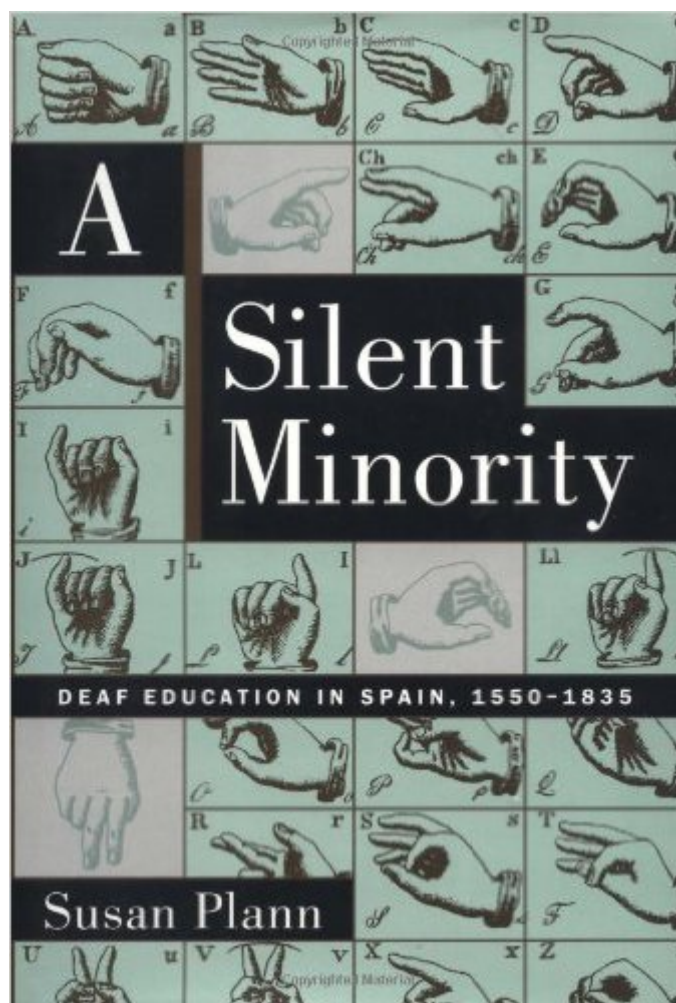


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A Silent Minority: Deaf Education In Spain, 1550-1835



Synopsis

This timely, important, and frequently dramatic story takes place in Spain, for the simple reason that Spain is where language was first systematically taught to the deaf. Instruction is thought to have begun in the mid-sixteenth century in Spanish monastic communities, where the monks under vows of silence employed a well-established system of signed communications. Early in the 1600s, deaf education entered the domain of private tutors, laymen with no use for manual signs who advocated oral instruction for their pupils. Deaf children were taught to speak and lip-read, and this form of deaf education, which has been the subject of controversy ever since, spread from Spain throughout the world. Plann shows how changing conceptions of deafness and language constantly influenced deaf instruction. Nineteenth-century advances brought new opportunities for deaf students, but at the end of what she calls the preprofessional era of deaf education, deaf people were disempowered because they were barred from the teaching profession. The Spanish deaf community to this day shows the effects of the exclusion of deaf teachers for the deaf. The questions raised by Plann's narrative extend well beyond the history of deaf education in Spain: they apply to other minority communities and deaf cultures around the world. At issue are the place of minority communities within the larger society and, ultimately, our tolerance for human diversity and cultural pluralism.

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