

Book, Video, and Film Reviews

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Lang, Harry. *A Phone of Our Own: The Deaf Insurrection Against Ma Bell*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2000, 260 pages \$29.95 softcover.

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In surveying the Twentieth Century few would question the revolutionary impact of the harnessing of electricity and the use of the telephone. After all, for the past half century, the voice telephone - invented by Alexander Graham Bell in the 1870s, and subsequently marketed by the American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T) - has been widely accessible to and has greatly benefitted citizens from all sectors of American society. Or has it?

In *A Phone of Our Own: The Deaf Insurrection Against Ma Bell* Harry Lang, a deaf professor and researcher at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) in Rochester, NY, turns to the deaf community to question this common, but incomplete, portrayal of the voice telephone and AT&T. "For nearly a century after the advent of the voice telephone," Lang explains, "we deaf people were without a phone of our own" (p. 1). Thus, in this welcomed study, Lang chronicles how widespread indifference, as well as narrow self interest at AT&T, long hampered the production and distribution of communication technologies including the TTY the recent development of which has especially aided deaf and hard of hearing citizens.

A Phone of Our Own, however, is much more than another case study of the way mainstream ignorance and profit motives intersected to restrain the production of technological advances of special interest to a minority community (and, in so doing, contributed to that group's marginalization!). For example, Lang chronicles how deaf individuals from across the country, led by Robert Weitbrecht, James Marsters, and Andrew Saks, worked tirelessly from the 1960s through the 1980s first to design and then to promote successfully the production and distribution of equipment that has culminated in the current TTY.

These unsung deaf adults, Lang further explains, also went on to spur state and federal governments to establish a national telephone relay system that now crisscrosses the nation. Finally, Lang demonstrates how these largely unrecognized efforts have been instrumental in enhancing educational, vocational, and social opportunities for deaf individuals. This untold story of self-activity is a "missing" chapter in the still unfolding history of the nation's deaf community and, likely, the work's most lasting contribution.