

## Trailblazer

### Black Deaf Studies Symposium Proceedings

#### **Carolyn McCaskill**

Gallaudet University, [www.gallaudet.edu](http://www.gallaudet.edu)  
[Carolyn.McCaskill@gallaudet.edu](mailto:Carolyn.McCaskill@gallaudet.edu)

#### **Glenn Anderson**

University of Arizona, [www.ualr.edu](http://www.ualr.edu)  
[gbanderson@ualr.edu](mailto:gbanderson@ualr.edu)

#### **Lindsay Dunn**

Gallaudet University, [www.gallaudet.edu](http://www.gallaudet.edu)  
[Lindsay.Dunn@gallaudet.edu](mailto:Lindsay.Dunn@gallaudet.edu)

#### **Abstract**

*The first-ever symposium on Black Deaf Studies brought together scholars and community members in a spiritually resonant gathering, highlighting the intersection of Black and Deaf experiences. Presentations and discussions shed light on the historical and contemporary challenges faced by Black Deaf individuals, emphasizing the need for recognition and understanding. The symposium served as a platform for sharing research, history, language, and culture, fostering a sense of pride and hope for the future. It underscored the importance of Black Deaf Studies in promoting awareness and showcasing the talents within the Black Deaf community.*

#### **Keywords**

Black Deaf Studies, DSDJ, Symposium, Bilingual and Bimodal Dissemination, Foreword

## Presentation Transcript

#### **Carolyn McCaskill -**

People were so excited to be here for our first ever symposium. The invited speakers, new Black Deaf scholars – I was so happy to watch them present live their research and their work. It was very inspiring, very educational, very uplifting – truly amazing. The gathering seemed spiritual. The lights were flickering on and off, as if our ancestors were showing up to say hello with each flickering. But, this place is sacred. This is a place where they attended Kendall School as kids. So it feels like they were present, watching over us and saying hello. It touched me.

During our discussions, we wanted to listen to the audience. That became a time of openness and honesty (SHOWING-HEART). Because each of the presentations' talks had an impact on them individually. We had different topics, including one particular topic about Black bodies, and I think that really made an impact on many of us.

When we look back at the experiences many of us have had, we have given a lot of ourselves. Our Black bodies have been abused, and it feels like they are not getting enough recognition for what we're doing. So the pain was there, and today, I noticed the pain is raw. Especially with our Black men, because our conference at this time only had four Black men. One was a Black hearing man, one was a Black Deaf man who was not here but was on video, and there were other Black Deaf men present. We recognized that it is not enough. What our Black Deaf men experience on a daily basis needs to be acknowledged. I thought that was very powerful and raw.

Other people talked about not getting enough recognition for their work. The Center of Black Deaf Studies itself is something I'm excited about. Because we serve as a platform for sharing our Black Deaf experiences and spotlighting our history, language, community, and culture. I feel that this symposium effectively addressed those topics.

I think it's wonderful, and I think that we went above and beyond. It really satisfied my expectations of what I expected from the symposium.

### **Glenn Anderson -**

Why does Black Deaf Studies matter? The reason is that we Black Deaf community have talent. Many talents individually at the same time such as writing, researching, public speaking, teaching, science – we need a platform where we can showcase our talents. Not many people are aware of the abilities of our community.

My reaction to the success of this symposium: Wow. Importantly, over the years I have long ruminated over the fact that there is not enough young writers, researchers, and scientists. I worried about the future of our Black Deaf community. This week, seeing so many young people I've never met before – talented and brilliant with advanced degrees – I felt rejuvenated. I was more hopeful for the future than I was before this conference started.

I hope in the future we have ten, fifteen, twenty more Lindsay Dunns. We need more people like him who aren't afraid to be vocal (BARK-BARK-BARK) and get people's attention, people who speak the truth, – that is key, he speaks the truth, and that helps people become more aware of the issues we're concerned about.

### **Lindsay Dunn -**

Now I am a professor, a historical researcher, a community activist, and a member of the Black Deaf community, and really, I feel privileged. I teach Black Deaf history from 1818 to 1890. Often people ask why start at 1818, and that's because 1818 is when the first Black Deaf person entered a school for the deaf to get formal education. This was at the New York School for the Deaf, Fanwood. So it starts there - before that, we don't know but we know it begins in 1818 and we've also found out about the many others who followed from that point onwards.

In the nineteenth century, over 100 Black Deaf people received education. Among them was Thomas Flowers, from the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, who got his degree from Howard University in 1885. Imagine that! Many young people don't know this information is important. This is because Black history is typically told by those who are hearing, while Deaf history is typically white. So where is our Black Deaf history? So, my course now gives us an opportunity to study ourselves, to tell the world who we are, and where we're from, and show them that we have been here since the beginning. Also, that is a privilege provided by the CBDS.

As time went on, it became clear that a symposium needed to happen. Organizing the symposium was challenging for us because we brought in people from inside and outside Gallaudet, too. Those inside Gallaudet basically shared a similar vision, but those outside of Gallaudet, were excited to offer new ideas, and there was some tension. Then we decided, we needed to focus on a specific question: why Black Deaf Studies matters? That narrowing down, really zeroing in on that topic. There was a lot that came from that, and we realized, we can't do that. The symposium is typically short, unlike a conference. It will be short and simple. The primary objective was to bring together scholars from both Black studies and Deaf studies. So, bringing them together to discuss that question.

Initially, we felt that we couldn't limit participation exclusively to academics; we had to be a bit more flexible. My argument, indeed our CBDS argument, is that we have an array of people all over, and so we need to really honor our young Black Deaf academics. So the committee put together some names and typed it up, then developed a program. The program was created and revised, and we found some of the most fascinating discoveries. First, the number of young Black Deaf people with Ph.Ds is significantly increasing; the number of young Black Deaf who are pursuing a Ph.D. is also significantly increasing; the number of Black Deaf people who are in a Master's program and are getting ready to think about going for their Ph.D. - increasing. So now, we have a huge pool of potential, brilliant young people who will take over going forward in the future – that's really exciting for us. Really exciting.

So we put together this program and worked everything out, then fast forward to now - March 29th, 2023. The opening was CHAMP. Last Thursday, in the first morning session, five people were referred to as the 'OG' group. I won't spell what OG means, but if you aren't Black and watching this, I'm sorry. If you are Black and watching this, you get it. The OG group preached the words from the beginning, which set the tone with their incredible knowledge, ingenuity, and expertise. That set the bar. Then we moved on to the second group, discussing why Black Deaf Studies matters from a linguistics perspective, I felt bad for that group because they had to fill the huge shoes that the first group had set. But what a commendable job. Lastly, on Friday, that group was lucky, because they had seen the first two, and they knew what to do. They had time to revise and to make sure that they beat the first two groups. They did a fantastic job.

I had the honor of moderating the panel for the third session on Black Deaf Studies from a Global Perspective. I think they really blew our minds, it was awesome, we had the opportunity to see what Black Deaf Studies could do for Black Deaf people all over the world. That makes sense! Gallaudet is the center, Black Deaf people all over the world look up to Gallaudet to lead the way and liberate them. So, it was wonderful. Then, lord, the fourth and last group, focusing on why Black Deaf Studies matters from an educational perspective, they went Black on us. We felt like we were in church. These sisters were awesome - truly AWESOME. Not just the presentation but also the style they used, which is very, very, very black. Black oratory skills in ASL, which were very visual for everyone to see, were gorgeous and authentic.

The space created in the symposium provided us with an experience that is hard to explain... it's hard to explain, especially to people who weren't there.

It is a watershed moment, moment that that will stick with us for life, in many ways. The content of their presentations, the style, what they left for us to reflect on – it was really unique ... I've travelled to many conferences all over the world and never seen anything like this. This just beginning. I believe that now. Deaf Studies, Deaf education, the Deaf community itself, now has opportunity to truly transform, if those in power will allow us and are not threatened by our excellence. They should feel that this kind of excellence is necessary for the Deaf community to transcend and move out of old Jim Crow ideologies and ways of being and move to build a better future.