories. Given the scarcity of similar works outside the United States, particularly in Europe and other global regions (Monaghan et al. 2003; Ladd 2003), this analysis underscores the need for more inclusive, intersectional approaches in order to recover and validate the experiences and contributions of Deaf women.

### **Emergence of Deaf Women’s Studies**

The emergence of Deaf Women’s Studies has been driven by the need to highlight the unique experiences and contributions of Deaf women. This interdisciplinary field explores the intersections of gender and deafness, addressing the dual marginalization faced by deaf women and promoting their visibility within both the deaf community and the broader society. By documenting and celebrating the achievements of deaf women, this field provides a crucial counter-narrative to dominant cultural discourses that often overlook or misrepresent their lives and contributions.

This development can be better understood through the example of African American struggle for recognition and equality. African Americans experienced significant deprivation of their history and cultural heritage, which catalyzed the Civil Rights Movement aimed at reclaiming their past and fostering social awareness. Consequently, Black Studies emerged as a vital means of preserving and celebrating African American heritage, history, and contributions, offering a counter-narrative to the dominant cultural discourse (Karenga 2002). This movement paved the way for the establishment of other interdisciplinary fields, such

as Women's Studies, Disability Studies, and Indigenous Studies. Each of these fields developed out of the necessity to shed light on the lives, struggles, and achievements of historically marginalized groups who had been denied equal opportunities.

Women's Studies, for example, evolved to enhance women's lives and address the systemic denial of equal opportunities, as noted by historian Gerda Lerner (1994). These fields collectively aimed to foster a more inclusive and accurate understanding of history and society.

Studies of Deaf women began to gain academic attention in the 1990s, reflecting broader societal movements towards inclusivity and recognition of diverse experiences. In 1993, Vicki Hurwitz offered the first Deaf Women's Studies course at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) as part of her master's degree program in social work (Kelly 2016). This pioneering course marked a significant step towards acknowledging and examining the unique experiences of Deaf women.

In 1996, Genie Gertz introduced another Deaf Women's Studies course at California State University Northridge (Kelly 2016). Gertz identified a critical gap in the field of Deaf Studies, noting that the experiences of Deaf women were often overlooked. Her course provided a multidisciplinary analysis, exploring the roles and contributions of Deaf women within both the Deaf community and the broader American society. This approach not only highlighted the intersectionality of gender and disability but also emphasized the importance of understanding the diverse experiences within the Deaf community.

Inspired by the efforts of Hurwitz and Gertz, Arlene Blumenthal Kelly launched the first Deaf Women's Studies course at Gallaudet University in 1997 (Kelly 2016). Kelly's work continued to build on the foundation laid by her predecessors, further expanding the academic exploration of Deaf women's experiences and their contributions to society. These courses and the scholarship they generated played a crucial role in elevating the visibility of Deaf women and fostering a deeper understanding of their unique challenges and achievements.

The emergence of these courses and the broader field of Deaf Women's Studies reflect a growing recognition of the need for inclusive histories that honor the diverse experiences of all people. By bringing the stories of Deaf women to the forefront, scholars and activists challenge the traditional narratives that have long excluded marginalized voices. This movement not only enriches our understanding of history but also empowers the communities whose stories are being told, fostering a sense of pride, identity, and agency.

## **Representation of Deaf Women in Historical Contexts**

In discussing the marginalization of Deaf women in historical monographs, it is essential to consider both historians' intellectual biases and the methodological challenges inherent in researching historically marginalized groups. As Castañeda (1990) argues, historical records often reflect the perspectives of dominant groups, leading to the exclusion of marginalized voices such as Deaf women. The absence of these narratives is not simply due to missing archives but also reflects power structures that historically controlled the creation and preservation of records (Castañeda 1990).

Similarly, Lerner (1975) highlights the limitations of traditional historical methodologies in recognizing women's contributions, especially for those who face intersectional marginalization due to gender and disability. Lerner's concept of compensatory history calls on historians to actively recover the stories of women within existing records, while contribution history underscores the importance of documenting women's roles in shaping society. Compensatory history involves adding women back into historical accounts from which they have been omitted, while contribution history focuses on highlighting the achievements and influences of women throughout history (Lerner 1975). These challenges apply acutely to Deaf women, whose experiences remain at the margins of both Gender Studies and Deaf Studies (Kelly 2016). As Blumenthal-Kelly (2016) argues, the persistent invisibility of Deaf women's narratives reflects not only intellectual bias but also structural issues within the historical discipline, where sources related to Deaf women are difficult to locate or interpret.

This problem necessitates a shift toward alternative methodologies—including oral histories, community records, or non-traditional archives—to bridge the gaps left by conventional historical documentation (Castañeda 1990; Karenga 2002). By recognizing both the challenges of source availability and the limitations of past historiographical practices, we gain insight into why Deaf women's stories have remained largely untold.

Some scholars argue that the scarcity of Deaf women's narratives is due to a lack of available sources rather than intentional exclusion. They suggest that historical records are limited because Deaf women faced barriers to education and public life, resulting in fewer documented achievements (Padden and Humphries 2005). However, this perspective overlooks the systemic factors that have suppressed Deaf women's voices and contributions. By acknowledging these systemic issues, historians can take proactive steps to uncover and highlight Deaf women's stories.

The exclusion of Deaf women from historical texts reflects the complex ways in which gender and disability intersect, creating unique forms of marginalization. While Crenshaw (1989) developed the concept of intersectionality to describe the overlapping oppressions faced by Black women, her framework has since been extended to explore how multiple marginalized identities—such as gender, race, and disability—interact to shape individual experiences (Garland-Thomson 2005). Applying this framework to the study of Deaf women reveals that they experience exclusion not only as women but also as Deaf individuals within both broader society and the Deaf community.

The most prominent American monograph with a Deaf historical perspective is *Journey into the Deaf-World* (Lane, Hoffmeister and Bahan 1996). Although foundational in its overview of Deaf culture and community, the text dedicates only a single paragraph to Deaf women's historical status, noting:

*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 ... Nevertheless, stereotypes about women endure in the DEAF-WORLD, as they do in our larger society.* (Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan 1996: 162)

This limited focus exemplifies a trend within Deaf historiography to emphasize Deaf men's contributions, often sidelining the distinct experiences and achievements of Deaf women (Ladd, 2003). In contrast, European Deaf historiography often focuses on institutional histories or the development of Deaf education, focusing on figures like Abbé de l'Épée in France or Laurent Clerc in the U.S., rather than on the lived experiences of the Deaf community (Monaghan et al. 2003; Ladd 2003).

Lane's earlier work, *What the Mind Hears* (1984), similarly overlooks Deaf women's narratives. Although Lane briefly acknowledges a few Deaf and Deaf-Blind women, he frames their stories as secondary to broader themes, acknowledging the gap yet failing to fill it. Reflecting on his limitations as a hearing man, Lane admits:

*Never have I felt my limitations as a historian more keenly than at this moment ... Many women have been kept in servitude by some relative; coarsely clad, faithful and diligent in labor ... they live and die knowing little of the outer world, and it records nothing of them”* (Lane 1984: 384).

This admission underscores the limitations of male, hearing-centered perspectives in capturing Deaf women's lived experiences. In regions like Asia and

Africa, Deaf history is often studied within broader disability narratives, with gender-specific accounts largely absent. In Japan and South Africa, for example, Deaf histories prioritize language rights and accessibility issues, with few works examining Deaf women's distinct experiences (Nakamura 2006; Kusters 2017).

Historians Van Cleve and Crouch (1989) have written a widely read and popular historical account of the development of the American Deaf community. Still, this text was written from a hearing male perspective. They do not mention Deaf pioneering women nor their contributions to society or Deaf culture. They mostly focus on the position of the Deaf community and highlight the male figures and their undertakings.

Similarly, Oliver Sacks's *Seeing Voices: A Journey into the World of the Deaf* (1989) discusses sign language and Deaf culture's visibility without acknowledging the contributions or unique experiences of Deaf women. These omissions perpetuate the invisibility of Deaf women within Deaf cultural history, leaving significant gaps in understanding the intersection of gender and Deaf identity.

Scholars in the field have also observed these gender gaps: Paddy Ladd (2003), in *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*, notes that Deaf Studies often lack diversity, overlooking women and other marginalized groups. Monaghan et al. (2003) acknowledge in *Many Ways to Be Deaf* that while international perspectives on Deaf culture are expanding, they still frequently omit Deaf women's stories.

Additionally, Baynton's *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (1996) examines the cultural repression of sign language in the United States, highlighting male advocates but neglecting to discuss how these dynamics specifically impacted Deaf women. Comparable works that explore the lives of Deaf women do not have equivalents in Europe or other global regions, underscoring an international gap in Deaf historiography that limits understanding of Deaf women's roles worldwide (Monaghan et al. 2003; Kusters 2017). Unlike fields such as Women's Studies, where extensive efforts have been made to recover women's voices across cultures, Deaf historiography lacks parallel initiatives specifically dedicated to Deaf women, especially outside the United States.

## Conclusion

The underrepresentation of Deaf women in historical and cultural narratives underscores a significant gap within both Gender and Deaf Studies. As scholars such as Blumenthal-Kelly (2016) and Ladd (2003) have noted, Deaf women remain largely invisible within mainstream and Deaf-centric historiographies. Influential texts within Deaf Studies often prioritize male voices and U.S.-centric perspectives, perpetuating a narrative that sidelines the contributions of Deaf women. The lack of international works focused on Deaf women (Monaghan et al. 2003; Kusters 2017) further exacerbates this gap, reinforcing a restricted view of Deaf history that fails to encompass the unique experiences of Deaf women worldwide.

As demonstrated through the efforts of scholars like Hurwitz (1993), Gert (1996), and Kelly (2016), Deaf Women's Studies has gradually emerged as a crucial field dedicated to addressing this oversight. By focusing on the intersections of gender and deafness, this field challenges dominant historical methodologies that traditionally overlook marginalized groups, calling for more inclusive approaches (Castañeda 1990; Lerner 1975). Scholars in this field advocate for alternative methodologies to reconstruct the stories of Deaf women whose experiences have been systematically excluded from the historical record (Castañeda 1990; Karenga 2002).

This paper calls for a concerted effort within Deaf Studies to adopt a more intersectional approach that acknowledges the voices of Deaf women, following the framework of intersectionality introduced by Crenshaw (1989) and extended to Disability Studies by Garland-Thomson (2005). Doing so would not only enrich the field but also foster a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Deaf culture and history. Future scholarship should aim to recover Deaf women's stories across cultures, challenging the U.S.-centric and male-dominated narratives that currently prevail (Ladd 2003; Monaghan et al. 2003).

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## РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЈА ГЛУВИХ ЖЕНА У ИСТОРИЈСКИМ МОНОГРАФИЈАМА ЧУЈУЋИХ АУТОРА

### Сажетак

Овај рад истражује историјску заступљеност глувих жена у општим и специјализованим историјским текстовима. Упркос њиховом значајном доприносу, глуве жене се често занемарују, што доводи до перцепције њиховог идентитета првенствено као глувих појединаца, а не као жена. Ова двострука маргинализација и унутар заједнице глувих и ширег друштва наглашава системске проблеме у историјској науци. Главни радови аутора као што су Сакс, Лејн и Бејнтон, иако су кључни у документовању културе глувих, често занемарују јединствена искуства и достигнућа глувих жена. Кључне прекретнице, попут избора Гертруде Галовеј за прву жену председницу Националне асоцијације глувих у САД и оснивање удружења *Deaf Women United Inc. (DWU)*, су минимално истражене, одражавајући шире друштвене родне предрасуде. Овај рад наглашава критичну потребу за инклузивним историјским наративима који у потпуности интегришу искуства глувих жена. Документовањем и признавањем њихових јединствених изазова и доприноса, можемо подстаћи свеобухватније и правичније разумевање историје, оснажујући глуве жене потврђивањем њиховог идентитета и достигнућа.

**Кључне речи:** глуве жене, историјска репрезентација, маргинализација, студије глувих, родна пристрасност