

Preface

Much can be learned about a group of people and the power structure of their society by studying the process of change and its impact on the greater society. My first experience with attempting to alter the status quo occurred when I was thirteen years old. My classmates and I arrived at the conclusion that we were not being challenged to our fullest potential and, therefore, were being cheated out of our education. I personally led a student protest in the classroom, complete with picket signs. Although this humble protest hardly made a dent in our society, it taught me about democracy and equal rights.

My interest in social change and my desire to salute the efforts of the Deaf community—past, present, and future—created the impetus for my dissertation study, on which this book is based. *Deaf Empowerment: Emergence, Struggle, and Rhetoric* is intended to illustrate how hard-fought struggles by our ancestors helped pave the way for the unprecedented Deaf President Now protest of 1988, which in turn, continues to empower the Deaf community in so many valuable ways. Our society is a much better place because of these efforts.

This book is also about communication. It offers a unique perspective of communication not only as the means of conveying information but also as the central issue of the Deaf movement, thus, making this a reflexive study of communication. This approach made the book more personal for me. I chose to study communication because I grew up in a community where communication was not taken for granted. I lived in the Deaf commu-

nity and saw the ease with which Deaf people congregated and communicated in our beautiful language of signs. Paradoxically, for the first one-and-a-half years of my academic life I attended a day school for deaf children where sign language was prohibited. I then attended public schools for most of my remaining school years, a time when interpreters were virtually unheard of. These experiences taught me to value communication both as an issue and as the means to effective interaction. It seems fitting, therefore, that I have chosen to make this a study on communication about communication.

The Deaf community is a truly unique cultural entity—one that I am proud to be a member of. My hope is that readers will gain insights into and new respect for the struggles and achievements of this most fascinating community.