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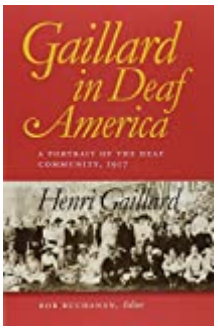

Henri Gaillard. *Gaillard in Deaf America: A Portrait of the Deaf Community, 1917.* Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2002. vi + 205 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-56368-122-6.

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A Frenchman's Look at Deaf America

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In the summer of 1917, prominent French deaf activist Henri Gaillard toured the United States. He had been invited to come to America by Jay Cook Howard, president of the National Association of the Deaf, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the American School for the Deaf (ASD). ASD had been co-founded by another deaf Frenchman, Laurent Clerc, and the deaf community on both sides of the Atlantic took the centennial as a chance to celebrate their educational, cultural, and historical connection. Arriving in Hartford, Connecticut, Gaillard would also visit New York City, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Akron, Albany, Buffalo, Washington, D.C., and Jersey City. He kept a journal of his travels, reprinted here by Gallaudet University Press as part of the Gallaudet Classics in Deaf Studies series. Editor Bob Buchanan, together with translator William Sayer, guides the readers through the journal, allowing us to follow in Gaillard's footsteps as he is introduced to the American deaf community and its institutions during 1917.

Gaillard's journal is wonderful to rediscover. Historically, writings from a deaf perspective are quite rare. Volumes have been written about deafness and/or deaf people over the years but much of this literature has been produced by hearing people. A deaf point of view is therefore most welcome. Gaillard peppers his account with numerous reflections on prominent deaf Americans of the early twentieth century, as well as with general observations about America as he saw it.

Unfortunately, in spite of these strengths and in spite of its clear interest to specialists in deaf history, it is difficult to imagine using the volume with undergraduates, even those enrolled in either a deaf history or a disability studies class. Several factors work against the volume in such settings.

First, the text is not annotated and it definitely needed to be. Gaillard drops names and events, not all of which are self-explanatory. For example, Marcus Kenner, John Carlin, and even Laurent Clerc are not names in common circulation. The average reader will not know why these people are significant nor why exactly Gaillard was interested in them. Gaillard's comments alone do not always provide enough of a context for truly understanding all

the references.

The lack of annotation contributes to the second problem, which is the lack of a good overall historical context in which to situate this text. Buchanan's introduction is far too short to do justice to all the topics it wants to take up. In fifteen pages, it tries to explain who Gaillard was, outline the historical connections between the French and American deaf communities, explain the oral/manual controversy in deaf education, and draw the reader's attention to a few of the specifics of Gaillard's reflections. In fifteen pages, this becomes an impossible task, and at times, a nearly incomprehensible one. Gaillard, for instance, mentions his previous trips to the United States in the journal and draws comparisons between his earlier impressions and his current ones. But I was not clear why he had been here before, when, or for how long, and the introduction provides no specific answers. While discussing the oral/manual controversy, Buchanan emphasizes that oral education offered a vision of deaf children restored to mainstream society by speech, and the word restored is italicized every time it appears in this discussion. As a specialist in the field, I probably could guess why, but what is the average reader to make of this? What is so special about the word restored? The text, and the introduction, should be accessible to a wider audience; otherwise we can hardly expect non-specialist readers to attempt to learn about a topic we as specialists find important and exciting.

Third, Gaillard repeatedly writes of communicating in sign language wherever he goes, yet there is no discussion in the introduction about signed languages. Readers are likely to conclude erroneously that sign language is a universal language, a common enough preconception. After all, a deaf Frenchman shows up in the United States and communicates easily in sign with deaf Americans. Failing to discuss this issue in the introduction at all simply fuels an already common misconception.

Finally, the title proclaims that this is a portrait of the deaf community of 1917. Rightly so, but it will come as a surprise to most undergraduates to learn that there was, and is, such a thing as the deaf community. It would be nice and, more importantly, valuable, to have a text that would indeed introduce students to the very idea of a deaf community and a text that would help interested professors who are non-specialists in the field introduce some aspects of disability history to their students. Indeed, I have been waiting for that text myself. I teach sections of modern American history on a regular basis and I would like, however briefly, to slip in disability-related topics, if only to stop the segregation of such issues in "special topics" courses. Unfortunately, this is not that book. You have to be a specialist in order to really profit from it or to offer the necessary background material to help students to read it well.

There is no denying that the journal is a classic, but it is likely to suffer the fate of so many books so designated: everyone has heard of it, some even own a copy, and few actually make it from cover to cover.