Introduction

In order to understand the significance of the Deaf President Now (DPN) protest, it is necessary to place this event in its proper historical and social context. It appears that many people who had not thought much about deafness or deaf people were somewhat surprised to see a group of "handicapped" people achieve such a lopsided victory in the spring of 1988. In fact, however, for more than 150 years deaf people have been involved in developing and shaping the deaf community in the United States, working to ensure the preservation of American Sign Language, and establishing a number of residential schools and self-help organizations. Our purpose here is not to describe these efforts toward self-determination in great detail, since others have done that very

well.[1] Nevertheless, it is important to see that even though DPN was unique in the sense that it was more forceful and disruptive than previous efforts, it was, in many ways, an explosive culmination to years of relatively quiet struggle by an oppressed minority.

The DPN protest is an example of what social scientists call collective action (or collective behavior). Collective action is group behavior that is relatively unpredictable, unstructured, spontaneous, and frequently disruptive. This type of behavior contrasts with more conventional everyday behavior, which is more institutionalized and predictable. Crowds, panics, protests, social movements, fads, crazes, and similar types of behavior are classified as collective action. Collective behavior is often seen as a way of achieving goals outside of the regular political process; some call it "politics by other means."

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In the nineteenth century a number of significant events took place in the lives of deaf people in America. While deaf people themselves were responsible for much of the progress toward self-determination, especially in the growth and development of the deaf community, the assistance of hearing people who supported the goals of deaf people was often of vital importance. This was particularly true in the field of higher education.

In 1864 President Abraham Lincoln took time out from his role as commander in chief of the Union forces in the Civil War to sign legislation that allowed the Columbia Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind to confer baccalaureate degrees. This institution, which had been established in 1857 by philanthropist and former postmaster general of the United States Amos Kendall, consisted of a few buildings on a parcel of land owned by Kendall about a mile northeast of the U.S. Capitol. At its inception, the school was limited to deaf and blind elementary and high school students. After 1864 college students were admitted to the National Deaf Mute College, the name given to the collegiate branch of the Columbia Institution (blind students began attending the Maryland School for the Blind in 1865). Since then, in a situation quite unusual in American education, students from kindergarten to college (and beyond) can attend

1. See, for example, Lane (1984, 1992), Gannon (1981), Van Cleve and Crouch (1989), and Schein (1989).

school on the same campus, now known as "Kendall Green." In 1894 Congress changed the name of the college to Gallaudet College to honor Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet. Gallaudet was a nineteenth-century American clergyman who, along with Laurent Clerc, a deaf man and native of France, established the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, the first permanent school for deaf students in America (Denninger, 1987; Jones and Achtzehn, 1992).

The first superintendent of the Columbia Institution was a young man named Edward Miner Gallaudet, Thomas's son, who was hired by Kendall soon after the school's establishment. Gallaudet continued as president of the institution after it was given the authority to award the baccalaureate. Establishing a precedent for longevity that was followed by most of those succeeding him in office, he served as president for forty-six years (1864–1910).

The Gallaudets were among those hearing people who assisted deaf people in their efforts to secure the skills necessary for success in the world, but other hearing people were not so benevolent. Throughout the nineteenth century many prominent hearing educators and administrators who worked with deaf people did not see them as qualified to teach or administer, even in the residential schools for deaf children that were being established around the nation, often by deaf people themselves (Moores, 1993). Ironically, these attitudes persisted even though sign language was usually the medium of instruction in these schools and even though the schools did in fact include a number of deaf teachers. Other hearing "experts" in deaf education, including Alexander Graham Bell, also thought they knew what was best for deaf people, and many of them played a role in trying to suppress the use of signs. Bell, who was married to a nonsigning deaf woman, also tried to discourage deaf people from marrying one another. He argued that intermarriage among deaf people contributed to the formation of what he called a "deaf variety of the human race."

Most deaf people in the nineteenth century in America supported the use of sign language in the education of deaf students. So did Edward Miner Gallaudet, but as a hearing man, Gallaudet also stressed the importance of speaking and came to support the "combined method," a system that encouraged the use of speech as well as signs. Gallaudet's eclectic view, however, was not shared by most hearing educators of deaf pupils, partic-

ularly after 1880, when delegates at an influential international conference in Milan, Italy, declared that speech and lipreading should be the only methods of communication used in schools for deaf students. These "oralists," such as Bell, who felt that signs or other forms of manual communication had no place in the field of deaf education, gradually prevailed. In fact, by 1919 almost 80 percent of children in schools for deaf students in America were educated via oral methods, a dramatic contrast from forty years earlier when only about 7 percent were taught orally (Van Cleve and Crouch, 1989). Outside of class, many deaf students continued to use sign language to communicate, even though their hearing educators strongly discouraged this. Since most deaf people were not oralists, they were seldom found as educators of deaf children during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth.

While hearing people were assuming greater control over the education of deaf students, deaf people themselves sought to preserve their culture and community by establishing a variety of local, regional, and national organizations. These included the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) and the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf (NFSD), organizations that can be seen as milestones in the struggle for self-determination. In 1880 the NAD was established as a voluntary, self-help, advocacy organization because, as its founders said, "we have interests peculiar to ourselves which can be taken care of by ourselves" (quoted in Schein, 1987). The NFSD was established in 1901 as a mutual benefit (fraternal) order. A few years later it began providing insurance coverage for deaf people denied coverage by other companies.

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During the twentieth century Gallaudet grew from a small college to a major university. In 1986 Congress again voted to change the name of the institution, from Gallaudet College to Gallaudet University. The university now has both a pre-college and a university faculty. The pre-college faculty consists of those teaching at the Kendall Demonstration Elementary School (KDES) and at the Model Secondary School for the Deaf (MSSD). Those schools, whose lineage can be traced to the original Columbia Institution, are housed in large, modern complexes on Gallaudet's ninety-nine acre campus and are located in an area separate from the buildings that house the undergraduate and graduate programs (see map). Both of

these schools are demonstration schools established by Congress. This means that the schools are required to develop materials and conduct research that can be disseminated to other programs for deaf students around the country.

Gallaudet is located in an area of Northeast Washington that is a few miles from, and a few socioeconomic levels below, the affluent areas of Northwest Washington. The university is composed of modern and historically restored buildings. For security reasons the school grounds are completely surrounded by an eight-foot-high wire fence. Six gates control access to the university from adjacent streets, and all but one of the gates are locked at night and on weekends. The one gate that is always open is the main entrance to the campus at Eighth Street and Florida Avenue, Northeast.

Several events took place at Gallaudet during the 1980s that had a direct or indirect impact on DPN. In 1982 Edward C. Merrill, who had been Gallaudet's president since 1969, announced his retirement. Merrill was only the fourth president of the university. Edward Miner Gallaudet had served from 1864 until 1910, Percival Hall from 1910 to 1945, and Leonard Elstad from 1945 until Merrill took over in 1969. After a lengthy search during the 1982–83 academic year, the university's board of trustees selected Lloyd Johns, then the president of a university in California, to be the fifth president of Gallaudet. Since previous presidents had served for many years, it was generally assumed that Johns would also serve for a long time. However, Johns resigned from office in January 1984.

During the search for Merrill's replacement, a small number of people in the deaf community had urged the board to select a deaf president. Indeed, Merrill himself told some members of the board individually that it was time for a deaf president and that there were qualified deaf people available. Merrill had appointed a number of deaf people to important administrative positions at Gallaudet, and a leadership training program at California State University, Northridge, provided additional opportunities for deaf people wishing to prepare themselves for leadership roles. Despite Merrill's suggestions, however, and in stark contrast to what would occur five years later, there was little organized activity promoting a deaf president, and no deaf candidates were included among the three finalists considered by the board of trustees.

Following Johns's abrupt resignation after only a few months on the

job, the board of trustees was forced to reopen the search for a new president. The board soon decided, however, that, instead of going through the entire search process again, no permanent replacement for Johns would be selected. Rather, Jerry Lee, then the vice-president for Administration and Business at Gallaudet, was asked to assume the presidency temporarily. After having served as acting president for several months, Lee was asked by the board to assume the presidency of Gallaudet permanently. As was the case a year earlier, few efforts were made to encourage the board to select a deaf president. In this case there was no opportunity for anyone to pressure the board of trustees because the board simply announced that Lee's temporary status had become permanent.

The fact that there was little time to organize any type of lobbying effort on behalf of deaf candidates in 1984, coupled with the fact that Lee had been selected without a formal search, led to a good deal of resentment that would linger on for several years. As one influential member of Gallaudet's alumni association said a few years later: "We felt that Mrs. Spilman pulled a fast one to get her boy, Jerry Lee, selected without really going through the process."

In a June 1988 interview Jane Bassett Spilman, chairperson of the board of trustees from 1982 to 1988, said she had been very interested in trying to find a deaf person to succeed Johns in 1984 and had talked extensively with people in the university administration as well as with others on the board about this. However, because Gallaudet was, at the time, going through a number of audits mandated by Congress and several government agencies, the board felt that it was important for the institution to have at the helm a person who had a great deal of experience with budgets and other administrative issues. While Gallaudet is considered to be a private institution, it does receive a significant portion of its operating budget from the federal government (roughly 75 percent). In the mid-1980s some concern arose about whether this money was being spent efficiently, and the General Accounting Office as well as the U.S. Department of Education carried out extensive audits of the university. As we will see, having a seasoned administrator well-versed in the intricacies of management and budgets was also a major concern of the board of trustees during the search for a president after Lee's resignation in 1987.

Another event during the 1980s at Gallaudet important for our understanding of DPN was the establishment of the President's Council on

Deafness (PCD). An in-house advocacy and advisory group composed of deaf faculty and staff members, the PCD sought to ensure that the concerns of deaf people on campus were understood by those in positions of authority, particularly the president. It may seem odd that such a group was needed at a university established to educate deaf students. But, over the years, many deaf faculty and staff members felt that their interests were not being given appropriate consideration by a university administration historically dominated by hearing people. Consequently, in the mid-1980s this advisory group was established. Several years before the PCD was organized, the Deafness-Related Concerns Council (DRCC) had been formed in order to deal with a variety of issues of concern to deaf people on campus. During Lee's presidency, the DRCC was renamed the PCD. The PCD actively supported recruitment efforts and promotion opportunities for deaf people at Gallaudet, and, by 1988, "believed that the selection of a deaf president would be a step in the right direction toward resolving many of the problems it had identified" (Gannon 1989, p. 18).[2]

During the 1980s the orientation of members of the board of trustees toward deafness and deaf people became an important issue. After the DPN protest former president Merrill said that a small but powerful clique within the board, composed primarily of board members who viewed deafness from a "clinical" point of view ("deaf people are broken, fix them"), or who had a strong business orientation ("corporate mentality"), or both, had wanted to appoint a president to succeed him who would be "tough" and who would emphasize a "lean and mean" organizational structure. It was this orientation that led to the hiring of both Johns and Lee soon after Merrill's resignation and alienated many people on campus.

Finally, it is important to note that there were a number of conflicts between the faculty and the administration in the years preceding DPN. Perhaps the major conflict centered around salaries. Historically, faculty salaries at Gallaudet have been somewhat below those paid at most other major universities in the Washington, D.C., area. During the 1980s the faculty, through a faculty compensation committee, made a concerted effort to achieve "parity" with these institutions. The administration resisted this effort and reminded the faculty that salary increases were

2. Perhaps because Gallaudet now has a deaf president, the PCD is inactive as of this writing.

dependent on the annual congressional appropriation. Many members of the faculty felt, however, that if the administration really saw increasing faculty salaries as a high priority, they would support it regardless and let other items be contingent on the annual federal appropriation.[3]

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Deaf people outside Gallaudet were also becoming more politically active during the 1980s. Deaf people had participated in several advocacy and protest activities of the deaf and disability communities in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, including lobbying and picketing efforts centering around the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and a variety of lawsuits (see Gannon, 1981). However, compared to some other minority groups, deaf people had not been particularly active (see Rittenhouse et al., 1992). In the 1980s, though, things began to change. The National Association of the Deaf, for example, became involved in several advocacy efforts. In the mid-1980s Congress established a Commission on Education of the Deaf (COED) to evaluate and make recommendations concerning deaf education in the United States. In the original legislation, two of the twelve slots on COED were reserved for deaf people. The NAD did not think this was adequate and persuaded Congress to increase the number of deaf people on the commission from two to five. In addition, when a new hearing provost was selected at Gallaudet in 1986, the NAD and other organizations, such as the California-based Deaf Counseling, Advocacy, and Referral Agency, objected to this decision since they felt that qualified deaf candidates had been overlooked.

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By 1988, then, deaf people had made a number of efforts toward self-determination. Additionally, an "oppositional consciousness" (Groch, 1993), which recognized some of the problems deaf people faced and which included some anger at these inequities, began to take shape. Whether concerning the right to use sign language or even teach in schools for deaf children, or regarding the opportunity to work in occupations thought to be "off-limits" to deaf workers, many deaf people had become quite un-

3. It is worth noting that more than five years after DPN, this issue continues to be a point of contention between the administration and the faculty.

happy with the arbitrary restrictions that had been placed on their lives. In addition, perhaps as a result of previous advocacy efforts, well-publicized achievements by prominent deaf people (such as actress Marlee Matlin's 1987 Academy Award), and a growing body of literature emphasizing the importance of self-determination and the underappreciated heritage of deaf people,[4] there was an enhanced pride in being deaf and in being a part of a vibrant community with a unique language and culture. And, at least among the strongest advocates of self-determination in the deaf community, there was a growing sense that the time was finally approaching for the "big prize," the presidency of Gallaudet.

4. See, for example, Jacobs (1974), Higgins (1980), Gannon (1981), Lane (1984), and numerous articles in the *Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness* (1987), the single most indispensable source of information on deafness and deaf people currently available.