

The French Roots of Neo-Colonialism in Deaf America

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Differentiation of Sign Languages	8
The Four Manifestations of Colonialism	11
Historical Context: France, 1760	12
Separation of the Deaf from Society	16
Separation from French Society	16
Separation of the Deaf in America	21
Isolation of the Deaf as a Group	25
Isolation of the Deaf in France	25
Isolation of the Deaf in America	28
Objectification: Scientific, Philosophical, and Religious	31
Objectification of the Deaf in France	32
Objectification of the Deaf in America	36
Denial by Exclusion: the Congress of Milan	41
A Nuanced Debate: Manualism vs. Oralism	46
The Language Debate in France	46
The Language Debate in America	49
The Result: Neo-Colonialism in the Modern American Deaf Community	53
Bibliography	57

Introduction

A recent *New York Times* article continued a centuries-old debate concerning the nature of Deafness. The article, “Unlocking the World of Sound for Deaf Children,” drew fire from Deaf commenters for its argument that cochlear implants benefitted the Deaf because they corrected the disability of Deafness.¹ The comment section resembled a nineteenth-century French salon; Deaf people who were implanted and had fallen out of love with the technology shared their experiences, while hearing laypeople explained to Deaf doctoral candidates that they should read some research into Deaf issues. This article caused an uproar in the Deaf community because it laid bare the most recent of hearing attempts to deny Deafness as an identity and to assign the label of “disability” to the Deaf community.

But what exactly does it mean to be Deaf? That question is a lot more complex than asking what it means to be deaf. Lowercase-D deafness is a medical condition; the World Health Organization defines profound deafness as the “complete loss of the ability to hear in both ears,” with an “81 dB [decibel] or greater hearing threshold,” and with frequencies averaging between .5 and 4 kiloHertz.² Hearing impairment and disabling hearing loss are defined separately; each has a different hearing threshold which defines the level of hearing loss in each case. The grades of hearing loss have been categorized into four levels: mild, moderate, severe, and profound.³ For the purposes of this paper, the term “deafness”

¹ Jane E. Brody, “Unlocking the World of Sound for Deaf Children,” *The New York Times*, October 10, 2018, sec. Wellness, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/08/well/live/unlocking-the-world-of-sound-for-deaf-children.html>.

² “Prevention of Blindness and Deafness,” World Health Organization, last modified 2018, accessed October 12, 2018, <http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/facts/en/>.

³ *Ibid.*

refers to both severe and profound medical deafness, and the terms “hearing loss or hearing impairment” refer to moderate and mild levels of hearing loss. The term “hard of hearing,” refers to those people who fall into this latter category of hearing loss. The terms “hearing people,” “the hearing majority,” or “the hearing community,” refer to all those who do not have even mild hearing loss.

The terms used to describe medical deafness are largely hearing-centric; the definition of “deafness” in this medical context depends on the lack of an ability which hearing people possess. Indeed, many hearing people would go so far as to conflate deafness with a disability. But while the word “loss” reflects how hearing people perceive the reality of deafness, many deaf people do not define their deafness as a loss or lack of ability. These deaf people ascribe to a capital-D Deaf identity. Capital-D Deafness is not defined as the *loss* of an ability, but rather as the *presence* of an identity, characterized by a unique history, culture, language, and community separate from hearing people.

Deaf activist and scholar Paddy Ladd defines capital-D Deaf people as:

... [T]hose born Deaf or deafened in early (sometimes late) childhood, for whom the sign languages, communities, and cultures of the Deaf collective represent their primary experience and allegiance, many of whom perceive their existence as essentially akin to other language minorities.⁴

The nature of Deafness, also known as what Paddy Ladd has termed “Deafhood,” is what will be explored in this paper; not the medical conception of deafness as simply a lack of hearing, but a distinct identity, free from dependence on hearing perspectives and

⁴ Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood* (Pennsylvania: Blue Ridge Summit, 2003), xvii.

definitions. This identity, as one that is both transcontinental and considered a form of nationality, is susceptible to external forces, such as hearing neo-colonialism.

Neo-colonialism is not a word commonly associated with the Deaf community. Neo-colonial and post-colonial theories are more readily applied to issues of race, ethnicity, and nationality. But many Deaf activists consider themselves to be part of a *Deaf nation*, described by leading Deaf activist Paddy Ladd as being occupied by those who ascribe to a notion of *Deafhood*. Deafhood, according to Ladd, “affirms the existence of a Deaf sense of *being*.”⁵ In other words, that Deafness is not the lack of a physical sense, but rather the presence of an identity, complete with its own culture, history, and language. This ascription is a postcolonial construction of Deafness that all Deaf people belong to one nation, and one identity, despite the lack of a geopolitical entity or the occupation of a unified physical space. As a nation, the Deaf community is vulnerable to external forces, such as oppression and colonization by the dominant culture-- i.e., the hearing culture.

This neo-colonization manifests itself in various disturbing ways that those in the majority often take for granted. The lack of captions, or well-written captions, in most online videos, in the cinema, and in other media platforms is the most obvious of these manifestations. Just as clear, but unnoticed by the hearing population, is the prevalence of hearing aids and cochlear implants.⁶ Popular YouTube videos show deaf people hearing for the first time, and the comments and likes abound-- but the Deaf number few among them.

⁷ They rarely rejoice in the erasure of their culture and heritage through technology

⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁶ Hereafter, cochlear implants will be referred to as C.I.s

⁷ “Deaf People Hearing Sound for the FIRST Time [Compilation] - YouTube,” accessed October 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZ6vSn7PaPI>.

contrived by the hearing, peddled as a means of salvation and of access into the promised land of hearing acceptance.⁸ But the dark side of this colonization process remains, if under the surface: the under-researched statistics on the deaths of children as a result of meningitis contracted during the cochlear implantation process, and the isolation of the deaf recipients of C.I.s from both their Deaf compatriots as well as the very hearing community that promised them acceptance.⁹ The hearing laud the implantations but shun those who wear them, whether to shed themselves of enduring impaired speech or to avoid the awkwardness of another's "disability." Even in the pursuit of assimilation, the colonized and oppressed do not receive the full status of a member of society.

A third and far more malicious and long-lasting manifestation of hearing neo-colonization is the precarious nature of Deaf education. Today, as it was 120 years ago, the American Deaf are subjected to an educational method called "total communication," that employs both speaking and signing for the education of the Deaf. A 1975 study by Deaf scholar A.H. White, "The Effects of Total Communication, Manual Communication, Oral Communication and Reading on the Learning of Factual Information in Residential School Deaf Children," concluded that there was very little difference between the total communication method and the pure manual method. However, a 1989 study by scholars of the Deaf Robert Johnson and Carol Erting concluded that the total communication method benefitted the hearing teacher more than the deaf child.¹⁰ In theory, the combined

⁸ Paddy Ladd, "Cochlear Implantation, Colonialism, and Deaf Rights," *Surgical Consent: Bioethics and Cochlear Implantation* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2007), 12.

⁹ Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood*, 8.

¹⁰ Alfred H. White and Vivian M. Stevenson. "The Effects of Total Communication, Manual Communication, Oral Communication and Reading on the Learning of Factual Information in Residential School Deaf Children." *American Annals of the Deaf* 120, no. 1 (1975), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44400848>.

speaking and signing should present a complete message to the child; in reality, the teacher signs very little and speaks most of the time, leaving the child with only half the message.¹¹ And yet, the total communication method has been in use since the inception of the first Deaf schools in America in 1817.¹²

The hearing community in the Deaf education of both France and the United States has a colonialist and oppressive history. Even acclaimed activists like Laurent Clerc, Thomas Gallaudet, the Abbé Sicard, and Jean Massieu were at the very least capitulating to the hearing establishment, and at the worst, perpetuating hearing colonialist ideals themselves. I seek to take a critical look at the Deaf and hearing activists throughout the nineteenth century, to analyze why they failed to stop the Congress of Milan 1880, in what ways they resisted hearing colonialism in education and to what degree they were successful, and why oralism and its remnant ideology persist to this day, in both countries. I begin with an overview of the history of Deaf education from 1760 to 1880; then, I transition into a look at the major figures of French and American Deaf education. From France, I analyze the Abbé Sicard, Auguste Bébien, Laurent Clerc, and Alexandre Blanchet and their fierce debates over the use of oralism which would become the impetus for the Congress of Milan. From the U.S., I study Thomas Gallaudet, Horace Mann, Samuel Gridley Howe, and Alexander Graham Bell, and the constant game of back-and-forth between resistance and oppression that continues to define Deaf education in America today. This paper will cover the development of the Deaf identity in France and America, the roots of

¹¹ Robert E. Johnson, Scott K. Liddell, and Carol Erting, "Unlocking the Curriculum: Principles for Achieving Access to Deaf Education" (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University, 1989), <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED316978>.

¹² Gannon, Jack. *Deaf Heritage: A History of Deaf in America* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2012).

hearing oppression against both Deaf communities through education, and Deaf efforts to resist this oppression on both sides of the ocean. I argue that the manifestations of hearing neocolonialism today have their roots in the very beginnings of Deaf education in France, through the separation of the Deaf from society, their isolation as a group, their denial by exclusion from their language and dominant hearing society, and their objectification as targets of Christian salvation.¹³

It is important to note that no scholar of the Deaf has so far made this connection in an academic paper. The scholars I have read--Harlan Lane, Anne Quartararo, Paddy Ladd, Owen Wrigley, John Vickrey Van Cleve et. al, Jan Branson and Don Miller, to name a few--all discussed the French roots of Deaf education, the history of Deaf education in the United States, the origins of sign language, and historical constructions of the global Deaf identity. And yet, none of them seemed to think it necessary to connect the Paris Institute to the Hartford Asylum, to show that the methods used in the United States in educating the Deaf, often to their detriment, originated in France, specifically in the Paris Institute. Perhaps these scholars believed the connection to be so obvious that it needed no mention; but here, I will attempt to prove that this connection is real and important. From here, we embark on a journey through Deaf history where few scholars, if any, have ventured before.

Differentiation of Sign Languages

To understand the nuances of Deaf education in the 18th and 19th centuries, we must first break down the different sign languages used to educate the Deaf. There are many misconceptions about sign language. The most pervasive among these is that each

¹³ Wrigley, *Politics of Deafness*, 51.

sign language corresponds to a spoken language. This perception is a manifestation of hearing attempts to frame Deafness in the context of the hearing world. Rather, sign languages are their own languages; American Sign Language, for example, is not English. French Sign Language is not French. The signed languages have their own morphology, grammar, syntax, and etymology. The rules of a visual language also differ from those of an aural, or spoken, language. For example, natural signs are directional. If you want to ask for help in American Sign Language, you would sign HELP, with your dominant fist in an A-handshape placed on the palm of your nondominant hand in front of you, and then bring both hands towards you. If you wanted to offer help to someone else, you would form the sign HELP, but extend your hands from your chest outward toward the person to whom you are offering. In other words, instead of having a separate sign for a direct object, you would simply sign the verb in the direction of the object receiving the action. In many contexts, indexing is required: that is, assigning a person or object that is not present (or an abstract concept) to a physical space. Once that concept, person, or object has been indexed to a place, the signers can then refer to that point in space in place of signing the entire person, object, or concept over and over again.

In a spoken language, these rules have similar, but distinct counterparts; for example, pronouns take the place of indexing. But spoken language cannot be directional; hearing and speaking people must designate their direct and indirect objects every time they are relevant, in order to avoid miscommunication. The sign language used as an illustration here exemplifies a natural sign language. Here, it is important to differentiate between natural and methodical sign languages. The biggest difference between them is

that methodical sign languages assign a sign to each and every word, and these signs are placed in the same word order as the spoken language. These languages persist today, in America as Pidgin Signed English (PSE) or Signed Exact English (SEE), and in France as Français Signé (FS). These languages have signs for the verb “to be,” where natural sign languages do not. In ASL for example, to sign the sentence “I am tired,” you would point to yourself then sign TIRED, with varying levels of exaggeration depending on how tired you are. In SEE, the same sentence would require the sign BE, and additional signs to convey the depth of your fatigue.

More complex ASL sentences would have a TOPIC-COMMENT structure, meaning that the object is signed first, and the comment on that object follows. For example, in ASL, if you wanted to ask whether your friend has a car, you would sign CAR HAVE, while facing the person you are asking and raising your eyebrows in a questioning expression. In SEE, you would have to sign YOU HAVE A CAR, including the article, the sign for YOU, and the question mark.

Another major difference between these two types of languages are the people who use them. The term “Pidgin” describes any language that arises between two people who speak different languages.¹⁴ As such, Pidgin Signed English is a combination of ASL and English, using a more fingerspelling-heavy form of ASL signed in English syntax. Those who are deafened later in life, or the hearing who are learning sign language for the first time are more likely to employ PSE than native Deaf signers. Signed Exact English employs ASL signs with prefixes and suffixes to connote tense, signed in English word order. Most

¹⁴ Jacques Arends, Pieter Muysken, and Norval Smith, *Pidgins and Creoles: An Introduction* (John Benjamins Publishing, 1995), 3.

hearing parents of deaf children use this language to help their children learn English and sign language at the same time.

The Four Manifestations of Colonialism

Deaf activist and scholar Owen Wrigley lists the four categories in which the hearing administrations of France and the U.S. historically constructed the Deaf identity throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. These four categories are:

1. Separation (from society)
2. Isolation (as a type and group)
3. Denial by exclusion
4. Objects of Christian salvation.¹⁵

These categories represent the four main ways in which the hearing colonized the deaf. The timeline of deaf history can be organized into each of these four categories, with several areas of natural overlap; for the purposes of this paper, I will adapt the last category to include all types of objectification-- scientific, religious, and otherwise. This exercise will show the ways in which the hearing oppressed the Deaf throughout their history. While their intentions may not have been malevolent, the results of their work devastated the Deaf community for centuries, beginning with the very first public Deaf school in the world, founded in Paris in 1760, and continuing to today.

Historical Context: France, 1760

The Deaf identity has always existed; from references in sacred texts to modern TV shows, the Deaf identity exists on a continuum like any other identity. Its historical

¹⁵ Wrigley, *Politics of Deafness*, 51.

construction, however, has remained largely hearing-centric. As the activist and scholar Owen Wrigley explains in his book, *The Politics of Deafness*, what we think of as Deaf history “sounds remarkably like narrative forms of Hearing history in which only the names and details of auditory status have been changed.”¹⁶ In other words, the hearing have colonized Deaf history by reframing it as a Western-centric myth, centering around the benevolence of hearing educators and the helplessness of the Deaf students. For example, the so-called “creation story” of the Deaf community involves the Abbé Charles-Michel de L’Épée, who founded the first public school for the Deaf in Paris in 1760. Another version of this creation myth places Jacob Rodrigues Pereire at the forefront of Deaf education; his attempts to teach the deaf to speak were the first recorded in the Western world.¹⁷ But French author Théophile Denis addressed the question of the origins of the Deaf community in France in an article he wrote for the *American Annals of the Deaf* in 1887:

Heaven forbid that I should rob this glorious memory [of Abbé de L’Épée] of one iota of its prestige. But, in the light of undisputed facts, it must be acknowledged that the statement that to the Abbe de l’Épée belongs the credit of having been the first teacher of the deaf is not exact truth.”¹⁸

In this essay, Denis sheds light on the predecessors of both de L’Épée and Pereire; there were, according to Denis, teachers of the deaf as early as 1735.¹⁹ So these instructors were not the first of their kind, and they would not be the last. But Pereire, as Denis admits,

¹⁶ Wrigley, *The Politics of Deafness*, 43.

¹⁷ Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 67.

¹⁸ Théophile Denis, “The First Instructor of the Deaf in France,” *American Annals of the Deaf* 32, no. 2 (1887): 113, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44464403>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

was the first to apply oralist methods to deaf education, “an act the merit of which cannot possibly be heightened by a misstatement of any kind, however small.”²⁰ Thus, we have a conflicting account of the so-called “origins” of the Deaf community, origins obfuscated by the jostling of hearing educators trying to lead the narrative of a group to which they do not belong.

Jacob-Rodriguez Pereire was born in Spain in 1715, to Jewish consanguineous parents who spent much of their lives avoiding the Inquisition.²¹ He lived much of his life as a minority in a dangerous place; thus, he saw the value of being in the majority, and for this reason, he dedicated his life to forming the deaf to fit into hearing society.²² Pereire’s notable pupils included Azy d’Etavigny, who learned to speak under his care, and Saboreux de Fontenay, who learned multiple languages but mostly relied on the manual French which Pereire utilized.²³ As Pereire’s fame grew, he jealously guarded his techniques. Even after his death, his pupils refused to give up his secret.²⁴ What we know of his methods is revealed piecemeal by his students’ autobiographies: “[Pereire] would accompany his articulation with this phonetic fingerspelling designating sounds, much as one hearing person addressing another accompanies his visible articulation with the sounds themselves.”²⁵ Fontenay describes a manual language which includes “...twenty-five signs for the letters... excluding *k* and *w* which are not used in French... altogether, the

²⁰ Ibid., 114.

²¹ Ernest La Rochelle, *Jacob Rodrigues Péreire, premier instituteur des sourds-muets en France : sa vie et ses travaux* (Paris: P. Dupont, 1882), <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30742964m>, 1.

²² Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears* (New York: A Division of Random House, Inc., 1984), 75.

²³ Anne Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2008), 230n24.

²⁴ Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 82.

²⁵ Saboreux de Fontenay, 1779 quoted in Lane, *When the Mind Hears*.

[dactylogical] system includes more than eighty signs.”²⁶ De Fontenay lauds this unwieldy system, but his success was one of only two in Pereire’s entire career-- and neither d’Etavigny nor de Fontenay had been educated by Pereire from the beginning. His methods were mostly unknown, but his legacy contributed to the prevalence of oralism in Deaf education throughout France in the late eighteenth and the entire nineteenth century. But he was not the only one whose attempts to educate the Deaf were noted.

In 1760, the Abbé de L’Epée began teaching deaf children in his school, beginning with two deaf girls.²⁷ He taught his small constituency of deaf students using his system of sign language, which he called methodical signs. This system of signing was a precursor to manual signed languages like PSE. The Abbé de L’Epée is credited with creating sign language, but of course, this is not the case. Most historians, such as Jan Branson and Renate Fischer, agree that the Abbé did not simply translate French into signs. Rather, he combined the natural signs of his deaf students with artificial signs he created himself, and placed them all in the same syntax and grammar structure as spoken French.²⁸ However, historians Anne Quartararo and Harlan Lane contend that the Abbé de L’Epée’s methodical signs were altogether different from the natural signs used by the students of the Paris Institute.²⁹ His refusal to recognize natural sign language as a true language, with its own grammar, set a precedent of the Deaf being shut out of Deaf issues, spaces, and decisions

²⁶ Saboreux de Fontenay, “Extract of a Letter from Saboreux de Fontenay, a Congenitally Deaf Person, to Mademoiselle, *The Deaf Experience*, ed. Harlan Lane, trans. Franklin Philip (Cambridge: Massachusetts, 1984), 26. Emphasis in the original.

²⁷ Lane, Harlan, *When the Mind Hears*, 58.

²⁸ Renate Fischer, “Abbé de L’Epée and the Living Dictionary,” in *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship*, ed. John Vickrey Van Cleve (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1993), 20-22; Jan Branson, Don Miller, *Damned for Their Difference: The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as Disabled, A Sociological History*, (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2002), 107.

²⁹ Anne Quartararo, *Deaf Education and Social Images in 19th-Century France*, 210n2.

relating to their own education. For example, in the Paris Institute, Deaf alumni often became teachers, but they were not allowed to rise above the hearing educators, and they were paid significantly less. This precedent would manifest most dangerously in the Congress of Milan in 1880, whose ramifications will be expounded upon later in this paper.

The Abbé de l'Épée's contributions to the Deaf community in France were largely positive; however, his actions have disturbing historical parallels to colonialists. For example, Épée's rejection of sign language directly parallels Christopher Columbus' refusal to recognize the native language of the Caribbean peoples he colonized for Spain.³⁰ Épée, like Columbus, drew the attention of their respective publics to the foreignness of the colonized. Both colonizers needed the colonized people to be lesser than themselves, to justify colonization, but similar enough to the majority that they could still be "saved."³¹ Épée knew that natural sign language existed, and rather than learning and formalizing it, he decided to impose his own upon his deaf students. In short and in the words of Wrigley, "[t]he gift of the Abbé de L'Épée to the Deaf was... attention, examinations, discipline, surveillance, administration, and colonization by the Hearing."³² Indeed, his own words betray him in his own treatise on deaf education, wherein he calls the deaf "a truly destitute class of persons who, though similar to ourselves, are reduced, as it were, to the condition of animals..."³³ While Épée may have been a product of his time, his paternalistic attitude

³⁰ Wrigley, Owen. *The Politics of Deafness*, (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1996), 47.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 49.

³³ Abbé Charles-Michel De L'Épée "The True Method of Educating the Deaf, Confirmed By Much Experience," in *The Deaf Experience: Classics in Language and Education*, ed. Harlan Lane, trans. Franklin Philip (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); quoted in Anne Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 12.

had far-reaching and damaging effects on the Deaf community, most notably through their separation from society.

Separation of the Deaf from Society

Separation from society, both in France and in the U.S., was gradual and often voluntary on the part of the Deaf. Traditional images of the Deaf as isolated from the rest of society persisted leading up to the 18th century, and pervaded the entirety of the 19th. In each country, this method of colonizing the deaf did not vary drastically; each country separated its children into different schools, each called these schools “asylums,” and each perpetuated images of the Deaf that separated them socially.

Separation from French Society

One of the earliest signs of colonialism in the French Deaf community was their separation from general society, both physically by separating the Deaf children into separate schools known as “asylums,” and socially by the classification of Deaf education as a welfare issue rather than an educational one. The social images of the Deaf as mentally unstable and spiritually stunted, as well as the medical images of them as physically disabled further separated the Deaf from hearing society. These images and classifications of the Deaf have their roots in the Enlightenment.

The French Enlightenment profoundly influenced Épée’s work with the deaf. During the 17th century, a pre-Enlightenment period known as the Great Confinement took place. Michel Foucault’s book, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, described the Great Confinement in detail. A 1656 piece of French legislation outlawed

begging in public, and consequently, beggars were hunted down and imprisoned for their crimes.³⁴ Historically, deaf people were excluded from work, being deemed liabilities to their employers; thus, the deaf formed a large portion of these poor imprisoned.³⁵ These asylums shaped French society to fit a standard set by the majority; the poor, deaf, disabled, mentally ill, and chronically ill did not fit the model of French society towards which Enlightenment thinkers fought, and thus had to be purged from sight.³⁶

The French government and the public who knew of his pedagogy considered Epée's work with the deaf students to be charity towards the deaf. During this time, French Enlightenment philosophers such as Etienne Bonnot de Condillac and Denis Diderot were convinced that language was the path to ultimate knowledge.³⁷ Epée believed, as they did, that language was the best and only medium through which to be educated. Finding the native language inadequate for this mission, he created his own, and thus entered the philosophical stage centered around finding a universal language.³⁸ Here, we can deduct two arguments: that Epée simply acted out of the goodness of his heart in educating those deemed lesser by the French legislation; or that Epée saw a prime opportunity in the legislation to create an experiment of the deaf, and earn fame in the community of Enlightenment philosophers. I argue the latter.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, (New York: Random House Inc., 1965), 49.

³⁵ Interestingly, this statistic is not the only manifestation of hearing colonialism in Foucault's work. The very first page of his preface pits "Reason" against "Madness," calling them both "deaf to all exchange, as though *dead to one another* (emphasis added)." Even before his argument, Foucault conflates deafness with a sort of death.

³⁶ Wrigley, *The Politics of Deafness*, 50.

³⁷ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 10; Branson, *Damned for Their Difference: the Culture Construction of Deaf People as Disabled*, 107.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

If we follow the myth of *Épée*, his lessons with the two deaf girls had grown into the famous Paris Institut National des Jeunes Sourds-Muets by his death in 1789.³⁹ In the time between his first attempts in 1760 and the French Revolution, *Épée* cultivated a reputation among Parisian philosophers and educators. He regularly presented his students before crowds of fascinated people, and even famous figures like the Austrian emperor Joseph II and even Louis XVI. Through these presentations, he won funding for his efforts, and his school grew to around a hundred students in the decade before the Revolution.⁴⁰ His utilization of deaf children, and his exposure of them to the morbid fascination of hearing audiences draws disturbing parallels to the human zoos popular in the late eighteenth century.

After Abbé de L'Épée's death on December 23rd, 1789, the succession of the school fell into question.⁴¹ A hearing teacher from Bordeaux happened to be studying *Épée*'s methods at the Institute when *Épée* died: Abbé Roch-Ambroise-Cucurron Sicard.⁴² Sicard had spent several years as an educator at a deaf school in Bordeaux, and this experience, combined with his connections to members of the National Assembly placed him in a prime position to be *Épée*'s successor. Just a year after Sicard's takeover at the school, at the height of the Revolution in 1790, he successfully maneuvered for his Institute to be placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior, specifically a subcommittee known as the Poor Relief Committee.⁴³ He secured this position by presenting Jean Massieu before

³⁹ Hereafter, the Paris Institut National des Jeunes Sourds-Muets will be referred to as the Paris institute.

⁴⁰ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 37.

⁴¹ Florence Encrevé, *Les Sourds Dans La Société Française au XIXe Siècle: Idée de Progrès et Langue des Signes*, (Grâne: CreaphisStudios, 2012), 71.

⁴² Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 39.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 40-44.

the National Assembly, whose petition so impressed upon the audience the importance of Deaf education that they secured the necessary funding, protection under the Ministry of the Interior, and a new, larger school building on the Rue Jacques.⁴⁴ However, this classification of Deaf issues as one of welfare instead of education would resonate for centuries; medical and pathological conceptions of Deafness would take legal precedence over sociopolitical and cultural conceptions of Deafness again and again, as a result of this move.

The move to place Deaf education under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior was facilitated by Désiré Ordinaire, who served as a prominent member of the Ministry between 1804 and 1814.⁴⁵ He, Sicard, and Jean Massieu were all members of the same Society of Observers of Man, “a group of philosophers, historians, and linguists who were interested in studying *primitive* cultures and languages, and their material environment [emphasis added]”.⁴⁶ Sicard cooperated with his mentor and superintendent, the Baron Joseph-Marie de Gérando; his pedagogy also perpetuated elements of hearing colonialism, including oralism, the discouragement of natural sign language, and an emphasis on a combination of methodical signs and lipreading. Combining Épée’s methodical signs with written French, Sicard attempted to teach his inherited students how to write.⁴⁷ However, without sufficient knowledge of the French language to begin with, the students were only able to memorize the sentences with which he supplied them, without realizing what they meant.⁴⁸ Part of his pedagogy also included training in articulation. To

⁴⁴ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁸ Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 63.

carry out this oralist curriculum, Sicard quickly employed the services of a rising surgeon, Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard, whose work in curing medical deafness was renowned in the city.

⁴⁹ Deafness during this period was considered to have pathological implications, rather than just medical.⁵⁰ Itard's mission to find a "cure" involved tortuous surgeries, presumably to dislodge whatever could have been causing a physical blockage; we will examine Itard's methods later in this paper.⁵¹ Sicard allowed and encouraged these methods, and made articulation courses an integral part of the curriculum at the Institute. This addition separated the Deaf students from their language and, subsequently, each other.

Such were the years of the late eighteenth century in France for the Deaf community. These decades were marked by Deaf peoples' reluctant acceptance of hearing people's paternalistic aid. The methods of the hearing grossly underestimated the power of natural sign language to convey meaning; Sicard himself claimed that Deaf people had no language at all.⁵² Rather than accept the natural language of the Deaf, hearing educators created their own artificial language and imposed it on the natives, hoping to conform them to the standards of the majority society. Through the invasion and destruction of natural sign language, the hearing were able to wedge themselves between the French deaf and their Deaf identity, thus separating them from their own identity as well as physically and socially separating them from the rest of the dominant hearing society.

⁴⁹ Branson, *Damned for Their Difference*, 113.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵¹ Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 132-134.

⁵² Roch-Ambroise-Cucurron Sicard, "Course of Instruction for a Congenitally Deaf Person" in *Cours d'instruction d'un sourd-muet de naissance*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Le Clère, 1803), 3; *The Deaf Experience: Classics in Language and Education*, ed. Harlan Lane, trans. Franklin Philip (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 88.

Separation of the Deaf in America

Though manualism reigned supreme throughout the first half of the 19th century, the Era of Reform of the second half transformed education in the United States. The onset of the Second Great Awakening coincided with the middle and later years of the Industrial Revolution, spawning two major theoretical movements which defined 19th-century Deaf education in the United States. The first of these theories was evolution; Charles Darwin published *Origin of Species* in 1859, redefining human development in terms of a battle for social improvement between those with desirable characteristics and those without. Creationism had previously dictated humanity to exist on a spectrum; God had created all humans, and given each their different characteristics. Evolutionism, however, declared humanity to exist on a scale of evolutionary development.⁵³ Sign language, rather than being closer to the “original language” of humans fresh from Creation, became closer to the language of “apes” and “savages.”⁵⁴

During the early eighteenth century, most parents in the U.S. outsourced their Deaf education to the Braidwood School in Scotland, whose founder, Thomas Braidwood, was a lukewarm manualist and encouraged articulation and lipreading.⁵⁵ Indeed, he even said that “it is almost impossible for *deaf* persons, without the use of *speech*, to be *perfect* in their ideas”.⁵⁶ Throughout the late eighteenth century, the American deaf began to be

⁵³ Douglas C. Baynton, “‘Savages and Deaf-Mutes’: Evolutionary Theory and the Campaign Against Sign Language in the Nineteenth Century,” John Vickrey Van Cleve, ed., *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1993) 96-98.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵⁵ R.A.R. Edwards, *Words Made Flesh: Nineteenth-Century Deaf Education and the Growth of Deaf Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 13.

⁵⁶ Branson, *Damned for Their Difference*, 101. Italics included in the original.

educated in small residential schools; however, their education would not be formalized until the emergence of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc in the early nineteenth century.⁵⁷ Publications in support of oralism by prominent Americans such as William Thornton, the architect of the Capitol, contributed to the development of deaf education in America during the eighteenth century.⁵⁸ In the nineteenth century, the philosopher Horace Mann and director of the Perkins Institute for the Blind, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, were both outspoken supporters of oralism.⁵⁹ Alexander Graham Bell personally advocated for the eradication of Deaf people, their language, and their culture by advocating against intermarriage between the Deaf.⁶⁰ Each of these men— Gallaudet, Howe, Mann, and— contributed, intentionally or otherwise, to the separation of the Deaf from American hearing society throughout the nineteenth century, all within the context of the Age of Reform and the Second Great Awakening.

Inherent in the separation of a minority group from the dominant society is a level of paternalism; and particularly in the nineteenth century, paternalism defined many relationships, from the employer and the employed, to the evangelizer and the evangelized, to hearing educators and their Deaf students. Scholar Phyllis Valentine defines paternalism as “a posture of omniscient authority in the presence of dependent persons.”⁶¹ Paternalism was the cornerstone of Thomas Gallaudet’s reign at the Hartford Asylum; he often referred

⁵⁷ Barry A. Crouch and Brian H. Greenwald, “Hearing with the Eye: The Rise of Deaf Education in the United States,” in *The Deaf History Reader*, ed. John Vickrey Van Cleve (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2007), 25.

⁵⁸ Gannon, *Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America*, 1.

⁵⁹ R.A.R. Edwards, *Words Made Flesh*, 143.

⁶⁰ Alexander Graham Bell, *Memoir Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of the Sciences, 1884).

⁶¹ Phyllis Valentine, “Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet: Benevolent Paternalism and the Origins of the American Asylum,” in *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations of the New Scholarship*, John Vickrey Van Cleve, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1993), 55.

to his students as his “children.”⁶² His paternalism, however, was benevolent; rather than using his authority to manipulate or exploit his students, as Sicard did, Gallaudet treated all of his students with “extraordinary kindness.”⁶³ Part of this paternalism included a level of evangelism as well; the Second Great Awakening had convinced Gallaudet that mass conversion would usher the Second Coming of Jesus. He looked on the evangelization of the Deaf as his special mission; he was “... a shepherd ‘for those poor lambs of the flock who hitherto had been wandering in the paths of ignorance.’”⁶⁴ The objectification of the Deaf as targets for Christian evangelism will be expanded upon more later in this paper; but this paternalism founded in religion separated the Deaf as “heathens” from the hearing society, who were already saved. While Gallaudet’s intentions were generally benevolent, his paternalism resulted in the general belittling of the Deaf at the Asylum, and the prevention of their development into self-actualized individuals. For example, in 1822 several rebellious students refused to submit to the discipline of the professors; Gallaudet offered “‘fatherly’ guidance,” to which they did not respond, being too old to readily accept his condescending advice.⁶⁵ Alumni also suffered the consequences of Gallaudet’s paternalistic legacy; his successor, Lewis Weld, was prone to offering advice to graduates, unprompted. The Deaf at the Hartford Asylum were thus successfully denied entry into adulthood, separated from their hearing counterparts and perpetually isolated from the dominant hearing society to which they were expected to adjust.

⁶² Ibid., 54.

⁶³ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 63.

While Gallaudet's paternalism was benevolent and had the unintended consequence of belittling the Deaf, his successors did not follow suit. For example, Gallaudet's second successor, Collins Stone, believed his Deaf students to be at "the level of mere animal life," without moral education by a hearing person.⁶⁶ According to Stone, Deafness conferred immorality, and the hearing were responsible for lifting the Deaf out of their "deplorable condition."⁶⁷ As a principal of the Hartford Asylum, Stone oscillated between pity for the Deaf who were "so helpless and so dependent upon care and aid," at his best and arrogance towards those "savages who could never attain full humanity."⁶⁸ Whether treating them as child-like dependents or grieving their inability to become fully human, Stone perpetuated images of the Deaf that firmly separated them from the rest of hearing society, even as he attempted to help them assimilate.

Separation from society was among the first manifestations of colonialism in the nineteenth-century Deaf community, but it was by no means the last. "Separation," Deaf scholar Owen Wrigley writes, "achieves isolation," that is, the isolation of the Deaf as a group.⁶⁹

Isolation of the Deaf as a Group

Isolation of the Deaf in France

Isolation of the Deaf was a result of their separation from the dominant hearing society. However, while their separation was physical, whether behind the walls of the

⁶⁶ Collins Stone, "On The Religious State, And Instruction Of The Deaf And Dumb," *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb* 1, no. 3 (1848): 134, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44401107>.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 137; Baynton, "Savages and Deaf-Mutes," 102.

⁶⁸ Valentine, "Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet," 65.

⁶⁹ Wrigley, *The Politics of Deafness*, 52.

Paris Institute or in the isolation of the Hartford Asylum, the isolation of the Deaf was largely social throughout the 19th century. Particularly in the U.S., Alexander Graham Bell advocated for the isolation of the Deaf from each other, which is a more advanced manifestation of colonialism, but still pervasive in the early Deaf community. This colonialist tendency to keep the Deaf away from the hearing has its roots in the Paris Institute, with the Abbé Sicard. But the 19th century also became the site of some of the first seeds of resistance within the Paris Institute, led by Auguste Bébien and his students.

Between 1790 and 1822, the Abbé Sicard directed the Paris Institute.⁷⁰ His actions there would have consequences across the ocean and resonate years after his death. Not only had Sicard sown harmful images of Deaf people during his tenure at the school, but he also promoted educational methods that were designed to force Deaf children to deny their identity and conform to majority society.⁷¹ Like Pereire before him, Sicard sought to make the Deaf as much like hearing people as possible. After his death in 1822, his successors carried on his legacy in France as well as in America. However, these successors were not without their opponents and the budding French Deaf community was not without its defenders. Among the most outspoken supporters of the Deaf identity and its natural language was Roch-Ambroise Auguste Bébien.

Named after his godfather, the Abbé Sicard himself, Bébien was a hearing student who attended and lived at the Paris Institute from his arrival in 1802 as a student at the age of thirteen, to his exile from the Institute in 1821.⁷² While at the Institute, Bébien befriended the star pupil, Laurent Clerc, and quickly became fluent in natural sign

⁷⁰ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 15.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 14-16.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 50, 60.

language.⁷³ As he progressed through the school, he attended classes with his Deaf friends, learned both methodical and natural sign language, and quickly rose to the top of the class after Clerc's departure. But he was also exposed to the inner workings of the educational pedagogy. A hearing man fully accepted by the Deaf community, Bébien was perfectly positioned to be a mediator between the Deaf students and the hearing administration; and mediate, he did. After becoming a professor, Bébien made a point of showing up to board meetings unannounced to air his grievances with the scandalized board members.⁷⁴ He made his position against oralism extremely clear.⁷⁵ He insisted on the use of natural sign language as a medium through which to teach Deaf children. He also fought vehemently for more funding for clothing and food for the students, even going so far as to pay for supplies out of his own pocket. His views on Deaf education and community drew fire from proponents of oralism, including the Baron de Gérando, the Minister of the Interior who oversaw the school's funding. Though he was promoted to the highest possible position in the school to which a teacher could rise, Bébien regularly butted heads with Sicard. The final straw came when, during a visit by the Duchess of Berry, Bébien pointed out the students' lack of sufficient clothing, embarrassing the school and forcing his exile in 1821.⁷⁶

Following his departure, Bébien wrote a two-part treatise on Deaf education, advocating for manualism and officially formalizing the natural sign language that had been forged for decades in the Institute.⁷⁷ He wrote the treatise, titled *Mimographie*, specifically

⁷³ Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 117-119.

⁷⁴ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 59.

⁷⁵ Emmett Kennedy, *Abbé Sicard's Deaf Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2015), 88.

⁷⁶ Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 117.

⁷⁷ Ferdinand Berthier, *Forging Deaf Education in Nineteenth-Century France: Biographical Sketches of Bébien, Sicard, Massieu, and Clerc* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press 2009), 9.

to help the parents of Deaf children, educators of the Deaf, and any hearing person willing to learn sign language. His book coincided with the rise of Désiré Ordinaire, Sicard's successor and a staunch oralist, who took over the Institute in 1831, after the school passed through several hands.⁷⁸ During his tenure, Ordinaire took two steps to undermine the use of manualism in Deaf education. First, he ordered that the students stay with one teacher through successive years, rather than staying with one teacher during their entire time at the Institute. This change meant that the students would get only oral education if assigned to a hearing teacher, and only manual education if assigned to a deaf teacher. But that was not enough for Ordinaire; he insisted that every student must have oral education. Logically, that meant all the students had to be assigned to hearing teachers, rendering the deaf educators useless.⁷⁹ Ordinaire acted with the support of the Baron de Gérando, the most powerful member of the school board, and their combined efforts secured the dominance of oralist pedagogy at the school for years to come.⁸⁰ But even after the resignation of Ordinaire and the succession of Adolphe de Lanneau in 1838, the installation of the oralist doctor Alexandre Blanchet, a disciple of Itard, carried on the oralist cause well into the late nineteenth century.⁸¹

Isolation of the Deaf in America

The story of Deaf education in America officially begins in 1812, when the General Association of Congregational Ministers in Connecticut conducted a census of the deaf at

⁷⁸ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 61.

⁷⁹ Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 150.

⁸⁰ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 60-63.

⁸¹ Bernard Mottez, "The Deaf-Mute Banquet and the Birth of the Deaf Movement" in *Deaf History Unveiled*, ed. John Vickrey Van Cleve (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press 1993), 33.

the request of Mason Cogswell, the father of a deaf girl named Alice; this census concluded that eighty-four deaf people lived in Connecticut, with as many as seven living in Hartford.⁸² ⁸³ Cogswell and Gallaudet were neighbors, and when illness confined Gallaudet to the home of the Cogswells, he began to take an interest in deaf education through his association with Alice.⁸⁴ Gallaudet's Yale education in theology combined with his interest in deaf education positioned him to preach the Gospel to the deaf.⁸⁵ This paternalistic attitude towards the Deaf informed his decision to continue methodical education at the Hartford school, despite his education in the natural signs by Laurent Clerc. From the time he founded the school with Clerc in 1817 to his death in 1851, Gallaudet tread the line between oralism and manualism; while his son, Edward Miner, defended Deaf education against oralists at the Congress of Milan in his name, Gallaudet himself aligned with Alexander Graham Bell on the question of Deaf intermarriage.⁸⁶ While his published works applauded the use of natural sign language to teach the Deaf, he continued to use the methodical signs he learned in Paris, sometimes combining his language with the natural signs of the students.⁸⁷

In 1817, Mason Cogswell sent Gallaudet to scout for teachers to help them start a school in Hartford for the deaf unearthed by the census; in Paris, he met Clerc while studying under Sicard and Massieu.^{88,89} Gallaudet convinced Clerc to come back to America

⁸² Edwards, *Words Made Flesh*, 14.

⁸³ Joshua L. Williams, "At a Meeting of the South Association of Hartford County," in *Hartford South Association 1743-1822* (1813): 194, <http://nehh-viewer.s3-website-us-east-1.amazonaws.com/#/content/CTGA/viewer/Hartford20South20Association2C2017431822/197>.

⁸⁴ Edwards, *Words Made Flesh*, 14.

⁸⁵ Phyllis Valentine, "Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet: Benevolent Paternalism and the Origins of the American Asylum" in *Deaf History Unveiled*, ed. John Vickrey Van Cleve (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1993), 58.

⁸⁶ Edward Miner Gallaudet, "The Intermarriage of the Deaf, and Their Education," *Science* 28 (Nov 1890): 295; Branson, *Damned for Their Difference*, 152.

⁸⁷ Van Cleve, *Deaf History Reader*, 38, 9.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

with him to start the school, and Clerc accepted. He taught Gallaudet French sign language on the 58-day voyage to America.⁹⁰ Together, they co-founded the first asylum for the Deaf, then called the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons and later renamed twice.⁹¹ Tuition per year was about \$20,000 (roughly \$300,000 in today's currency); classes were taught using natural and methodical sign language, as well as the manual alphabet and writing.⁹² Oral education was nonexistent. Gallaudet's paternalism, while perpetuating popular images of Deaf Americans as in need of saving, did not extend to his educational methods.

Gallaudet describes natural sign language as "an indispensable necessity."⁹³ Laurent Clerc's relationship with Bébien, as well as his experiences as a Deaf student at the Paris Institute informed his views on the uses of natural sign language, which influenced Gallaudet.⁹⁴ However, Rochester University professor of Deaf history Rebecca A.R. Edwards, describes a curriculum at the Hartford school that included methodical signs.⁹⁵ According to Edwin Mann's 1836 description of the other American schools, Gallaudet and

⁸⁹ Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 196-197.

⁹⁰ Laurent Clerc, *The Diary of Laurent Clerc's Voyage from France to America in 1816* (West Hartford, Connecticut: American School for the Deaf, 1952), 5-6.

⁹¹ Gannon, *Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of the Deaf in America*, xvii, 1-2. It is important to note the difference between asylums and schools. That the Deaf were first housed in asylums, which were later converted into schools for the convenience of hearing teachers, reflects the widely held notion of the Deaf as disabled in the nineteenth century. Not until well into the nineteenth century will these Deaf asylums become known as schools--but by then, the image of the Deaf as infirmed would be irreversibly ingrained in the minds of the American public. It is also important to note that, contrary to popular belief, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet did *not* establish Gallaudet University, but rather his son, Edward Miner, well after Thomas Hopkins' death.

⁹² American School for the Deaf Hartford, *Report of the Directors and Officers* (Connecticut: Hudson & Co. Printers, 1819), 7.

⁹³ Thomas. H. Gallaudet "On the Natural Language of Signs; and Its Value and Uses in the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb [Concluded]." *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb* 1, no. 2 (1848): 79-93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44401101>.

⁹⁴ Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 228; Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 50-51.

⁹⁵ Edwards, *Words Made Flesh*, 38.

Clerc's school was the exception rather than the rule.⁹⁶ While the other schools used the manual approach, their manualism was methodical rather than natural.⁹⁷ Historian Jan Branson attributes this preference for methodical signs to the influence of the "Paris school."⁹⁸ The roots of the Paris school's influence trace back to Clerc's time as a student and later a teacher there. The story of his meeting with Gallaudet while still a teacher at the Paris school has become a Deaf American myth, comparable to that of the Abbé de L'Épée in France.

In fact, Gallaudet and his son, Edward Miner, were staunch manualists. Despite Thomas Gallaudet's views against the intermarriage of the Deaf, he remained of the opinion that manual education was best for Deaf students. However, the fact that neither he nor his son fell prey to the oralist cause does not mean that oralism never entered America, nor that the Paris institute had nothing to do with the rise of oralism in America. Gallaudet, being a white hearing Protestant who married a Deaf woman to prevent her from having Deaf children, was an easy target to blame for the entrance of oralism into American Deaf education. His paternalistic and even colonialist views of the Deaf as "heathens" and his relegation of Clerc to the status of a mere "assistant" both seem behaviors more fit for an oralist.⁹⁹ However, Gallaudet is not the point of entrance for oralism in America, nor is his son, nor are any of the Deaf schools established in America before 1850. Rather, the

⁹⁶ Edwin Mann, *The deaf and dumb, or, A collection of articles relating to the condition of deaf mutes : their education, and the principal asylums devoted to their instruction* (Boston: D.K. Hitchcock, 1836), 178.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Branson, *Damned for Their Difference*, 138.

⁹⁹ Valentine, "Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet," 66.

emergence of oralism in America during the nineteenth century can be attributed in part to three men: Samuel Gridley Howe, Horace Mann, and Alexander Graham Bell.¹⁰⁰

Objectification: Scientific, Philosophical, and Religious

The list of categories mentioned in the first pages of this paper lists the category of “Objectification” at the end; however, because the act of separating and isolating a group of people inherently recreates them as objects that can be separated and isolated, I will treat this manifestation of colonialism here. Objectification of the Deaf began as early as their education; educators of the Deaf like Itard, Sicard, Épée and the Baron de Gérando treated the Deaf as experiments for religious, philosophical, and social progress. Their experimentation took place as part of a larger conversation about the origins of language, and these educators used their students to stake their place in the debate. This debate echoed across the ocean to the United States where, as previously mentioned, three men dominated the national educational debate in America throughout the 19th century. Each of these men— Howe, Mann, and Bell—often, if unintentionally, used the cause of the Deaf to further their own agendas and to gain fame on the international stage during a period in which education and languages were topics of contentious philosophical debate.

Objectification of the Deaf in France

The objectification of the Deaf in France may not have begun with the Paris Institute but it certainly became systematic there beginning in the late 18th century. As previously

¹⁰⁰ Edwards, *Words Made Flesh*, 143.

mentioned, the Abbé Sicard allowed the doctor Itard to perform literal scientific experiments on the Deaf students. These experiments included: soaking students' ears with "a blistering agent," and "caustic soda,;" "fracturing the skull of a few pupils"; pressing "a white-hot metal button behind the ear,;" threading "a string through a pupil's neck with a seton needle, which caused a suppurating wound"; and inserting all manner of instruments into their ears.¹⁰¹ Itard believed he was contributing to an ongoing debate concerning the causes and cures for deafness between medical contemporaries like Nicolas Deleau and Johann-Christoff Hoffbauer.¹⁰² However, Itard also created a dangerous environment for the Deaf students both inside the Paris Institute, as well as in the context of hearing society. By experimenting on the students, he reduced the Deaf students to their physical bodies; in short, he denied and ignored their humanity for the sake of scientific "progress."¹⁰³ This objectification extended beyond the walls of the school, and beyond Itard's life; in his will, he endowed the Paris Institute with funds to continue his experiments, which Leon Vaïsse began in 1843 and Jean-Jacques Valade-Gabel continued beginning in 1850.¹⁰⁴ The Abbé Sicard died in 1822, so he did not oversee the extension of Dr. Itard's experiments; however, he was not innocent of objectifying the Deaf during his tenure.

While director of the Paris Institute, Sicard was responsible for procuring funds for the school from the Ministry of the Interior after their subsummation under its jurisdiction in 1789. Like his successor Épée, Sicard paraded his deaf students before crowds of people

¹⁰¹ Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 134.

¹⁰² Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 24-25.

¹⁰³ "Progress" here is in quotes; Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard never successfully cured a congenitally deaf student.

¹⁰⁴ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 24; Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 436n110.

to answer questions in sign language; his most famous students were Jean Massieu and Laurent Clerc. With these students, Sicard would capitalize on public opinions of the Deaf as mentally impaired by presenting them as objects of fascination before hearing audiences. In this way, he would gain funding for the school, the sympathy of the public, and the acclaim of his benefactors.¹⁰⁵ While the education of the deaf children depended on the funding garnered through these presentations, I argue that both Sicard and Épée may have exploited deaf children for fame. I have two main reasons for my argument: the first is that Épée's "dictionary" was extremely flawed, despite his reputation as an excellent teacher; and the second is that Épée deliberately under-educated his deaf students in order to make the presentations easier for them to complete, and gain more funding for his school.

If the Abbé de L'Épée had a genuine interest in the well-being of the deaf in his care, he would not have written a sign dictionary whose entries often did not contain mention of the signs themselves.¹⁰⁶ For example, Épée's entry for the sign TO HEAR reads: "The deaf-mutes do not hear, but they understand what you explain to them through signs."¹⁰⁷ Similarly, several entries leave out descriptions of the actual sign, and for this reason, his dictionary was mostly ineffective. Yet, his methodical sign language with which he educated his students depended on the signs he described in this dictionary. If Épée's dictionary and the methods which he drew from it were so ineffective, how did he garner funding for his school? How did the presentations draw such illustrious audiences?

¹⁰⁵ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 53-54.

¹⁰⁶ Fischer, "Abbé de L'Épée and the Living Dictionary," 17.

¹⁰⁷ Abbe Charles-Michel de L'Épée, *Dictionnaire*, quoted in Fischer, Renate "Abbé de L'Épée and the Living Dictionary," in *Deaf History Unveiled*, ed. John Vickrey Van Cleve (Washington, D.C., Gallaudet University Press, 1993), 19.

The answer lies in a letter written from Épée to his successor, Abbé Sicard, in 1785: “If it is a matter of asking them [the deaf students] to resolve a question once in a while, it should be little familiar, and always the same ones... you have seen great personages of the Court... not asking for more.”¹⁰⁸ Here, Épée reveals that his questioning at the presentations was deliberately simple, to keep from challenging his students beyond what he believed to be their capacity. His words indicate that his intention had changed from educating the Deaf out of benevolence, if paternalistic, to educating the Deaf in order to gain renown. He goes on to admonish his successor to be satisfied with “the glory you see me enjoy.”¹⁰⁹ And again, in another letter, Épée urges Sicard not to get too ahead of himself in the education of the deaf: “Do not expect that they [the deaf students] can ever express their ideas in writing... Is it not sufficient for your glory to be destined to share mine?”¹¹⁰ In his own words, Épée reveals that his interest was not in educating the deaf, but in profiting off of their oppression. In the words of Deaf scholar Owen Wrigley, “... the Abbé de L’Épée sought a pious justification for his use of Deaf people both to demonstrate popular theories of language origins and to curry royal favor and public popularity.”¹¹¹ Clearly, his motives were not pure, and unfortunately, he passed them on to his successor, the Abbé Sicard, who built on his colonialist legacy with the help of the new French Revolutionary government.

Within the French Revolutionary government, the Ministry of the Interior oversaw this subjection of French Deaf students to experimentation. The Baron Joseph-Marie de Gérando was the most powerful member of the Ministry, from his first installation on the

¹⁰⁸Abbé Charles-Michel de L’Épée, quoted in Kennedy, Emmet *Abbé Sicard’s Deaf Education: Empowering the Mute, 1785-1820*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 13.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹¹¹ Wrigley, *The Politics of Deafness*, 55.

board in 1804 to his assignment as a governor of the Paris Institute in 1814.¹¹² He believed Deaf people to be “capable of attention, reflection, imagination, judgment and memory,” but that they were “condemned... to a great intellectual poverty,” as a result of their deafness.¹¹³ Gérando created images of the Deaf that objectified their differences from the hearing and branded them as negative; he conflated deafness with “indigence” and “misery,” and called on the hearing to “make this illness [deafness] more rare and less serious.”¹¹⁴ Gérando sought to recreate the Deaf in the image of the hearing by requiring the Deaf to learn to speak and to lipread. He did not believe sign language was a real language, and throughout his time as a governor, helped Itard and Ordinaire set oralism as the Paris Institute’s official pedagogy. Because he refused to accept sign language as a true language, he believed the Deaf to be without “a true language.”¹¹⁵ In a period when, philosophically, language was considered essential for human existence, Gérando therefore not only denied the Deaf their language, but also their humanity.

The French were not the only ones who treated their Deaf students as objects of philosophical, social, and religious experimentation; the Americans participated in similar methods throughout the 19th century, methods which directly led to the Milan Congress of 1880.

¹¹² Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 18.

¹¹³ Baron Joseph-Marie de Gérando, *De l'éducation des sourds-muets de naissance*, quoted by Anne Quartararo in *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 18.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹⁵ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 18, 60.

Objectification of the Deaf in America

Any discussion of the objectification of the Deaf in America must begin with Samuel Gridley Howe. Howe was a physician who became the first director of the Perkins Institute for the Blind in 1839.¹¹⁶ He championed oralism in the school and wrote extensive treatises encouraging other schools to follow suit. His most famous student, Laura Bridgman, entered the halls of Deaf historical mythology as one of the first Deaf and blind students in America. In his article, "Laura Bridgman and Oliver Caswell," Howe explains that he taught Bridgman using sign language, but regretted not attempting to teach her to speak, adding that "[t]he few words which she has learned to audibly pronounce prove that she could have learned more."¹¹⁷ Later in the article, he calls speech "the crowning achievement in human development," effectively relegating the deaf and mute to subhuman status.¹¹⁸ In the same article, he attributes his inspiration to none other than the Abbé Sicard, who, according to Howe, did not go far enough in trying to solve the question of teaching the Deaf to communicate.¹¹⁹ Howe insisted that a systematic and universal language could be discovered, using the Deaf as human experiments. In his article "The Comparative Happiness of the Deaf and Blind," published in the *American Annals of the Deaf* in 1875, Howe concludes that Deafness "is a more formidable obstacle in the way of normal development," because hearing "brings us into those moral and social relations and affections from the indulgence of which is the purest, highest, and most lasting happiness is

¹¹⁶ "Founders," Perkins School for the Blind, accessed October 29, 2018, <http://www.perkins.org/history/people/founders>.

¹¹⁷ Samuel Gridley Howe, "Laura Bridgman and Oliver Caswell," *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb* 20, no. 2 (1875): 106, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44401437>.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

derived.”¹²⁰ In the context of a Deaf publication, one might argue that he simply wanted to show sympathy for his Deaf audience; but further historiography would prove that the Deaf of the nineteenth century denied that their Deafness was at all an “obstacle” to their happiness or morality, as Howe believed.

Far from being concerned with the happiness of the Deaf, Howe wanted to terminate all hints of cultural Deafness. To do this, Howe attacked sign language as a means through which the Deaf created a world of their own, and therefore were not only separating themselves from hearing people, but were also unable to morally improve because of their self-imposed isolation from the hearing.¹²¹ In Howe’s work, *Remarks upon the Education of Deaf Mutes*, he defended the statement of the Massachusetts Board of Education, of which Horace Mann was the chairman; they said, “Speech is essential for human development,” and Howe agreed, even calling the statement “sound.”¹²² However, Howe did not advocate for mainstreaming; he called Blanchet’s plan “impractical to the full extent.”¹²³ Still, he said, “... it [mainstreaming] certainly has very valuable features, which deserve notice and trial. We will watch the experiment in France with great interest...”¹²⁴ Here, Howe reveals the influence of Dr. Blanchet and the Paris Institute on his views. While he was unwilling to implement mainstreaming in America for fear of contaminating the hearing students, he applauded Blanchet’s efforts and sought to replicate his oralist views

¹²⁰ Samuel Gridley Howe, “The Comparative Happiness of The Blind and The Deaf,” *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb* 20, no. 3 (1875): 178, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44401452>.

¹²¹ Edwards, *Words made Flesh*, 186.

¹²² Samuel Gridley Howe, *Remarks upon the Education of Deaf Mutes in Defence of the Doctrines of the Second Annual Report of the Massachusetts Board of State Charities, and in Reply to the Charges of the Rev. Collins Stone, Principal of the American Asylum at Hartford* (Boston : 1866), 19, 16, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/yul.11351739_000_00.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

in American Deaf education. For Howe, simply making the Deaf resemble the hearing as closely as possible, and to make them reject other Deaf people was a high enough goal.¹²⁵ Howe's desire to separate the Deaf was not out of a sincere intent to make their lives easier. He believed Deafness to be a cultural illness with "morbid effects" that had to be prevented for the good of society.¹²⁶ Howe was not alone in his misconception of the Deaf and sign language as threats to moral society; his close personal friend, colleague, and fellow philosopher, Horace Mann, agreed with his views.

Horace Mann was one of the most important education reformers in the 19th century. He served on the Massachusetts Board of Education from 1837 to his election to the Senate in 1848, and his involvement with Deaf education was brief but extremely influential.¹²⁷ He wrote exactly once on the topic, in the *Seventh Annual Report of the Massachusetts State Board of Education* published in 1844. In it, he writes:

I found a class in the school for the deaf and dumb in Paris, which the instructor was endeavoring to teach to speak orally; but it is not certain that the experiment will succeed in the French language, —that language having so many similar sounds for different ideas. With the English language, however, a triumph over this great natural imperfection might undoubtedly be won...¹²⁸

Here, then, is the undeniable proof of the French roots of American oralism, and thus, of American neocolonial attitudes towards the Deaf. With the influence of the Paris Institute, Mann advocated for the implementation of oralist pedagogy in Massachusetts. Not only did he believe Deafness to be a disease, but he also related the Deaf to "savages,"

¹²⁵ Edwards, *Words Made Flesh*, 187.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹²⁸ Horace Mann, "Seventh Annual Report to the Massachusetts State Board of Education," *The Common School Journal* 6, no. 8 (March 1844): 81.

and supported the prevention of Deaf intermarriage, claiming that a “diseased” mother would not produce healthy children, no more than “an immoral mother will train her children to morality”.¹²⁹ He went on to conflate rational thought with speech; because humans think in the same language they speak, he reasoned, the Deaf must not be able to think in a human way, being unable to speak.¹³⁰ His report spurred the Massachusetts Board of Education to approve funds for a separate, entirely oralist school for the Deaf.¹³¹ In 1867, the Clarke School for the Deaf opened, using only oralist techniques to teach their Deaf students.¹³² Mann did not live to see his oralist dreams come true; he died in 1859, leaving a legacy of oralism which would be continued by his oralist supporters, including the inventor, Alexander Graham Bell.

Alexander Graham Bell is conspicuously less famous for his support for the eradication of Deafness. He viewed lowercase-d deafness as a disease, and did not recognize Deaf culture at all.¹³³ Consistently, he defended his views against the intermarriage of the Deaf in the famous *Science* magazine.¹³⁴ Essentially, Bell believed that Deafness was an undesirable characteristic that should be prevented from spreading and eventually eradicated.¹³⁵ Not only did he paint deafness as a disability, he admonished anyone who attempted to defend the Deaf identity.¹³⁶ For example, Dr. Philip Gillett, the superintendent of the Illinois Institution for the Deaf for most of the nineteenth century,

¹²⁹ Ibid., 189-190.

¹³⁰ Edwards, *Words Made Flesh*, 149.

¹³¹ Ibid., 146.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Bell, *Memoirs Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race*, 3.

¹³⁴ Alexander Graham Bell, “Professor A. Graham Bell’s Studies of the Deaf,” *Science* 16, no 396 (1890): 135-136.

¹³⁵ Bell, *Memoirs Upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race*.

¹³⁶ Bell, “Professor A. Graham Bell’s Studies of the Deaf,” *Science*, 136.

argued vehemently against the prevention of Deaf intermarriage, calling such a practice “monstrous cruelty.”¹³⁷ He pointed out that being Deaf was not “a crime, or a disgrace,” and insisted that the Deaf were happier when united.¹³⁸ Bell, on the other hand, advocated for the separation of Deaf people by denying them marriage; he also advocated for separating children into “normal” schools and vehemently insisted on teaching the Deaf to speak, believing speech to be absolutely indispensable and the Deaf without recourse.¹³⁹ Bell outlined his ideas at the Congress of Paris in 1900, advocating for the implementation of the resolutions of the Congress of Milan, ten years earlier.¹⁴⁰ The Milan resolutions would deal considerable damage to the Deaf community for nearly a century, and whose images of the Deaf would continue to inform hearing perceptions of Deafness today.

Denial by Exclusion: the Congress of Milan

The most obvious manifestation of the fourth and final category of colonialism was the Congress of Milan in 1880, which resulted in the official exclusion of Deaf educators from schools, and the exclusion of their language from Deaf classrooms. The Congress was purely oralist from its inception to its conclusion. The Congress began in September of 1880 and lasted for five days. The organizing committee for the Congress consisted of twelve people from the Paris Convention, a congress that had taken place in 1878 in Paris.

¹³⁷ Philip G. Gillett, “Deaf-Mutes,” *Science* 16, no. 404 (1890): 249, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1767111>.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Alexander Graham Bell, “The Progress Made in Teaching Deaf Children to Read Lips and Talk, in the United States and Canada,” *Science* 20, no. 499 (1892): 120, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1767780>.

¹⁴⁰ Edward Miner Gallaudet, *History of the College for the Deaf, 1857-1907*, ed. Lance J. Fischer and David L. de Lorenzo (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1983), 196.

¹⁴¹ Of the twelve, eleven came from France, and eight supported oralism.¹⁴² Edward Miner Gallaudet, who attended and gave his vehement defense of sign language, wrote that the Congress was arranged in such a way that “the promoters of articulation secured every possible advantage to themselves.”¹⁴³ His first impressions of the organization of the Congress were only the beginning; the entire Congress, which was supposed to give each side the same amount of time to argue their points, was hijacked by the oralists. They came with their minds made up: sign language was inadequate as a form of instruction for the Deaf.¹⁴⁴ Of the 164 people in attendance, *three* were Deaf: Joseph Théobald, a teacher at the Paris Institute, Claudius Forestier, Berthier’s friend and colleague, and James Denison, from the Kendall School in Washington, D.C.¹⁴⁵ None of these Deaf men were able to defend their language; in three days, the Congress had legalized the oppression of oralism over the Deaf. How did the Congress come to the conclusions that it did?

The discussion topics at the Congress were not varied; they included questions “relating to buildings, and all material arrangements for the accommodation of inmates of institutions... everything concerning the details of instruction... the various methods of teaching... [and] special questions.”¹⁴⁶ There was only one question concerning furniture: whether Deaf schools should accept boarding students or only day students.¹⁴⁷ None of the eight resolutions adopted by the Congress addressed this issue, except to say

¹⁴¹ Richard G. Brill, *International Congresses on Education of the Deaf: An Analytical History 1878-1980* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet College Press, 1984), 13.

¹⁴² E. M. Gallaudet, “The Milan Convention,” *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb* 26, no. 1 (1881): 2, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44461114>.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 92.

¹⁴⁵ Brill, *International Congresses*, 18; Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 93; Gallaudet, “The Milan Convention,” 3.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴⁷ Brill, *International Congresses*, 18.

that Deaf schools should only provide oralist textbooks.¹⁴⁸ Perhaps the question of boarding students was left unanswered because of the overwhelming responses to the next section of the Congress: the best way to teach the Deaf.

The principal of the Pereire School for the Deaf in Paris opened the proceedings, and he was immediately followed by two women arguing for the oralist method.¹⁴⁹ In his brief summary of their arguments, Gallaudet interposed that he advocated for the “combined” system of signs and articulation. “Those views,” he continued, “... found little favor in the Convention.”¹⁵⁰ Though the speakers were only allotted a short amount of time to speak, the Abbé Tarra, president of the Milan Institution for the Indigent Deaf-Mutes and of the Congress itself, spoke for more than two hours on two consecutive days on the merits of oralism, allowing the manualists no time for rebuttal.^{151,152} At the end of the week, the Congress adopted eight resolutions that would change the course of Deaf education for nearly a century.

The Congress passed eight resolutions; five of these concerned the textbooks required for oralism, the appropriate age to begin articulation courses, the increase in funding for oralist schools, the encouragement of the instructors to check on their students’ progress in oralism after they left school, and that writing and reading should be taught by the oral method.¹⁵³ But the two most impactful resolutions adopted by the Congress of Milan were as follows:

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴⁹ Gallaudet, “The Milan Convention,” 5.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Brill, *International Congresses*, 18.

¹⁵² Gallaudet, “The Milan Convention,” 5.

¹⁵³ Brill, *International Congresses*, 20-21.

1. " The Convention, considering the incontestable superiority of speech over signs, (1) for restoring deaf-mutes to social life,(2) for giving them greater facility of language, declares that the method of articulation should have the preference over that of signs in the instruction and education of the deaf and Dumb."

2. "Considering that the simultaneous use of signs and speech has the disadvantage of injuring speech and lip-reading and precision of ideas, the Convention declares that the pure oral method ought to be preferred."¹⁵⁴

These two resolutions were opposed only by the five American delegates and a single English delegate.¹⁵⁵ The resolutions effectively banned sign language from Deaf schools, a ban which would continue until 1988, when Gallaudet University called for a return to ASL as the main method of education. In the meantime, the oralist delegates returned to their respective countries, full of the ideas they'd heard from other oralists, the confidence in the inadequacy of sign language, and the determination to implement oralist techniques in their schools. Gallaudet raged against the Convention in the *American Annals of the Deaf*, calling the Congress undemocratic in its representation, "wholly partisan in its management and not at all representative in its composition or manner of voting..."¹⁵⁶ Gallaudet excoriated each of the speakers for their support of pure oralism, pointing out inconsistencies between their presentations at the Congress and their practices at their schools.¹⁵⁷ Having discredited the presenters, he then went on to disprove the premises on which they had founded their support for oralism. That sign language impeded reading comprehension or the development of adequate writing skills, said Gallaudet, was a fallacy

¹⁵⁴ Gallaudet, "The Milan Convention," 6.

¹⁵⁵ Brill, *International Congresses*, 20.

¹⁵⁶ Gallaudet, "The Milan Convention," 6.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-11.

proven wrong through experience.¹⁵⁸ While Gallaudet admits that speech would be preferable given time and resources, he also explains that the time and resources would be utterly wasted; the Deaf live happy, fulfilling lives in hearing society without needing to speak.¹⁵⁹

Gallaudet closed his remarks on the Congress by quoting the Abbé Tarra, the president of the Congress as saying, “Speech is addressed to the intellect, while gestures speak coarsely to the senses.”¹⁶⁰ Gallaudet expressed his disdain at the Abbé Tarra, who claimed to be an expert in sign language as well as the oral method: “...every *master* of that language knows how completely it may be made to convey and clearly express the highest religious and moral truths and sentiments.”¹⁶¹ Gallaudet ended on a somber, yet hopeful note, calling on his Deaf and manualist colleagues to keep the oralists’ pedagogy from “attempting manifest absurdities.”¹⁶² Gallaudet’s call to action, however, would prove futile.

In the aftermath of the Congress, French and American Deaf schools solidified oralism as their main method of education. There was no official legislation; the only authority the Congress had was its influence over public opinion of Deaf education. Parents of Deaf children insisted on articulation education, and indeed, most schools in America and France offered them; even Gallaudet, with all his opposition, made sure articulation was offered at the Hartford Asylum.¹⁶³ The process to expand oralism that had begun in the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., italics included in the original.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Thomas Day, “A Brief History Of The American Asylum, At Hartford, For The Education And Instruction Of The Deaf And Dumb,” accessed November 24, 2018, 54, <https://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/lib/detail.html?id=1371&page=all#55>.

1860s in America only accelerated after the Congress of Milan, aided by Alexander Graham Bell's publications and his speech at the 1900 International Congress for the Education of the Deaf in Paris.¹⁶⁴ At this Congress, the hearing and the Deaf were separated; the hearing passed resolutions on Deaf issues without seeking a vote by the Deaf or consulting any of the Deaf delegates.¹⁶⁵ When Gallaudet requested a joint session, he was denied; Alexander Graham Bell justified this motion by explaining that "the adult deaf were not competent to discuss or to vote on the value of speech or speech-reading unless they themselves could speak well."¹⁶⁶ With this structure, the manualists and Deaf delegates were once again shut out of the discussions concerning their issues. The exile of the Deaf from Deaf spaces and discussions of Deaf issues began a precedent that continued well into the twentieth century and continues to inform hearing-Deaf interactions today.

A Nuanced Debate: Manualism vs. Oralism

The Language Debate in France

Though the succession of Adolphe de Lanneau in 1838 and the installation of Alexandre Blanchet as the physician at the Paris Institute dealt a heavy blow to the Deaf community in the 19th century, all was not completely lost for the manualist cause. The Deaf students and professors at the school found ways to resist oralist encroachment both inside and outside the school. The students sprayed graffiti on the walls and passed around rude cartoons of the school board members.¹⁶⁷ Despite Ordinaire's attempts to undermine

¹⁶⁴ Gallaudet, *History of the College for the Deaf 1857-1907*, 196.

¹⁶⁵ Brill, *International Congresses*, 56.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 396.

¹⁶⁷ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 63.

the presence of Deaf educators at the Paris Institute, Deaf professor and prominent activist Ferdinand Berthier continued to teach at the Paris Institute while he began a movement with other Deaf educators in France to protest the rise of oralism in the Institute's pedagogy.¹⁶⁸ He and his fellow Deaf teachers and Paris Institute alumni, Alphonse Lenoir and Claudius Forestier created what most Deaf historians such as Anne Quartararo, Harlan Lane, Paddy Ladd, Jan Branson and John Vickrey Van Cleve refer to as the Banquet Movement.¹⁶⁹

The Banquet Movement began in 1834 when Berthier called a meeting of ten other deaf educators and activists at his home in Paris. The members of the committee included Deaf Paris Institute alumni, Deaf artists, and Deaf teachers of other Deaf schools.¹⁷⁰ Together, they planned the first meeting of deaf educators and activists from European countries for November of that year, on the 122nd anniversary of the birth of Abbé de L'Épée.¹⁷¹ Each banquet was dedicated to the memory of the Abbé de L'Épée.¹⁷² Those in attendance at the first banquet in 1834 were mostly the white male Deaf elite of France, Germany, Italy, and England and a selected few hearing guests, totaling 60 people in attendance.¹⁷³ The banquets were organized, planned, and run exclusively by the committee formed and led by Berthier. Each banquet consisted of signed speeches by the Deaf in attendance, a time to socialize with other Deaf, and exchanges of ideas concerning

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 114.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.; Mottez, "The Deaf-Mute Banquet and the Birth of the Deaf Movement," 31; Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture*, 109.

¹⁷⁰ Mottez, "The Deaf-Mute Banquet and the Birth of the Deaf Movement," 31-33.

¹⁷¹ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 114.

¹⁷² Branson, *Damned for Their Difference*, 144.

¹⁷³ Mottez, "The Deaf-Mute Banquet and the Birth of the Deaf Movement," 32.

Deaf education, society, and politics.¹⁷⁴ The banquets gave the European Deaf communities a chance to mingle, exchange ideas, and develop their sense of communal identity.

These annual banquets were held in Paris, and became the sites of identity development, but they were also the sites of major points of contention for the Deaf community. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, prominent Deaf activists formed rival Deaf associations, societies, and groups. The first and most important society was the *Société Central*, founded by Berthier in 1837, which consisted of the same ten leaders as the Banquet Movement committee.¹⁷⁵ Berthier received official permission from the Ministry of the Interior to form the society, whose purpose was to unite “all deaf people spread across the globe, ... to put speaking and deaf men of intelligence and heart in rapport with each other, no matter the distance, no matter the difference in language, culture, and laws.”¹⁷⁶ The Banquet Movement continued well into the 1850s, but was marked by dissension among the Deaf leaders of the *Société Centrale*. Some leaders, like Berthier, wanted the group to focus on the development of a broader Deaf identity, whereas others wanted the group to work towards more practical goals for the Deaf, including employment and discrimination protections.¹⁷⁷ The 1848 revolution and the promise of a more republican national government opened a door for Deaf leaders regardless of their differences; the volatile environment was a prime opportunity to leverage for Deaf issues, particularly education. Students from the Paris Institute took part

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 35-37.

¹⁷⁵ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 117; Mottez, “The Deaf-Mute Banquet and the Birth of the Deaf Movement,” 37.

¹⁷⁶ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 115.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 118.

in political demonstrations and public debates in increasing numbers.¹⁷⁸ Berthier took advantage of this political climate to advocate for the Paris Institute to be shifted from the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Education.¹⁷⁹ At the same time, he suggested to the new provisional government that the selection of the Paris Institute administration be determined by popular vote of the students, though this request was denied.¹⁸⁰

And these notions *were* prevailing; despite the best efforts by the Deaf activists in the first half of the nineteenth century in France, oralism continued to spread across France, supported by the Ministry of the Interior and the Paris Institute, which had become the national standard for Deaf education in France.¹⁸¹ Efforts by the Paris Institute hearing teachers kept their Deaf counterparts away from Deaf students and competed with their Deaf associations for funding in the public domain; a government dominated by oralists refused to allow the Deaf to make decisions for their community. This conflict between the Deaf and the hearing would define the language debate in America as well as in France throughout the 19th century, and even continues today.

The Language Debate in America

In the United States, the first seeds of oralism were sown in the eighteenth century by Dr. William Thornton in his essay, "Teaching the Deaf, or Surd, and Consequently the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 119.

¹⁷⁹ Alphonse Lenoir, *Faits Divers, Pensées Diverses et Quelques Réponses de Sourds-Muets, Précédés de Notions Sur La Dactylogogie*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Rue Racine, 1850), <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k859648k>, 18.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 119.

¹⁸¹ Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 80.

Dumb, to Speak.”¹⁸² By 1850, oralism had begun to prevail over manualism as the best means for educating Deaf students. The endeavours of three prominent American oralists--Alexander Graham Bell, Samuel Gridley Howe, and Horace Mann-- as well as the philosophical roots of American oralism in nineteenth century France will be analyzed here, along with the futile efforts of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc to maintain manualism. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, it seemed as though the Americans had learned from the mistakes of the French. Historian and scholar Jan Branson described an educational environment in which, generally, “ ... nearly all educators considered sign language indispensable.”¹⁸³ Until the 1860s, methodical sign language was the dominant method through which American educators taught Deaf students.

Leading up to the Congress of Milan, the Banquet Movement in France and the success of manualism in America would pose a formidable threat to the oralist establishment in the nineteenth century, one which leading oralists-- most notably, Alexander Graham Bell-- would feel compelled to challenge. The conflict between manualism and oralism raged in America, led by Bell and Edward Miner Gallaudet, Thomas Gallaudet’s son and the founder of the Columbia Institute, now known as Gallaudet University. Their conflict had its counterpart in France, where Ferdinand Berthier continued to lead the charge in support of manualism, with Lenoir, Forestier and an army of Deaf activists who had endured and criticized the methodology at the Paris Institute, which was, after 1850, widely adopted by other schools in France.¹⁸⁴ On both sides of the

¹⁸² Marian G. Bell, “Dr. William Thornton and His Essay on ‘Teaching the Deaf, or Surd, and Consequently the Dumb, to Speak,’ 1793: Sketch of the Life of Dr. William Thornton,” in *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, 20 (1917): 225-236, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40067084>.

¹⁸³ Branson, *Damned for Their Difference* 93.

¹⁸⁴ Brill, *International Congresses*, 14.

ocean, oralism was on the rise; in America, the Civil War caused an upheaval in Deaf education that allowed oralists to dominate educational discourse. In France, the 1860s and 70s saw a marked increase in attacks on sign language.¹⁸⁵ These attacks would lead to the fateful battle in Milan.

Chief among the attacks on sign language in France was the publication of Oscar Claveau's report on deaf schools.¹⁸⁶ The Ministry of the Interior had charged him-- the nephew of the famous oralist Baron de Gérando-- with researching the benefits of oralism in French schools.¹⁸⁷ His report in favor of the oralist method would directly influence the conclusion of the Milan Congress.¹⁸⁸ Claveau's research gave French oralists courage to stand more firmly against sign language in schools.¹⁸⁹ Chief among these oralists were Paris Institute teacher Jean-Jacques Valade-Gabel and Paris Institute doctor Alexandre Blanchet. Valade-Gabel did not advocate so much for the teaching of articulation, but rather to use written language as the primary medium through which to educate the Deaf.¹⁹⁰ He considered sign language to be "vague and cloudy" and pose a "serious obstacle[...] to the study and practice of the French language."¹⁹¹ But where Valade-Gabel's views on sign language were lukewarm at best, Blanchet's were virulent. He was obsessed with the creation of a unified French identity, which meant eradicating all forms of difference in society, including French sign language.¹⁹² He created the *Société generale d'assistance et de*

¹⁸⁵ Branson, *Damned for Their Difference*, 45.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ "Death of Oscar Claveau," *American Annals of the Deaf* 50, 1 (January 1905): 264.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Branson, *Damned for Their Difference*, 46.f

¹⁹⁰ Jean-Jacques Valade-Gabel, "The Institutions for the Deaf and Dumb in France," *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb* 24, no. 4 (1879): 243, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44401631>.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 240.

¹⁹² Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 87.

prévoyance in 1849, and through this organization he published his works in support of oralism, gained funding from the Ministry of the Interior, and started ten schools in Paris by the mid-1860s, all using pure oralism.¹⁹³

In each of Blanchet's schools, the blind and deaf commingled; this coexistence was a stepping stone to mainstreaming, which Valade-Gabel had proven was beneficial for the Deaf, and which Blanchet began to promote in 1863.¹⁹⁴ The Ministry of Public Instruction accepted Blanchet's proposal to generalize mainstreaming by forming a special committee to investigate the effects of mainstreaming. The minister of education, Victor Duruy, had no jurisdiction over Deaf schools because they were still under the Ministry of the Interior; however, he enlisted the help of Blanchet and Valade-Gabel to conclude that mainstreaming had only three issues. These issues included how the Deaf students would be disciplined in class, how they would adversely affect the performance of the hearing students, and how much of the teachers' time they would take up.¹⁹⁵ However, all of these problems were overshadowed by what the commission seemed to think was a larger benefit: by being exposed to civilized hearing students, the Deaf would be educated in morality, social order and respect for authority.¹⁹⁶

Alexander Graham Bell and Edward Miner Gallaudet argued over the same issue. Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, oralists and manualists published arguments in *Science*, in independent publications through their institutions, and in reports on their education

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Anne T. Quartararo, "The Poetry of a Minority Community: Deaf Poet Pierre Pélissier and the Formation of a Deaf Identity in the 1850s," *Sign Language Studies* 8, no. 3 (2008): 251, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26190579>; Quartararo, *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*, 88.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 89.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

techniques to their respective boards of education. Until the mid-1860s, methodical sign language was widely accepted as the *modus operandi* in Deaf education.¹⁹⁷ Charles Darwin's *Origins of Species* transformed the American social and political landscape, and this transformation could be seen sharpest in the conversations surrounding Deaf education. Social Darwinism justified the views of eugenicists such as Bell, and their ideas of Deafness as social disease. Paralleling the social push to make the Deaf as hearing as possible, the educational debate also shifted away from sign language in the 1860s. The early emphasis on sign language had edged articulation out of the educational discussion, and since sign language seemed to the parents of Deaf children to have produced unfavorable results, oralism began to rise.¹⁹⁸ Deaf schools refused to hire Deaf teachers. Parents were told to speak to their Deaf children as early as possible, to prepare them for articulation classes. Any child caught using sign language had their hands tied up, placed in bags or were made to sit on them.¹⁹⁹ These practices continued right up until the Congress of Milan in 1880; by that time, American Deaf education was irrevocably oralist, and primed to receive an even more radical oralism championed by the Milan Congress.

The Result: Neo-Colonialism in the Modern American Deaf Community

Historians Jan Branson and Don Miller claim that the effects of the Milan Congress are “overstated.”²⁰⁰ I disagree. While oralism had been on the rise in France and in America in the decades preceding the Congress, the resolutions passed there did not just signal an

¹⁹⁷ Gannon, *Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America*, 359; E.A. Fay, “Notice of Published Proceedings,” *American Annals of the Deaf* 24 (1879): 277, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44401636>.

¹⁹⁸ Gannon, *Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America*, 359.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 361.

²⁰⁰ Branson, *Damned for Their Difference*, 154.

official shift to oralism in Deaf education. The banning of sign language was an outright rejection of the humanity of Deaf people. To deny a people access to their native language is one of the mainstays of colonialism. What is left of Native American languages are slipping further and further into obscurity; the 1800 Congress of Milan was a nearly successful attempt by the hearing to do the same to sign language. I say nearly successful, because American sign language did survive, thanks to the preservation of the language by black Deaf Americans, whose segregation in every aspect of American life had left them on the outside of the effects of the Congress' resolutions. Though ASL survived this period of oppression, Branson's argument that the effects of the Congress of Milan were therefore overestimated is still flawed.

In the decades following the Congress of Milan, several countries began to fund projects and organizations dedicated to enacting its resolutions.²⁰¹ These organizations, usually in Catholic countries, used religion as a means to conduct oralism in Deaf schools; we can see hearing-centric references in religious texts, not least of which is the constant relation of medical deafness to immorality. Oralists in the countries represented at the Congress began campaigns to educate the Deaf through oralism, with the justification that speech alone was "divine itself," and "the right way to speak of divine matters."²⁰² This quote by Abbé Tarra reflects a disturbing and common conflation between Deafness and soullessness; in one sentence, the president of the Congress deprived the Deaf of their humanity. Not only that, but the Congress also deprived the Deaf of the ability to make

²⁰¹ Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture*, 120-124.

²⁰² Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 394.

decisions based on their own experience, leaving them vulnerable to hearing oppression through their education.

The two major manifestations of hearing neocolonialism mentioned at the beginning of this paper deserve attention here. Those manifestations were: the prevalence of cochlear implants and the mainstreaming of Deaf children into Deaf schools. The former is a direct result of the centuries of research carried out by the oralist doctors in the Paris Institute, searching for a cure and designing prototypes of what would become hearing trumpets, then hearing aids, and finally cochlear implants. Today, 11% of Deaf people in the world are implanted, and 34% of Deaf Americans have been implanted.²⁰³ Once implanted, the children are at an increased risk for meningitis. But beyond the physical ramifications of the implants, Deaf children are socially isolated from the only people who can directly relate to their Deaf experience; this forced and legalized isolation is one of the many ways in which hearing people have colonized the Deaf community. The success of the implants varies from case to case, the surgery is costly, and some Deaf people for whom the surgery fails report utter disappointment. Cochlear implants only allow some sound to be heard in some cases where the Deaf person is not congenitally Deaf; but they do not allow for the differentiation of sounds.²⁰⁴ Cochlear implants are just another phase of attempts by the hearing to make the Deaf less Deaf, under the guise of helping them navigate a hearing world that they can *already navigate* with sign language.

The second manifestation, that of mainstreaming, is arguably the more pernicious of the aforementioned neocolonial tactics, being more widespread and its effects more

²⁰³ "Quick Statistics About Hearing," NIDCD, August 18, 2015, <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/statistics/quick-statistics-hearing>.

²⁰⁴ Wrigley, *The Politics of Deafness*, 208-9.

far-reaching than the implantation of an individual. The hearing supporters of mainstreaming argue that in allowing the Deaf to be educated with the hearing, they have equal access to education. But this is a fallacy; here again, we see the conflation of Deafness as disability. In mainstreaming the Deaf, they are being denied an *identity* wholly separate from their peers, an identity which informs the ways in which the Deaf interact with their world. But this identity is not static, and cannot simply be catered to through “special education.”²⁰⁵ The physical inclusion of the Deaf in hearing spaces is inherently their exclusion; far from feeling accepted, they feel all the more alienated, and their difference is pronounced while their identity is denied.

But why does this matter? Why should we care about a Congress in 1880 or the ways Deaf students interact with hearing ones? What does one meeting of educators of the Deaf nearly 138 years ago have anything to do with what is happening today? Looking closely, one will see manifestations of hearing neocolonialism present all around. In the way we speak to someone after they have asked us to repeat ourselves (*are you Deaf?*), in the hearing-centricity of idioms (*Deaf as a post*), in the way the wildly incorrect captions on a TV in a local restaurant draw derision and laughter. In my research for this paper, I have encountered more evidence of hearing neocolonialism than I ever imagined could exist: in the confusion of hearing people as to why I would be interested in such a topic; in the indignation by some who dismissed the history of Deaf rights as irrelevant; in the efforts by some professionals to advise that I temper my own attitude towards the subject of hearing oppression. These people mean well. Their questions (“Why isn’t there a universal sign

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 92.

language? Why don't Deaf people just not attend the theater? Who cares, if I've never met a Deaf person?") are borne from genuine curiosity. And this is the problem that the Congress of Milan so profoundly influenced: that hearing people do not pay attention to the issues facing the Deaf. When I say this, I am met with sheepish nods from my friends, my coworkers, and my family. If we know that we do not pay attention, why do we not make more of an effort to educate ourselves?

The Congress of Milan, in solidifying oralism, also cemented this apathetic attitude of the hearing towards the Deaf. Because oralism is founded fundamentally on the view of Deafness as disability, and this conception became the official one adopted by the Congress, the label of "disability" became ingrained in hearing society. Today, hearing people struggle to view Deafness in any other way. Is it not disrespectful to a Deaf person not to recognize their struggle? Yes. But it is infinitely more disrespectful to conflate their struggle with disability, as if Deafness is simply a lack of a sense and not a presence of an identity rich in a history of resistance, in a beautiful language that survived against all odds, and in a community that regards each of its members as precious.

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