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The Struggle to Educate Black Deaf Schoolchildren in Washington, D.C.

Sandra Jowers-Barber

Editors' Introduction

Sandra Jowers-Barber's study adds significantly to what is known about Gallaudet University and issues related to race and education. She reviews the history of African American deaf students in the precollege programs on Kendall Green and then focuses specifically on attempts by black parents Louise and Luther Miller to enroll their deaf son, Kenneth, in Kendall School. After several years of frustration with Gallaudet's administrators and with the Washington, D.C., Board of Education, in 1952 the Millers triumphed. In a decision known as Miller v. D.C. Board of Education, the U.S. District court ruled that Kendall School had to accept black students from the District of Columbia. Kendall School responded by creating separate facilities, called Division II, for African American deaf students, actively resisting integration until the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in Brown vs. Board of Education. Jowers-Barber concludes that Gallaudet, although a unique national institution, funded largely by the federal government to serve all deaf Americans, nevertheless followed the trends of the time and did not challenge prevailing racial policies.

FOR MANY AMERICANS the chance to obtain an education has been a struggle. Frederick Douglass recounts how during his enslavement his owner's wife started teaching him to read only to stop after her husband forbade the lessons. At the risk of severe physical punishment he used every opportunity he could find to continue his education.¹ For a great many African Americans, hearing and deaf, the struggle to obtain an

integrated education lasted well into the twentieth century and ended with the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954.²

African American deaf children of school age in the District of Columbia began that struggle after an early, but brief, promise of educational integration. The Columbia Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb and Blind was established by Amos Kendall in the district in 1856. A year later, it was incorporated by an act of Congress.³ On February 16, 1857, Kendall secured the passage of another act that granted an allowance of one hundred and fifty dollars a year for the maintenance and tuition of each child received in the institution from the district.⁴

That same year Kendall offered Edward Miner Gallaudet, by letter, the position of superintendent of the Columbia Institution.⁵ Gallaudet's background was above reproach. His father, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, co-founded the first American school for the deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1817. His deaf mother, Sophia, was one of his father's first students. Gallaudet and his mother came to Washington together. She took the position of housemother to the students.

When the school opened, an estimated twenty deaf and ten blind students were expected from the district and an unknown number from Maryland.⁶ Among the students that Gallaudet was preparing to direct were a few who were Black. This was an unusual situation for this period. Before the Civil War, Black people, both deaf and hearing, struggled to obtain a formal education. Because it was a criminal offense in some states to educate enslaved people, those enslaved persons who learned to read, like Frederick Douglass, concealed that fact. However, the pre-Civil War Columbia Institution accepted Black students, but their numbers were always small. Many came because of the intervention of wealthy white patrons. Gallaudet received numerous requests for assistance and generally responded positively to them by accepting the youth at the Kendall School. Gallaudet clearly saw the school's mission as providing education for all deaf students when he initially accepted both races. He noted in the *History of the College for the Deaf* that there had been "colored pupils since the early days of the school." Although Black and white students had separate sleeping and eating accommodations, all of them were taught together in the classroom.⁷

Gallaudet continued to receive letters in the late 1800s regarding orphaned Black students found abandoned in alleys, sponsored by church groups and other social agencies. He continued to respond positively to these requests for assistance for poor, Black deaf youth in need of training and accepted all who were sent. One such request came in a letter from R. Y. Maussma, dated March 3, 1879.

Wm. N. Catlett, mulatto, 6 years old, residing on Wilson St. County, D.C., was born deaf and dumb. His father, a laborer in the Treasury Dept. wishes him to enter into your institute. What conditions have to be observed to gain admission for him. Please inform.⁸

In another letter dated Nov. 21, 1889, Jenine W. Scudder, asked,

Would you please inform me whether colored deaf mute children are received at Kendall Green? I have discovered a poor deaf mute colored boy, living in an alley and would like to try to help him to "better things" but before anything can be done I must know whether you can receive him or not. May I hear from you as soon as convenient?⁹

The integration of the races in the classroom had been established from the early years of the school. In 1898, Kendall School had fourteen Black deaf students enrolled. However, two years earlier Gallaudet had begun to receive complaints from the white parents about the intermixing of students, and by 1901 white parents had begun to object strenuously to the presence of these students. Soon after the parental objections began, the relationship between the students, which had been cordial, quickly deteriorated. When the white students began harassing the Black students it became obvious to Gallaudet that the ability of the students to coexist had eroded.¹⁰ Contributing to this hostile environment was the conclusion of the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, the Supreme Court decision that established the doctrine of "separate but equal" as the law of the land.¹¹ Gallaudet, feeling compelled to take some action, approached Senator Francis Cockrell (D) from Missouri. The senator offered assistance by obtaining Congressional legislation, approved on March 3, 1905, that provided for the transfer of the African American students to the Maryland School for Colored Deaf-Mutes in Overlea, Maryland.¹²

The Maryland School for the Colored Blind and Deaf was founded in 1872 by Frederick Douglas Morrison, director of the Maryland School for the Blind. The School for the Colored Deaf was located within the physical structure of Maryland's School for the Blind.¹³ The legislation sponsored by Cockrell further authorized the education of deaf Black district pupils at the Maryland facility.

For the maintenance and tuition of colored deaf-mutes of teachable age belonging to the District of Columbia in the Maryland School for Colored Deaf-Mutes, as authorized in an Act of Congress approved March third, nineteen hundred and five, and under a contract to be entered into by the

Commissioners of the District of Columbia, five thousand dollars, or such thereof as may be necessary.¹⁴

The Congressional action eliminated the presence of African Americans at Kendall. The fourteen students in attendance were transferred in September 1905 to the Maryland School for Colored Deaf-Mutes. The resulting policy of educating deaf Blacks outside of the district stayed in place for the next fifty years.

In 1946 Louise B. Miller, a district resident with a deaf child, began her challenge to this policy, a journey that would not end until 1952. On May 21, 1946, Miller met with A. K. Savoy, associate superintendent of the district's schools. At that meeting, she requested that her deaf five-year-old son, Kenneth, be allowed to attend the district's deaf facility, Kendall School.¹⁵ When her request was denied, she asked that he be educated, at the expense of the district, in the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (PSD) in Mount Airy, Pennsylvania.¹⁶ Founded on May 15, 1821, PSD was an integrated institution that from its beginning accepted out-of-state students.

The Congressional Appropriation Act of March 3, 1905, allowed for support of district students at facilities other than the Maryland school, but Miller was not able to secure this support. The district would not send children to the Pennsylvania school unless they had some special needs that could not be met at the Maryland school. Miller was informed that her son would have to undergo a required preliminary examination before any placement could take place. Following the results of the examination, she was advised that he did not have special needs. The admission committee that reviewed student applications for admission to the school thought that Miller's son was too young for acceptance. Additionally, there were no vacancies at the Maryland institution.¹⁷ To compound the matter there were other students ahead of him on the admission list. Francis Andrews, superintendent of the Maryland School for the Blind commented, "I would prefer that he wait another year, for there are certainly Washington children of school age, who probably should be with us."¹⁸ On October 3, 1946, six months after she first met with Savoy, Miller received a letter from the District of Columbia School Board formally notifying her of their decision. Because of limited space and his young age, the board decided that Kenneth would have to wait until the next school year to be placed with the Maryland facility.¹⁹

Although the language in the March 3, 1905, Congressional Appropriation Act for the district provided for instruction and maintenance of "colored deaf-mutes," Miller encountered several obstacles in trying to

obtain both instruction and maintenance for her child. Kenneth could not be educated at Kendall School because of his race. He was unable to start his education at the Maryland school because of his age and lack of space. Furthermore, his education would not be sponsored by the district at the PSD because he did not have any special needs. Refusing to be deterred, in April of 1947 Miller wrote to G. C. Wilkinson, one of the commissioners of the District of Columbia. She restated her request for immediate admittance of her son to the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf at the district's expense. Wilkinson, responding to the correspondence, contacted Assistant Superintendent Savoy on April 14, 1947, seeking clarification of the situation.²⁰

Savoy's memorandum of April 15, 1947, explained the circumstances of the Miller case. He stated that he was acting in accordance with the conclusion of Francis Andrews, superintendent of the Maryland School for the Blind and the Maryland School for the Colored Deaf. Andrews, in a September 7, 1946, letter, reported that the Maryland facility could accommodate Kenneth if

The District has the funds and if he has been trained to take care of his personal wants, such as toilet habits, Etc. Of course he is younger than we generally take them but we can make exceptions, especially if the child seems most promising. I think when you and I discussed the Washington pupils this boy was one whom we thought we would accept if there was room in the district group.²¹

However, three days later, another letter arrived from Andrews. He had changed his position and explained, "Concerning Kenneth Miller, of whom you wrote; I would prefer that he wait another year, for there are certainly Washington children of school age, who probably should be with us. We certainly will be glad to consider Kenneth in the fall of 1947."²²

Since Miller's appeal to Wilkinson to have the district support her son's education at PSD also was unsuccessful, she realized that her son's education would have to come without assistance from the District of Columbia, where she and her husband both worked and lived. Miller was employed as a statistical clerk at the Census Department, and her husband, Luther Miller, was a district police officer. They were determined to provide the best educational opportunities for their son. The Millers believed that an early educational start was necessary for deaf children to excel. From 1947 to 1948, the Millers engaged private tutors for Kenneth and paid them \$5 an hour to provide the educational foun-

dition they believed Kenneth needed. They decided in 1949, when their son turned eight, to place him in PSD at their own expense. Kenneth's tuition for the first year was \$1,350; it rose to \$1,650 during the second year.²³ He was educated there for the next two years. Because the institution was a residential facility, Kenneth boarded there. He was away from his family from September until the end of the school year in May. The Millers believed the expense of the tuition, the absence of their son, and the lack of parental guidance for him to be unfair and unnecessary burdens on their family.

Lack of parental guidance and the absence of family support for children boarding at school have historically been complaints of parents with children educated away from home.²⁴ Ernest Hairston, a Black and deaf scholar and author, addressed the issues of Black hearing families with deaf children in his 1983 book. He acknowledged the value of having deaf children stay in the home environment whenever possible and noted the importance of including the children in all of the family's activities.

Some Black parents have two or three jobs just so their children will have a better life than themselves. They want to achieve educationally and economically. They have strong spiritual values. Black deaf children when exposed to these things come to feel a part of the family. They learn family values, goals, and expectations. This is a form of communication at its best and the Black deaf child should be part of this sharing in the joy and sorrow of everyday family life. . . . Parents should be there to share their moments of happiness and defeat, to lend words of encouragement, to say "no" when necessary, and to recognize the frustration many Black deaf children experience.²⁵

Sending children away to school at such an early age deprives both parents and the child of the many benefits that Hairston addressed.

Before the Millers made the decision to enroll their son in PSD, however, they had visited the Overlea facility and found that the condition of the school was unacceptable. "I was shocked at the rundown physical plant and the poor system and I could not leave him there," Miller said. More importantly, she stated that at the Maryland facility "children can only communicate by sign language or by writing."²⁶ In contrast, students at PSD were instructed using the oral method, which was considered a more advanced method of instruction during that period. The decision to send Kenneth to school in Pennsylvania, even though it was a greater distance from the district, was based on the Millers' belief that

he would receive a better education there. That outweighed that fact that he would be further from home.²⁷

Miller's complaints about the state of the Maryland facility were not unusual. The problems of inadequate facilities and quality education for handicapped and special-needs Black students were pressing issues. The lack of resources for deaf Black students in rural towns in the South was the subject of an article in *The Journal of Negro Education* in 1932. In 1937, James A. Scott, a Black educator, noted the lack of adequate funding made available by states and federal government for the facilities. Howard Hale Long, writing in 1947, looked at the lack of special educational services for Black youth. He included a table that showed enrollment in Southern residential public and private schools of both white and Black students. The District of Columbia provided for 234 white, deaf students and no Black students.²⁸ It would remain this way until a successful legal challenge in 1952.

Some individuals and organizations in the district were concerned with advocating for equality for all citizens. Paul Cooke, a member of the Greater Washington Area Council of the American Veterans Committee (AVC), took up the cause of the district's deaf Black children. He became, along with his organization, one of their staunchest advocates.²⁹ Cooke's involvement began when he read in the Congress Appropriation Act of 1950 that Congress had allocated funds for the instruction of the district's white deaf children within the district, but not for Black children. The act provided funding for the education of deaf Black children at an institution outside of the district. Cooke had previously been unaware of this situation. He found it disturbing that such an unfair and discriminatory practice was going on and immediately took the matter to Florence Nierman, the chair of the Washington chapter of the AVC. She called for immediate action. The AVC board declared that the practice of racial discrimination was a denial of the children's rights under the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, and AVC embarked on a campaign to end this injustice.³⁰

Cooke's responsibilities were to research the Congressional acts, interview the parents of the children, determine the contact persons in the responsible district agencies, and prepare communications to them. His research indicated that the major figures in the educational decisions for the deaf children were the Board of Education, the superintendent of schools, the Board of Commissioners, the Federal Security Agency, and the Board of Directors of Gallaudet College, of which Kendall School was a part. Through conversations with churches, charitable agencies, and school officials, he found and contacted parents of deaf children.³¹

Nierman, in her capacity as chair of the AVC, began writing to the agencies and directors identified by Cooke to apprise them of the organization's support of the parents and to try to see if there was an administrative remedy to the exclusion of the Black deaf students. She wrote to Albert Atwood, president of the Board of Directors of Gallaudet, in April 1951. The letter, which was forwarded to Leonard Elstad, Gallaudet's president, expressed the concerns of the AVC at the inequality of the educational situation for the district's Black deaf children.

Elstad's response to Nierman addressed several issues. He acknowledged that white deaf children from the district were educated at Kendall School. He further informed her that the education of "colored deaf children" was provided for in statutes dating back to the founding of the institution. He stated that the collegiate department of the institution had a Black student. According to Elstad there would be more, but "the difficulty has been that the education of the colored deaf is so far behind that of the white deaf that they have not been able to reach college entrance level in their education."³² He noted that Kendall School had a different situation because of legal segregation and that

As long as all the white deaf children of the District of Columbia are educated here, we are compelled to refuse entrance to colored deaf children in that department. It would seem, therefore, that if colored deaf children were to be educated here it would have to be on a segregated basis.³³

Hobart Corning, superintendent of the District of Columbia Public Schools, wrote to Nierman on May 14, 1951. He outlined the policy for educating Black deaf children and explained that the responsibility for that policy was not with the office of the superintendent of public schools. Joseph Donohue, commissioner, District of Columbia, wrote to Nierman on July 23, 1951, and related part of a conference with Elstad.

As you probably know, under Section 1011 of Title 31 of the D.C. Code, the directors of the Columbia Institution for the Deaf are authorized to provide for the education of colored deaf mute children properly belonging to the District of Columbia in Maryland School. I take it that the authorization contained in that section of the Code is tantamount to a direction . . . that the solution of the problem requires an authorization from Congress to establish facilities for teaching the deaf colored mutes of the District of Columbia within the District of Columbia.³⁴

Donohue also made a statement about this matter in the *Washington Post* on July 24, 1951. It spoke to the effect of the AVC's advocacy for the deaf children of the district. The *Post* reported,

District Commissioner F. Joseph Donohue said yesterday he plans to study the possibility of having deaf Negro children educated here. They now go to a school at Overlea, Md., near Baltimore. Deaf white children are sent to Kendall School, which is part of the Federally-subsidized Columbian [sic] Institution for the Deaf here which also includes Gallaudet College . . . Donohue announced his plans after hearing requests for local education of the handicapped Negro children from the Greater Washington Council of American Veterans Committee. . . . Because of the shortage of the Negro teachers trained for work with the deaf, Elstad told Donohue, the board of education might have difficulty in staffing the school, but Gallaudet could furnish teachers. Meanwhile, school officials have been studying the entire program of education for the deaf children. A report and recommendations will probably be given the board this fall."³⁵

John L. Thurston, the acting administrator of the Federal Security Agency, wrote to Nierman on August 15, 1951. His letter replied to the AVC's inquiry about education for the deaf Black children of the district.

In specific answer to your question, then, it would appear that the matter is not within the control of the Federal Security Agency. In fact, it appears to be inseparably connected with the problem of educational segregation in the schools of the District of Columbia, a matter entirely outside the responsibility or authority of this Agency.³⁶

The correspondence with the agencies involved in the process did not bring any immediate change to the children's situation. Cooke and the AVC Board believed that the parents should join together and fight for an end to the policy of educational segregation that had for so long affected their families.³⁷ The strategy set an example that was used later in the *Brown v. Board of Education* suit filed in 1954. Cooke assembled Miller, Minnie Mayfield, David Hood and his wife, Clyde Howard, Marvin Brown, Grace Jones, and Luke Richardson, all parents of district African American deaf children who attended either the Maryland or Pennsylvania institutions. They gathered at the AVC Clubhouse located in the Northwest section of the district, and there they met representatives from the law firm of Cobb, Howard, and Hayes, which would take legal action on their behalf.

The next step in the AVC strategy was a letter-writing campaign. Parents were encouraged to state their concerns in writing. They agreed to start documenting their requests for a change in the policy of sending their children to another state for education. The letters were sent to the Board of Education. Minnie Mayfield's August 1951 letter to the Board

of Education stressed the importance of having a child remain with his or her family, and it became the model for all of the other letters.

I am the mother of Donald Mayfield, who is living in Washington and attending the Maryland School for the Blind at Overlea, MD. My child is 8 years of age and it works an extreme hardship on the child and me to have the child attending school outside of the District of Columbia. I understand that it is the responsibility of the Board of Education to provide for the education of all children within the District of Columbia. I therefore respectfully request the Board of Education to provide education for my child within the District of Columbia beginning with the September 1951 term.³⁸

By December 1951, the AVC had spent more than eight months corresponding with the agencies responsible for the oversight of the education of the district's deaf children. They prepared, wrote, and delivered a six-page statement to the Board of Education on December 26, 1951. The statement, with a cover letter from Cooke, outlined the unequal situation of the students. It set forth the current legislation regarding the education of the deaf students. Additionally, it supported the requests of the Black parents who also wrote the agencies. Their letters requested admission for their deaf children to the Kendall School in the District of Columbia. This statement marked the end of the AVC's first phase of a two-prong strategy to challenge educational policy.³⁹

On February 2, 1952, the law firm of Cobb, Hayes, and Howard filed *Miller et al. v. Board of Education of District of Columbia et al. Civil No. 515-52* in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia. Louise B. Miller and her son Kenneth, who was now eleven and on whose behalf she had begun her advocacy in 1946, were the lead plaintiffs. They were joined by Marvin Brown and his daughter, Irene Brown; Mattie Hood and her son Robert Jones; Grace Jones and her son William Matthews; Minnie Mayfield and her son Donald Mayfield; and Luke Richardson and his daughter Doris Richardson. John D. Fautleroy and Phineas Indritz, respectively, argued the case for the plaintiffs and prepared the plaintiffs' briefs.

The defendants in the suit were the Board of Education of the District of Columbia, the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia, and the Board of Directors of Gallaudet College. They were represented by two legal teams: Vernon E. West, corporation counsel, and Milton D. Korman, assistant corporation counsel,⁴⁰ and Roger Robb for Gallaudet. The judge in the nonjury hearing was David Pine. An article in the *Washington Afro-American*, on February 8, 1952, summarized the initial filing

as follows, "A suit [w]as filed in District Court last Friday to force the Columbia Institution for the Deaf, the District Board of Education and the District Board of Commissioners to educate colored deaf children within the District of Columbia."⁴¹

The *Washington Pittsburgh Courier* ran an article on the filing on February 9, citing the policy of sending the deaf students out of the city.⁴² An article in the *Washington Post* on February 21, 1952, reported on discussions centered on changing the residential program at Kendall to a day school.⁴³ But it was an article in the *Washington Daily News* on February 21, 1952, that drew the most attention. Written almost three weeks after the filing of *Miller*, it reported on an overture by the District School Board that was prophetic. The article stated that, "School Supt. Hobart M. Corning today has orders from the District School Board to study the possibility of 'integrating' white and Negro schools here, and to report within 30 days."⁴⁴

Judge Pine's decision in finding for the plaintiffs in the nonjury hearing immediately changed the almost fifty-year-old educational policy for deaf Black district children. The judge's decision was based on the ruling in the 1938 *Missouri ex. Rel Gaines v. Canada*, 305 U.S. 337 case. In this case, Lloyd L. Gaines, an African American, was denied admission to the University of Missouri law school because of his race. As a practice, the state paid the tuition of African Americans at out-of-state schools rather than admit them to the University of Missouri. This way the state avoided the expense of having to construct separate-but-equal facilities. The court ruled for the plaintiff and held that Missouri provided no equal access to higher education for both races within its borders. The court found Missouri's policy to be state-practiced racial discrimination, and therefore in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. Missouri then built and staffed a Black law school within the University of Missouri. Judge Pine, in basing his ruling on that precedent, stated,

As I see it, the practice involved in this case offends against the Gaines decision; and therefore, to maintain the legality of the separation of the races, it is the duty of the District to provide equal educational facilities within the District for the deaf children of both races, if it provides for any therein.⁴⁵

In the fall of 1952, Black students were again attending Kendall School. Cooke felt that "the victory for the families and students was one of the more significant undertakings of the AVC." Challenging the type of injustice that was inflicted upon the deaf community was one of the

reasons he had become a member of the AVC. Cooke believed that a tremendous injustice had been righted.⁴⁶

This victory proved bittersweet for the students as they joined their hearing peers in the district's segregated school system. The policy of segregation mandated that in the aftermath of the court decision the Kendall School had to set up a separate area for Black students. The result was Kendall's creation of Division I for the white students and Division II for the Black students.

A positive and significant change brought about by *Miller v. D.C. Board of Education* was the hiring of Black teachers. This became a necessity after the hostile response of the white teaching staff to the return of Black students. Some were quite vocal in their refusal to teach Black students. A few wore black armbands after the decision and the return of the students to show that they were in mourning for the passing of the institution's policy of segregation.⁴⁷

Finding Black teachers was not an easy matter, for Black teachers of the deaf and deaf Black teachers historically had been in short supply.⁴⁸ In 1914, Thomas Flowers, a Black deaf educator from the North Carolina School for the Colored Deaf expressed concern about the specific challenges that Black deaf and hearing teachers faced. Low pay, poor facilities, and large classes kept a significant number of Black teachers from entering the field, he said.⁴⁹ At the 1939 Conference of Executives of American Schools for the Deaf, Clarence J. Settles stated that the major reason for the shortage of teachers of color was the absence of special teacher-training schools for Blacks. He also believed that the lack of summer-school classes was a factor.⁵⁰

To determine the current number of Black teachers of deaf Black students and, therefore, the need for more Black teachers, Settles sent a survey to the sixteen schools in the country that had schools or departments for Black deaf students. The educators analyzed the survey data and concluded that a training center for Black teachers should be established at some institution in the South. The survey responses revealed a general consensus that more African American teachers needed to be trained, but when, how, and where varied between schools that had departments and those that had separate schools for Black students. Howard University and Hampton Institute were recommended as good places to set up a summer training program. The never-ending debate regarding whether the training should be oral or manual was also mentioned. The surveyors also noted the issue of financial need, especially for poor teachers who did not have funds to travel.⁵¹

Surprisingly, the questionnaire did not ask about the race of the teach-

ers. The only question regarding race referred to the principal or supervising teacher of the “colored school.” Some institutions, like the Maryland School for the Black Colored Deaf, employed white instructors. James Bledsoe, superintendent of the school, responded that

Our department for the colored deaf in the Maryland School for the Blind is, I think, one of the oldest in the country. It started in 1872. Since that time our teachers have all been white persons. We have never had any colored people as teachers or officers in that school. So far we have not had any great difficulty in securing teachers. . . . So far as we are concerned, we don't feel that we need any such training as that spoken of by Mr. Settles, but I think that probably, for the majority of the schools in the south, they do need that training.⁵²

The 1947 directory issue of the *American Annals of the Deaf* included a list of the 105 Black teachers (71 were women) who were teaching at twelve residential schools in the country. The journal also mentioned that there were 1,160 Black deaf students in residential schools across the country.⁵³

In 1953, the *American Annals of the Deaf* published information on the number of teachers and pupils in public residential schools for the deaf as of October 31, 1952, the same year that Kendall School hired its first Black instructors. The journal included the new Division II at the school. The data showed that among five Black schools for the deaf—Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Maryland, and Mississippi—there were seventeen deaf academic instructors. Three of the institutions (Alabama, Maryland, and Mississippi) collectively had eight deaf teachers for vocational classes. Four of the deaf academic teachers and one deaf vocational instructor taught at the Maryland school. There is no indication, however, that the deaf instructors at the Black schools were Black. The white institutions employed a significantly higher number of deaf instructors. The 61 schools included in the *Annals* reported having a total of 216 deaf academic instructors and 165 vocational instructors.⁵⁴

Although Black deaf teachers had always been a small minority, they had a long history of teaching in the South. North Carolina, which established the first state school for Black deaf children in 1869 in Raleigh, provided two of the earliest known teachers. In 1877, Julius Garrett and Amanda Johnson, both graduates of the North Carolina program, along with H. L. Johns, who had attended the Maryland school for Black deaf children in Baltimore, were hired as teachers at the Texas Institute for Deaf, Dumb, and Blind Colored Youth.⁵⁵

The Texas institution had been established through the efforts of Wil-

liam Holland, a former slave who had become a soldier, legislator, and teacher. His proposal to the Texas legislature resulted in the opening of the school on April 5, 1887, and he was named the first superintendent on August 15, 1887. Holland hired Garrett, Johnson, and Johns that same year.⁵⁶ He also hired a Black hearing teacher and artist, Mattie B. Haywood White, in 1900. For over forty years White taught at the school using innovative and creative techniques. Deaf and blind students were not usually instructed in extensive art courses, but White used sign language and written instructions to teach deaf students to paint, draw, crochet, knit, embroider, and make rugs. Her blind students learned how to crochet and weave baskets and rugs.⁵⁷

Kendall School's first Black instructors, Rubye Frye, Bessie Thornton, Mary E. Phillips, and Robert Robinson, were also hearing. They all had training in special education and held advanced degrees. One was an ardent oralist; the other three knew and used sign language in the classroom.

Frye had been educated at Howard University in Washington, where she received her BA degree. She moved to New York and attended Hunter College in New York, where she earned an MA degree in special education. Frye learned the oral method of instruction and believed that it was superior to the manual method.⁵⁸

Thornton received her MA degree in special education from Hampton Institute, in Hampton, Virginia. Before coming to Kendall School, she taught at the Virginia State School at Hampton and the day school for colored deaf in Atlanta, Georgia. She had participated in summer classes taught by Gallaudet instructors at Hampton starting in 1946. Thornton was trained in both the oral and manual methods; however, she believed that the manual method allowed for more effective teaching.⁵⁹

Phillips attended Hampton Institute with Thornton. She also received her MA degree in special education. She had four years of teaching experience in the department for the deaf at the North Carolina School for the Blind and Deaf in Raleigh. Like Thornton, Phillips had taken summer classes on deaf education taught by Gallaudet instructors. She shared Thornton's philosophy on teaching with sign language. Phillips thought that oralism could be used with certain students, especially those who were late-deafened.⁶⁰

Robinson was the only male instructor. The number of male instructors lagged considerably behind female instructors.⁶¹ He received his BS degree from Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia, and then Robinson taught at the Virginia State School for the Deaf and Blind in Peters-



Students at Kendall School

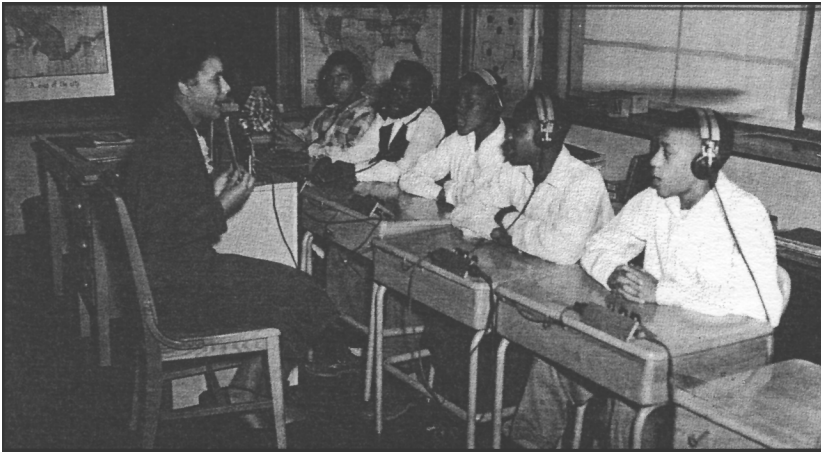
burg. He had taken courses in education of the deaf at Hampton Institute.⁶² When he was hired at Kendall, Robinson was in the process of writing his master's thesis. He completed the thesis and received his MA degree before the start of school. Robinson taught using sign and was a proponent of the combined method. He used sign language, writing, speech, and speechreading.⁶³

These four hearing Black teachers were charged with instructing the first class of Black students in almost fifty years at Kendall School. The class had twenty-four students, sixteen of whom had transferred from the Maryland School for the Colored Deaf.⁶⁴ Because there were no dormitory facilities for them, the Black students arrived at and departed from the campus in Yellow Cabs.⁶⁵ Although Gallaudet College paid for the students' transportation, this process served to further remind them that they were a separate part of the school. Former student Robert Milburn remarked that initially the cab rides were fun, but they quickly lost their appeal. He said that he soon began to think "they wanted to get us in and out as fast as they could."⁶⁶

Construction began on the dorms for Black students in the fall of 1952 and was completed in spring of 1953. This allowed the students to stay

on campus, although in a segregated environment. That environment prevented the Black students from obtaining education equal to that received by white students. There was a vast difference in the quality of the curriculum offered to the students in Division I and Division II. The curriculum given to the Black teachers consisted of a list of words, a list of prepositions, color words, and number words. The Division I curriculum was similar, but the students had textbooks and they took economics. There were no textbooks for Division II students or any vocational courses for them. The advantages for the Division I students were obvious.⁶⁷

The 1952 *Miller* decision is significant because it made possible the education of Black deaf school-age residents of the district within the boundaries of the city. These children no longer had to leave their families and be without their guidance, support, and interaction. What the decision did not do, and could not do, was overturn the district's policy of educational segregation. Neither could it erase the prejudice and racism of white teachers who refused to instruct Black students. The hiring of Black teachers who were dedicated to providing the best possible education to the students was another positive result of *Miller*. But the dream of educational equality would not be realized until the historic 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. At the beginning of the academic year after the *Brown* decision, for the first time in almost fifty



Students in an oral class at Kendall School

years, Black and white deaf students took their places in Kendall School classrooms together.

Notes

1. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (New Haven: Yale University Press; 2001).
2. For more information on *Brown* see Waldo E. Martin, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Macmillan, 1998); Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Radical Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Vintage, 2004).
3. Edward Miner Gallaudet, *History of the College for the Deaf: 1857–1907* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1983), 20.
4. *Ibid.*, 6. In 1901 Congress provided for the free education of all deaf district residents in the act of March 1, 1901.
5. *Ibid.*, 280.
6. The Maryland School for the Colored Blind and Deaf was established in 1872.
7. Gallaudet, *History of the College*, 201–2.
8. Papers of Edward Miner Gallaudet, MS 118, Box 1, File 4, Gallaudet University Archives.
9. *Ibid.*, MS 118, Box 2, File 2. For a discussion of alley dwelling, see James Borchert's *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850–1970* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1982).
10. Gallaudet, 50, 201.
11. *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 483, 493. For more discussion of *Plessy* and its impact, see Brook Thomas's *Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997); Charles A. Lofgren's *The Plessy Case: A Legal-Historical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Henry Julian Abraham's *Freedom and the Court: Civil Rights and Liberties in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Keith Medley, *We as Freemen: Plessy v. Ferguson* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Co., 2003); and Leon A. Higginbotham's *Shades of Freedom: Racial Politics and Presumptions of the American Legal Process* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
12. Gallaudet, *History*, 202–3.
13. Sandy White's Papers for Black Deaf Project, MSS 118, Box 3, File 1, Gallaudet University Archives.
14. Act of March 3, 1905, Section 31–1011.
15. Constance McLaughlin Green, *Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 305.
16. MSS 118, Box 1, File 2, Gallaudet University Archives.
17. Papers of Paul P. Cooke, Box 813, File 2, Moorland-Spangarn Research Center.
18. MSS 118, Box 1, File 2, Gallaudet University Archives.
19. Papers of Paul P. Cooke, Box 813, File 2, Moorland-Spangarn Research Center.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. School Board Minutes, 76, 19 September 1951, 258, Sumner Museum and Archives.

24. Mary Herring Wright, *Sounds Like Home: Growing Up Black and Deaf in the South* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2002), 85.

25. Ernest Hairston and Linwood Smith, *Black and Deaf in America: Are We that Different?* (Silver Spring, Md.: T.J. Publishers, Inc., 1983), 7–8.

26. "School Board Is Urged to End District Deaf Training Jim Crow," *Washington Pittsburgh Courier*, August 25, 1951.

27. The Maryland School was approximately an hour and a half away. PSD was more than two hours away.

28. Eva T. Honesty, "The Handicapped Child," *The Journal of Negro Education* 1, no. 2 (July 1932): 304–24; James A. Scott, "Educational Facilities Available for Physically Handicapped Negro Children," *The Journal of Negro Education* 6, no. 3 (July 1937): 455–67; Howard Hale Long, "The Availability of Special Educational Services to Negroes," *The Journal of Negro Education* 16, no. 3 (Summer 1947): 474–79. See also Harry Best, *Deafness and the Deaf in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1943); and Harry J. Baker, *Introduction to Exceptional Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1944).

29. See, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Washington, D.C., Papers of the American Veterans Committee. The American Veterans Committee was unique in that it was an integrated organization of veterans with an agenda that included addressing problems of all Americans.

30. Paul Cooke, interview with author, January 12, 2005.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Papers of American Veterans Committee, Moorland Spingarn Research Center.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Paul Phillips Cooke and Ravelle G. Beresford, "Discrimination Against Colored Deaf Children," (unpublished manuscript, Papers of Paul P. Cooke, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, 1951).

35. "Donohue to Study Plan to Educate Negro Children Here," *Washington Post*, July 24, 1951, sec. A, 7.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Cooke, interview with author, 2005.

38. Papers of Paul P. Cooke, Box 813, File 2, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center.

39. Cooke, interview with author, 2005.

40. Korman represented the district in the *Bolling v. Sharpe* case that was part of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* legal challenge that ended educational segregation. He was later appointed to the D.C. Superior Court.

41. "Parents Sue Board of Education," *Washington Afro-American*, February 8, 1952.

42. "Claim Deaf Children Are Sent Outside Capital to School," *Washington Pittsburgh Courier*, February 9, 1952.

43. "Regular Day Classes Are Urged for Deaf," *Washington Post*, February 21, 1952, sec. B, 8.

44. "School Board Orders 'Integration' Study," *Washington Daily News*, February 21, 1952.

45. *Miller v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia*, 106 F. Supp. 988. Case in the United States District Court, District of Columbia, July 3, 1952. Case heard and decided by Judge David Pine.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Rubye Frye, interview with David de Lorenzo, October 13, 1981.

48. J. Woodward, "Black Deaf Teacher—Short Supply," *Perspectives for Teachers of the Hearing Impaired* 4, (1985): 18–19.

49. Douglas C. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 46.

50. Clarence J. Settles, "Normal Training for Colored Teachers," *American Annals of the Deaf* 85 (March 1940): 210.

51. *Ibid.*, 210–11.

52. *Ibid.*, 216.

53. *American Annals of the Deaf* 92 (1947): 36, 39.

54. *American Annals of the Deaf* 98 (1953): 182, 186.

55. Jamie Berke, "When Skin Color Separated Black and White Deaf Kids," About.com, <http://deafness.about.com/cs/featurearticles/a/seggregated.htm> (accessed June 22, 2008).

56. *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "Holland, William H," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/HH/fh030.html> (accessed April 4, 2005).

57. *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "White, Mattie B. Haywood," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/WW/fwh78.html> (accessed March 16, 2005).

58. Frye, interview with David de Lorenzo.

59. Sandy White, "Class of '52." DVD, Gallaudet University Department of Film and Television, 1981.

60. Mary Phillips, undated interview with David de Lorenzo, Sandy White's Papers for Black Deaf Project, Box 2, Folder 2, Gallaudet University Archives. For further discussion on the limits of oralism in children born without hearing see Marc Marschark, *Raising and Educating A Deaf Child* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

61. *American Annals of the Deaf* 92 (1947): 39.

62. For discussion on the training program for Black teachers at Hampton Institute see Nancy Hutchinson, "Teacher Training for Negroes at Hampton Institute," *Buff and Blue*, no. 2 (1951): 1.; and Powrie V. Doctor, "Deaf Negroes Get a Break in Education," *The Silent Worker* (1948): 45–50.

63. Papers of Sandy White's Black Deaf Project, MSS 118, Box 1, Folder 2, Gallaudet University Archives.

64. *American Annals of the Deaf* 98 (1953): 182.

65. Sandy White, "Class of '52."

66. Robert Milburn, interview with author, March 12, 2002.

67. Frye, interview with David de Lorenzo.