



# From Pity to Pride: Growing Up Deaf in the Old South

*Hannah Joyner*

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The antebellum South's economic dependence on slavery engendered a rigid social order in which a small number of privileged white men dominated African Americans, poor whites, women, and many people with disabilities. *From Pity to Pride* examines the experiences of a group of wealthy young men raised in the old South who also would have ruled over this closely regimented world had they not been deaf. Instead, the promise of status was gone, replaced by pity, as described by one deaf scion, "I sometimes fancy some people to treat me as they would a child to whom they were kind."

In this unique and fascinating history, Hannah Joyner depicts in striking detail the circumstances of these so-called victims of a terrible "misfortune." Joyner makes clear that Deaf people in the North also endured prejudice. She also explains how the cultural rhetoric of paternalism and dependency in the South codified a stringent system of oppression and hierarchy that left little room for self-determination for Deaf southerners. *From Pity to Pride* reveals how some of these elite Deaf people rejected their family's and society's belief that being deaf was a permanent liability. Rather, they viewed themselves as competent and complete. As they came to adulthood, they joined together with other Deaf Americans, both southern and northern, to form communities of understanding, self-worth, and independence.

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