

Deaf Culture Question of the Week – January 28-Feb 1, 2013

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Which of these prolific authors, who is a renowned neurologist, wrote a book which explores the world of Deaf people, their culture, and how Deaf people think and process American Sign Language?

- a. Harlan Lane
- b. Oliver Sacks
- c. Eric Lennenberg
- d. Helmer Myklebust

Bonus question: What is the name of this famous author's book regarding Deaf people?

Scroll down for the answer.

Answer: “b” – In 1990 Oliver Sacks turned his attention to the Deaf community. He published a seminal book entitled *Seeing Voices: A Journey into the World of the Deaf*. Dr. Sacks is well known for taking on complex topics and sometimes quirky neurological conditions in his writings. For example some of his other books have titles such as:

- *Migraine* (1970) London: Faber and Faber; Berkeley: University of California Press
- *Awakenings* (1973) London: Duckworth; New York: Doubleday
- *A Leg to Stand On* (1984) London: Duckworth; New York: Summit Books
- *The Man who Mistook his Wife for A Hat* (1985) London: Duckworth; New York: Summit Books
- *Seeing Voices: A Journey into the World of the Deaf* (1990) Berkeley: University of California Press; London: Picador
- *An Anthropologist on Mars* (1995) New York: Alfred A. Knopf; London: Picador
- *The Island of the Colorblind* (1996) New York: Alfred A. Knopf; London: Picador
- *Uncle Tungsten: Memories of a Chemical Boyhood* (2001) New York: Alfred A. Knopf; London: Picador
- *Oaxaca Journal* (2002) Washington DC: National Geographic Directions
- *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* (2007) New York: Alfred A. Knopf; London: Picador
- *The Mind's Eye* (2010) New York: Alfred A. Knopf; London: Picador

[Cited from: <http://www.oliversacks.com/about-the-author/list-of-publications/>]

What makes this book important in the history of Deaf culture and Deaf people's struggle against oppression of their identity and language is that it is written by a complete “outsider” and a renowned neurologist. Dr. Sacks is well respected as a doctor and a scientist in his field. This book was published shortly after the 1988 Deaf President Now protest at Gallaudet

University. This protest is what drew Dr. Sacks' attention to the Deaf community. He includes a chapter in his book about the significance of the Deaf President Now protest. The book also came at the beginnings of what might be called "the new Renaissance" for the Deaf community. After Deaf President Now the power relationship between Deaf and hearing people with regard to the institutions that affect Deaf people's lives shifted dramatically. The institutions that affected Deaf people's lives could no longer ignore the very people they served. More Deaf leadership was infused at every level of education and social service. The decade of the 90s saw an affirmation of the importance of American Sign Language to a more typical developmental path for deaf children in child rearing and education. Dr. Sacks affirms this in his book. The endorsement of ASL as a legitimate language and as a language critical to normal cognitive development for Deaf children coming from someone outside the field of deaf education was very important.

There is much more that can be said about this very important book. I urge readers of DCQW to read this book. In his own words Dr. Sacks says the following about writing *Seeing Voices*:

"I had never thought about what it might mean to be deaf, to be deprived of language, or to have a remarkable language (and community and culture) of one's own. Up to this point, I had mostly thought and written about the problems of individuals—here I was to encounter an entire community." [Cited from: <http://www.oliversacks.com/books/seeing-voices/>]

Note: All of the answer choices in this question are noted psychologists, doctors or linguists who wrote about Deaf people or deafness. The first three Drs. Lane, Sacks and Lennenberg could be said to have contributed to better understanding of the Deaf experience and American Sign Language. Dr. Myklebust wrote the book *The Psychology of Deafness: Sensory Deprivation, Learning and Adjustment*. This book was "standard, required reading" in the field of deaf education for many years and influenced the thinking of the majority of professionals in the field up through the 1970s. Needless to say, Dr. Myklebust's book (by its very title) supported a pathological, deficit model of being deaf. His theories and approaches to child rearing and education are not well accepted today. An interesting side note: Dr. Myklebust is a Gallaudet alumnus; that is, he received a Masters degree from Gallaudet in 1935. You can read more about Dr. Helmer Myklebust and his work here: <http://hammill-institute.org/hipp/?p=91>.