

REVIEWS

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CAROL A. PADDEN & TOM L. HUMPHRIES, *Inside Deaf culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005. Pp. 224. Hb \$22.95.

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Since its publication in 1988, Padden & Humphries's book *Deaf in America: Voices from a culture* (Harvard University Press) has been an important resource for people studying American Sign Language, Deaf studies, and the linguistics of signed languages. The book sheds light on the Deaf experience and on how American Deaf people construct themselves through stories and language play, including poetry and jokes. It is a positive, at times humorous window into Deaf culture and identity. Harvard University Press has just released the authors' much-anticipated second book, reviewed here. Although it is just as informative, engaging, and well-researched as their first book, *Inside Deaf culture* examines a much bleaker aspect of Deaf America: its encounter with hearing hegemony.

Padden & Humphries, who are Deaf themselves, write a Deaf State of the Union address, intermixed with history and stories about various individuals. As a starting point for discussion for most of the chapters, they establish context by examining a particular historical event. These historical moments remind readers that the existence of Deaf America and its struggle and resistance against the hegemony of English speakers is long and ongoing. Padden & Humphries show how the Deaf community over time has negotiated its cultural and linguistic existence, employing varying strategies of counter-hegemony.

Drawing upon Foucault's analysis regarding institutions and the regulation of the body, Padden & Humphries elaborate in detail sex abuse allegations against a principal and his relations with deaf female students at a residential school in the early 19th century. Nineteenth-century institutionalization emphasized segregation "to remove the afflicted – the deaf, the blind, and insane, and the criminal – 'from the streets' where they were wont to wander without constraint, and place them in more regimented environments." Deaf people were victims of state power, sometimes abused further by individual agents of that power. At the same

time, institutionalization helped to constitute Deaf identity by bringing Deaf people together, allowing collective cultural and linguistic definition as well as united resistance and struggle.

Padden & Humphries also explore the relationship between Deaf blacks and Deaf whites, noting the exclusion of Deaf blacks from various Deaf-run organizations, including the National Association of the Deaf, the first civil rights organization in the United States.

The authors address the “then and now” transformation of class consciousness and social spaces. After World War II, the Deaf working class developed strong social cohesiveness across the nation by creating physical Deaf-owned and managed meeting spaces; today, access to technology, among other things, has resulted in an increased use of ephemeral spaces. They conclude that “while spaces have changed, the strong rhetoric of self-preservation and independence has not.”

One chapter looks at how the arts and sciences scrutinize the once hidden and private Deaf America. Initial research on signed language, before it was named American Sign Language (ASL), for example, had at first drawn resistance from members of the Deaf community. Later, as ASL became part of the public domain through wider public awareness, more ASL classes were offered to meet foreign-language requirements. Other examples include the increasing popularity of non-deaf parents using sign language with their non-deaf toddlers. As for the arts, theater once consisted of small vaudeville skits at local Deaf clubs, with audiences limited to signers. Since the establishment of National Theatre of the Deaf in 1967 through federal grant funding, performances in ASL have gotten into the spotlight for the nonsigning world to see. Public scrutiny of Deaf America resulted in cultural redefinition and change; it also contributed to the Deaf Pride movement in the 1980s.

How will genetic engineering or cochlear implants via microchips affect the Deaf community and the contestation between and among Deaf and hearing people in the future? For over a hundred years, Deaf people have fought a perpetual ideological war with people wishing to pathologize them and to eliminate sign language; some of these people directly or indirectly supported the eugenics movement. As rhetoric in the United States encourages acceptance of human diversity, Padden & Humphries poignantly point out that Deaf people continue to struggle to defend their culture and identity.

The authors successfully describe the evolution of Deaf resistance. Scholars in disability studies, Native American studies, and other culture-related studies will likely find cross-group similarities in terms of how state power and institutionalization constitute cultural identities and oppression in general; such cross-group analysis following the authors’ frame may yield interesting results.

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