In *Writing Deafness*, Christopher Krentz examines the formation of identity portrayed by both deaf and hearing authors in American literature to highlight a discourse over what it means to be deaf. Using the “hearing line,” parallel to W. E. B. Du Bois’s color line, Krentz describes how deaf and hearing authors address the invisible boundaries separating deaf and hearing people by examining their similarities and differences.

Krentz uses a theoretical base on race and culture to explain how Americans negotiate deafness and indicates that the history of deaf Americans contains some interesting parallels to that of African-Americans and other minorities. In describing how deafness intersects with race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, the author enriches our understanding of the minority experience. Krentz describes how both African-Americans and deaf people have been viewed as inferior, savage, less than human, and denied full participation in society. Even more interesting is how both groups used similar strategies to gain recognition of their intelligence and humanity and achieve social justice. For example, identifying with the struggle of another oppressed group (i.e., African-Americans) offered a good deal of support for the Deaf community during the 1988 Gallaudet protests.

Krentz notes that the growth of deaf education raised the visibility of deaf people in America during the 19th century. Deaf authors such as Laurent Clerc, John Burnet, and James Nack wrote to find a voice in public discourse and dispel the subordinate status that hearing people assigned them by demonstrating their intelligence and humanity to society. Like other minority authors, deaf writers use essays, lectures, autobiography, and poetry to raise understanding and promote justice. Clerc and Burnet focused on social and political aspects of deafness, arguing for sign language, deaf education, and tolerance. Clerc’s writings contributed to the literature against oppression, and Burnet addressed social attitudes where he tried to convince hearing readers that deaf people are humans who have rich potential and communicate visually. Burnet argued that the stigma of deafness is largely a social fabrication. It is interesting to recognize some of that still holds true today.

Unlike Clerc, Burnet, and Nack, hearing authors such as Lyndia Huntley Sigourney, Mark Twain, Herman Melville, and James Fenimore Cooper, who wrote about people, cover a wide variety of topics within the deaf experience to define deaf people by portraying themselves as superior, competent and rational, and forming a self-perceived hearing identity. By examining the deaf presence, we see the authors using the unknown, imagined expanse of deafness to create their own identities as hearing people. Krentz offers examples of how hearing authors infantilize deaf characters as if they were always inferior, silent, and child like and how this contributed to public perceptions of the deaf community.

Krentz reminds us of the importance of using the deaf voice in public discourse to portray the humanity of the deaf community. Readers will come to value the complexity and diversity of the deaf community and the parallels with African-Americans. This book offers insights into identity formation, perceptions, physical differences, race, and minority writing. *Writing Deafness* provides a bridge for scholars and students of deaf studies, cultural studies, disability studies, social sciences, and American literature who seek that insight and understanding.

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