

# Language Justice and American Sign Language

James Christianson, Jr.

March 4, 2025

# Introduction



# A Brief History of ASL

## 1.

In the 16th Century, Spanish monk taught deaf children in gesture. In the 18th century, the first public school for deaf children in the world is in Paris, France. In 1817, first deaf school is in Hartford, Connecticut.

## 3.

ASL is the third most commonly used language in the United States. More hearing people already know some signs language like thank you.

## 2.

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) was formed in 1880 to advocate for the civil rights of Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, primarily focusing on the right to use sign language. Additionally, American Sign Language (ASL) was recognized as a natural language in the 1960s.

## 4.

ASL is increasingly visible in media, including movies, TV series, documentaries, books, social media, apps, and more.

- ASL as the primary language
- Community and collectivism
- Direct/Visual communication
- Deaf identity
- Deaf clubs and gatherings
- Advocacy for accessibility (interpreter and captioning bills)

# Deaf Culture

- Inclusion
- Certified & Qualified
- Educational interpreting
- Signers
- VRI vs. Live Interpreting
- Deaf Interpreter (Cultural & Linguistic)
- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

# Interpreter

- Inaccessibility of services (education, healthcare, legal rights).
- Discrimination or bias against ASL in professional and educational settings.
- Lack of access to interpreters in essential situations (e.g., emergency services, courtroom).
- Misunderstanding ASL as just “gestures” or “visual communication,” not recognizing it as a fully developed language with its own grammar and syntax.

# Language Justice for ASL: Current Issues

- Legal measures (e.g., the Americans with Disabilities Act, RCW, accessible interpreting services).
- Creating more inclusive educational programs and policies. (e.g., Deaf-centered)
- Advocacy and awareness (e.g., promoting ASL in schools, media, and public spaces).
- Ensuring accessible language options (e.g., Deaf-Friendly)

# What can be done?

**THE GREATEST IRONY:**



*Mason J. Gage*  
www.mjg.com



Hearing, Speech & Deaf Center

[hsdc.org](http://hsdc.org)

Office of the Deaf & Hard-of-Hearing

[www.dshs.wa.gov](http://www.dshs.wa.gov)

Language First

[language1st.org](http://language1st.org)

Washington Center for Deaf and  
Hard of Hearing Youth (CDHY)

[cdhy.wa.gov](http://cdhy.wa.gov)

# Resources

thank you



James Christianson, Jr  
[jrchristiansonjr@gmail.com](mailto:jrchristiansonjr@gmail.com)