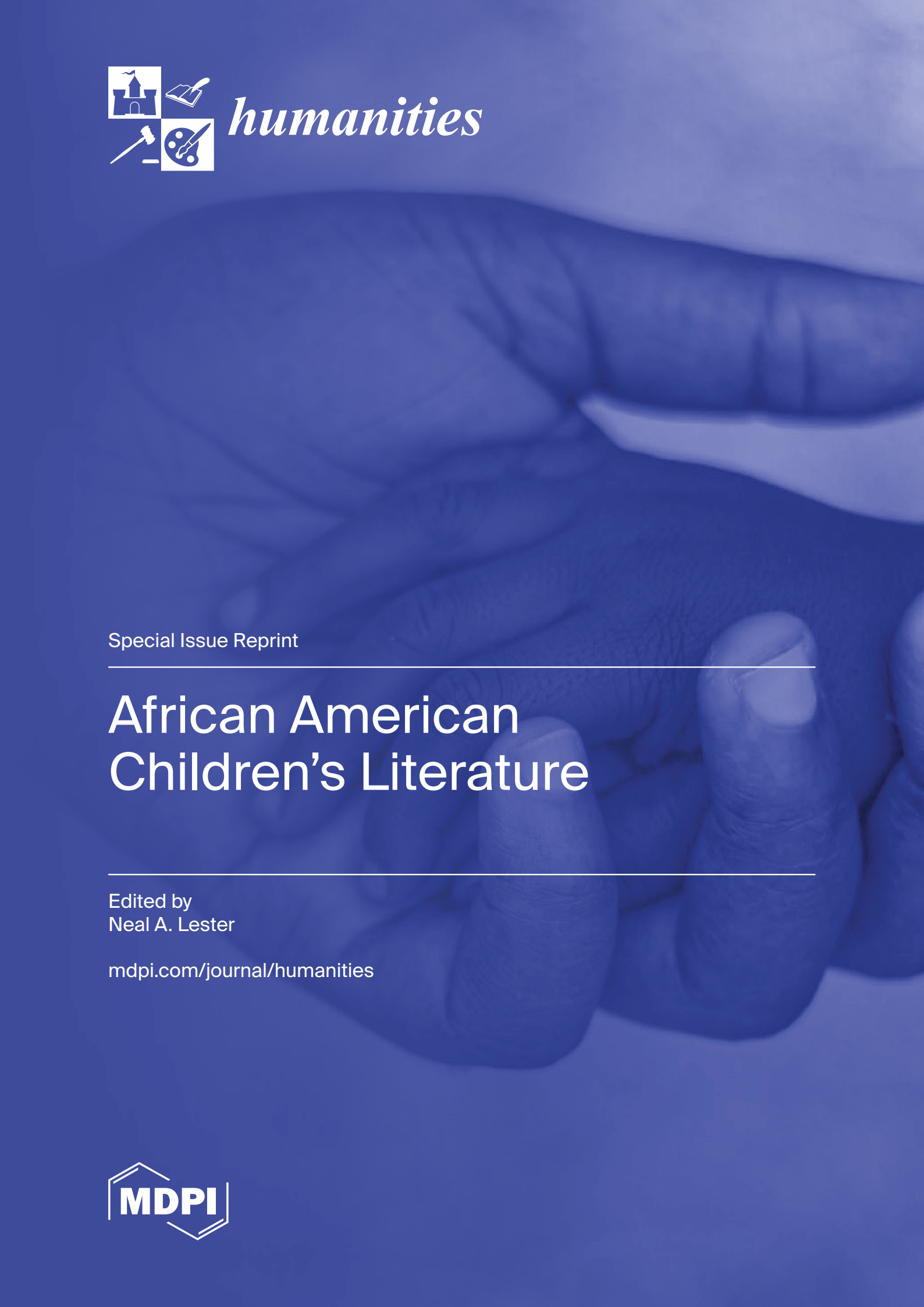

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Special Issue Reprint

African American Children's Literature

Edited by
Neal A. Lester

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Guest Editor

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About the Editor

Neal A. Lester

Neal A. Lester, PhD, is Foundation Professor of English and Founding Director of the multiple award-winning Project Humanities initiative at Arizona State University. With expertise in African American literature and culture, Dr. Lester has authored or edited eight books and myriad of essays and chapters on such topics as the race and gender politics of hair, violence against Black children, rethinking empathy, Black masculinities, neo-slave narratives, and African American folklore, to Toni Morrison's children's books. In addition to his publications on ntozake shange, Alice Walker, Beyoncé, Lorraine Hansberry, Richard Wright, Sapphire, and Zora Neale Hurston, Dr. Lester has done pioneering work on the Nword, having created and taught the first college course on the Nword in the US. His expertise on cultural appropriation, everyday lessons in privilege and bias, and humanities and entrepreneurship is nationally and internationally recognized. His expertise has led to interviews with *CNN*, *USA Today*, *Good Morning America*, *The Special Report with Reva Martin*, *Newsweek*, *Your Teen (for Parents)*, *Arizona Horizon*, *Arizona Horizonte*, *Raising Arizona Kids*, *Tavis Smiley*, *Arizona Republic*, *Ahwatukee Foothills News*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

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Editorial

Introduction: African American Children's Literature

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Accepting the notion that "childhood" and "adulthood" are social constructs and not biological facts affords an opportunity to see and understand how the lived experiences of children and adults, past and present, intersect in complicated and multitextured ways. Literature created for and about children, then, is always filtered through the lens of adult experiences since children are not writing, publishing, or buying their own texts. Adults are the gatekeepers defining and documenting the good and the bad of children's lives and placing value and legitimacy on the creative and literary expressions for and about children.

To read the history of a society, a nation, a country, a community, and of a people is to attend to the children's texts—songs, ditties, toys, stories, folktales, folklore, jokes, games, and play rituals—that serve to indoctrinate and to teach lessons and values about good and evil, about right and wrong, about Black and white. Even as adult politics are framed allegedly around "protecting the children," children have participated directly in social movements and been directly affected by social injustices.

This Special Issue of *Humanities* focuses on African American children's literature and looks at the many ways in which reading and studying children's texts teach as much about the adult world as about the world of children. This collection is not a history of African American children's literature though histories certainly inform the texts written, published, lauded, celebrated, banned, taught, or ignored. Those who study and teach African American children's literature know that stories and narratives about Black children were not always available in ways and forms that celebrated Black children when they were not altogether erased or absent. From stereotypes to violence, literary and creative expressions about Black children by non-Black authors—when available—engaged problematic tropes of white saviorism, exceptionalism, animalization, primitivism, violence, and tokenism—too often in efforts to "educate" and entertain white children often through humor and dehumanization. When Black authors endeavored to rescue Black children from the damaging tropes that denied humanity, they too often subscribed to respectability politics, "toxic positivity," colorism, and classism. From representations to illustrations to narratives, this Special Issue offers a more critically nuanced treatment of Black children's lives and experiences.

A 2018 "Diversity in Children's Books" Infographic created by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, Department of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, offers this representation breakdown in children's books: "American Indians/First Nations (1%), Latinx (5%), Asian Pacific Islander/Asian Pacific American (7%), African/African American (10%), Animals/Other (27%) and White (50%)" (Dahlen 2019). So, while there are far more books about Black children, there is plenty of work to be done to move Black children's literature to the same studied value both inside and beyond the academy to reflect the value and meaning of Black children's complex lives and experiences. This Special Issue moves that critical conversation along more deliberately and intentionally,

moving African American children's literature from the sidelines and margins to the center of literary and cultural studies. This collection imbues African American children's literature with the same complexity, nuance, and relevance as African American adult literature, essentially breaking down the artificial barriers around relevance, value, and importance.

In Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Claudia MacTeer narrates a childhood memory of meeting her Black family's new rental tenant. This perspective mirrors the ways in which adults have not always centered children or children's experiences in the world: "Freida and I were not introduced to [Mr. Henry]—merely pointed out. Like, here is the bathroom; the clothes closet is here; and these are my kids, Frieda and Claudia; watch out for this window; it doesn't open all the way" (Morrison 1970). Ideally, this Special Issue contributes to the growing body of scholarship and discourse that covers a range of identity and representation issues that center rather than marginalize African American children. This collection further underscores the reality that critical conversations about children and what they are exposed to are as much about the adults who create and present these texts and ideologies to children. This Special Issue will be of interest to and a valuable resource for students, parents, teachers, and community members invested in representation, narrative, social justice, critical race theory, identity politics, and publishing industry bias. It also makes the invisible visible and relevant, and acknowledges children and children's lives beyond just being extensions and human possessions of adults and parents.

As for putting this Special Issue together, contributors responding to the 2021 Call for Papers were offered these possible prompts to show the volume's open range of perspectives for consideration:

- *Black children and mental health;*
- *Black children and sexuality;*
- *Black children and transgender identity;*
- *Black children and violence;*
- *Black children and US history;*
- *Black children and the Diaspora;*
- *Black children and toys and games;*
- *Black children and sports;*
- *Black children and death and dying;*
- *Black children and education;*
- *Black children and dance;*
- *Black children and theater;*
- *Black children and creativity;*
- *Black children and disability;*
- *Black children and racial justice;*
- *Black children and white supremacy;*
- *Black children and social movements;*
- *Black children and Black Lives Matter;*
- *Black children and "critical race theory";*
- *Black children and language;*
- *Black children and music;*
- *Black children and the arts;*
- *Black children and folklore;*
- *Black children and science;*
- *Black children and class;*
- *Black children and social organizations;*
- *Black children and homelessness;*
- *Black children and other racial/ethnic groups;*

- *Parenting Black children;*
- *Black children and "curriculum violence";*
- *Black children and trauma;*
- *Black children and intergenerational trauma;*
- *Black children and play.*

Such a list of possible topics underscores the complexity of perspectives and the myriad angles from which this specific literature could and can be examined. This list is also a reminder that this volume is not meant to be comprehensive in that everything about this literature is included. While the various essays that constitute this volume involve historical and social contexts, the goal of the collection and these essays is to remind readers across disciplines and professions that Black children are and have always been at the nexus of adult US racial politics.

Special Issue Trials and Tribulations

Relatively speaking, having this volume of essays on African American children's literature come together has been no small feat. While I enthusiastically accepted the invitation to edit this Special Issue as an exciting opportunity four years ago, I also encountered a number of challenges. Some of these challenges had to do first with getting enough Contributors. Other challenges involved the very nature of this journal's review process to include different kinds of essays solicited and received. This process has taught me quite a bit about professional and editorial gatekeeping and about the ways in which efforts to open up and even expand critical conversations about African American children's literature from multiple and diverse perspectives continually bump up against "tradition," against scholarly and editorial skepticism. My frustration in this regard was shared among those who do not come at this and their work in African American children's literature as "traditional scholars." What constitutes this final volume makes me happy and satisfied that I and some of the authors persisted to the bitter end.

One of the first lessons I have learned in this Special Issue Guest Editorship is that African American children's literature is still a relatively small area of academic inquiry, exploration, and expertise within the academy. I already knew based on my engagement with mostly faculty colleagues at other institutions of higher education that I can readily identify folks who do African American "adult" literature. I can easily find folks who do children's literature more broadly. Those who do African American literature do not necessarily do children's or young adult literature, and those who do children's literature do not always hold space for and expertise in African American children's literature. Arguably, those of us who do African American children's literature are a rather rare cast of academics. That was potentially part of the challenge of receiving contributions but also in identifying reviewers who could speak critically and knowledgeably about this particular genre.

This reality is also what led to other bigger challenges that I faced as the Guest Editor. Attending in March 2024 the inaugural African American Children's Literature Symposium[1] in Washington, DC, opened my eyes to the reality of multiple aspects of African American children's literature that go beyond the authored books and the "traditional scholars" who analyze and write about children's books. The symposium, focusing on the "Role of DC Writers in Building Canon and Community—1970s through the Present." had a very specific regional focus, but the attention to others associated with publishing, distributing, illustrating, and marketing African American children's books was on full display. Attending this conference allowed me to make connections with others who are not affiliated with institutions of higher education, and that in itself proved challenging for the journal's review team. At the conference, I also met authors writing these books that constitute the African American children's literature canon as we know it, and their

contributions offer an insider's perspective on this subject, particularly regarding publisher biases, marketing, and distributions. I was also reminded of the blatant gatekeeping that still exists within the publishing industry that keeps certain kinds of stories from seeing the light of day. That means, I have learned, that so many stories, experiences, perspectives go unheard and unrealized. Hence, this volume intentionally engages these sobering conversations that in many ways led to the initial historical need for Black stories that intentionally center Black children's lives and perspectives. While I invited many more individuals to consider submitting pieces than appear in this volume—an illustrator, a satirist, a filmmaker, a doll collector, a bookstore owner, a bookstore distributor, and a social justice organization, for instance—many of those approached declined my invitation or gave up after we reviewed first drafts and abstracts because they felt unprepared to write what I and this journal were asking of them critically. What I was asking of them was what was being asked and expected of me as the journal issue's Guest Editor. For those who accepted my invitation, I am most grateful. I, too, felt the air sucked from beneath their and my wings each time another level of edits and revisions was requested before an essay was finalized and then moved forward to completion and final acceptance. Importantly and disappointingly, these editorial revisions often had nothing to do with the overall quality of the submissions but all to do with a checklist of what essays in this journal "traditionally" look like and entail.

At last, this volume has come together in a way that showcases and amplifies multiple aspects of African American children's literature. I am also adding two journal-identified "editorial pieces" as insider perspectives to complement these "scholarly articles" that do have their professionally obligatory footnotes and referencesIn one of the final essays submitted, reviewed, and accepted for this volume, the author contextualizes her teaching of a Jacqueline Woodson young adult novel within the current US political climate that is legislatively and aggressively whitewashing, erasing, or rewriting US history. This current moment disturbingly reflects the publication reality that initially led to the need for Black authors to tell their Black human stories as they both lived and imagined their experiences.

On a related note, as I was putting this volume together, I was invited to be part of a community grassroots advisory team facilitating the inaugural Black Children's Book Week[2] in Phoenix, AZ, from 23 February through 2 March 2025. As the five of us identified several local Black Arizona authors with books, enthusiasm, and readiness to participate in what was a very successful inaugural event, one of our marketing pieces went out thusly: "Celebrate Black Children's Book Week in Phoenix: Inaugural Events to Highlight Black Authors and Literacy." As we were promoting the culminating event where multiple authors would be reading to children from their books, I received a communication from my university dean and the university's General Counsel asking—or rather telling me—to remove the word "Black" from our reference to "Black Authors" (Figure 1). While, technically, non-Black authors can and did write Black children's literature that was not laden with racist tropes, caricatures, and stereotypes, the very reason that Black authors emerged was to counter the all-too-prevalent racial and cultural misrepresentations by non-Black authors. As instructed, we removed the word and recognized in so doing that the socially and politically aggressive anti-CRT (Critical Race Theory), anti-WOKE, and anti-DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) movements are once again trying desperately to silence, erase, or whitewash Black stories, Black experiences, and Black lives altogether, both inside and beyond classrooms, libraries, and publications. The very existence of this volume will not allow that to happen.

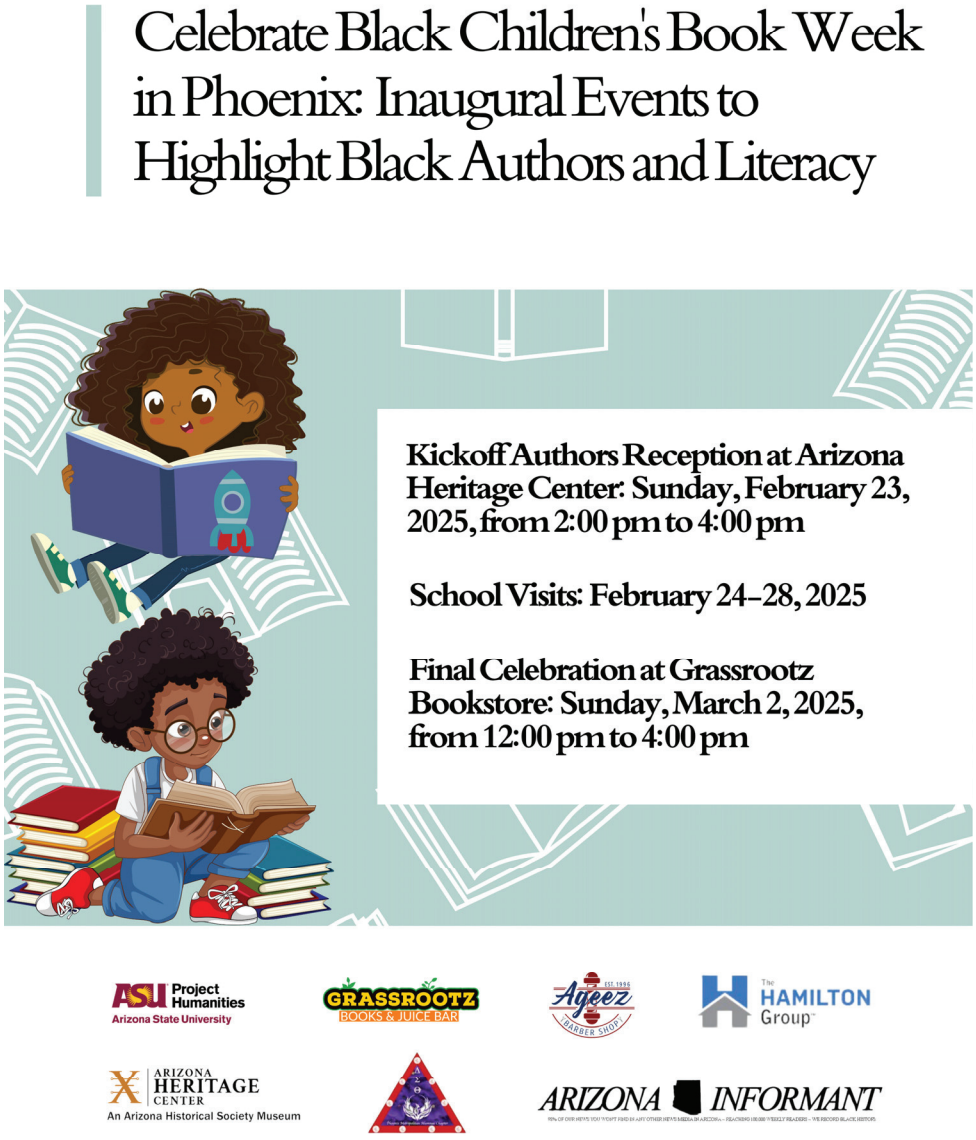

Figure 1. Marketing flier for inaugural Black Children's Book Week in Phoenix, AZ (23 February–2 March 2025), sent out electronically on 27 February 2025 from the Arizona State University Project Humanities marketing team since Project Humanities was a leading event sponsor.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares that there are not conflicts of interest.

Notes

1 Presented by (Esther Productions et al. 2024), with this complete title: "African Americans and Children's Literature: An Examination of the Role of DC Writers in Building Canon and Community—1970s through the Present." See day's event video recording of all panels here: https://tinyurl.com/5fb74pc2. (available online 27 September 2025)

2 See (Chambers 2022). Founded by Veronica N. Chapman in January 2022, this national event was created as "an invitation for everyone to be intentional about making sure Black children feel our love."
This sweeping anti-Blackness is both literal and figurative, part of a broader political movement to paint diversity generally and Blackness specifically as "divisive" and un-American. See this story by Daniel Johnson about removing the word "Black" from a named Goldman Sachs marginalized group initiative: "(Johnson 2025)." About this change, Ashai Pompey, an African American woman and Goldman Sachs' Global Head of Corporate Engagement, admits being aware of the current political scrutiny of all public and private alleged DEI programs: "Goldman Sachs was 'aware of what's out there,' a reference to the political climate around diversity, equity, and inclusion, but said that despite this, 'we are very focused on achieving the objectives of our program. Of course, we do that in operation and in compliance with laws, but our commitment to One Million Black Women is strong.'"

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Editorial

Mirrors and Windows: Lucille Clifton and African American Identity in Children's Books

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In March 2024, the Guest Editor of this Special Issue on African American Children's Literature attended the first of its kind—a day-long symposium specifically devoted to African American children's literature. The event, "African Americans and Children's Literature: A Symposium and Exhibition", included a range of diverse perspectives; among them were African American authors, bookstore owners and distributors, and illustrators. The following opening plenary address by Sidney Clifton further contextualizes historically and socially this historical event and this Special Issue.

Short Biography of Author

Emmy-nominated producer Sidney Clifton has over twenty years of experience as an Executive Producer and Development Executive overseeing animated and mixed-media content, currently serving as Head of Animation at Mattel Television Studios. Prior to this role, Clifton served as a producer and Senior Vice President of Animation and Mixed Media at The Jim Henson Company. Prior to the Henson Company, she worked with Deluxe Animation Studios, Riot Games, Bento Box Entertainment, and Film Roman Animation.

Sidney Clifton's productions include the Children and Family Emmy-nominated *Slumberkins* (2022) for The Jim Henson Company, where she also produced the animated *Harriet the Spy* (2021) series; *Black Panther* (2010) for Black Entertainment Television; *Mosaic* (2007) for POW! Entertainment; *Hellboy: Sword of Storms* (2006) and *Hellboy: Blood and Iron* (2007) for the Cartoon Network; Stan Lee's *The Condor* (2007) for Anchor Bay Entertainment; *Me, Eliose!* (2006) for Starz Media; and *The Happy Elf* (2005) with Harry Connick, Jr. for HC Productions.

In her role as mentor to emerging writers and artists, Sidney Clifton has been a featured presenter, guest, and commencement speaker at colleges and universities across the USA. Her commitment to developing and supporting underserved communities of storytellers and creators was the catalyst that launched The Clifton House—a writers and artists workshop and retreat space at her childhood home in Baltimore, Maryland. Sidney Clifton is the daughter of US writer, poet, and educator Lucille Clifton (1936–2010).

Lucille Clifton attended Howard University in Washington, DC, and published eleven books of poetry and twenty children's books. Publishing her first book of poetry *Good Times* in 1969, Lucille Clifton received both the Coretta Scott King Award for *Everett Anderson's Good-bye* (1984) and the National Book Award for *Blessing the Boats: New and Selected Poems*, 1988–2000 (2001). In 2007, Clifton received the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize (2007) and served as Poet Laureate of Maryland (1979–1985).

Sidney Clifton's African American Children's Book Authors Event Keynote Address delivered on 2 March 2024

(Keynote video recording here: https://tinyurl.com/m6vne48c)

I was honored when award-winning author Jonetta Rose Barras asked me to give the keynote at the inaugural African American Children's Literature Symposium. The event, curated in partnership with humanities scholar Bernard Demczuk, PhD, was presented by Esther Productions Incorporated, The Black Student Fund, and The Institute for African American Writing. When asked, I accepted with no hesitation. Ms. Barras was a colleague of my mother's, National Book Award winning poet and Coretta Scott King Award winning children's book author Lucille Clifton.

As Lucille's daughter and President of The Clifton House (www.thecliftonhouse.org), I am committed to educating our communities about the triumphs and struggles of our artistic and literary icons. I have been a producer for twenty-plus years, working primarily in animation. My passion is to continue their creative legacy by elevating authentic Black voices always, in all ways. I am my mother's daughter, and I represent her honesty, integrity, and creative courage.

About thirty years ago, my mother was giving a reading in New York City. A local elementary school asked if she would be willing to come for a visit and speak to the children, and she happily obliged.

As was her custom, after she spoke with students, she asked to visit the school's library to check their selections, make recommendations, but mostly to see if they had any of her books. They did not.

She asked the librarian, "I notice you don't have any books about Black children?"

The librarian replied "No, we don't."

"Why not?" Mom asked.

"We don't have any Black children in this school," the librarian responded.

"But you have books about bunnies. . .," Mom continued.

Years earlier in 1970, Lucille Clifton had six children in elementary school; her four girls and two boys were active and curious and beautiful and unabashedly Black. In 1970, there was still unrest in our country; her husband—my father Fred Clifton—was active in the National Black Assembly, working toward racial justice and equity. And poet Lucille did what she was called to do for her Black sons and daughters: she writes children's books that do not yet exist, celebrating their lives in all their rich and sometimes complicated glory.

As we are all aware, in the 1960s and 1970s [in the US] while we were still fighting for representation in media, the mainstream children's literature industry did not pick up this fight. Books featuring Black protagonists written by Black authors published by mainstream publishers were all but nonexistent. Books featuring Black children often perpetuated stereotypes or portrayed limited narratives.

One exception is [white author] Ezra Jack Keats' *The Snowy Day* (1962), a popular book that featured a Black main character. This book won the Caldecott Medal in 1963. Keats said that "All children should be able to see themselves in books they love". I cannot comment on Keats' motivation. Whether or not his intentions were genuine, and despite the popularity of the book, there was little immediate impact on the publishing of Black children's books by Black authors.

Mainstream [i.e., white] editors and publishers lacked, and in many cases still lack, understanding and appreciation of or real care about the value of diverse perspectives. This is not news.

It is also not news that access to diverse literature is essential for Black children's sense of self and also for promoting empathy, understanding, and cultural competence among *all* children. The lack of representation in and access to Black children's books by Black authors limit opportunities for cross-cultural learning and contribute to a narrower world-view among young readers, creating narrow-minded, dangerous adults who perpetuate

dangerous and divisive mindsets that still impact us today. Here is where our passionate independent writers, publishers, and booksellers have stepped in to bridge that gap. We are grateful for your sacred work.

As a poet and children's book author, my mother described her job as providing mirrors and windows—mirrors reflecting our own lives and windows into the lives of others which can help us fully understand our kinship to the world at large.

This she did brilliantly, telling stories that reflected the varied experiences of undeniably Black people, moments large and small.

Mirrors and windows and strong leaders, entrepreneurs, and advocates.

Because of my mother's success in poetry, her then agent Marilyn Marlowe at Curtis Brown, Ltd.—"one of the world's leading literary agencies representing a wide variety of established and emerging authors of all genres since 1914"—who was a strong advocate for her clients, was able to set up her books with mainstream publishers, primarily Dutton, Holt, Rinehart and Winston and Henry Holt. Did having a white agent advocate who was once described as a "bulldog" help? Probably. But Mom's work also stood on its own. Her stories exhibited a radical beauty that helped build the foundation on which the storytellers that followed could solidly stand.

A few of these stories, all beauties, large and small:

The Black BC's (1970) takes the form of a poem for each letter of the alphabet as it celebrates the contributions and US history of African Americans past and present.

Don't You Remember? (1973) is about a little Black girl who thinks everyone makes promises to her that only she remembers.

The Boy Who Didn't Believe in Spring (1973) takes place in the middle of the city when eight-year-old friends King Shabazz and Tony Polito go in search of a season they have never seen before and find it in an unlikely place.

Good, Says Jerome (1973) is the story of nine-year-old Jerome who does not want to move, go to a new school, or leave his friends, but his older sister Janice Marie allays his fears.

My Brother Fine with Me (1975) is the story of Johnny's little brother Baggy who decides to run away, and his big sister is okay with it. Maybe.

Amifika (1977) is the story of a little Black boy so afraid that his father won't remember him after a stint in the army that little Amifika looks for a place to hide before his father comes home.

And the beloved, 1970s award-winning *Everett Anderson Series* books, written in verse:

Some of the Days of Everett Anderson (1970) describes the typical days in six-year-old Everett's week.
Everett Anderson's Christmas Coming (1974)
Everett Anderson's Year (1974)
Everett Anderson's Friend (1976)
Everett Anderson's 1,2,3 (1977)
Everett Anderson's Goodbye (1983)
Everett Anderson's Nine Month Long (1987)
One of the Problems of Everett Anderson (2001)

As an example of continuing the legacy of Black children's literature and storytelling, I am currently working with brilliant writer and three-time Emmy nominee Keion Jackson to develop the Everett Anderson books into an animated series for young children. This series celebrates Black boy joy with a beautiful six-year-old who lives in the projects with his loving mama. There is joy, even to quote my mother's poem, "in the inner city, or like we call it, home."

Lucille Clifton's cultural authenticity was not without controversy, however, even within Black communities. When her book *All Us Come Cross the Water* (1973), illustrated by the extraordinary artist John Steptoe, was published by Henry Holt, critics bristled at the concept of her using colloquial Black spoken language in children's literature. She even got a letter from an elementary school teacher stating that she would share the book with her students, but when reading aloud to them, she would change the title to "All of Us Have Come Cross the Water". Mom did not respond to that letter. I am grateful that my mother's cultural integrity and creative courage would not allow her to submit to the fears of her critics. In her life and poems and her children's books, Lucille Clifton was honest, audacious, funny, nurturing, and courageous. That is what it takes for storytellers. Being mirrors and windows takes courage, passion, and persistence.

Consider *All Us Come Cross the Water*

Our lives. Our voices. Specificity. In 1973, writing a children's book referencing being "born with a veil over her face", talking to Big Mama, the neighborhood Panther's Bookstore, a man with wine in a paper cup was revolutionary.

My deepest gratitude to the participants in this groundbreaking inaugural African American Children's Literature symposium; to the passionate, talented writers, illustrators, entrepreneurs, booksellers, and independent publishers who have taken up the call to action for our Black children's sake, showing them that there is a future and all of them are in it.

And finally, to one of my Black author inspirations and Sheroes, Ms. Sharon Bell Mathis.

Ms. Sharon's book *Listen for the Fig Tree* (1974) was one of my all-time favorite books as a young Black girl, and I believe it played a large part in my path toward producing. She may not remember this, but after I read the book, I sent her a letter for casting suggestions when it became a movie because I was SURE that was going to happen.

Today, as then, I am grateful for the stories and am honored to be in the company of "Mirrors and Windows. Creative Courage. Passion and Persistence". Pass it on.

Thank you.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Article

Black Children's Lives Matter: Representational Violence against Black Children

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Abstract: Black children have never been exempt from the violence and abuse that have beset Black adults. Any comprehensive attention to and understanding of systemic racism, anti-Blackness, and intergenerational Black trauma must consider the historical violence literally, representationally, and fictionally against Black children and youth. For each news story headline about violence against Black children, there is a comparable Black adult story, underscoring the interchangeability of Black adult and Black children subjected to racial violence. This essay is not a history of violence against Black children in literature but, rather, an effort to understand and demonstrate that Black children's lives have not always mattered and that to address true racial justice in this country, systemic assaults on Black children and, by extension, on Black children's families and communities, must be included in any justice conversation and work. This essay looks at representative children's literature that normalizes violence against Black children.

Keywords: children's literature; racial justice; violence; Black children

> *Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes.*
>
> *Run, Jip, run. Jip runs, Alice runs. Alice has blue eyes.*
>
> *Jerry has blue eyes. Jerry runs. Alice runs. They run*
>
> *with their blue eyes. Four blue eyes. Four pretty*
>
> *blue eyes. Blue-sky eyes. Blue-like Mrs. Forrest's*
>
> *blue blouse eyes. Morning-glory-blue-eyes.*
>
> *Alice-and-Jerry-blue-storybook-eyes.*
>
> Each night, without fail, she prayed for the blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that would take a long, long time.
>
> Thrown, in this way, into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people.
>
> —Morrison (1970) *The Bluest Eye* (p. 40).

1. Introduction: Abusing as Schooling

In the September 1918 issue of *The Crisis*, Walter F. White, Assistant Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Brooks and Lowndes Counties, Georgia, describes the lynching of Mary Turner, who had spoken out against the lynching of her husband the day before:

> At the time she was lynched, Mary Turner was in her eighth month of pregnancy. The delicate state of her health, one month or less previous to delivery, may be imagined, but this fact had no effect on the tender feelings of the mob. Her ankles were tied together, and she was hung to the tree, head downward. Gasoline and

> oil from the automobiles were thrown on her clothing and while she writhed in agony and the mob howled in glee, a match was applied and her clothes burned from her person. When this had been done and while she was yet alive, a knife, evidently one such as is used in splitting hogs, was taken and the woman's abdomen was cut open, the unborn babe falling from her womb to the ground. The infant, prematurely born, gave two feeble cries and then its head was crushed by a member of the mob with his heel. Hundreds of bullets were then fired into the body of the woman, now mercifully dead, and the work was over. (White 1918, p. 222; see also *The Mary Turner Project* 2021).

In February 2013, as a Delta Airlines flight descended to land, a sixty-year-old white man, agitated by the child crying next to him, turned to the little boy's white mother, called the toddler the Nword, and slapped him:

> As the plane began its descent into Atlanta, the boy began to cry because of the altitude change and his mother tried to soothe him. Then Hundley, who was seated next to the mother and son, allegedly told her to "shut that (N-word) baby up." Hundley then turned around and slapped the child in the face with an open hand, which caused him to scream even louder, an FBI affidavit said. The boy suffered a scratch below his right eye. Other passengers on the plane assisted Bennett [the mother], and one of them heard the slur and witnessed the alleged assault, the affidavit said. (Ward and Martinez 2013)

The white man was charged with simple assault and later fired from his executive job (Thornton 2013). In August 2020, a white woman slapped an eleven-year-old Black child and called him the Nword because his go-kart accidentally hit hers: "At Boomers, an entertainment center in Boca Raton, last weekend, Haley Zager, 30, took umbrage when a young Black boy bumped her car at a go-kart track. Angry that the little boy didn't apologize, Zager slapped him in the face while calling him a n*****" (Thornton 2020). In February 2021, a nine-year-old Black girl was handcuffed and pepper sprayed by police because of their upset at her distress witnessing her father's unpleasant encounter with them:

> The 9-year-old Black girl sat handcuffed in the backseat of a police car, distraught and crying for her father as the white officers grew increasingly impatient while they tried to wrangle her fully into the vehicle. "This is your last chance," one officer warned. "Otherwise pepper spray is going in your eyeballs." Less than 90 seconds later, the girl had been sprayed and was screaming, "Please, wipe my eyes! Wipe my eyes, please!" What started with a report of "family trouble" in Rochester, New York, and ended with police treating a fourth-grader like a crime suspect, has spurred outrage as the latest example of law enforcement mistreatment of Black people. (Hajela and Whitehurst 2021)

These incidents and so many others underscore the reality that Black children have never been exempt from the violence and abuse that have beset Black adults. Any comprehensive attention to and understanding of systemic racism, anti-Blackness, and intergenerational Black trauma, then, must consider this historical and contemporary violence literally, representationally, and fictionally against Black children and youth. This essay is not a history of violence against Black children; it is, rather, an effort to understand and demonstrate that Black children's lives have not always mattered and that to address true racial justice in this country, systemic assaults on Black children—including representational assaults in literature—and, by extension, on Black children's families and communities, must be included in any justice conversation and work.

Representations of violence against Black children in children's books further underscore the interchangeability of Black adults and children subjected to racial violence. The violence depicted is not just physical but is also represented through caricature, such as in Charles Twelvetrees's (1916) "N***** MILK" calendar illustration that mocks Black

children's alleged minstrelsy-colored skin hue (Figure 1) (Getty Images 2021). This "n***** milk" joke became a popular gag in 1920s cartoons.

Figure 1. Charles Twelvetrees, "N***** MILK," c. 1916 (Getty Images 2021).

2. Education and Learning What?

That schools and classrooms are safe spaces for every child is a myth. Indeed, the very texts that have taught youngsters to read and write have also misrepresented and assaulted the sensibilities of Black children, their Black families, and their Black communities. In endless ditties, rhymes, and picture books that saturated and helped to shape US and other societies' cultural norms, Black children were a staple in the complex tapestry of adult racial politics, whether through outright American Blackface minstrelsy stereotyping or through depiction of dehumanizing physical threats to Black children and/or the Black adults in Black children's lives. The following sampling of children's picture books speaks to the devaluing of Black children's lives and bodies.

Because of its immense and long-term popularity, Helen Bannerman's (Bannerman 1899) *The Story of Little Black Sambo* tops any list about anti-Black violence and Black children's trauma. In addition to the story's myriad authorized and unauthorized editions, its popularity and ubiquity are attributed as well to the various formats in which it went on to appear, such as puzzles, games, and sound recordings.[1] Despite the seemingly romanticized nostalgia for this little Black child who allegedly outwits three ferocious and threatening tigers to save himself, this story is really about a Black child's fear, panic, physical violation (in the form of literally stripping him of his new clothes), desperation, and luck:

> And poor Little Black Sambo went away crying, because the cruel Tigers had taken all his fine clothes.
>
> Presently he heard a horrible noise that sounded like "Gr-r-r-r-rrrrrrr," and it got louder and louder. "Oh! dear!" said Little Black Sambo, "there are all the Tigers coming back to eat me up! What shall I do?" (Bannerman 1899, pp. 34–36)

For me, Little Black Sambo is no trickster, as too many nostalgic readers—especially non-Black readers—contend (Lester 2012). Bannerman has not written him as surviving because of his own mental and reasoning faculties, but rather on the fickleness of luck: the tigers are distracted by greed, chasing each other around a tree so frantically and frenziedly that they miraculously turn to butter. That three tigers threaten him on three different occasions during this encounter is nothing less than trauma. This Black child's and his parents' disparaging names—Sambo, Mumbo, and Jumbo—served to delight Bannerman's young Scottish children as they traveled by train in India to visit their dad during Bannerman's writing of this tortuous tale. Coupled with the problematic names and the narrative action itself are the Black minstrelsy features of the characters—the physical weight of parents Mumbo and Jumbo is either too fat or too thin (depending on the story version), and they wear mismatched bright-colored, clown-ish clothing. These characters' dark black skin and exaggerated red smiling lips and Mumbo's mammy attire, complete with bandanna and checkered dress, further mock and Other the Black characters. Little Black Sambo becomes more animal-like as he becomes more naked and scared, hiding behind a tree in the distance, while the tigers become more human, greedily fighting for each other's clothing. While this book could have been a critique of colonialism and "civilization," it is not. Instead, for many Black and white adults, it remains childhood nostalgia, with little to no acknowledgement of its imperialist objectification of people of color. The book jacket for what is hailed as "the only authorized American edition of *The Story of Little Black Sambo* written and illustrated by Helen Bannerman"[2] furthers this glossing over of representation and misrepresentation:

> The jolly and exciting tale of the little boy who lost his red coat and his blue trousers and his purple shoes but who was saved from the tigers to eat 169 pancakes for his supper, has been universally loved by generations of children . . . . *Little Black Sambo* is a book that speaks a common language of all nations, and has added more to the joy of little children than perhaps any other story. They love to hear it again and again; to read it to themselves; to act it out in their play. (Bannerman [1900] 1923, front cover jacket)

This blurb is as problematic as the book, on many levels. First, Little Black Sambo does not "lose" his clothing as a result of his own childhood negligence, as the wording of "lost" might suggest. Clearly, this circumstance is different from Little Bo Peep who lost her sheep or the Three Little Kittens who lost their mittens. Furthering this Black child and Black family misrepresentation is the projecting of childhood excess and the gluttony of eating 169 pancakes, perhaps also suggesting an underlying hunger of massive proportion. The notion of a "common language," in my reading, is the violence and threat of violence against Black children whose Black parents are neglectful, unaware, and ultimately unable to protect their Black child from wandering through a dangerous jungle. In Bannerman's stories, and in US culture more widely, the violence associated with children being eaten alive by animals echoes the popular notion that the babies of enslaved persons were eaten by alligators, an image that appears on licorice candy, and of adults being chased up palm trees by alligators. Typically, animals eat other animals, so this representation equates Black bodies with animals (and not in the anti-speciesism way), leaving white people as humans whom animals would never consider eating. Bannerman (Bannerman 1899) wrote *Little Black Sambo* expressly to "amuse" her two little girls ("Preface") at the expense of Black children.[3]

In direct contrast to the demeaning characterizations and deadly, dehumanizing situations in *Little Black Sambo* and many other stories with caricatured Black figures, Bannerman's (1966) *The Story of Little White Squibba*, "completed and released by . . . Bannerman's daughter, Day, twenty years after her mother's death," is about a little white girl—one of Bannerman's few white characters[4]—who encounters and befriends a tiger, an alligator, an elephant, a mongoose, frogs, and a snake (*The Story of Little White Squibba* n.d.).[5] While two of the animals threaten to eat her, the other animals join her on her adventures

because "One day she had a birthday and all of her friends sent her books about little black children who had wonderful adventures in the Jungle" (Bannerman 1966, p. 8). The animals who take Little White Squibba's jacket and scarf give these clothing items back to her, for various reasons, and by the story's end, are now friends with Squibba: "And then presently [the animals] all reached Little Squibba's home, and she said to her mother, 'these are all friends of mine, and they're never going to hurt children again. So, can we have tea now?'" (n.p.) A Black child is in mortal danger in Bannerman's first book, while a white child assumes the role of a fairytale heroine in her last. The differences in treatment and representation of a white child and a Black child are miles apart in granting humanity to one but not to the Other.

Like the genocidal nursery rhyme "Ten Little Indians" (Winner 1868), "Ten Little N******" (Green 1869) teaches subtraction through violence against little Black boys (Opie and Opie 1997, pp. 387–88; see also Jennings 2018).[6] As the counting backwards from ten to one commences to a gleeful sing-songiness, the boys disappear one by one: one boy chokes to death, one chops himself in half, one is stung to death by a bumble bee, another is swallowed by a fish, one is presumably hugged to death by a bear while at the zoo, and one just "frizzled up" in the sun. Furthermore, if they do not disappear because of violence, they disappear because they are lazy—one oversleeps and another is irresponsible (he stays late rather than leaving on time)—and the final boy marries, suggesting marriage is undesirable for Black folks. Appearing in publications from at least the mid-1800s through the 2010s, the verses are accompanied by Blackface images of the little boys. The "pickaninny" character, minstrelsy Blackface, and even the corresponding violent counting rhymes were also present in film from its beginnings. Consider Edison's (1894) early kinetoscope (movie-like series of images) demo, *The Pickaninnies*, with young dance performers Walter Wilkins, Denny Tolliver, and Joe Rastus (British Film Institute (BFI) (2021)). Edison (1908) also has a later counting-game-based short film *Ten Pickaninnies* [or *The Pickaninnies*]. In many more films, he and other early filmmakers capitalized on racist stereotypes and violence as humor:

> African American children were subjected to violence in such films as *The Gator and the Pickaninny*.... Here a black child is swallowed by an alligator. While the father eventually saves his child, the image is truly frightening . . . . "Black children were often considered 'disposable'" . . . . These films include such violence as children who "are knocked out, kidnapped, bee stung to death, shot, drowned, and eaten by an alligator." The violence is "sadistic" . . . . (Waterman 2021, p. 796)

Filmmakers continued this tradition in white action movies, with the "token" adult Black or other minoritized villain or hero eventually the character whom film audiences are trained to expect will die.

Based on this early nursery rhyme, Nora Case's (1907) *Ten Little N***** Boys* is a version that teaches addition.[7] *Ten Little N***** Boys*—or *Ten Little N***** Boys and Ten Little N***** Girls*–went on to have numerous editions by publishers on both sides of the Atlantic, starting with Chatto & Windus 1907, as one of the Dumpy Books for Children (Bannerman's (1899) *The Story of Little Black Sambo* is also a Dumpy Book), through 1962. In these addition scenarios, a boy helps another put on shoes, two boys save another from drowning, the children frolic in a watering hole, they save another from an aggressive lion, one is saved from being strangled by a snake, they show each other how to ice skate, they play jokes on each other, they chase chickens in a yard, and they are chastised for reasons unknown by their red-bandanna-adorned mom—figured as Mammy with heft, apron, bug eyes, and minstrel black skin. It is not clear how their playfulness makes them "naughty little n***** boys" (Case 1907, p. 28) at the section's end. In this animal connection, even Nature perpetrates harm upon Black children.

The second half of Case's (1907) *Ten Little N***** Boys* is about "Ten Little N***** Girls." The Black girls section of this dual text teaches subtraction. Their Black girls' numbers diminish when one goes to Paris, one disappears from doing a summersault on a gate,

one chooses to leave the group on a trip to Devon, one is burned up while making toffee sticks, one is presumably stung to death by a honey bee, one abandons a task of floor cleaning for no specified reason, a giant bird steals one away, a polar bear at a zoo snatches and hugs another, and a fish eats one. The same trope of animals acting violently toward Black children resurfaces. While there are inconsistencies in both sections regarding the nature and degree of anti-Black violence, what is consistent are the children's minstrel Blackface representations. The narratives paint pictures of Black boys and Black girls as careless, lazy, irresponsible, and generally insignificant; they have been created to amuse and entertain others at the cost of the Black children's humanity and human dignity. Of further importance about these books with their problematic representations is that they are also physically small, meant to fit a little child's hands—4.5 inches by 6 inches.

Also child-sized, *Ten Little Pickaninnies* (Brown 1900) is a 12-page paper booklet, volume 21 of The Faultless Starch Library that served as both advertisement for the popular starch and entertainment for children.[8] Bushnell (2021) describes how, "In the mid-1890's, Faultless embarked on an aggressive marketing campaign that involved the publishing of small books that came free with every box of Faultless starch. The Faultless Starch Library published 36 titles between 1896 and the mid-1930's . . . . The booklets were a huge hit in Texas and the Indian Territories as they were used as primary readers and supplements to school texts. Many in rural areas learned to read using the Faultless booklets." Children in urban and rural areas also "collected and traded the booklets . . . " (Davis 2005, p. 18). In the anti-Blackness style and content of *Ten Little N***** *Girls*, Faultless's *Ten Little Pickaninnies* depicts minstrelsy-style young Black girls with bicycle-spokes-sticking-from-their-heads plaits who engage in the following activities to teach subtraction to children:

> Ten pickaninnies hanging washing on a line,
> One pinned her nose fast, and then there were nine.
> Nine pickaninnies scrubbing early and late.
> One ate a cake of soap, and then there were eight.
> Eight pickaninnies, quarrelling like eleven,
> One of them began to cry and then there were seven.
> Seven pickaninnies, tired of naughty tricks,
> One of them is pouting, so there are six.
> Six pickaninnies thought they'd take a drive.
> One got left behind, and then there were five.
> Five pickaninnies went to a grocery store,
> One ate a green apple—then there were four.
> Four pickaninnies buying *Faultless Starch* with glee,
> One got another sort, and then there were three.
> Three pickaninnies very weary grew,
> One threw her box away, and then there were two.
> Two pickaninnies, to use *Faultless Starch* began,
> One went away to rest, and then there was one.
> One pickaninny, when with *Faultless Starch* she's done,
> Finds she's turned all over white, so there were none. (Brown 1900, n.p.)

The literal and metaphorical washing-the-black-off racist commercial advertising (a common trope in US visual history) further perpetuates the notion that Black girls, like their adult Black moms and aunts, are solely meant to serve as cleaners and domestics for white people. The poem/song mirrors the nonsensical minstrel songs in that there is no logic explaining the disappearance of the girls, one by one. Here, the violence takes the form of "pinning her nose fast," "eating a cake of soap," and quarreling and crying,

with the culminating act of the last little Black girl disappearing altogether by turning "all over white."

This notion of whiteness as an ideal and Blackness its antithesis is precisely the premise of Toni Morrison's (1970) first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, the source of this essay's epigraph, in which the "ugly" Black Pecola prays for blue eyes as a symbol of whiteness and its alleged goodness and perfection. The famous Mamie and Kenneth Clarke 1950s "Doll Test" provided data to show Black children's positive bias toward white dolls over Black dolls that looked more like them with their brown skin (Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF) (2021)).[9] While this test has been updated from the 1950s, with more factors included, such as colorism, and with both white and Brown children asked the Doll Test questions, the results of all tests through the years is that white is right, better, and best, even with dolls. The starch ad, Morrison's (1970) theme in *The Bluest Eye*, and the various iterations of the Doll Test all speak to another form of violence against Black children: the violence of absence, of nullified identity, and of self-contempt as foregrounded in this childhood verse: "God made the little n*****, He made them in the night, /He made them in a hurry, and forgot to make them white!" (Figure 2) (Pinterest n.d.). The bilingualism (French [top line] and Dutch [bottom line] translation: "Five souls . . . . . one thought"), the Black minstrelsy back row, and the mischievous Black boys seemingly ready to pounce on the Black girls perpetuate the global anti-Black sentiments that prevail in Christianity and beyond English-speaking societies. Black children—like Black adults—are connected with criminality and mischief in this image as well.

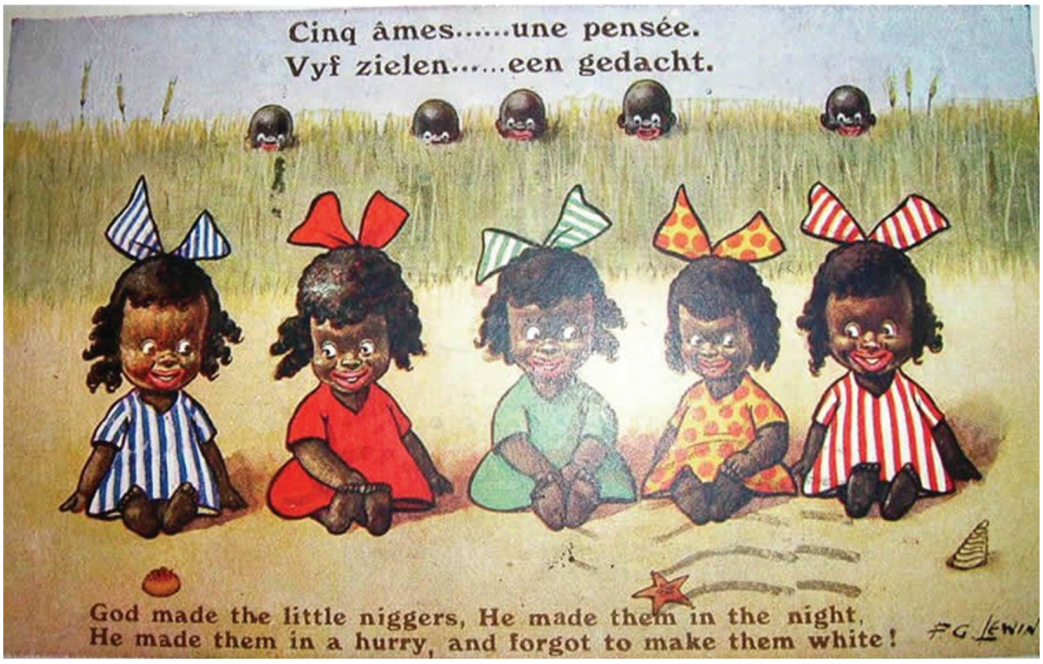

Figure 2. Caricature and familiar childhood verse (Lewin n.d.).

Lynda Graham's (1939) *Pinky Marie: The Story of Her Adventure with the Seven Bluebirds* mocks a Black girl child because of her hair and non-white skin color. Violence and child trauma in this children's book take the form of birds attacking and stealing the child's ribbons while she sleeps. As in other stories, the Black child is linked with animals meant to do her harm, this time by violating her body in its most vulnerable state, during sleep. Pinky Marie has two Black parents whose names are meant to be funny and mocking, and even nonsensical for children, because their names are too many "white names" strung together, seemingly for importance. Additionally, Pinky Marie and her parents are not just Black; they are very Black:

> Mr. Washington Jefferson Jackson was black. As black—as black—as black as INK. Mrs. Washington Jefferson Jackson was black, too. As black—as black—as NIGHT. And Mr. and Mrs. Washington Jefferson Jackson had a little girl. Her name was Pinky Marie Washington Jefferson Jackson. Oh! Oh! Oh! What a big, big name for such as a round roly-poly little girl. But she wasn't black. Oh no! She was brown. As brown—as brown—as brown as a chocolate candy bar. And she looked good enough to eat. (Graham 1939, n.p.)

By comparing Pinky Marie's color to candy, the white author depicts Black children as edible treats, a trope that has also appeared much more recently. In a 1980s Conguitos (Spanish candy) commercial, a white child emulating Tarzan swings from a jungle tree and jokes with little personified marching African minstrelsy candies. The roughly translated voiceover says that "The candies taste good, and they make you big and strong" (Tokyvideo 2020).[10] In another Conguitos ad entitled "Anuncio Conguitos Tribu Color," the stereotypical animated candies are literally plucked from the jungle by white hands and eaten by white people (Chocolateclass 2015).

While the child in *Pinky Marie* is not minstrel Black, her parents are, and Pinky and her dad have "kinky black hair." Her mom is adorned in the mammy trope bandanna: "And Mrs. Washington Jefferson Jackson had—well, you couldn't tell what kind of hair she had. Maybe no hair at all, for she always wore a big red-and-white hanky tied around her head" (Graham 1939, n.p.). On the day of the story, Pinky Marie goes to town with her father. For this special outing, she wears a beautiful dress that is, like the jacket of her literary cousin Little Black Sambo, "just the color of the part of the watermelon that you eat" (n.p.), and her hair is in multiple "pickaninny pigtails" adorned with "beautiful, beautiful colored strings—pink and green and yellow and red and orange and blue and purple" (n.p.). These visual depictions of Black girl children are common and prevalent in similar textual representations, especially the multiple plaits poking from the child's head as though they are bicycle wheel spokes. Punctuated with references to Pinky Marie's parents as "Pappy" and "Mammy," the story takes a violent turn during the journey to town when Pinky Marie falls asleep and a flock of "father" birds steals her beautiful hair strings to add a touch of color for their nests. Described thusly, the birds look down from their tree to see their target, the sleeping Pinky Marie:

> Then all the other birds looked down where the first father bird was looking and their bright, bright eyes sparkled too. "Yes, yes!" they twittered. "Yes, SOMETHING COLORED TO BRIGHTEN UP OUR NESTS!" For there, far below, slept Pinky Marie Washington Jefferson Jackson in her beautiful, beautiful dress and the beautiful, beautiful strings tying her kinky black hair." (n.p.)

The author's sympathies lie with the birds in need of decorating their nests, not with this Black child whose physical and psychological trauma derive from this violent assault on her physical person:

> And without waiting a minute, the seven father birds swooped down, down, down, and each took the end of a beautiful string in his sharp yellow bill . . . . PULL! PULL! PULL! PULL! PULL! PULL! PULL! Away went the seven father birds with Pinky Marie's beautiful strings in their bills. One father bird had a pink string; one had a green string; one had a yellow string; one had a red string; one had an orange string; one had a blue string; and one had a purple string. (n.p.)

The assault—a metaphorical rape—reveals a few details that constitute specifically racialized trauma: this child is objectified as "SOMETHING COLORED," a phrase not just referencing Pinky Marie's string ribbons but her whole person; the pulling and tugging on her hair by multiple "father" birds with "sharp yellow bills" suggests violation by a group of (white) men who themselves have daughters but view Black women and girls as prey; and the little girl's sleeping, as she awaits her father's return back to their travel wagon,

demonstrates her total vulnerability. Pinky Marie, like Little Black Sambo, is ambushed and left helpless and afraid:

> And down in in the wagon Pinky Marie Washington Jefferson Jackson woke up. And her head hurt just for a very little bit, so she put up her fat chocolate-colored hands to rub it and then, oh, my! Her big brown eyes grew bigger and bigger, for her pigtails were gone—her beautiful pink and green and yellow and red and orange and blue and purple Sunday School and going-to-town day strings were gone! And her kinky-curly black hair was blowing this way and that way in the soft gentle breeze. She didn't look like a birthday cake, oh no! She looked just like—just like old Baa Black Sheep with his thick wool all scrumbled-scrambled up. Then Pinky Marie Washington Jefferson Jackson began to cry . . . . Pinky Marie was crying so she couldn't say a word. She could only shake her kinky, wooly, chocolate head. (n.p.)

Even in this moment of vulnerability, Graham, having created Pinky Marie as a living, hollow, chocolate candy sheep-girl, does not miss an opportunity to mock the little girl's physical body—her size, shape, hair, and "big name," a not-so-subtle nickname or rhythmic shorthand for "pickaninny," all meant to mock and amuse. The narrative's solution to this trauma is to give Pinky Marie a bandanna to wear, making her a younger embodiment of her Mammy mother: her Pappy "pulled out his big red-and-blue-and-green hanky and tied it around Pinky Marie's scrumbled-scrambled, kinky, wooly head just like Mrs. Washington Jefferson Jackson tied hers. And then he said, 'There you is, honey. You looks fine again'" (n.p.). The adult "father" birds' violently forcing this young girl into womanhood is similar to the many narratives of the sexual and other types of "adultification" of Black girls in contemporary times (Campaign for Youth Justice 2020). What is clear is that this book—like *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (Bannerman 1899) and *Ten Little N***** Boys and Ten Little N***** Girls* (Case 1907)—does not acknowledge a Black child's pain, fear, and suffering, thereby underscoring research data that shows white people generally, and medical professionals specifically, believe that Black people allegedly do not feel pain as do white people (National Public Radio (NPR) (2013); Swetlitz 2016). Hence, their pain and suffering can be easily denied, minimized, or ignored altogether.

Similar familial caricatures are present in Blanche Seale Hunt's (1945) *Little Brown Koko Has Fun*, which opens with mocking both the mother's and the little boy's physical persons: "Little Brown Koko's nice, big, ole, good, fat, black Mammy went to town one afternoon and left him at home to keep the chickens scared out of the flower-beds. But before she left she took one of her big, fat, black fingers under Little Brown Koko's little, flat, brown nose and said, 'An' mind, Little Brown Koko! Don't you-all skeer up no mischief while I's gone'" (p. 5). The scene is set for little Black child who has to be disciplined and subtly threatened. Whatever violence that might come this child's way is therefore reasonable, expected, and ultimately justified. Indeed, whether Brown or Black, these children are cut from the same cloth as their adult parents.

Kate Gambold Dyer's (1942) *Turky Trott and the Black Santa*, with illustrations by Janet Robson, seeks to be a more Black-affirming story but is undermined by the pedestrian, minstrelsy-black illustrations and the red bandanna-wearing Mammy character. Racially problematic illustrations also appear in Eva Knox Evans's (1936) *Jerome Anthony* and in James Holding's (1962) *The Lazy Little Zulu*, which depicts a Black African child as "lazy" because he enjoys experiencing Nature. Equally problematic because of the minstrel "Uncle Tom-ish" caricatures of Black adults and children is Bonte and Bonte [1900]'s (Bonte and Bonte [1900] 1908) *ABC in Dixie: A Plantation Alphabet*. (Amazon (n.d.) warns that this book's "content may be considered offensive or racist," describing it as an "early pictorial children's reader, about learning to read, building proficiency, and enjoying good old fashion slapstick humor, featuring strictly people of color, Afrocentric. Black Americana." Even when the narrative itself is not racialized, as in Maben's (1943) *Pickaninny*, the naming of a little Black child as "Pickaninny" carries this generic disparagement that

denies humanity and individual identity. Amazon (n.d.) describes this book with absolutely no mention or acknowledgment of its problematic name itself: "A beautifully illustrated children's book about little Pickaninny and his adventures with the handsome Mrs. Turtle." This minstrelsy Black child image is most pronounced in Jean Robertson's (1950) *More Adventures of Little Black Nickum*, with its exaggerated minstrelsy, mocking dialect, and Mammy and Poppa naming— modeled on Bannerman's (1899) *Little Black Sambo* and Case's (1907) *Ten Little N***** Boys*.

Decades later, the minstrelsy image of "Jackson" in the 13 May 1970, *Dennis the Menace* cartoon (Figure 3) that appeared in newspapers nationally, reveals Black children as a source of visual difference and racial humor, inhabiting the same political space as Black adults. Some editors rejected the cartoon, and some newspapers that ran it printed apologies for doing so after readers angrily protested. In his autobiography, Ketcham (1990) explains:

> Back in the late 1960s when minorities were getting their dander up . . . I was determined to join the parade led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and introduce a black playmate to the Mitchell neighborhood. I named him *Jackson* and designed him in the tradition of Little Black Sambo . . . . He was cute as a button, and . . . would. . . . inject some humor into the extremely tense political climate . . . . The rumble [reader protests against the image] started in Detroit....The cancer quickly spread to other large cities.... I gave them a miniature Stepin Fetchit when they wanted a half-pint Harry Belafonte. (pp. 191–92)

Shocked at the negative reactions, Ketcham apparently never came to understand why his Sambo-like initial representation of Jackson had been offensive, no matter his intentions (see also Mikkelson 2015).

Figure 3. Hank Ketcham (1970) *Dennis the Menace*. Copyright permission obtained from Fantagraphics.

Not coincidentally, the pain and suffering of Black adults and Black children is reflected in the actual games white people played at the expense of Black folks. In these games, both Black children and Black adults were targets of objects tossed and thrown aggressively at

them in order to score points. According to the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia's (2014) short film *Blacks as Targets*,

> Carnival games in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries highlighted and exploited white people's hostility toward blacks. Presenting African Americans as willing victims of white aggression made the violence seem normal and legitimate. Games like *The African Dodger*, also known as *Hit the N***** Baby* or *Hit the Coon*, which used actual human targets, were commonplace in local fairs, carnivals, and circuses. Sometimes a picture or model of an African American was used instead, but the message was clear—unprovoked violent aggression toward blacks was the social norm.

Violence normalized in games and literature as education and entertainment is a direct reflection of a history of violence consistently directed at Black bodies in real life—all in the interest of maintaining white supremacy.

At least two 1950s board games by Chad Valley Company, Ltd. have as their objective to shoot Black children: *Five Little N***** Boys* (Chad Valley Company Ltd 1950a) and *Four Little N***** Boys* (Chad Valley Company Ltd 1950b) (see Figure 4). Both come with small stand-up figures to be shot down with toy rifles. On the box of the *Four Little N***** Boys* game are these words: "Five Little N***** Boys/Looking very sore/One of them was shot off/And then there were four." *Five Little N***** Boys* is billed on the box as a "Shooting Game" (Windel 2016). In a recent realistic version of this shooting game, Miami Police reported in 2015 using the mug shot images of Black teens for target practice (Jordan 2016; Savransky and Rabin 2015). More than a century earlier, white soldiers in Tampa, Florida, resisting the 1898 temporary encampment of a company of Buffalo Soldiers en route to support Cubans under seizure by Spanish armies, used a Black child for target practice:

> "It's one of these ugly moments we cannot forget is part of our story," said Fred Hearns, a historian of Tampa's African American history. "Shooting at a black kid for target practice. Think about it. People supported that once". . . . A white soldier from Ohio grabbed an African American toddler wearing a loose-fitting pajama gown. Holding the little boy upside down, the soldier announced a contest: Anyone who could shoot a hole through the child's sleeve would be considered the top marksman. The target was hit; the child was unharmed. (Guzzo 2018)

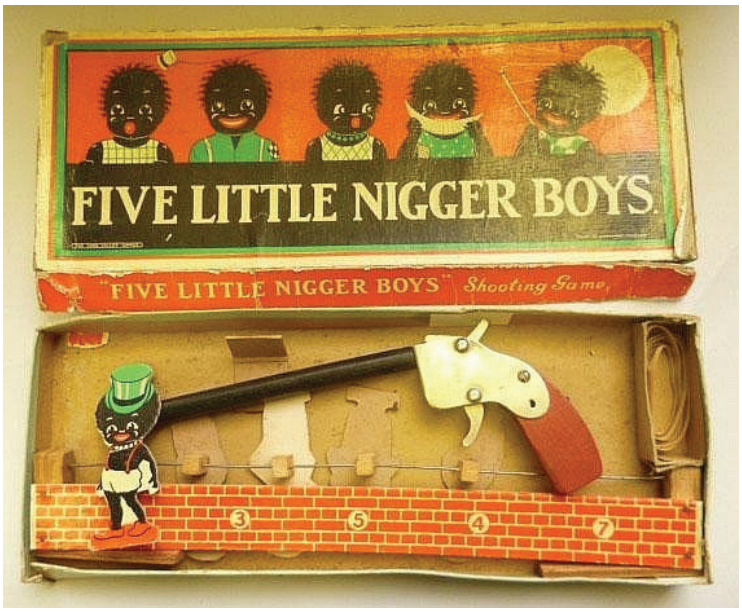

Figure 4. Chad Valley Company Ltd (1950a) shooting game with Black children as targets.

In sharp contrast to Black children and youth as targets of white violence is the existence of *Junior Shooters*, an online and print journal representing an organization dedicated to training (apparently only white) children and youth in gun use and safety. According to the organization's "About Us" page,

> *Junior Shooters* strives to be the first of its kind to promote juniors involved in all shooting disciplines online and in print. We care about kids and their parents and want you to have a place to go to find what is needed to get started in many different shooting venues. Questions are answered about safety, guns and gear, protective gear, events, organizations and more. *Junior Shooters* is dedicated to juniors of all ages and their parents . . . . (Junior Shooters 2021)

On the site's "Get Involved" page, the organization states,

> *Junior Shooters* strives to be the first of its kind to promote juniors involved in shooting and the many disciplines they are shooting, all in one publication. Junior shooters and their parents now have a publication they can go to and find what is needed to Get Started . . . . The premier issue of *Junior Shooters*, Volume 1, was published in August 2007 and is receiving an outstanding response! *Junior Shooters* is dedicated to juniors of all ages, but primarily from the age of eight to 21, depending upon the shooting sport. It will be published quarterly starting in 2008. (Junior Shooters 2021)

That this site has no children of color pictured with guns underscores the parallel position of whites represented in these children's books. In other words, just as the Black children become targets like Black adults, white children become the perpetrators of anti-Black violence like white adults.

Denis Mercier (n.d.), in "From Hostility to Reverence: 100 Years of African-American Imagery in Games," offers further commentary on violence against Black adults and children in game formatting:

> Of all the American popular genres using African-American imagery, children's games have been among the most uniformly negative . . . .
>
> Games of the late 19th and early 20th centuries reflected racial attitudes ranging from the benign to the aggressively violent. Although some of the games . . . stereotyped African Americans as comical entertainers, many revealed an intense white hostility towards Blacks. This hostility was legitimized, even celebrated, by making it appear as if Blacks depicted enjoyed the victimization to which the games subjected them. Many target games . . . portrayed the Black targets as smiling broadly. The unspoken message was that Blacks, unlike other [white] people, felt no pain, so players could indulge in and enjoy aggressive assault because no real pain was inflicted.

These games were commonly paired with minstrelsy illustrations and representations, further denying Black people any semblance of basic humanity.

In Sara Cone Bryant's (1907) *Epaminondas and His Auntie*, minstrel-like images of the Black child protagonist and his Mammy-trope "Auntie" and his mother are inhumane and grotesque, augmented by maternal verbal abuse and physical pain. While the story is about a Black child's (in)ability to follow parental instructions, the narrative essentially becomes a journey into the humiliation of a Black child who does not understand adult instruction. This young child's misunderstandings afford no empathy or compassion from the adults in the story and serve to amuse and entertain at a Black child's expense. For instance, as Epaminondas is tasked by his "Auntie" with bringing cake to his mother, he smashes the cake in his hands in his efforts to carry it as instructed. When he arrives with the crumpled and crumbled cake, his mother responds with disdain and insult: "Epaminondas, you ain't got the sense you was born with! That's no way to carry cake. The way to carry cake is to wrap it all up nice in some leaves and put it in your hat, and put your hat on your head,

and come along home" (Bryant 1907, p. 6). Rather than adults giving a task to him, then confirming that he fully understands the task as instructed, this Black child is the source of racist mythologies about Black folks' innate intellectual inferiority, both Black children and Black adults. Notice that the explanation and task clarification come from the adult after the verbal assault and humiliation—all for a reader's entertainment at this child's expense. No responsibility is given to the adults engaging this young child in these tasks. When this child learns from each of the previous failures, he seeks to apply that learning to his next familial assignment—delivering butter to his mother, taking a new puppy home, and delivering a loaf of bread to his mother. With each task, however, comes the refrain that attacks his child illogic and unthinking, when he is actually interpreting his instructions quite literally. Such literal interpretations are lower-level skills that apparently, according to Bryant, warrant adult belittling and verbal chastising. This book further offers commentary and examples that disparage Black parenting and Black adulting.

Here, Bryant's (1907) final refrain summarizes each of the missed communications: "O, Epaminondas, Epaminondas, you ain't the sense you was born with; you never did have the sense you was born with; you never will have the sense you was born with!" (p. 14). Not only is this Black child scolded for ruining the piece of cake, messing up the butter, drowning the puppy, and dragging the cake on a leash, but the final source of laughter for the reader comes at the story's end when the Black child steps into hot mince pie because he misunderstands his mother's instruction: "'But I'll just tell you one thing, Epaminondas! You see these here six mince pies I done make? You see how I done set 'em on the doorstep to cool? Well, now, you hear me, Epaminondas, *you be careful how you step on those pies!*'" (Bryant 1907, p. 15). Predictably, the last scene of this book is the Black child stepping into the presumably still-hot pies: "And then,—and then,—Epaminondas was careful how he stepped on those pies! He stepped—right—in—the—middle—of—every—one" (p. 16). No empathy, compassion, or human dignity is extended to this Black child who suffers insult and injury on multiple fronts. His mistakes and mishaps are meant to draw uproarious laughter and glee from young and old readers alike.[11]

Offering more trauma-inducing adventures into the animal world, Bernice G. Anderson's (1930) *Topsy Turvy's Pigtails* is the story of the Blackface stocking doll with her characteristic multicolored bows on multiple wheel spoke-like plaits.[12] Topsy had earlier appeared in Harriet Beecher Stowe's (1852) *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as the consummate Black girl "pickaninny," remaining so in an abridged version for young readers, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Young Folks' Edition* (Stowe 1905).

> "I've made a purchase for your department,—see here," said St. Clare; and, with the word, he pulled along a little negro girl, about eight or nine years of age.
>
> She was one of the blackest of her race; and her round shining eyes, glittering as glass beads, moved with quick and restless glances over everything in the room. Her mouth, half open with astonishment at the wonders of the new Mas'r's parlor, displayed a white and brilliant set of teeth. Her woolly hair was braided in sundry little tails, which stuck out in every direction. The expression of her face was an odd mixture of shrewdness and cunning, over which was oddly drawn, like a kind of veil, an expression of the most doleful gravity and solemnity. She was dressed in a single filthy, ragged garment, made of bagging; and stood with her hands demurely folded before her. Altogether, there was something odd and goblin-like about her appearance,—something, as Miss Ophelia afterwards said, "so heathenish," as to inspire that good lady with utter dismay; and turning to St. Clare, she said,
>
> "Augustine, what in the world have you brought that thing here for?"
>
> "For you to educate . . . and train in the way she should go. I thought she was rather a funny specimen in the Jim Crow line. Here, Topsy," he added, giving a whistle, as a man would to call the attention of a dog, "give us a song, now, and show us some of your dancing."

> The black, glassy eyes glittered with a kind of wicked drollery, and the thing struck up, in a clear shrill voice, an odd negro melody, to which she kept time with her hands and feet, spinning round, clapping her hands, knocking her knees together, in a wild, fantastic sort of time, and producing in her throat all those odd guttural sounds which distinguish the native music of her race . . . . (Stowe 1852, pp. 351–52)

Topsy is the antithesis of the white girl Eva, their opposites represented in a doll popular before Stowe wrote her novel: "Topsy-Turvy dolls were popular toys for young children on plantations in the antebellum South. One end . . . resembled either an angelic white child wearing her best dress or a beautiful white mistress. When turned upside down, the doll revealed the face and costume of a young black female slave or a Mammy figure. These dolls remained popular into the mid-twentieth century, when patterns for the toy were mass produced by companies including McCalls, Vogart, Redline, and Butterick. In the 1940s Redline and Vogart began selling patterns for the dolls under a new name: Topsy and Eva . . . ." (Buckner 2011, pp. 55–56; see also Jarboe 2015 and Vogart 1940). In Stowe's novel, when Topsy disrupts her new white household, Miss Ophelia questions why Topsy "'[mis]behave[s] so badly.'" Topsy responds in exaggerated minstrelsy dialect, essentially inviting violence upon her small Black person because she deserves it: "'Dunno, missis—I 'spects cause I's so wicked'.... 'Laws, missis, you must whip me. My old missis always did. I ain't used to workin' unless I gets whipped'. . . . 'I's so awful wicked, there can't nobody do nothin' with me. I 'spects I's the wickedest crittur in the world'" (Stowe 1905, pp. 42–43). That Topsy is rambunctious, misrepresents herself, and insists that she needs to be whipped to keep her in line speaks to the narrative of white supremacy and anti-Blackness that beset this misrepresentation of Black children and therefore justifies violence against them. Judy Garland portrays this humorous, dehumanized Blackface, pigtailed Topsy character in *Everybody Sing* (Marin 1938). Two white sisters, the Duncan Sisters, even created a comic act (performed 1923–1959) as the characters Eva and Topsy from Stowe's novel. They refocused "the story of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on the relationship between the impish, young, black, female slave Topsy, and her beautiful, young, white, female mistress Eva . . . " (Buckner 2011, pp. 58–59). The show embodies these racialized stereotypes: Topsy is "impish and wild" and Eva the "sweet" girl needed to "tame this poor child" (59). Eva is "an angel" and "Topsy, a pest." Topsy is "ragged and black" and "the 'wickedest gal'" (59).

Capitalizing on the popularity of the Topsy character, Anderson's (1930) *Topsy Turvy's Pigtails* picture book features Topsy as the opposite of her "very prim, trim . . . , with every pin in place" black-stocking parents: "But Topsy Turvy!—oh, dear me! What a topsy-turvy black-stocking doll she was! She was anything but a prim, trim body, and wherever Topsy Turvy went things seemed to have a way of becoming upside down, inside out and helterskelter all about!!!" (Anderson 1930, n.p.). Already, this child is unattractive because of her physical person—her skin color, her hair, and her body. Not only does havoc follow her, but she is also "so untidy." The conflict here is that a white child, the presumably white-owned Comical Doll House's "little mistress," wants to cut off Topsy's pigtails, essentially because she can. This white girl child's skin color and social status give her that authority and privilege, such that Topsy runs away to save herself and her pigtails.

The threat and action of cutting off children's locks is a reality today, resulting from school policies and individual actions that have attacked Black children. In 2018, the white referee of a New Jersey high school wrestling match "who may have a history of racist behavior" forced Black high school student Andrew Johnson to choose between having his dreadlocks cut or forfeit his match (Hohman 2018). Though his "coaches argued with the referee . . . about his call," Johnson chose to comply, and won the match, but "appeared visibly upset" (Hohman 2018). In a 2009 instance, a white teacher, annoyed that a Black seven-year-old was fiddling with her braids in class, punished the student by cutting off one of her braids:

> Sometimes, when she sits in class, seven-year-old Lamya Cammon twirls the colorful beads that adorn her braids. Her mother . . . says that she does it "maybe out of nervousness or distraction." On 28 November, the girl's first grade teacher at the Congress Elementary School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, became "frustrated" when Cammon kept playing with her hair and told the girl to walk to the front of class. The obedient child complied, and, to her surprise, her teacher reached for a pair of scissors and cut one of Lamya's braids off. An outburst of laughter filled the room and little Cammon went back to her seat, put her head down on her desk, and cried. (Watts 2009)

This Black child's violation and trauma come on many levels—being treated punitively for something about which she was potentially unaware, the premeditated physical assault by the authority figure in a classroom space that should be safe for every child's learning, the teacher's making the child the source of class spectacle and peer entertainment, and the fact that the child's hair was cut and tossed in the trashcan. Neither this child nor the parent may ever know what this teacher's particular discipline choice aimed to achieve, especially when there was no evidence that the child's hair ritual was disrupting the class.[13]

The violence against the Black girl child in Anderson's book once again asserts the trope of a child at the mercy of animals. Specifically, as Topsy runs away from home, she encounters obstacles along the way that threaten to take her pigtails. A goat, for example, blocks her journey: "You shall not pass me until you have given me your beautiful pigtail tied with the scarlet ribbon" (Anderson 1930, n.p.). The goat does not allow her to pass, even though she cries and tries to run away. The goat ultimately takes what it wants, thus violating Topsy's physical person, further traumatizing her: "'You must give it to me,' said the goat, 'for I need it to tie to my tail so I will look fine at the Animals' Tail Show tonight.' AND WITH ONE BIG NIP HE NIPPED THE PIGTAIL OFF! Poor little Topsy Turvy ran on" (n.p.). As Topsy's journey continues, a cow makes the same threat for her green ribbon, blocking her path and eventually nipping off a second pigtail. A white pig wants, and gets by force, Topsy's pigtail with the blue ribbon. Another pig nips another pigtail, a donkey wants and nips another pigtail—all leaving Topsy crying and running back home. Through the little white mistress's negotiations, Topsy is allowed to go back to each of the animals to request her pigtails. Each animal requires that Topsy make their individual animal noises and sounds in order to get her pigtails back. Only with the help of a moon-elf, who gives Topsy a magical whistle that mimics animal sounds, is Topsy able to summon the animals holding her pigtails hostage. While the story allegedly ends happily, with Topsy getting her pigtails back, she cannot pretend away the trauma done to her physical doll person. Topsy cannot save herself and is at the whim and mercy of her white child owner, the animals, and the moon-elf. Readers again witness threats and violence against Black child bodies.

In illustrator Edward Windsor Kemble's popular *Coon* series, which includes *Comical Coons* (Kemble 1898b), Black children and Black adults, presented as one and the same, are, like Topsy—unkempt, unattractive, minstrel Black, clumsy, and prone to accidents and harm as the source of grotesque humor and comedy. Amazon (n.d.) describes Kemble's (1898a) *A Coon Alphabet* as "The classic 1898 African American Alphabet book with wit and humor illustrations in black and white drawing." *Kemble's Coons: A Collection of Southern Sketches* (Kemble 1896) presents similar images of Black characters exaggerated and mocked in the form of a coffee table book. About Kemble's "Negro drawings," Railton (2012) writes:

> I've found hundreds of Kemble illustrations of African Americans in periodicals and books from 1885 to 1910. He was used by magazines like *The Century* to illustrate short stories in the popular, nostalgic genre of the "plantation tale," and also, for example, did the illustrations for several of Joel Chandler Harris' *Uncle Remus* books and an 1892 edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. His work was obviously very popular. In a comment on an article he illustrated in *The Southern Magazine*, *The American Monthly Review of Reviews* referred to him this way: "the only artist who has yet seemed to have any success in picturing the Southern negro—E.W. Kemble" (April 1894) . . . . Though mainly an illustrator of other people's works,

> Kemble produced two books of his own drawings: *Kemble's Coons* (1897) and *Comical Coons* (1898) . . . . Over the decades between 1885 and the early 20th century, his "comical" cartoons were also regularly featured in magazines. . . . [A]ll of them feature caricatures of African Americans.

That Black children are physically ugly, lazy, criminal, undesirable, and incompetent beings makes it easier to imagine and accept violations of Black children's, youths', and adults' bodies. These picture books illustrate Black children as grotesque and non-human, clumsy, unkempt, and in need of being rescued and tamed by white saviors—sometimes in a book's narrative and sometimes in the author's call to action.

These racially problematic images transcend US domestic borders and underscore the prevalence of global anti-Blackness in representations of and for children. In the UK, for example, and in addition to Bannerman's (1899) hugely popular *Little Black Sambo*, Violet Harford's (1954) *Sunshine Corner Picture and Story Book*, features a UK version of the US Blackface pickaninny, the "golliwog," and includes references to and images from minstrelsy Blackface, such as "the Ten Little N***** Boys" and their "jolly-looking Black Mammy." Earlier, American Florence Kate Upton's illustrations in the immensely popular *The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls and a "Golliwogg"* (Upton and Upton 1895) inspired the "golliwogg" rag doll. Because she had not patented the figure, more books, dolls, and images followed. Its "fame was so wide that it spread to advertising and other selling items like children's china and other toys, ladies' perfume, and jewelry. James Robertson & Sons, British jam factory, used Gollywog as a mascot from 1910 until 2001. 'Blackjack'—aniseed candy made in United Kingdom used gollywog's face from 1920s until 1980s" (History of Dolls 2021). Originally published serially by a conservative Belgian magazine in 1930–1931 and then in book form, Hergé's (1931) *Tintin au Congo* (translated into English as Tintin in the Congo: US 1991 and 2004 and UK 2005), from his *Adventures of Tintin* series, was intended to "show Belgium how the Congolese natives were introduced to civilization" (Jühne et al. 2014). The Congolese are represented as childlike, with minstrelsy black facial features, skin color, and hair, and they bow to and call the white teenaged Tintin "mastah." Ironically, while infamous for its racism, the story is also a source of "national pride" in the Democratic Republic of Congo: "Tintinologist Michael Farr has claimed it is the hardest book to buy in Francophone Africa because it's always sold out . . . . Across the country, selling Tintin trinkets to tourists is a lifeline for many families" (M.Admin n.d.). One shop owner said that "'in the comic strip, you never see . . . [Tintin] trying to kill the Congolese.' That, at least, is a much better attitude than that of Tintin's real-life Belgian contemporaries" (M.Admin n.d.).

Another colonial text for children, *A Funny Book about the Ashantees*, written and illustrated by Ernest Griset (1874, 1880) was expressly created as "Amusement and Instruction for the Young" (Griset 1880, back cover), its humor and nonsense shared through the judgmental "civilized" white gaze that is totally opposite the perspective of "these [Black] creatures." The back cover blurb goes on to assert that "These Picture-Books, from Designs by the renowned Artist, Ernest Griset, will be immensely popular with the Young, while the grotesque and extremely amusing Pictures cannot fail to command the admiration of their Seniors" (Griset 1880). Like Hergé's Congolese figures, Griset's characters are minstrelsy black, bug-eyed, red-lipped, scantily clad, thin, and seemingly undernourished, and they carry spears and have painted faces. Their dancing is mocked, readers are to see their nose-to-nose greetings with each other as funny, they hunt lions by tricking them, they avoid being eaten alive by a hippopotamus, they talk and eat with their mouths full and with their hands, and they quarrel with one another. A Black child is part of the humor mix, threats of violence, and mockery. In fact, there is little difference between what the single child in this story experiences and what the accompanying adult experiences, underscoring this text again as a representation of the adultification of Black children, whose lives and bodies warrant the same literal and figurative assaults as on adult Black bodies. Black children have no kinship with the protected and safe worlds of white children's bodies.

3. Conclusions: Blurred Lines

In regard to the many missing and murdered Black children in Atlanta, Georgia, between 1979 and 1981—often called the Atlanta Child Murders—poet and author ntozake shange (1983) beckons Black mothers to move beyond weeping, to screaming and hollering, to making loud noise about their missing Black children in "about atlanta": "oh mary dont you weep & dont you moan/oh mary don't you weep & don't you moan/HOLLAR I say HOLLAR/cuz we black & poor & we just disappear" (p. 45). shange's call to action emerges from the reality that the boys from mostly Black, poor, and single-mother households, all between the ages of eleven and eighteen, vanished and were found dead, and that there was little national outrage in this country. As though it were a manifestation of the disappearing Black boys in the innumerable folkloric, textual, and filmic renditions of "Ten Little N***** Boys," this reality emphasizes the low value placed upon Black children's lives intersectionally.

While this essay focuses on the lack of humanity extended to Black children and Black adults, this argument extends to the historical past and present violence against Latinx and Indigenous Americans, Asians, and Asian Americans—which includes the massacres of Chinese workers during the Gold Rush era, the WWII concentration camps for Japanese American families, and the current random horrific violence against Asian American elderly people and women—and, of course, the violence against Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Middle Eastern Americans, too. Recently, the US immigration policy that led to keeping migrant children in "cages" and separated from their parents at the US–Mexican border has been traumatic for those children and families. Angela Barraza, a trauma-informed care specialist at the El Paso Child Guidance Center, explains:

> Migrant children and their families experience a great number of stressors throughout their pre-migration, flight, and resettlement experiences that impact their psychological well-being . . . . [A] multitude of social, emotional, and cognitive complications . . . can occur from migrant children being separated from their parents. Migrant children may have symptoms including anxiety, recurring nightmares, insomnia, secondary enuresis, introversion, relationship problems, behavioral problems, academic difficulties, anorexia, somatic problems, as well as anxiety and depressive symptoms . . . . [They can feel] [s]ad, empty, hopeless, [experience] loss of interest, worry, fear, fatigue, irritability, restlessness . . . . (Coulehan 2020)[14]

The traumatic separation of migrant children from their parents echoes the separation of enslaved African American families on US antebellum auction blocks or at the reading of a slaveowner's will. In *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent*, Isabel Wilkinson (2020) offers further historical context:

> The United States has a centuries-old history of people in the upper caste [whites] controlling and overriding the rightful role of lower-caste parents and their children, the most extreme of which was selling off children from their parents, even infants who had yet to be weaned from their mothers, as with fillies or pups rather than human beings. "One of them," remarked an enslaver, "was worth two hundred dollars . . . the moment it drew breath." This routine facet of slavery prevailed in our country for a quarter millennium, children and parents denied the most elemental of human bonds. (p. 211)

And Native American children endured the trauma of boarding schools, where their language and culture were erased all in the name of cultural assimilation and hegemonic control. Violence clearly manifests itself in this opening piece of Navajo poet and author Laura Tohe's (1999) *No Parole Today*. "Our Tongues Slapped into Silence" intermingles the popular *Dick and Jane* early readers of the 1930s–60s "that introduced us to the white man's world" with Tohe's memories of the abusive boarding school environment:

> In first grade I was five years old, the youngest and smallest in my class, always the one in front at group picture time. The principal put me in first grade because I spoke both Diné and English . . . .
>
> All my classmates were Diné and most of them spoke only the language of our ancestors. During this time, the government's policy meant to assimilate us into the white way of life. We had no choice in the matter; we had to comply. The taking of our language was a priority.
>
> *Dick and Jane Subdue the Diné*
>
> . . . . . .
>
> *See Eugene speak Diné.*
>
> *See Juanita answer him.*
>
> *oh, oh, oh*
>
> *See teacher frown.*
>
> *uh oh, uh oh*
>
> In first grade our first introduction to Indian School was Miss Rolands, a black woman from Texas, who treated us the way her people had been treated by white people. Later I learned how difficult it was for black teachers to find jobs in their communities, so they took jobs with the Bureau of Indian Affairs in New Mexico and Arizona in the 1950s and 60s . . . .
>
> Miss Rolands, an alien in our world, stood us in the corner of the classroom or outside in the hallway to feel shame for the crime of speaking Diné. Other times our hands were imprinted with red slaps from the ruler. In later classes we headed straight for the rear of classrooms, never asked questions, and never raised our hand. Utter one word of Diné and the government made sure our tongues were drowned in the murky waters of assimilation. (pp. 2–3)

This cultural genocide—cultural violence as identity erasure—has persisted for centuries, never distinguishing between Native American children and Native American adults.

As with Black children, violence has beset all adults and children of color. Across non-white communities, violence against children is not distinguished from the physical and cultural violence against adults. In the context of the killings of unarmed Black adults that have given rise to the Black Lives Matter movement, therapists contend that what children witness of adult trauma immediately or vicariously potentially constitutes their trauma as well: "[B]lack children are experiencing trauma as a result of the chaos they're witnessing of people who look like them being killed by law enforcement . . . . 'They (black children) may not be directly connected to George Floyd or Ahmaud Arbery, but seeing someone being gunned down or hearing about it . . . the children know'" (Jackson 2020). While all children are being affected by this current state of social unrest connected with violence, "[c]hildren of color deal with racial trauma and stressors that other children [white children] do not experience because of racism . . . " (Jackson 2020). That a twelve-year-old Latinx girl is body-slammed by a school district police officer (Quinlan 2016) is yet more evidence that violence against Black and Brown children and youth far exceeds that of authorial violence against white children and youth.

The everyday and seemingly mundane reality of Black children's and Black adults' bodies subjected to perpetual white violence is beyond alarming. This intergenerational trauma, whether through US history, police brutality, curriculum violence (and silences) in the classroom (see Jones 2020), or children's books, continues to be perpetuated and absorbed unless the roots of white supremacy are extracted, examined, understood, and acknowledged—and a fundamental humanity extended to all people, young and old. When children's books and games that purposefully mock Black children's identities, deny their fundamental humanity, and even normalize their deaths are created, consumed, and

nostalgically held dear for well over a century, it not so surprising, then, that, in 2019, Florida police would arrest, handcuff, fingerprint, and take a mugshot of a six-year-old Black girl after a classroom tantrum (Darby 2019), or that two years later a white teacher would humiliate a five-year-old Black kindergartener by forcing him to clean a clogged toilet with his bare hands (Torres 2021).

The dehumanization of Black children and families is likewise deeply entrenched in and through higher education. In an online Ivy League class, "Real Bones: Adventures in Forensic Anthropology," the instructor, "without the permission of the deceased's living parents," uses the pelvis and femur of a teenaged girl gathered from the ashes of the 1985 bombing of the residential headquarters of the Black liberation and environmental activism group MOVE, discussing and holding the girl's bones up to the camera (Pilkington 2021a).[15] After suspension of the 5000-student course, Princeton University's anthropology department issued a statement admitting to the fundamental dehumanization that has in part defined the field of physical anthropology:

> "As anthropologists we acknowledge that American physical anthropology began as a racist science marked by support for, and participation in, eugenics. It defended slavery, played a role in supporting restrictive immigration laws, and was used to justify segregation, oppression and violence in the USA and beyond . . . . [P]hysical anthropology has used, abused and disrespected bodies, bones and lives of indigenous and racialized communities under the guise of research and scholarship. We have a long way to go toward ensuring anthropology bends towards justice." (Pilkington 2021b)[16]

Integral to all aspects of American sociocultural education—particularly after the 2020 murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Brionna Taylor, and countless others, and the subsequent alleged global racial reckoning—is acknowledging and understanding that the profoundly inhumane objectification of and violence against Black children's and Black adults' bodies are not only historically and inextricably linked but continue in the present.

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Notes

1 The following are those that I have in my personal children's books collection, all with the characteristic Blackface minstrelsy imagery, some more grotesquely illustrated than others: *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (Bannerman 1931), illustrated by Lupprian, from the McLoughlin Brothers' Junior Color Classics series; Platt & Munk's connect-the-dots *The Little Black Sambo Magic Drawing Book* [1928] (*The Little Black Sambo Magic Drawing Book* [1928] 1946); *Little Black Sambo: The Listen Look Picture Book* (Bannerman 1941) ("READ *the Story!*/A 16-page picture book in full color/HEAR *the Story!*/A double-faced record with dramatic sound effects"); the *Little Black Sambo Animated! Animated!* (Bannerman 1943), a pop-up book illustrated by Wehr; recordings by RCA's *Little Black Sambo's Jungle Band* (Bannerman 1939) and Columbia Records' *Little Black Sambo* (Bannerman 1946); a *Little Black Sambo* (1931) board game included in *Kellogg's Story Book of Games (Book Number One)* appearing with *Cinderella*, *The Three Little Pigs*, and *Hansel and Gretel*, suggesting the level of *Little Black Sambo*'s popularity among European Americans; and a vintage *Little Black Sambo* [1924] (*Little Black Sambo* [1924] 1945) board game. Among the anthologies in which *Little Black Sambo* appears are *Nursery Tales Children Love*, edited by Piper (Bannerman 1925) and *My Favorite Story Book III*, edited by Hays (Bannerman 1942).

2 "Frederick A. Stokes of New York published the first US edition of Bannerman's *The Story of Little Black Sambo* in 1900. After the story was reproduced in many pirated versions, Stokes moved to affix the line 'The Only Authorized American Edition' to its 1923 edition to maintain some kind of distinction in the marketplace" (Biblio 2021).

3 In addition to appearing in Bannerman's initial 1899 story, Little Sambo appears in her later books and in many other authors' stories (dozens of them pirated and with innumerable spinoffs to today). These include, for example, Ver Beck (1928a), *Little Black Sambo and the Baby Elephant*; Ver Beck (1928b), *Little Black Sambo and the Monkey People*; Bannerman (1935), *The Little Black Sambo Story Book* (which includes five additional stories: "Little Black Sambo and the Baby Elephant," "Little Black Sambo and the Tiger

Kitten," "Little Black Sambo and the Tiger Kitten," "Little Black Sambo and the Monkey People," "Little Black Sambo in the Bears Den," and "Little Black Sambo and the Crocodiles"); and Bannerman (1936), *Sambo and the Twins: A New Adventure of Little Black Sambo*. Although some scholars contend that babies were used as "alligator bait," the consensus among many others is that this cannot be definitively proved or disproved. What is clear, however, is that this grotesque image exists to underscore a real anti-Black sentiment that included both Black adults and Black children interchangeably: "During slavery and the Jim Crow era in the United States, African Americans were brutalized and mistreated in almost every way imaginable. If there was a way to kill, maim, oppress, or use an African American for any reason, it more than likely happened. If the skin from an African American might be used for leather shoes or handbags, *(see Human Leather)*, then pretty much all atrocities were possible and probable. African American babies being used as alligator bait really happened, and it happened to real people. It doesn't seem to have been a widespread practice, but it did happen" (Hughes 2013). See also Emery (2017).

4 See also Bannerman (1904), *Pat and the Spider*, which she illustrated, presumably based on her own son Pat. The boy in the book definitely has the body, facial features, hair, and clothes of an actual boy.

5 See Joseph Lelyveld's (1966) *New York Times* book review "Now Little White Squibba joins Sambo in facing jungle perils: NEW BOOK'S STAR IS WHITE SQUIBBA": "None of [Bannerman's Black] characters has fallen victim to liberal sensitivities on racial issues here [UK], as they have in the United States . . . . 'I've never heard of anyone complaining about those stories,' a librarian said. 'They're well-written, gripping stories. Children love them.' A Chatto & Windus editor said: 'These stories belong to an entirely different age. They're classically innocent. Certainly there's nothing malicious about them.' Chatto & Windus also publishes 'Ten Little N******,' which first appeared in 1908" (p. 34).

6 Based on the earlier nursery rhyme, Septimus Winner (1868) wrote "Ten Little Indians" for a minstrel show, which apparently inspired Frank Green's (1869) adaptation "Ten Little N******," using nearly identical lyrics and which was sung by the original Christy Minstrels in addition to becoming a minstrel show standard (Opie and Opie 1997, pp. 387–88; see also "Ten Little Niggers. The Celebrated Serio Comic Song." 2016).

7 See also McLoughlin (2012), *Simple Addition by a Little N*****, the abbreviated version of their original c. 1874 edition.

8 Davis (2005) claims that the Faultless storytelling–advertising booklets, printed by the Charles E. Brown Printing Company and citing no author, were written by D. Arthur Brown, a pastor (17-18). Brown "did not forget the ethnic groups" (p. 24). In addition to the *Ten Little Pickaninnies*, told "[i]n the tradition of one little, two little, three little Indians" (p. 24), Davis further attests to what she sees as Brown's interest in diversity: "*Hans and Gretel* are Dutch [volume 32], and Arthur remembers *The Indians* [volume 33]. The Chinese are not forgotten [*Chin-Chin and Chow*, volume 8]. He spins a tale of love with its painful moments of competition, even suicide. Of course, there is a happy ending because of Faultless Starch. 'Chin-chin married Chow, and they did live a long and happy life, upon the shelf behind the vase—Chin-chin and Chow, his wife'" (p. 24).

9 Also see DixonFuller2011 2012 (2012), for an updated iteration of the test, and u/BulkyBirdy (2019), showing the same test given to Italian children with the same resulting preference for white dolls.

10 See Southey (2020) regarding the petition "for the 'immediate removal' of all products marketed under . . . Conguitos branding" because of its racist cultural history and racist representation of Black children's bodies.

11 In contrast, this same humor through language literal and figurative is the basis of the beloved *Amelia Bedelia* series, originally by Peggy Parish (Parish) and continued by her nephew Herman Parish after her death about a white woman who misunderstands language cues and expressions and is the source not of mockery but of light amusement and glee. She is not humiliated or mocked as is Epaminondas.

12 Two other books in Anderson's Topsy Turvy black-stocking character series are *Topsy Turvy and the Tin Clown* (Anderson 1932) and *Topsy Turvy and the Easter Bunny* (Anderson 1930, 1939), the latter originally published in *Topsy Turvy's Pigtails* as "Topsy Turvy and the Easter Bunny's Eggs" with three other tales: "Topsy Turvy's Valentine Box," "Topsy Turvy and the Christmas Tree," and "Topsy Turvy and the Christmas Tree."

13 This is certainly not the only instance of hair-related traumatization of Black children. See, for example, Gray (2021). Native American children have historically been assaulted: boarding school standards stripped Indigenous children of their own language, traditional clothing, and hair customs. Recently, a teacher cut a child's hair as part of Halloween role playing: "Students say their English teacher, Mary Eastin, was dressed up as a Voodoo Queen of New Orleans, a 19th century figure who practiced occult and conjuring acts . . . . [T]he teacher confronted a Native American student who was wearing her hair in braids. . . . Eastin asked the student if she liked her braids. When the student said she did, the teacher picked up a pair of scissors and cut off about three inches of the student's hair . . . . The president of the Navajo Nation, Russell Begaye, also responded to the incident in a statement, calling it a 'cultural assault'" (Schuknecht 2018).

14 As the following recent attack on children shows, anti-Mexican and Islamic child hate also directly reflects sentiments against adult Mexicans and Muslims: "A Des Moines woman has pleaded guilty to federal hate crimes for intentionally driving her SUV into two children in 2019 because she said she thought one was Mexican and the other was a member of the Islamic State group . . . . Prosecutors said Franklin intentionally jumped a curb in Des Moines that afternoon and struck a Black 12-year-old boy, injuring one of his legs. During her hearing Wednesday, Poole said she thought the boy was of Middle Eastern descent and was a member of IS . . . . Minutes later, Franklin ran down a 14-year-old Latina girl on a sidewalk, leaving her with injuries for which she was hospitalized for two days. Police said Franklin told them she hit the girl because 'she is Mexican.' About an hour

later, Franklin was arrested at a local gas station, where officers say she had thrown items at a clerk while yelling racial slurs at him and other customers" (Associated Press 2021).

15 In 1985, when police attempted to serve several warrants at MOVE's residential headquarters, a gun battle with police ensued. Philadelphia police subsequently dropped aerial incendiary bombs on the building (reminiscent of the police-sanctioned aerial bombings by a dozen or more planes that destroyed the Black community of Tulsa in 1921, killing up to 300), ultimately razing sixty-one homes and killing five children and six adults (Pilkington 2021a). In 2020, the city of Philadelphia formally apologized for the bombing, which led to planning for an inaugural commemoration of the event in 2021.

16 The director of the University of Pennsylvania's Penn Museum, where the bones had been housed for thirty-six years, has said they would be returned to the family and that "'It was a serious error in judgment to use these remains in a class of any kind, especially given the extreme emotional distress in our community surrounding the 1985 bombing of the Move house" (Pilkington 2021b). See also The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990, enacted after centuries of pilfering and museum displays of Indigenous peoples' bones and cultural artifacts. NAGPRA "provides a process for federal agencies and museums that receive federal funds to repatriate or transfer from their collections certain Native American cultural items—human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony—to lineal descendants, and to Indian tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, and Native Hawaiian organizations" (Bureau of Land Management (BLM) (n.d.)).

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Article

Remapping Black Childhood in *The Brownies' Book*

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Abstract: This essay examines the recurring preoccupation with geography in W. E. B. Du Bois's and Jessie Redmon Fauset's African American children's magazine, *The Brownies' Book* (1920–1921). Drawing in part on conventions established by early Black periodicals, including an emphasis on the rich global presence of non-Western peoples and places, many of the magazine's features, from its stories and poems to its images and games, offered Black children a much wider view of their place in the world—both literally and imaginatively—than that provided by typical U.S. schoolroom atlases and geographies, which tended to have little to say (or show) about countries and continents outside North America and Europe. By aiming to develop in its readers alternative forms of geographic and political consciousness, *The Brownies' Book* provocatively recast geography as a radical mode of knowledge available to Black children through cultural as well as cartographic forms, in the process remapping Black childhood itself.

Keywords: children's literature; *The Brownies' Book*; *St. Nicholas*; geography; Black children; Black periodicals

1. Introduction: New Cartographies

The outpouring of new work on *The Brownies' Book* (1920–1921) in honor of the centennial of its publication has brought not only renewed appreciation for the magazine's accomplishments but also a clearer understanding of its educational strategies along with fresh pathways for navigating its contents. Scholars of the periodical are now more alert, for example, to the impact of co-editor W. E. B. Du Bois's longstanding interest in the history and theory of Black childhood (Oeur 2021), and particularly his embrace of transfiguration—"a vision and political activism that saw children as capable and powerful beings" (Webster 2021, p. 347)—on the magazine's centering of Black children's voices. We are correspondingly more attuned to the importance of *The Brownies' Book*'s insistence on depicting real children rather than "abstract notions of 'The Child'" (Fielder 2019, p. 162), a realization with implications for our own scholarship as well. We are beginning to recognize the ways that iterative representations of play not only "complicate the magazine's visual and literary emphasis on uplift" but also amount to "an alternate form of civil rights strategy" (Capshaw 2021, pp. 368–69). And we are in turn newly attentive to the "productive heterogeneity" (Capshaw 2021, p. 369) underlying *The Brownies' Book*'s experimental mixing of genres, styles, and approaches. With yet another volume of essays on the magazine scheduled to appear this fall, this is an exciting time to be working on this extraordinary periodical.

My essay builds on this new work by drawing attention to a striking component of *The Brownies' Book*'s educational strategy that permeates the magazine but that has not yet been adequately explored: its recurring preoccupation with geography, spatially, literally, and figuratively. From the very first issue, and across nearly all the magazine's departments—including fiction and poetry, current events and photographs, games and puzzles, even letters from readers—*The Brownies' Book* deploys the tools, methods, and materials of geography to offer Black children a much wider view of their place in the world, both literally and imaginatively, than that provided by typical U.S. schoolroom atlases

or popular periodicals for children. Drawing in part on conventions established by early African American periodicals, which had long "concerned themselves with world histories and current affairs" (Fielder 2021, p. 422), this turn toward geography provocatively recasts a "deeply conservative" subject (Cain 2015, p. 280) as a radical mode of knowledge available to Black children through cultural as well as cartographic forms, helping them shape powerful new maps of global citizenship and belonging. In what follows, I show how thoroughly the inaugural issue of *The Brownies' Book* foregrounds this pedagogy, how the magazine's approach amplifies strategies common to Black periodicals in order to push explicitly against what children were being taught in U.S. geography classrooms, and how these new cartographies reverberate through the magazine's two-year run. I also highlight the ways in which the magazine's incorporation of the social sciences in general and geography in particular differs starkly from the treatment of similar materials in *St. Nicholas* magazine, sharpening our understanding not only of the contrast Du Bois and co-editor Jessie Redmon Fauset sought to draw with the most influential children's periodical of the era but also of the "hybrid" texture (Capshaw 2021, p. 371) that makes *The Brownies' Book* so distinctive yet also so recognizable within the history of African American magazine culture.[1]

Through this analysis, I demonstrate how keenly the magazine recognized that to "seek to teach Universal Love and Brotherhood for all little folk" (Du Bois 1919, p. 286) would require the active remapping of both geographic and imaginative space. Not only did *The Brownies' Book* invite Black children, as Ebony Elizabeth Thomas (2021) has evocatively argued, to "dream of Afrofutures" by providing them with "tales of *otherwheres* and *elsewhens*" (p. 407), it simultaneously encouraged those children to redraw the maps of the world in which they currently lived. It thus tried to undertake, in both real and figurative registers, the necessary (if still barely begun) task that Thomas (2019) calls "rethinking the cartographies of our imagination," the mental maps "formed and reformed" by the racial imaginary of mainstream Anglo-American culture that perniciously interpellate Black characters (and by extension, persons) as "*monstrous*, *invisible*, and *always dying*" (pp. 282–83). This, too, is the intent of the geographic project of *The Brownies' Book*: to teach Black children how to remake the pernicious maps—fictive and literal, past and present—that distort Black places and presences when they are not ignoring them entirely. If *The Brownies' Book* had lasted longer—it stopped printing after two years for want of sufficient subscribers, rather than compromise its quality, an outcome all too common in early African American periodical publishing, where structural disparities often led to financial precarity[2]—perhaps it would have helped redraw some of those maps more successfully. But its thwarted effort to do so does not diminish the significance of the attempt, and it is to that attempt we now turn.

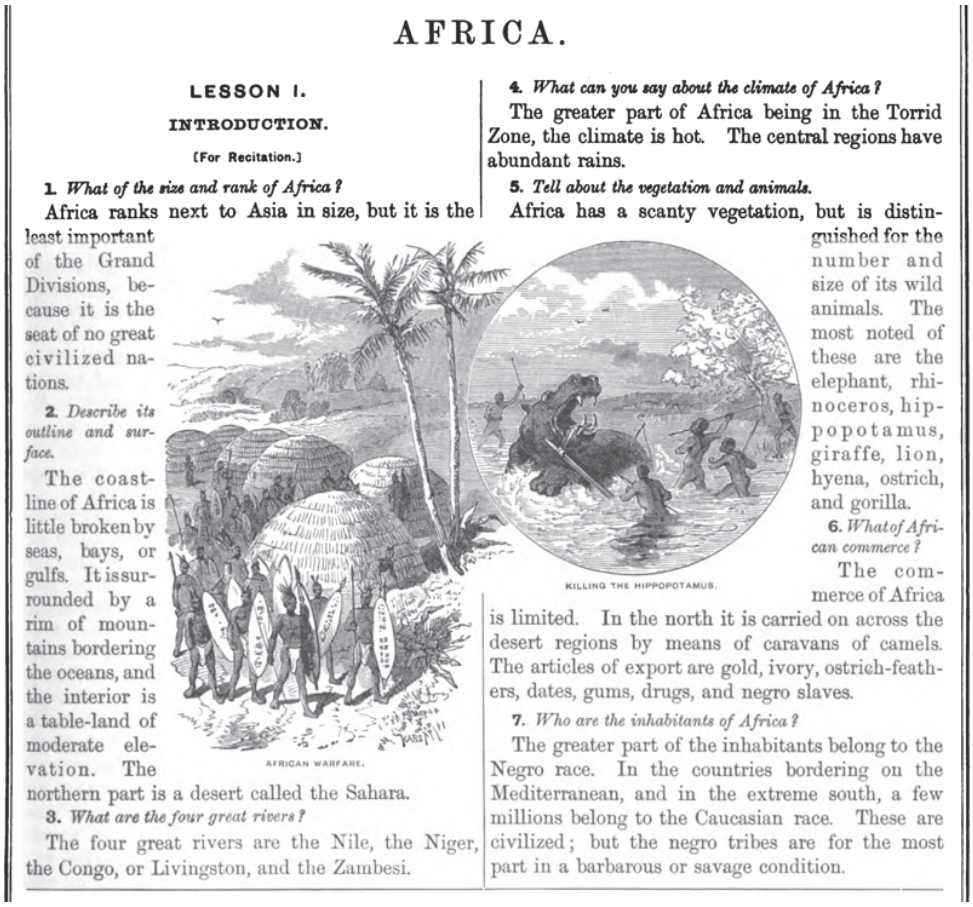
2. The Racialism of U.S. American Geography

Geographic texts have long helped ground racialized notions of American identity. As Martin Brückner (2006) has shown, the "culture of geographic letters"—including maps, textbooks, and other materials—"became staple goods in the American marketplace," beginning in the colonial era (p. 11). For many, geography not only provided the "gateway to literacy itself" (Brückner 2006, p. 7), it "fostered a sense of national identity" (Brückner 2006, p. 8), while also priming Americans for territorial adventures at home and abroad. By the mid-to-late nineteenth century, notes Susan Shulten (2001), geography was "central" (p. 94) to the schoolroom curriculum of the U.S., but mainstream American publishers and mapmakers routinely gave short shrift to non-Western places and peoples. Africa, in particular, was almost always an afterthought. In Rand McNally's (1885) popular *New Household Atlas of the World*, for example, "the entire continent of Africa was reduced to a single page" (Shulten 2001, p. 29) while the U.S. state of Alabama alone received two. When non-Western regions did receive attention, they were frequently described—Africa in particular—as offering nothing of value to Western civilization. The first lesson in the

brief section on Africa (at the back of the volume, naturally) in William Swinton's (1875) *Elementary Course in Geography*, for instance, begins this way:

> LESSON I.
>
> INTRODUCTION.
>
> [For Recitation.]
>
> *1. What is the size and rank of Africa?*
>
> Africa ranks next to Asia in size, but it is the least important of the Grand Divisions, because it is the seat of no great civilized nations. (Swinton 1875, p. 121)

As indicated by the bracketed instruction, "For Recitation," these were not opinions to consider, but facts to be drilled into memory and repeated aloud in the classroom. Typical of the genre, there is little in the rest of the lesson that would make one regard Africa as anything other than uncivilized, even dangerous. While geographies tended to present Europe as "a theater of economic and political power," Shulten (2001) observes, Africa always looms as the "dark continent" (p. 146), marked by violence and cruelty. The illustrations that accompany Lesson I, "African Warfare" and "Killing the Hippopotamus" (Figure 1), dramatize this convention, as does the final recitation, which declares that although the Caucasian inhabitants of Africa are civilized, "the negro tribes are for the most part in a barbarous or savage condition" (Swinton 1875, p. 121).



AFRICA.

LESSON I.

INTRODUCTION.

(For Recitation.)

1. *What of the size and rank of Africa?*

Africa ranks next to Asia in size, but it is the least important of the Grand Divisions, because it is the seat of no great civilized nations.

2. *Describe its outline and surface.*

The coast-line of Africa is little broken by seas, bays, or gulfs. It is surrounded by a rim of mountains bordering the oceans, and the interior is a table-land of moderate elevation. The northern part is a desert called the Sahara.

3. *What are the four great rivers?*

The four great rivers are the Nile, the Niger, the Congo, or Livingston, and the Zambesi.

AFRICAN WARFARE.

4. *What can you say about the climate of Africa?*

The greater part of Africa being in the Torrid Zone, the climate is hot. The central regions have abundant rains.

5. *Tell about the vegetation and animals.*

Africa has a scanty vegetation, but is distinguished for the number and size of its wild animals. The most noted of these are the elephant, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, giraffe, lion, hyena, ostrich, and gorilla.

KILLING THE HIPPOPOTAMUS.

6. *What of African commerce?*

The commerce of Africa is limited. In the north it is carried on across the desert regions by means of caravans of camels. The articles of export are gold, ivory, ostrich-feathers, dates, gums, drugs, and negro slaves.

7. *Who are the inhabitants of Africa?*

The greater part of the inhabitants belong to the Negro race. In the countries bordering on the Mediterranean, and in the extreme south, a few millions belong to the Caucasian race. These are civilized; but the negro tribes are for the most part in a barbarous or savage condition.

Figure 1. William Swinton (1875), "Africa," *Elementary Course in Geography*, p. 121.

Between 1893 and 1910, educational reformers tried to shift school geography away from rote memorization toward the study of "human relationships" (Shulten 2001, p. 122) as part of a wider effort to ground the field in the social sciences rather than the physical and natural sciences. But this only ended up strengthening the environmental and racial determinism that consigned Africa (and other regions populated primarily by Black and Brown people) to the bottom of the socio-cartographic hierarchy. And even though Swinton's (1875) *Elementary Course in Geography* had been replaced by other popular textbooks by the time *The Brownies' Book* appeared, and the U.S. acquisition of new territories in Asia, the Pacific, and the Caribbean in 1898 led some schoolroom geographies to reconsider the economic (and civilizing) potential of countries such as the Philippines, the "unmodified racialism" of the field—particularly concerning Africa—persisted well into the 1920s (Shulten 2001, p. 115).

Another innovation in geographic pedagogy in the opening decades of the twentieth century—the increased use of visual media—gave this racialism an even firmer footing. Seeking to help an increasingly diverse U.S. student population form clear "'mental pictures' of a complex modern world" (Cain 2015, p. 276), geographers identified a set of "select images" (Cain 2015, p. 277) for use in textbooks and stereo-opticon slides. Not surprisingly, these images consolidated rather than challenged the stereotypical depictions of non-Western places that had long appeared in geography classrooms. The illustrations produced from this comparatively small set of "banal and often highly racialized" (Cain 2015, p. 282) images were not only "stubbornly durable" (Cain 2015, p. 277), they were everywhere. Indeed, "thanks to their constant recurrence and circulation," Victoria E. M. Cain (2015) reports, "children viewed these images as frequently as they did continents on a world map" (p. 282). When these visual stereotypes appeared in the space of the classroom, moreover, they "became an officially sanctioned source of knowing and knowledge," inscribing "popular typologies with scientific authority" and exerting "considerable, if quiet, influence" (Cain 2015, p. 282)—exactly as the reformers intended. Nor were these images restricted to non-Western locales. Certain U.S. American regions received similar treatment, as in the image of "A southern cotton plantation" that originally appeared in a popular magazine but which was then reprinted in multiple schoolroom geographies (Figure 2). As Cain (2015) notes, this image and its accompanying text naturalize Black labor as a racial trait linked to environmental conditions "rather than the result of an entrenched system of racism" (p. 284). "The climate that is favorable for growing these crops [cotton and rice]," the text declares, "is more oppressive to white people than to negroes. Hence *negroes* are largely employed to do the field work" (Dodge 1906, p. 94; original emphasis). These are just a few examples of the endlessly recirculating images and ideas that Black children encountered in their classrooms and that *The Brownies' Book* was determined to disrupt.

FIG. 151. *A southern cotton plantation. The second picking.*

Figure 2. "A southern cotton plantation," from Richard Elwood Dodge (1906), *Dodge's Elementary Geography*, Rand, McNally, p. 94.

3. The Brownies Push Back

Challenges both overt and subtle to the racialized paradigms of U.S. geography saturate the first issue of *The Brownies' Book*. One tactic was simply to bring as many non-Western people and places into view as possible, both visually and textually, to suggest a "map" of the world that welcomes rather than ridicules (or ignores) Black presences. These inclusions usually follow one of two approaches: the validation of Black stature or achievement, or the demonstration of similarities between Black and Brown children around the world and Black and Brown children in the U.S. Fauset (1920b) makes the first of these aims explicit in the dedicatory poem that closes the volume:

> To Children, who with eager look
>
> Scanned vainly library shelf and nook,
>
> For History or Song or Story
>
> That told of Colored Peoples' glory,—
>
> We dedicate THE BROWNIES' BOOK. ("Dedication", Fauset 1920b, p. 32)

The frontispiece of the first issue fulfills this aim by presenting an image one would be hard-pressed to find in a typical U.S. geography textbook: a portrait of "Her Royal Highness, Zaouditou, Queen of the Kings of Abyssinia, the Empress of Ethiopia." The photograph not only belies the stereotype of Africa as a "dark continent" populated by barbarous savages, it shows a non-white person wielding extraordinary wealth and power. Strikingly, the image appears to have been licensed by Underwood & Underwood (who are credited beneath the picture), one of the principal commercial providers of photographic images and other visual aids to the publishers of geographic textbooks in the early twentieth century (Cain 2015, p. 280) and thus partly responsible for shaping the "stubbornly durable" (Cain 2015, p. 277) set of anti-Black images that *The Brownies' Book* was trying to disrupt in the first place. The presence of this image in Underwood & Underwood's collections is quite telling. It suggests that there was always visual evidence that Africa and other "dark"

regions did not conform to the stereotypes propagated by textbook publishers, but that these images were passed over in favor of those that supported longstanding racial biases. It is even more startling to realize that one of the most radical images in the first issue of *The Brownies' Book*, the photograph of Black children marching down Fifth Avenue in New York City in July, 1917, in protest against the deadly East St. Louis riots and pervasive anti-Black violence in the U.S. ("Children in the 'Silent Protest' Parade, New York City" (Du Bois and Fauset 1920, p. 26)), was also licensed to the magazine by Underwood & Underwood. It is as though Du Bois and Fauset are deliberately assembling a counter-archive of possibility and purpose from a repository more commonly deployed to objectify Black people.

To advance their second aim—showing similarities between children of color around the world—Du Bois and Fauset (1920) juxtapose a photograph of a "Girls' School Directed by Nuns, Addis-Ababa, Abyssinia," with one of "Y. W. C. A. Girls in New York City" (Du Bois and Fauset 1920, p. 22), arranged vertically one above the other. The juxtaposition is meant to speak for itself. The photographs do not accompany a separate story, nor is there any text beyond the joint caption, though the top photo directly recalls the frontispiece, which is also from Ethiopia, thereby broadening the child reader's view of that country while simultaneously inviting that child to think about what connects children in New York City with children in East Africa. Multiple references to children in other nations appear throughout the issue, further helping Black children reconfigure the mental and literal maps provided by their textbooks.

The Brownies' Book did not invent these strategies. As Brigitte Fielder (2021) has noted, Black periodicals had long sought to counter racially myopic depictions in mainstream U.S. print culture by "situating African American readers within a larger Black diaspora" (p. 422) that acknowledged the "larger global contexts with which African American people have historically concerned themselves" (p. 421). Nor was *The Brownies' Book* the first Black periodical to have a child readership (Fielder 2019, p. 160) or to recognize the importance of "cultivating black children as sophisticated readers" (Wright 2017, p. 148), capable of developing not just knowledge but also political agency.[3] What *The Brownies' Book* did was center geography as a way of making sense of the world more thoroughly and consistently than previous periodicals, including the magazine that served as its literal inspiration: the *Crisis*, which Du Bois had helped found in 1910 and which, beginning in October 1912, had published an annual Children's Number. To the *Crisis*'s already broad array of content, these Children's Numbers introduced several genres that would come to feature prominently in *The Brownies' Book*, including folk tales from the African diaspora, stories and poems by African American authors, as well as pictures and accounts of Black children from both within and outside the U.S.[4] *The Brownies' Book* distinguished itself not simply by multiplying these materials but by foregrounding a radical geographic consciousness in several of the magazine's key departments.

Du Bois's (1920a) monthly column, "As the Crow Flies," in which he adopts the persona of a "black and O so beautiful" crow who flies "far above the earth" (Du Bois 1920a, p. 23) reporting on current events around the world, for example, contributes powerfully to this geographic consciousness. The insistently oscillating geography of "As the Crow Flies," in which Du Bois moves back and forth from the U.S. to other countries around the globe, at once mirrors the "doubleness of double consciousness" (Phillips 2013, p. 603) while also inviting children to see themselves differently—not through the eyes of white supremacist U.S. Americans but through "the eyes of the transnational Crow" (Phillips 2013, p. 603). Like the juxtaposition of photographs described above, this movement also invites cross-cultural connection. As Fielder (2021) observes, "The Crow positions himself as a Black figure moving throughout the world in order to connect the African American child readers of *The Brownies' Book* to the larger global contexts with which African American people have historically concerned themselves, while also noting their specific diasporic condition and history in the United States" (p. 421). Du Bois (1920a) even conducts his first column, in part, like a geography lesson, directing readers to "Take your atlas" (Du Bois 1920a, p. 23) when the Crow begins his flight. Moreover, the sheer volume of place names invoked in

Du Bois's column—in the first issue alone, the Metz; the Rhine; Paris; Haiti; Europe; the Imperial German Republic; Austria; Poland; Czecho-Slovakia; Hungary; the kingdom of Serbs and Jugo-slavs; Jerusalem; Italy; France; Belgium; Japan; China; the United States; Ireland; India; the British Empire; Egypt; Russia; the Balkans; New York City; Chicago; the South; South Dakota; the Atlantic Ocean; Abyssinia; Liberia; Spain; Washington; Omaha; Mexico; Longview, Texas; Phillips County, Arkansas—implicitly shapes a map in which Africa and Asia (and in later columns, South America as well) are as important as North America and Europe. This abundance of place naming does not simply bring the whole globe "home," encouraging transnational solidarity (though it certainly does that). It also helps ground the pointed critique of U.S. geographic pedagogy that the issue undertakes.[5]

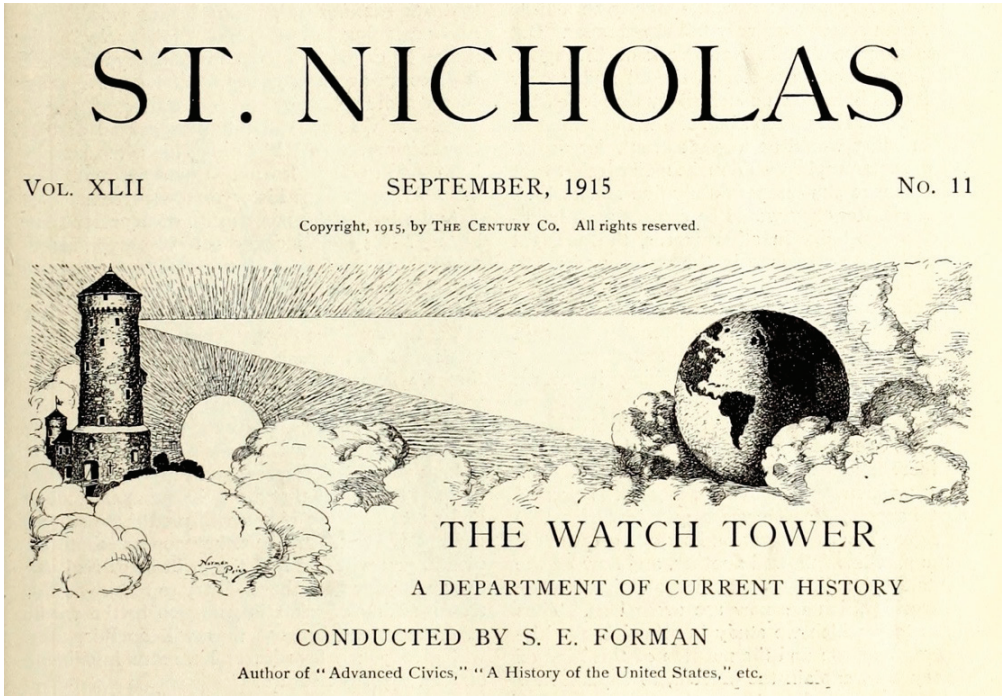
Du Bois's method in "As the Crow Flies" also highlights how differently *The Brownies' Book* represented the wider world within its pages than its chief competition, the long-running *St. Nicholas* magazine, which by 1920 was nearing half a century in print and was by far the highest circulating children's periodical in the world. Despite the international reach of its contents—even the very first issue, in November 1873, put readers in contact with Spain, Germany, China, Africa, and the Pacific—*St. Nicholas* tended to perpetuate many of the same racialized presumptions found in U.S. geography textbooks, contributing in its own powerful way to the distorting cartographies of real and imagined spaces both abroad and at home.[6] Laura E. Richards' (1878) poem, "Tommy's Dream; or, the Geography Demon," which appeared in the January 1878 issue of *St. Nicholas*, gives an early hint of this tendency. Tommy, who hates geography because it is a jumble of "nonsense and names" (Richards 1878, p. 213), has a terrifying dream, in which a "great horrid monster" (p. 213)—the Geography Demon—abducts Tommy from bed and forces him to fly around the world. Their itinerary is chaotic, blurring countries and climates in a phantasmagoric rush that leaves Tommy not just anxious for his sanity but fearful for his life as the demon urges them on:

> Hie! hie! rise and hie
>
> Away to the banks of the Yang-tze-ki!
>
> There the giant mountains of Oshkosh stand,
>
> And the icebergs gleam through the falling sand;
>
> While the elephant sits on the palm-tree high,
>
> And the cannibals feast on bad-boy pie. (Richards 1878, p. 214)

After another stanza in which Tommy is told "the kettle boils and waits for thee" (p. 214), he screams and then wakes up. "Do you blame me for hating my lesson?" he asks (p. 214). Though clearly intended as comic, the humor in "Tommy's Dream" merely exaggerates the anxieties fostered by geographies and atlases that consistently depicted non-Western people and places as inscrutably Other or savagely violent. And while every location Tommy is forced to visit in his dream is disorienting, including those in the U.S., he is only menaced by persons of color. The question Tommy asks when he wakes up is thus, of course, rhetorical. No reader of *St. Nicholas*—educated in the same curriculum—would blame him for hating such a lesson.

Whether Du Bois actually read "Tommy's Dream," it is not difficult to see how his conception of "As the Crow Flies" is diametrically opposed to the ethos of the *St. Nicholas* poem. Rather than a forced flight of terror, Du Bois's (1920a) young readers are invited to imagine the exhilaration of soaring with the Crow, "happy and free, high up in these wild spaces" (Du Bois 1920a, p. 76), developing knowledge instead of fear. "As the Crow Flies" also seems designed deliberately to counter the geographic parochialism of *St. Nicholas*'s own current events column, "The Watch Tower." First appearing in September 1915, roughly one year after the start of the First World War, "The Watch Tower" was described to readers as "a special Department in which American boys and girls can learn month by month much about the great things that are happening in all parts of the globe" (Forman 1915, p. 963), which chimes with the general aim of "As the Crow Flies." But

unlike Du Bois, neither S. E. Forman nor his successor, Edward N. Teall, spent much time looking for "great things" in places other than Europe or the U.S.[7] The illustration that accompanied every installment of "The Watch Tower" (Figure 3) makes this ironically clear, showing a spotlight illuminating a distant globe in which only the western hemisphere is visible, with the rest of the world in shadow. And even though Europe would get plenty of time (metaphorically speaking) in the sun, "The Watch Tower's" beacon rarely swept over Africa or Asia.


ST. NICHOLAS

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THE WATCH TOWER

A DEPARTMENT OF CURRENT HISTORY

CONDUCTED BY S. E. FORMAN

Author of "Advanced Civics," "A History of the United States," etc.

Figure 3. S. E. Forman (1915), "The Watch Tower," *St. Nicholas* 42, p. 963.

Du Bois's Crow signifies on *St. Nicholas*'s tower in other ways as well. Where the Crow is constantly in motion, traveling from place to place, the tower stands still, waiting for the globe to turn. A specially commissioned frontispiece that accompanied the inaugural installment of "The Watch Tower" (and that appeared again when Teall wrote his first column in 1917) makes this distinction fully clear: it shows two white children enclosed within a similar tower, looking out through their window at the world below (Figure 4). One holds a large, open book, perhaps an encyclopedia or even a geography. Markers of Western culture and civilization surround the children, including a second globe, which is not only also turned to the western hemisphere, but which shows clearly only North America. It is a rich environment, but also an isolated one. Indeed, whether or not Du Bois was familiar with "The Watch Tower" (though it is reasonable to presume that he was)[8], it seems fair to say that the larger aim of *The Brownies' Book*—in contrast to *St. Nicholas*—is to bring its child readers out of their metaphorical towers and into the world. Rather than present the non-Western world as spectacle, in other words, to be looked at from a safe (and implicitly elevated) distance, *The Brownies' Book* invites its readers to imagine themselves as part of the peoples and places they meet in the magazine's pages.

Figure 4. Norman Price (1915), "In the Watch Tower," *St. Nicholas* 42, p. 962.

The Brownies' Book accomplished this aim in part through an innovative blend of disciplinary approaches that foregrounds geography while also recalling the practice of early Black periodicals, which frequently drew their materials from a variety of genres (Wright 2017). As Ivy G. Wilson (2013) notes, for example, the *Anglo-African Magazine* offered readers "pieces as seemingly disparate as sheet music and articles on astronomy" (p. 24) alongside its regular treatments of world events, politics, and culture. For its part, *The Brownies' Book* was particularly successful in interweaving social scientific materials in general and geographic discourse in particular with the more usual children's fare of stories, pictures, and games, thereby making the social sciences, broadly considered, a crucial partner with literature and the arts in the shaping of the magazine and its readers. Du Bois's guiding presence was surely a factor in this approach, given not just his sociological training but also the multidisciplinary eclecticism of his own work, most notably in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Indeed, "As the Crow Flies" is a good example: it combines journalistic reportage with historical, economic, and socio-political analysis that is then presented through the globe-spanning figure of an imaginary talking animal. As Fielder (2021) has persuasively argued, the Crow is at once realistic and fantastical—social scientist and storyteller, we might say—drawing on the Black storytelling tradition of the Flying

African not merely to deliver the news but to tell a story "of hopeful and fantastical future-making" (p. 431). Although other periodicals, including *St. Nicholas*, sometimes incorporate materials from the social sciences, too, they do not do so nearly as often as *The Brownies' Book*, or across as many departments.[9] Readers of *The Brownies' Book* were as likely to encounter a social scientific perspective in a given issue's photographs, frontispieces, games, and stories as they were in more explicit forms, such as the historical accounts of Black history and achievement that appear nearly every month. I do not mean to downplay the importance of other elements distinctive to the magazine, such as the canny significations of its Afrocentric folk tales and fairy tales (Kory 2001), or the "uplift photographic portraiture" (Capshaw 2021, p. 368) that populates "Little People of the Month"—though each of these, too, might be said to have a social scientific (and even geographic) dimension. But recognizing how strongly the incorporation of geography and the social sciences shapes the texture of *The Brownies' Book*, particularly in contrast to its competitors, adds depth to our sense of what critics have insightfully termed the magazine's "cross-written nature" (Oeur 2021, p. 337), its use of "multisemiotic" discourses (Young 2009, p. 18), and its "productively hybrid" admixture of texts (Capshaw 2021, p. 371). *The Brownies' Book*'s commitment to integrating the study of human behavior into virtually every component of the magazine deserves more attention in this regard than we have so far given it.[10]

Let us turn back to the first issue again to see two more examples of this integration at work. The first, "Over the Ocean Wave," is both "A Geography Story" (as it is described in the Table of Contents) and a political story, one that uses geographical knowledge to help children challenge the stories they may have heard about Black and Brown people around the world—in this case, what they may have heard about Filipinos.[11] In the story, two children, Betty and her younger brother Philip, go to the movies with their Uncle Jim. At the movies, they see a picture of "two young colored girls" (*Over the Ocean Wave* 1920, p. 9) from the Philippines who are now enrolled as students at the University of Chicago. Walking home afterward, the children ask Jim to tell them about the two girls—"Where did you say those girls came from?" "Were they really colored?"—and Jim explains that although the girls are "colored" ("that is, their skin is not white"), they belong to the "brown, or Malay race," rather than the "black, or Negro race" (p. 9). He then tells them where the Philippines are, but since they are still walking home and he cannot pull out an atlas, he calls on their existing knowledge to draw a picture in the air:

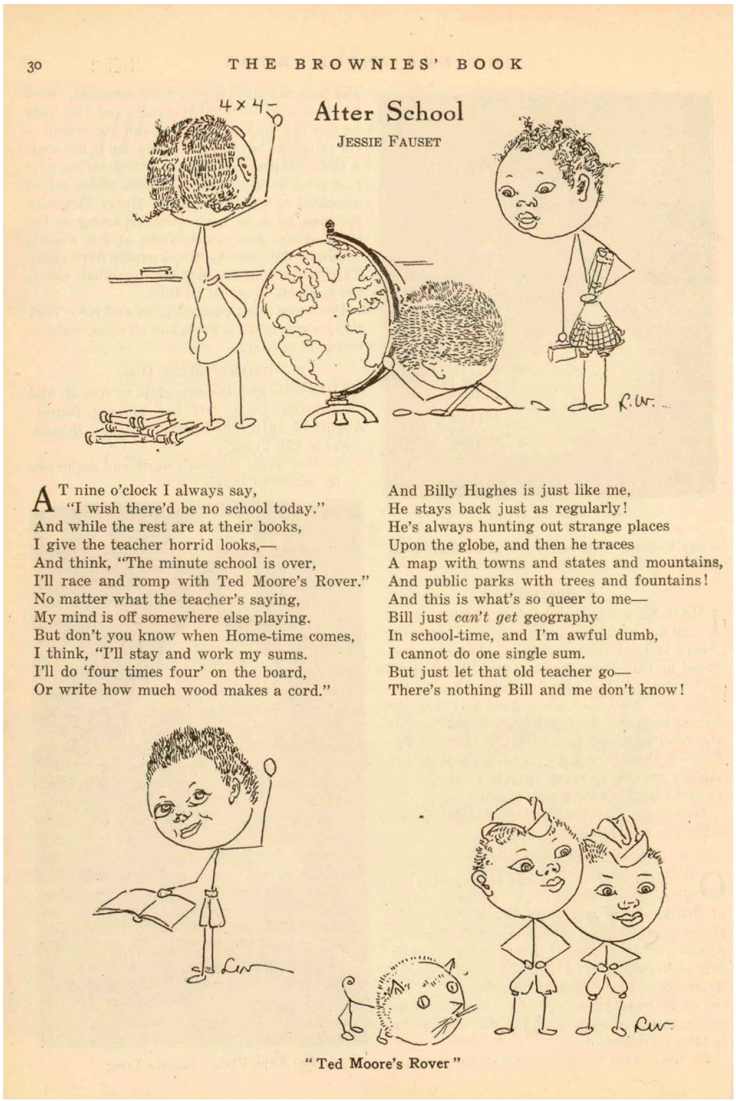
> "Well," said Uncle Jim, "let me see if I can make you see them plainly without the map. Do you know where China is?"
>
> "Yes," said Philip, "it's in Asia, right on the Pacific Ocean."
>
> "Good," said his uncle; "now the Philippine Islands are a large group of islands lying in the Pacific Ocean, south and east of China, directly east of French Indo-China, and north and west of Borneo. The China Sea is on the west of these islands, between China and the Philippines, and to the north and south and east lies the wonderful Pacific Ocean. Do you get the picture, Betty?"
>
> "Yes," said Betty, "I do." (*Over the Ocean Wave* 1920, p. 9)

The children then ask him why one of the girls was described as the daughter of a "bandit" (*Over the Ocean Wave* 1920, p. 10). Jim explains that she is actually the daughter of "a great Filipino leader" who, resenting U.S. rule in the Philippines after 1898, "waged warfare for a long time against the Americans. He was finally captured and banished by the new-comers in authority," Jim explains (p. 10). He pauses, then continues: "'Of course, according to them he was a bandit, or outlaw, —a person who breaks the laws. But in the eyes of his own countrymen he was probably regarded as a patriot. It all depends,' said Uncle Jim, 'on how you look at it'" (p. 10). Jim's impromptu lesson turns out to be a "Geography Story" about questioning the dominant culture's geography stories.

"How you look at it," one might say, is also the focus of the second piece, an illustrated poem by Fauset that appears near the end of the issue. "After School" (Fauset 1920a) sets an actual schoolroom scene, in which the speaker, a young girl, describes hating school and wanting it to be over from the moment she arrives, only to discover that as soon as school is out—and the teacher is gone—she wants to stay and "work her sums" on the board (p. 30). In the second half of the poem, she describes a classmate who feels exactly the same, only about geography:

> And Billy Hughes is just like me,
>
> He stays back just as regularly!
>
> He's always hunting out strange places
>
> Upon the globe, and then he traces
>
> A map with towns and states and mountains,
>
> And public parks with trees and fountains!
>
> And this is what's so queer to me—
>
> Bill just can't get geography
>
> In school-time, and I'm awful dumb,
>
> I cannot do one single sum.
>
> But just let that old teacher go—
>
> There's nothing Bill and me don't know! (Fauset 1920a, p. 30)

It is not simply that learning flourishes when figures of authority leave the room, it is that their absence provides an opportunity for someone like Billy—who does poorly in geography at school (he "can't get" it)—to resist what he has likely been taught and to search out the knowledge that the teacher will not give him. That seems clearly to be the significance of the accompanying illustration (Figure 5), which shows Billy not just peering at the globe, but turning it specifically to Africa, sizing up the continent that his geography—and his teacher—have probably told him "is the least important of the Grand Divisions," filled with "barbarous" people (Swinton 1875, p. 121). Billy is going to see for himself. The student standing to Billy's right, who is not mentioned in the poem but who looks on in fascination as Billy turns the globe, suggests that this kind of radical re-learning is contagious. The stick-figure aesthetic of the illustrations by Laura Wheeler, who would go on to become one of the most prolific contributors to *The Brownies' Book* and an important shaper of the "visual vocabulary" (Kirschke 2014, p. 85) of the magazine, moreover, recalls the kinds of drawings young children themselves might make, perhaps to imply that it is one of the students who has memorialized this counter-lesson in pen and ink. That the children's heads are drawn like miniature globes seems deliberate as well, reinforcing the new connection between geography and identity that Billy discovers once he begins to teach himself.[12]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After School

JESSIE FAUSET

AT nine o'clock I always say,
"I wish there'd be no school today."
And while the rest are at their books,
I give the teacher horrid looks,—
And think, "The minute school is over,
I'll race and romp with Ted Moore's Rover."
No matter what the teacher's saying,
My mind is off somewhere else playing.
But don't you know when Home-time comes,
I think, "I'll stay and work my sums.
I'll do 'four times four' on the board,
Or write how much wood makes a cord."

And Billy Hughes is just like me,
He stays back just as regularly!
He's always hunting out strange places
Upon the globe, and then he traces
A map with towns and states and mountains,
And public parks with trees and fountains!
And this is what's so queer to me—
Bill just *can't get* geography
In school-time, and I'm awful dumb,
I cannot do one single sum.
But just let that old teacher go—
There's nothing Bill and me don't know!

"Ted Moore's Rover"

Figure 5. Laura Wheeler, illustrations for "After School," by Jessie Fauset (Fauset 1920a), *The Brownies' Book* 1, p. 30. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/22001351 (accessed on 29 April 2022).

4. Ongoing Reverberations

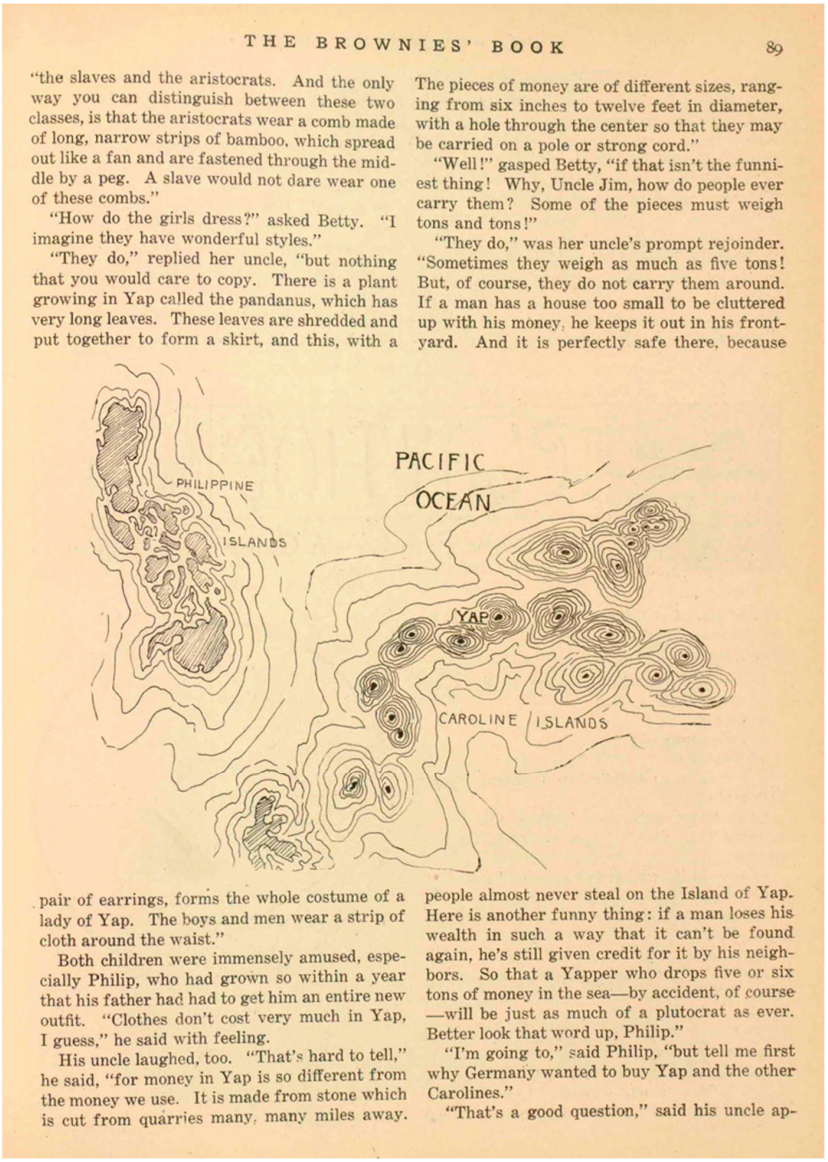
This preoccupation with geography and (and as) counter-pedagogy is not unique to the first issue. Repeatedly, in forms both familiar and new, Black children were invited to remap their place in the wider world. Du Bois's "As the Crow Flies" column, for example, which appeared in every issue, continued to bring readers in contact with an extraordinary range of peoples and places, almost always occupying two full pages and typically highlighting thirty to forty different news items from across the globe, and their corresponding locations. Jim, Betty, and Philip also make a repeat appearance in the March 1920 issue, in a sequel of sorts to "Over the Ocean Wave" called "A Strange Country." Although "A Strange Country" (1920) is not specifically listed in the March 1920 table of contents as "A Geography Story," it certainly qualifies as one. In the story, Philip comes home from school singing a rhyme about the "Island of Yap" (*A Strange Country* 1920, p. 87), which he has heard another boy sing and which he is convinced is not a real place. But Betty insists that it is. "I saw something about it once in a book," she says (p. 87). They ask Jim to referee, and Jim affirms not only that Yap is a real place, but that it is near the Philippines. "'Do you remember that day I told you about the Philippine Islands?'" (p. 87), Jim asks, alluding to their earlier conversation in "Over the Ocean Wave." Both Betty and

Phillip nod a "vigorous" yes (p. 87). Jim then describes to them, once again without an actual atlas, the location and shape of the Caroline Islands, of which Yap is the largest. Jim also gives them a geopolitical history of the competition to own the island, a strategic naval base in the mid-Pacific, between Portugal, Spain, and Germany. He ends the story by explaining that Yap is now back in the news because the United States wants to buy the island from its current owner, Germany, as a cable, radio, and trading base between San Francisco and Hawaii, one of the U.S.'s other recent island acquisitions. Whereas at the start of the story, Yap was for Philip simply a source of rhyming silliness, by the end of "A Strange Country," the children recognize Yap as a site of U.S. expansion and imperial desire—providing them another way of thinking alternatively about what they hear in school, or in the news. The hand-drawn map (Figure 6) that appears as an illustration near the end of the story (also contributed by Laura Wheeler) is never actually referenced in the story—we are not told who draws it, for example—and it is almost literally an alternative geography, since the Philippines and the Carolines are not as close to each other as they are proportionately depicted. But what the map does do is give Yap a different scale, one appropriate to its geopolitical importance and that links it with the U.S. involvement in the Philippines and the Pacific more broadly. That is the lesson "A Strange Country" might bring home to readers like Philip and Betty.[13]

In August 2020, *The Brownies' Book* published another mixed-genre "Geography Story," Julia Price Burrell's "The Quaintness of St. Helena." Burrell's (1920) story offers a different kind of alternative pedagogy to "Over the Ocean Wave" and "A Strange Country." Despite the emphasis on "Quaintness" in the story's title, Burrell, a resident of St. Helena, which is part of the Carolina Sea Islands and a thriving center of Gullah culture, offers a straightforward, insider's guide to the foodways and folkways distinctive to the region and its inhabitants, nearly all of whom are Black. (Only fifty out of "about seven thousand," she notes, are white (Burrell 1920, p. 245)). Burrell was not born on the island—she had arrived there as "a mere girl" (p. 246) some years earlier—and she occasionally punctuates her descriptions of the "native" (p. 246) residents with exclamation points ("Old people here seem so alone—so desolate—and always sick!" (p. 247)), but her tone seems intended to convey fascination rather than ridicule, and ultimately works to lessen the distance between the magazine's young readers and Burrell's fellow Islanders, instead of holding the latter picturesquely at arm's length. The paragraph that includes the comment about the old people seeming "always sick," for example, begins by noting "Here's a picture of a dear old couple" (p. 247). Burrell's affection, in other words, is evident—these are her neighbors and friends, after all—and she clearly hopes that readers of *The Brownies' Book* will want to learn more about them.[14] A much more respectful introduction to a predominantly African American community than children were likely to find in their textbooks, Burrell's story helps readers imagine what geography written by and for Black people might look like.

These stories even inspired at least one young Black reader—Du Bois's daughter Yolande—to write a geography tale of her own. Likely composed in 1920, "A Curious Geography Lesson" centers on Minnie and Dickie, twin children "in the same geography class in school" whose "present trial was learning the countries of Africa by name and location" (p. 1). Frustrated by the task, they complain to their mother, "if only we didn't have to study this old geography, it's so uninteresting" (p. 1). Their mother expresses surprise: "why I should have thought that geography would be the most interesting of all, especially Africa where all the little children are brown like you" (p. 1). When she asks what they know about Abyssinia, for example (which Dickie thinks "sounds awfully silly" (p. 1)), it quickly becomes clear that the children have been taught only the most rudimentary facts about each country—its name, what part of Africa it is in, and the other countries it borders—and nothing at all about the people or place itself. "Oh, my dears," their mother exclaims, "there are really many interesting things to learn about Abyssinia" (p. 2). In the remainder of the story, she tells them about the history, religion, and politics of the country, highlighting the role of the emperor Menelik in securing Abyssinia's independence ("Have you ever heard his name before? No?" she asks (p. 2)). She also reminds Minnie and

Dickie that the current ruler, Queen Zaouditou—whom, she notes, they should remember "from the picture in the first BROWNIES' BOOK" (p. 1)—is "only a little girl like Minnie" (p. 4). The reference to *The Brownies' Book* itself is particularly telling. It not only suggests that Yolande may have hoped her story would be published there; it also underscores the multiple ways "A Curious Geography Lesson" consciously advances the geographic counter-pedagogy the magazine has been developing. For in addition to invoking the frontispiece of the first issue, Yolande's story (which remained unpublished, though she would later contribute a fairy story to the December 1921 issue of *The Brownies' Book*)[15] also recalls Fauset's "After School"—like Billy, Minnie and Dickie must learn outside the classroom what their instructors will not teach them about Africa—as well as "Over the Ocean Wave" and "A Strange Country," in which an adult family member provides children with historical and geopolitical contexts missing from their Western-centric atlases. Clearly, the magazine was teaching some readers new ways of mapping that "uninteresting" subject, geography.



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"the slaves and the aristocrats. And the only way you can distinguish between these two classes, is that the aristocrats wear a comb made of long, narrow strips of bamboo, which spread out like a fan and are fastened through the middle by a peg. A slave would not dare wear one of these combs."

"How do the girls dress?" asked Betty. "I imagine they have wonderful styles."

"They do," replied her uncle, "but nothing that you would care to copy. There is a plant growing in Yap called the pandanus, which has very long leaves. These leaves are shredded and put together to form a skirt, and this, with a pair of earrings, forms the whole costume of a lady of Yap. The boys and men wear a strip of cloth around the waist."

Both children were immensely amused, especially Philip, who had grown so within a year that his father had had to get him an entire new outfit. "Clothes don't cost very much in Yap, I guess," he said with feeling.

His uncle laughed, too. "That's hard to tell," he said, "for money in Yap is so different from the money we use. It is made from stone which is cut from quarries many, many miles away. The pieces of money are of different sizes, ranging from six inches to twelve feet in diameter, with a hole through the center so that they may be carried on a pole or strong cord."

"Well!" gasped Betty, "if that isn't the funniest thing! Why, Uncle Jim, how do people ever carry them? Some of the pieces must weigh tons and tons!"

"They do," was her uncle's prompt rejoinder. "Sometimes they weigh as much as five tons! But, of course, they do not carry them around. If a man has a house too small to be cluttered up with his money, he keeps it out in his front-yard. And it is perfectly safe there, because people almost never steal on the Island of Yap. Here is another funny thing: if a man loses his wealth in such a way that it can't be found again, he's still given credit for it by his neighbors. So that a Yapper who drops five or six tons of money in the sea—by accident, of course—will be just as much of a plutocrat as ever. Better look that word up, Philip."

"I'm going to," said Philip, "but tell me first why Germany wanted to buy Yap and the other Carolines."

"That's a good question," said his uncle ap-

Figure 6. Laura Wheeler, illustration for "A Strange Country" (*A Strange Country* 1920), *The Brownies' Book* 1, p. 89. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/22001351 (accessed on 29 April 2022).

The Brownies' Book also provided space for readers to articulate the trauma—and rage—that the insistent racialism of contemporary geography books could engender. As Elinor Desverney Sinnette (1965) first observed, the letter "from a young girl in Philadelphia" that appeared in June 1920 in "The Jury," the monthly installment of correspondence from child readers, "points out the bitterness that smoldered in the hearts of Negro children as a result of many painful school experiences" (Sinnette 1965, p. 140). "Sometimes in school I feel so badly," the young girl, named Alice Martin, writes:

> In the geography lesson, when we read about the different people who live in the world, all the pictures are pretty, nice-looking men and women, except the Africans. They always look so ugly. I don't mean to make fun of them, for I am not pretty myself; but I know not all colored people look like me. I see lots of ugly white people, too; but not all white people look like them, and they are not the ones they put in the geography. Last week the girl across the aisle from me in school looked at the picture and laughed and whispered something about it to her friend. And they both looked at me. It made me so angry. Mother said for me to write you about it. (Martin 1920, p. 178)

This is as clear a statement of the impact of the routine and repetitive visual denigration of Blackness in U.S. geography textbooks as one could imagine. Although no response is offered in "The Jury," which typically did not comment on the letters it printed, it may be no accident that Burrell's "Geography Story" (1920) about the Sea Islands' West African-influenced Gullah culture appeared so soon after Martin's letter. And there was more to come. Indeed, "what better reply could there have been" to Martin's frustration, Sinnette (1965) suggests, "than the short article by Kathleen Easmon written for the June 2021 issue entitled, 'A Little Talk About West Africa' [that] included a full-page photograph of West African students posing proudly outside their school much in the same way as high school students in Philadelphia" (p. 140). Once again, *The Brownies' Book* helps picture—literally—an alternative geography that takes Black subjects seriously.

Though Fauset, who supervised "The Jury," did not respond directly to Alice Martin in that space, she may also have had her letter in mind the following year when Fauset (1921) devoted several consecutive installments of her regular (though unsigned) column, "The Judge," to the reading, writing—and influence—of geography. ("The Judge" is another of *The Brownies' Book*'s strategically multidisciplinary spaces, one in which Fauset, as the Judge, conducts semi-Socratic dialogues with a group of fictive Black children about moral, ethical, philosophical, and social questions). The sequence to which I refer begins in the April 1921 issue, when Billy, the second youngest of the children, complains about having to go to school. The Judge notes that while some children do not need to attend school, most will regret it "if they haven't a certain amount of training and knowledge" when they get to be older (Fauset 1921, p. 108). Sometimes knowledge can be gained through experience, the Judge allows, much as the children's friend Maude knows all about geography because of the many places she and her parents have traveled, even though "she had never been to school" (p. 108). ("'Oh,' says Billy in surprise, 'is that the way history and geography are made? I never thought they had anything to do with people that you know about.'") But not all children can "get their training like [Maude] by visiting new people and places," explains the Judge, "so that is the reason why they must learn them from books, which are short cuts to the knowledge gained by actual experience" (p. 108).

Although the next installment (May 1921) does not appear to address geography at all, it subtly dramatizes the negative impact (and stubborn persistence) of the kinds of racial and cultural stereotypes—one might say, "short cuts"—that mainstream geography textbooks all too commonly pursue. The discussion once again focuses on Billy, who laughs when Billikins, the youngest of the group, recounts his abuse of "Hong Loo," a neighborhood laundryman: "'Such fun!' [Billikins] pants. 'A lot of us fellers [...] teased him and called him names. He got so mad that he started to throw something at us, and chased us half-way down the street. Oh it was great!'" (Fauset 1921, p. 134). When the other children express their disapproval, Billy waves them off. "'What difference does it make?'

Billy queries, open-eyed, 'he's only a Chinaman, ain't he?'" (p. 134). The Judge spends the rest of the column helping Billy see that his presumption of national superiority ("aren't you 'only an American'?" the Judge asks Billy (p. 134)) and Billy's mockery of the way the Chinese man dresses ("I don't wear a funny, loose jacket and wide pants and slippers—think of wearing slippers on the street!" (p. 134) exclaims Billy) blind him from recognizing the essential equality of all persons regardless of their superficial differences. "Think of the world as a huge desert island," proposes the Judge, employing geographic synecdoche, "and all the people just wrecked on it. Hasn't each one of us a right to everything on the island—joy, light, love, 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'?" (p. 134). Even Billy cannot disagree.

In her June 1921 column for "The Judge," Fauset next turns to the role of schoolroom geographies in the perpetuation of misinformation specifically about Africa. At the start of the column, Billikins announces, "My teacher wants to know which is the greatest continent" (Fauset 1921, p. 168). The other children quickly nominate their candidates—America, Europe, and Asia each get a vote—and when asked by the Judge to justify their choices, each child falls back on facts they have clearly memorized in school. (Billy, who had nominated America but cannot seem to remember anything specific about what makes it the "greatest," can only reply "O, well—it just is, everybody knows that" (p. 168).) But the Judge has other ideas:

> "And I," said the Judge, "would say Africa."
>
> They all stared at him.
>
> "Are you joking?" asked Billy.
>
> "No." (Fauset 1921, p. 168)
>
> The children insist that he cannot really mean it.
>
> "I suppose," pouted Wilhemina [one of the older children], "that you're just saying Africa because we are all of African descent. Of course—"
>
> "Do I usually lie?" asked the Judge.
>
> "No-o oh no!—but how on earth can you say that Africa is the greatest continent? It is stuck way in the back of the Atlas and the geography which Billy uses, devotes only a paragraph to it."
>
> "I say it because I believe it is so. Not because I want to believe it is true—not because I think it ought to be true, but because in my humble opinion it is true." (Fauset 1921, p. 168)

The Judge then provides seven detailed reasons for this opinion, each full of information that the children have clearly never encountered in any geography they have ever been assigned. Given how radically this information is intended to revise the common understanding of Africa circulating in U.S. classrooms, how central this lesson is to the larger project of geographic counter-pedagogy in *The Brownies' Book* that we have been tracing, and how emphatically the Judge presents this information, all seven reasons are worth recounting in full:

> "*First:* Africa was the only continent with a climate mild and salubrious enough to foster the beginnings of human culture.
>
> "*Second:* Africa excels all other continents in the variety and luxuriance of its natural products.
>
> "*Third:* In Africa originated probably the first, certainly the longest, most vigorous, human civilization.
>
> "*Fourth:* Africa made the first great step in human culture by discovery the use of iron.
>
> "*Fifth:* Art in form and rhythm, drawing and music found its earliest and most promising beginnings in Africa.

> "*Sixth:* Trade in Africa was the beginning of modern world commerce.
>
> "*Seventh:* Out of enslavement and degradation on a scale such as humanity nowhere else has suffered, Africa still stands today, with her gift of world labor that has raised the great crops of Sugar, Rice, Tobacco and Cotton and which lie at the foundation of modern industrial democracy.". (Fauset 1921, p. 168)

It is a tour de force presentation, to be sure. The younger children are mostly nonplussed ("'Don't understand,' wailed Billikins" (p. 168)), but the older children quickly see the implications of what the Judge has told them. Wilhelmina then poses the question that *The Brownies' Book* has been priming readers to ask from the very first issue:

> "I was just wondering," mused Wilhelmina, "who the guys are that write our histories and geographies."
>
> "Well you can bet they're not colored," said William.
>
> "No—not yet," said the Judge. (Fauset 1921, p. 168)

Imagining that future is the focus of the next column. In the July 1921 installment of "The Judge," in which the children ask about the lost civilization of Atlantis (a place that William, to his frustration, cannot find in any atlas), the children ultimately decide that they will write a new geography, one that incorporates all that they have learned, along with whatever they might discover by visiting Africa themselves—especially after the Judge tells them that some have theorized Africa as Atlantis's home. Indeed, they will not just write this new geography: recognizing the power (and the danger) of the visual stereotypes they have encountered all their lives in their own geographies, they will also provide the images. "'I'll do the illustrating,'" announces Wilhelmina. "And instead of these uncanny types that I learned of, when I was a child, as the people of Africa, we'll put in beautiful, mysterious faces" (Fauset 1921, p. 202). By the end of this column, Black children are exactly where the magazine has wanted them to be: in charge and ready to write the kinds of "geography stories" they have been denied for too long.[16]

5. Conclusion: No Apologies

The Brownies' Book lasted twenty-four issues. Although glowing testimonials from readers to the importance of the magazine appeared in every installment of "The Jury" ("I wish to let you know how much I enjoy reading *The Brownies' Book* every month," began one typical encomium from an eight-year-old reader (Washington 1921, p. 298), subscriptions never rose above 5000 per year, far below the rate to maintain publication. In the back pages of what turned out to be the penultimate issue in November 1921, Du Bois and Fauset (1921) pleaded with readers to save the enterprise: "In order to keep the magazine at its present high standard—as we are determined to do—we must have at once 12,000 subscribers. Won't you help us now to reach that figure?" (Du Bois and Fauset 1921, n.p.). When the support did not materialize, the magazine ceased publication. On the cover of the final issue, instead of an illustration, the editors printed a farewell (Figure 7):

> This is the last *Brownies' Book*. For twenty-four months we have brought Joy and Knowledge to four thousand Brownies stretched from Oregon to Florida. But there are two million Brownies in the United States, and unless we got at least one in every hundred to read our pages and help pay printing, we knew we must at last cease to be. And now the month has come to say goodbye. We are sorry—much sorrier than any of you, for it has all been such fun. After all—who knows—perhaps we shall meet again. (Du Bois and Fauset 1921, n.p.)

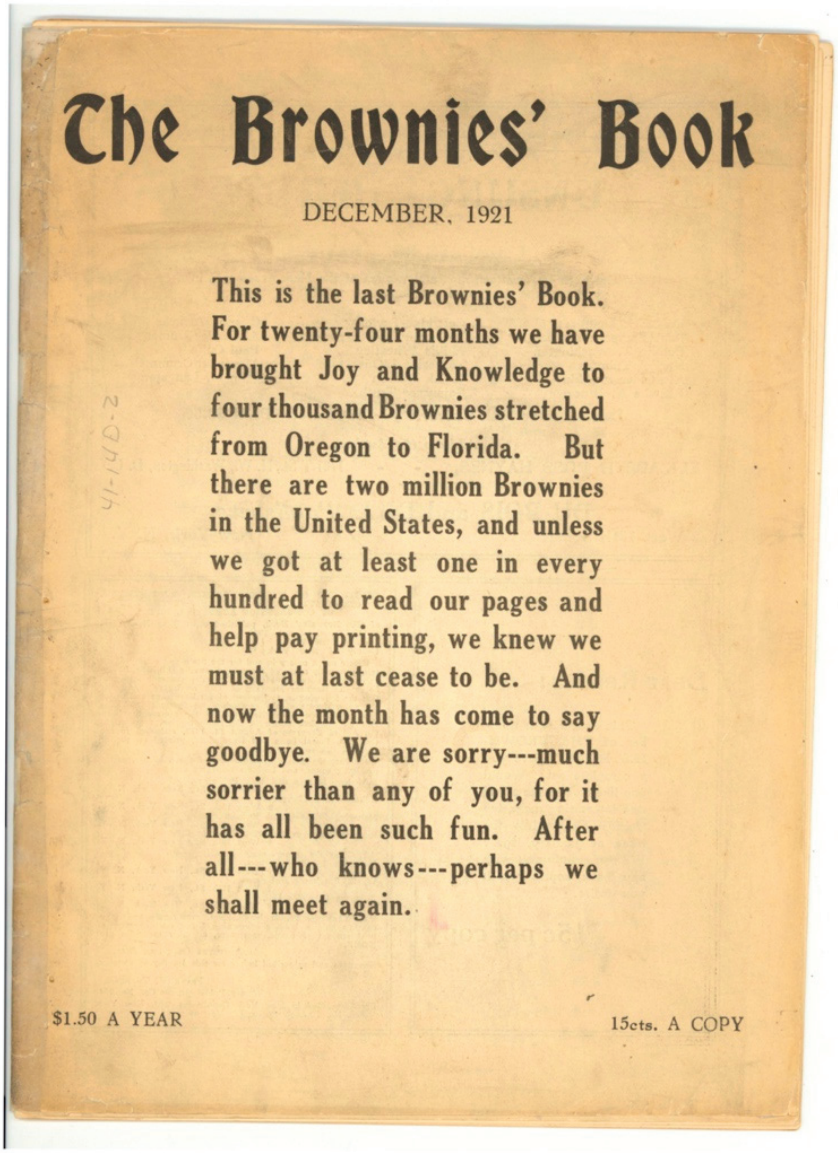

Figure 7. Cover of the final issue of *The Brownies' Book* (Du Bois and Fauset 1921, n.p.). Courtesy W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Research Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

It is a farewell that both celebrates and scolds. It also looks ahead to a possible future in which the magazine would begin printing again, although that never came to pass. Fauset devoted her final column for "The Judge" to a conversation about the economics of printing *The Brownies' Book*, which the children are disappointed to learn will stop appearing. "It's never too late" (Fauset 1921, p. 341) to get more people to subscribe, declares the Judge optimistically at the column's end. But it was.

The farewell also expresses regret for the end of the magazine—"We are sorry"—but makes no apologies for the innovative mixture of materials and disciplines that made up every issue and that remade the genre of the children's periodical for those readers who had for too long been ignored or belittled by mainstream publications such as *St. Nicholas*. "No apologies" could indeed have been *The Brownies' Book*'s motto, as made clear by a letter from a teacher that Du Bois and Fauset excerpt in an early, full-page advertisement for the magazine that appeared on the inside cover of the June 1920 issue. The ad is divided into three sections—one for parents, one for children, and one for teachers—proposing reasons that each group might want to encourage others to start their own subscriptions. The

section addressing teachers asks, "Are you in the same class with that teacher who wrote us the other day?" and then quotes their letter: "I am anxious to find a magazine which I can place in the hands of my children without feeling that I must apologize for the pictures and the stories; one whose pictures and stories will be an inspiration to my boys and girls" (Du Bois and Fauset 1920, n.p.). Although the teacher is likely referring to magazines like *St. Nicholas*, they could easily have been describing the supposedly scientific geography textbooks they also had to put into their students' hands, and for whose pictures and stories one might also feel the need to apologize. What Du Bois and Fauset are really sorry for at the end of *The Brownies' Book* is the lost opportunity to continue to provide materials in all genres that are unapologetically suitable, if not inspiring, for Black children yearning to redraw the cartographies of their imaginations.

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Notes

1 Du Bois served as general editor of *The Brownies' Book*, while Fauset served as literary editor in 1920 and managing editor in 1921. Augustus Granville Dill served as business manager. See Smith (n.d.a).

2 See Wilson (2013) for more on the disproportionate precarity that made Black magazine publishing "such a tenuous venture in the nineteenth century" (p. 19) compared to more established white periodicals, including a smaller pool of readers from which to draw a subscriber base, fewer opportunities for capitalization by major publishing houses, and less access to printers and binders supportive of African American print culture. Even the *Crisis*, one of the most successful Black periodicals of the early twentieth century, was not financially self-supporting until 1916, six years after publishing its first issue. See Du Bois (1920b, p. 3).

3 As Fielder (2019) notes, "the children's sections of early African American newspapers such as the *Colored American* and the *Christian Recorder* recognized the need to address Black children in the larger context of nineteenth-century African American print culture" (p. 160), demonstrating that Black children "were already acknowledged and taken seriously" (p. 160) even in the early days of Black periodical publishing. In the late 1880s, Amelia Etta Hall Johnson, "one of the first known African American writers to devote a considerable part of her creative efforts to producing imaginative literature for Black children" (Bishop 2007, p. 16), also published two magazines for children, *The Joy* and *The Ivy*, that have not yet been recovered.

4 See Smith (n.d.b) for a detailed discussion of the decision to expand the annual Children's Number of the *Crisis* into *The Brownies' Book*. Du Bois's well-known engagement with Ethiopianism, as well as his ongoing support for the Pan-Africanist movement, not only helps account for the increasing presence of images of Africa in the *Crisis*, as Kirschke (2004) has shown, but also likely helped shape the general Pan-African ethos, visual and otherwise, of *The Brownies' Book*, starting with the images of Abyssinia that appear in the first issue of the magazine.

5 Du Bois (1940) would later note that he was subject to this same geographic pedagogy during his own childhood. "The history and development of the race concept in the world and particularly in America, was naturally reflected in the education offered me," he writes in *Dusk of Dawn*. "In the elementary school it came only in the matter of geography when the races of the world were pictured: Indians, Negroes and Chinese, by their most uncivilized and bizarre representatives; the whites by some kindly and distinguished-looking philanthropist" (Du Bois 1940, p. 101).

6 See Sinnette (1965); Kory (2001) for excellent accounts of *St. Nicholas*'s "unself-conscious Eurocentrism" (Kory 2001, p. 93) and its "hostile environment" of "gross" racial "caricature" (Sinnette 1965, pp. 134–35). Kory (2001) notes that "throughout *St. Nicholas*, various distancing strategies—linguistic, geographic, temporal—insulate its readers from confrontations with contemporary African Americans, even fictional ones," and that "the underlying racism of *St. Nicholas* became more, not less, pronounced as it entered the 1920s" (p. 94).

7 Neither Forman nor Teall was in any sense an internationalist like Du Bois. When Forman was selected to conduct "The Watch Tower," he was the author of high school civics and American history textbooks (Forman 1915, p. 963). When Teall succeeded him in November 1917, he was a New York-based editor, author, and book reviewer (*Edward Nelson Teall* 1920, p. 2794). Teall remained in charge of "The Watch Tower" until 1927.

[8] As Wright (2017); Fielder (2017); and Gardner (2017) have shown, Black periodical editors were usually not only familiar with other mainstream white publications, they also "reprinted widely" (Wright 2017, p. 148) from them, especially in the nineteenth century. Given the cultural prominence of *St. Nicholas*—which was read in Black households as well as white—it is very reasonable to believe that Du Bois and Fauset were well-informed about, if not readers of, that magazine. Indeed, the very name of their enterprise—*The Brownies' Book*—in part signifies on the work of one of the best-known contributors to *St. Nicholas*: Palmer Cox, whose stories and illustrations of elflike "brownies" had begun appearing in that magazine in the early 1880s. See (Kory 2001).

[9] There is not space to provide a full accounting of these different approaches here, but a comparison of the tables of contents for the January 1920 issues of *The Brownies' Book* and *St. Nicholas* will suggest just how little social scientific material the latter magazine tended to include, as well as how infrequently it was integrated into other materials.

[10] Of the critical attention paid to the social scientific dimensions of *The Brownies' Book*, no work has quite illuminated the crucial partnership between the social sciences, literature, and the arts that I argue for here. Curry (2015), for example, has helpfully considered the "sociological significance" (p. 1) of *The Brownies' Book*, highlighting the ways it reflects Du Bois's interests in history, sociology, and ethnology, but the main purpose of Curry's article is to challenge critiques by contemporary scholars of Du Bois's gender politics. Young's (2009) valuable examination of the "culture-based instructional design" (p. 1) of *The Brownies' Book*, which carefully charts the ideas, themes, and concepts present in each department of the magazine, comes closest to my interests, though Young's principal aim is to consider the implications of her findings for contemporary instructional design.

[11] It is tempting to see *The Brownies' Book*'s "Geography Stories" as a deliberate response to the "Plantation Stories" that commonly appeared in *St. Nicholas* before 1920. As Kory (2001) notes, not only do these plantation tales foreground "an extreme regional specificity," they also allow the editors to "elide the 'Great Migration' from the South to the North that took place after World War I" thereby "avoid[ing] any discussion" of contemporary race relations (pp. 94–95).

[12] Kirschke (2014) uses the phrase "visual vocabulary" to refer to Du Bois's use of "art, drawings, cartoons, and photography" (p. 85) in the *Crisis*, but it applies equally well to Wheeler's contributions to *The Brownies' Book*. Wheeler's story deserves to be better known. Trained first in the U.S. and then in Europe, where she first met Jessie Fauset, Wheeler was already an established illustrator for the *Crisis*—and on her way to becoming the "most frequently featured woman artist" (Kirschke 2014, p. 91) in that journal—when Du Bois invited her to contribute to *The Brownies' Book*. Across its two-year run, Wheeler would publish more than two dozen illustrations in *The Brownies's Book*, including four covers; only Hilda Rue Wilkinson contributed more drawings to the magazine. Although it is not clear whether Wheeler helped conceptualize the geographic discourse of the periodical, her drawings, "with their delicate pen-and-ink lines and precise details" (Goeser 2007, p. 67), certainly helped establish the magazine's visual aesthetic and often accompanied the "geography" stories published therein. She also illustrated many of the African and African American folk tales that appeared in *The Brownies' Book*. Wheeler's body of work also makes clear that the unrefined aesthetic of the illustrations in "After School" is the result of deliberate choice rather than lack of ability.

[13] When Yap reappeared in Du Bois's "As the Crow Flies" columns the following year, after the Paris Peace Conference, which followed the First World War, "assigned" it to Japan over U.S. objections (Du Bois 1921, p. 114), readers of the magazine would likely have recalled learning about it first in "A Strange Country."

[14] Capshaw (2021) sees a similar ethos at work in Burrell's contribution to the "Playtime" department the following month of "Four Games from St. Helena." Instead of adopting the patronizing tone of contemporary white ethnographers of Gullah culture such as Elsie Clews Parsons, who collected Gullah folklore on a visit in 1919, Burrell "frames the games as an opportunity for a friendly meeting" rather than a cultural oddity and "avoids exoticizing or spectacularizing the Sea Islands" (Capshaw 2021, pp. 376–77).

[15] In the typescript copy of "A Curious Geography Lesson" held in the W. E. B. Du Bois Papers at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, "by Yolande Du Bois" appears in pencil beneath the title (Y. Du Bois 1920). There is no correspondence in the archive indicating whether the story was formally submitted to *The Brownies' Book*. Yolande's choice of Abyssinia as the focus of her story, and especially her emphasis on Menelik's preservation of Ethiopian independence, suggests the enduring appeal that an independent Ethiopia held for many African Americans in 1920. After the first issue of *The Brownies' Book*, however, Ethiopia rarely appears in the magazine. For more on both "A Curious Geography Lesson" and "The Land Behind the Sun," the story Yolande published in *The Brownies' Book* in 1921, see Green (2022).

[16] As though recognizing that it may be some time before the children write their "new geography," in the next two installments of "The Judge," August 1921 and September 1921, Fauset offers readers suggestions for good books about Africa that they can read right now, making six consecutive columns focused on geography and pedagogy.

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Article

John Brown, Black History, and Black Childhood: Contextualizing Lorenz Graham's John Brown Books

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Abstract: Lorenz Graham wrote two children's books about the (in)famous abolitionist, John Brown—a picture book, *John Brown's Raid: A Picture History of the Attack on Harper's Ferry, Virginia* (1972) and a biography for young adults, *John Brown: A Cry for Freedom* (1980). Both books recount a history of Brown's life and antislavery work, situated within Brown's African American context and recounted from a Black perspective. While Graham's books are exceptional in their extended treatment of this historic figure for a child audience, they are not unprecedented. This essay situates Graham's children's biographies of Brown in the long history of Black writers' work on him—for both adults and children. Reading Graham's John Brown in this context shows how Graham follows familiar traditions for encountering Brown within the larger context of Black freedom struggles. Graham's books follow a rich tradition of presenting him to Black children.

Keywords: John Brown; Lorenz Graham; African American; children's literature; 19th-century; Black children

1. Introduction

Lorenz Graham's historical children's books about John Brown follow a distinctly Black literary tradition. Inasmuch as African American children's literature has broadened the perspectives presented to child readers, it has been an essential site for education. History-centered literature (in a variety of nonfiction and fiction genres, from biographies to historical fiction) have remained prominent in African American children's literary history, no doubt because Black authors have borne the primary responsibility for conveying Black history to Black children. At times, African American children's authors have also reframed white histories. Graham wrote two children's books about the radical white abolitionist: a picture book, *John Brown's Raid: A Picture History of the Attack on Harper's Ferry, Virginia* (1972) and a biography for middle-grade or young adult readers, *John Brown: A Cry for Freedom* (1980). Both books recount a history of Brown's life and antislavery work, situated within Brown's African American context and recounted from various Black perspectives. (I use both the terms "African American" and "Black" throughout this essay, to refer to U.S. people of African descent, in keeping with the two most prominent terms for this racial group that are still in popular use).

John Brown's radical abolitionism culminated in an 1859 raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia, meant to prompt an insurrection that would bring about the end of slavery. Brown was convicted of murder, treason against the state and conspiring with the enslaved to rebel, and hanged before the year's end. Beginning in 1859, the story of John Brown would be told and retold, from perspectives that variously paint him as a fanatic, a madman, and a terrorist—or, alternatively, as a martyr, a prophet, and a saint. Brown's story has also been told throughout African American literary history, from the self-published memoir of Osborne Perry Anderson (the only Black man to escape the Harper's Ferry raid with his life) to W. E. B. Du Bois' ([1909] 2001) biography of the abolitionist.[1] Brown has been the subject of writing across various genres, including poetry, short fiction, historical accounts of the Harper's Ferry raid and its aftermath in the early Black press, and children's literature.

While Graham's books are exceptional in their extended treatment of this historic figure for a child audience, they are not unprecedented. This essay situates Graham's children's biographies of Brown in the long history of Black writers' work on him—for both adults and children. Reading Graham's John Brown in this context shows how Graham follows familiar traditions for encountering Brown within the larger context of Black freedom struggles. As Graham traces Brown's history and attends to his legacy, he carries forward a tradition of Black reporting, remembrance, and evaluation of the controversial white figure, a figure who is better understood by taking Black perspectives into account. Understanding Graham's John Brown books within this tradition, we can better understand what they offer beyond an account of this prominent figure. My discussion of these still under-studied children's books illustrates the context for and stakes of presenting Black children with histories that are informed by Black perspectives, sources, and methodologies.

In order to contextualize Graham's picture book and biography about John Brown, I trace Brown's relationship to Black children (in both history and myth) and Black representations of Brown, particularly in early African American children's literature. Graham's late twentieth-century children's books about John Brown belong to a Black literary and intellectual history dating back to the aftermath of his execution and continuing throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This intellectual and artistic tradition allows us to understand Graham's John Brown books, however radical one might take them to be, within the continuities of African American writing and education about a man who was arguably the most controversial of white abolitionists.

2. John Brown, Black History, and Black Children

John Brown has always been a figure of interest in Black history. Black interpreters of Brown have taken a more expansive approach than most white accounts, situating him beyond exclusively white contexts for antislavery and other antiracist activism. Elsewhere I have has discussed popular attention to Brown via the racialization of both madness and violence, which shows how African American writers have discussed him in relation to—and at times even placed him within—Black antislavery discourse and activism, especially within critiques of white moderacy.[2] White characterizations of Brown as "mad" and those that assess his violence as unjustified have overwhelmingly failed to situate him alongside Black antislavery sentiment and defined violence as justifiable only when it tends toward white supremacist ends. Alongside such representations, we can also observe a parallel history of Black attention that diverges sharply from such assessments. Brown has been represented more legibly by Black writers who have discussed him with a fullness of attention that evades caricatured representations of him as either an irrational, fanatical madman or a saintly savior. These readings of Brown make him legible because they situate him within African American histories of abolitionism, rather than exclusively white ones.

Scholars have noted Brown's relationship not only to white abolitionism, but also to Black history. Benjamin Quarles discusses Brown's "Black orientation" at length, noting Brown's relationships with Black people.[3] Manisha Sinha compares Brown's Kansas militia, the Liberty Guard, to Black militias that were formed before the start of the Civil War.[4] Additionally, Kellie Carter Jackson notes the importance of recognizing Brown's place in the movement of Black antislavery strategists.[5] Moreover, Brown is not only the purview of recent scholarship in African American history. Dating back to Brown's own lifetime, prominent Black leaders described his radical abolitionism as stemming from his relationships to Black people. For example, in an 1848 issue of his antislavery newspaper *The North Star*, Frederick Douglass writes that "Though a white gentleman, [Brown] is in sympathy a black man, and as deeply interested in our cause, as though his own soul had been pierced with the iron of slavery".[6] In his 1909 biography of Brown, W. E. B. Du Bois describes him as "the man who of all Americans has perhaps come nearest to touching the real souls of black folk".[7] For Black writers, it was significant to find an example of a white abolitionist who was in collaborative relationship with Black people themselves, and therefore stood out from the spectrum of white abolitionists that skewed heavily moderate and paternalist.

Black people have encountered Brown and interpreted his legacy not only through his culminating act of violent radical abolitionism, but have also contextualized the events of Harper's Ferry within his larger relationships to Black people.

Brown's relationships with Black people also included Black children. Unsurprisingly, this began during Brown's own childhood. Nineteenth-century white abolitionists notably understood childhood as a key period for developing antislavery sentiment. Although some white abolitionists recounted a "conversion" of sorts to antislavery views in adulthood, others described abolition as part of their childhood development and tied to historical, religious, or moral education. By the antebellum period, antislavery children's literature explicitly addressed white children in order to shape their ideas about racial difference (and sometimes even racial equality), to inform them about histories of the transatlantic slave trade and the current state of slavery in the United States and elsewhere, and to recruit them to actively participate in the antislavery cause. The last of these goals, prompting white children's involvement in abolition ranged from more passive calls for them to "feel right" on the subject, to more pragmatic ones, from product boycotts, advocacy with adults, and (future) political participation, to more radical ones suggesting they might even participate in illegal activities such as harboring fugitives. However, not all white children's views on slavery were formed via literary instruction. For Brown, an early lesson about slavery involved an encounter with an enslaved boy.

During the War of 1812, Brown assisted in his father's cattle-driving work and sometimes traveled alone, even though he was then only a child. During one such trip, when he was only twelve years old, he lodged with an enslaver family who held a boy Brown's own age captive.[8] Although this family treated young Brown well, their neglect and abuse of this other child left a lasting impression. Brown saw that, deprived of his parents, this enslaved child had no adult advocates. Unlike most white children of the time, Brown had not been raised to think himself more deserving of good treatment than Black children. He knew this treatment was unfair. Biographers cite this encounter as formative in sparking of Brown's radical abolitionism. Significantly, however, this formative encounter was not just an event in Brown's own childhood, but one of witnessing enslaved childhood.

In his discussion of Brown's "Black orientation", Benjamin Quarles describes this event as "the most important disclosure" in Brown's autobiographical account".[9] Although Quarles goes on to query whether this account was one of "total recall" by an "unusually thoughtful youngster" or a sentimental expression of "wishful reconstruction", countless scholars of childhood across fields have shown how youth becomes a key site for creating formative ideas about race and racism. Brown's later relationships with Black people were likely heavily influenced by early encounters like this one.

Brown's interest in Black children extended beyond this scene from his own childhood. Osborne Perry Anderson, the sole Black man to escape Harper's Ferry, gives an account of Brown's interest in and care for a Black newborn in his narrative, *A Voice from Harper's Ferry* (1861). During earlier events in which Brown helped to free a group of enslaved people from Missouri who ultimately escaped to Canada, an emancipated woman gave birth on the journey. Anderson recounts the care that Brown and his army paid the mother and child, writing that "not one jot of comfort or attention for the tender babe and its invalid mother was abated".[10] While this may seem at first glance the most obvious course of action, white care for Black children was not a given in this antebellum moment, even among abolitionists. This child was apparently named "John Brown", at the elder John Brown's urging. Though a gesture of seeming self-importance, it also signals whom Brown included among those he intended to carry on his legacy.

Anderson's attention to this moment also seems fitting in his shaping of Brown's legacy for the public and future generations. Moreover, his representation of Brown names Black children explicitly within his interests. As he describes,

> John Brown, the liberator of Kansas, the projector and commander of the Harper's Ferry expedition, saw in the most degraded slave a man and a brother, whose appeal for his God-ordained rights no one should disregard; in the toddling

> slave child, a captive whose release is as imperative, and whose prerogative is as weighty, as the most famous in the land.[11]

Here Anderson includes the familiar abolitionist rhetoric of the enslaved as a "man and a brother" to Brown while making childhood visible as well. The presence of enslaved Black children within Brown's biography and Black histories of him is notable in a larger context in which enslaved children were often rendered invisible. Historian Wilma King writes that, despite being a significant percentage of the enslaved population in the US, children "have received little attention [from historians] because they, more than other enslaved persons, were 'silent and invisible'".[12] Increased attention to both free and enslaved Black children of the nineteenth century appears in recent work by scholars including Crystal Webster, Nazera Wright, Robin Bernstein, Sarah Chinn, Kate Capshaw, Anna Mae Duane, Karen Woods Weierman and myself. Nevertheless, Black children and Black childhood in the antebellum era still remain underexamined.

Attending to how the lives of actual enslaved children matter for comprehending Brown complicates how Black children have been more often discussed, in largely sentimental ways in which they are oddly abstracted and removed from his biography or the future of young Black readers who would receive his story. Nevertheless, considering these moments of attention to Black children in Brown's biography and memorialization, it seems fitting that Brown sometimes appears in popular (though mythologized) imagery alongside a Black child.

Those familiar with Brown in popular culture may recall the image of the condemned man stopping to kiss a Black baby, lifted up by their mother, on his way to the scaffold.[13] This likely apocryphal incident in Brown's life was recounted in popular newspapers such as the *New York Daily Tribune*, paintings by artists including Louis Ransom and Thomas Satterwhite Noble, and poetry by Lydia Maria Child and John Greenleaf Whittier, the latter of whom describes the "poor slave-mother with her little child pressed nigh".[14] Thomas Hovenden's 1884 *The Last Moments of John Brown*, for example, represents Black people among those gathered outside the prison on his execution day (Figure 1: Hovenden's *Last Moments of John Brown* Engraving).

On the right side of the image, Hovenden depicts a Black woman holding her child over the railing as Brown descends the stairs, to embrace him. While the veracity of this incident in Brown's biography is heavily contested, the persistence and repetition of this story in the popular imaginary shows how Brown was imagined to be connected to Black childhood. Moreover, as will become clear, this image of Brown embraced by a Black child might be taken not simply as a sentimental, apocryphal scene within his biography but a metaphor for the ways Brown's life would be presented within Black history for future generations, including for Black children.

Black people also participated in circulating the apocryphal image of Brown kissing a Black baby. Depictions of the incident circulated in the Black Press following Brown's death in such stories as "The Execution of John Brown" in the December 1859 *Anglo-African Magazine*.[15] The story recounts Brown's characteristic "calmness and serenity" as he approached the scaffold and encountered "a black woman, with her little child in arms" and "stopped for a moment in his course, stooped over, and with the tenderness of one whose love is as broad as the brotherhood of man, kissed the child affectionately".[16] Regardless of whether this moment actually happened in the lead up to Brown's execution, I am interested in the cultural—we might even say literary—quality of this story. As this story works its way into the popular imagination, we see the immediacy with which Brown becomes a figure offered to Black children.

Figure 1. Thomas Hovenden, Etcher, and George Gebbie. *The last moments of John Brown leaving the jail on the morning of his execution*/Hovenden N.A., Painter & Etcher, ca. 1885. Philadelphia: Geo. Gebbie publisher, August 12. Photograph. Courtesy, Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/item/2012648890/ (accessed on 5 May 2022).

Brown himself wanted to be mourned and remembered by Black children. In an 1859 letter sent from prison as he awaited his execution, Brown wrote to Mrs. George L. Stearns that he wanted no hypocritical religious mourners at his public murder, but asked "that my only *religious attendants* be poor, *little, dirty, ragged, bare headed & barefooted Slave boys & Girls*; led by some old *grey headed Slave Mother*".[17] Whittier's poem couples the mythologized scene mentioned above with the hope Brown expressed to Stearns in this letter, describing Brown's kiss alongside this dying wish for those he deemed would be his most appropriate mourners. In Whittier's poem, Brown declares,

> I will not have to shrive my soul a priest in Slavery's pay
> But let some poor slave-mother whom I have striven to free,
> With her children, from the gallows-stair put up a prayer for me.[18]

It is difficult to separate Brown's mythologization from his own crafting of his image. Nevertheless, one wonders whether, in this late thought about enslaved child mourners, Brown might have considered the enslaved children he did encounter during his life. Brown may well have remembered the child who bore his name, born en route to freedom in Canada, or the enslaved boy who (if still living) would have then been a man Brown's age. Within this context of considering Brown's relationships to Black children, we must also consider Black children as later recipients of Brown's story.

3. Brown in Early African American Children's Literature

Just as John Brown's biography intersects with accounts and representations of Black children, he is also represented in children's literature. Lydia Maria Child's poem about Brown (called "The Heroes Heart" when published in the *Liberator*) would be retitled "John Brown and the Colored Child" when it was reprinted in the *Freedmen's Book* in 1860.[19] For Child, as for other white abolitionists, this moment presented what was likely a more palatable image than an account of Brown's violence. The *Freedmen's Book* was intended for recently emancipated Black communities (assumedly for people of all ages and regardless of literacy status) and included short pieces of prose and poetry by both white and Black authors.[20] Several texts include discussions of children and childhood. Readers (or auditors) would have encountered this poem about John Brown alongside other writing about Black children, such as Child's brief biography of Phillis Wheatley, Wheatley's own "The Words of Providence" (which indicates that the poem was "written at sixteen years of age"), Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's poem "Thank God for Little Children", and Jourdon Anderson's "Letter from a Freedman" in which he discusses his own children's education. Even as white abolitionists used this story about Brown to counter more popular images of him as violent and insane, the story circulated within a broader context of care about Black children and even writing for them.

This image of Brown cannot be entirely divorced from the violence of his biography, however. While this may initially seem an impediment to presenting this history to children, we must also recognize what forms of violence remain celebrated in children's literature. Although violence is sometimes a contentious topic for children's literature, national accounts of war are often included in children's historical texts. One might think only of the popularity of children's historical war fiction (such as Esther Forbes' 1946 Revolutionary war novel *Johnny Tremaine*) or the prominence of wartime US presidents (such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln) in children's picture books and early readers to understand that certain kinds of violence are not absent but sanctioned in popular literature for children. Beyond these nationalist histories, children's literature has also been a site for radical content.[21] Antislavery histories were, of course, the purview of white and Black children's authors alike.[22]

While Brown is most often exceptionalized in histories of white abolition, in Black histories, his radical abolitionism is less exceptional. This is also true within African American histories written for children. In African American children's literature, as in discussions of him in other Black contexts, Brown is presented within the history of Black abolitionism. As a figure of interest for Black history, then, it makes sense that he would be included in histories presented to children. In these histories, Brown's radicalism and immediacy are not exceptional precisely because he is presented alongside Black abolitionists.

Silas Xavier Floyd's 1905 Floyd's Flowers: Or, Duty and Beauty for Colored Children, Being One Hundred Short Stories Gleaned from the Storehouse of Human Knowledge and Experience includes a description of an Ohio monument to three Black men—Shields Green, John A. Copeland, and Lewis S. Leary—the last of whom died at Harper's Ferry and the former two of whom were hanged for their participation. In this account, we also read about John Brown. The chapter focusing on Green describes the meeting between him and Brown, via Frederick Douglass, an "associate and intimate friend" of Brown, and with whom Green had been staying. In its discussion of Green's martyrdom for the cause

of abolition, it also weaves his connection to the white abolitionist. Floyd describes the impossibility of Green and his companions rescuing Brown and Green's devotion to the mission's commander, including his ultimate willingness to "'go down and die with the old man', meaning John Brown". This selection ends by describing Green's martyrdom: "There is scarcely a more touching incident than this in all our national history".[23] In many ways, Floyd's Flowers was not a radical text. Nazera Wright describes the conduct book as emphasizing "a conservative agenda that promoted propriety, morality, and decorum".[24] However, in this early twentieth-century context, Black pride is promoted through Black antislavery history. Brown appears not as a fanatical outlier but alongside Black martyrs in a "touching" history of interracial solidarity within the Black freedom struggle. Brown becomes relevant within this Black history.

In one example from the *Brownies' Book* in 1920, we encounter an explicit framing of interest in both Black history and John Brown for Black child readers. Created by W.E.B. Du Bois, Augustus Granville Dill, and Jessie Redmon Fauset, the periodical includes letters written by its readers. Among the letters in a recurring section called "The Jury", Pocahontas Foster of Orange, N.J. comments on the magazine as grounds for encouraging children's interest in history. Foster writes,

> I have never liked history because I always felt that it wasn't much good. Just a lot of dates and things that some men did, men whom I didn't know and nobody else whom I knew, knew anything about. Just something to take up one hour of the three hours left after school.
>
> But since I read the stories of Paul Cuffee, Blanche K. Bruce and Katy Ferguson, real colored people, whom I feel that I do know because they were brown people like me, I believe I do like history, and I think it is something more than dates.[25]

Scholars have usually counted Pocahontas Foster among the *Brownies' Book*'s child readers when noting her contributions. While it is not clear exactly how old Foster would have been when she wrote this letter to the magazine, she was likely among the *Brownies' Book's* older readers and not a child, herself (via a 1919 letter to W. E. B. Du Bois, Foster had already accepted a position as a stenographer and file clerk at the *Crisis* by the time the Browines' Book began publication).[26] Still, interpretations of Foster as "young" follow the periodical's framing of her as a reader of the *Brownies' Book* and it stands to reason that younger readers might align themselves with her comments here. Expanding one's view of history beyond rote memorization and remote, masculinist accounts seems a clear antidote to improve the subject, as does racial inclusion. The history that interests Foster is indeed "something more than dates", "stories of . . . real colored people". What she calls for is a narrative Black history, much like the account of Shields Green in *Floyd's Flowers* and that which other African American children's literature from the *Brownies' Book* to later children's biographies would center. While this reader aligns her historical interests racially, she also goes on to offer other possibilities.

Foster continues her letter with an account of reading the paper aloud to an eight-year-old friend, Beatrice Turner, who herself comments by requesting not only history about Black figures, but also about John Brown. Whether real or fictionalized, Beatrice Turner's position is presented as that of a young person with whom *Brownies' Book* readers might identify even more clearly than with Foster's. According to Foster, Turner agrees with her assessment, saying:

> Now that's just the kind of history I like. Won't you ask THE BROWNIES' BOOK to tell some more stories like that? I would like so much to know the story of John Brown. I have heard so many people talk about him and we used to sing a song about him, but nobody seems to know what he really did,—I don't.[27]

Turner's request for further discussion of John Brown amid a call for history that otherwise centers Black figures is noteworthy. First, it highlights Brown's resonance in folk song. She likely refers to the popular song "John Brown's Body", a ballad that rose in popularity and the tune to which Julia Ward Howe set "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"

in 1861. Although Howe's lyrics are now likely better known than those commemorating the anti-slavery martyr, this is one place his story and history resonated in Black children's culture. The song was sung in schools for freed people during Reconstruction.[28] As Turner's account shows, the song's legacy extended into the early twentieth century, even as a common popular understanding of Brown's history may have waned (at least among young singers of the tune). Turner's request is not the only mention of John Brown in the children's magazine.

The *Brownies' Book* for May 1921 included the second installment of a series called "Girls Together", by Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman, which recounted events in the life of antislavery Quaker activist Rebecca Buffum (Spring).[29] The beginning of the installment discusses Buffum's encounter with a self-emancipated Black woman named Susan, as she navigates the North as a free woman. The end of the piece addresses Spring's relationship to John Brown, who she visited in prison before he was hanged. The description of Brown's hanging highlights his abolitionist effort and its opposition. We read, "In October, 1859, as nobody in America must ever forget, John Brown made an effort to induce the slaves of Virginia to leave their masters in such numbers, that the institution of slavery, in that State, would crumble away itself".[30] The brief history of Brown included in this piece responds to the call represented by Beatrice Turner and the assumption that young readers of the magazine will benefit from knowing it.

Although this piece recounts Brown's history only briefly, it makes his political alignments clear. Spring positions Brown against his proslavery captors and executioners, here shown in light of the Civil War and its aftermath. She writes, "John Brown was finally taken prisoner, by Colonel Robert E. Lee, who, you will remember, later committed treason".[31] Recounting Brown's hanging, Wyman further notes, "Robert E. Lee managed the military parade at the execution, and John Wilkes Booth, who afterwards assassinated Abraham Lincoln, was a volunteer among the soldiers".[32] This situating of Brown does not allow his violence to stand alone but recognizes it in a larger history of violence meant to preserve slavery.

As John Brown's story is recounted in these Black histories, his radical abolitionism is understood more broadly than when framed within exclusively white antislavery histories. In these Black accounts, he is also memorialized in accordance with myth and his own wishes. Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson's 1920 collection of readings, *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer*, which included David B. Fulton's "Memorial Day in the South," includes John Brown in its "Decoration Day" remembrances. In this piece, Fulton focuses on the Civil War dead, but also looks back to Brown, writing that "To the Afro-American woman of the South on that day will come vivid recollections of the inexplicable gloom that pervaded the land everywhere when John Brown went to the scaffold".[33] This universalized Black woman's mourning of Brown is meant to be shared by the child readers of this volume. Dunbar-Nelson dedicated the volume in this way: "To the children of the race which is herein celebrated, this book is dedicated, that they may read and learn about their own people".[34] Here, we see Brown positioned among "our own people" and a practice of relaying his memory to new generations of Black children. I skip now from these mentions of Brown in early African American children's literature to the mid-to-late-twentieth-century rise of the genre, to show how these Black literary traditions of his representation have been sustained in more recent African American children's literature. Lorenz Graham's John Brown books carry on these traditions of African American writing about him.

4. Graham's Twentieth-Century John Brown Moment

Graham wrote his John Brown books in a moment of renewed attention to African American literature and history. Following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case and the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s (and the racist backlash that ensued), increasing public attention was given to the treatment of race and racism in U.S. children's literature. In 1965, former president of the International Reading Association Nancy Larrick's essay, "The All-White World of Children's Books", addressed the un-

derrepresentation of Black people (and especially the underrepresentation of realist and positive images of Black people) in U.S. children's literature. That year, the Council on Interracial Books for Children was established to address these issues of representation. Additionally, in 1969 the American Library Association established the Coretta Scott King Book Awards to honor African American authors and illustrators. With a career running through the mid-century Civil Rights Movement, Graham's writing is situated in what Michelle Martin has called the "Golden Age" of African American children's literature, during which African American children's book publishing increased more rapidly and with more public attention than in previous decades.[35]

Graham was already a groundbreaking African American children's author by the time he penned his two books about Brown. With a career that spanned from the 1940s through the 1980s, Graham is known best for his collations of African-based religious stories and for his Town Series about a Black boy growing up amid the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-20th century.[36] Like other Black authors both before and after him, Graham was committed to presenting fuller and more accurate representations of Black people to child readers. This is fitting with other trends in African American children's literature. Because African American children's literature has historically supplemented or corrected absences and misinformation about Black people in white-dominated children's texts, educational curricula, and popular culture, it makes sense that Black American writers have tended strongly toward representing Black people. Among African American children's literature, Graham's books on Brown are therefore unusual in their focus on a white historical figure. For example, winners of the Coretta Scott King Award from the 1970s and 1980s overwhelmingly focus on Black figures, both historical and fictional.

In this historical moment, focusing African American children's books on a white figure may seem counterintuitive, risking the semblance of saviordom at the expense of diminishing other figures. However, given how Brown's history is intertwined with and guided by the work of Black activists, his biography presents an opportunity to illustrate the possibility of white action—even in the midst of its rarity and improbability. Katharine Capshaw notes how Civil Rights Era African American picture books illustrated "the possibility of child political agency" for readers.[37] We might similarly say that Graham's picture book (and, one might argue, his illustrated biography) similarly illustrated the possibility of white political agency via Brown. That is, Brown's history makes clear that white people's alignment with white supremacy was and is not necessary or inevitable, even while it has, historically, been common and predictable. Graham's readers, in the 1970s and beyond, might read this history with a mind to similar political possibilities in their own moment. Graham frames Brown in this way—as a useful historical figure for larger antiracist projects. Julia Mickenberg counts Lorenz Graham (and his sister, Shirley Graham) among Cold War era writers of the Old Left generation, whose work had, by the late 1960s, become increasingly radical.[38] *John Brown's Raid*, for example, was published in Scholastic's Firebird Books series, which Mickenberg calls "strikingly political" in its treatment of histories of racism and oppression. Despite the eventual abolition of slavery, a white abolitionist who used violence in defense of Black freedom was an undeniably radical figure. The radicality of a book featuring—and celebrating—such a figure becomes clearer still in light of the centering of moderate white abolitionism in national histories. Brown remains a controversial figure because his activism was not the stuff of peaceful protest. He waged violence in opposition to that of the state and alongside Black people, rather than only in a state-sanctioned war that is often framed as having been waged on Black people's behalf. Graham's attention to this image of white abolitionism acknowledges this radical avenue for white participation in Black freedom efforts, offering an alternative to dominant versions of white antislavery history.

Beyond the "Golden Age" of African American children's literature, Graham's books might also be regarded within the larger scope of writing about Brown in this historical moment. Graham's books appeared amid a wealth of new scholarship about Brown and the increased availability of nineteenth-century African American (and adjacent) texts,

made available for twentieth century readers via new inroads into publishing. At the close of *John Brown: A Cry for Freedom* Graham includes a short bibliography that makes this publication landscape clear. Graham's children's books appeared alongside recent biographies of Brown, including Stephen B. Oates' 1970 *To Purge This Land with Blood*, Jules Abels' 1971 *Man on Fire: John Brown and the Case for Liberty*, and Richard O. Boyer's 1973 *The Legend of John Brown: A Biography and History*. Graham also notes Benjamin Quarles foundational book, *Black Abolitionists*, published by Oxford University Press in 1969.

Graham's reading list also included recent editions of early work on Brown, such as the Arno Press's The American Negro: His History and His Literature series reprintings of Richard Josiah Hinton's 1894 *John Brown and His Men* (in 1968) and Osborn Perry Anderson's 1861 *A Voice from Harper's Ferry* (in 1972) as well as a 1962 edition W. E. B. Du Bois' ([1909] 2001) biography of Brown (from International Publishers), a 1969 edition of Franklin Benjamin Sanborn's 1885 *The Life and Letters of John Brown* (from Negro Universities Press), and a 1970 reprinting of white abolitionist James Redpath's 1860 *The Public Life of Captain John Brown*.[39] Graham's books are possible and relevant, in part, because of this larger context for renewed interest in Brown. This list for "Further Reading" both encourages readers to learn more and situates Graham's work in these larger conversations about Brown, from writing by those who knew him personally (like Anderson) to biographers of the late twentieth century.

Beyond these print contexts, Graham's books trace Brown's relevance via continuities with his own late twentieth-century political moment. Although Graham's 1972 picture book does not include an introduction or conclusion explicating Brown's contemporary relevance, he ends this first book on Brown with a gesture toward the future. His climactic twelfth chapter recounting the raid closes with Brown's words from an 1859 prison interview, in which he predicted "You may dispose of me very easily. I am nearly disposed of now; but this question is still to be settled—this negro question I mean; the end of that is not yet".[40] Graham concludes his picture book not with Brown's execution but with the impending Civil War that would bring about emancipation. The final image in the book is a broadside of "John Brown's Song", making this familiar connection, that "his soul's marching on" in these later battles. Readers in the 1970s might well have extended the meaning of Brown's words beyond the war, however. Just as African Americans responded with realistically guarded hope to the Reconstruction Amendments, Graham's contemporaries knew that the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s had not eradicated institutionalized racism in the nation and there was more work to be done.

In his introduction to the 1980 biography, Graham is more explicit about connecting Brown's history to the project of combatting racism in the twentieth-century. In this Introduction, Graham explains his interest in Brown in terms of continuities between Brown's time and his own, writing that "We need to share Brown's view of the destructive aspects of slavery. Then we will recognize the self-poisoning effects of race hatred. We need to know why he so willingly died. Then we will understand why today some men and women are willing to give their lives in the struggle for social justice".[41]

Concluding the introduction, Graham explains that the rights of Black people in the United States are still unsettled. While the question of slavery has been resolved, the question of racial equality remains, as

> Some people still believe that members of their own race are inherently superior to members of other races. In America some white people want to keep black people in a separate and unequal status. Those who struggle for full equality in education and employment meet resistance not only in words but also in the form of violence. After reading about John Brown and the conditions in his day, we will better understand some of the problems with which we still have to deal.[42]

Thus summarizing his present aims, Graham indicates how books about Brown's life and work allow children to read history through a lens that refuses to naturalize racism and calls us to demand better in the present. Brown is relevant not only as a historical figure,

then, but as an example illustrating what forms of antiracism were—and are still—possible. Acknowledging the long history of writing about Brown that precedes his own work, Graham argues that Brown's story needs to be told and re-told: "The story of John Brown and his cry for freedom is now given again because his life did indeed help to make this country to be what it is today, and his beliefs, his words, and his prophesies apply to present conditions".[43] Situating Brown within Black antislavery contexts as well as his own moment of publication allows readers to understand him within a broader and more accurate historical context.

As Graham presents a more complex view of abolitionism than a simple progress narrative, he also presents abolitionism from and for Black perspectives on white antislavery efforts. While Brown is exceptional, he is not impossible. Placing Brown (as other Black writers have done) in relation to his African American contemporaries rather than just in comparison to moderate white antislavery activists offers a more complete picture of this U.S. history. Graham's books resist flattening Brown's history because he places Brown within and alongside Black history. Both the pictorial history of the Harper's Ferry raid and the biography align with the patterns of reading Brown within Black History—a history that both includes and represents him specifically for Black children.

5. Reading Graham's John Brown

In a 1985 interview, Graham attests "No white man could have written my book on John Brown".[44] Both of Graham's books about Brown—the picture book *John Brown's Raid: A Picture History of the Attack on Harper's Ferry, Virginia* (1972) and the young adult biography *John Brown: A Cry for Freedom* (1980)—read him beyond the context of white moderate antislavery discourse. More than merely describing his racialized approach to a historical figure, Graham here indicates that he grounds his books in the long literary history of Black writing about Brown. In this, Graham follows the precedent of other Black writers. Moreover, Graham's books respond in various ways to earlier African American children's contexts.[45] I discuss them together in their shared aim to present Brown for Black children's history readers. Graham's books (like earlier African American writing about Brown) present him as someone influenced by and in community with Black people of his time.

Although his picture book account focuses specifically on the Harper's Ferry raid rather than on the biographical more generally, here, too, Graham reads this event through the lens of Brown's longer Black historical context. This lens offers what might also be understood as a history text in which Brown appears as one actor among many, despite the significance of his raid. Importantly, Graham's treatment of Brown's violence is not decontextualized from other histories of violence. This includes revolutions, slave revolts, and the anti-Black violence of slavery itself. While this contextualization may seem commonsensical, narratives including proslavery literature, plantation nostalgia genres, and children's texts have histories of problematically softening slavery for both adult and child audiences.[46] Meanwhile, other authors have refused to obscure slavery's inherent violence, even in writing for children. For example, Graham opens his picture book by presenting Brown's abolitionist violence within the larger context of slavery's violence by including a reproduced image of the slave ship *Brookes* and accounts of kidnappings in supposedly "free" states. Additionally, he notes Black resistance to violence among Brown's Black influences, citing David Walker's 1829 *Appeal*, which asked African Americans, "'Had you rather not be killed than to be a slave to a tyrant who takes the life of your mother, wife, a dear little children?'" and commenting, "This was a question that John Brown would not forget".[47] Like Black biographers before him, Graham frames Brown alongside other histories of Black revolutionary action—from Black participants in the American Revolution to the longer Black freedom struggle of radical actors such as Nat Turner.

As Graham shows, Brown's intellectual, political, and moral inspirations also included his Black contemporaries. Alongside prominent white abolitionists with whom he was in conversation, Graham notes the influence of Black antislavery advocates. These include

Frederick Douglass, of course, but also lesser-known figures such as Jeremain Wesley Loguen and Henry Highland Garnett. Such leaders were invested not only in abolition but also broader antiracist projects that addressed the discriminatory laws of the North, which affected personal safety, labor, and education. Graham presents Brown's antislavery development as a product of both his white antislavery upbringing and political Black thought. The biography describes Brown's awareness of these problems via his own observation, and also as he forms further relationships with Black people.

This biography outlines Brown's early moral and abolitionist development in a chapter called "Brown Forms His Own Opinions". Here, we read about the oft-recounted encounter with the enslaved Black boy. In this telling, Graham dwells, though briefly, on this enslaved child: "The slave was about the same age as John. John saw that the boy worked hard and that he was smart. The two boys talked together. John believed they could have become friends, but he realized that their lives were very different".[48] These children are presented as peers, as we read about Brown's "silent horror" as his friend is beaten, his bold articulation of his own antislavery education in the face of the enslaver and child abuser, and a recognition of the very real threat to this other child's life that this beating posed. Graham gives no unnecessary embellishment of the 12-year-old boy's intervention in this scene, but concludes the episode noting that "John never forgot that slave boy, and he never forgot that slave owner".[49] A briefer account of the episode appears in *John Brown's Raid*, but this version similarly characterizes the two boys as friends and notes the lasting impression this encounter had on Brown. This shorter telling also gives a clear sense of injustice and white privilege, as "John noticed how differently they were treated. While he was praised and fed, the slave was beaten and went hungry".[50] Rather than embrace this privilege, however, Brown continues to develop fuller relationships with Black people.

While this event seems to be Brown's first encounter with slavery, it is not his only relation to Black people. The biography represents Brown also in conversation with Black people in everyday contexts, including beyond more clearly antislavery work. Before reading about Brown's antislavery plans, we are told:

> It was in Springfield that Brown first became well acquainted with blacks. He met with them as individuals, and he hired some in his business. He visited in their homes and got to know them as families. He went to their churches, and he often sat quietly in their meetings while they talked about their problems and their hopes and their fears. With them he considered himself an equal. They sat at his table, and he sat at theirs.[51]

Graham here shows Brown in community with Black people, among folks for whom antislavery sentiment was not exceptional.[52] Graham shows Brown as also observing Black intellectual community, as "He saw free men asserting themselves as individuals and in groups. He took time to visit other cities to meet more".[53] Readers see that Black antislavery thought and action exist apart from Brown. This framing of Brown as a participant in a broader movement—and one that does not simply prioritize white participants—resists representations that depict Brown as a white savior.

Even in its focus on Brown, Graham's picture book does not lose sight of his accomplices. In a 2019 essay occasioned by the 160th anniversary of the Harper's Ferry raid, Eugene Meyer lamented that the five African American men who participated in the raid with Brown have been "overlooked, overshadowed by their martyred commander, treated as footnotes, if at all, in the John Brown saga". Meyer goes on to describe "African American soldiers, all but forgotten" and "unmentioned" in many commemorative accounts.[54] While this may be true in white histories and commemorations, it is not necessarily the case in Black ones. Langston Hughes, for example, in his 1931 poem to John Brown, writes of

> John Brown
> Who took his gun,
> Took twenty-one companions,

White and black,

Went to shoot your way to freedom . . . [55]

Neither does Graham ignore Brown's Black compatriots. *John Brown's Raid* includes a seven-page spread with pictures and brief descriptions of the twenty-one men who comprised "John Brown's Army". These images and brief notes are repeated across four pages of the chapter on Harper's Ferry in *John Brown: A Cry for Freedom*. The latter's chapter quotes extensively from Frederick Douglass (who gives an account of a meeting with Brown and Shields Green) and Osbourne Perry Anderson. Readers of Graham's history would not understand these figures as "forgotten", but, like readers of *Floyd's Flowers*, find these Black histories essential for understanding Brown's. Following the wishes of young Beatrice Turner, whose friend recounted her interest in learning about Brown in the *Brownies' Book* and those reading his memorialization in the *Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer*, Graham's books continue the tradition of presenting Brown alongside these Black histories.

In light of historical treatment of Brown, we might consider how the young readers of Graham's books might receive the image of Brown kissing a Black child. While the picture book omits this scene in its rather brief account of the execution, toward the end of the biography, Graham reproduces Thomas Hovenden's 1884 *The Last Moments of John Brown*, with the caption "John Brown kissing a slave woman's child as he leaves the jail for his execution". The account of this moment of embrace is brief but illustrates Brown's interest in Black people and Black people's interest in Brown. We read that "Another woman called to him, 'God bless you, old man. I wish I could help you'", offering a small amount of comfort to the condemned man, while noting that citizens were not allowed to be present for the actual hanging. Graham does not leave Brown on the scaffold, however, but traces his memory forward.

Before concluding with lyrics to the song memorializing him and an account of how "the legend of John Brown" mattered for the larger antislavery movement that would soon lead to the Civil War, Graham gives an account of a funeral service in Brown's hometown of North Elba, New York. Among the family mourners, Graham recounts that "As the coffin was lowered into the grave, Lyman Epps, an ex-slave, with his wife and children, sang one of John Brown's favorite hymns".[56] As readers imagine this scene, we might picture some of the Black mourners Brown himself wished for—including Black children—singing

Blow ye the trumpet, blow

Sweet is Thy work, my God, my King.

I'll praise my Maker with my breath.

O, happy is the man who hears.

Why should we start and fear to die

With songs and honors sounding loud

Ah, lovely appearance of death.[57]

While the image of Brown kissing a child at the scaffold may well be fiction rather than history, this image of Black children is not.

The Epps family were friends and neighbors to the Browns, among the small community of Black property owners in that area, and collaborators in the antislavery community who also participated in the Underground Railroad work of harboring of fugitives on their way to Canada. The family included four children, including Lyman Epps, Jr., who would later recount his own childhood memories of Brown. Epps, Jr. described Brown as "a true friend of my father's . . . He'd walk up to our house on the Table Lands and come in and play with us children and talk to father. Many's the time I've sat on John Brown's knee. He was a kind and friendly man with children".[58] This account from a Black man who knew Brown from a child's perspective connects visual representations of Brown (including the mythological) to Brown's own connections to Black history, which was not only national but also personal.

In 1935, Epps, Jr. was present at the unveiling of Italian American artist Joseph Pollia's statue of Brown and a Black youth (Figure 2: Pollia—John Brown and Black youth). Commissioned by the John Brown Memorial Association, the statue is located at the John Brown Farm in Lake Placid, New York (now a New York State Historic Site). The image is not one that mimics the kneeling slave of white abolitionist visual rhetorics, but is more complex. Here, an adult Brown holds his arm around a child (presumably a boy) who only reaches his shoulder. Their relation seems de-sentimentalized; neither holds a look of particular pain or joy, but rather they seem in serious conversation, holding some common understanding. Historian Louis A. DeCaro considers this statue alongside Epps, Jr.'s history, writing "Perhaps the figure of the black youth standing next to Brown is, in part, an idealization of Lyman Eppes' life long devotion to John Brown. Whether or not his story was a direct inspiration to Pollia as a sculptor is not clear. But it is not hard to imagine what it must have meant to Lyman, especially in his final years".[59] Historical records conflict, so it is unclear how old Epps, Jr. may have been when he sat on Brown's knee or when he sang at his funeral, but this very real Black man's remembrances of his own childhood may give pause to those who might dismiss the image of Brown kissing the Black baby as mere fabrication. We might instead read this popularly circulated image and the statue at his former home alongside these histories of connecting the man to a history in which Black children figured and in which they may be interested.

Figure 2. Joseph Pollia, John Brown, John Brown's Farm State Historic Site, Lake Placid, New York, 1935. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Pollia#/media/File:John-Brown-Pollia-1935.jpg (accessed on 5 May 2022).

Inasmuch as Graham's framing of Brown is part of what might be called a Black children's history project, it also represents an image of white antiracist possibility. Early in *John Brown's Raid*, he explains, "Some men had always spoken against slavery" (p. 8), citing Brown's father Owen Brown as an example. De-exceptionalizing Brown in this way, Graham counters the naturalization of white racism that excuses this position because

it was common among white people of the time. This naturalization of white racism is all too common in children's literature. In a 2002 letter to the editor of the *Horn Book*, Jonda McNair proposes more children's literature about John Brown. The letter discusses a previously published interview with Russell Freedman in which he gives a familiar apologia of Abraham Lincoln, which pretends the president's racism is excusable because it was not recognizable as such in his historical context. This is, of course, not true. McNair's explanation of racism as identifiable, even in the past, makes for a useful comparison to his contemporary, John Brown, who she describes as "anti-racist by any [historical] standard".[60] Illustrating the dishonesty of a historical account that omits Lincoln's racist history and the responsibilities of a nonfiction author "whose books are read by thousands of children and adults", McNair holds out Brown as an apt counterexample.

In her letter to the *Horn Book*, McNair also calls for attention to white antislavery figures beyond the lauded Lincoln. She writes, "I would like to see Freedman write a book about John Brown or William Lloyd Garrison".[61] After the publication of Brown's two books, later African American children's literature has continued this work. Gwen Everett's *John Brown: One Man Against Slavery* (1993) gives an account of Brown from the perspective of his daughter, Annie, accompanied by illustrations selected from painter Jacob Lawrence's 1941 series commemorating Brown. Patricia McKissack and Fredrick McKissack's *Rebels Against Slavery: American Slave Revolts* (1996) includes John Brown among its array of Black radical antislavery figures. While the author of this essay is not convinced that a book about Brown by Freedman would necessarily be beneficial, McNair's suggestion echoes Graham's investment in telling and retelling Brown's story for child readers. As we consider, African American children's literature is one avenue fulfilling Brown's wishes for his remembrance. Graham's books follow a rich tradition of presenting him to Black children, and this occasion for considering this history calls not for closure but for the continuation of this project in future African American children's literature.

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Notes

1 A connection worth noting is that W. E. B. Du Bois' second wife, Shirley Graham Du Bois, was Lorenz Graham's sister.

2 See Fielder (2021), "Black Madness, White Violence, and John Brown's Legacy," Abolition's Afterlives Forum, American Literary History 33.1: e40–50. Accessed 15 April 2022. https://academic.oup.com/alh/advance-article/doi/10.1093/alh/ajab006/6208115?searchresult=1#233672486.

3 See Quarles ([1972] 2001), Allies for Freedom: Blacks on John Brown, pp. 15–36.

4 See Sinha (2016), *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*, p. 454.

5 Jackson (2019), *Force and Freedom: Black Abolitionists and the Politics of Violence*, p. 107.

6 Douglass (1848), The North Star, p. 1.

7 Du Bois ([1909] 2001). David Roediger, p. xxv.

8 On this incident, see Reynolds (2005), Abolitionist: The Man who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights, p. 33.

9 Quarles ([1972] 2001), p. 15.

10 Anderson (1861), A Voice from Harper's Ferry; with Incidents Prior and Subsequent to Its Capture by Captain Brown and his Men, p. 17.

11 Anderson (1861), A Voice from Harper's Ferry, p. 6.

12 King (2011), Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century American, p. xix.

13 On the mythology surrounding this moment, see Malin (1940), "The John Brown Legend in Pictures. Kissing the Negro Baby," Kansas Historical Quarterlies 9.4, 339–341; and "The Legend of John Brown's Last Kiss" Graphic Arts Collection, Special

Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University, 23 December 2020. Available online:. https://graphicarts.princeton.edu/2020/12/23/the-legend-of-john-browns-last-kiss/ (accessed on 1 April 2022). This incident was, however, contested as early as 1885. For example, one account insisted that no Black people were present at Brown's execution, reporting that "The story that Brown kissed a negro baby at the foot of the gallows is an invention, for there were no colored people in the immediate vicinity of the place of execution." See "Lee's Capture of John Brown," The Sun (9 August 1885), p. 5.

14 Whittier (1959), "Brown of Osawatomie" New York Independent.

15 Edward H. House's account of this story seems to be its original source. See "The Execution" New York Daily Tribune (5 December 1859): 8. The account that appears in the Anglo-African Magazine seems to be a pastiche of sorts rather than a verbatim reprinting, but the two paragraphs that tell this story are identical to those in the New York Daily Tribune. See "The Execution of John Brown," The Anglo-African Magazine 1.12 (December 1859): 398. This was not the only reference to Brown in the Anglo-African Magazine. The above account of Brown's execution appeared alongside an extended, serialized account of "The Outbreak in Virginia" and was followed the next month with an allegory of sorts suggesting that Brown's violence would spark the revolutionary overturn of slavery, by Frances Ellen Watkins (Harper), and a poem by Joseph Murray Wells, "John Brown at Harper's Ferry."

16 The Execution of John Brown.

17 John Brown, letter to Mrs. George L. Stearns, Charlestown, Jefferson Co Va. 29 November 1859, in The Tribunal: Responses to John Brown and the Harper's Ferry Raid, ed. Stauffer and Trodd (2012), p. 70.

18 Whittier (1959), "Brown of Osawatomie."

19 Child (1869), "John Brown and the Colored Child," Freedmen's Book, pp. 241–42.

20 While age is not mentioned in Child's preface, she is clear that the text is meant to be shared among families and communities—read aloud by those who can to those who cannot. Some poems included here, such as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's poem "Thank God for Little Children" have been identified as early African American children's literature. On this point, see Chandler (2017), "'Ye Are Builders': Child Readers in Frances Harper's Vision of an Inclusive Black Poetry," in Who Writes for Black Children? African American Children's Literature before 1900, ed. Katharine Capshaw and Anna Mae Duane, pp. 41–57.

21 For a selection of leftist radical children's literature, see, for example Mickenberg and Nel (2008), Tales for Little Rebels: A Collection of Radical Children's Literature.

22 For a selection of some of white-authored antebellum antislavery literature, see, for example, Deborah DeRosa (2003), Domestic Abolitionism and Juvenile Literature, 1830–1865.

23 Floyd (1905), Floyd's Flowers; Or, Duty and Beauty for Colored Children, Being One Hundred Short Stories Gleaned from the Storehouse of Human Knowledge and Experience, p. 185.

24 See Wright (2016), Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth, p. 151.

25 Letter from Foster (1920), "The Jury," Brownies' Book. vol. 1, No. 5, p. 140.

26 See Letter from Pocahontas Foster to W. E. B. Du Bois, 6 October 1919. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers. University of Massachusetts, Amherst. https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b165-i137.

27 Letter from Foster (1920), "The Jury," p. 140.

28 On this point, see Morris (2010), Reading,'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861–1870, 176–179.

29 Although the Brownies Book generally featured Black authors, this piece's author, Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman, was the niece of Rebecca Buffum Spring. (Wyman was the daughter of the white activist Elizabeth Buffum Chace; Chace's younger sister was Rebecca Buffum Spring.) Spring published an essay on her encounter with Brown in prison, "A visit to John Brown in 1859." See Virtuous Lives: Four Quaker Sisters Remember Family Life, Abolitionism, and Women's Suffrage, ed. Salitan and Perera (1994), pp. 122–23. Another version of this account was published in the New York Tribune. See "A Visit to John Brown By A Lady," New York Tribune, 2 December 1859, p. 6.

30 Wyman (1921), "Girls Together," Part II, Brownies' Book. vol. 2. No. 5, p. 141.

31 Wyman (1921), "Girls Together," p. 141.

32 Wyman (1921), "Girls Together," p. 141.

33 "Jack Thorne", Fulton (1920), "Memorial Day in the South," The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer, ed. Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, p. 212.

34 Dedication, The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer, n.p.

35 Martin (2004), Brown Gold: Milestones of African American Picture Books, 1845–2002, pp. xi–xvii.

36 The Graham's collection of Bible stories told in West African traditions, How God Fix Jonah was first published in 1946. (A new edition was published in 2000.) Graham's Town Series includes South Town (1958), North Town (1965), Whose Town (1969), and Return to South Town (1976).

37 Capshaw (2014), Civil Rights Childhood: Picturing Liberation in African American Photobooks, p. xi

38 See Mickenberg (2005), Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States.

[39] The importance of reprintings of early Black texts in this historical context cannot be understated. For example, on the above mentioned Arno Press series, see Womack (2020)'s "Reprinting the Past/Re-Ordering Black Social Life." American Literary History 32.4, pp. 755–80.

[40] See Graham (1972), John Brown's Raid, 65. A transcript of this interview was published in the New York Herald on 21 October 1859.

[41] Graham (1980): A Cry for Freedom, p. x.

[42] Graham (1980): A Cry for Freedom, p. xi.

[43] See Note 41.

[44] Irby (1985), "MELUS Interview: Lorenz Bell Graham 'Living with Literary History'" MELUS 12.2 (Summer 1985), p. 79.

[45] While African American children's literature about Brown, more generally, deserves more attention, Graham's books have been particularly neglected. For example, Tyler Hoffman prioritizes white-authored children's books and omits Graham's books entirely in "John Brown and Children's Literature" in The Afterlife of John Brown, ed., Taylor and Herrington (2005), pp. 187–202.

[46] On the significance of this last point see, for example, discussions of Ramin Ganeshram and illustrated by Vanessa Brantley-Newton's 2016 picture book A Birthday Cake for George Washington, such as Thomas et al. (2016). Much Ado About A Fine Dessert: The Cultural Politics of Representing Slavery in Children's Literature. *Journal of Children's Literature* 42: 6–17.

[47] Graham (1972), John Brown's Raid: A Picture History of the Attack on Harper's Ferry, Virginia (New York: Firebird Books/Scholastic Book Services), p. 15.

[48] Lorenz Graham, John Brown (1980): A Cry for Freedom, p. 13.

[49] Graham (1980): A Cry for Freedom, p. 14.

[50] Graham, John Brown's Raid (1972), p. 11.

[51] Graham (1980): A Cry for Freedom, p. 31.

[52] Thus de-exceptionalizing Brown, it is notable that Graham (like the majority of his Black biographical predecessors) resists characterizing Brown as insane in this biography, explicitly emphasizing accounts who upheld Brown's sanity, See, for example, John Brown (1980): A Cry for Freedom, p. 153.

[53] Graham (1980): A Cry for Freedom, p. 31.

[54] Meyer (2019), "Five black men raided Harpers Ferry with John Brown. They've been forgotten." The Washington Post. 13 October, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/10/13/five-black-men-raided-harpers-ferry-with-john-brown-theyve-been-forgotten/ accessed on 15 April 2022. Meyer is also the author of Five for Freedom: The African American Soldiers in John Brown's Army (Meyer 2018).

[55] Hughes (1992), "October 16: The Raid," in The Panther & the Lash: Poems of Our Times. 28–29. It is notable also that Hughes was the grandson of Mary Sampson Paterson who (before her marriage to Charles Langston) was the wife of Lewis Sheridon Leary, one of Brown's allies who was killed at Harper's Ferry.

[56] Graham (1980): A Cry for Freedom, p. 161.

[57] Graham (1980): A Cry for Freedom, p. 161. The song is the Methodist hymn written by Charles Wesley, "Blow Ye the Trumpet, Blow."

[58] Lyman Epps, Jr.'s remembrance of Brown is quoted in Mary Lee (1929), "John Brown Rests Amid the Mountains," New York Times, 20 October 1929, pg. SM4. On the Epps family's relationship with Brown see also Reynolds, John Brown, Abolitionist, p. 127.

[59] See DeCaro (2016), "Lyman Eppes Jr.'s Christmas Memory of John Brown," John Brown Today: A Biographer's Blog, Sunday, 25 December 2016. https://abolitionist-john-brown.blogspot.com/2016/12/lyman-eppes-jrs-christmas-memory.html accessed 10 May 2022.

[60] Jonda McNair, Letter to the Editor, Horn Book (November/December 2002), p. 131.

[61] McNair, Letter to the Editor.

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Article

Strong Enough to Fight: Harriet Tubman vs. The Myth of the Lost Cause

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Abstract: Black creators who tell Harriet Tubman's story engage in an ongoing rhetorical battle over historical memory with regard to slavery and the Civil War. This essay examines the challenges Tubman's story poses to a Lost Cause narrative that took root in the nineteenth-century and manifests in the work of celebrated children's author Robert Lawson. Reading Ann Petry's YA biography *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad* (1955), Jacob Lawrence's picture book *Harriet and the Promised Land* (1968), and Kasi Lemmons' film *Harriet* (2019) together, and within the context of Lawson's award-winning *They Were Strong and Good* (1940) and his historical primer *Watchwords of Liberty: A Pageantry of American Quotations* (1943) offers an opportunity to assess the rhetorical firepower of creative work about a historical figure who continues to fascinate people of all ages. Such reading also underscores the extent to which the apartheid in and of children's literature limits the imaginations of critics, thereby hindering efforts to promote social justice.

Keywords: white supremacy; Lost Cause narratives; Robert Lawson; Harriet Tubman; children's literature

> *My favorite quote of [Tubman's] is, 'I prayed to God to make me strong enough to fight.' That's super interesting for the time we live in—there's so much that we have to pray to be strong enough to fight for*.—Kasi Lemmons (Sims 2019).

1. Introduction: Stories as Sites of Resistance

As a subject of interest and inquiry, Harriet Tubman has garnered attention from a wide range of constituencies, from a US Treasury Secretary proposing to put her picture on the USD 20 bill to scholars in various academic disciplines, museum curators, educators, and creative artists. In "Between History and Fantasy: Harriet Tubman in the Artistic and Popular Imaginary", Janell Hobson focuses on the latter, exploring interest in Tubman from Aaron Douglas' and Jacob Lawrence's visual art in the 1930s and 1940s to the contemporary *Black Moses Barbie* YouTube videos of Pierre Bennu. While finding the historical figure in some surprising places, Hobson argues that "[b]ecause of Tubman's frequent appearances in juvenile literature, we should revisit children's stories as sites of resistance, or what [Robin D. G.] Kelley calls the 'black radical imagination'"; Hobson cites Faith Ringgold's *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* as an example of interweaving history and fantasy in a children's picture book and thus "radicaliz[ing] youth by liberating their imaginations" (Hobson 2014, p. 63). A current example of storytelling with similar liberating potential is *Harriet Tubman: Straight Up Outta' The Underground*, an interactive virtual production of the Cincinnati Children's Theater, available via Broadway on Demand for USD 15. For an additional fee, viewers can actively participate in the story by choosing one plotline over another, although the ending remains the same for everyone. Marketed to school children in grades 3–8, *Straight Up* invites them to "[b]ring the past to the present and change the future"[1]. Like the fictional siblings in Ringgold's picture book, the audience gets a history lesson that functions as a call to action. This type of storytelling builds, in innovative ways, on Augusta E. Bird's 1921 biographical sketch of Tubman that appeared in *The Brownies' Book*, a children's magazine edited by W.E.B. Du Bois and Jesse Fauset. A

direct line can be drawn from the editors' focus on Black notables as sources of pride and inspiration at the dawn of the Harlem Renaissance to *Straight Up* and more broadly focused contemporary texts such as Kwame Alexander and Kadir Nelson's *The Undefeated* (2019), a picture book that honors dozens of Black cultural figures and that made Nelson only the fourth Black illustrator to win the prestigious Caldecott Medal.[2] Tubman's story has never, however, been strictly for children. Nor has it served only to instill Black pride and stir the Black imagination, even as both aims continue to be necessary and significant outcomes for artistic projects.

The fact that stories about the most famous formerly enslaved conductor on the Underground Railroad keep getting (re)told suggests the strength and resiliency of exactly what her story challenges—White supremacy. In her meticulously researched biography, *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, an American Hero*, Kate Clifford Larson documents how, beginning in 1869 with Sarah Bradford's *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman*, the freedom fighter's story has been written and rewritten to suit the historical moment and, in the spirit of "reconciliation and reunification", robbed of its power to expose the Lost Cause as White fantasy (Larson 2003, p. 265). In other words, Harriet has been used to tell a story of US exceptionalism, not racist exploitation. Indeed, while Black-authored children's books about Tubman counter the racist imagery and revisionist history in dominant or "master" narratives, they do so largely by satisfying White expectations for what constitutes an American hero, resulting in stories that focus largely on character, not context.[3] This essay foregrounds that context by putting three Black-authored Tubman stories—a Young Adult (YA) biography, a picture book, and a film—in literary contestation with the Lost Cause narratives of a celebrated children's author. In his award-winning *They Were Strong and Good* (1940) and his historical primer *Watchwords of Liberty: A Pageant of American Quotations* (1943), Robert Lawson presents a narrative of US history and the Civil War that erases or distorts the role slavery played in that history while using White and Black characters to (re)define America(ns) as White. As sites of *White* resistance, published during WWII and reprinted in an era of expanding opportunities for Black Americans,[4] Lawson's texts foster radicalization of a profoundly dangerous sort: they invite and endorse White supremacist thinking. Foregrounding Lawson's Lost Cause narratives, republished as recently as 2006, makes visible the rhetorical battlefield upon which Black-authored stories about Tubman wage war against White supremacy.

While the myth of the Lost Cause circulates widely, manifesting in a variety of forms, it becomes more apparent, as well as more potent, during moments of heightened White racial anxiety. The Tubman stories discussed in this essay appeared during two such moments: the classic phase of the civil rights movement and the Trump/MAGA era. In 1955, Ann Petry, better known for her adult fiction, published *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad*, reprinted several times and as recently as 2018. In 1968, Jacob Lawrence, a distinguished figure in the art world, created *Harriet Tubman and the Promised Land*. In true "Brownies" fashion, Lawrence used his artistic talent to express pride in his rich Black heritage, just as he had done in 1940, with thirty-one narrative panels comprising his *Harriet Tubman* series. Both literary texts—Petry's historical biography and Lawrence's picture book—demarcate the place many people will form their first, and perhaps only, impressions of Tubman—in the pages of books marketed to young readers. Kasi Lemmons puts her 2019 film *Harriet* in conversation with representations of Tubman in children's literature. Arguing that such books "defanged [Tubman], declawed her, to make her more palatable", the filmmaker implicitly identifies (as well as implicates) a White audience for stories about Tubman, noting that "there's something quite terrifying about the image of a black woman with a rifle" (Ito 2019). At the same time, Lemmons makes clear her desire to reach an intergenerational and presumably multicultural audience: "I really wanted to create a film that a sophisticated 10-year-old could see with his grandmother, which isn't easy for a film that takes place during slavery" (Obenson 2019). This diverse group is perhaps similar to those who read Petry's biography or Lawrence's picture book during the civil rights era.

Reading Petry, Lawrence, and Lemmons together, and within the context of Lawson's Lost Cause narratives offers an opportunity to assess the rhetorical firepower of creative work about a historical figure who continues to fascinate people of all ages. More importantly, putting Tubman in literary contestation with Lawson and the myth of the Lost Cause underscores not only the significance of children's literature as a field of study, but also the extent to which apartheid within and of children's literature[5] limits the imaginations of critics, thereby hindering efforts to promote social justice.

2. Robert Lawson's Lost Cause Narratives

Black creators who tell Tubman's story engage in an on-going rhetorical battle over historical memory with regard to slavery and the Civil War. In *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, David W. Blight describes this battlefield by foregrounding debates, carried on by politicians and in the pages of newspapers, about the terms of reunification following Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox in 1865. What would be the consequences of the Confederacy's defeat? Blight argues that to the extent reunion occurred, it did so by denying the full emancipation of millions of formerly enslaved Black people. Denying Black people citizenship, and thereby (re)defining American identity as White, required constant vigilance, an all-hands-on-deck approach to creating, disseminating, and recycling a narrative about the Civil War that erased or distorted the role slavery played in a bloody conflict that left hundreds of thousands of Americans dead. In *Slavery in American Children's Literature, 1790–2010*, Paula T. Connolly chronicles, in spectacular fashion, the role books for children have played in this ideological battle, covering an impressive array of texts and authors and noting the tension between (and within) dominant White-authored narratives and resistant Black-authored ones. The historical sweep of her study demonstrates the importance of children's literature to the debate over race and national identity, a significance evident in our own era via attempts to whitewash the story of Rosa Parks in social studies textbooks; ban the showing of documentaries about Ruby Bridges, the six-year-old who, in 1960, faced a White mob when she integrated an elementary school in New Orleans; defund libraries that refuse to comply with demands to remove books deemed dangerous or divisive; and establish a 1776 Commission to promote "patriotic education".

Robert Lawson's work represents a literary tradition encompassing a wide variety of texts that rewrite the narrative of the Civil War by casting White Southerners as freedom-loving patriots who stood tall against tyranny. The type of patriotism these texts espouse equates *patriot* with *White nationalist*. The Black pride Lawrence artfully expresses in both his *Harriet Tubman* series and *Harriet and the Promised Land* contrasts sharply with the White pride depicted in Lawson's *They Were Strong and Good*, a picture book awarded the Caldecott Medal in 1941 and reprinted by Viking Press sixteen times between 1940 and 2006. Lawson is the only author recognized with both a Caldecott and a Newbery Medal,[6] such recognition securing an exalted place for him in US children's literary history. Every October, a festival is held in Lawson's honor at the Connecticut home that bears the name of his Newbery-winning *Rabbit Hill*. In 2009, Connie Rockman, the program coordinator for the event, responded to a blog post in which Peter Sieruta, a writer and reviewer for *Horn Book Magazine*, mused about whether Lawson's home still existed: "Yes, Peter, there really is a Rabbit Hill" (Sieruta 2009). In a rare pulling back of the curtain to reveal how racism thrives in darkness, Rockman then compared what she called the "racially insensitive comments" recently expunged from *Rabbit Hill*, to those in Lawson's other award-winning book: "The racist comments and—even worse—images are most prevalent in his Caldecott winner, a book we tend to downplay in promoting his legacy" (Sieruta 2009). Lawson followed *They Were Strong and Good* with *Watchwords of Liberty: A Pageant of American Quotations*, published in 1943, reprinted nine times by Little, Brown, and distributed by Scholastic Book Services in 1957 and 1965. Resurrected during key moments of the civil rights movement, conspicuously absent from many lists of Lawson's published works, *Watchwords* resonates strongly with the White nationalist fervor in our

own era. Whether Lawson continues to be widely read or not, the racism underlying his Lost Cause narratives, as well as the particular insidious brand of patriotism they promote, remain a prominent part of both his and our cultural legacy, presenting the opportunity to contextualize Black-authored stories about Tubman in a way that draws attention to children's literature, as Connolly's book-length study does, as a significant arena for the perpetuation *of* as well as challenges *to* White supremacy.

Watchwords of Liberty covers more than three hundred years, from the arrival of the Mayflower to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Lawson begins by quoting George Washington, encouraging his young readers to "erect a standard to which the wise and honest may repair" (Lawson 1965). This standard is defined almost entirely by White men: of the fifty-seven quotes Lawson uses to demonstrate US devotion to "independence and freedom of thought and action", only one comes from an African American, and none comes from a woman. Lawson considers Booker T. Washington noteworthy for the principle upon which he built Tuskegee Institute, quoting a line from the Black notable's 1895 Atlanta Exposition Address, included in his autobiography *Up from Slavery*: "No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem" (Lawson 1965, p. 113). A controversial figure in African American history, Washington is remembered primarily, and perhaps unfairly, by the accommodationist stance he advocated, most (in)famously in another line of his Atlanta speech: "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."[7] Washington's position on segregation is perfectly in line with *Plessy* vs. *Ferguson*, the Supreme Court ruling, made the following year (1896), that established the doctrine of "separate-but-equal", thereby legalizing Jim Crow. His position is also in line with the Southern Manifesto, or Declaration of Constitutional Principles, put forth sixty years later, in 1956, by ninety-six members of Congress who vehemently opposed *Brown* vs. *Board of Education*, the 1954 Supreme Court decision declaring segregation in public schools unconstitutional. Citing "chaos and confusion" caused by the ruling, Southern governors in Arkansas and Virginia chose to close schools rather than comply with a federal order to integrate.

Lawson essentially uses the founder of an industrial school for Black people to legitimize an insidious anti-democratic understanding of liberty. In the pencil drawing accompanying this vignette, Lawson presents Washington in a three-piece suit and bow tie, holding a book to his chest. Behind him, a Black man wearing overalls holds a plow and walks behind a horse. The background for both men is an ornate building with pillars and a dome, set in a landscape suggesting neglect or ruin, presumably at Tuskegee. In her fascinating (and chilling) cultural history, *White Supremacy in Children's Literature: Characterizations of African Americans, 1830–1900*, Donnarae MacCann provides relevant context for this era: "After the armed conflict, the South reinvested a cheap labor system by means of ex-slave contract labor, convict leases, crop liens, indenture contracts, and obsolete forms of industrial education in place of education opportunity." MacCann wryly points out that the North "did not intervene in this process" (MacCann 1998, p. 235), nor, as Lawson's illustration implies, did Black folks living and working in the South. After all, the leading Black spokesman at the dawn of the so-called Progressive era seems, at best, not to mind the marginalization of Black people and, at worst, believes it is necessary and proper. The role Washington plays in Lawson's "pageant" is to express a preference for maintaining order by accepting second-class citizenship over liberty. Put another way, at a time when Du Bois, a sociologist and contemporary of Washington's, identified the "color line" as the problem of the twentieth-century, Lawson concocts a version of American history that does not minimize this problem so much as deny that any such problem exists.

Watchwords of Liberty presents an unabashed White nationalist version of US history that, if understood as fact, makes any claim of racial discrimination or inequality an absurd, unpatriotic attempt to divide the nation based on color. It is precisely the type of revisionist history promoted by groups such as the 1776 Commission. Lawson begins his story of the Civil War with "Cotton is King", a quote from a speech given in March 1858 by US

Senator James Henry Hammond. He then exploits the personification of cotton in a way that denies the reality of race and racism: "His realm was broad and rich; through many of the Southern states all people served him. From wealthy planter to humble slave, merchant, blacksmith, lawyer, carpenter—even the lean mule, all served King Cotton and depended upon his bounty for their very existence" (Lawson 1965, p. 70). Having set up an us-and-him, Lawson extends the King's reach to the North as well as East, beyond the borders of the US: "In the factory towns of New England and old England across the sea, cotton-mill owners waxed fat and prosperous, built themselves monstrous, ugly mansions; while in the mills the white slaves of King Cotton coughed their miserable lives away in the lint-filled gloom" (Lawson 1965, pp. 70–71). Challenging Hammond in this story is Abraham Lincoln, who, together with people "all over the country", realized "that slavery, the cheap labor on which King Cotton's throne uneasily rested, was a wrong thing; that this nation could not exist half slave and half free" (Lawson 1965, p. 72). By redefining slavery as "cheap labor", Lawson strikes a populist note, acknowledging "slavery" as economic exploitation while simultaneously evading the question of Black freedom. Such evasion is a crucial component of the Lost Cause narrative.

While equating the "humble slave" in the South with the "white slaves" of the North, Lawson evokes nostalgia for the pre-Civil War South via popular (and stereotypical) images of Black people in service to Whites. One of only three illustrations in *Watchwords* that feature Black people, the drawing that accompanies "Cotton is King", depicts the front lawn of a well-tended plantation house. In the shade of a large oak tree stands a White couple, exquisitely dressed, and their male child, who wields a sword. Behind the child is a Mammy figure, wearing an apron and kerchief. While the White adults look lovingly at the boy, who presumably will grow up to slay dragons and rule the kingdom, the Black woman appears with exaggerated minstrel-inspired features and a blank expression. Pictured with a doll dangling from her right hand, she is both the young boy's caretaker and play-thing. In the foreground, five Black figures march in formation, two with bags of cotton on their heads and the others carrying hoes. Black people in Lawson's history appear as props, part of the landscape but never the focus of the narrative. These "humble slaves", like their Northern (and European) counterparts, are in service to and dependent upon the King. The collective memory Lawson constructs completely erases the fact that White people bought and sold Black people as commodities, often without regard to family ties, that the quality of life of enslaved Black men, women, and children was wholly dependent on the economic fortunes and whims of their White owners, and that these owners, or the overseers they employed, wielded whips to enforce submission and to satisfy their (psychosexual) desires to dominate and subjugate. In other words, Lawson's revisionist history denies slavery as an economic system of racist exploitation put in place and maintained by a White majority who value profits and what W.E.B. DuBois called "the wages of Whiteness" more than the idea of freedom and justice for all.

In *Watchwords of Liberty*, Lawson advances and fortifies the myth of the Lost Cause, and by keeping his White nationalist primer in print, the White-dominated publishing industry helped that myth take root and spread. The literary–critical establishment assisted in this process by turning a blind eye to Lawson's racism, declaring "freedom, liberty, the courage to fight for independence—these are the virtues celebrated in Robert Lawson's books" (Schmidt 1997, p. 2). In his Foreword to the 1957 edition of *Watchwords*, written two months after the Montgomery Bus Boycott successfully challenged segregation in Alabama and put the national spotlight on a young charismatic preacher named Martin Luther King, Jr., Lawson (re)presents his carefully curated selection of quotations that he insists "live[s] in the hearts of most Americans" (Lawson 1965). The "one fact" that "stands out strikingly" for Lawson is that "nowhere in the words of our most honored fighting men does one find a trace of hate or venom. There is determination, but behind it lies sorrow and regret"; hence, Lawson encourages his readers to hold Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee in equal esteem—the former a "ruthless bulldog" who in victory called for peace; the latter, a "magnificent general" who in defeat "counseled his ruined and embittered people to

'bury contention with the war'" (Lawson 1965). Lawson's history gives readers no reason to think that the "contention" requiring burial had anything to do with slavery. While Black people obviously existed, they were victims along with practically everyone else. As in the Revolutionary War, the problem facing American patriots in 1861 was a "King" whom "all people served" and whose insatiable greed made nearly everyone's life—aside from cotton mill owners—a misery (even wealthy Southern planters were just one storm away from ruin, thanks to the King's insatiable appetite for cotton). While injecting a great deal of ambiguity over what Grant and Lee's armies actually fought about, Lawson expresses certainty over how the battle ended: "The Cotton Kingdom fell in civil war, in flame and blood and the roar of combat. It fell in bitterness, destruction and desolation, bringing mourning to almost every home in the land" (Lawson 1965, p. 72). Readers are thus encouraged to mourn this loss as if no one is actually to blame, and in this way, Lawson provides one of the key "ingredients" of the Lost Cause, which Blight, in his study of the Civil War in American memory, describes as "people forming a collective identity as victims and survivors" (Blight 2001, p. 38).[8] A master of misdirection, Lawson perpetuates White supremacy by denying any such thing as White power manifesting as anti-Black racism. White Southerners took up arms and fought valiantly because that is what men do: just like Daniel Boone, Lawson tells us in the Foreword, each man must "kill his bear" (Lawson 1965).

The racist ideology of *Watchwords* is matched by the racist imagery of Lawson's award-winning *They Were Strong and Good*, imagery which the keepers of his legacy "downplay". *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* characterizes the illustrations in Lawson's pictorial family history as "racially insensitive", which is like calling the characterization of Mammy and Prissy in *Gone With the Wind*, David Selznick's homage to the Lost Cause and winner of the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1940, *perhaps* problematic, depending on one's point of view. In her essay suggesting how teachers can use eight Caldecott award winners to meet Common Core standards, Kathleen T. Horning calls the illustrations of Native Americans and African Americans in *They Were Strong and Good* "extremely dated", a fact she considers "unfortunate", presumably because of Lawson's remarkable skills as an artist (Horning 2012, p. 12). But at least Horning read the book before ultimately endorsing it. Writing nearly four decades before Horning, Judith Sloan Hoberman wonders whether librarians recommend Lawson's Caldecott winner based solely on previous recommendations. After calling attention to what the National Council of Teachers of English had to say about the book in 1973—"Lawson's straightforward, irrepressibly humorous and sometimes touching stories and his vigorous pictures of our ancestors should, as the artist hoped, make us 'proud of the country that they helped to build'"—Hoberman concludes that "the book's merits cannot compensate for the pain inflicted by passages that are blatantly racist" (Hoberman 1976, p. 469). Published in the *Harvard Educational Review*, Hoberman's sober assessment of Lawson's work has not, unfortunately, carried the day. To confront racism is to resist seemingly insurmountable market forces. For example, consumers searching for award-winning children's books will find the following summary on the Penguin Random House website:

> Awarded the Caldecott Medal in 1941, *They Were Strong and Good* is a classic book that follows the path of one family's journey through American history. Robert Lawson introduces us to his forefathers and with them we brave Caribbean storms, travel to the wharf markets of New York, and fight in the Civil War. Amidst these adventures Lawson's grandparents meet, marry, and raise a family, and later his parents follow the same cycle of life. But this book is more than just the story of one family, it's a social history of our country. It reminds us to be proud of our ancestors—who they were, what they did, and the effect that they had on the nation we live in today.[9]

In a comment posted on Peter Sieruta's blog, "MC" describes purchasing Lawson's picture book based on this type of marketing. Identifying as someone who works at a domestic violence shelter, MC hoped to use the book to work with children, many of whom identify

as African American, on "building a family history they could be proud of". But after reading *They Were Strong and Good*, MC could not "figure out how it will work in this context". Children, she explained, "are very perceptive and will pick up [sic] on the subtle racism", adding, "I don't think I can use it" (Sieruta 2009). While downplaying the racism in Lawson's legacy obviously helps sell books, refusing to confront that racism makes us complicit in a literary culture that perpetuates White supremacy, limiting the imaginations of *all* readers.

The nostalgia in (and for) *They Were Strong and Good* is rooted in and seeks to perpetuate a collective false memory. A critical component of this false narrative is the idea of fighting for a righteous cause, without defining it and without confronting the question of Black freedom. Asserting his authority not only over his own personal story, but also the story of the country, Lawson admits in his Foreword that his version may not be entirely accurate, but that accuracy "does not really matter":

> This is the story of my mother and my father and of their fathers and mothers.
>
> Most of it I heard as a little boy, so there may be many mistakes; perhaps I have forgotten or mixed up some of the events and people. But that does not really matter, for this is not alone the story of my parents and grandparents, it is the story of the parents and grandparents of most of us who call ourselves Americans.
>
> None of them were great or famous, but they were strong and good. They worked hard and had many children. They all helped to make the United States the great nation that it now is.
>
> Let us be proud of them and guard well the heritage they have left us. (Lawson 1940)

The heritage Lawson urges his young readers to "guard well" is the same way of life Ashley Wilkes and Rhett Butler defend, with their lives and livelihoods, lest it be "gone with the wind". In this fictional world, created by interweaving history and (White) fantasy, Black people not only serve the interests of White people, they prefer and are content to do so. Both the racist imagery and White nationalist ideology in Lawson's picture book should be understood in the context of a tradition of Lost Cause literature that stretches back to the Civil War era and includes General Grant's bestselling *Personal Memoirs*,[10] history and social studies textbooks that erase or minimize slavery as the cause of the Civil War, travel literature that mythologizes the South, and songs such as "Dixie" and "The Bonnie Blue Flag"[11]. The most egregious example is D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, a virulent racist film that swelled the ranks of the Ku Klux Klan. Screened at the White House, the 1915 homage to the Lost Cause turns terrorists into patriots by celebrating, promoting, and normalizing White nationalism. Over a century later, the inheritors of this tradition marched in Charlottesville, Virginia, to protest the removal of a statue to Robert E. Lee. In the current era, the tradition of the Lost Cause manifests in calls to "take our country back", on bumper stickers, hats, and T-shirts declaring "heritage not hate", and in speeches by political leaders such as Nikki Haley, the former Governor of South Carolina, who proclaimed, without apology, that for many people, the Confederate flag symbolizes service, sacrifice, and heritage.

Through text and image, Lawson positions the White reader of *They Were Strong and Good* to identify with his White ancestral pride, ingenuity, and above all, fighting spirit. Reviewing the book for *The New York Times*, A. T. Eaton underscored its educational value: "Of all the books designed to teach boys and girls the meaning of democracy and to encourage patriotism that are being hurried to press today, this one is likely to make the deepest impression on children" (Schmidt 1997, p. 18). One wonders whether Eaton considered the impression children of color would get from Lawson's picture book or if "children" always meant White children. Lawson introduces his maternal grandfather as a Scottish-born sea captain who braves violent storms as he sails from New York to the Caribbean islands for "monkeys and parrots, sugar cane and sometimes Panama hats" (Lawson 1940). The illustration accompanying this introduction depicts a young Black

boy, presumably the sea captain's slave, wearing only tattered shorts, no shirt or shoes, carrying a monkey and balancing another on his head. Whether his grandfather engaged in the slave trade is unclear, although the drawing suggests he traded the commodities—timber, tobacco, rum, and sugar—typically exchanged for Black people in chains. Lawson introduces his paternal grandfather as an Englishman living in Alabama who "was always fighting something". After successfully fighting the Indians, he became a preacher so that he could "fight the Powers of Evil" (Lawson 1940). In the corner of the drawing that accompanies this statement, a Black boy looks up at the preacher mounted on his horse, as if standing in the White man's shadow. In two pages, Lawson thus associates both Indigenous people and Black people with evil, while defining America and American identity as White-only. The introduction of Lawson's father coincides with the beginning of the Civil War. In the illustration marking this moment, everyone is distraught that the grandfather "quit fighting Satan and went off to fight the Yankees instead" (Lawson 1940). Only twelve at the time, Lawson's father is pictured crying, with his face turned away. The twelve-year-old's slave, and hunting companion is also crying, with his head down and his hand covering his face. In the foreground, standing on the porch is a distraught Mammy figure wearing an apron, her hands covering her face as well. Even one of the dogs has his head bowed. Lawson depicts the grandfather standing tall in his uniform, carrying a rifle, with a canteen hanging from his belt, engraved with the letters CSA—Confederate States of America. In his book-length study of Lawson, Gary Schmidt emphasizes "the pain of separation" in this scene, one of many illustrations that, for him, conveys the "moral impetus" of the nation (Schmidt 1997, p. 17). How this illustration (and others) reveals the *immorality* of a nation seems not to concern Schmidt.

Lawson links his Southern male ancestors—his evangelizing grandfather and his father—with the CSA canteen and the image of a White man on a horse. Lawson uses this iconic image (which occurs in *Watchwords* and replicates the statues of Robert E. Lee erected throughout the South, many in the early years of the twentieth-century) to advance the cult of the fallen soldier, another crucial trope of the Lost Cause narrative. After the grandfather leaves to fight the Yankees, Lawson's father, despite his young age, "walked to where the war was" and joined the army: "He was pretty small, so they made him guidon bearer in the artillery and gave him a mule to ride" (Lawson 1940). When the mule is gone, the boy stands as straight as before, holding the flag, now tattered: "There had been four guns in the battery at first, but later there were only three, then two, and finally there was only one. But my father still stood up where the Captain told him to, very stiff and holding his flag very straight. He still felt proud, even though there was only one gun to line up beside him" (Lawson 1940). After "a big battle over Atlanta", when only a bit of the flag remains, the boy tucks it under his shirt for "a souvenir" and retreats, using the stick as a crutch. Prominent in the drawings, prior to the defeat in Atlanta, is the adolescent's canteen, engraved with the letters CSA. Participating in the war, aligning himself with the Confederate cause, becomes the boy's initiation into (Southern) (White) manhood, and despite a devastating loss, the war has given him, as well as his heirs, something of which to be forever proud: "I am proud of my mother and my father and of their mothers and fathers. And I am proud of the country that they helped to build" (Lawson 1940). While Lawson does not claim that his ancestors were the *only* ones who built America, he makes clear that his family, and everyone like them, are the true Americans—patriots upholding that standard to which, as Lawson tells us in *Watchwords* "the wise and honest may repair". In this way, the award-winning author uses his picture book not just to promote values such as service and sacrifice, but to engage in the insidious business of White nation-building.

3. Writing Harriet into History

What makes the stories Ann Petry, Jacob Lawrence, and Kasi Lemmons tell about Harriet Tubman noteworthy, in addition to bridging the artificial divide between a child and adult audience, is that each occupies the rhetorical battleground upon which Robert Lawson raises the flag for the Lost Cause and conflates patriotism with White nationalism.

In doing so, they use Tubman's legacy to fight against White supremacy and *for* a collective public memory that foregrounds the contradictory nature of our history as well as the consequences for choosing power over justice, order over liberty.

A formidable adversary to the myth of the Lost Cause, Petry's *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad* challenges the paternalistic view that White men not only get to write and interpret history, but also to represent it. Drawing from existing historical research and utilizing her skills as a novelist to create a compelling narrative, Petry writes Tubman into history by chronicling the freedom fighter's life within the sociopolitical context of a nation at war with itself over the question of freedom. A hybrid text that defies categorization, either by genre or readership, *Harriet Tubman* contains twenty-two chapters, beginning with "The Quarter" and Harriet's birth in 1820, and ending with "The Last Years" and the text inscribed on the bronze tablet erected in her honor during a mass meeting (attended by Booker T. Washington) in Auburn, New York, in 1914. All but two of the chapters end with an italicized section that contextualizes Harriet's life story within a much larger national drama. These sections chronicle important events in the timeline of abolitionist activity leading up to the Civil War, including references to William Lloyd Garrison, Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, John Brown, and Frederick Douglass (among others) as well as the Fugitive Slave Act, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the Kansas–Nebraska Act, and the Dred Scott decision. Petry strengthens the documentary nature of her text by including primary source material, such as letters written by Thomas Garrett and excerpts from William Still's journals. Petry imagines conversations between Harriet's parents and among the enslaved community that further instruct her readers, providing insight into the Middle Passage, White psychology, and Black resistance strategies. A narrative of US history spanning nearly one hundred years, with a focus on how one woman's life exemplifies not only the nature and cost of freedom, but the lengths to which people will go to secure (or deny) it, Petry's text is valuable not because it exposes histories such as Lawson's *Watchwords of Liberty* as incomplete or impartial, but because it shows them to be ideologically driven and purposefully inaccurate.

Whereas Lost Cause narratives, via denial and deflection, impede progress toward the democratic idea(l) of liberty and justice for all, *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad* forces a confrontation with what the Southern Poverty Law Center calls "hard history". Petry's work appeared during a period of heightened White racial anxiety—the year after *Brown* vs. *Board*. In *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*, Toni Morrison (another Black writer better known for her adult fiction) commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of this landmark decision, taking young readers on a journey "through a time in American life when there was as much hate as there was love; as much anger as there was hope, as many heroes as cowards" (Morrison 2004). The archival photographs that help tell the story in *Remember* put a spotlight on White hate, anger, and fear: a group of White women scream at Black children entering a previously all-White school, a White man throws water in the face of a young Black man protesting outside a segregated lunch counter, a White boy wearing a Klu Klux Klan robe watches, along with his little sister, a cross burning. Fostering the sense of a *shared* "hard history", Morrison's and Petry's creative nonfiction acknowledges that what some Americans have fought for is the *denial* of liberty and justice for all. Indeed, the White boy in the KKK costume is being taught that such denial is a righteous cause. The institution of slavery is the single most heinous example of the anti-democratic and immoral impetus of a majority White nation. Petry cites the inadequate and inaccurate coverage of slavery in textbooks as her reason for writing *Harriet Tubman*. In his Foreword to the 2018 edition, Jason Reynolds, the former National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, recounts the lack of attention paid to slavery in his own schooling. Although Reynolds grew up in a different era than Petry, the context within which he lives is eerily similar to hers. The White mob that threatened nine Black teenagers integrating Little Rock's Central High School in 1957 has its twenty-first-century equivalents in White militia groups and Stop-the-Steal "patriots" who stormed the US Capitol, assaulted police officers, erected a gallows, and proudly waved Confederate flags on 6 January 2021.

Published in 1968, Jacob Lawrence's *Harriet Tubman and the Promised Land* is an outlier in the world of picture books that tell Tubman's story. In *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature*, Rudine Sims Bishop honors Lawrence's work as a "precursor of the modern African American picture storybook", connecting it to a tradition "of celebrating the historical achievements of African American heroes and 'sheroes'" dating back at least to Du Bois' *The Brownies Book* (Bishop 2007, p. 117).[12] Bishop notes, however, that Lawrence's expressionism "disturbed" a late 1960s Black audience that desired "realistic and appealing images of Black people in books for children" (Bishop 2007, p. 117). Lawrence himself reports receiving angry letters, a New England librarian chastising him for making Tubman look "grotesque and ugly". Lawrence's tart reply suggests more than impatience with this view: "Isn't it sad that the oppressed often find themselves grotesque and ugly and find the oppressor refined and beautiful?" (Wheat 1991, p. 41). Both the personal and political nature of Black representation is clearly evident in this exchange. Devoting four chapters (a third of her study) to picture storybooks, Bishop considers this genre crucial to combatting the racist images of Black people pervading not just children's literature but US popular culture: "Picture books, with their combination of verbal and visual art, would seem to be an obvious choice of weapon for Black writers and artists engaged in a battle over what kind of images of Black people are presented to children" (Bishop 2007, p. 115). In this context, the librarian who wrote to Lawrence suggests that the distinguished artist is doing the Devil's work. Lawrence's reply puts the Devil in the eye of the beholder who has internalized racism by adopting White standards of beauty.

Contemporary readers of *Harriet Tubman and the Promised Land* would benefit from learning about Lawrence's artistic influences and development, particularly his lifelong interest in Tubman as an American hero. In his Foreword to the 1993 edition, Lawrence recalls learning about "the drama and the exploits of Harriet" at a very young age (Lawrence 1993). His fascination with Tubman was not, however, confined to childhood. In 1940, after completing projects honoring Toussaint Louverture and then Frederick Douglass, Lawrence completed his *Harriet Tubman* series. In thirty-nine narrative panels, the artist tells the freedom fighter's story within the context of political debates about slavery and freedom, planting a flag in the rhetorical battlefield that would determine the fate of four million enslaved Black people. In narrative panel #1, the artist dispels the notion that enslaved Blacks were content to serve by choosing a quote from Henry Ward Beecher: "With sweat and toil and ignorance he consumes his life, to pour the earnings into channels from which he does not drink" (Wheat 1991, p. 81). Lawrence follows Beecher's anti-slavery argument with the pro-slavery position articulated by Henry Clay:

> I am no friend of slavery, but I prefer the liberty of my own country to that of another people, and the liberty of my own race to that of another race. The liberty of the descendants of Africa in the United States is incompatible with the safety and liberty of the European descendants. Their slavery forms an exception (resulting from a stern and inexorable necessity) to the general liberty in the United States. (Wheat 1991, p. 82)

The painting accompanying Clay's rationalization for denying liberty to Black people—that such liberty will threaten the safety of White people—depicts a brown figure hanging, arms outstretched suggesting crucifixion, three pale yellow gashes across his chest. Lawrence follows his panel visualizing the deadly consequences of Clay's preference for White liberty with a quote from Abraham Lincoln: "A house divided against itself cannot stand [. . .] It will become all one thing or the other" (Wheat 1991, p. 83). Lawrence thus sets the stage for the entrance of his heroine, who appears in panel #4 as one of four nearly identical children doing cartwheels on a sunny day. Harriet the child reappears twenty-eight years later in Lawrence's picture storybook, first as a newborn with adoring parents and then as a young child holding a White infant, sitting on the steps of a house with white pillars, in the shade of a blossoming cottonwood tree. The White infant is dressed in an ornate White gown made of cotton. Both image and text suggest that although still a child herself, Harriet has

been robbed of her childhood, slavery putting her in a state of perpetual service: "Harriet, clean;/Harriet, sweep./Harriet, rock/The child to sleep" (Lawrence 1993).

Although *Harriet and the Promised Land* is devoid of the political debate Lawrence foregrounds in his *Harriet Tubman* series, when read within the context of Lawson's Lost Cause narratives, both of Lawrence's Tubman stories shatter the myth of White victims and survivors as well as the fiction that slavery had nothing to do with the Civil War. The most striking feature of Lawrence's picture storybook is that the text, written as a poem, does not avoid harsh truths about slavery: "Harriet, Harriet/Born a slave,/Work for your master/From your cradle/To your grave" (Lawrence 1993). Lawrence brings this scene to life by featuring both children and adults engaging in different kinds of labor—preparing food, doing laundry, carrying water, splitting wood, hauling planks, sacks, and farming tools. Lawrence does not minimize the danger of escape, either: "Some were afraid,/But none turned back,/For close at their heels/Howled the bloodhound pack" (Lawrence 1993). The bloodhound pack returns when the runaways must march through snow, presumably having reached the north: "Then the north wind howled/Like a bloodhound pack;/But none were afraid,/And none turned back" (Lawrence 1993). When read as civil rights literature, Lawrence's picture storybook connects the Black children in Birmingham facing dogs and firehoses in Kelly Ingraham Park and the marchers crossing the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma with enslaved Black people who risked everything for freedom: "They marched through the cold,/They marched through the heat;/And the only sound/Was their marching feet" (Lawrence 1993). *Harriet and the Promised Land* read alongside *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad*, reminds us that a century before King told a sea of supporters gathered at the Washington Mall that "we cannot turn back", Tubman was leading enslaved men, women, and children through enemy territory, threatening to shoot anyone whose courage faltered. Allowing them to turn back would have endangered everyone involved in the nineteenth-century freedom movement. Writing for *The Brownies' Book* in 1921, Augusta E. Bird did not think young readers should be spared that detail.[13] Nor did Petry, who titled one of her chapters, "Go On or Die!"

In her 2019 film *Harriet*, Kasi Lemmons underscores the contradictions at the core of the American experiment by placing Tubman firmly within a tradition of freedom-loving patriots, and in so doing, she reclaims patriotism as distinct from White nationalism. In a pivotal scene shortly after she escapes the plantation, "Minty" (Cynthia Erivo) faces her master and his posse on a bridge in Dorchester County, Maryland. Instead of surrendering, she jumps into the river below, right after proclaiming, "I'm gonna be free or die" (Lemmons 2019). Lemmons conducted extensive research while collaborating with Gregory Allen Howard on the screenplay, and like others before her, she noticed a recurring theme: "To live free or die is a very powerful concept; Tubman says it over and over again" (Sims 2019). Indeed, Lawrence has Harriet saying it in his picture storybook, presenting her choice in the context of her enslavement: "A runaway slave/With a price on her head,/'I'll be free,' said Harriet,/'Or I'll be dead!'" (Lawrence 1993). In *Watchwords*, Robert Lawson develops this theme by quoting the source, giving Patrick Henry the fourth position in his *Pageant of American Quotations*, right after "taxation without representation is tyranny", a phrase the author tells us became one of the "slogans for lovers of liberty" (Lawson 1965, p. 13). Lawson presents Henry as the spokesman for "the small shopkeepers, the carpenters, shipwrights, farmers, lawyers and the men of the frontier", whom he calls "all the little people [. . .] to whom independence was as dear as life itself" (Lawson 1965, p. 15). In 1775, Henry spoke in Richmond, Virginia, at the Second Revolutionary Convention, urging preparations for war: "*Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!*" (Lawson 1965, p. 16). Equating taxation without representation with enslavement required a staggering amount of self-delusion about an economy that relied on the literal enslavement and exploitation of Black people. It also displays a pathological level of comfort with contradiction, with what Henry Clay would

later describe as making an "exception" with regard to the principle of liberty when it comes to Black people.

The dramatic scene on the bridge parallels an even more intense confrontation near the end of the film when Lemmons takes direct aim at the myth of the Lost Cause. Having renamed herself Harriet, and having garnered a reputation as the slave-stealer "Moses", our heroine again faces Gideon (Joe Alwyn), only this time, she has a rifle and, thanks to her skill at moving through the landscape undetected, the advantage of surprise. Forcing her former White master to his knees and holding him at gunpoint, Harriet rejects Gideon's false memory that she cared and prayed for him in his youth. Most importantly, she names his family's greatest crime (Figure 1): "I asked God how a sickly young boy could think he owned me. [. . .] Ever since your daddy sold my sisters, I prayed for God to make me strong enough to fight. And that's what I prayed for ever since. I reasoned there was one of two things I had a right to—liberty or death. If I couldn't have one, I'd have the other" (Lemmons 2019). Gideon responds by predicting a gruesome lynching for Harriet, her rotting flesh smelling "like roasting pig". Harriet then makes a prediction of her own: "You gonna die right here. On a freezin' blood-soaked battlefield, the moans of a generation of young men dying around you in agony—for a lost cause, for a vile and wicked idea, for the sin of slavery." Mounting Gideon's white horse, a triumphant Tubman proclaims, "God has showed me the future, and my people are free. My people are free!" (Lemmons 2019). While the twenty-first-century viewer is left to ponder the extent to which Harriet's people are *actually* free in the future she envisions (and we inhabit), the film, by pitting Harriet and her rifle against Gideon and his racist view of Black people as pigs, frames the Civil War as a battle between a righteous cause of liberty waged by Black revolutionaries and a wicked one of enslavement, human trafficking, dehumanization, terror, and torture waged by White nationalists.

Figure 1. Harriet (Cynthia Erivo) takes aim at the Lost Cause (Lemmons 2019).

The most significant contribution Lemmons' film makes to the tradition of storytelling about Tubman is that it presents the freedom warrior ensconced within a web of close relationships based on kinship and the shared values of service, sacrifice, love, and liberty. From the first scene to the last, Lemmons reminds viewers that Harriet is the daughter of loving parents. In this way, the filmmaker brings to life the early chapters of Petry's historical biography, which highlight a mother and father worrying about their child's future, and the first page of Lawrence's picture storybook, which depicts a tiny Harriet and two proud and adoring parents. *Harriet* features multiple displays of tenderness between "Minty" and her father Ben Ross (Clarke Peters). When Minty decides to run, Ben gives her a small wooden figurehead carved in his likeness, assuring his daughter: "I'll be with you." Before Minty slips into the night, she says, "I love you, daddy", and once the door closes and Ben collapses into his chair, he whispers, "I love you, too" (Lemmons 2019). Each time Minty returns to the Brodess planation, her father embraces her. Harriet's circle widens

in Philadelphia to include William Still (Leslie Odom, Jr.) and Marie Buchanon (Janelle Monae), both of whom provide friendship, counsel, and comfort. The strength of those close attachments allows Harriet to express vulnerability: in response to the "defanging" and "declawing" of Tubman she sees in children's literature, Lemmons humanizes her heroine, presenting her as both the superhero *and* grandmother Jason Reynolds imagines her to be.

By contrasting Harriet's humanity with the inhumanity of the slave-owning, slave-selling Brodess family, Lemmons keeps the attention on the type of violence she highlights—family separation. Elizabeth Brodess (Jennifer Nettles) exemplifies that inhumanity, even as she reveals the psychic consequences of treating humans as property to use and abuse, telling her son Gideon, "I'm suffocating in this place. I'm being imprisoned, awaiting my execution, surrounded by hostile black-faced guards" (Lemmons 2019). In the next scene, Elizabeth faces down her angry White neighbors who demand restitution for the loss of their property now that Moses has been identified as Minty Ross. In a fiery speech, Elizabeth voices the key component of the Lost Cause narrative: "We are victims of this diabolical n*****, just like you are!" (Lemmons 2019). Her plan is to put Harriet's niece up for auction, thus luring Moses to return, at which point, she and her neighbors, White folks who value vengeance even more than property, will "burn [Harriet] at the stake like Joan of Arc" (Lemmons 2019). The victimhood and bloodlust of the Brodess family highlights the heartache and pain of a series of separations endured by the Ross family. The film's ending, featuring a tearful Harriet resting her head once again on her father's shoulder, reminds viewers of the toll those separations take even as it reunites Harriet with her remaining kin. Lemmons gives us a Hollywood ending that nonetheless serves as a reminder of not only what has been torn asunder, but also exactly who is responsible for that tearing apart and the tortured logic and lies they told to either deny or justify it.

4. You Ready to Kill the Snake?

At the end of Lemmons' film, just before viewers witness Harriet's tearful reunion with her parents and extended family in Auburn, New York, they watch her leading a Black regiment at the Combahee River. To rally her troops, she tells them a story about a snake "coiled at your feet" that "shoots up to bite you". While the doctor is cutting out the bite, the snake bites again, "in a new place this time". Finally, Harriet says, "you realize the snake ain't gonna stop until someone kills it." Telling the men that "slavery is still alive", she asks a question that will be the last words she speaks in the film: "You ready to kill the snake?" (Lemmons 2019). When Tubman equates the snake with slavery, she leaves no doubt as to the cause and purpose of the Civil War. The snake as a metaphor for slavery appears throughout African American literature, from Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) to Lawrence's *Harriet and the Promised Land* (1968) to Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016). But it would be more accurate (as well as more productive) to think of the snake as White supremacy because while the Emancipation Proclamation, Lee's surrender, and the era of Reconstruction dramatically altered the conditions of formerly enslaved Black people, White supremacy remained as both an existential threat to democracy and a literal threat to the health, safety, and prosperity of Black people living *anywhere* in the US. In other words, the snake in Tubman's story simply took on other forms, rising up, over and again, to bite "in a new place this time".

Harriet debuted amidst a national discussion about slavery prompted by the publication of *The 1619 Project*, a discussion that *seems* to have opened up space to talk more directly about White supremacy.[14] For several reasons, that conversation has proven to be extremely difficult to have. While the current director of the FBI reports that the greatest threat the country faces is from domestic White extremism, state legislatures continue to pass laws banning the discussion of "divisive concepts", and hysteria over critical race theory fuels efforts to ban books. Writing at the end of the twentieth-century, MacCann, in the final paragraph of *White Supremacy in Children's Literature*, asks: "In the upcoming century, can we expect the arts and institutions to maximize social justice? Or will the record reveal once

again that the Confederate cause wins?" (MacCann 1998, p. 241). Perhaps we should pose the question differently: What will it take for the Confederate cause to loosen its grip over the radical imaginations of so many White Americans? We may not be able to end what MacCann rightly calls America's centuries-long "exercise in cultural self-deception", but we can commit ourselves to the kind of interdisciplinary textual analysis that highlights the relationship between storytelling and political power (MacCann 1998, p. 234). Being strong enough to fight in our era and in the sphere of literary studies means engaging in a righteous confrontation with stories as weapons of repression. Without denying or diminishing the aesthetic pleasures of literature, we need an all-hands-on-deck approach to meeting the rhetorical power of texts and images that promote White nation-building with the rhetorical firepower of stories that advance the cause of democracy and liberty for all.

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Notes

1 https://thechildrenstheatre.com/shows/harriet-tubman-20-21/ (accessed on 28 April 2023).

2 Since its conception in 1938, the Caldecott Medal has been awarded to only four Black illustrators: Kadir Nelson (2020), Javaka Steptoe (2017), Jerry Pinkney (2010), Leo and Diane Dillon (1977, 1976). In 1962, Ezra Jack Keats, a White artist, won the Caldecott Medal for illustrating *The Snowy Day*, the first book with a Black protagonist to be so honored.

3 Carole Boston Weatherford's award-winning *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom* (illustrated by Kadir Nelson) is interesting to consider in this regard. Connolly (2013) discusses the picture storybook as hagiography. I find the framing devices noteworthy. While the text and the images present Tubman as simply doing God's will, the Foreword and the Author's Note provide the context needed for readers to understand Tubman's contribution to an ongoing struggle for Black freedom. The book thus presents a "palatable" story within a "hard history" frame.

4 In 1941, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, banning discrimination in employment practices and establishing the Federal Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). In 1948, President Eisenhower ended segregation in the armed forces with Executive Order 9981.

5 In "The Apartheid of Children's Literature", a March 2014 op-ed for the *New York Times*, Christopher Myers notes that of the 3200 books published for children that year, only 93 focused on Black people. In "Children, Too, Sing America", a 2022 Special Issue of *College Literature*, the editors take up this term and discuss its causes and consequences: https://muse.jhu.edu/issue/48102 (accessed on 28 April 2023).

6 For the 100 years of Newbery award, only five Black authors have won the medal: Amina Luqman-Dawson (2023), Jerry Craft (2020), Christopher Paul Curtis (2000), Mildred Taylor (1977), and Virginia Hamilton (1975). For *Story of the* Negro (1949), Arna Bontemps became the first Black writer to receive a Newbery honor.

7 https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/BookerT.pdf (accessed on 26 April 2023).

8 In addition to "organizations" and "rituals", Blight lists the following as the ingredients forming the Lost Cause: "a public memory, a cult of the fallen soldier, a righteous political cause defeated only by superior industrial might, a heritage community awaiting its exodus, and a people forming a collective identity as victims and survivors". Blight points out what is erased—slavery and Black freedom (Blight 2001, p. 38).

9 https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/323479/they-were-strong-and-good-by-robert-lawson/ (accessed on 24 April 2023).

10 Blight discusses Grant's memoirs as a significant contribution to the Lost Cause narrative, the General memorializing his personal feelings upon Lee's surrender as reinforcing "Lost Causers, reconciliations, and war romancers of almost any persuasion." Grant wrote that he felt "sad and depressed" at vanquishing such a worthy foe: "I felt like anything rather than rejoicing at the downfall of a foe who had fought so long and valiantly, and had suffered so much for a cause, though that cause was, I believe, one of the worst for which a people ever fought, and one for which there was the least excuse. I do not question, however, the sincerity of the great mass of those who were opposed to us." Blight reads in Grant's memoir "the terms of the American reunion rendered in probably the most oft-read chapter of one of its best-selling works: shared grief at war's costs coupled with Northern respect for the *sincerity* of Southern devotion to their cause, even when that cause was judged repugnant." Grant, he concludes, engaged at this death in a "politics of forgetting", thus mirroring "the culture he was about to depart" (Blight 2001, p. 215).

11 In Selznick's award-winning film, Rhett Butler calls his beloved daughter Bonnie Blue. The opening lyrics of the song do the work of revising history to advance the myth of the Lost Cause:

We are a band of brothers and native to the soil
Fighting for the property we gained by honest toil
And when our rights were threatened, the cry rose near and far
Hurrah for the Bonnie Blue Flag that bears a single star
Hurrah! Hurrah!
For Southern rights, hurrah!

[12] Katharine Capshaw and Anna Mae Duane extend the roots of this tradition in (Capshaw and Duane 2017).

[13] Bird (1996) writes: "Sometimes members of her party would become exhausted and footsore, and declare they could not go on; they must stay where they dropped down, and die. Others would think a voluntary return to slavery better than being overtaken and carried back, and would insist on returning; then there was no alternative but force. The revolver carried by this bold and daring pioneer would be pointed at their heads, "Dead n****** tell no tales", said Harriet. "Go on or die" (pp. 95–96).

[14] Nikole Hannah-Jones and her Pulitzer Prize-winning *The 1619 Project* sparked heated debates among historians and educators, politicians seizing on the publication and wielding it as a weapon in the culture wars, Trump issuing an Executive Order establishing a 1776 Commission and calling for a ban on critical race theory. Hulu presented *The 1619 Project* as a four-part mini-series in 2023.

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Article

Art and Storytelling on the Streets: The Council on Interracial Books for Children's Use of African American Children's Literature

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Abstract: From 1970 until 1974, the Council on Interracial Children's Books (CIBC) ran the Arts and Storytelling in the Streets program throughout New York City. This program involved African American and Puerto Rican artists and storytellers bringing children's literature directly to children in the streets. This occurred amid a rise in African American children's literature and educational upheavals in the city as local communities demanded oversight of their schools. Originating in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district in New York City, the Arts and Storytelling on the Streets program helps to underscore the interrelation between African American children's literature and educational activism. This article examines how storytelling sessions run by authors and illustrators became extensions of African American children's literature and educational activism in the city as Black American children's books became key tools in a fight for a more representative and relevant education. Storytelling teams hoped to use African American children's literature to help engage children in reading and provide a positive association with literature among local children. The Art and Storytelling program mirrored ideas and themes within African American children's literature including Black pride, community strength, and resisting white supremacy. The program also became a key extension of the literature as the locations, storytellers, and the audiences all helped to expand upon the impact and many meanings inherent in contemporary African American children's literature.

Keywords: African American children's literature; Ocean Hill-Brownsville; community control; storytelling; Council on Interracial Books for Children; Rose Blue; John Steptoe

1. Introduction

In 1974, artist and children's illustrator Leo Carty described his process as reaching "inwardly for a positive Black image" and that his work was not about "striking out and trying to destroy but helping Black people—[his] people—get a better image of themselves" (Tapley 1974). This philosophy was imbued in Carty's work creating Black greetings cards and paintings created in his Anton Studio on Norstrand Avenue, Brooklyn. Crucially, this philosophy was also integral to his work on the streets of New York City each year from 1970 until 1974, as he sketched out images from African American children's literature as Joyce Carty read out stories to children gathered around in parks, on stoops, and an array of locations around New York City. The Cartys were just one of many storyteller teams brought together by the Council on Interracial Books for Children's (CIBC) 'Art and Storytelling on the Street Program.' The CIBC was an organization created to support and facilitate the creation of antiracist and antisexist materials for children. Through reviews, educational programs, events for children, and campaigning, the CIBC sought to highlight representative children's literature and support aspiring authors and illustrators of color. The program's use of storytelling built on a long history of the oral tradition used to "teach and to comfort members of the community" (Champion 2016). In storytelling events that predominantly used African American children's literature as well as significant Puerto

Rican children's books, the CIBC engaged children with vital themes and topics within a growing canon. Despite a proliferation of African American children's literature in the late 1960s and 1970s, a combination of red tape in school libraries and resistance from some figures within the educational establishment meant that these books were not reaching library shelves quickly. The success of the Art and Storytelling program underlined how important grassroots organizing and activism was to the continued successes of African American children's literature and how interlinked the canon became with educational activism. An examination of the CIBC's program uncovers how authors, illustrators, educators, and activists sought to harness the blossoming of African American children's literature in the 1970s to help educate and celebrate children in local communities.

This article focuses on how the Art and Storytelling program interacted with and promoted African American children's literature during a dramatic rise in Black-authored and illustrated works for children. The CIBC's program was a pioneering example of activism that utilized African American children's literature and demonstrated the necessity of grassroots coordination to build on the work being established by authors and illustrators. Giselle Anatol (2011) asserts that African American children's literature has responded to "a number of needs within the American cultural and political context", but often these responses have been hindered by a range of individuals and groups including Boards of Education, teachers, politicians, and right-wing activist groups. In the face of book bans, censorship, and the slow approval process for books in schools, the access to African American children's literature has often been accompanied by grassroots organizing and protest in order to sustain access to these books. Through the program, activists, authors, and educators cooperated to bypass and outmaneuver the obstacles children have faced in accessing African American children's literature. Many Black educators worked to change the racist and damaging education children received such as teachers like M. Lee Montgomery who argued for cultural differences to "be recognized and appreciated" (Montgomery 1970, p. 49). Art and Storytelling on the Streets promoted these books and provided a platform to connect educators with creators who shared a vision to help black children "develop self-worth and dignity through knowledge of their history and culture" (Vann 1970, p. 232).

Despite its crucial links to educational activism in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the Black Arts Movement, and the rise of contemporary African American children's literature, no scholarly examination of this program has been undertaken. While the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program was only based in New York City, it had a wider impact across the nation as the CIBC became a powerful advocate and ally for protests and programs across the United States and internationally too. A history of the Art and Storytelling program is important because it became an important experimental platform that brought together a range of interesting figures. Children who sought more relatable stories attended the sessions and Black creators who wanted to directly engage with their readership read stories and sketched out images from their books. Furthermore, many of the participants were also part of the Black Arts Movement and they saw an opportunity to further a Black aesthetic and help provide children with a strong Black identity.

The program was an extension of African American children's literature as the teams promoted many of the themes underlying ideologies and visions of contemporary Black creators and indeed were often creators of books themselves. By examining the work of the storytelling teams, it is possible to see how African American children's literature engaged children and contributed to wider educational activism in the city that sought to challenge white supremacist educational practices. Storyteller teams and the CIBC sought to amplify the works of Black and Puerto Rican children's authors and use their books to innovate in education and help celebrate different communities in the city. In their anthology on African American storytelling, Linda Goss and Marian Barnes argue that "the storyteller, the story, and the audience are of equal importance" (Goss and Barnes 1989, p. 10), and in the CIBC's program, the storytellers, the children watching, and the books used were all

crucial components in furthering key ideas of Black pride, community strength, and the power of education.

The Art and Storytelling on the Streets program was part of a surge in "culturally conscious" (Bishop 2007) African American children's books that arose in the late 1960s and 1970s but its significance to the literature has not been recognized. Many scholars have identified and analyzed these books' content revealing common topics such as Black pride, Black history, and realistic depictions of children's lives (Johnson 1990b; Fraser and Perry 2013; Austin 2016; Martin 2004). A history of how books were used complements the work of these scholars but also provides insight into how many authors and illustrators understood how their work could be used to further contemporary educational activism. Books by authors such as Muriel Feelings, John Steptoe, Rose Blue, and Sharon Bell-Mathis addressed history, friendship, racism, education, and folklore among many other topics and themes. The publication of these authors' books was crucial in addressing the needs of many children in the 1960s and 1970s; however, the CIBC's program offered a platform to introduce people to these books and gave creators an opportunity to connect directly with their readers. These books were brought to life in storytelling sessions, and understanding how they were used enhances our understanding of their content, as well as underscoring the active role authors and illustrators played in their local communities. The illustrator George Ford, who was a member of the CIBC and contributed to the program, revealed that he was directly responding to how the publishing industry regarded Black children as "peripheral" (Ford and Ford 2019). Both Black creators of children's books and the CIBC were animated by the same desire: to reach out to Black child readers and provide books and events for them.

The CIBC, an organization led by Director Bradford Chambers in 1970, included a growing list of members of educators, publishers, writers, and illustrators. An outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement, the organization continued to develop close ties to a range of activists nationally and internationally. Beryle Banfield, a longtime member and President of the organization distilled the goals of the CIBC into two key aims: "to promote a literature for children that better reflects the realities of a multi-cultural society" and to "effect basic change in books and media" (Banfield 1998, p. 17) and with the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program, the organization achieved both of these aims. Through programs and their publications, the CIBC conducted campaigns to rid schools of racist books including *Little Black Sambo* and *Dr. Doolittle*, but the organization also challenged libraries that did not feature any books written by people of color. The CIBC recognized the need to support the publication of African American children's books but also the necessity to ensure that these books populated schools and library shelves.

The project developed beyond small storytelling sessions with children to then include exhibitions of the artwork of professional illustrators and children and a 'printmobile' in which children could create their own original works. Not only was the program introducing children to African American children's literature often absent from school library shelves, but it engaged children in the creative process. The CIBC's project addressed local educational needs but also championed the power of multicultural children's literature. The storyteller teams were also integral in reaching out to Puerto Rican communities with these events. This research though reflects the CIBC's initial focus on Black American children's literature. The art and storytelling events give insight into children's responses, the uses of books, and their potential in developing a more relevant education. The selection of the storytelling teams, the books, and the locations underscores how these events were not just about entertainment but were designed to transmit key emphases in African American children's literature, including pride in Blackness, a focus on community strength, and the power of education.

2. The Origins of Art and Storytelling on the Streets: Educational Activism and African American Children's Literature

The idea for the program seemed simple: "children playing in the neighborhood gather as a storyteller opens a book and reads, while nearby an illustrator starts to draw scenes from the story" (Carey Bond 1971). This project, however, was not simple; it was underpinned by a powerful educational philosophy that sought to harness the power of African American children's literature. The program was initiated in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, an epicenter of educational activism, and spread across the city in museums, schools, and housing projects. The CIBC's program was designed to connect children with literature that was more relevant to their lives; to challenge the white supremacist education they were often exposed to in school, and to show children how fun books could be. The draft program proposal, written by Director Bradford Chambers, centered on introducing children "to relevant reading material and positive role models" (CIBC 1970a). These aims came at a crucial juncture in African American's children's books that Walter Dean Myers described as a "new beginning" (Myers 1986). The CIBC's work was deeply intertwined with contemporary authors and illustrators who increasingly began working with the organization with the Storytelling on the Streets being one of the most enduring of these relationships. The CIBC's grassroots organizing was a crucial accompaniment to the burgeoning canon that connected authors and illustrators directly with their readership and educators interested in promoting a more culturally relevant education.

The program arose after the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district became one of the 'experimental districts' to explore the possibilities of greater community control over education. Local communities sought more oversight over how schools were run, particularly the curriculum provided. In 1968, New York City Mayor Lindsay initiated three experimental districts across the city in East Harlem, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, and Two Bridges in the Lower East Side as part of his platform to increase citizen oversight (Viteritti 2014). Ocean Hill-Brownsville became the most publicized and contentious district during this short-lived experiment. Jerald Podair (Podair 2002) has highlighted how the local community's struggle against the intransigent Board of Education involved a web of grassroots, federal, union, and corporate politics that deepened racial tensions in the city. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville conflict became a lightning rod for a wide range of disputes in the city (Edgell 1998; Gordon 2001), but often missing from accounts of this story is what happened to children's education. The National Association of Afro-American Educators called for a "Blackening of the curriculum" (National Association of Afro-American Educators 1968), and a range of new classes and materials became available across the Ocean Hill-Brownsville District as educators sought to use it as an opportunity to provide better materials for the students. The Art and Storytelling program, therefore, was more than just showcasing African American children's literature as it used the books to facilitate the educational activism in New York City. While scholars like Podair offer insights into the political struggle in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program highlights how educators, authors, and activists seized the opportunity to offer new directions in education.

The CIBC used their program to build on contemporary educational activism. Leading Black educators such as Albert Vann in Ocean Hill-Brownsville sought to radically alter curricula, teachers, and participation in education and New York became a focal point for these debates (Vann 1970). The Art and Storytelling program was a significant effort in shaping what education could look like and should be understood as part of wider activism that sought to radically change assumptions about education in the United States. Russsell Rickford (2016) has identified the 1960s as a radical era in which activists theorized a radical "black education" that focused on autonomy and cultural relevance but the CIBC's programs are not assessed as part of this wider movement. The CIBC's work in the district and beyond, though *not* always in schools, was still part of this wider educational activism. Through programs like Art and Storytelling on the Streets, educators worked with authors, illustrators, and children in ways not feasible in the school environment.

The Ocean Hill-Brownsville experiment was sensationalized in national headlines and conservative politicians exploited the issue to play on racist fears of constituents across the nation (Burks 1968). The district came under national scrutiny, acting as a conduit for discussions of law and order and racial politics. Out of the spotlight, however, many educators were seizing the opportunity to make a difference in children's education and the books to which they had access. The district librarian, Harriet Brown, was one key figure who created the community library, 'The Hut', attached to one of the schools on Dean Street in Brooklyn. The Hut became a crucial space for fostering a more representative curriculum as Brown ensured that the library carried "a wide selection of minority-orientated children's books" (Davidson and Chambers 1969). Librarians in the district complained that books needed central approval from the Board of Education, and that often meant many books were objected to by the "white middle-class" (Davidson and Chambers 1969). With increased control over the purchase of books, Harriet Brown began working with the CIBC to assist in the promotion of books authored and illustrated by people of color. The experimental districts created crucial spaces for the innovative use of African American children's literature and this drew together a coalition of activists including educators, parents, authors, illustrators, and the CIBC.

3. Coalition Building and Planning

In 1970, storyteller teams met at The Hut as it became the base for the entire project. From this library, Harriet Brown coordinated events and storytelling teams worked with educators to plan their routes and gathered the books to be used. The origins and location of the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program underscores how educational activism was central to the project. The first Art and Storytelling on the Streets program engaged thousands of children across New York City and provides a key example of the growing interactions between book creators, their audiences, and local activists. As the project was repeated over the years, it expanded beyond Ocean Hill-Brownsville as the CIBC envisioned that storyteller teams would visit "streetcorners, parks and playgrounds and community centers. . .wherever children congregate" in different boroughs of the city. The CIBC worked with several storyteller teams and librarians to develop a citywide program that used African American children's literature to engage all ages. The books on the shelves of The Hut became emblematic of a larger fight for a more representative education. George Ford claimed that "No one was interested in what [Black children's] lives were really like" within the publishing world, but it was at The Hut that concerned authors and educators gathered to directly address how Black children were being ignored by the white establishment.

Indeed, to engage children in African American children's literature the CIBC forged alliances with Harriet Brown and Ocean Hill-Brownsville Unit Administrator Rhody McCoy. Together, they hosted several events, including a Book Week in 1968 and the 'Be-In' in 1969 for creators, children, and publishers to meet. A year later, they created their most enduring project: Art and Storytelling on the Streets. As a consultant on the project, Harriet Brown understood the critical concept of helping children feel positive about education, and she passionately believed that good children's books could foster a positive relationship with learning. The CIBC brought to Ocean Hill-Brownsville a network of interested parties including publishers and creators so they could witness the educational activism happening in schools. In 1968, Brown met with authors and illustrators in a roundtable discussion and explained that misrepresentation in literature was crucial in the "sowing of seeds of despair" (Brown 1968) in children that led to a disengagement with literature by high school. The pedagogical promise of African American children's literature brought together a coalition of writers and illustrators, including Tom Feelings, Terry Berger, and Walter Dean Myers with educators and CIBC activists to create the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program.

The ambitious planning notes of the project were scrawled in thick green marker onto large pink poster paper as the organizers established their aims for the project and

their vision of action. The anonymous notes reveal a focus on how Storytelling on the Streets could lead to the opening of "new modes of education" as theories "must be built from the bottom up" (CIBC 1970c). The heavily annotated notes speak of a communal effort from Bradford Chambers, Harriet Brown, and other coordinators of the program in trying to explore the possible benefits of children's books. For the organizers, African American children's literature was not just about entertaining the children of the city but in introducing an "aesthetic experience" (CIBC 1970b) often denied to them. The planners' belief in the power of children's literature is laid bare as they countenanced that the first summer of events with Black and Puerto Rican illustrators and storytellers was a "period of testing and experimentation" that would develop into much larger community projects.

Across three large posters, the plan begins with a storytelling visit to a community center before building to taking over storefronts and developing programs in other cities. This was not just geographically ambitious; the plan listed short-term goals of interesting children in books, then building on this to help children create their own books, and finally to helping facilitate a new generation of creators who could make use of "community-controlled printing and publishing services" (CIBC 1970c). From the outset, the storytelling sessions were designed to build upon African American children's literature and use the books to enact changes in local education. Inspired by their work in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, this coalition of activists evidently believed African American children's literature could play a vital role in developing a better education and in turn, the children involved could become writers and illustrators themselves. It was not just the content of the books that the CIBC considered powerful, but meeting and engaging with creators too.

4. Storytellers and Artists in Communities

Crucial to this project was not just Black American children's books, but the authors and illustrators who became involved. The aims of this project in the draft proposal were to "raise the level of aspiration" of children who had been disadvantaged by what their schools provided by offering the opportunity with "an intimate, face-to-face relationship with creative and artistic talent" (CIBC 1970a). The project offered a novel approach to storytelling events that were traditionally run by teachers and librarians; instead, children had the opportunity to meet the real authors and illustrators. There were many iterations of storytelling teams, and these included many married couples: Leo and Joyce Carty, Frances and George Wilson, and Don and Dorothy Robertson. As well as these established teams, the other prominent participants who all worked with one another were Betty Dillard, Jeanene Gosey, Charles Bible, Lydia Gonzalez, Nikki Giovanni, Muriel Feelings, George Ford, Peri Thomas, and Sonia Sanchez. These permanent storytelling team members were helped by many other participants across the years who showcased their work to children in exhibitions, including photographer Arnold Hinton and illustrator Tom Feelings. These storytelling teams brought a unique perspective to storytelling sessions as they had intimate knowledge of how books were produced, but crucially, they could act as role models for their audiences. The CIBC's network of contacts and funding created opportunities for children's book creators to share their work and engage with their readership on an unprecedented level.

The opportunity children had to meet and learn from these creators realized the project's aim to inspire children to become writers and illustrators. Before the first Art and Storytelling on the Streets program began in the Summer of 1970, the CIBC arranged for Janet Harris, author of *Black Pride*, and Leo Carty, illustrator of Myers' *Where Does the Day Go?* to visit Intermediate School 271. They discussed their work with the children and answered questions on their processes. Several children wrote about their experience of meeting Harris and Carty. A common theme among the responses was a fascination with the process of making a book. Donna Richards, an eighth-grade student, reported that the class wanted the guests back to hear "more about how books are written" (Richards 1970). Patricia L., however, was more interested in the illustrations. She praised the "young, gifted and Black" Leo Carty whose work had made her realize that she wished to "write a

book and have it published". Patricia and Donna's comments speak to the impact of the storytelling sessions with authentic writers and illustrators. These sessions arranged by the CIBC helped produce concrete results for their experimental phase: the sessions sparked children's creativity and interest.

At one session in February of 1971 at the MUSE, a temporary location of the Brooklyn Children's Museum, a school class attended one of Joyce and Leo Carty's sessions. Joyce Carty reported on the session, that after the prompting of his proud peers, one artistic boy in the class approached Leo Carty for advice because he had "never received training but wanted the artist to tell him about schools of art" (CIBC 1971). The sessions gave children the opportunity to gain more understanding of how books were made and how to become involved in their creation. Carty gave the boy some advice about art schools, scholarships, and how to prepare a portfolio, further underscoring how unique these storytelling sessions were. Mary Gould Davis, a professional library storyteller, claimed that in the minds of the children, "the most important thing is not the storyteller, but the *story*" (Baker and Greene 1987, p. 71). For CIBC's project, the stories were invaluable instruments of education and culture, but equally important were the storytellers themselves. Rudine Sims Bishop asserts that though there was a swell of African American children's literature from authors like Lucille Clifton, Eloise Greenfield, and John Steptoe, books to which children had access to were predominantly by white authors (Bishop 2003). By bringing African American children's literature to children, these storytelling teams could engage Black and Brown children with books that were culturally authentic and spoke more directly to their lives. Furthermore, the creators inspired the children themselves and opened up new opportunities in children's lives.

The inclusion in the storytelling teams of prominent writers and artists associated with the Black Arts Movement was indicative of the movement's influence on children's literature and education. By the beginning of the Art and Storytelling program, Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez had both published poetry collections within the Black Arts Movement. Their active involvement in the movement and their challenges to the masculinist trends established them as key figures in the quest to establish a new Black identity. Cherise Pollard argues that rather than being silenced by their male contemporaries, these women found ways to promote their understanding of the "black aesthetic" (Pollard 2006). Their role as storytellers was an important form of fostering a strong Black identity as the Art and Storytelling program provided a crucial platform to explore these ideas with children. Indeed, this was a view shared by many of the authors whose books were used. Lucille Clifton claimed that within her work she felt it was "better to try and define ourselves than to remain defined by others" (Rowell 1999, p. 67) and so her work like *The Black BC's* and others like Julius Lester's *Black Folktales* reflected ideas that were integral to Black Power and the Black Arts Movement. While not explicitly part of the movement, the program became an important way for authors and activists to engage children with ideas of Black pride and Black nationalism. The sessions gave space and opportunity for an array of storytellers and artists to engage with children and many of them were part of, or at least sympathetic to, the contemporary Black Arts Movement. The storytelling sessions were not like the political education found in Amiri Baraka's African Free School, but they did provide crucial spaces for exchange between the children and the storytelling teams.

Storyteller Dorothy Robertson described her and her husband's approach as "storytelling with noise." The sessions were planned to be fun for children and provide a different reading experience that children had access to in school. All the storytelling teams reported how children would follow them from stop to stop, eager to join the sessions whenever they could. Robertson even reported that the children still followed them across Brownsville despite the 95-degree heat, so her husband Don bought ice cream for everybody there (CIBC 1971). The storytelling sessions became large communal events as diverse community members gravitated to see the artists and storytellers in action. Jeanene Gosey, one of the storytellers, reported that it was not just children gathering but also interested parents keen to hear about African American children's books, teenagers bringing their younger sib-

lings, and "grandmothers peered down from first floor windows" (Gosey 1971). Bringing storytelling out of libraries and classrooms and into the streets helped foster excitement in audiences. Children would run off when they met the storytelling teams just to bring back more children to come and watch. The proportion of books that included Black characters doubled from 1965 to 1975 (Chall et al. 1985), yet what cannot be gleaned from this data is the excitement experienced by the children by these books. The storytelling sessions were key extensions of African American children's literature and the program offered a communal way to engage with the literature and showcased the demand for these books.

5. "Insatiable Enthusiasm": Children as Active Participants in Storytelling

The artists and storytellers helped bring children together and brought the stories alive, but the books enthralled many of the children. The CIBC reported that once the sessions got underway, there was an "insatiable enthusiasm" (*Interracial Books for Children* 1970, p. 4) from the children. Children across the city not only listened to the stories, but joined in with the narrative, read back to the storytellers, and borrowed books to read privately. The reports on the sessions never named the children involved so there is no clear way to trace the impact the storytelling sessions had on the children involved in terms of their reading, their ambitions, and later life trajectory. Nevertheless, the storytelling reports written by the teams indicate how children engaged with the sessions and reveal how the same children kept on returning.

Numerous reports of the storytelling sessions reveal that after being read to, many of the children wanted to read the stories themselves. Whether reading these books in private or aloud back to the storytelling teams and other children, this interest in the books provides some insight into reader responses. Moving beyond Rosenblatt's theory of reader response, scholars have examined the variety of ways that children engage with African American children's literature and emphasize the need for a culturally situated understanding of readers (Brooks and McNair 2012; Nilsson 2008; Smith 1995). Dorothy Robertson's "storytelling with noise" was emulated in other sessions as call-and-response became a key feature as children shouted, acted, and participated in stories of Anansi and High John. The children at these events were active participants who added their own meanings and interpretations to stories as their interjections built into the narratives. In one instance, two girls wanted to read back to the storytellers, underscoring the reciprocal relationship between children and authors as they wanted to provide their own reading of the text. Lawrence Sipe (1999) asserts the need to contextualize children's responses to literature, and a history of events, such as the Art and Storytelling program, reinforces how the development of African American children's literature in the late 1960s and 1970s engaged children. Even though their voices were not recorded by the program organizers, the storytelling teams and teachers who brought children to the sessions all reported on the excitement and joy within the sessions.

Black children's responses to the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program underscore their active participation in literature. The diverse responses to the program from Black children reiterate how books impacted each individual differently. Some children were evidently keen to display their command of reading and literature while others became caught up in the excitement of stories like John Steptoe's *Stevie* or fascinated by Black history as storytellers read out Lucille Clifton's *The Black BC's*. Brigitte Fielder has challenged the "dominant framings of Black children" (Fielder 2019, p. 162) that have reduced their lives to racist generalizations and caricatures, depriving Black children of their innocence and humanity. Indeed, the varied responses of Black children to the storytelling sessions reinforce Fielder's comments. Thousands of children demonstrated their literacy and command of the word; pride in their communities; their desire to see better representations of Black childhood, and their joy in literature. That children reacted in a multitude of ways highlights how African American children's literature was not monolithic as was often perceived by mostly white publishers, but that there was a diverse base of readers who clamored for better and more representative books. Though a limited insight into the

children's lives, the storytelling reports reveal how the storytelling sessions became crucial spaces of expression. The CIBC's program demonstrated the necessity for the continued broadening of African American children's literature as during each storytelling session, children responded in a variety of ways. Over its four-year run, the program reaffirmed many educators' beliefs and convinced others of the possibilities of African American children's books within education.

6. Classrooms without Walls: African American Children's Books and Schools

Within a public education system that upheld white supremacy, many children had not been afforded the opportunity to extensively interact with African American children's literature. Rudine Sims Bishop has asserted that African American children's literature "nurtures the souls of Black children" (Bishop 2007, p. 273), providing through text and imagery stories and ideas often denied to them. Indeed, when the Art and Storytelling program began, there was a dearth of culturally relevant literature available in schools and so the sessions on the streets became important educational sites, free from the oversight of educational authorities. Miriam Cohen, an educational consultant for Doubleday and Co., spoke to the CIBC in 1969, claiming that a "long and laborious" (Cohen 1969) process meant any advances in publishing took a long time to reach library shelves. The result of this was a desire among children for access to the increase in African American children's literature that schools could not (and often would not) supply. The CIBC reported in their own publication that for many of the children, the sessions with the teams were "their first encounter with books outside the school environment" (*Interracial Books for Children* 1970, p. 4). The Art and Storytelling program's grassroots organizing ensured that children would have an opportunity to hear the stories and read the books themselves. The coordinators of the program, many of them educators, realized that to reach children with African American children's literature meant doing so outside the confines of schools.

The CIBC had lobbied educational authorities and publishers to provide more relevant material for children who had been routinely ignored but quickly realized that the children needed to be reached out to directly. Storyteller Frances Wilson reported in 1970 that in a session "one little boy looked at each picture carefully and handled the book gently, not flipping the pages quickly but almost with a caressing motion" (Wilson 1970). The attention this boy showed to the book is reminiscent of a scene in Rose Blue's *A Quiet Place*, a book published just a year prior and used in the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program. In Blue's book, the protagonist, Matthew, picks out a particular book because "the boy had brown skin, just like Matthew's and he looked about the same age. Matthew thought it would be nice to read a book about a boy who looked so much like himself" (Blue 1969, p. 54). Blue, a public school teacher in Brooklyn, wrote children's books specifically to cater to the wants, needs, and hopes of local children with her other book *Bed-Stuy Beat* (Blue 1970) also featured in the program. That her work was included in the storytelling sessions speaks to the organizers' vision for providing children's literature that spoke directly to local children's needs. Vital to cries for community control in the city was a more relevant curriculum that reflected the lives of the children who attended the schools. Educators and authors, like Blue, focused on African American children's books as an avenue to achieve this aim and the CIBC's program gave them the outlet to achieve this.

7. The Stories Told: Mirroring and Building on Themes in African American Children's Literature

Originally, the CIBC sought to "encourage the integration of Black people into books for children" (Charnes 1984, p. 18) rather than focusing on developing Black American children's literature. One of the founders, Nancy Larrick, sought to highlight the issue of the "All white world of children's books", but this failed to develop the work of Black creators. As such, in the first year of the Art and Storytelling program, many white authors featured in the selections including Ann McGovern, Jack Keats, and Jill Krementz. The first iteration of the program therefore partially reflected the CIBC's focus on removing racist

literature as well as promoting material by Black authors and Black illustrators. As the program developed, there was an increased focus on African American children's literature which reflected both increased availability as well as a more concerted effort to support Black creators. In a 1971 article in the CIBC's publication, Ray Anthony Shepard, a winner of the CIBC's writing contest the year prior, articulated this shift away from inclusion to one of truer representation when he compared the work of Jack Keats to John Steptoe's *Stevie*. For Shepard, within Keats' work there "was someone who looked like [him]" but in Steptoe's "there is someone who knows what is going on" (Shepard 1971, p. 3). As the program developed, there was an increased focus on rising literary stars of African American children's literature, including Sharon Bell Mathis and John Steptoe, as well as established figures like Langston Hughes. The Art and Storytelling program mirrored the rise in African American children's literature and became a key format to present new children's books to their audiences.

Over the course of the program, the books used signaled an increasing focus on fostering a positive self-identity in children and promoting positive associations with Blackness through a variety of themes and approaches. Some stories were set in New York City like *Bed-Stuy Beat*, while others focused on African culture like *Zamani Goes to Market*. Other stories focused on heroes like Harriet Tubman or the fictional Stagolee, and others offered intimate stories of children's lives. Michelle Martin (2004) rightly asserts that during the 1970s, African American children's literature focused on normalizing Blackness and sought to address topics that were "systematically ignored" in education. The Art and Storytelling program became a crucial medium in which to engage children with these books, and furthermore, showcased to educators and publishers the demand for this literature.

Each storytelling session featured several books, and often this included one or two stories being read twice due to demand. After an early session in the summer of 1970, Joyce Carty predicted that "one book that is going to be very well known is *Stevie* by John Steptoe" as this was repeatedly requested to be read several times. *Stevie*, a story about peer jealousy, became a staple of the storytelling sessions due to its popularity in the sessions. As Kaavonia Hinton asserts (Hinton 2005) *Stevie* was a pioneering book that was one of the first picture books to include "empowering images of African American males, African American communities, and Black English vernacular" combined with a story of peer jealousy common to all children. As Shepard noted, it was not just the broad appeal of friendships and rivalries in *Stevie* that resonated, but Steptoe's obvious "love for his people" (Shepard 1971, p. 4) appealed to children. Other Steptoe titles included in the sessions were *Uptown* and *Train Ride,* and all became popular titles in the storytelling sessions. Grace E. Funk, a school librarian from New York City, explained in a letter to John Steptoe the "mystical rapport" African American children had with his work. Funk's letter acclaims the "immediate identification" children had with his work, and she explained that one boy responded to *Stevie* by saying "that boy feels like me" (Funk 1970). Though provided in a second-hand account, this anonymous boy's response to Steptoe's work demonstrates an emotional engagement with the book and a clear identification with the characters. The focus on presenting authentic characters in familiar settings, such as local landmarks and recognizable architecture, was a crucial element of the growing Black American children's literature in the 1960s and 1970s. Walter Dean Myers, the first winner of the CIBC's writer contest, argued that it was crucial to include "recognizable fabric of Black life" (Myers 1986) which included subtleties in language, setting, and culture that went beyond simply including Black characters in books. Myers, along with other authors and the CIBC, sought to pressure the publishing industry to reflect a multicultural society.

The Art and Storytelling program used a range of literature with Black protagonists and gave voice to Black children, reflective of wider contemporary African American children's literature. Though there was a rise in Black characters, this did not necessarily result in realistic or even voiced characters. Rudine Sims Bishop's categorization of children's literature includes 'melting pot' books in which Black characters are included but "they

choose to ignore anything, other than skin color, that might identify the characters as Black" (Bishop 2012, p. 7). Whether it was Mathis' *Sidewalk Story* or Steptoe's *Uptown*, there was a concerted effort to include materials that connected to the lived experiences of the children to whom they read as these books referred to specific neighborhoods and celebrated community spirit. Illustrator Charles Bible claimed the "best part" of the project was "when [the children] see themselves" (Friedman 1972). For Bible, this aspect of the program was also integral to his work in children's literature; the Art and Storytelling sessions built on key aspects of African American children's literature to help engage children with books.

In his sessions, Charles Bible expanded on his work in the book *Black Means*. . . which was another regular feature across storyteller teams. Created by Barney Grossman, the principal of P.S. 150 in the Bronx, and Gladys Groom, a teacher at the school, the book focused on the impulse to facilitate a more relevant education. Each double-page spread of the book features an illustration by Charles Bible and a definition of 'Black' submitted by a child of the school. The emphasis is on children's voices as their contributions are the only text within the book in large font opposite Bible's illustrations. The children's diverse understandings of what 'Black' meant to them included definitions ranging from "Black is as precious as a kitten" to overtly politically inspired definitions such as "Black is a people striving for freedom" (Pupils of P.S. 150 1970). The book explicitly places Black children's voices within the literature and directly challenges wider children's literature's erasure and dehumanization of Black children. As Dianne Johnson asserts, all children "need to see representations of themselves both visually and verbally" (Johnson 1990a, p. 11) and Bible's experiences working on books and in the streets both capture this sentiment.

Rudine Sims Bishop (2007) argues that a principal component of culturally conscious children's books is a familiar cultural environment and the Art and Storytelling program included such books, but also drew upon the immediate surroundings within the sessions. Many of the books read were set in nearby neighborhoods, including Harlem and Bedford–Stuyvesant. The inclusion of these familiar settings reinforced children's pride in their local communities but also served to capture children's interest. In *A Quiet Place*, Blue focuses on this lack of familiarity common in children's literature as the character Claudia disparages the books her little brother Matthew reads for being set in places that "may as well be on the moon" (Blue 1969). When Matthew finally discovers a book he wants to read, he is immediately taken by the illustrations of "houses on a street that looked like his street" as Tom Feelings' illustration depicts the child captivated by the book. Rose Blue's works were included in the storytelling sessions as they offered a detailed and positive depiction of the local area as her characters are shown to be proud of their communities. In *Bed-Stuy Beat*, the storyteller would take children through familiar settings and landmarks as the book follows a boy dancing through his neighborhood. Illustrator Harold James' detailed renderings of Bedford–Stuyvesant including brownstones, the library, the subway, local shops, and many other key landmarks would be recognizable to many of the audience in the sessions.

Children could pick out familiar settings in Steptoe's *Uptown* which included detailed paintings of the New York subway, or the familiar brownstones in Sharon Bell-Mathis' *Sidewalk Story* and Ruth Sonneborn's *Friday Night is Papa's Night* as the illustrators sketched out familiar landmarks and buildings, emphasizing the value of their local areas. One of the illustrators, Charles Bible, reveled in the experience of working with the children. During a session on the Lower East Side in Tompkins Square Park, he fascinated a young Millie Moldanado by sketching out local landmarks. Each time she recognized one, she leapt up and pointed out where they were in the city (Friedman 1972). A common thread within a lot of the African American children's literature at the time was to challenge white racist perceptions of the 'ghetto' often found within wider children's literature. In depicting children's local communities, artists and storytellers emphasized to their audiences that their neighborhoods were worthy of being included in literature as they moved beyond the racist stereotypes to which children were too often exposed. In Lucille Clifton's *The Black BC's*, another book frequently used in the program, the letter 'G' is used for ghetto, "a place

where we can be at home loved and free" (Clifton 1970, p. 14). The storytelling teams acted as a key extension of contemporary African American children's literature in reiterating key themes and fostering a positive identification with specific cultural environments. Children saw their neighborhoods and city in print and also met authors and illustrators who grew up in the same environment.

Lucille Clifton used the letter 'A' to represent Africa and used it as an opportunity to expand on the "king of the continents" (Clifton 1970, p. 1) to highlight the multiplicity of African cultures and nations. The storytelling teams used books like *The Black BC's* and Muriel Feelings' *Moja Means One* and *Zamani Goes to Market* to further another contemporary focus within African American children's literature: to instill pride in children's African roots. *Moja Means One* is a Swahili counting book that uses the format to not only teach children a new language but is also designed to introduce a variety of cultures and traditions from across Africa. Writing in 1965, Nancy Schmidt argued that most children's literature produced about the continent was imbued with "colonialist biases" and featured "unfavourable stereotypes of African people" (Schmidt 1965, pp. 64–65). Numerous Black children's writers focused on challenging monolithic depictions of Africa and this messaging was embraced by the storytelling teams as stories about Africa and Swahili counting books like *Moja Means One* became features of the sessions. The storytelling sessions built on a long heritage of correcting and challenging white racist literature and helped children challenge the status quo. The storytelling sessions built on the range of African American children's authors and helped deliver them to the intended audience. In the preface to her book *Moja Means One*, Muriel Feelings states that she hopes "boys and girls of African origin will enjoy learning to count in Swahili. . .gaining more knowledge of their African heritage" (Feelings 1971). The collaborative work of Muriel and Tom Feelings focused on celebrating African culture and, as Vincent Steele (1998) has argued, was linked to a pan-African nationalism that was closely tied to the Black Arts Movement. The artists and storytellers who used this book transmitted these ideas and made the book a fun experience for the children.

Though a lot of the attention in the planning of the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program was focused on African American children's literature, these teams also reached out to the Puerto Rican communities in Ocean Hill-Brownsville and Harlem. Central to the CIBC's mission was to be responsive to community needs and support the work of children's authors from a variety of perspectives often ignored by "the establishment media" (Charnes 1984, p. 19). The CIBC's program was deeply indebted to a long heritage of activists and librarians who used storytelling to engage local communities and to provide a more bespoke education not provided in local schools. The New York Public library hosted storytellers from diverse backgrounds as an important service to reach different communities. Storytellers from a range of backgrounds were invited to speak to local children and to facilitate a connection to their cultural heritage from Jewish folktales to Pinocchio in the original Italian (Baker and Greene 1987, p. 21). To serve the growing Puerto Rican community in the city, the NYPL hired Pura Belpré. She became one of the most famous storytellers and was the first Puerto Rican to work for New York Public Library. The Art and Storytelling on the Streets program used her work and Spanish-speaking storytellers to amplify and celebrate Puerto Rican culture and communities.

One of the most common stories used was Pura Belpré's *Perez y Martina* (Belpré 1961) a Puerto Rican folktale that was the first Spanish-language children's book published by a mainstream U.S. publisher in 1932. Belpré's children's literature originated from her role as a librarian after she was requested to submit a story for a storytelling hour. The Art and Storytelling program was part of a longstanding and reciprocal relationship between storytelling and children's literature in which storytelling became a crucial way to engage children with more relevant books. Belpré worked as a storyteller in communities across New York City from the 1930s and was still a powerful force in the city by the 1970s and was invited to bring her bilingual puppetry to the Art and Storytelling program. For Belpré, storytelling was a crucial precursor to her writing as she responded directly to the needs of

the children she met (Belpré n.d.). Her first work, *Perez y Martina*, was originally inspired by the Puerto Rican folktales she heard from her grandmother and passing these on to new generations was an integral part of her process. For Belpré, and by extension the storytelling teams, these folktales resonated with children as they were crucial modes for transmitting social, cultural, and political mores (Walker 2021).

As storytellers read out Julius Lester's retelling of Stagolee or High John, the illustrators etched out the folk heroes onto the sidewalk or onto canvases for children to see. The use of African American folklore in the events connects with a contemporary focus within children's literature to put into print many folktales and stories passed down through generations. As well as Lester's *Black Folktales*, versions of African folktales by white authors like Gerald McDermott's *Anansi the Spider* became popular tales used in the sessions. The storytelling sessions, therefore, not only transmitted contemporary children's literature but also built on a longer African American folkloric tradition. Fables and folk heroes were never static, and, through storytelling, these tales could take on new meanings and resonance. Lawrence Levine identifies African American folktales not as escapism but as "mirrors of reality" (Levine 2007, p. 439) that have reflected contemporary issues with each retelling. The storytelling sessions that took place across parks and playgrounds were part of a long oral tradition that had long roots in education and resistance. Folktales resonated because they manifested contemporary hopes and ideals. Julius Lester, author of *Black Folktales*, claimed that their popularity endures precisely because it is "in the tale that we communicate about our fears, hopes, dreams and fantasies" (Lester 1991). Therefore, the storytelling sessions built upon African American children's literature as children could engage with different interpretations of the stories in the books as audience members, storytellers, and artists added to and adapted the stories.

When they came to conduct a storytelling session at The MUSE in 1971, Leo and Joyce Carty encountered a local man born in 1899 who "recalled the tales of the old folks in the Black community" (CIBC 1971). This intergenerational aspect of the storytelling sessions was built into the program as the organizers hoped to use stories to connect community members. In a press release for the events, Harriet Brown claimed that one of the key aims was to connect children with "all the rich cultural resources of their community" which emphasizes how the storytelling events were more than just to incentivize reading but much wider educational ambitions. In creating storytelling sessions, the CIBC created an environment that invited books to be read communally. Within many of the books used such as Feelings' *Moja Means One*, the authors included a focus on the importance of storytelling for communities. To adapt Bishop's analogy for African American Children's Literature (Bishop 1990), the storytelling events acted as mirrors to African American literature as storytelling teams focused on the same themes in the books and shared many of the same aspirations as the creators. The sessions, however, were also windows as they offered new perspectives and opportunities for the books to be expressed and enjoyed as a broad array of figures were invited to take part in the sessions and add their own contributions.

Embedded in many works used in the program, such as Julius Lester's (1969) *Black Folktales* and Nikki Giovanni's poetry *Spin a Soft Song*, was a focus on a tradition of oral storytelling in which these books were intended to be part of an intergenerational sharing of ideas, values, and history. Julius Lester highlighted that his work was intended to be read aloud as "a folktale assumes the shape of its teller, and through the teller's voice colorations, vocal timbre and rhythms, gestures. . .the tale is recreated and made new" (Lester 1969, p. ix). As Lester reveals, storytelling is not simply a repetition of words but a unique and dynamic performance that amplifies the literature and infuses it with something new. All books used in the Art and Storytelling program were woven with different intonations, interpretations, and audience involvement.

Though the reports of these sessions cannot fully capture the nuances of the readings, the "storytelling with noise" focused on audience participation. The storytelling reports allude to call-and-response happening throughout stories as children became more familiar with the stories and were able to add their own details. The storytelling sessions invited

children to join in as their engagement became a key aspect of the literature. Whether it was joining in with the dozens in Lester's *How the Snake Got His Rattles*, as Mrs. Snake starts telling Mr. Snake that "his mama was a lizard and his daddy was a fishing worm" or whether it was rapping along to Blue's *Bed-Stuy Beat* (which included musical notation aids), the storytelling sessions became sites for children to bring their own meanings and flairs to the books. In the context of their telling, the storytelling sessions gave power to the children to intervene and contribute to the meanings of the stories being told. African American children's literature provided an avenue to help children express themselves and actively engage in their education.

8. New Modes of Education: African American Children's Books and Educational Innovation

In her report on one session, Joyce Carty mused that "Storytelling was one of the earliest means of communication. It was a great medium for sharing experience, for teachings, and for handing down from one generation to another ideas, ideals, values, standards of behavior" (Carty 1971). Inherent in the program was a focus on facilitating an education denied in mainstream schooling. As well as covering topics that were often excluded from public education such as African American folklore and Black history, the storytelling sessions embodied forms of narrative structures and orality often discouraged in Eurocentric models of education (Champion 2016). Champion highlights how African American stories often feature digression, repetition, and allusion, among many other features, and these could be incorporated in storytelling sessions in a way often not possible in the public education system. The storytelling sessions were not just a fun way to enjoy books; the planning notes reveal they were an attempt to provide "new modes of education" (CIBC 1970b) for children whom the Board of Education routinely overlooked in their curricula.

These modes of education scrawled in thick green marker were laid out from the beginning of the project. The CIBC, authors, illustrators, and educators all collaborated because they perceived African American children's literature to be a key in opening up education to children. The organizers identified that the Art and Storytelling program had three-fold educational benefits. Firstly, they claimed that an interest in books would spark a realization of the necessity to be able to read and write which will "follow through in their school work" (CIBC 1970b). Secondly, the organizers believed that these interactive sessions would help establish that "children <u>can</u> teach children;" and provide different avenues for learning as schools had not yet found ways to achieve this. Finally, they hoped that the sessions would help the publishing of more books and this circulation of books would help encourage parents and adults to become more involved in education. At a time when there was clamor for more community involvement in schooling, these educational aims of the project underscore how African American children's literature was perceived to be a crucial tool in the fight for a more relevant and community-oriented education.

In February 1971, the project's second year, the CIBC established a semi-permanent base in Marcus Garvey Village in Brownsville, Brooklyn. This pedestrianized community space was the scene for storytelling sessions and an art show of all the previous summer's artwork by illustrators and children. CIBC member Donnarae McCann highlighted that ten different schools transported children "by the busload" (McCann 1971) to the project for field trips as it became a crucial draw for educators, too. Parents and educators perceived the project as education outside of school rather than simply an activity to entertain children. The approval of local teachers demonstrates that many felt limited within schools in a way that the storytelling project was not. In her notes on the work of CIBC, Donnarae McCann claimed that the project provided children with an informal education which revealed the "potential of mobile, loosely structured activities, in contrast to confining all service within pseudo-Grecian, Carnegie buildings" (McCann 1971; CIBC 1970c). The project's draw for educators was clear; these sessions provided a learning experience not possible within the confines of the curricula they had to follow and African American children's literature could

provide a crucial alternative to books provided in school. Dorothy Robertson commented that many teachers were surprised by the substantial numbers of Black-authored children's books the storytelling teams possessed, demonstrating how these books were often not available in schools. The books had key educational value, but the storytelling events helped bridge the gap between children and educators.

By bringing education outside the school and into new avenues, streets, and homes, the project focused on crucial elements of Black educational philosophy such as cultural relevance, Black pride, and Black history. Not bound by the New York Board of Education, the storytelling teams used an array of books not found on the bookshelves of schools, and these books helped facilitate a Black-centered education. Gloria Ladson-Billings, a pedagogical theorist, argues that the dominant groups' ideology and vision permeates the curriculum, leaving "an incoherent and disjointed picture of those who are not White" (Ladson-Billings 2003, p. 4). The CIBC sought to rectify the fragmentary inclusion of African American stories, histories, and images within schools by focusing on trade books. The Storytelling on the Streets program exemplified a more radical understanding than the New York Board of Education of what relevance meant and used African American children's literature to further their educational aims.

Augusta Baker, another pioneering figure within the New York Public Library (NYPL), was a great advocate for storytelling and its educational benefits (Baker and Greene 1987). She praised the CIBC's Art and Storytelling program as a "wonderful way to motivate children's interest in books" and a model for community education projects. Baker, Coordinator of Children's Services at NYPL at the time, understood how Black children's books acted as a stimulus for many children otherwise disengaged from education. Indeed, as the program developed, the storytelling teams moved from the streets and into children's homes as local educational specialists saw the potential in the program. In the winter of 1971, Don and Dorothy Robertson visited several homes in Red Hook, South Brooklyn, where they read to smaller groups of children who did not attend school at all and provided illustration demonstrations. By going into homes, the storytelling teams supplemented public education that reached out to children who, for many reasons, did not attend school. An educational aide warned the Robertsons that one child never spoke when in the district office but to their surprise, the child became "very warm and talkative" (Robertson 1971b) during the storytelling session. The CIBC felt that African American children's books could be useful educational tools and though not replacing education, they could provide an opening for some children who felt disconnected from education.

9. Portraits and Printing: The Importance of Visualization in Storytelling

In 1971, several of the storytelling teams spoke to school groups and hundreds of other children at the MUSE, the Bedford Lincoln Neighborhood Museum in Brooklyn. There was, however, an increased focus on art as the illustrators sketched hundreds of children and created an exhibition that moved across community centers and libraries across the city. A visual aspect had been integral since the formation of the project as children lined up to have their portraits taken. Each storytelling report not only highlighted how many children attended, but how many of them also had their portrait taken. That the program was selected as a regular feature at the MUSE is indicative of the cultural and community benefits others saw in the sessions. Just eighteen months prior to the events taking place in the museum, community activists and museum officials met to discuss how "the white establishment" (Harvey and Friedberg 1970) was not addressing local cultural needs. As a result of the frank discussions, Emily Dennis Harvey, former Acting Director of the Brooklyn Children's Museum, stated that there existed "fundamental questions about art or culture, and about their function in a community" (Harvey and Friedberg 1970). The CIBC's program addressed some of these concerns and was part of a wider grassroots movement that believed the educational power in Black art.

Across the city in Harlem, Edward Spriggs, the director of the Harlem Studio Museum, developed his own initiative of 'Studio in the Streets' in 1971. Intimately linked with the

Black Arts Movement, the program sought to expose "the Harlem community to some bold artistic images and the ideas underlying them" (Braun-Reinitz and Weissman 2009, p. 45). This was one of many community-oriented art projects that encouraged the involvement of young people in painting murals and creating their own art. This creative impulse was shared by the illustrators and artists involved in the CIBC's program. Central to many of the artists' drive was a desire to foster a positive self-identity for children through art. Their work in African American children's literature was just one key avenue for them to pursue this idea and the storytelling sessions provided an opportunity to expand on this work. Tom Feelings described it as a duty as an artist to provide recognizable images for children to "see the beauty" in themselves. (Roberts 1982). The storytelling events were more than extensions of the African American children's books used; increasingly, the creation of images took on a more significant role in the process.

The children who attended the storytelling sessions listened to Judith Berry Griffin's *Nat Turner* while also witnessing Leo Carty sketch out his own illustrations from the book on the sidewalk in real time. Witnessing the creative process underpinning the books was crucial in helping children connect with books and in identifying with those who created them. As the program developed, however, the art focused more on sketching the children who attended, helping children understand their importance to African American children's literature. They were not just passive listeners but could be active participants in the literature and creation of books.

The value later ascribed to Black illustrators' work by scholars such as Dianne Johnson (1990a) is evident in children's responses recorded in the reports. Children followed the storytelling teams and lined up to talk to the artists and have their portrait taken. At the grassroots level, illustrators engaged children in reading children's books by showing them art in progress and by including them within the context of children's literature. Johnson's assertion of the importance of visual literacy played out on stoops and sidewalks as illustrators brought the words of African American stories to life in front of them. The CIBC reported that many of the children were amazed to discover that children's books were "drawn by real live artists and not by machines" (*Interracial Books for Children* 1970). Seeing artists create images for them became a key draw for children as the Art and Storytelling sessions engaged children in the creation of African American children's literature and not just the books themselves.

By also sketching each child, the artists cemented a place for the children within children's literature. Children could witness artists like George Ford and Betty Dillard paint familiar images from the stories within the same session that they got to be drawn. Each storytelling session ended with a queue of children waiting to be drawn, often with parents asking to pay the artist to take these images home. Dorothy Robertson reported that her husband "took great pains to sketch almost a complete drawing of each child. He felt that within this age group, self-image and identity were of paramount importance" (Robertson 1971a). The storytelling teams helped children realize that there were Black creators like Leo Carty, Tom Feelings, and Dorothy Robertson who were making books for them and with characters like them.

In their long-term goals for the Art and Storytelling program, the organizers focused on generating children's interest in creating their own books. By 1972, the project's third year, this aim was realized as the 'Printmobile' hit the streets and brought bookmaking directly to children. After the success of the Art and Storytelling project, the Printmobile continued to "bring books alive for children" (Chambers 1972). From their experience in the storytelling sessions, many of the organizers realized that many children had a fascination with the process of making books. Leo Carty was chosen as the director for this offshoot program and he, along with three others, parked their truck and unloaded a block press and an offset press onto the sidewalk or playground. They wanted to build upon the "visual and verbal feel for books and storytelling" and show children "how a manuscript is put together" (Chambers 1972). The Storytelling sessions had successfully used African American children's literature to emphasize the value and significance of Black children in

literature. The Printmobile expanded on this and helped inspire children to draw and print their own designs.

Hundreds of members of the neighborhood gathered around the truck which had an emblazoned message on its side: "Printmobile for Kids and Everybody." The Printmobile built on the Storytelling sessions by focusing on creating educational activities in local communities and engaging with African American children's literature. The power of children's books was not just in hearing them be read, but in harnessing people's creativity and encouraging people to contribute to literature.

10. Conclusions

In 1974, the final year of the Art and Storytelling program, Sharon Bell Mathis addressed a conference of librarians on behalf of the CIBC, addressing how institutional racism was still prominent in the children's book industry as she accused *The Slave Dancer*, winner of the Newbery Award, of perpetuating racist stereotypes (Guillaume 1974). Indeed, the organization and many of the authors involved continued this fight far beyond the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program as they sought new avenues to promote African American children's literature. Many of the authors and illustrators articulated that they sought to change the publishing industry's assumptions with their work but, as Walter Dean Myers later claimed, rising conservatism and market forces limited many opportunities (Myers 1986). The CIBC continued their work well into the 1980s as they moved much of their work from the streets and into universities and schools. The CIBC's long struggle to promote anti-racist and anti-sexist children's literature has been taken up ever since by a range of organizations and individuals. African American children's literature and their inclusion in schools has been marginalized and targeted ranging from subtle censorship in curricula committees to the planting of bombs in the 1974 Kanawha County protest. Myers' concern for rising conservatism has been shared by organizations including PEN America and the National Coalition Against Censorship as it has not been enough to just have stories told, but it has been necessary to organize to keep these books accessible for children.

A year after the Art and Storytelling program ended in 1975, the Parents of New York United, a conservative organization, were successful in removing books including works by Langston Hughes and Alice Childress that they deemed "anti-American" from the Island Trees school district in Long Island, New York. Steven Pico, a seventeen-year- old student, sued the board with the support of local librarians and educators who were fearful of the increasing level of censorship being employed in public schools (Foerstel 1994, p. 14). While the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program was not in defiance of a specific book ban, it was in reaction to an educational system that was unresponsive to the needs of many students, precisely the form of censorship Pico was referring to. The CIBC's efforts in the late 1960s and 1970s bypassed many of the obstacles children came across in accessing African American children's literature and this was supported by many educators who had become frustrated with the silent censorship and bureaucracy that limited access. While the program does not feature in histories of book bans, like Herbert Foerstel's, or work on African American children's literature, it was a significant grassroots campaign that helped children access books that were often denied to them. The CIBC's program offered funding, a network of contacts, and also provided key spaces in order to support African American children's literature. Their constant activism and advocacy was crucial in providing access and support to the growing canon.

In recent years, book bans have increased considerably. In their analysis of what books have been banned from 2021 to 2022, PEN America has discovered that 41 percent of banned books contain LGBTQ+ themes or characters and 40 percent feature a protagonist or prominent secondary character of color (Friedman and Johnson 2022). This heightened focus on censoring LGBTQ+ topics and the targeting of books that feature discussions of race or racism through a misappropriation of Critical Race Theory has, however, been resisted. While not consciously emulating the CIBC's program of the 1970s, organizations

like the Book Ban Busters have remarkable similarities to the powerful work undertaken decades ago. A grassroots organization with support from prominent children's authors such as Ibi Zoboi and Melissa Hart, the Book Ban Busters are reminiscent of the work undertaken in the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program as they seek to ensure access to important works for children. Their Banned Bookmobile and Read-ins are indicative of an ongoing coalition of writers and activists in an effort to defy the racist and anti-LGBTQ+ efforts of politicians and activist groups. While the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program has not been adequately recognized within wider scholarship for its pioneering support of African American children's literature, its legacy has lived on as activists, educators, and creators have continued to defy limits placed on more representative children's literature.

Although many of its grander aims were never achieved, the Art and Storytelling program did reach thousands of children over four years. These children became engaged and contributed to African American children's literature as the events became key extensions of the myriad hopes, messages, and meanings present within the literature. Dianne Johnson argues that African American children's literature interprets and invokes aspects of African American life and culture which helps young readers understand the "many meanings and implications of 'Blackness.'" Artists sketched subversive characters like Stagolee for children as well as intimate portraits of familial love as storytellers read out that "Black is as good as your mother tucking you into bed" (Pupils of P.S. 150 1970). The Storytelling sessions were important extensions of African American children's literature that demonstrated its diversity and power to children across New York City. Furthermore, these sessions were more than just retellings of the stories but were important conduits to help the books reach new audiences. Through the story of just one city, the project underscored how African American children's literature could be used to help innovate in education, provide fun for children, and help secure Black children's place within literature. The CIBC was conscious of the wider implications of their work as they believed that their work in New York City could be implemented elsewhere. In notes on their program for *New York Amsterdam News*, the organizers claimed that "all communities can take advantage of their local artists and storytellers to go into the streets where the children are and turn them on to the rewards of reading" (CIBC 1970a).

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Article

Afro-Latin@ Representation in Youth Literature: Affirming Afro-Latin@ Cultural Identity

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Abstract: Studies show that diverse representation in children's literature can positively impact the self-perceptions of marginalized children. To promote feelings of self-worth, children must see their cultural identities authentically portrayed in a manner that does not promote stereotypes in stories that affirm and support their world experiences. This essay focuses specifically on Afro-Latin@ identity in the United States and the role Afro-Latin@ representation in children's and young adult literature can play in shaping Afro-Latin@ feelings regarding race and cultural heritage, and in constructing and affirming self-identity and feelings of self-worth.

Keywords: Afro-Latin@; mestizaje; blanqueamiento; Afro-Latinidad; colorismo

1. Positionality

From an emic perspective and cognizance of the inherent subjectivity in research, this author acknowledges how her cultural, personal, and professional experiences may impact this paper's objectivity. For this reason, the author wishes to disclose information about her cultural identity. The author is a cinnamon-skinned, cisgender, and middle-aged woman who presents phenotypically as Black and identifies culturally as Afro-Latina. Her father was a native Spanish speaker of Afro-Panamanian descent who immigrated to the US from Mexico in the 1940s. Her mother was of Afro-Caribbean heritage, born in the United States to Bajan/Barbadian parents (one of African descent, the other of African and Scottish ancestry). The author was born and raised in New York City during the early 70s and late 80s, mainly growing up in Harlem and in the predominantly [2]Latin@ neighborhood of Washington Heights. Her cultural and racial background undoubtedly informs this research as they position her as an insider in this community being discussed.

2. Introduction

Afro-Latin@[1] identity is complex as the mere presence of Afro-Latin@ populations in the Americas works to dismantle popular racialized narratives about who is Latin@ and who is not, particularly in the context of racial identification within the United States, where there tends to be a limited approach to capturing the fullness and rich diversity of Latin@ identity. Additionally, to be Black and forced to categorize oneself as simply Latin@ while denying racial or phenotypic makeup dismisses the unique challenges that Afro-Latin@s face within their respective communities, within the United States, and beyond (Adames et al. 2016; Comas-Diaz 2001). The purposeful erasure of Black identity, supported by the US and Latin American colonial machine, has led many Afro-Latin@s to distance themselves from their African origins. Historically, there have been strategic attempts throughout Latin America to minimize the presence of Black people and their contributions to Spanish-speaking societies.

In any discussion about the Afro-Latin@ experience, anti-Blackness and Black erasure must be considered if a complete picture of the challenges faced by these communities is to be entertained. Without a fundamental understanding of the historical treatment of these groups, it is difficult to comprehend the importance Afro-Latin@ representation

in children's literature plays in helping to positively shape the identities of Afro-Latin@ children. This essay identifies critical historical elements that have led to the erasure of the Afro-Latin@ identity within larger Latin@ communities and the role that erasure has played in formulating Afro-Latin@ perceptions around identity and belonging. Additionally, the author explores the necessity and importance of positive Afro-Latin@ representation within US youth literature in promoting cultural pride among young Afro-Latin@s in the United States.

3. Afro-Latin@ Identity

Per Pew Research, as of 2020 there are approximately 6 million adults in the United States that identify as Afro-Latin@, and they make up 2% of the US adult population and 12% of the adult Latin@ population (Gonzalez-Barrera 2022). Pew points to the difficulty associated with accurately representing the number of Afro-Latin@s in this country as much of the complexity is tied to the way the information has been historically captured by the US Census Bureau. The Pew Research Center took a different approach to census taking insofar that they moved away from the US Census construction of Afro-Latinidad as being those who identify as Hispanic and Black, to a more pointed approach in which they asked those surveyed whether they self-identify as Afro-Latin@ (Gonzalez-Barrera 2022). The 2020 census results showed that 1.2 million people (all ages) identified as Black and Hispanic while the Pew Research approach garnered a larger number of individuals who identify as Afro-Latin@ thus highlighting the complexity associated with Afro-Latin@ identity (Gonzalez-Barrera 2022). Per Gonzalez-Barrera (2022), Afro-Latin@ responses to Census Bureau questions regarding racial identity display vastly different responses as approximately three-in-ten Afro-Latin@s identified their race as white, 25% chose Black, 23% selected other, 16% chose the multiple race option, and 1% identified as Asian. Additionally, those Afro-Latin@s that did not consider themselves Latin@ were more likely to identify as Black (59% vs. 17%), which further contextualizes the deep divide among Afro-Latin@s in the ways in which they choose to identify.

When discussing Afro-Latin@ demographics, it is essential to clarify the usage of the terms "Latin@" and "Hispanic". The terms "Latin@" and "Hispanic" are often used interchangeably without acknowledging their distinct meanings (Rochin 2016). The term "Latin@" is derived from Latin and refers to those individuals who originate from Latin America despite their national ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds and can include those who originate from Brazil and the Indigenous people of Latin America (Rochin 2016). The origin of the term "Hispanic", comes from the term "Hispania" which references Spain; therefore, individuals with Spanish ancestry are the only ones that would be considered "Hispanic" (Rochin 2016). This grouping excludes those of Brazilian origin and those individuals from English- or French-speaking regions of Latin America (Rochin 2016). Comas-Diaz (2001) expressed that the term "Hispanic" in essence is an umbrella term generated by the United States Bureau of the Census to identify individuals of Spanish origin in the 1970 census. Comas-Diaz (2001) situates the usage of this terminology in relation to internalized colonization and suggests that its usage was promoted by conservative political actors who believed their European-Spanish ancestry to be superior to dominated groups. The important distinction to make in terms of this discussion is that all individuals of Latin American origin are Latin@, while not all Latin@s are Hispanic.

The Pew Research Center's attempt at capturing Afro-Latin@ identity has shown the inherent difficulty with the task. Afro-Latin@ presence in the United States is undeniable, but given the monolithic way that racial classification operates in this country, many are unsure of how to view identity that falls outside of US societal norms, leaving those in charge of racial enumeration confused about the complex nature of Afro-Latin@ identity and wondering what or who are Afro-Latin@s. The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States speaks of this confusion surrounding the term and points to the fact that most people have bought into the mutual exclusivity of Blackness, which defaults to a singular notion of what it means to be Black in the United States and is centered

around the Black and white binary. Blackness is defined through the lens of the African American or Southern Black experience and does not account for the complexity that exists within Afro-Latin@ or Afro-Caribbean identity. For the purpose of this discussion, we define *Afro-Latinidad* as those individuals of African descent who are from Mexico, Central and South America, and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, and those individuals of African descent in the United States who are of Latin American and Caribbean origins (Jiménez Román and Flores 2010).

4. Anti-Black Colonial Narratives in Latin America and Beyond

In discussions surrounding Afro-Latin@ identity in Latin America and the United States, it is important to provide some historical context as to how Blackness operates within the confines of most Latin American countries. We must first acknowledge that the existence of Black people in Latin America is indisputable. From a diasporic perspective, the African presence is undeniably felt throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Of the Africans forcibly brought to the Americas as part of the Middle Passage, approximately 10.7 million of the enslaved landed in Latin America and the Caribbean. At the same time, only 0.036 percent arrived in the United States (Hernández 2022). Much like in the United States, the after-effects of colonization and racial stratification in Latin America have created an environment where Afro-Latin@s, especially those with dark skin and African features, are often poor and socioeconomically disadvantaged as opposed to their white Latin@ counterparts (Hernández 2022). For example, this behavior can be seen in Cuba prior to the Cuban revolution of 1959, where dark-skinned Afro-Cubans were denied access to certain jobs that light-skinned mixed-race Cubans were allowed to occupy due to the general belief that the lighter-skinned applicants were racially superior (Hernández 2022). So, despite popular narratives often perpetuated within Latin@ communities about the absence of racism and racial discrimination in Latin America, historically speaking, just as in the US, racism is pervasive and a fact of life in Latin America and the Caribbean (Hernández 2022).

To situate the importance of positive Afro-Latin@ representation in children's literature, it is necessary to first identify how anti-Blackness in Latin America and beyond has historically worked to inform the attitudes and perceptions of Latin@s and Afro-Latin@s about Blackness and Black people. Discussions around anti-Blackness in many Latin@ communities are often situated within the racialized paradigm fostered in the United States that positions African Americans as racially inferior. Additionally, some Latin@ circles suggest that racial prejudice and stereotyping are uniquely US constructs not reproduced in Latin America. Bonilla-Silva (2004) outlined the tri-racial system that exists in Latin American countries that places white and light-skinned Latin@s and Asians at the top of the pecking order and dark-skinned Latin@s of all races at the bottom of the hierarchy. Perez Lopez (2017) affirmed that this stratification explains the perceptions of some Latin@ groups around the existence of racism in Latin America and the United States. Additionally, it provides insight into how racist incidents might possibly be disregarded or undocumented within Latin American countries: "This model explains how, for example, in Mexico it is normal/common to say that there is no race or racism. It is also common to say that in the United States people are very racist, but not in Mexico; and as a result, racism is scarcely documented in Mexico" (Perez Lopez 2017, p. 3).

Tanya Kateri Hernández (2022), a leading scholar of Afro-Latin@ experience and Anti-Blackness in the Latin@ communities, discusses the denial on the part of some Latin@s of the existence of racism against Afro-Latin@s in Latin America and within Latin@ communities. Hernández (2022) situates the root of this denial in the concept of mestizaje, which refers to the racial mixture present among the population within many Latin American countries. Mestizaje denies and counters narratives of racism as it enables Latin@s to claim racial innocence by suggesting that due to their own racial mixture, and the racial mixture that exists in many Latin@ families, that they, meaning Latin@ people, are somehow incapable

of harboring Anti-Black sentiments or racist attitudes toward Afro-Latin@s or African Americans (Hanchard 1994; Costa Vargas 2004; Johnson 2020).

Quiros and Dawson (2013) also spoke of the existing racial hierarchy in the US and the historical construction of race having moved away from the idea of the one-drop rule, the Jim Crow era law that specified that anyone possessing Black ancestry must identify as Black, to more of a tri-racial system where those associated with whiteness (in this case "white" Latin@s) earn greater privilege and acceptance over darker-skinned Latin@s (Hickman 1996). It is important to note that the one-drop rule was not practiced in Latin America; as mentioned previously, the idea of mestizaje was supported, and the racial mixing of Europeans with non-Europeans was encouraged and used to promote colonial interests and to perpetuate white supremacy in Latin America during the Postcolonial era. The end goal of mestizaje was to "mejorar la Raza" or, as the English translation suggests, "better the race" by working strategically to actively dilute the existing non-European gene pool. This process was designed purposefully to eliminate Black and Indigenous populations from the larger population (Chavez-Dueñas et al. 2014; Charles 2021). The presence of existing racialized categories and attempts at social stratification within Latin America and the United States intentionally privilege light-skinned or white Latin@s over dark-skinned Afro-Latin@s, thus causing many Afro-Latin@s to suffer psychological and socioeconomic distress based upon these socially constructed and widely held perspectives (Hochschild and Weaver 2007; Bonilla-Silva 2004; Ore 2003).

The colonized notion of blanqueamiento, the belief that whiteness and one's approximation to whiteness are associated with intelligence, status, and wealth, while Blackness and Indigenousness are lacking in sophistication or refinement, is historically a commonly held proposition that permeates the Latin@ community and many Latin@ families today (Garcia 2015). The practice of colorism, the "process that privileges light-skinned people of color over dark in areas such as income, education, housing, and the marriage market", is common among Afro-Latin@s and other racialized groups (Hunter 2007, p. 237). However, it, too, is rooted in colonialism and white domination and promotes the idea that white European identity is ideal and preferential over Indigenous or African ancestry (Fanon 1952; Hunter 2002; Quiros and Dawson 2013). Additionally, colonization has contributed to perceptions about the undesirability of Blackness or Brownness by painting these groups as lazy and ugly (Fanon 1952; Hunter 2002; Quiros and Dawson 2013; Garcia 2015). This colonized belief system is reproduced in many Latin@ communities, and is often present particularly in discussions of idyllic beauty, preferred skin tone and hair texture, and in instances where one's societal positioning is dependent upon their proximity to whiteness (Quiros and Dawson 2013).

Despite the predominance of anti-Blackness in Latin America, its presentation does not emerge uniformly across all Latin@ communities as perceptions about Blackness and the willingness to align oneself with Blackness differ greatly depending upon the country of origin and an individual's proximity to Blackness. Johnson (2020) posits in his study examining the effects of racial fluidity on Black consciousness, that among mixed and Afro-Panamanians, phenotype is a better predictor of how an individual perceives things such as system equality and whether they believe in the possibility of Black mobilization. Those who appear more phenotypically Black (darker-skinned) tend to have stronger perceptions of systemic racial equality while those who appear more racially mixed tend to express a belief in collective Black mobilization to address systemic issues. Johnson (2020) also found in his discussion with Panamanian participants that mestizaje did not negatively impact the way mixed-race Panamanians perceive their Black identity. Surprisingly, they were able to move fluidly between identifying as mestizo (mixed race) and as Black.

One of the participants in a non-Afro focus group, a dark-skinned woman, self-identified as mestiza during the recruitment phone call. When she was asked her racial identification during the focus group—this time in a room of seven light skinned mestizos—she proudly claimed, "I am Afro-Panamanian". Many Afro-Panamanians recognize that

they are both mixed and Black. Their ability to claim race-mixture does not necessarily negate Black self-recognition (Johnson 2020, p. 373).

5. Positive Afro-Latin@ Representation and Afro-Latin@ Youth Identity

Thus far, this essay has discussed the complexities associated with Afro-Latin@ identity, the historical manifestations of anti-Blackness in Latin America and beyond, and how mestizaje and colorism function within Afro-Latin@ communities. The discourse around mestizaje, blanqueamiento and Blackness in the Latin@ community highlights the importance of positive Afro-Latin@ representation in literature to affirm, reshape, and combat negative perceptions of Blackness and Black identity. The historical context presented frames this argument of how positive Afro-Latin@ representation within youth and children's literature can help Afro-Latin@ young people embrace the positive attributes of their African identities. As Jank's suggests, it is essential for Latin@s from different cultural backgrounds to have the ability to reshape existing discourses (qtd. in Braden and Rodriguez 2016, p. 58). Braden and Rodriguez (2016) posit that the presence of multicultural literature provides a window into understanding the culture and experiences of others. Children who are presented with literature that reflects a singular cultural identity or heritage tend to place that cultural experience above all others (Braden and Rodriguez 2016). This, of course, creates a climate where there is disbelief of cultural significance on the part of young people of color. The authors emphasize the importance of children's literature being inclusive in schools in helping to affirm self-identity and allowing children to begin to resist the negative ways some groups are represented through storytelling (Braden and Rodriguez 2016).

The possibility of literature as a tool of resistance is demonstrated by Xie (2013) who pointed to children's literature implemented as a postcolonial tool to decolonize and deconstruct racial and ethnic differences in an attempt to move toward "globalized post-coloniality" (p. 13). Durand and Jiménez-García (2018) support Xie's anti-colonial perspective in their discussion of visual narratives and their potential to deconstruct colonial ideas of race. The authors mention Eric Velasquez, an author challenging homogenous beliefs about African American, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-Latin@ people. Through his work and visual representations, Velasquez challenges existing depictions of Afro-Latin@ and Afro-Caribbean people by presenting alternate images and ideas of Black identity (Durand and Jiménez-García 2018).

When considering the role positive Afro-Latin@ representation plays in working to affirm Afro-Latin@ cultural identity, one must understand how children generally form ideas surrounding racial identity. Children generate perceptions of race at early ages, and within the US even if not actively involved in discussions of race, they are inextricably forced to contend with the systemic aftermath of its social construction. For example, young children of color often live in segregated neighborhoods, and in school and beyond, they are subjected to literature and media that actively center white lead characters and highlight their lived experiences (White and Wanless 2019). Additionally, children, early on, comprehend the race-based social order within the United States that positions and privileges some racial groups above others. This understanding points to the importance of presenting Afro-Latin@ children with positive cultural representations to prepare them to contend with the inevitable systemic racism they will undoubtedly encounter (White and Wanless 2019). It is equally important to note that schools often function as sites of cultural and racial erasure as children of color seldom see themselves represented or reflected in the books available to them in schools, and this lack of representation often works to negatively impact their perceptions of self (Pérez Huber et al. 2023).

Mizell (2022), in his work, emphasizes the power associated with children being able to access literature reflective of their cultural identity. Using LatCrit and testimonios, he explores the immigrant story of a young Afro-Latin@ boy. Latin@ Critical Studies, or LatCrit, is an offshoot of Critical Race Theory and emphasizes the usage of testimonio[2] and counter-storytelling powerful tools to reconcile historical wrongs by countering sin-

gular white colonist narratives (Lopez 2007; Solórzano and Yasso 2001; Tran 2019) Mizell (2022), by emphasizing the potential of counter-storytelling in picture books, explores the possibility of picture books being used as an entry-point to provide students of color with counternarratives decentering whiteness and hegemony and combating anti-Latin@ and anti-Black perspectives. Mizell (2022) contends that when presented in picture book format, "testimonios reinforce the lived experiences of Latine immigrant children to contest dominant deficient or inaccurate narratives and build a shared emphatic understanding with others" (p. 6).

6. Shifting the Narrative: Racial Representation and Affirming Cultural Identity

In a general search of Afro-Latin@ children's books, this author encountered an article published by Essence magazine, a popular Black women's magazine, depicting seventeen children's books featuring Afro-Latin@ and Afro-Caribbean characters (Peart 2020). Many books were written and illustrated by Afro-Caribbean/Afro-Latin@ authors and illustrators. Some books were self-published by the authors, some through publishers outside of the US, and others by smaller divisions of larger, well-known publishers. Smaller, less-known publishers published most of the titles. Notably, Harper Collins, a larger-known publishing house, published a few of the titles. The books listed were mainly for younger children; however, the article mentions a few young adult novels. Broadly, the books in the article address topics relevant to young Afro-Latin@ readers, such as colorism and navigating dual cultural identities.

The following titles are presented in the article and reviewed independently by this author: *Bad Hair Does Not Exist*, which was written and illustrated by Sulma Arzu-Brown, a Garifuna-Honduran author and illustrator, and published by Afro-Latin Publishing, a company dedicated to publishing titles that focus on the experiences of Afro-descendants. Aruzu-Brown's work attempts to combat the colonial narrative commonly reproduced throughout Latin America around the existence of "good" hair (straight and silky) and "bad" hair (coarse or tightly coiled); *Cendrillon: A Caribbean Cinderella* by Robert D. San Souci, a white San Francisco-based writer known for reimagining global folktales, illustrated by Brian Pickney, an award-winning African-American artist, and published by Aladdin Books, a division of Simon and Shuster dedicated to publishing culturally relevant books. The book presents colorful images that help to paint a picture of island life. *Down by the River: Afro-Caribbean Rhymes, Games, and Songs for Children* by Grace Hallworth, a Trinidadian author, illustrated by Caroline Binch, a white illustrator, and published by a U.K.-based publisher, Frances Lincoln Children's Books. Hallworth exposes children to popular Caribbean children's songs and games. Her work helps to showcase the rich history of storytelling in Caribbean cultures; *Drum Dream Girl* by Margarita Engle, a Cuban-American author, published by Harper Collins and illustrated by Mexican-born artist Rafael Lopez, is based upon the childhood of Millo Castro Zaldarriaga, a Chinese-African-Cuban musician who fulfilled her childhood dream of becoming a drummer, a profession traditionally frowned upon for women in Cuba. Millo later would form the first all-female dance band, Anaconda, with her sisters. *Isabella's Hair and How She Learned To Love It* by Brooklyn-based English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher and Afro-Latin@ author Marshalla Soriano Ramos and illustrated by Michael Murphy, a children's book illustrator. Ramos self-published the book through CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, an Amazon publishing service. The illustrations are crudely depicted and not as stylized as in other reviewed books. However, the story highlights the experiences of an Afro-Puerto Rican child and her struggle to accept her natural hair. *Kitchen Dance*, written and illustrated by Maurie J. Manning, a white-presenting author and published by Harper Collins, presents a positive image of an Afro-Latin family who enjoys singing and spending time with each other. *Letters to My Mother* by Teresa Cárdenas, an Afro-Cuban author, was published by Groundwood Books, a Canadian-based publisher known for publishing books by Latin@ authors in English and Spanish. The book is a young adult novel featuring an Afro-Cuban girl who moves in with her aunt and cousins after her mother's death. The main character

endures attacks from her family related to her physical features (hair, dark, and skin color). To deal with her suffering, she writes letters to her deceased mother. The story helps to illustrate the colorism within families and its damaging effects on individuals. *Marisol and Magdalena* is a young adult novel written by Afro-Panamanian author Veronica Chambers and published by Little Brown Books for Young Readers. The story depicts the experiences of two Panamanian-American girls sent to Panama to live with their grandmother for a year. The book is a coming-of-age story highlighting the uniqueness of being an American-born Panamanian who has to navigate life in Panama. *Max Loves Muñecas*! by Zetta Elliott, a Black Canadian author, illustrated by Mauricio Flores, a Honduran freelance illustrator, and published by CreateSpace, tells the story of young Max, a boy who likes dolls. The author, through her storytelling, attempts to deconstruct and challenge the notion of traditional gender roles; *My Feet Are Laughing* by Lissette Norman, Afro-Dominican poet and writer, illustrated by Frank Morrison, an African-American graffiti artist and former break-dancer, and published by the American publishing company, Farrar, Straus and Giroux. The story focuses on a young, out-spoken Afro-Latin@ girl who moves with her mom and sister from her family apartment to her maternal grandmother's New York City brownstone following her grandmother's death. The book incorporates poetry into the storytelling and presents a non-traditional depiction of family as the main character's parents are amicably divorced and committed co-parents, showing that divorce does not mean the complete dissolution of the family unit; *Me Llamo Celia* by Monica Brown, a Peruvian-American author, illustrated by Rafael Lopez (mentioned previously, he also illustrated *Drum Dream Girl*), and published by Cooper Square Publishing, LLC. The book is colorful and beautifully illustrated. It introduces young children to the life of the renowned Afro-Cuban singer Celia Cruz; *Niña Bonita* by Ana Maria Machado, a Brazilian-born writer, illustrated by Venezuelan illustrator Rosana Feria and published by Kane/Miller Book Publishers. The book tells the story of a dark-skinned Afro-Latin@ girl who meets a white bunny who loves her dark skin and wants to be black and beautiful like her. The book explores colorism within families as the main character is the darkest member of her family; *Pelé, El Rey del Fútbol* by Monica Brown, Peruvian American author, illustrated by Rudy Guiterrez and published by Harper Collins. The book focuses on the life of the famous Afro-Brazilian footballer Pelé and his rise to fame. The illustrations attempt to capture the motion and smooth artistry of Pelé's footwork on the soccer field. *Secret Saturdays* is a fictional novel for young adults written by Afro-Puerto Rican author Torrey Maldonado, a Brooklyn public school teacher. The story captures a friendship between two young Afro-Latin@ boys raised by single mothers and growing up in the Brooklyn Red Hook Project, where the author grew up. *Shadowshaper* by Daniel José Older, a Cuban-American author and published by Scholastic Inc, is a young adult novel about a young Afro-Latin@ girl searching for her Afro-Boricua roots. Older tends to write young adult stories that center the experiences of multicultural/ethnic characters. *Show and Prove* is a young adult novel by Sofia Quintero, a Bronx-raised Afro-Puerto Rican-Dominican author, and published by Knopf Books for Young Readers, a division of Penguin Random House Canada. The book is set in the Bronx, NY, during the early 1980s and deals with the racial tensions that arose during the early days of hip hop; finally, *A Song for Bijou* is a novel written by Josh Farrar, a white Brooklyn-based author, and published by Bloomsbury USA Children's. The book features a Haitian girl who has recently immigrated to the US. The young girl meets a white boy interested in dating her, and the book chronicles the cultural challenges associated with intercultural dating. The author is not a member of Haitian culture, so it is unclear how closely he captured the Haitian experience; however, his bio states that he interviewed members of the Haitian community before writing his book (Peart 2020).

This preliminary search highlights some of the existing literature that positively represents the Afro-Latin@–Afro-Caribbean experience. Still, despite the existence of these books and progress in children's literature, growth has hovered between 13 and 15 percent from 2002 to 2015 and has not exceeded 15 percent since then (Nel 2017). Nel (2017) attributes this stagnant growth to racism within the children's publishing

industry and attempts on the part of publishers to maintain institutional racism through the implementation of "colorblind" practices that effectively deny the marketability of works that center on the experiences of people of color. So, given the structural racism and institutional racism that exists in the US, how do we go about ensuring the creation and publication of books that feature positive representations of Afro-Latin@ characters? Nel (2017) suggests that one way to combat the colorblind practices present in the children's publishing field that aim to white-wash Black characters and to counter the resistance to telling Afro-Latin@ stories on a larger scale is to increase the number of editors of color in these largely white spaces who are willing to publish diverse stories.

Additionally, some of the institutional racist practices in children's publishing are now being combated on an individual level by authors such as Zetta Elliott, who has decidedly made it a point to cut out the middle person and self-publish her work to ensure that her multicultural stories continue to be told (Nel 2017). Elliott (2015) identifies herself as a Black feminist writer who writes stories about Black children and teens. She spoke of her experiences as a writer of youth literature and the challenges associated with attempting to publish her work through traditional methods:

Since I started writing for young readers in 2000, only three of my thirty stories have been published traditionally. I turned to self-publishing as my only recourse, and now face the contempt of those who see self-publishing as a mere exercise in vanity (Elliott 2015, p. 1).

Elliott (2015) expresses that her reasons for moving towards self-publishing were largely to combat traditional publishing ideas about the perceived benefits of publishing stories featuring people of color. Additionally, she speaks of self-publishing as a means to combat the white privilege present in the field, self-publishing then serving as a means for multicultural stories to be told without the permission of the largely white-dominated publishing industry (Elliott 2015).

7. Final Thoughts

Today's highly politicized climate evidences a cultural shift away from an attempt to celebrate the richness and diversity of lived experience in the United States to one aimed toward suppressing marginalized voices and forms of expression, literary work among them (Lowery 2023). Now more than ever, those committed to social justice, dismantling white supremacy and hegemony, must be ever vigilant of these attempts to ban the distribution of knowledge that falls outside the parameters of societal white norms. As mentioned throughout this essay, the presence of positive literary examples plays a role in affirming a child's cultural identity. Multicultural children's authors committed to inclusive storytelling and increasing Afro-Latin@ presence in children's literature must begin to think creatively about how to combat the anti-progressive pushes happening all across our country and around the world.

The tendency on the part of traditional children's publishing houses to dismiss or minimize the need for inclusive literature and the telling of non-white stories must be challenged, but in the words of Audre Lorde, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" and given our understanding of the way that white supremacy operates in our society, writers of color must begin to think creatively about how to distribute their work to the masses. If book banning continues and if white-run publishing houses continue to discredit and minimize the importance of non-white voices, self-publishing may be a means to do so. Regardless of the approach, as academics, we must challenge the current political discourse that aims to discredit or diminish the contributions of non-white Americans. Diverse stories deserve to be told, Afro-Latin@ stories among them. Afro-Latin@ children have a right to see themselves reflected in children's literature and their cultural identities affirmed, and we must collectively work to ensure that happens.

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Notes

[1] "Black" and "Latin@" will be capitalized in this work, while "white" will remain lowercase. This grammatical decision is a purposeful attempt by the writer to decenter whiteness and white people in the discussion (Appiah 2020). In addition, Latin@ is used instead of "Latine", "Latinx" or "Latino/a" to affirm and promote gender neutrality (Lopez Torregrosa 2021). Despite recent academic pushes towards using *Latinx*, as an Afro-Latin@, this writer does not prefer it.

[2] According to Rodriguez-Campo (2021), "Testimonio involves bearing witness to the collective experiences of historically marginalized communities, particularly as it relates to their oppression, resistance, and resilience. As an approach, it is an inherently decolonial process since it decenters Eurocentric knowledge and challenges power. Unlike oral history, memoir, or autoethnography, testimonio positions itself as an urgent and political voicing that rejects notions of objectivity and neutrality".

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Article

Digital Blackface: Adultification of Black Children in Memes and Children's Books

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Abstract: The adultification of Black children is a form of anti-Blackness that brings Black children into adult situations. The adultification of Black children can be rooted in early 20th-century children's books with minstrel imagery showing Black children in perilous situations for adult entertainment and for white children's learning. This essay puts "digital blackface"—the online cross-racial memes using Black children's reactions, emotions, and stereotypes as cross-racial humor—in conversation with historical children's books featuring Black children. Linking digital representations and misrepresentations to children's picture books demonstrates how Black children in both formats and social spheres are thrust into adult politics at their expense. Adultifying Black children across time in children's books with minstrel imagery and digital blackface shows how Black children have never been exempt from the anti-Blackness and systemic white supremacy erroneously believed to be an adult issue.

Keywords: digital blackface; adultification; memes, children; children's books

> What shall I tell my children who are Black
> Of what it means to be a captive in this dark skin?
> What shall I tell my dear one, fruit of my womb.
> Of how beautiful they are when everywhere they turn
> They are faced with abhorrence of everything that is Black?
>
> Margaret Burroughs, "What Shall I Tell My Children Who Are Black (Reflections of an African American Mother)" (Burroughs 1963)

1. Black Children and Anti-Blackness

The United States of America has a long, complicated, and disturbing multi-layered history of depicting Black children in problematic ways and treating them poorly. This treatment of Black children mirrors the treatment of Black adults rooted in the global illusion of white supremacy and often manifested in anti-Black violence, both real and fictional. Such anti-Blackness comes in many forms, one of which is digital memes that, while believed to be harmless online internet jokes, insert Black children into adult situations for the sake of adult racialized mockery and humor. Such online manifestations constitute another form of seemingly inconsequential discriminatory racial microaggressions. Amanda Williams offers social and political context for this kind of racial online activity:

> Despite original projections that the Internet would provide a safe space for individuals belonging to marginalized groups, racial prejudice and discrimination persists online. . .. Internet memes are a popular and pervasive phenomenon that may contribute to the climate of racial discrimination that can exist in online communities. Internet memes are individual bits of cultural information. . . that are widely shared electronically. Although Internet memes are often intended to be social commentaries, they can be racist in nature. (Williams 2016)

While our essay is not a history of internet racism, we recognize unmistakable connections with early US children's books. Our contention is that a certain genre of Black visualization in memes engages Black children in adult politics, reinforcing the same problematic messages that plagued early children's books written primarily by non-Black authors invested in creating and sustaining the illusion of white superiority. This online adultification of Black children in memes extends the tenants of systemic racism that deny Black children—and by extension, Black people and entire Black communities—justice and humanity.

More broadly speaking, digital blackface is the trend wherein adults across racial lines employ memes and gifs of Black people to express or emote online, typically for humor or comic relief to a viewing audience. We contend that digital blackface is rooted in the tradition of US minstrelsy wherein both Black and white actors darkened their faces to act out dehumanizing stereotypes and caricatures of Black people. Such stereotypes and caricatures served to uphold the illusion of the superiority of whiteness as a social construct. Such patterns of misrepresentation showed up in everyday ways, from commercial products to children's songs and ditties and books created for young white reading audiences. Narrator Esther Rolle, in Marlon Riggs's documentary *Ethnic Notions* (Riggs 1987), offers this catalog of anti-Black images that endure and impact racial attitudes today:

> The mammy, the pickaninny, the coon, the Sambo, the Uncle. Well into the middle of the twentieth century, these were some of the most popular depictions of Black America. . .. These were the images that decorated our homes, that served and amused and made us laugh. Taken for granted, they worked their way into the mainstream of American life. Of ethnic caricatures in America, these have been the most enduring. Today, there's little doubt that they shaped the most gut-level feelings about race.

That Black children were not exempt from these misrepresentations is evidenced in the myriad books intended for mostly white children, ensuring that the adult politics of white supremacy were socialized and perpetuated. Indeed, these images are the basis of digital blackface as defined by John Blake: "If a White person shares an image online that perpetuates stereotypes of Black people as loud, dumb, hyperviolent or hypersexual, they've entered digital blackface territory" (Blake 2023). The anonymity of memes and gifs makes it hard to locate their origins, even as digital blackface perpetuates and sustains harmful racial stereotypes with each keyboard click, heart, thumbs up, and share action. Such online creator anonymity means that there is little to no social accountability for digital blackface, what Ruha Benjamin calls the "New Jim Code,"

> an overt simultaneously private and public anti-blackness wherein technologies often hide, speed up, and even deepen discrimination, while appearing to be neutral or benevolent when compared to the racism of a previous era. This set of practices . . . en-compasses a range of discriminatory designs–some that explicitly work to amplify hierarchies, many that ignore and thus replicate social divisions, and a number that aim to fix racial bias but end up doing the opposite. (Benjamin 2019, p. 8)

As a "New Jim Code," children and adults fall prey to creators' seemingly unending ways to keep Black people in their places of social subservience.

This essay considers the visual and narrative parallels between children's books written by racial outsiders for the sole purpose of advancing white supremacy and the digital manifestations of this blackface in a sampling of digital memes. Our effort is not to be exhaustive but rather to show how digitization is but one of the newest ways to practice racism and to observe and analyze US racism. Our cultural studies approach is informed by both studies in narrative and culture. More specifically, we see these representative early 1800s and 1900s white-authored children's books in social and political conversation with present-day memes that continue the racial misrepresentation and dehumanization common to the Black adult world: Sara Cone Bryant's *Epaminondas and His Auntie* (1937)

and the meme "Did I Do That?"; Lynda Graham's *Pinky Marie: The Story of Her Adventure with the Seven Blackbirds* (1939) and the meme "Crying Black Girl"; and Nora Case's *Ten Little N***er Boys and Ten Little N***er Girls* (1962) with "African Kids Dancing." While books are static in what and how they are published, meme images can take on different messages depending on the creators. What is consistent, however, no matter the caption, is the static visual that speaks to our digital blackface premise. Our work here aligns with Kim Gallon whose thoughts about the recovery work of digital Black humanities rest at the intersection of early racist children's books and anti-Black digital memes:

> Recovery rests at the heart of Black studies, as a scholarly tradition that seeks to restore the humanity of black people lost and stolen through systemic global racialization. It follows, then, that the project of recovering lost historical and literary texts should be foundational to the black digital humanities. It is a deeply political enterprise that seeks not simply to transform literary canons and historiography by incorporating black voices and centering an African American and African diasporic experience, though it certainly does that; black digital humanities troubles the very core of what we have come to know as the humanities by recovering alternate constructions of humanity that have been historically excluded from that concept. (Gallon 2016, p. 44)

The specific memes we have selected highlight how Black pain, specifically Black children's pain, is often memeified for adult humor. These memes were chosen because they connect with the most prevalent blackface minstrelsy images and narratives in selected popular children's books. These memes individually and collectively underscore a reoccurring pattern within the internet space regarding the treatment and adultification of Black children. This same kind of dehumanization across memes is not common in children's books that feature white children. This adultifying and disparaging humor connecting past and present stereotypical representations drives our choices of memes. Calling out the prevalence of adultification through various forms of anti-Black violence at its center is a rescue and recovery effort to restore humanity to all Black people, adults and children alike.

2. No Innocence for Black Children

Children's books with minstrel imagery were typically written by white authors making caricatures and stereotypes of Black children's and adults' lives and usually engaging in anti-Black violence to uphold the illusion of white supremacy. Librarian Augusta Baker addresses these inauthentic and humanizing representations:

> In the 1920s and 1930s, children's books seemed to foster prejudice by planting false images in the minds of children. Most authors were white. With little knowledge about black life, and yet they wrote as if they were authorities. No wonder it was an accepted fact in children's books that blacks were lazy, shiftless, lived in shanties, had nothing and wanted nothing, sang and laughed all day…. Consequently, few children knew that blacks lived just as other people lived, having the same aspirations and hopes. (Baker 1975)

Including memes that present both pre-teens and teenagers in our exercise underscores the fact of Black dehumanization and adultification from which no Black child is exempt. Considering teens also highlights that Black children are rarely allowed to exist in a world that does not make them victims of systemic racism and adultification. Anissa Durham explains this particular adult bias that other adults create and perpetuate:

> Adultification bias is a stereotype based on the ways in which adults perceive children and their childlike behavior. It's rooted in anti-Black racism that goes back to chattel slavery—as enslaved Black children were used for their labor, often working in the field with no recreation or means of gaining an education. This stereotype often treats Black children like they do not deserve to play. They need less nurturing, protection, support, and comfort. (Durham 2022)

Durham's definition contextualizes these memes and children's books as adult spaces wherein Black childhood as a social construct is denied even a semblance of the illusory innocence and purity of white children who are socially valued and worthy of adult protection and attention.

Because anti-Black violence includes but also extends beyond physical injury, we include under this anti-Blackness umbrella the very act of adultification that denies Black children the ability to be seen and treated as innocents. As for this racialized, gendered, and classed notion of childhood innocence, Phillip Goff, in a study on Black boys and innocence, offers this clarification:

> Children in most societies are considered to be in a distinct group with characteristics such as innocence and the need for protection. Our research found that black boys can be seen as responsible for their actions at an age when white boys still benefit from the assumption that children are essentially innocent. (Goff et al. 2014)

Black girls are also perceived and treated as being less innocent than white girls, as Monique Morris notes:

> The assignment of more adult-like characteristics to the expressions of young Black girls is a form of age compression. Along this truncated age continuum, Black girls are likened more to adults than to children and are treated as if they are willfully engaging in behaviors typically expected of Black women. This compression strip[s] Black girls of their childhood freedoms [and] renders Black girlhood interchangeable with Black womanhood. The lack of protection and innocence leads to the criminalizing of Black children and making it impossible for Black children to make mistakes without severe consequences.

Childhood innocence, then, is a privilege and luxury not afforded Black children in the same way that white children inhabit this ubiquitous, safe, and elevated social, political, and cultural space. For Black children, violence is normalized and pervasive, past and present, physical or representational.

3. Children's Books and Memes

3.1. "Did I Do That?": Urkel and Epaminondas

A meme based on the popular television show *Family Matters* (1989–1998) centers on the main character Steve Urkel's catchphrase, "Did I do that?" to convey his nerdy confusion whenever something goes wrong. Urkel is a troublemaker and a social outcast within the show, and using this meme furthers that comic point. One of the running gags throughout the show and within each episode is that Urkel will do something wrong, be superficially punished, and ultimately utter his catchphrase, "Did I do that?" According to this sitcom formula, the African American family within the show—the Winslows—react with annoyance and anger at Urkel for the problems he causes. Although the Winslow family members tolerate him, the show's comedy at Urkel's expense comes in their efforts to rid themselves of him for causing problems. Urkel is a social outcast throughout the episodes until he transforms into his ultra-cool alter ego, Stefan Urquelle, who has swagger and does not have the high-pitched voice, oversized glasses, or suspenders that geeky Urkel has as his signature high-waisted costumed performance. That Urkel is a child throughout the show offers interesting commentary on the treatment of Black children, especially as comic relief. Arguably, Urkel is a part of the US minstrel tradition in his exaggerated nerd/geek portrayal and as a social outcast made into a joke at his own expense.

This visual meme (Figure 1) of Urkel is deliberate in its comic mockery and Othering. Urkel's oversized glasses make his face clownish. His bulging eyes exaggerate his features and make his look funny and ridiculous, not unlike the white adult socially constructed "happy smiling darkies" trope common in so many popular children's books, sheet music, commercial advertisements, and children's plantation ditties. This meme visualization easily links to minstrelsy as it presents this Black child character as static, one-dimensional, and a source of others' humor and entertainment. Elvin Holt, in "*A Coon Alphabet* and

the Comic Mask of Racial Prejudice"—assessing *A Coon Alphabet*'s author and illustrator Edward Windsor Kemble's drawings as "repulsive and degrading"—further explains this popular portrayal of Black adults and Black children alike:

> In keeping with the prevailing stereotypes of the late nineteenth century, Kemble's blacks are portrayed as nappy-headed, saucer-eyes, broad-nosed, thick-lipped, grinning, ragged subhumans whose misfortunes were an unending source of humor for whites. . ..Kemble's crude parody of black dialect creates the illusion of a black narrative voice caught up in a pathetic display of self-mockery. The visual images and the verses convey a powerful message about the way whites perceived blacks at the turn of the century. (Holt 1986, pp. 307–9)

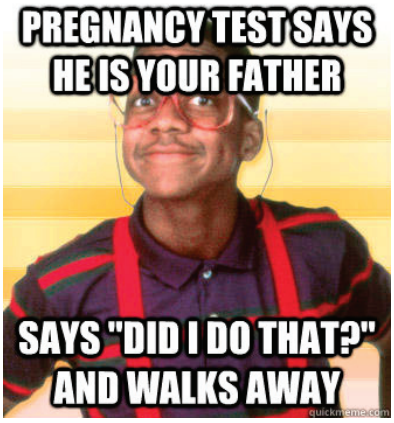

Figure 1. "Did I Do That?" meme features African American television fictional character Steve Urkel played by actor Jaleel White.

This meme injects Urkel into an adult situation and circumstance through its caption, an allusion to the popular *Maury* (1991–2022), a US daytime television reality show often solely about paternity test reveals. This show was most often about young Black heterosexual couples getting the results of paternity tests as live audiences witnessed their emotional responses. Since, as the folkloric saying goes, "Momma's baby is poppa's maybe," the show thrived in this Black stereotypical public space of Black adult promiscuity and social irresponsibility, especially regarding Black men who are either responsibility shirkers, deadbeat dads, or players incapable of monogamous relationship commitment until forced through public shaming.

This lack of Black male responsibility plays into the Black buck caricature of Black men as irresponsible and hypersexual. Suzane Jardim points out that "Black bucks are usually muscular men, who defy the will of the whites and are a damn menace to American society. They are excitable, restless, moody, impulsive, extremely violent, and of course, sexually attracted to white women—and only them" (Jardim 2016). While Steve Urkel is not the muscular personification of this buck image, the meme's premise here is that heartless, philandering Black men target Black women to victimize in demonstration of their manhood. Attaching this adultification of adolescent Urkel to sexual promiscuity, unplanned pregnancy, and irresponsibility furthers the anti-Black stereotypes common to Black adults. This is also not far removed from the Black rapist stereotype that historically and hysterically created fear among white women and catalyzed white men to respond with lynching to protect virtuous white womanhood. In reality, teenagers do engage in sex and can impregnate and become pregnant. However, what is different here in this meme is that the hypothetical suggestion of Urkel doing so is the source of racist humor. The racist stereotypes at the center of *Maury* were deeply controversial, and rapper Chuck D took to Twitter to speak on it: "Just how much the fed$ pay these old white dudes like Maury & Jerry showtiming young folks dysfunctional sht on Air...especially young blacks. Beware of elder media Nucointelpro buzzards hovering. Everything ain't entertainment in fact it's

exploitation." Chuck D emphasizes how these reality shows—*Maury* and *The Jerry Springer Show* (1991–2018)—profited off distorted stereotypes of Black men as inactive fathers and hypersexual men while generating revenue for the shows' presumably white creators and producers. This meme exploits Black cisgender males through racist stereotypes that paint Black males as irresponsible who, after impregnating unsuspecting women, are anti-social and unwilling to take responsibility for the children they co-created.

The meme caption furthers the Black buck caricature through Urkel's smiling and taking no responsibility for his actions of allegedly impregnating someone. Here, Urkel is a child who is simultaneously mocked and adultified. Naomi Day explains how these kinds of gifs and images reduce compassion and understanding of different race groups: "Having more flat representations of Black people in images and GIFs does nothing to improve cross-cultural understanding. In my experience, it actually decreases the likelihood that people will extend compassion to other racial groups" (Day 2020). While teenage parenting is a reality for some, this meme's humor denies Urkel a compassionate humanity of understanding what he might be going through as a teen parent; instead, linking him to the historical representations of hypersexualized Black males who need to be feared, tamed, policed, and too often killed. Danielle Selby speaks to the trope of Black men and boys as rapists:

> From the Scottsboro Boys, who were wrongly convicted of raping two white women, to the "Exonerated Five" to Christopher Cooper, the man a white woman falsely told police had threatened her life in May, Black and brown men in America have continued to be perceived as dangerous, violent, and hypersexual. The harmful and racist stereotypes of Black men as predators has contributed to Black men being incarcerated at higher rates and to wrongful conviction. (Selby 2020)

As an historical literary companion to Urkel's problematic representation above, Sara Cone Bryant's *Epaminondas and His Auntie* (1937), illustrated by Inez Hogan, is a children's book with blackface minstrel imagery depicting Black child Epaminondas's efforts to complete chores for his "Auntie"—this generic Black women's adult name itself one associated with US slavery and Jim Crow era segregation designed to keep Black people in their places of subservience beneath white people in every social aspect. Bryant's book invokes visual minstrelsy with young Epaminondas and his family's pitch-black skin, hair spiraling up from the boy child's head, exaggerated bright red lips, and the characters' exaggerated minstrelsy dialect. Throughout the story, Epaminondas follows his Auntie's and Mammy's instructions to the word, clearly not understanding the complexities of adult directions or instructions. For instance, Epaminondas first receives a cake from his Auntie to take home. Her instruction to him is to "take [cake] home to his Mammy—yet another racist derogatory naming for Black adult women with its own problematic social mythologies. The child hears and acts on this seemingly straightforward: "Epaminondas took it in his fist and held it all scrunched up tight. . .. By the time he got home, there wasn't anything left but a fistful of crumbs" (Bryant 1976, p. 4). His understanding is that he should carry it like any other ordinary object, not like a delicate piece of cake that would crush in his tight fist. Having misunderstood what was being asked of him, he returns home to this adult chastisement and berating: "Epaminondas, you ain't got the sense you was born with!" along with an explanation of what he should have done with handling the cake, but after the fact: "That's no way to carry cake. The way to carry cake is to wrap it all up nice in some leaves and put it in your hat, and put your hat on your head, and come along home" (Bryant 1976, p. 6). The problem with the cake incident is that Epaminondas had not been given instructions on how to handle the cake and, therefore, had to figure it out on his own. When he fails to do so as the adults expect, he receives a shameful scorning: "Epaminondas, you ain't got the sense you was born with!" (Bryant 1976, p. 8). That this child allegedly lacks what the chastising adult defines as "common sense" imagines that his thinking should "mirror the adults.' This pattern of not understanding follows the child throughout every subsequent task he is given, tasks which he predictably fails at because he has no "common sense," like cooling butter and caring for a puppy. Bryant even shows

the child abusing a puppy because he does not understand what he has been instructed to do. Here, not only is the child being verbally abused, but the child is also unknowingly and unwittingly engaging in animal cruelty and violence.

This narrative and representation ignore the reality that Epaminondas is a young child of about seven or eight years old whose brain cannot know exactly what adults want when they do not spell out their wants and expectations. At no point in this story are the Black adults held accountable for failing to give this child age-appropriate instructions on how to care for the dog. Instead, he is supposed to know what to do with the dog, the butter, the cake, and lastly, the pies. This uneducable and unintelligent trope mocked Black adults and children in US minstrelsy, a source of entertainment and Othering that separated Black folks from intelligent white people who psychologically and systemically benefitted from these myriad and consistent Black misrepresentations. Past and present manifestations of white supremacy further created pseudo-science expressly to prove that Black people are less intelligent than white people, allegedly because they have smaller brains. Charles Murray and Richard Hernstein's *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein and Murray 1994), for example, was a *New York Times* best-seller arguing that Black people, especially economically insecure Black people, are less intelligent than other people. Tom Morganthau summarizes the authors' racist notions:

> Their most explosive argument is a blunt declaration that blacks as a group are intellectually inferior to whites. . .. Murray and Hernstein say the evidence of a black-white IQ gap is overwhelming. They think the difference helps explain why many blacks seem destined to remain mired in poverty, and they insist that whites and blacks alike must face up to the reality of black intellectual disadvantage. (Morganthau 1994, p. 53)

US minstrelsy presented Black people as ignorant and lacking intelligence, and the story of Epaminondas channels this sentiment through his many mistakes and mess-ups. Epaminondas is not granted the innocence of childhood to make mistakes and is instead told six different times that he has no common sense and verbally abused: "[Y]ou ain't got the sense you was born with; you never did have the sense you was born with, you never will have the sense you was born with!" (Bryant 1976, p. 14). That his Mammy has given up on the possibility that Epaminondas will ever learn anything meaningful characterizes him as lacking intelligence even though he is a child. Such a static conclusion locks this Black child into the subhuman Other, also defined by white supremacy in much the way minstrelsy presented and defined Black adults. That a white author creates a verbally abusive and mean-spirited children's text for white children speaks to a racist romanticization of Black people that ultimately justifies denying Black people their full humanity and their social justice.

Contrastingly, *Amelia Bedelia* (1963), by Peggy Parish, is another older children's book featuring and premised on a white adult female housekeeper who makes multiple mistakes in her job. Amelia Bedelia does not lose her job after her many mess-ups; instead, her boss extends to her compassion, kindness, and forgiveness—fundamental elements that define humanity. In the end, Amelia Bedelia takes everything literally, much like Epaminondas—dressing food and dusting furniture, for example—but suffers no consequences for these actions. In Parish's book, she is neither ridiculed nor mocked. In fact, when she is about to be fired from this job, she makes a pie that moves the white Rogers family from anger: "Mrs. Rogers was angry. She was very angry. She opened her mouth. Mrs. Rogers meant to tell Amelia Bedelia she was fired. But before she could get the words out, Mr. Rogers put something in her mouth. It was so good Mrs. Rogers forgot about being angry" (Parish 1963, p. 60). Thus, the book teaches forgiveness and human frailty that is not necessarily grounded in racial or adult mockery.

One might read these two instances of miscommunications in Epaminondas and Amelia Bedelia as adults not making their expectations clear to other adults and children. One might also read these stories as ableist, faultily assuming that every child and adult is neurotypical. Perhaps there are cognitive issues wherein one who receives instructional

information may not understand what is being asked of them. To acknowledge such a possibility is once again to grant humanity and humility to all without mocking or otherwise shaming and belittling. Aamna Mohdin interviewed a Black woman diagnosed with ADHD who recalls being labeled defiant as a child in school because she was neurodivergent:

> I went through all of my schooling without being diagnosed with ADHD; no one picked up on it. All my teachers just assumed I was being defiant, and my impulsive outbursts were seen as me being rude. They associated my behavior as a child with words you would use to describe an adult—they saw me as calculating and disrespectful, not just a young child struggling. They never gave me any grace as a child. (Mohdin 2022)

That white adults label this Black child here as difficult shows how adults across the racial spectrum adultify Black children.

Urkel's and Epaminondas's representations reinforce violence toward Black children through adultification. Such adultification is not just fictionalized. It traces historically through real-life violence of Black boys as in the case of Emmett Till, a Black fourteen-year-old murdered by two white male adults for allegedly whistling at, touching, or "being fresh" with a white woman, a pronounced and deeply coded Jim Crow era taboo, especially for Black men and boys in their interactions with white women and white girls. His murderers seemed set on making Till pay for his mistake of not knowing the ways of Southern US culture regarding treating white people:

> The men searched the occupied beds looking for Till. Coming to Till's bed, Milam shined a flashlight in the boy's face and asked, "You the n***ah that did the talking down at Money?" When Till answered, "Yeah," Milam said, "Don't say "yeah" to me, n***ah. I'll blow your head off. Get your clothes on." (Famous Trials)

A Black child's being talked to by adults in this way underscores the white patriarchal threat that shadowed all Black males—children and adults—for any real, suspected, or even fabricated racial transgression. Upon finding Till's dead body, Sheriff H.C. Strider recounts this inherent Black male child adultification: "The body we took from the river looked more like that of a grown man instead of a young boy" (Famous Trials). The lack of childhood innocence denied Black children correlates to real-world violence toward Black children, as in the cases of Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Alexander McClay Williams[1], George Stinney[2], and so many others.

3.2. No Tears for "Crying Black Girl" and Pinky Marie

The "Crying Black Girl" meme shows a young nine- or ten-year-old Black girl crying in the backseat of a car, and is used online to convey emotional upset. Her crying could be due to frustration or sadness, as the meme leaves the possibility of both or neither. In this meme (Figure 2), the Black girl seems to be shying away from the photographer, perhaps because few adults or children would welcome being photographed in this state of emotional vulnerability, especially for the public display of social media. Being in a car suggests that her physical space is limited and that she is further cornered into this picture. The Black girl here is turned into a Black cultural joke. Lauren Michelle Jackson's comments about digital blackface's effects on Black women also apply to Black girls: "After all, our culture frequently associates black people with excessive behaviors, regardless of the behavior at hand. Black women will often be accused of yelling when we haven't so much as raised our voice" (Jackson 2017). "Excessive behavior" is defined by adults and refers to Black girls showing emotions. In contrast, for white women and white children, crying is deemed a socially normal display of humanity and emotional complexity. The caption is part of the hashtag "Growing Up Black" about Black people making jokes about their potentially traumatic childhood experiences. While there is no proof that the person posting the meme is Black, the meme takes on different critical nuances through the lens of race. For instance, Ellen Jones is a white person who made a fake Black woman online profile named Wanda. Doing so is fundamentally blackface. That she does so allegedly to

embody her racially problematic perceptions of Black people adds insult to this injurious creation. Jones justifies her racist creation as flattery:

> When I created Wanda, . . . I was living in northeast Washington DC, AKA 'Chocolate City.' I was surrounded by black culture at the time. I loved it and I miss it . . .. There is such a thing as black culture. It exists. And it's great because it's honest and loud and proud and it's got character and funkiness and weirdness and backbone. (Jones 2020)

A non-Black person fascinated with Black culture and Othering it by calling it "loud" and "weird" and then making a digital blackface profile engages in misogynoir, a specific humanity-denying sexism specifically towards Black women and girls.

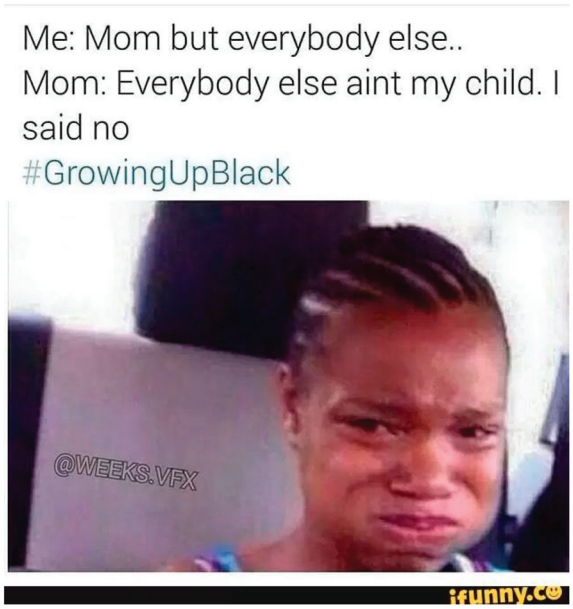

Figure 2. "Crying Black Girl" meme features emotional young Black girl crying as she is stared at and photographed.

The "Crying Black Girl" meme makes fun of a Black girl's pain and connects with Lynda Graham's *Pinky Marie: The Story of Her Adventure with the Seven Bluebirds* (1939), a children's book about a young eight- or nine-year-old Black girl being violently attacked by birds as she sleeps. This child is on a wagon with her father on a trip into town when she falls asleep. A flock of birds, envious of the child's multiple bright colorful ribbons atop her pickaninny-imaged head, picks at her head to take out her many ribbons. While the child is rightfully upset and traumatized, her Black parents make light of the circumstance by giving her a bandanna to wear as though the Black girl child's physical appearance is all that she has suffered and all that should matter in this adult world. The parents easily give up looking for the ribbons even as Pinky Marie cries. Making light of the violent bird assault that is easily akin to rape, her parents respond to the child's distraught by giving her a headscarf to cover her head; thus, visually making this child a younger and smaller version of her mammy-troped mother. This lack of care is important, and Neal A. Lester comments on this commonplace violence towards this Black child in this story:

> The narrative's solution to this trauma is to give Pinky Marie a bandanna to wear, making her a younger embodiment of her Mammy mother: her Pappy "pulled out his big red-and-blue-and-green hanky and tied it around Pinky Marie's scrumbled-scrambled, kinky, wooly head just like Mrs. Washington Jefferson Jackson tied hers. And then he said, 'There you is, honey. You looks fine again'" (n.p.). The adult "father" birds' violently forcing this young girl into womanhood

> is similar to the many narratives of the sexual and other types of "adultification" of Black girls in contemporary times. (Lester 2022)

Graham is more interested in the joke of Pinky Marie's pain and adultification by forcing her, at least visually, into a one-dimensional stereotypical mammy role. The source of the humor, then, is having a Black girl experience a traumatic event, denying her the ability to act out her emotions and connecting her with adulthood. The lack of care for the pain and emotions that the Black girl is experiencing in the meme and this children's book is itself a form of anti-Black violence. Rebecca Epstein explains this common adultification of Black girls:

> Beginning as early as 5 years of age, Black girls were more likely to be viewed as behaving and seeming older than their stated age; more knowledgeable about adult topics, including sex; and more likely to take on adult roles and responsibilities than what would have been expected for their age. (Epstein et al. 2017)

Casting Black girls into adult situations means that they are not granted the grace of presumed childhood innocence that white children and white people inherently and automatically receive. In these instances, adult creators and adult audiences turn a Black girl child's pain and suffering into a spectacle for adult entertainment and amusement.

The success of US minstrelsy and digital blackface relies on emotion and dialect, which correlates to both *Pinky Marie* and the "Crying Black Girl." The meme stereotypes Black people and dehumanizes Black people for comedy. InJeong Yoon's analysis of internet memes associated with racism explains this connection between meme creation and circulation and systemic racism:

> The Internet is one of the few sites where racist humor can be accessed and shared without being censored. . .. [Internet memes can provide] a critical understanding of how race matters, how racism works, and how issues around race and racism affect people's lives . . .. Even if the intention of these memes is satirical, they function to create a space where people can mock and ridicule people of color. Furthermore, racial and ethnic humor should not be discussed in terms of the speaker's intentions, but with regard to its impact on people of color and the whole society. (Yoon 2016, pp. 93–94, 109)

The comedic content of both this meme and picture book denies Black children a full range of emotions by ignoring them altogether or making light of their pain. This one-dimensional blurred minstrelsy mammy/pickaninny image appears across multiple anti-Blackness children's texts, among them *Pickaninnies Little Redskins* (1910), wherein the rhyme asks: "Mammy, mammy, I love you so,/What shall I do when I shall grow,/Too big, this tired head to rest/In slumber on they kindly breast?" A later page shows two Black children in a kitchen anxiously waiting: "On a griddle mammy bakes" (np). Thus, the cycle of societal and historical subservience for Black women and Black girls continues this minstrel interconnected representation between mother and young daughter.

*3.3. "African Kids Dancing" and Ten Little N***er Children*

The "African Kids Dancing" meme showcases four- to six-year-old Black children dancing on an arid plain in their underwear. This state of undress connects Black children with racist stereotypes of Blackness as the antithesis of civilization, decorum, and humanity. Having no visual gender marker in the meme indicates that the Black children have no distinct identities beyond their pickaninny identity in a white world. Making these Black children appear less human and more like wild animals that do not wear clothes is part of the humor and the racial Othering. The imagery of genderless naked Black children dancing employs elements of the common pickaninny child caricature in US antebellum popular culture and in both antebellum adult and children's literature:

> Picaninny [children] . . . have big, wide eyes, and oversized mouths—ostensibly to accommodate huge pieces of watermelon. The picaninny caricature shows black

> children as either poorly dressed, wearing ragged, torn, old and oversized clothes, or, and worse, they are shown as nude or near-nude. This nudity suggests that black children, and by extension black parents, are not concerned with modesty. The nudity also implies that black parents neglect their children. A loving parent would provide clothing. The nudity of black children suggests that black people are less civilized than whites (who wear clothes). The nudity is also problematic because it sexualizes these children. Black children are shown with exposed genitalia and buttocks—often without apparent shame. (Pilgrim 2000)

This combination of smiling, dancing, and bug-eyeing is a visual minstrel performance in this meme. The imagery of dancing Black children is also part of the quaint appeal of the children's book *Kinky Kids* (1908), wherein the Black children dance much like the Black adults who are footloose and fancy-free with not a care in the world: "Way down South in the land of cotton/. . . That's where the little darkie children/Play all day in the sun;/Dancing, singing, eating, sleeping, My! But they do have fun" (np). Again, these images intersect with the historically racist stereotypes of Black adults as simple, close-to-nature, animalistic, irresponsible, and prone to little more than watermelon eating and being controlled by their carnal pleasures and self-gratification (Figure 3).

Figure 3. "African Kids Dancing" meme features four scantily-clad young Black children dancing in an arid outdoor space.

Along with the imagery, this caption, "POV:YOU FOUND WATER IN AFRICA," points to the colonization of Africa, which led to resource scarcity, especially water. According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), "while three out of four people worldwide used safely managed drinking water services in 2020, regional coverage ranged from 96 per cent in Europe and Northern America to just 30 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa." Data show how scarce clean drinking water still is in parts of Africa, so finding water for Black children and adults might be a joyous occasion due to water insecurity. Here, however, the joyous occasion is but the source of adult humor and Black children's mockery. Francesca Sobande points out:

> On many occasions photographs and videos of Black people, sometimes in distress, have been used as part of the creation of a Graphics Interchange Format (GIF). These GIFs are commonly intended to be humorous but may be used in ways that involve complete disregard of the original context in which such Black people are depicted and indicate much disinterest in their possible upset in response to images of them being remixed in this way. Such digital activity can involve a Black person's mannerisms, facial expressions, image, and overall hu-

> manity being treated as though it is nothing more than a mere digital commodity and means to communicate online. (Sobande 2021)

The digital commodity is humor at the expense of Black children's complicated lives and experiences. As such, this meme furthers the adultification of Black children.

Nora Case's *Ten Little N***er Boys and Ten Little N***er Girls* (1962) is a counting book for children using the historically and present-day racially derogatory and inflammatory n-word. In this children's book used as a white adult's teaching tool, Black boys are added to this narrative one by one in dehumanizing ways, while the Black girls in the second half of the book are taken out of the story in violent ways. The Black boys' story shows how each Black boy is added to the group as they begin their day: "One little n***er boy/ Putting on his shoe. Sambo comes to help him,/ And then there are two" (Case 1957, pp. 7–8). The name "Sambo" connects this tar-black imaged Black male child to Helen Bannerman's popular children's book *Little Black Sambo* (Bannerman 1899), wherein a little Black boy, Sambo, is threatened by three hungry tigers as he strolls alone happily through a jungle in his new clothes. Case shows the boys doing rather arbitrary activities: rowing out to sea to save a drowning friend, diving into a water hole, sitting by a lake and almost being strangled by a snake, learning how to skate, marching in a line and being tripped, chasing a chicken. That they are called "naughty" has no logical justification or explanation as they mostly do good deeds. However, in the world of US minstrelsy, narratives do not rely on logic and rationale as these characteristics are reserved for white people: "Nine little n***er boys,/ Naughty little men,/ Chasing chicken round the yard/ And calling number ten" (Case 1957, p. 24). Randomly calling the boys "men" pushes at adultification. At the end of the story, the Black boys are little more than "Ten little n***er boys,/ In deep disgrace, you see/ Sent to bed at five o'clock/Without any tea./...Naughty little n***er boys/ Sleep well, good night" (Case 1957, p. 27). The language and minstrel imagery of the exaggerated red lips, bulging eyes, and coal-black skin make a humorous interaction of pain, struggle, and unwarranted chastisement of a white child's math education and entertainment.

*The Ten Little N***er Boys* is Nora Case's educational companion to *Ten Little N***er Girls*, using violent imagery to teach white children how to subtract. The book starts differently from the *Boys* book: "Ten little n***er girls/ Dressed so fine" (Case 1957, p. 31). The girls are given a degree of modesty and grown-up class in their dress. The story continues a similar plot as the *Ten Little N***er Boys* by showing the girls engaging in gendered labor and having them do household tasks: "Five little n***er girls/ Scrubbing the floor,/ One says she's tired of it,/ And then there are four" (Case 1957, p. 43). The continuous disappearance of the girls is violent even in their everyday play: "Nine little n***er girls/ Swinging on a gate,/ One turns a somersault,/ And then there are eight" (Case 1957, p. 35). The violence is also in the girls' playing with or interacting with nature and animals:

> Six little n***er girls/ Playing near a hive,/ A honey-bee stings one/ And then there are five./... Four little n***er girls/ Taking their tea,/ A bird flies away one/And then there are three./ Three little n***er girls,/ Went to the Zoo,/ The polar bear hugs one/ And then there are two./ Two little n***er girls/ Paddling in the sun,/ A big fish feels hungry/ And so there is one. (Case 1957, pp. 42–48)

Even within the narrative, the author-orchestrated physical violence is shocking to the girls as their eyes are bulging and their mouths agape, further connecting them with US minstrelsy visuals. Like the Pinky Marie story above, this story also involves a Black girl's violent attack by birds. The Black girls' fear of violently dying here makes for a comic ending for the last Black girl left: "One little n***er girl/ Safe home once more,/ 'Dear Dinah let me in,/ And shut fast the door'" (Case 1957, p. 51). The fear is apparent with the final girl fleeing and being left alone, unlike the boys, who safely get into the room and fall asleep together. The carnage the Black girls experience is cyclical as the book closes: "Only the cabin,/ No one about,/ Wait till the morning/ And they'll all come out" (Case 1957, p. 52). The ending normalizes violence against and even the death of Black children for adult humor and the education of white children. Using illustrator Inez Hogan's same

crude and grotesque blackface images as in *Epaminondas and His Auntie*, Anne Christopher's *Petunia Be Keerful* (Christopher 1934) makes Epaminondas and Petunia twin siblings in their constant mistakes and inability to understand adult instructions. Aside from the exaggerated minstrelsy language created to Other, to mock, and to elicit white adult and child humor at a Black girl's expense, Christopher choreographs similar verbal abuse of a child by a Black family member. For her honest childhood mistakes, the child meets with these degrading adult responses: "You no 'count chile"; "You is powerful dumb, Petunia Brown. . ."; "What de name 'er goodness is you got eyes fo'?; and "Lawsy mussy . . . You is de stupidest black chile I'se eber done see" (np).

"African Kids Dancing" connects to *Ten Little N-word Boys* through adultification. Even though their alleged environmental circumstance is violent—draught and barrenness—they frolic with no care in the world. The meme and children's stories deny Black children's humanity while demanding that they grin and bear any potential hardships. Such historical and modern-day racial representations and misrepresentations collapse the differences associated with Black adults and children, dangerously engaging and treating Black children as adults.

4. Not Allowing Black Children to Be Children

The adultification of Black children connects digital blackface in memes with the misrepresentation and mockery of early racist children's books that center on US minstrelsy. While historical US minstrelsy was primarily created by and for white audiences and performed primarily by white actors in blackface, digital blackface crosses racial lines. The problem with crossing racial lines is that it expands and makes people, regardless of race, complicit in adultifying, dehumanizing, and ultimately endangering Black children. We fully acknowledge that such adultification also happens to white children in memes used for adult humor and emotion (Figure 4).

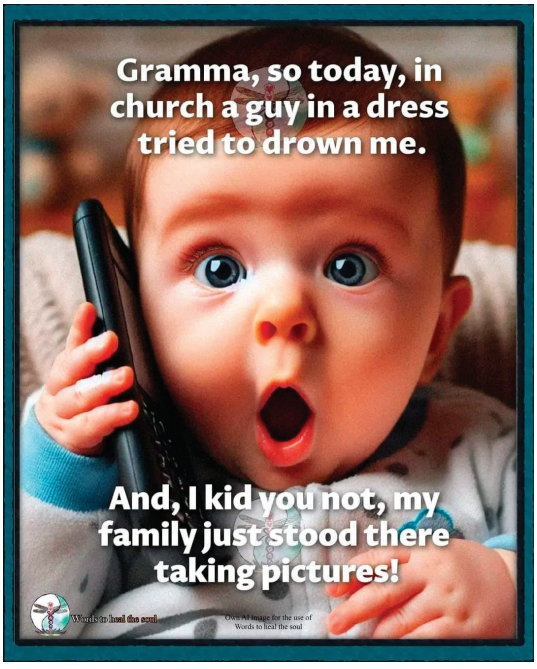

Figure 4. This humorous meme featuring a white infant using a cell phone to call a family member contrasts memes that mock Black children as racist adult humor.

While having the white child above with bulging eyes and mouth agape is also a source of adult humor, this white infant child is fully clothed and protected as they are narratively making a call, presumably to an adult, about their safety within a "civilized" Christian church ritual. Contrastingly, memes that thrust Black children into adult circumstances

and situations make Black children part of the adult world of anti-Black violence and mockery with little to no adult protection or care. In addition, no long and multilayered US history reduces white children or denies them of their fundamental humanity and dignity. Memes about Black children amplify the larger problem of anti-Blackness and global white supremacy from which Black children and Black adults are not exempt. While meme captions change from creator to creator depending on a creator's purpose and intent, nothing historically changes the static image and its accompanying attitudes and beliefs about the inferiority of Black children and Black adults. Yoon—whose 2016 study revealed that of all racial and ethnic groups memeified, African Americans were memeified significantly more than American Indians, Asians, Jewish people, Mexicans and Mexican Americans, Muslims, and White people (Yoon 2016, p. 106)—validates our critical concerns and social alarm that continue from early racist children's books to the rapidly circulated and consumed digital manifestations of anti-Blackness using Black children:

> Internet memes on racism should be investigated as a site of ideological reproduction. Popular discourse including humor is an ideal lens through which to examine how everyday interaction and social dynamics are influenced by ideology and the social structure. . . . Internet memes impact people on the macro level in that they shape people's mindsets, forms of behavior, and actions, despite that they are spread on a micro basis. (Yoon 2016, pp. 93, 96)

Our effort here has not been to assess the success of memes based on digital engagement through likes and shares. Similarly, we have not spent time and attention trying to track down more specific demographic details about who bought, read, and shared these books that are still in public circulation. Nor do we make any effort to hypothesize about a more specific demographic who reads the books or receives and responds to these memes. For us, the very existence of these texts as cultural artifacts substantiates our position that both formats are indeed racially and socially problematic for Black people who know that Barack Obama's ascendancy to the US presidency did not bring about the alleged post-racial society and for non-Black folks who only see racism in overt confrontational ways. As Tabitha Fairchild contends:

> Digitally, internet memes are widely used rhetorical vehicles, reaching large and broad audiences. The roles these artifacts play in the reproduction and transmission of racist ideology is often obfuscated by the perception that internet memes are "just jokes". . . .
>
> Memes act as mechanisms through which culture in its various forms is produced, disseminated, and reproduced. Digital spaces often function as mechanisms through which the culture of society at large is reproduced resulting in a digital world that mirrors the oppressions of the real world. Digital social platforms create new spaces and methods for discussions where the stereotypes and racial biases of the physical world are often reified, an issue that may potentially be exacerbated as the divide between our digital and corporeal identities grows thinner. (Fairchild 2020, pp. 2–3)

Hence, these books and digitization make it easier and more palatable to practice, perpetuate, and sustain global anti-Black bias manifested in racial discrimination and continued social injustice.

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Notes

[1] See Maryclaire Dale's story of the exonerated 16-year-old Alexander McClay Williams, the youngest person in Philadelphia executed in 1931 for allegedly stabbing to death a white woman (Dale 2024).

[2] Fourteen-year-old George Stinney, Jr. was executed in South Carolina, allegedly for killing two young white girls in 1944. See (Fourteen-Year-Old George Stinney Executed in South Carolina n.d.).

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Article

Unjust: Publishing Black and African American Children's Books and School Availability

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Abstract: Traditional book publishing has a pronounced and unjust deficiency of Black and African American voices. White culture, thoughts, and rules are the standard in traditional publishing. Black and African American authors are not typically picked up by white-dominated publishing companies. In traditional publishing, mostly white literary agents are gatekeepers and acquisition editors shut the doors too frequently to non-white authors. Aspiring Black authors then resort to hybrid or vanity press companies that often use unscrupulous practices, charge exorbitant fees, accomplish little or low-quality work, and deny authors' agency and full rights in the final disposition of a book. Because a majority of traditionally published children's books featuring Black or African American stories or characters are written by or illustrated by non-Black people, the wide possibilities of adventure, celebrations, discovery, and friendship stories are not published for Black children. Instead, publishers favor stories about slavery, the civil rights movement, famous Black people, and hair tales as well as racially ambiguous characters. Regrettably, Black and African American culturally relevant stories written and illustrated by Black or African Americans are not readily available to children in school and library settings consistent with schools' community or student demographics. This article shares research findings and viewpoints of Kathy Anderson and Karen Bowlding, two Black children's book writers and publishing consultants who are also parents. Black and African American students encounter education and cultural injustice because of the practices of traditional publishing companies, educators, and librarians. Parents and guardians can ameliorate these issues with discernment and action. Foremost, publishing company decision-makers must acknowledge their own racial biases that deny representation and authenticity to all children in our US classrooms.

Keywords: children's books; Black and African American children; bias in publishing; self-publishing; diversity; representation

1. Obstacles and Hurdles

Despite the attention to and investment in diversity initiatives, Black and African American authors face significant challenges in publishing and distributing their books. They are not getting their children's books picked up by the five big publishing companies—Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, Hachette Book Group, and Macmillan—under the established traditional publishing system (Pen America 2022). These five companies control over 80% of the trade publishing market, and their decisions support white authors and their values and beliefs. These white-dominated companies rarely acquire books and extend contracts to untried and little-known writers, let alone Black authors. Such is the unspoken but real injustice in the children's book publishing industry.

Traditional publishing starts with immediate gatekeeping. The initial requirement is that authors must have literary agents. According to *WordsRated*, the agent industry is 83.1% white and 4.1% Black as of 2023, and agents select only three to six new authors per year (Curcic 2023). *Lee & Low Books* produced "The Diversity Baseline Survey" to capture the composition of the publishing workforce and to establish statistics for diversity trends in the industry. According to the *Lee & Low Books'* 2023 publishing diversity baseline survey

results, 72.5% of respondents identified as white, and 5.3% identified as Black/African American/Afro-Caribbean (Lee & Low Books 2023). Agents comfortably represent what is familiar to them and what is of interest to them and others who look like and think as they do.

The next obstacle for Black and African American authors at publishing houses involves acquisition editors charged with finding and acquiring manuscripts or proposals. At 85% white, they determine which proposals have market potential for a publishing house based on criteria developed by white people. Given the lack of Black and African American acquisition staff at the large traditional publishing houses, potential Black and African American books are not published due to insufficient decision-making authority of these specialists. According to *The New York Times* article, "A Conflicted Cultural Force: What It's Like to Be Black in Publishing," Black publishing professionals shared their experiences and frustration with issues surrounding Blackness in the workplace (de León et al. 2021). Tracy Sherrod, the editorial director of Amistad, an imprint of HarperCollins, admits: "Sometimes there are proposals that come along, and you know in your heart that this is an important book on an important subject, but because the editorial room is all white, you may not be able to acquire it, so the only really painful thing about racism in publishing is the books that are not around, the books that didn't get to be published" (de León et al. 2021).

It is a public secret that traditional publishers do not invest in Black and African American producers because they know that the USA as a whole will not support Black writers or support Black writers to the extent that they will support and market white children's book authors. Whiteness, as in society, is standardized in the publishing industry. Stories outside of the norm must be extra special to get through the multiple layers of decision-making at publishing houses. Black celebrity-written or ghost-written stories, books about sports superstars, famous singers, or political agenda-driven topics get published, especially if championed through by a white staff. Still, a small percentage of books written by Black and African American authors published by traditional houses exist. Some of these books are culturally disrespectful in story and illustrations. For instance, too many of these big agency children's stories center the narrative that Black folks only exist aggrieved in enslavement survival, move up from poverty, fight for civil rights, or overcome extreme hurdles to become famous—stories that favor the exceptionalism rather than the everyday joys of Black people's lives.

There should be no books depicting Black children with bulging eyes, dark brown palms, pink lips, pointy noses, pickaninny hairdos, or Black or African American child characters added for the sake of diversity, as tokens. Yet, these portrayals still occur when illustrators inexperienced with drawing Black and African American characters are selected to visualize characters in a story. In our view, the following books are examples many written or illustrated by non-Black creators: *Right This Very Minute: A Table-to-Farm Book About Food and Farming* (2019) by Lisl H. Detlefsen; *Plants Feed Me* (2014) by Lizzy Rockwell; *Lola Reads* series by Anna McQuinn, *King & Kayla* series (2017) by Dori Hillestad Butler; *Ten, Nine, Eight* (1982) by Molly Bang; *I Can Do It Too!* (1989) *by Karin Baicker; I Know a Lot!* (2013) by Stephen Krensky; *The Camping Trip* (2020) by Jennifer K. Mann; *Saturdays at Harlem Grown: How One Big Idea Transformed a Neighborhood* (2020) by Tony Hillery; *Catch That Chicken!* (2020) by Atinuke; *My Hair* (2019) by Hannah Lee; *Rapping Princess* (2021) by Hannah Lee; *Little Red and the Very Hungry Lion* (2015) by Alex T. Smith; and *The Big Bed* (2018) by Bunmi Laditan (Colours of Us 2017) Quite a few traditionally published books prove the limited influence Black and African American writers have over the disposition of their stories as evident in the lack of books both written and illustrated by both Black and African American people.

2. Inside the Industry

In 2020, the #PublishingPaidMe hashtag generated by L.L. McKinney, a young adult fiction writer, started a conversation about the lack of attention paid to Black authors in

comparison to white authors (Grady 2020). They posited: "The trend shows that beloved black authors with well-established fanbases earn comparatively small advances that grow only slowly and over time. Virtually unknown white authors, meanwhile, report getting astronomical advances on debut novels, with no track record to speak of" (Grady 2020). Award-winning Black authors received dismal advances while Chip Cheek, a white first-time author, received an $800,000 advance (Grady 2020).

Once a Black children's book is produced, the publishing house determines the investment in that book. According to Constance Grady, "... black authors don't always receive support from publishers that matches the appetite readers are showing for their work" (Grady 2020). Often, marketing capital and promotional support are limited or non-existent. Publishers push the high-cost books to recoup their upfront costs from large advancements to authors based on proven sales potential. An author cannot prove sales without financial and marketing team support, and denying them such support adds to the reasons publishers use to avoid Black authors. About 25% of books out-earn advances, yet white authors meet advantages not provided to non-white authors (MacGregor 2016). Disconcertingly, a huge percentage of traditionally published books, around 95% or more written by white authors, is never sold and returned to publishers each year with the standard being about 30% of books within six months of publication (Warner 2016)Thus, it is not hard to surmise that traditional publishers are satisfied with losing money on white authors while denying financial support for books by Black and African American authors. The industry does not seem bent on addressing this discordance. L.L. McKinney states, "What they're paid. What the marketing is. How their books are treated. How one black book not reaching its parameters casts a shadow on all black books and all black authors, and that's not the same for our white counterparts" (Grady 2020).

That authors may obtain reversion rights or gain permission to purchase unsold inventory from their publisher is not well known, and these considerations are not advertised outside certain networks in the publishing industry (Authors Alliance 2019). Black and African American authors are disadvantaged in industry connectivity and are not likely to learn of additional monetary opportunities offered to white authors. Generally, Black and African American authors with access to less influential agents receive minimal or no advances, earn lower royalty rates, and have no control over editing, cover design, artist selection, and publishing-based rights through traditional publishing.

In 2020 after the police murder of George Floyd, a call to action on addressing systemic racism resonated within the business industry. Traditional publishing sector employee demographic statistics were revealed, and Black publishing professionals were interviewed with their concerns published (Grady 2020). Each shared their story about challenges working within the industry and obstacles encountered getting Black stories published and books sold (Grady 2020). Across the interviews, the issue seemed to be publishers' interest when there were racial discussions in political circles and lack of interest when race was not a hot-button issue that could be a profit opportunity for white publishers (Grady 2020). The paradigm does not exist for white people in publishing occupations or white authors. Based on the discussion, white people are not penalized for lackluster performance and are unaffected by being a barrier to Black success. In the end, publishing is a business, and Black creativity do not matter unless there is a substantial monetary gain for the publisher, which often translates to excluding many Black creatives.

The upswing in Black characters and Black authors in the children's book publishing world's best sellers proves Black pain profitable for white people. As soon as a particular grievous event dies down in the media, interest in Black life fades. *WordsRated* reported a "23% Decrease in Black Characters in Children's Bestsellers as BLM Bounce Fades" (McLoughlin 2022). Key findings pulled from an assessment of *The New York Times* Best Sellers List and *School Library Journal* Best Picture Books demonstrated that between 2020 and 2021, the percentage of Black characters in children's best seller books declined by 23%, and there was a 31% drop in the number of bestseller children's books published and written by Black authors (McLoughlin 2022). During the same period, white authors

experienced the largest bump (17%) in published children's books best sellers over the last ten years (McLoughlin 2022).

3. Self-Publishing: An Insider's Perspective

Faced with the challenges created by the traditional publishing industry workforce, many Black authors resort to or choose to self-publish. Kathy Anderson and Karen Bowlding acknowledge that traditional publishing is also difficult for white authors; however, they do not face racism as step one, as evidenced by data showing that 95% of traditionally published authors are white (So and Wezerek 2020). Self-publishing can be accomplished as do-it-yourself with print-on-demand services, utilizing hybrid or vanity press outfits, or hiring service providers for each step in the process. New authors often use vanity or hybrid press businesses that charge upfront fees to cover the costs of publishing a book. The amount and quality of work done varies from minimal editing, poor art, and bad printing to a high-quality book produced for several thousand dollars and sometimes well over ten thousand dollars. These types of companies often charge a low fee for editing to hook the author, and once a contract is signed, they pressure authors to add additional services with exorbitant fees. Because authors are excited about their book project and not always aware of the holistic publishing process, they fall for the sham and expend excessive funds on a frustrating experience. In Karen Bowlding's history as a publishing consultant, several hybrid press-published authors and would-be authors have contacted her about their sub-standard children's books and shared tales about the expense, deceptions, and betrayal. Common issues included that their book was not sufficiently edited, illustrations were not provided, or when so, Black characters looked like white people with unkempt hair—harkening back to racist stereotypes by mostly white authors in years past. Overall, these books were of poor caliber, and printed on low-quality paper without the copyright notification and book identifier numbers. Many times, these authors were given less than twenty-five copies for self-sales and had to pay additional fees to order more books. Marketing, promoting, and participating in costly sale opportunities became an absolute financial loss when considering the return on investment and that the average self-published book sells two hundred and fifty copies (Rizzo 2023). This statement is not to discourage aspiring authors, since quite a few self-published authors have earned $25,000 to $100,000 in a year, meanwhile, traditionally published books sell on average about one thousand copies (Rizzo 2023).

Bowlding hired a press company to produce her first book; however, she was misled by a marketing scheme and a large book printing at the outset. She was convinced that all the hybrid companies were the same. After the publication of that book, she taught herself the entire publishing process and used her editing and design skills to publish all of her subsequent books and Anderson's second through current children's books. Since then, Bowlding has gained clients, over 95% Black, African American, or African, through word-of-mouth and client successive books. In a sense, Bowlding has become a Black author and illustrator social justice warrior, ensuring that Black authors have quality culturally relevant illustrated picture books that include artwork of non-white illustrators unless a client selects the illustrator prior to working with this author. She has also helped her clients calm high expectations of traditional publishing and avoid the predacious hybrid or vanity presses. Further, Bowlding rescued a few authors from predatory contracts as well as re-edited, designed, and produced high-quality replacement books. Nineteen years after that first lesson, she still recommends self-publishing for new and experienced Black authors to ensure their Black author voice authenticity and vision are manifested in the final book.

Once Bowlding's client's book is completed, she provides additional guidance for authors. She explains that distribution companies charge high fees for storage and shipping and that authors may get locked into long-term contracts that benefit the distributor, even while the books are not being sold. She suggests that authors order a manageable number of books from the printer, market, and sell the books themselves by reaching out to bookstores,

retail venues, and news outlets. Authors must also push their books on social media and find local vending opportunities. Bowlding's advice for authors is this: Trust and believe in yourself. Your writing has high value and is worth your caring effort to get the books in many deserving hands. If you write a great story and include beautiful culturally meaningful illustrations, you will sell your books.

Kathy Anderson and Karen Bowlding's children's books feature Black American characters and stories with themes of encouragement, food, farming, foraging, gardening, and outdoor adventures. We avoid online marketplaces, bookstores, and retail outlets since a good chunk of a book's price is taken for shelf or screen space. We sell our books on our own with 100% profit once we make enough sales to cover illustrations, registrations, and printing, which usually occurs within a few months of a book's release. Our books are purchased by various audiences: Africans, Asians, Europeans, Hispanics, Latinx, and others, including non-English speakers. Our colorful illustrated covers are eye-catching and has conversation-generating power. The books are unique, and people desire books featuring Brown-skinned children and even children unlike their own. These diverse buyers recognize the value in diverse stories and welcome learning about different cultures. Simply put, they see a good book for a child and make a purchase. Black and African American buyers see our books and seem to be overcome with joy. They smile and show their children the books and speak with excitement. We witness similar reactions from people who buy books for Black or biracial children in their families or the children of their Black friends. We are proof that books written and illustrated by Black Americans are popular with more people than those traditionally assumed mainstream readers.

Too many gatekeepers in the traditional publishing industry do not understand or care to provide books for wider audiences unless they can monetize a trend. The publishing industry is willing to suffer financially, wastepaper and ink, and anger open-minded people to ensure that white people earn a profit. Publishers ignoring the desires and needs of Black and African children is a huge loss of revenue, creativity, and enrichment, yet here we are, about 384 years after European colonizers started book printing in what was to become the United States, without the book needs of this demographic met. Black and African Americans must start their own publishing companies which include illustrated children's books, independent of university presses and traditional publishers, with financial standards for workers, writers, and illustrators that pay creators their value. Such book-justice companies would make a substantial difference for Black and African American authors and illustrators, editors and designers, and associated workers in the publishing operation. Until such time, there is limited cultural influence on the industry. Black and African American authors are stuck with vulture capitalistic options to get their books to market, and Black folks will continue to struggle to find critical culture reading material for all young readers.

4. Broader Implications

A child's introduction to creative language occurs through verbal storytelling subject to the choices, animation, and interpretation of the storyteller. In their early life, a child hears stories and books read by family members and guardians within their culture, sometimes with a Black cultural twist on white storybooks. With formal education and reading instruction, Black and African American students encounter education and cultural injustices. Illustrated reading assignments and beginning readers featuring white cultural norms and character depictions in all levels of private and public instruction are consistent and ubiquitous. In many education systems, few, if any, reading materials include representations of non-white characters or their lived authentic experiences. Book choices are limited due to the cultural and other biases of the decision-makers. Note that scholastic publishers are most often not Black or from African American communities.

Common to the US traditional mainstream publishing industry is a children's book featuring a Brown skinned child with European features written by a white woman, illustrated by a white man, and published by a white company with all eyes on the product

sharing the same perspective. The author, illustrator, and publisher's diversity range and experiences imprint on the setting and characters in a book and those notions often do not align with the actual personality and environs of a character different from their life accounts. These interconnected limitations are evident in the public school system literature offerings.

Black and African American children's choices are limited by the lack of availability of books that validate and reflect their lived experiences. Children can be empowered to select their own books; however, this Black child self-determination is restricted by decisions made by librarians, teachers, and school system personnel. Keep in mind that 80% of all public-school teachers and administrators are white even if their students served and serviced are more racially and ethnically diverse (National Center for Education Statistics 2020). Indeed, the dearth of Black and African American professionals in the library and school systems is a large part of the story, although, with increased numbers, the influence of these professionals might be still limited by long-term holistic and systemic biases against Black and African Americans socially, historically, and politically. According to the *Department for Professional Employees AFL-CIO's* "Library Professionals: Facts & Figures, 2024 Fact Sheet," 7% of librarians identified as Black or African American in 2023 (Department of Professional Employees 2024). According to the *National Center for Education Statistics'* (NCES) "Race and Ethnicity of Public School Teachers and Their Students" (2020), a representative sample from the 2017–2018 National Teacher and Principal Survey data indicated 7% of Black identified teachers and 79% white teachers (Department of Professional Employees 2024). The NCES noted, "The majority of teachers were White in schools where a majority of students were Hispanic (54%), Black (54%), Asian (60%), or American Indian/Alaska Native (61%). That is, a larger percentage of teachers were white than of the same race/ethnicity as the majority of students" (National Center for Education Statistics 2020). Too few Black people interact with students below the leadership levels either in the classroom or libraries, underscoring a deeply systemic issue also connected with what is and is not published, what is and is not read, what is and is not made accessible to all students.

Our research of school systems is based on books at the second-grade level because the age range is seven to eight years old when children have learned basic reading, know more complex words, and are developing literacy skills, including reading comprehension. At these ages, children are more independent thinkers and better able to articulate their thoughts. This time is also when children develop advanced ideas, interests, and preferences, and these preferences are often dictated by what is introduced to them. Online book lists for schools and families with young children are comprised of an astounding disproportionate majority of resources for white children while the list producers claim that these books are for all children.

We examined each book on every list shown during our online search. We scrutinized author and illustrator articles, photographs, professional and social websites, and other online information to determine the country of origin, culture, ethnicity, or race based on how the creators self-identified and in accordance with names and socially constructed and perceptible physical traits common among people of shared descent. We looked at book covers and available interior pages of each book reviewed for this research and followed the same strategy in considering the character depictions, setting, story, themes, and topics in characters' sociopolitical appraisals. Scholastic serves more than 90% of the K–12 schools in the United States (Scholastic n.d.a). Scholastic's "Credo and Editorial Platform," which has not changed much since 1970, includes these statements: "Help build a society free of prejudice and hate, and dedicated to the highest quality of life in community and nation" and "Respect for the diverse groups in our multicultural society" (Scholastic n.d.b). However, reading lists for second graders lack representation of Black child characters, authors, and illustrators. Of the sixteen books in the Scholastic listing "16 Books to Engage Second Grade Readers," one is about a Black American baseball player and written and illustrated by white people (Scholastic 2024a). One book has one Black

character, with the majority of his face drawn scratch-lined shadowed, unlike the white characters. The remainder of the books are about white people or animals.

The "Ultimate Summer Reading Book List for 1st to 2nd Grade" (2020) includes twenty books for second graders: one written by a biracial celebrity and illustrated by a Black person; one written by a white person and illustrated by a Black person, one written by a Black child and illustrated by an Asian artist; one featuring a Black child written and illustrated by a white person; one book with multiracial characters featuring a Black child on the cover (the same book being sold featuring multiracial children on the cover) written and illustrated by white people; one written and illustrated by a Black person; and one featuring a variety of family situations written by white people and illustrated by a Portuguese person (Scholastic 2024b). Thus, only one book is about a Black child and is written and illustrated by the same Black illustrator who illustrated a featured book written by a white author.

Time website "100 Best Children's Books Of All Times" for 2015 includes only four books with Black people on the cover, two of which were written and illustrated by the same white male (D'Addario et al. n.d.). The other two books were authored and illustrated by Black men (D'Addario et al. n.d.). *Reader's Digest's* "106 Best Children's Books of All Time" for 2023 described its review of bestseller lists and ask librarians, teachers, and parents to name books which they listed as the best children's books of all time (Pennington 2023). This listing of 106 books includes 25 books featuring a Black main character, and of those, only eight are both written and illustrated by Black, African American, Caribbean, or African authors (Pennington 2023). The *Reader's Digest* list of diverse books features eleven books with Black, African American, African, or Caribbean authors, and of these, three are illustrated by Black or African artists (Moreno 2023).

Bored Teachers has lists as well. The "50 Must-Read Books for Second Graders from Bored Teachers" caveats the listing with text that consists of the following:

Any book list or classroom library worth its salt includes books featuring LGBTQIA+ characters, racially diverse characters, characters with disabilities, characters in the foster care system, characters from a wide variety of socioeconomic and religious backgrounds, and so on. Importantly, the diversity of the characters doesn't always need to be the focus of the literature—in other words, a book featuring a black character or gay character doesn't need to be about those individuals exploring their blackness or their gayness; those characters can have kid problems that apply to all children regardless of their race or sexual orientation (Amy 2024).

Despite this progressive sentiment, the books on the website are more likely to immediately appeal to white audiences. The book about Negro League baseball is the only book written and illustrated by a Black American. Five books have at least one Black-presenting character, and they are all written and illustrated by white people. Only one book about a Black girl acting out white-themed events and characters is written and illustrated by white people (Amy 2024).

Librarians in schools have a responsibility to provide age-appropriate books consistent with school curricula to complement learning. Although the language in the education domain has been written to describe a will to be culturally responsible, based on the demographics of the student body in diversely populated geographic areas, choices have not been made to support that resolution.

For the 2023–2024 school-system student demographics of Prince Georges County, Maryland—the second wealthiest majority-Black American county in the nation—the population data show: American Black or African American (52.23%), Hispanic/Latinx of any race (39.32%), Asian (2.73%), and white (3.82%) (Prince George's County Public Schools n.d.). The "Prince Georges County Memorial Library System 2023–2024 Second Grade Book List" includes a listing of sixty-two books (Prince George's County Memorial Library System 2024). Out of sixty-two books, one series features a Black female character with the author and illustrator white; one series features mostly white characters and two Brown characters with white features; one book features a formerly enslaved Black American

who does not learn to read until age 116, and one book features a Black American and a host of diverse characters (Prince George's County Memorial Library System 2024). The creators of these books include one biracial illustrator, one Nigerian illustrator, and one Black American author. The remaining creators are majority white authors and illustrators. If these statistics hold across the system grade levels, 3.82% of the student demographic see themselves represented in some way in about 92% of the books. Only one book is created by both a Black American and a Nigerian, and that book about a woman who cannot read or write is published by a white traditional publisher.

Data in the Texas public school system report, "Enrollment in Texas Public Schools, 2022–23" shows the student demographics as Hispanic (52.9%), white (25.7%), African American (12.8%), and Asian (5.1%) (Texas Education Agency 2023). The *Texas Library Association's* "Current List of Recommended Books for Children Ages Two to Grade Two" features twenty books, one about a Black child written and illustrated by a person of Indian-Caribbean and Black American heritage, four books with multi-cultural characters with one highlighting a Black character, all written and illustrated by white people (Texas Library Association 2024). The remainder of the books feature white characters and animals, the majority of which are written and illustrated by white people (Texas Library Association 2024).

According to the "Georgia Department of Education Enrollment by Ethnicity/Race, Gender, and Grade Level," information for Atlanta Public Schools, the October 2023 enrollment by ethnicity/race comprised 70% Black students (Georgia Department of Education n.d.). According to the *Atlanta Public School's* 2024 Summer Reading List, of eight books, there are no Black character storybooks and not a single Black author or illustrator (Atlanta Public Schools 2024). One book features a biracial child and it is written by a white person and illustrated by a Mexican artist (Atlanta Public Schools 2024).

The student body at the schools served by *Jackson Public School's* District is 94.6% Black, 2.7% Hispanic/Latino, 1.3% White, and 0.1% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander (U.S. News 2024 Jackson Public School District n.d.). The *Jackson Public School* District's "Elementary School Division (Grades Pre-K—5) Summer Reading List" has eleven books listed for second graders (Jackson Public School District 2024). One book features a Black child written and illustrated by a Honduran creator, one book written by a Black celebrity and illustrated by a Black artist, and two books written and illustrated by Black people (Jackson Public School District 2024). Thus, 36% of the second-grade books in a school system with 94.6% Black student enrollment have Black representation while the Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, and white student populations are each represented in 18% of the books.

Even reading lists developed for Black people limit discussion of books for young readers. The *Center for Black Literature* Reading List focuses on adult literature (Center for Black Literature n.d.). The list includes three picture books and one graphic novel out of 130 books. The *List Challenges* article "100 Must-Read African American Books" for 2024 does not list illustrated children's books (List Challenges n.d.). 2022 *The New York Times* "Children's Books by Black Authors: A Reading List" acknowledges the difficulty of finding Black children's literature yet lists older books adults may find more interesting than children (Fielder 2022).

5. What Does This Mean?

Parents understand the importance of diverse children seeing their non-stereotypical identities and experiences expressed in literary works. Outside of the classroom, the lack of Black and African American representation in children's book offerings in bookstores, libraries, and marketplaces is persistent. When available, these books are limited to white-accepted themes related to US antebellum enslavement, the civil rights movement figures, sports icons, well-known inventors, or hair tales. Black and African American children's books do not need to have an expressed diversity or activist focus for a child to relate. Too many of these didactic books miss the excitement and joy of Black adventure, fantasy,

friendship, or outdoor activity. Reading diverse books featuring culturally responsive storylines and characters are opportunities to introduce young readers to a wide range of varied ideas and tales that reflect different viewpoints, experiences, and backgrounds; both their own and those of others with a certain level of comfort. This Black American child or that African American child can dream out an adventure because they see something of themselves in the story.

The dearth of story representation, character portrayal, and creation by Black and African American people in children's book literature is alarming. The decision-makers in US education and library systems tolerate the underrepresentation for Black children while wholly supporting overrepresentation of Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and white children. "Black children are five times as likely as white children to attend schools that are highly segregated by race and ethnicity", according to the *Economic Policy Institute* (2020 (García 2020)). In schools, Black and African American children are required to read and learn about Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and white people while not being provided culturally significant stories about themselves that are both written by and illustrated by people within their demographic. School systems with a majority Black student enrollment can, and must, review and select from the lists of books on Black children's book resource websites and seek out independent Black and African American authors and illustrators and purchase the books of these creators to strengthen the self-esteem, literacy, and cultural satisfaction of Black children.

There are resources for finding traditionally published Black children's literature. A good list for Black-themed books is provided by The *African American Literature Book Club (2023)* which features the African American Literature Book Club's "Top 117 African American Children's Books for 2023" (African American Literature Book Club 2023). The website identifies books for various ages written and illustrated by Black creators, including stories about adventures, courage, family, hair, historical figures, music, sports, and more. The *FindMyKids* Blog lists (Bourque 2022) and The *I Am Unique* (I Am Unique 2020) website capture themes such as race/anti-racism, biographies, self-esteem, Caribbean/African diaspora, family, arts, and STEM. *Essence* has a list of books penned by Black celebrities and renowned authors through traditional publishing (Boone 2020). Quite a few are illustrated by non-Black artists. Nonetheless, there is fun and interesting reading for Black children. *SheKnows* has a list of books by Black authors and illustrators that are not common to some of the other book listings (McCovey et al. 2024). The list of "28 Brilliant Black Children's Book Authors We Love" from *We Are Teachers* has a varied Black cultural list of uplifting teacher favorites (Moore 2023). *Reading Middle Grade* (2024) offers "Best Children's Books by Black Authors" from early readers through late teen bookworms with a variety of diverse characters and topics (Reading Middle Grade 2024). For a child interested in Black artists and photographers, a short list of books, "Black Art History: Ten Children's Books Illuminate the Lives of Important African American Artists and Photographer" can be found at *Culture Type*, a website dedicated to visual art from a Black perspective. Black and African American children deserve to read stories that reflect them, and non-Black children can benefit as well.

While these seem like a lot of relevant lists, the books are a sliver of the number of published children's books. Per 2022 data, *Scholastic* alone publishes over 750 children's books each year (Talbot 2022). Yet, over the last six years, about 11% to 15% of children's books featuring Black/African characters were received by the *Cooperative Children's Books Center* (Cooperative Children's Book Center School of Education University of Wisconsin-Madison n.d.). School system personnel must not only select representative characters but also obtain books with diverse themes for Black and African American children similar to books for white children, such as splashing in the rain, playing with cars, being a super-hero, dreaming of a woodland adventure, or growing up on a farm without mentioning sharecropper or enslaved ancestors.

Good storytelling involves proficiency in a particular topic, understanding a Black and African American child audience, and demonstrating care about the topic. Black and

African American authors and illustrators are in the marketplace; however, they are not often featured in traditional publishing, media, on prominent bookshelves, or in libraries. Some books for Black and African American children are written and/or illustrated by both Black and African Americans; however, most are produced by white publishers with full control over content, design, distribution, and rights. Those publishers often pair a Black or African American author or illustrator with a white person or creator of another ethnicity. It takes research and due diligence to find books created by both Black and African American authors and illustrators that have control over their work via the self-publishing process. The creators and their books are at local author book signings, farmers markets, childcare and club events, and book fairs hosted by entrepreneurs, local government agencies, and non-governmental entities.

Parents and guardians of Black and African American children must be vigilant in holding schools and libraries accountable for the lack of culturally appropriate resources for their children while paying tax dollars to support an overabundance of literacy assets for other children. They must also hold themselves responsible for providing books in a variety of genres with meaningful Black and African American images and storylines that instill in Black self-love, impart knowledge, and entertain with creative adventures. Some of these books are found in the homes of elder family and friends. On a recent visit with our friend, "Auntie," we were introduced to *Bright Eyes, Brown Skin* (1990), by Cheryl Willis Hudson and Bernette G. Ford and illustrated by George Ford; *The Other Side* (2001) written by Jacqueline Woodson and illustrated by E.B. Lewis; and *Little Cliff and the Porch People* (1999) by Clifton L. Taulbert and illustrated by E.B. Lewis. Each of these books is written and illustrated by Black creatives. One may also find children's books written by author Eloise Greenfield who wrote 40 books including biographies, chapter books, picture books, and poetry.

Black and African American authors are witness to educators' reactions to seeing their books with stunned, surprised, teary celebratory expressions. Children's eyes light up and mouths are agape with pleaded looks to their parents. Imagine the excitement, squeals, laughs, and hugs expressed by children when they are handed an autographed book from an author who looks like them with stories and art reflecting their experiences and cultures! As Black authors and Black author allies, we must take cultural literacy justice into our own hands. Purchase books by Black and African American authors and illustrators, encourage others to do the same and write one's own Black and African American culturally meaningful children's book.

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Article

Roots and Refuge: A Critical Exploration of Nature in Black Visual Narratives

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Abstract: This article examined the underrepresentation of Black characters in children's picture books, particularly in natural settings, and its effect on Black children's relationship with nature. Through an analysis of four contemporary picture books, the study revealed how visual depictions challenge these exclusions and expand narratives about Black engagement with the natural world. Utilizing visual semiotics and the theory of Black Aliveness, this research underscores the transformative power of illustrations by Black artists in enriching children's literature and advancing joy.

Keywords: African American; children's literature; nature; visual analysis

1. Introduction

The history of racism in outdoor spaces has deeply influenced who feels welcome and safe in natural environments. Finney's (2014) work, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*, elucidates how outdoor spaces have been racialized, often being unsafe for Black people due to legacies of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and racial violence. These legacies have led to the development of stereotypes that depict Black people as uninterested in outdoor activities such as camping, hiking, or swimming. This misconception ignores the historical context of exclusion and danger that made natural spaces inaccessible or threatening to Black people (Finney 2014). Despite legislative efforts like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Wilderness Act, which aimed to desegregate public accommodations and protect natural areas, racist planning practices have continued to impact access to green spaces, contributing to ongoing environmental inequalities (Hoffman et al. 2020).

In response to these systemic barriers, Black communities have historically accessed outdoor spaces through resilience and resistance, finding ways to connect with nature despite these challenges. This connection manifests in various forms, such as community gardens, urban parks, and cultural practices that honor the natural environment (Kahrl et al. 2020). Grassroots movements and organizations have also played a crucial role in reclaiming and redefining Black presence in the outdoors, advocating for equitable access and representation (Corrigan et al. 2023). This rich history of engagement with nature demonstrates the enduring relationship between Black people and the natural world.

Similarly, in literary conversations, the representation of Black people in natural settings has often been overlooked. Dungy (2009) argues for greater inclusion of diverse voices in discussions about human interaction with the natural world, describing the complex relationship Black people have with land as one shaped by histories of "toil and soil." She emphasizes the necessity of recognizing the spiritual and physical connections Black people have with nature for survival. This perspective is echoed in contemporary literary analyses, such as Bayoumy's (2024) examination of ecofeminist texts that explore characters' perceptions of environmental injustices, highlighting the need for humans and

nature to coexist. Although these texts do not specifically depict Black characters, they stress the power of all humans with nature and the importance of ecological awareness.

In children's literature, picture books are powerful tools for shaping young minds and influencing how children perceive the world and their place within it. However, as Christopher Myers (Myers 2014) points out, Black characters have been historically underrepresented in these books, with more stories published about talking animals than about Black people. This underrepresentation is particularly evident in the lack of depictions of Black characters in natural settings, reinforcing stereotypes that alienate Black children from nature. Addressing this gap is crucial in fostering a richer narrative for Black youth interested in the outdoors and challenging the exclusion of Black people from stories about environmental stewardship and exploration.

This article investigates how contemporary picture books featuring Black characters in natural environments challenge these exclusions, presenting a richer, more diverse depiction of Black life. By analyzing four recent picture books, this study explored the visual narratives that counter stereotypes and affirm Black children's presence in all aspects of life, including the outdoors. Employing visual semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen 2021; Painter et al. 2013) and the theory of Black Aliveness (Quashie 2021), this research highlights the transformative power of illustrations by Black artists in reshaping societal perceptions. These depictions offer new perspectives on the relationship between Black communities and the natural world, countering historical narratives that have often excluded them.

2. Context and Related Literature

The representation of Black characters in children's picture books has undergone a significant evolution, marked by notable milestones that have shaped the publishing landscape and influenced the broader cultural narrative. A landmark moment in this evolution was the publication of *The Snowy Day* (1962) by Ezra Jack Keats, which was the first major picture book in the US to feature a Black child as its protagonist. This book tells the story of Peter, a young Black boy who explores the wonders of a snowy day in his urban neighborhood. Keats's illustrations are celebrated for their simplicity and vividness, capturing Peter's joy and curiosity as he interacts with the snow-covered environment. Dressed in a bright red snowsuit, Peter's activities—making footprints, building a snowman, and creating snow angels—are depicted with a playful and imaginative touch, highlighting a Black child's joyful engagement with nature.

Beyond its narrative, *The Snowy Day* is significant for its groundbreaking visual portrayal of Black childhood in literature. Andrea Davis Pinkney (Pinkney 2016), in her work *A Poem for Peter*, refers to Peter as the "Brown Sugar Boy in a blanket of white", acknowledging Keats as "a man who saw you for you". Similarly, Bryan Collier has reflected on the personal impact of seeing Peter in literature, noting how it made him feel visible in a predominantly white world of books (Zipp 2012). For book creators like Pinkney and Collier, Keats's work served both as a mirror and a gateway, inspiring them to pursue careers in children's literature.

Scholars have explored the evolution of Black representation in picture books, examining these works across a historical spectrum (Martin 2004; Bishop 2012; Barton et al. 2022). These studies suggest that depictions of Black children in literature affirm Black identity and humanity while also challenging non-Black audiences to perceive Black childhood in diverse and nuanced ways. Bishop (2012) argues that Black illustrators have sought to dignify the portrayal of African Americans in children's books, challenging stereotypes and showcasing the diversity of Black experiences.

Despite the progress, detailed analyses specifically focusing on visual representations by Black illustrators remain relatively rare. Thompson (2001) conducted a visual analysis of three picture books about Harriet Tubman, highlighting the varied artistic interpretations by Jerry Pinkney, Jacob Lawrence, and Faith Ringgold. Thompson's work underscores the diversity of visual storytelling and the importance of these differing perspectives in portraying historical figures like Tubman.

Other studies have examined the thematic elements in picture books by Black illustrators. Millman (2005) analyzed Faith Ringgold's picture books, identifying a recurring theme of darkness—both literal and metaphorical—that conveys the gravity and discomfort associated with Black experiences. Similarly, Gardner (2017) examined children's reactions to picture books featuring Black characters. Her study, though centered on children's literary responses, also analyzed the illustrations. Importantly, she highlights the need for a deeper examination of how Blackness is depicted, given societal biases that often associate it with negativity. Gardner emphasizes the importance of critical racial literacy, encouraging the reading of multiple texts and teaching children about the visual and stylistic elements in African American children's literature.

More recent research by Cueto and Brooks (2019) focused on how picture books created by Black artists confront anti-Blackness, presenting Black children in new, empowering lights. This critical content analysis of visual images highlights the role of these illustrations in challenging societal norms and countering racist imagery prevalent in mass media.

The importance of inclusive representation in children's literature, particularly in stories involving nature and outdoor exploration, has become increasingly recognized. Substantial research emphasizes the critical role nature plays in promoting cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic development. Conversely, a lack of exposure to natural environments has been linked to psychological distress (American Psychological Association 2020; Hari 2018). Despite this, there is a notable lack of research on the representation of Black youth in natural settings.

The scarcity of children's literature featuring Black children engaging with nature highlights a significant gap in representation. In her article, "Black Kids Camp Too", published in *The Horn Book Magazine*, Martin (2019) discusses the impact of this absence, arguing that it limits the imaginative possibilities for Black children, who are often depicted in urban settings or roles unrelated to nature. Martin emphasizes the importance of including Black children in nature-themed literature to foster a sense of belonging, challenge stereotypes, and broaden perceptions of who participates in outdoor activities.

Martin (2019) also explored the concept of "wildness," a term borrowed from biologist Drew Lanham, to describe a unique understanding and experience of the outdoors. She argues that this "wildness" offers a distinct way of knowing, which is vital for holistic childhood development. Additionally, Martin references Louv's (Louv 2005) idea of "Nature-Deficit Disorder," which describes the consequences of disconnection from nature, such as reduced sensory engagement, attention difficulties, and increased physical and emotional challenges. However, she critiques Louv's portrayal of children as predominantly white, middle-class, and viewed through a nostalgic lens. Martin asserts that similar patterns are reflected in children's picture books, where minoritized children are underrepresented in immersive outdoor settings.

Our study addressed these concerns by analyzing four contemporary picture books that feature Black characters in natural environments. By emphasizing the importance of visual representations, this research broadens the scope of children's literature to be more inclusive and reflective of all children's experiences. It underscores the need for Black youth to see themselves in the outdoors through illustrations that immerse them in the natural environment.

3. Book Selection

The books for this visual analysis center Blackness, as articulated by Campt (2021), who discusses how Black artists redefine Black visual experiences through the creation and curation of a Black gaze. By focusing on Black illustrators and their representations of Black characters, we shift from merely observing these visual narratives to engaging with them, understanding the perspectives and experiences of Black youth as depicted through these artworks.

These books—*Where's Rodney?* (Bogan 2017), *Tasha's Voice* (Bogan 2024), *Nell Plants a Tree* (2023), and *Emile and the Field* (2022)—feature illustrators with strong credentials and

distinctive styles that portray the lived experiences of Black children in relation to nature. The books highlight themes of inclusion, resilience, and the human right to a connection with the natural environment. Children ages four to eight constitute the target readers of these books.

Notably, the illustrators' racial and ethnic backgrounds contribute significantly to the authenticity and depth of these representations. While most illustrators are from Black communities, Daniel Miyares, illustrator of *Nell Plants a Tree*, is of Cuban descent. However, the alignment with the author's (Anne Wynter) identity as a Black person ensures that the story maintains its focus on Black experiences and perspectives.

These books not only provide rich, empowering visual experiences for young readers but also align with the research goal of examining Black perspectives through the visual work of Black artists. This approach aligns with our goal to prioritize a "politics of looking with, through, and alongside another" (Campt 2021, p. 8), thereby offering a nuanced, insightful analysis of Black characters in the books described below.

Where's Rodney? by Carmen Bogan, illustrated by Floyd Cooper, tells the story of Rodney, an energetic young Black boy who finds the classroom confining and longs for the freedom of the outdoors. His restlessness and vivid imagination lead him to daydream about wide-open spaces. When his teacher organizes a trip to a nearby park, Rodney is introduced to the boundless joy of nature for the first time. The book portrays his newfound freedom as he immerses himself in the fresh air, open skies, and the sensory delights of the natural world. Rodney's journey is a celebration of discovery and the unrestrained joy that nature brings, especially to children who rarely experience such environments.

Tasha's Voice by Carmen Bogan, illustrated by Daria Peoples, is about a young Black girl, Tasha, who finds her confidence and voice through her unique connection with nature. Initially quiet and reserved, Tasha is overshadowed in a noisy world until she visits a tranquil park near her home. There, she finds solace in the gentle whisper of leaves, the songs of birds, and the caress of a gentle breeze. Nature becomes her sanctuary, a place where she feels seen and heard. The story captures Tasha's transformation as she embraces the serenity and harmony of the natural world, illustrating the joy and peace that nature can instill in those who open their hearts to its beauty.

Nell Plants a Tree, by Anne Wynter and illustrated by Daniel Miyares, is about the enduring impact of a single, loving act. It follows Nell, a young Black girl who plants a small sapling and watches it grow into a majestic tree that becomes a cherished part of her family's life. This story, filled with tender familial moments and lush illustrations, is a celebration of growth, both in nature and within Nell's family. It captures the joy of nurturing life and the powerful legacy that a simple, loving gesture can create, resonating through generations.

Emile and the Field, by Kevin Young and illustrated by Chioma Ebinama, is a lyrical exploration of a small Black boy's deep, joyful connection with a field he treasures. Emile finds endless delight in the changing seasons, each bringing new wonders to his beloved field. He revels in the flutter of butterflies, the rustling leaves, and the scent of wildflowers, finding a sense of freedom and joy in nature's embrace. As Emile grows older, his bond with the field becomes a source of inspiration and reflection, making him mindful of the passage of time and the need to preserve natural spaces. The story invites readers to find wonder and joy in the world around them and emphasizes the importance of cherishing and protecting our natural environment.

4. Methodology and Visual Analysis

Our study employed a detailed visual analysis of selected picture books using the interpersonal metafunction framework outlined by (Painter et al. 2013). We explored how illustrations convey relational dynamics and viewer engagement through various visual systems.

The analyses examined four primary systems within the interpersonal metafunction: social distance, proximity, attitude, and orientation. These systems are critical for un-

derstanding the perceived intimacy between viewers and the characters depicted. Social distance, for instance, is a key focus, as it defines how closely viewers connect with the characters. Illustrations featuring close-ups create intimacy by bringing viewers to connect with the character's personal space, whereas medium shots suggest a more social relationship. Long shots imply detachment (Painter et al. 2013).

In scenarios where close-ups are less prominent, this study shifted its focus to proximity, attitude, and orientation. Proximity relates to the physical closeness between characters within the illustration, influencing perceived relationships. Attitude considers the way characters engage with viewers, for example, through direct eye contact or body positioning, which can convey power dynamics and emotional states. Orientation examines how characters are depicted in relation to one another and to the viewer, providing insights into the nature of their interactions and the intended viewer response.

Beyond these core systems, this study also investigated other aspects of interpersonal metafunction, including focalization, pathos, affect, and ambience. Focalization refers to the perspective from which the viewer perceives the scene, such as a character's point of view versus an external, objective perspective, which can affect the viewer's sense of involvement and empathy. Pathos and affect relate to the emotional resonance of the illustrations; this is particularly evident in depictions that employ high levels of detail and naturalism, creating lifelike representations that foster emotional connections despite their fictional context. Additionally, this study explored how the use of color, medium, and "provenance"—cultural meanings associated with the images—contributes to the overall ambience and viewer interpretation (Kress and van Leeuwen 2021).

To deepen the analysis, the visual elements were considered alongside theoretical discussions on Black Aliveness by Kevin Quashie (2021), allowing for a nuanced understanding of the interpersonal dynamics and cultural implications present in the illustrations. By focusing on Black Aliveness, we move beyond the confines of resistance as an aesthetic or reactionary response to exclusion. Instead, we illustrate how Black characters in these books engage with nature in personal, leisurely, imaginative, and communal ways that are detached from systemic inequalities. This approach aligns with Quashie's broader questioning of what lies beyond resistance in the shape and meaning of Black culture and subjectivity (Quashie 2009, p. 336). In the following section, we rely on key tenets from Quashie's framework, including the following:

1. Expressiveness of Inner Life: Black Aliveness is a lens that captures both textual and visual representations of the depth of Black experiences, going beyond outward displays of resistance. Inner life, according to Quashie, is dynamic and full of "wild motion", reflecting a wide range of emotional and psychological states.
2. Beyond Resistance: Quashie critiques the overemphasis on resistance in Black cultural expression, questioning what more can be said about Black subjectivity outside of a reactionary stance to oppression. His framework urges a shift in focus toward the broader experiences of Black life, not limited to systemic struggles or exclusions.
3. Black Engagement with Nature: Engagement with nature by Black communities is not necessarily a form of resistance. Instead, it is often personal, leisurely, imaginative, and communal. Quashie's concept of Black Aliveness detaches Black engagement with nature from reactionary responses, recognizing it as a full and rich interaction free from systemic inequities.
4. Black Interiority: Building on his earlier work on Black Interiority (2012), Quashie emphasizes the importance of understanding the "full range" of Black life (Quashie 2012, p. 6). This includes the complexity of feelings, desires, ambitions, and emotions, reflecting the nuanced and expansive inner life of Black individuals.
5. Expansive Black World Orientation: Quashie advocates for a worldview that recognizes the richness of Black life in all its facets beyond the lens of struggle or resistance. Hence, Black Aliveness involves a deep engagement with the self, community, and nature, embracing a full range of human emotions and experiences

4.1. Book 1—Where's Rodney?

In Carmen Bogan's *Where's Rodney?* (2021), illustrated by Floyd Cooper, a young Black boy, Rodney, discovers the beauty and freedom of nature. The illustrations by Floyd Cooper resonate deeply with Kevin Quashie's concepts of Black Aliveness and speak to the ongoing reclamation of outdoor spaces by Black people, specifically males. In a socio-cultural context where Black boys are often subjected to harmful stereotypes and systemic violence, these illustrations offer a powerful counter-narrative. They present Black boys as joyful, curious, and intimately connected with nature, challenging prevailing narratives that restrict Black youth to urban or confined spaces and deny them the freedom to explore and thrive in the natural world.

Cooper's use of the oil erasure technique throughout the book emphasizes themes of accessibility and inclusion. From the first image on the cover, Rodney is depicted with agency and vitality. The vertical angle looking up at him not only empowers Rodney but also suggests readiness and adventure, qualities often denied Black boys in a society that frequently views them through a lens of suspicion or threat. By placing Rodney against a lush green background and having him look directly at the viewer with wide-open eyes, Cooper creates an immediate connection that humanizes Rodney, showcasing his presence and importance in natural spaces.

Throughout the book, nature is a liberating force for Rodney, a place where he can express his curiosity and engage in self-discovery. The illustrations of Rodney in his classroom, juxtaposed with those of him exploring the outdoors, highlight this contrast. In the classroom scene, Rodney's prominent placement in the foreground, combined with the grainy texture of the room and the clear view of the bird outside, symbolizes his longing for freedom and movement—an echo of the broader historical and cultural yearning of Black communities for access to open, natural spaces. This imagery aligns with the reclaiming of outdoor spaces by Black Americans, where engaging with nature is a form of resistance and a means of reclaiming health and well-being.

One of the most impactful images in the book is Rodney climbing a hill at the park. Here, Cooper's detailed textures and use of space create a visual narrative of struggle, achievement, and personal growth. This illustration counters stereotypes that limit Black boys to specific, often negative roles. Instead, it shows Rodney in a moment of triumph, embodying resilience and determination. This depiction of Rodney's ascent mirrors the ongoing efforts of Black Americans to reclaim and redefine their relationship with nature, as outdoor activities and spaces are historically fraught with exclusion and racialized violence. By portraying Rodney in such a positive light, Cooper's work underscores the potential of nature to be a space of healing and empowerment for Black youth.

Moreover, the detailed illustrations that show Rodney observing ants or reaching for a tree speak to his engagement and curiosity, qualities that are often overlooked or underestimated in narratives about Black boys. These images offer a vision of Rodney as a thoughtful, introspective child, fully alive and immersed in his environment. Such representations are vital in challenging reductive stereotypes and affirming the richness of Black Aliveness—Rodney's presence in these spaces suggests not just survival but thriving and growing in an environment that is often denied to him.

4.2. Book 2—Tasha's Voice

In a nation that often denies Black women and girls the right to joy and healing, this book features a Black female main character with solace and a space to breathe freely. Carmen Bogan's *Tasha's Voice*, illustrated by Daria Peoples, is a visual celebration of Black Aliveness that resonates with the themes of Black women and girls' connection to nature. The book captures the transformative journey of a young Black girl, Tasha, as she finds her voice amid the rich landscapes of U.S. National Parks. This visual narrative underscores the importance of nature as a space of healing, exploration, and self-expression for Black girls, which is not commonly seen in everyday life. Nature provides a sanctuary where

Black girls can find peace, reflect, and connect with themselves, free from societal pressures and stereotypes.

The book's cover juxtaposes Tasha with her lively classmate Rodney from the previous book. While Rodney stares directly at the viewer with confidence and boldness, Tasha glances to the side with arms outstretched, suggesting both movement and hesitation. Her braids and posture, set mid-stride, symbolize the beginning of her journey, echoing a dynamic balance between contemplation and movement. This portrayal aligns with Quashie's concept of Black Aliveness, where stillness and motion coexist, reflecting the multifaceted experiences of Black children. The butterfly further symbolizes transformation and freedom, enhancing the scene's vitality. The eye-level perspective ensures relatability and empathy, particularly for Black children, making Tasha's story easily accessible and deeply personal.

Peoples' use of collage and watercolor techniques, combining gouache, charcoal, and ink, creates a vivid, textured environment where Tasha's journey unfolds. This layered artistic approach mirrors the complex layers of Black identity and experience. Organic shapes like trees, flowers, and animals blend seamlessly with Tasha's figure, emphasizing her integral connection to nature. The vibrant color palette and rich textures capture the vibrancy of natural landscapes, reflecting the dynamic presence of Black Aliveness in these spaces. This speaks to the essential role of nature in offering Black girls a space to explore their identities freely and connect with the environment on their own terms.

As Tasha's class arrives at the park, the artwork captures the lively energy of exploration. Dynamic lines in the straw field and bold character outlines distinguish the children against the detailed background, celebrating their active engagement with nature. The composition, anchored by a Black park ranger, not only grounds the scene but also highlights the importance of representation in these natural spaces. Tasha's positioning within this scene, counterbalancing the textures around her, symbolizes her growing connection to her surroundings, embodying belonging and discovery that resonates with Black Aliveness. This connection to nature is vital for Black girls, providing them with a space where they can feel seen and valued.

In a serene scene where Tasha discovers a turtle, the illustration shifts to a softer, more introspective tone. Clean lines and a minimalistic approach focus on Tasha's interaction with the turtle, capturing a quiet moment of connection and introspection. This portrayal reflects the contemplative aspect of Black Aliveness, emphasizing the depth and richness of Black interiority. The cohesive color palette, featuring Tasha's deep brown skin, her yellow shirt, and the turtle's hues against a soft blue background, creates a serene atmosphere that invites reflection and connection.

As the day ends, Tasha's climactic moment of finding her voice focuses on movement and transformation. The dynamic composition, with Tasha's profile on the left and butterflies on the right, symbolizes a harmonious balance between stability and change. The scale of Tasha's face, juxtaposed with the delicate butterflies, emphasizes her newfound voice and presence. This imagery of breath, lightness, and flight captures the essence of Black Aliveness, celebrating Tasha's journey as a powerful narrative of growth, resilience, and hope.

In *Tasha's Voice*, Daria Peoples' artwork not only complements Carmen Bogan's storytelling but also transforms the narrative into a celebration of resilience and the beauty of the Black presence in nature. Through Tasha's journey, the book offers a visual testament to the richness of Black experiences and the transformative power of nature, resonating deeply with themes of Black Aliveness and joy discussed in contemporary dialogues about Black girls and nature.

4.3. Book 3—Nell Plants a Tree

In *Nell Plants a Tree*, by Anne Wynter and illustrated by Daniel Miyares (Wynter 2023), the fusion of visual and textual elements celebrates Black land ownership, labor, and the richness of Black life in nature. Inspired by the pecan trees of Wynter's childhood, the book

moves between past and present, illustrating the enduring legacy of planting a tree. This narrative, while simple, holds deeper significance and is a testament to the resilience and vitality of Black communities, as well as the healing power of connection to the land.

The narrative's structure alternates between time periods, showing young Nell planting a pecan seed that grows into a tree enjoyed by future generations. The tree functions as a symbol of joy, a playground, a reading nook, and a family gathering place, reflecting the cyclical nature of life and the lasting impact of Nell's actions. By centering the story around a tree, Wynter subverts the historical context in which trees were often associated with racial terror, particularly lynching, as described in historical accounts of racial violence. Instead, Wynter reclaims the tree as a symbol of life, growth, and community—transforming it into a site of nourishment, joy, and Black continuity.

Miyares's illustrations using gouache, watercolor, color ink, and acrylics further enhance this theme of Black Aliveness, which Kevin Quashie defines as the fullness of Black life beyond mere survival. The illustrations depict children climbing the large tree, showcasing not only joy and energy but also a profound engagement with nature. The organic shapes and natural colors reinforce a realistic and intimate atmosphere, while overlapping elements and layered space add depth, reflecting the multifaceted nature of Black experiences. This attention to visual complexity emphasizes the richness of ordinary Black life amid nature, suggesting a subtle form of resistance against historical narratives of Black suffering and violence.

Nell Plants a Tree emphasizes the importance of Black people reclaiming narratives of land and nature as spaces of safety, joy, and belonging by situating Black life in a direct relationship with the earth, portraying the tree as a site of familial connection and generational memory. In one flashback, young Nell, around seven or eight years old, contemplates the seed she holds. The slightly high angle of view suggests introspection, positioning her within a quiet, thoughtful connection with nature. The composition, with Nell in the foreground and surrounding foliage in balance, emphasizes her solitude and contemplative relationship with the land. This scene evokes ancestral ties to the soil and the ways in which Black people's connection to the land is a form of self-determination and identity.

The very act of Nell's planting a pecan seed is a metaphor for nurturing future generations, demonstrating how small, everyday actions can have long-lasting effects. This is further emphasized in an illustration where Nell opens a curtain to let sunlight in on her newly planted sprout. Miyares explains that this image symbolizes how Nell "lets in the sun" for her family, embodying a deep connection to the land and a legacy of care, growth, and nurture that transcends generations. This life-affirming relationship with the earth exemplifies Quashie's concept of Black Aliveness, portraying Black life not in the shadow of trauma but within a continuum of joy, labor, and renewal.

The final scenes depict Nell as an older woman surrounded by her grandchildren on a porch, with the family gathering under the tree as lanterns hanging from its branches. These moments, rich with warmth and togetherness, emphasize themes of community and shared experiences. The detailed brushstrokes and vibrant colors create a festive, celebratory atmosphere, inviting viewers to recognize the beauty of ordinary life. This celebration of Black land ownership and stewardship stands as a powerful counter-narrative to the historical accounts of violence—such as trees and lynching—and displacement often linked to Black people's relationship with the land.

4.4. Book 4—Emile in the Field

In *Emile in the Field*, Kevin Young's narrative and Chioma Ebinama's illustrations focus on a young Black boy, Emile, experiencing profound belonging and joy in nature. This portrayal, similar to how Wynter and Miyeras reframe the symbolism of trees often associated with racial terror in *Nell Plants a Tree*, contrasts the history of Black labor in the American South, particularly the brutal realities of the cotton economy and slavery. Historically, the connection between Black people and the land, especially the fields, was

defined by exploitation and suffering. In *Emile in the Field*, however, this painful legacy is subverted. Instead of toiling in the field, Emile explores, owns, and delights in his surroundings (Young 2022).

The historical context reminds us that during the height of the cotton economy, Black people were forced to labor on vast plantations, representing economic bondage and oppression. In this context, the field was a site of forced labor, pain, and a deprivation of freedom. Slavery was the backbone of the US cotton industry, with enslaved Africans enduring brutal conditions to fuel the economy. Though they tilled the land, they never owned it, creating a violent disconnect between their labor and the wealth it generated, which was exclusively enjoyed by white landowners.

Contrasting this with Ebinama's illustrations, where Emile—a young Black boy—romps through fields and forests, free and joyous, creates a visual counter-narrative. In the spring scene, Emile is bathed in the calming blue hues Ebinama uses to evoke peace, wonder, and universal belonging. The bright flowers, open sky, and lively playfulness starkly contrast the historical memory of backbreaking labor in cotton fields. Here, Emile is not separated from the land through oppression; he is part of it, owning his experience with curiosity and wonder. His freedom in the field reclaims and redefines a space historically associated with Black suffering.

The summer scene in the book is another important juxtaposition. While enslaved people worked relentlessly through hot summers, their labor unseen and undervalued, Emile's active, playful engagement with his surroundings showcases his connection to nature in a way that emphasizes pure joy. The colors yellow, pink, and blue evoke nostalgia, creating an intimate and personal connection to the land. Unlike enslaved people who had no agency over their labor or environment, Emile's direct engagement with the landscape suggests a shift from laboring under duress to freely exploring and owning his experience.

Even in the more subdued and reflective autumn and winter scenes, Emile is part of a nurturing environment surrounded by family and enveloped in a warm and protective space. The color palettes used by Ebinama—blue, red, and green against the snowy background—reinforce calm, security, and growth, emotions seldom associated with the historical experiences of Black children during slavery. In *Emile in the Field*, nature is a place of learning, familial bonds, and personal growth rather than a site of exploitation.

By reclaiming nature as a place and source of joy, freedom, and exploration for Emile, this book offers a visual and thematic contrast to the past, where fields represented sites of racialized violence and oppression. Ebinama's use of blue further underscores the theme of shared humanity and the right of all people, especially Black children, to enjoy and be in communion with the natural world (Whitaker 2021).

5. Cross Book Themes

In examining the four books' illustrations through the lens of Kevin Quashie's concept of Black Aliveness, several consistent themes emerge that highlight the multifaceted nature of Black experiences and the profound connections to land and nature. Quashie (2021) imagines a Black world where Black being is considered in its fullness, not merely as a response to anti-Black violence but as a heterogeneous existence shaped by relationality and interiority. This perspective is pivotal in understanding the themes we draw across these works.

5.1. Reclamation of Nature and Land

The existential connection to nature and land is a recurring theme, reflecting a historical and cultural reclamation of these spaces. In *Nell Plants a Tree*, Anne Wynter and Daniel Miyares remind us of Black land ownership and labor through the symbol of a pecan tree. The tree's growth and its central role in the lives of Nell's descendants underscore a deep, ancestral connection to the land, embodying a legacy of care and regard. Similarly, Carmen Bogan's *Where's Rodney?* illustrated by Floyd Cooper and *Emile in the Field* by Kevin Young and Chioma Ebinama, depict young Black children experiencing nature's beauty

and freedom. These stories challenge historical exclusions and highlight the importance of accessibility and inclusivity in natural spaces (Quashie 2021). Ebinama's vibrant use of color and organic forms in *Emile in the Field* captures the awe-inspiring beauty of nature, while Cooper's detailed textures in *Where's Rodney?* emphasize the tactile and immersive experiences of Black Aliveness in outdoor settings. Finally, *Tasha's Voice*, illustrated by Daria Peoples, continues this theme by showcasing a Black girl's journey of self-expression and self-knowledge within the US National Parks. All four narratives reclaim spaces and redefine them as places of transformation for Black people.

5.2. Legacy and Generational Impact

The idea of continuity is central to these visual narratives. *Nell Plants a Tree* illustrates how a single act of planting a tree can resonate through generations, providing joy, comfort, and a sense of rootedness. This theme is echoed in *Tasha's Voice*, where Tasha's discovery and expression of her voice signify a personal legacy of resilience and self-discovery.

In *Where's Rodney*? and *Emile in the Field*, the characters' experiences in nature are transformative, suggesting that these moments of exploration will have lasting impacts on their lives. That Emile experiences the land with his father signifies a multigenerational connection that does not begin or end with enslavement or sharecropping (Quashie 2021). These visual narratives emphasize the importance of creating and preserving spaces where Black children freely explore and connect with nature across time and generations.

5.3. Representation and Belonging

The representation of Black children in natural settings challenges historical narratives and asserts their rightful place in these environments. Each book emphasizes the diversity and richness of Black experiences in nature, celebrating moments of contemplation, curiosity, and exploration. This is particularly evident in Cooper's illustrations in *Where's Rodney*? and Ebinama's work in *Emile in the Field*, where the vibrant double-spread depictions of Black children in nature promote a more inclusive vision of who belongs in these spaces. Furthermore, in *Where's Rodney?*, the characters' curiosity about an outdoor space allows us to think again about where Rodney truly feels belonging. In *Nell Plants a Tree*, belonging manifests through family gatherings under the tree. *Tasha's Voice* presents a nuanced exploration of self-expression and transformation, capturing the fulfillment of finding one's voice in a space traditionally not seen as inclusive. The visual narratives provide an interior expressiveness of "belonging" (Quashie 2009) that is enlivened by a wide range of human forces brought forth by the natural world. These expressivities signify an expanded Black cultural aesthetic.

6. Conclusions

Historically, narratives around Black people and nature have often been underrepresented or portrayed through a limited lens, frequently focusing on urban settings or historical hardships. Through the lens of Black Aliveness, these four books collectively present powerful narratives that represent Black life in its fullness. In doing so, the representations enable the concept of Black Aliveness (Quashie 2021) to be further understood through portrayals of a wide range of inner life and uninhibited behaviors. In this way, the books and their characters "challenge or counter social discourse" and are "articulate and meaningful" in their impact on nature.

The themes of (1) reclamation, (2) legacy and generational impact, and (3) representation and belonging highlight the complexity and richness of Black experiences. These narratives and visual elements not only challenge historical exclusions but also offer more complete visions of Black lives, emphasizing the importance of relationality and the transformative power of nature. These four books illustrate Black Aliveness and the intimate relationship between Black people and the natural world, offering stories filled with warmth, inclusivity, adventure, and beauty. They are powerful reminders of the importance of representation and the transformative power of nature.

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Article

Redefining Black Beauty in a Children's Book

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Abstract: This essay explores the journey of co-authoring the children's book *Beauty With A Birthmark* (2022) inspired by my experiences as a Black mother and those of my Black daughter, the main character in the book. Our book examines themes of beauty and self-acceptance, challenging traditional beauty standards and promoting the need for continually creating space for Black main characters in children's books. Our essay further highlights the underrepresentation of Black protagonists in childhood picture books, acknowledging the pivotal role of gatekeepers in the publishing industry. We also address the impact of inclusive literature in classrooms and school libraries as it relates to Black children's self-esteem, appreciation of and exposure to diversity, and academic achievement. Through this lens, *Beauty With A Birthmark* fosters belonging and confidence among young Black readers, illustrating the far-reaching influence that representation in children's literature embodies.

Keywords: African-American; birthmark; beauty; children's books; self-esteem

1. The Journey to Self-Acceptance and Inspiration for *Beauty With A Birthmark*

"It's ugly, and I hate it, and you know it's ugly and should hate it, too".

These words of my then eleven-year-old daughter, Jessica, hit my ears like an incorrect piano chord in the middle of a masterpiece. She was referring to her birthmark on the right side of her face. We later discovered that her birthmark was named Nevus of Ota. I reassured her that it was not ugly and that she was beautiful, while I hid my sadness. I will always remember that day and the moment when I realized that my beautiful Black daughter had negative thoughts about her looks because of the birthmark. That realization led to the birth of the book that we co-authored, *Beauty With A Birthmark*.

In my dreams of motherhood, I had hoped to have this baby girl. She was my masterpiece. Born two years after her big brother, she was a perfect fit for our family. At birth, her face was much darker on the right side. While we noticed the color variation, we assumed that it was a temporary discoloration that would fade over time. However, as Jessica grew, the birthmark remained and became a permanent part of her identity. The journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance was both hers and ours, as a family. We navigated the complexities of societal beauty standards, often finding ourselves at odds with the pervasive Eurocentric ideals that still dominate virtually every aspect of media and literature. Our experience highlights the importance of positive representation in the books that all children read, sparking the idea for a book celebrating diverse physical appearances and telling Jessica's story as one of beauty, not of blemish.

2. Discovery of the Birthmark

> "Birthmarks highlight a person's individuality and this book shows their importance". Toni C. Stockton, MD, FAAD, endorsement of *Beauty With A Birthmark*

A routine visit to the dermatologist for my son's and Jessica's acne turned out to be one of the most pivotal moments in our journey with *Beauty With A Birthmark*. We had an appointment with Dr. Toni Stockton, a renowned name in the Phoenix medical community. At one time, she was the only Black dermatologist in the entire state of Arizona and represented just three percent of board-certified dermatologists in the U.S. That kind of representation, especially in healthcare, is rare and powerful.

During the appointment, after the physician's assistant examined Jessica, she called Dr. Stockton into the room. When I inquired about the birthmark on Jessica's face, Dr. Stockton recognized it as Nevus of Ota. I was surprised when she explained that the two small spots in Jessica's eyes were part of this condition. She told us it was critical that our ophthalmologist monitor any changes to ensure her vision would not be affected. Dr. Stockton's words were reassuring and informative. Nevus of Ota, caused by the hyperpigmentation of cells, is more common in women of African and Asian descent. It can be present at birth, just as it had been with Jessica. While laser treatment is an option for those who want to address it cosmetically, the priority for us was understanding and managing any potential risks to her vision, including the possibility of glaucoma.

The fact that Dr. Stockton, a woman who looked like us, was able to identify and thoroughly explain Jessica's condition is significant. It underscored how multicultural representation in health care matters. Studies have consistently shown that Black patients have better health outcomes when treated by practitioners who share their background and experiences. This is why Dr. Stockton's role in *Beauty With A Birthmark* goes beyond a mere depiction. She is a crucial figure who educated us both in the book and real life. Her thriving practice in Phoenix, Arizona, and her endorsement of the book, with a quote on the back cover, speak volumes about the importance of having diverse voices in the medical field.

3. Challenging Traditional Beauty Standards

> Birthmarks, moles, freckles, and scars
> all unique like the sky's stars
> These skin marks are our design—
> both mine and yours let us shine!
> —*Beauty With A Birthmark*

Traditional standards of beauty refer to the physical characteristics and traits valued and idealized within a given society. These standards are shaped by cultural norms, media portrayals, literature, and societal expectations. They show up in every fashion and style scenario on television, internet videos, and in the movies. In many Western societies, traditional beauty centers Eurocentric ideals: light or fair skin complexions that signal and grant privilege and higher status; symmetrical facial features; blue or green eyes; long, straight, and silky hair.

The creation of *Beauty With A Birthmark* was an act of resistance against these narrow and exclusive definitions of beauty. The book's cover was inspired by a photograph of Jessica that depicts her with the right side of her face darkened by the Nevus of Ota, kinky hair styled in cultural Afro puffs, dark brown eyes, and mocha skin. It is a way to tell Jessica and other children like her that their unique features are not seen as flaws, but as marks of beauty. The book challenges the status quo and promotes an inclusive understanding of beauty that celebrates diversity in all its physical forms and manifestations. Even the title of

this book defies typical capitalization standards and expectations. Figure 1 illustrates how the title was planned as a subversive exercise for the sake of demonstrating and valuing true diversity and acceptance outside the proverbial lines.

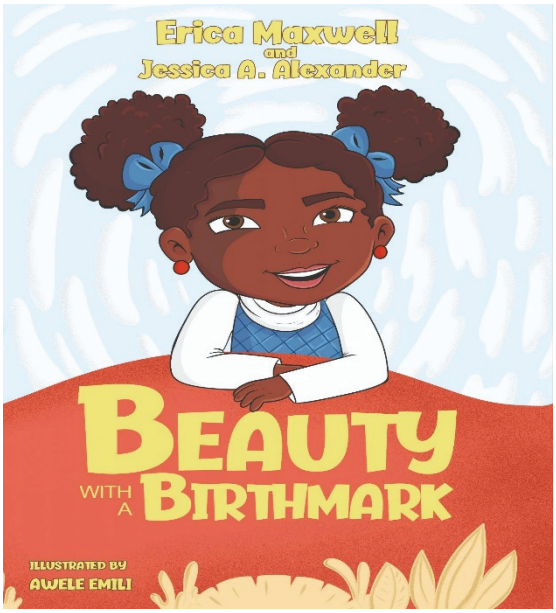

Figure 1. Front cover of *Beauty With A Birthmark*. Awele Emili. *Beauty With A Birthmark*, 2022.

To illustrate this message of Black self-affirmation, the book includes characters with various skin conditions like Mongolian spots, port wine stains, moles, and freckles (see Figure 2, *Beauty With A Birthmark*). Including these diverse traits, along with an educational glossary, normalizes different physical appearances, and expands readers' understanding and concepts of beauty.

Figure 2. Inside of Beauty With A Birthmark. Awele Emili. Beauty With A Birthmark, 2022.

4. Underrepresentation of Black Characters in Children's Literature

The landscape of children's literature has long been marked by a lack of diversity, particularly in representations of Black characters. When we began writing *Beauty With A Birthmark*, the underrepresentation was evident in books that sought to address birthmarks. Two prominent books were *Buddy Booby's Birthmark* (2007) and *Sam's Birthmark* (2013). While both books address birthmarks, they leave a pronounced void in representation. *Buddy Booby's Birthmark*, for example, features a stork as a presumably male protagonist, a

well-meaning but distant choice for children yearning for human characters they can see themselves in. Similarly, *Sam's Birthmark* places a white male at the center of its narrative, which again reflects the dominant trend in children's literature: white male characters as main characters. Both stories, while valuable in their lessons about acceptance and physical difference, fail to provide children of color, particularly Black children, with protagonists who resemble them and affirm their experiences. Such omissions reinforce the notion that Black children are either invisible or not deemed worthy of being central figures in stories about self-acceptance and beauty. This realization was a catalyst for *Beauty With A Birthmark*, a story where a Black child with her unique birthmark can stand proudly at the center. Through this work, we challenge the homogeneity of children's literature and offer a narrative that celebrates Black beauty, inclusivity, and the individuality of all children.

Nancy Larrick (1965) brought the lack of representation in non-white children's literature to national attention in her seminal 1965 article, "The All-White World of Children's Books", published in *The Saturday Review*. In her article, Larrick exposed the pervasive racial exclusion in children's books, revealing that a mere 7 percent of the 5206 children's books published between 1962 and 1964 include one or more Black characters. Even more troubling is the fact that when Black characters were present, they were often relegated to secondary roles or depicted through stereotypes: "Many children's books which include a Negro show him as a servant or slave, a sharecropper, a migrant worker, or a menial", reinforcing a social and racial inferiority rather than empowerment.

Despite the growing diversity in society, children's books featuring Black main characters remain woefully underrepresented. According to a study by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, only 11.9 percent of children's books published in 2018 featured Black characters. This lack of representation has profound effects on young Black readers, particularly in terms of self-esteem and identity formation. Within the space of Black protagonists, the gap remains for celebrated Black female protagonists. According to studies on diversity in children's literature, between one and two percent of children's books feature a Black female main character. A 2022 report by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) found that while there has been improvements in the representation of characters of color, the number remains disproportionately low, especially for Black female protagonists. Efforts to increase diversity are ongoing, but the underrepresentation of Black girls in children's books continues.

Historically, the opportunity for Black children to see themselves in literature was nearly nonexistent. W.E.B Du Bois, with *The Brownies' Book* (1920), sought to change this reality by showing Black children that being "colored" is a beautiful thing (McGee 2023). However, it was not until Ezra Jack Keats's *The Snowy Day* (1962) that a mainstream picture book featured a Black protagonist. And Keats' book was not without some stereotypical representations of a Mammy-like mother image and a Black father absent from the family unit. Walter Dean Myers echoed this ongoing issue of underrepresentation in his 2014 *New York Times* op-ed, asking "Where are the People of Color in Children's Books?" Myers argued that the absence of Black characters sends a message of exclusion and limits the opportunities for both Black and white children to understand the full spectrum of humanity, theirs and others' (Myers 2014).

5. The Importance of Inclusive Literature

Inclusive literature plays a crucial role in shaping children's perceptions of themselves and others. For all children, seeing characters that look like them in the books they read validates their experiences, raises their self-esteem, and fosters belonging. This reality is especially important for Black children who often face societal messages that devalue or erase their appearance and culture altogether. Books like *Beauty With A Birthmark* affirm

Black self-worth and beauty, countering the negative stereotypes they encounter. Our repetitive phrase, "I am a beauty with a birthmark", throughout our book is an affirmation, encouraging readers to celebrate their unique traits. Affirmations in educational settings can have far-reaching effects, helping to reduce academic stress and improve overall student well-being (Yeager and Walton 2011). For instance, in the (Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) 2019), a young student of color shared: "When I see people that look like me in books, it makes me feel like I belong in the world and can do things like the characters do". Still, within this diversity of representation, data shows that lighter-skinned Black and Brown children see themselves represented more often in these books than darker skinned children (Adukia et al. 2023), highlighting a persistent imbalance in whose experiences and identities are worthy of storytelling.

Research further shows that when students see themselves reflected in school curricula, they are more engaged and more motivated to learn. Incorporating diverse books into classrooms and school libraries validates students' experiences and enhances their academic performance. When children do or do not see others represented, their conscious or unconscious perceptions of their own potential and that of groups with identities different than theirs can be molded in detrimental ways and can erroneously shape subconscious defaults (Adukia et al. 2023). For marginalized students of any group, being able to read literature that reflects their identities assists educators in creating inclusive learning environments that support the success of all students.

6. Appreciation of Diversity in Inclusive Literature

About our book, *Beauty With A Birthmark*, Judith Outten, M.D., Licensed and Board-Certified Adult/Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, observed: "This delightful book is vital for building children's self-esteem as they learn to fully embrace themselves and what makes them unique. It's an integral part of any home library as an important child development tool that teaches empathy, understanding and acceptance—key character traits that can greatly reduce the likelihood of bullying". The impact of inclusive literature extends beyond individual self-esteem. It also promotes empathy and an appreciation of diversity among all readers. Jessica's story emphasizes the strength, resilience, and joy of a Black girl protagonist who engages in activities that any child might participate in: swimming, playing the piano, celebrating her birthday, cheerleading, traveling across the United States, and spending time with friends and family who fully embrace her in all of her beauty. Despite differences with the identity of the main character, who is a Black female with a birthmark, the reader can form a human connection through seeing these experiences, thereby potentially developing a more compassionate view when they interact with those who have birthmarks or other visible and invisible differences.

Inclusive literature celebrates the richness of human diversity by weaving together narratives that reflect the interconnectedness of various aspects of identity. As noted by Adukia et al. (2023), "we also draw on a central insight from the study of intersectionality. Different aspects of identity—such as race, gender identity, class, sexual orientation, and disability—do not exist separately from each other but are inextricably linked". This understanding emphasizes the importance of moving beyond single-dimension portrayals in literature to acknowledge the complexity of individual and collective experiences. When children's books embrace intersectionality, they provide authentic representations that resonate with readers from all walks of life.

Hopefully, Black children in our audiences and those who read our book will recognize a shared experience and connect with the main character in a way that transcends cultural, social, and personal barriers. By layering identities and portraying everyday experiences alongside Jessica's uniqueness, our book offers readers a broader understanding of beauty

and acceptance, challenging the conventional notions about normality and difference. When children are exposed to stories featuring diverse characters, they learn to see the world from different perspectives. This can lead to greater understanding and acceptance of people from different backgrounds, fostering a more inclusive society.

7. The Role of Gatekeepers

The process of writing and publishing this book was deeply personal and political. When cultural gatekeepers come from homogenous backgrounds, they unintentionally miss the richness and nuance of stories that speak to underrepresented communities. Our experience with self-publishing *Beauty With A Birthmark* was both empowering and eye-opening.

To begin our publishing journey, I consulted with several of my colleagues in the community colleges who referred me to a local author who was also a former student of theirs. This person had recently published a children's book with an animal as a main character. After meeting with this author who recommended a local company, Five Star Publications, and after spending USD 400 on an initial review of our manuscript in 2015, I was excited to receive feedback, hoping it would help bring our vision to life. However, the review came from a white male whose expertise centered on books with animals as main characters. His review marked our story as being without interest. The unique story that we wanted to tell—one that celebrates diversity, individuality, and self-acceptance—seemed to be overlooked in favor of animals as main characters and more generic subjects that might appeal to mainstream white readers—children, parents, librarians, and educators who still make up 80 percent of public-school K-12 classroom teachers. It was clear that the narrative shaped by Jessica's and my lived experiences did not resonate with this non-Black male reviewer's perspective. For more than 25 years, the landscape of major book publishers in the U.S. has remained the same. Today, the "Big Five" publishing houses are Penguin/Random House; Hachette Book Group; Harper Collins; Simon and Schuster; and Macmillan (Horne 2023). These giants dominate the industry, yet only five percent of the smaller publishing houses are Black-owned, according to Statista.com. Additionally, buyers play a crucial role as decision-makers in determining which books are on the shelves. As Horning notes, "more than one publisher has told me that they've heard Barnes & Noble buyers say that Black books don't sell" (Horning 2014). Still, we have experienced support from our local Barnes & Noble at Chandler Mall (Chandler, AZ), through participation in storytime and local author events where we have been invited and featured. While these local engagements have had a positive impact, we aim to expand our reach nationally, which will require buyers to purchase our books in bulk and stock them in stores across the country.

In my journey as a children's book author, I knew that we wanted something different—a publisher that reflected us and our culturally-specific perspectives. With intention, I sought out and found Amber Books, a reputable press right here in Phoenix, Arizona. Amber Books, owned by Tony Rose and his spouse Yvonne, stands as the largest African American publisher in the U.S. It was a privilege to partner with Yvonne, the director of Quality Press, a company that supports authors who self-publish. When we realized that the chances of *Beauty With A Birthmark* being selected by one of the major publishing houses were slim and that the costs associated with traditional publishing were daunting, we chose the path of self-publishing. We purchased a package from Bowker Publishing Services, which included essential tools like ISBN numbers, eBook creation, copyright registration, and barcodes.

Throughout the process, I leaned on Yvonne for her invaluable guidance. When my illustrations and text were finalized, she helped me cross the finish line, ensuring that my

book was properly formatted and ready for distribution through Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Her expertise was a crucial part of our success, and I continue to recommend her to other aspiring authors.

The publishing industry's gatekeepers—publishers, editors, and agents—play a critical role in determining which stories reach young readers. Historically, the industry has been dominated by white decision-makers, resulting in limited opportunities for authors of color telling stories of people of color. While there is a growing movement to diversify the publishing industry through organizations such as We Need Diverse Books, significant barriers remain. To ensure that more stories like *Beauty With A Birthmark* reach children and communities across the globe, publishers must actively seek and support diverse voices, recognizing the value of stories that reflect the experiences of all children.

According to the Lee and Low Books 2023 Diversity Baseline Survey Publishing Industry Demographics, 72.5 percent of workers in the book publishing industry identified as white, a decrease since their last study, published in 2019 (Anderson 2024). This percentage includes U.S. publishing, review journals, and literary agent staffers. In a New York Times article, publisher Linda Duggins stated "Publishing houses and institutions within this industry are not set up for people of color. . . . You're bucking up against really entrenched cultures" (Alter and Harris 2024). This lack of diversity adversely impacts Black children's literature in a variety of ways: limited representation; narrow narratives; cultural misrepresentations; fewer opportunities for Black authors; and impact on readers of all backgrounds. Overall, the publishing industry's lack of diversity creates an ecosystem where Black children's literature is underrepresented, limiting the range of stories available to all children and perpetuating systemic inequities in education and cultural understanding.

8. Inside Beauty with A Birthmark

Beauty With A Birthmark is written in rhyme and captures beauty beyond conventional standards as the main character born with a prominent birthmark comes to embrace her uniqueness. The vibrant illustrations were designed by Nigerian illustrator Awele Emili, a freelance artist whom I contracted with through Upwork. We provided Awele with several of Jessica's photographs, and we were pleased with the way Awele accurately rendered Jessica as she joyfully participates in everyday activities like playing the piano, cheerleading, and running track, highlighting her confidence and talent. Jessica's travels across the United States and her celebrations with friends and families who love and accept her for who she is further underscore our message of self-acceptance and inner and outer beauty. We were intentional about emphasizing Jessica's rich experiences, her supportive friendships, and embracing her individuality.

Beauty With A Birthmark is more than a book; it is a statement. It is a declaration that all children, regardless of their physical appearance, deserve to see themselves represented in the stories they read. It is a call to action for the publishing industry to prioritize diversity and to create space for voices that have been historically marginalized. Through our book, we know that we will validate and inspire other authors and illustrators to tell stories that reflect the rich diversity of our world.

9. The Personal and Local as Global

Our journey of writing and publishing *Beauty With A Birthmark* has been deeply intertwined with our desire to share the message of self-acceptance and beauty with children across the world. This mission came full circle during our literacy mission trip to Johannesburg, South Africa in October 2023. We shared our book at an elementary school where Jessica, the heart of the story and real-life inspiration behind the character, read the book aloud (see Figure 3, *Beauty With A Birthmark*). What unfolded was magical. Without

being prompted, the students rushed to share their own books with Jessica. They were astonished to discover that she was the main character in the book; their excitement was palpable. The principal engaged in a meaningful conversation with Jessica about her life as a child and young adult with a birthmark in the United States, further deepening the connection between her story and these young African students.

Figure 3. Elementary school in Soweto, October 2023.

This experience on the mission trip echoed the broader themes of *Beauty With A Birthmark*, particularly in the context of Africa where views of beauty, including birthmarks, vary across cultures. In some African cultures, birthmarks are symbols of uniqueness, beauty, or even good fortune, while in others, they may be misunderstood. Our book, because it is rooted in the idea that beauty comes from embracing one's uniqueness, aligns with these diverse perspectives, and opens into conversations about how different cultures view and celebrate beauty. Meeting the African students and seeing their reactions affirmed the power of storytelling to bridge gaps and to inspire self-love. It was a moment where our written words and real-life experiences merged to reinforce the fact that beauty transcends appearances and cultural boundaries.

Writing *Beauty With A Birthmark* has been a journey of discovery, resistance, and hope. It is a testament to the power of representation and the importance of inclusive literature. By challenging traditional beauty standards and promoting diversity in children's books, we can create a more inclusive and affirming world for all children. Jessica's story is just one of many, but it is a reminder that every child deserves to feel beautiful and valued.

10. From the Margins to the Center: In Jessica's Own Words

I would never have thought I would ever be the main character of a book! *Beauty With A Birthmark* highlights one of my biggest insecurities. What does it mean to me to have this opportunity to share my story of pain, vulnerability, and triumph? Empowering is the best way to describe this feeling now as I read my story to and share with others. I feel empowered through my loving mother whose care, concern, and consideration of me was enough to express my beauty through this children's book. I am empowered through being the main character, and a source of inspiration and empowerment to those around the world who have similar birth and skin marks, or none at all but are open minded to learn about them. I feel loved and seen through not just my loving and talented mother, but

also through the world/community. Our book has brought out love and support through my interactions and sharing my story with so many people with whom I would never have interacted otherwise. Awareness is another word that describes what this book has brought to me and to this new sense of being in community locally and globally.

My birthmark has damaged me. One of my first heartbreaks was self-inflicted through insecurity. My birthmark made me feel different—not stand out and stand tall "different"; more of a "different" where I didn't fit with others. I didn't belong. Was I ugly? Little old Jess didn't know why her face was two-toned until I was 11 years old, when a dermatologist showed interest, too. I was never ugly, but I always thought so. I recalled cruel, unthinking classmates calling me a "cow" and describing me as "the dark-skinned girl with that stuff on her face". My confidence waned as I attempted to connect with others and build relationships when I wasn't loving or embracing myself fully. It absolutely hurt me to my core. So, I wore my birthmark as a mask. Two-toned in the face, my birthmark had me masked up. I became those who made fun of me. I spat hate right back out my mouth because that's what was surrounding me as a form of protection I owed to myself. As I matured in age and grew in self-acceptance, it got easier because the crowd grew and people stopped caring about the way I looked. I gained confidence and found people who aided and reassured me that I was well-deserving of love and care. But that mask never left my side. I like to think it was the start of my attitude that I carry with me. The mask is a part of me and will never leave. I protect myself before opening up to anyone new. If I see anyone like me, I'm eager to converse because maybe they'll understand, and I'll be able to be seen and heard beyond my birthmark.

Books and readings are amazing, not just for the kids. I thank the adults who allow their kids to tune in because that's where education and empathy start! There are many pictures of me where it seems as though I'm more tuned in with the crowd than anything else, as if they're telling me the story. But that's how I view it. Others are now part of my story. *Beauty With A Birthmark* is me, I am a Beauty!

Kids engaging in the book will mention anything from "I like swimming, too" to trying to pronounce the word "dermatologist" for the first time. These genuine moments in response to our book and my story will always intrigue me. Sharing this book and story about me with others brings me joy. I will be forever grateful for the experience to educate those willing to listen, as well as entertain. Public readings of our book have also brought me close to many people. Some stop by just out of curiosity about the book. Some walk away 30 min later with a signed copy made out to someone specific because in some way, they connected them to our book. Our book speaks to people with and without birthmarks, of all ages, genders, ethnicities, and religious beliefs. Our mother-daughter book welcomes all, redefining beauty and amplifying awareness, love, and education. All kids need books that hug them in the way that Natasha Tarpley beautifully states when referring to books she writes, "I wanted the book to feel like a warm hug for Black kids—one that would encourage them to connect with their inner beauty and inspire a more holistic love of self" (Tarpley 2023).

11. Ripples of Impact

Beauty With A Birthmark has garnered significant attention and support since its release. The book has resonated with readers for its message of self-acceptance and the importance of embracing uniqueness. It has been especially meaningful to connect with families and educators who value diversity and representation in children's literature.

One of our most memorable engagements was an author's visit to an elementary school in South Phoenix. Jessica read the book to students and our visit sparked meaningful

conversations about self-love, uniqueness, and inclusion. Many students eagerly shared their own stories and affirmations.

Our journey also took us to Kent State University (Erica's alma mater), where we shared the book with children at the Child Development Center on campus. Connecting with young readers there was a special experience, bringing the book's message full circle to a place that shaped a meaningful educational journey.

In addition to schools and universities, we have had the pleasure of participating in Storytime and Local Authors Events at Barnes & Noble in Chandler Mall, where we connected with families and fellow authors to celebrate the importance of diverse children's literature.

The Phoenix Children's Hospital Dermatology Department also purchased copies to provide for their patients, furthering our mission to empower children with visible differences. Jessica had an incredible opportunity to be a special guest for the Wild 'N Out Tour in Phoenix, where she was recognized as an Ncredible Changemaker. She shared her book with celebrities, spreading the message of self-acceptance to an even broader audience.

Our media engagements on Good Morning Arizona (3TV) and Arizona Horizon (PBS) helped amplify the book's message across Arizona. Additionally, *Beauty With A Birthmark* is listed on the Vascular Birthmarks Association's Children's Book List, making it a valuable resource for families affected by vascular birthmarks.

Through these experiences, *Beauty With A Birthmark* has continued to inspire children and adults to embrace individuality. These engagements spark meaningful conversations about beauty, identity, and self-acceptance, and we look forward to expanding our reach to empower even more communities.

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Article

The Classroom as a "Brave Space" in Jacqueline Woodson's *Harbor Me*

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Abstract: In this essay, I utilize Robert Stepto's "ritual ground" concept and Ray Oldenburg's "third place" theory to analyze Jacqueline Woodson's *Harbor Me*. I posit that Ms. Laverne repurposes an old art classroom as both a "third place" and a "ritual ground" for her students, and as a result, her students are empowered to create community and find their individual and collective voices.

Keywords: African American children; classrooms; educators; pedagogy; ritual grounds; safe spaces; third places

1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the 2024 US Presidential election, I have experienced a mix of emotions: disappointment, anger, disillusion, and sadness. I am an African American woman who grew up in the integrated American South. While I did not live under Jim Crow, I lived with my parents and around family, friends, and neighbors who did. I heard stories about segregated schools, bathrooms, and modes of transportation. I heard stories about the limited economic and occupational opportunities that African Americans faced and maneuvered around. I heard about the intimidation tactics sanctioned by the southern states to impede African Americans' constitutional right to vote. However, I also heard stories of resistance, protests, boycotts, and marches. African Americans gained agency, mobilized, fought, faced incarceration, and died for sociopolitical change for themselves and their children.

As a result, the United States moved toward being a more inclusive, though imperfect, country. As I come out of this oppressive funk that has been weighing heavily on me since the 2024 election results were announced, questions have arisen for all educators, including myself, regarding the future of our profession. I have now been a professor in higher education for over twenty years. Resistance to inclusive classroom pedagogy practices has increased in recent years. How has and how will this affect my classroom and students? Will I face criticism, censorship, or termination for discussing social justice, "race", class, gender, and intersectionality in my university classroom? What has happened to educators' academic freedom? As I continue to ponder these and other questions, I am reminded of my own story and the stories of many other African Americans. I am reminded that I have touched and improved the lives of many of my students. I am reminded that I have an obligation to continue to build on the legacy of my ancestors—immediate and from long ago—and I have to continue to demonstrate agency and resistance in my classroom. How ironic that as a child of the New South, I am now addressing "safe" and "brave" spaces in this sociopolitical climate. Whereas both types of spaces were needed in the recent past, they are and will be essential going forward since both educators and students will need to be brave.

The African American author Jacqueline Woodson has created "brave spaces" in the children's literature industry for years. She is a prolific, venerable author of nearly fifty books who has boldly confronted censorship during her career. Her audience is primarily children, especially African American children; however, she has also written books for young adults and adults. Her books discuss topics deemed by some as controversial: death, sexual identity/orientation, interracial relationships, incarceration, and their impacts on the lives of African American children and young adults. In an interview with Hallie Rich, Woodson comments on the way students are negatively impacted by book bans:

> It makes us realize how powerful words are, of course, and it also makes me sad about the erasure. It makes me sad that my words are not reaching the young people that I am talking to. I've met so many young people who could use the stories that we're telling as mirrors, just as a way of seeing themselves in the world and understanding their own value.
>
> I know that it is so intentional, the violence that this erasure is connected to—there's so much violence in this country and in the world. We look at [these bans] and think, 'Oh, it's just books', but it's so much bigger and connected to so much else that's going on. And at the heart of it, like always, are the children. It's the children who carry weight of the burden in this case. They walk into classrooms with empty shelves; they have no libraries at home, and they're watching books get thrown into the trash. They try to get the books, and people are saying, 'No, you can't have this book in your hand'. It makes me very, very sad. (Rich 2024, p. 35)

Woodson believes in the power of words and the power of stories; she embodies the writer who knows that the pen can be mightier than the sword. In Emily Eakin's interview, "'I Grew Up in a Southern Family—There was a lot of talking': Jacqueline Woodson on Her Two New Best Sellers" (Eakin 2018), Woodson says she learned the value and power of telling stories during her own formative years: "I grew up in a Southern family—There was a lot of talking [. . .] More than stories there was transparency: we talked about race, we talked about class, we talked about so much of what it meant to be human in this world, and it helped to have that encapsulated in a story" (Eakin 2018, p. 1). Talking is exactly what takes place in Woodson's *Harbor Me* (Woodson 2018). Eakin remarks that in *Harbor Me* "as in much of Woodson's work, words hold tremendous power, driving characters apart and, more often, bringing them together, providing the means to bridge differences, superficial and profound" (Eakin 2018, p. 1).

I first came across Woodson's work during my doctoral studies, and I found her words inspirational. Other scholars and African American authors of Black children's and young adult literature have found her works impactful too. In "Our Foundation, Our Springboard, The Trailblazing Work of Mildred D. Taylor and Jacqueline Woodson", Kekla Magoon, an award-winning author of African American children's and young adult literature, states, "When you look at Taylor's or Woodson's individual bodies of work, they are remarkable and groundbreaking. Taken together, they form a powerful foundation that I and all the Black writers working today are fortunate enough to stand on" (Magoon 2021). Her words are reminiscent of Alice Walker's statement about Zora Neale Hurston as the foremother of contemporary African American women writers in Walker's essay, "In Search of our Mothers' Gardens" (1983). In a conversation with African American children's literature scholar Rudine Sims Bishop, Woodson says the following about *Harbor Me*:

> I started writing *Harbor Me* in 2014 or 2015, just going around the country and seeing the issues that young people were struggling with and thinking about my own childhood and what I was struggling with. This made me want to write

> about the need for us to take care of each other. I was born in the '60s and went through the ages of actual letter writing, actual talking on the telephone, actually sitting down and talking face-to-face to each other. Actually touching each other and seeing what happened when you said something that was hurtful to someone. Going from that to the age of the internet and the smart phone and all these ways in which we can each be in our own little bubble and where information gets disseminated so quickly—it's very easy to flip from a mass shooting to a cute kitten. And I've been thinking about the way in which it is so easy nowadays to not engage with the world. That was something that I was thinking about a lot in terms of writing *Harbor Me*. (Woodson 2018, pp. 33–34)

Many of Woodson's protagonists struggle with such difficulties as paternal loss and the need for a parental figure(s), reconciliation with the past, conversations between parents and children and peers, forgiveness, finding one's voice, and seeking and fortifying one's own identity. *Harbor Me* follows a comparable vein of difficult struggles.

2. Pedagogy, Literary Criticism, and the Ritual Grounds Concept

During my career, my research areas have varied within African American literature and culture, including textual analyses focused on African American women's literature, African American children's and young adult literature, and African American cinema. One of the subjects that I have focused my research on is space, utilizing Stepto's concept of the ritual ground. In *From Beyond the Veil* (1977, 1991), Stepto defines the concept as follows:

> Those specifically Afro-American spatial configurations within the structural topography that are, in varying ways, elaborate responses to social structure in this world [. . .] [T]hey serve a spatial expression of the tensions and contradictions besetting any reactionary social structure, aggressive or latent, subsumed by a dominate social structure. (Stepto 1991, p. 69)

These dual spatial locations, "ritual grounds", can have unique symbolic meanings. African American communities can be ritual grounds, namely "Black spaces" where Black people are generally separated from surrounding "white spaces", which suggests an illusion of protection from white oppression/supremacy. Using Stepto's concept, I have examined such spaces as the general store in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), the basement in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), the school in Jacqueline Woodson's *Maizon at Blue Hill* (1992), and the neighborhoods in Colson Whitehead's *Sag Harbor* (2009), Spike Lee's film, *Do the Right Thing* (1989), and Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* (2017). In my classroom, I have argued that the United States itself is a ritual ground for African Americans since the country now affords more socioeconomic, educational, and political opportunities while still needing to address unprogressive attitudes towards equity and inclusion. However, in more recent years, the "dual conflict" within these spaces has become more complicated and complex. For example, increased socio-political pressures from politically right-leaning entities to end practices such as diversity, equity, and inclusion have tried to make "white spaces" increasingly more difficult for African Americans. As a result, I have begun to explore various other spatial theoretical concepts to better express this psychological positionality of Black bodies in predominately white spaces in contemporary America.

Over my career, I have observed demographic changes in the classroom and have observed the needs of my students change and multiply. For example, more students have critical thinking deficiencies and are more difficult to engage with in the classroom—all examples of lingering COVID-19 pandemic effects; in fact, it has made me rethink my pedogeological approaches and even my rationale for becoming a professor. Whether

teaching at a predominately white institution (PWI) or a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), I have focused on creating a student-focused classroom and using student-focused pedagogies; for example, I often use small groups. In the past, I formed the student groups; however, in my current classroom, I ask students at times to select their own groups to encourage more individual, guided autonomy in the classroom. Group discussion sessions are timed, enabling students to grapple with the concept(s) and topics together on a small scale (lower stakes) while staying on task. This setting typically allows students to feel more secure in expressing their thoughts than in front of the entire class. This approach gives quiet students an opportunity to more easily express themselves. Often, they gain confidence and feel more comfortable in the classroom, choosing to speak up in class on their own. I used to call on students, and I still do occasionally. However, I am more careful when I do so and with whom I select because I am aware of the increasing number of students who are dealing with increased anxiety and mental health issues.[1] Through observation, I call on students who have shown themselves to feel comfortable expressing their points of view in front of large groups. I have been endeavoring to make my classroom feel like a "safe space".

Brian Arao and Kristit Clemens, in "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue around Diversity and Social Justice", define "safe spaces" as "environments [where instructors] hope will be reassuring to participants who feel anxious about sharing their thoughts and feelings regarding ... sensitive and controversial issues" (Arao and Clemens 2013, p. 135). Whereas I followed this definition more closely earlier in my career, I find that I must employ "safe spaces" even more now because students, who have disclosed their lived experiences to me through essays, emails, and discussions, are bringing more personal traumas into the classroom. For example, before assigning Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), I give students a "trigger warning" because someone may have been a victim of sexual assault, and I do not want to inadvertently elicit student anxiety, which would immediately negate the "safe space" environment that I am trying to create in the classroom. Additionally, students have the option to read an alternative text as a substitute, for example, Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959).

I am conscious that teachers' actions can trigger students' traumas, intentionally or unintentionally, in other ways as well. The reactivation of students' traumas can happen purposely (i.e., an instructor intentionally misgendering a student) or unconsciously (i.e., an instructor accidentally mispronouncing a student's name); each instance can lead to identity conflicts within the student and to hostility between the student and instructor in the classroom. Both scenarios can negatively impact the student's safe learning environment.

3. Third Place Theory

In order to create a more comfortable learning environment for students, I am incorporating elements of the "third place" in the classroom. "Third places", according to sociologist Ray Oldenburg, are informal public locations such as coffee shops and hair salons (i.e., hangouts) where people find and create community. Oldenburg suggests the following:

> [T]hough characterizations of the third place as a mere haven of escape from home and work are inadequate, they do possess a virtue—they invite *comparison*(sic). . . . The *raison d'etra* (sic) of the third place rests upon its differences from the other settings of daily life and can best be understood by comparison to them. (Oldenburg 2023, p. 23)

"Third places" are locations where people build community and feel free to express themselves freely. "Third places" are locations where people can hold uncomfortable dialogues while feeling sheltered from judgment because a community of trust and acceptance

has been formed there. Moreover, "Third places exist on neutral ground and serve to level their guests to a condition of social equality. Within these places, conversations are the primary activity and the major vehicle for the display and appreciation of human personality and individuality" (Oldenburg 2023, p. 45). Granted, an actual "neutral ground" is an unrealistic romanticized notion; even so, creating spaces where people feel more comfortable to express themselves as individuals is possible, if not perfect. As Oldenburg posits, "third places" have the following characteristics: possess home qualities like comfortability, encourage inclusivity, inspire conversation, are accessible and accommodating, have regular participants, and maintain an unassuming, playful mood/atmosphere.[2] Many of these aspects are present in Room 501, which Ms. Laverne, the teacher in *Harbor Me*, establishes for her students; however, the one that is particularly resonant with Ms. Laverne (and myself) is conversation as the main activity. Oldenburg says the following:

> In third places, the agenda of conversation is not dominated by the mundane matters of home maintenance, children's braces, who's going to take one child here and the other one there, and the like, nor by that tether that repeatedly brings workplace talk back to the office or shop. Novelty in the third place conversation is lent by the predictable changes but unpredictable direction that it always takes. (Oldenburg 2023, p. 51)

Technically, the classroom is more of a second place for students since this is the primary location where students "work". Their occupation is to learn the material and skills. However, to better enable students to learn those skills and course material, students can "work" better when classrooms embrace elements of the third place, especially conversation.

4. Textual Analysis: Ms. Laverne, the Brave Educator and Woodson's Ideal

In Woodson's *Harbor Me*, the teacher, Ms. Laverne, is an educator who creates a third place (Room 501) within the school for her special needs students, and it is within [her classroom] that "the seeds of social transformation [are] cultivated" (Kelly 2018, p. 387). Haley, the novel's protagonist, recollects: "There were eight of us then. Our small class had come together because the school wanted to try something new: Could they put eight kids together in a room with one teacher and make something amazing? Eight *special* (sic) kids" (Woodson 2018, p. 5). Ms. Laverne is open and communicative with her students, explaining to them in age-appropriate language what the space is for and how the students can use it. As a result of Ms. Laverne's actions, this "third place" becomes a "safe space" when the students take ownership of the space, renaming Room 501 to the ARTT Room, and ultimately, a "brave space" for the students as they begin to talk freely and share deep conversations with one another. According to Emily Eakin,

> Telling your story forges bonds. In *Harbor Me*, Haley, an 11-year-old girl, records the conversations she and five classmates have on Friday afternoons out of earshot of their perceptive teacher, who understands they need an 'ARTT'—'A Room to Talk'. The talk Haley's device captures is serious indeed: Racism, deportation, incarceration and the death of a parent are just some of the issues these students are dealing with. (Eakin 2018, p. 1)

More specifically, this middle-grade novel is narrated by an older Haley who reminisces about her experiences when she was in elementary school.

Haley's matured perspective colors the depictions of Ms. Laverne. She and her classmates (Holly, Amari, Tiago, Ashton, and Esteban) see their teacher as a compassionate, supportive adult who cares about their wellbeing: "We loved her immediately" (Woodson 2018, p. 6). Haley says the following:

> Outside, a blue jay perches on the edge of a branch. Ailanthus tree. Tree of Heaven. Ms. Laverne taught us that. It's the same tree the girl in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* saw from her fire escape. The thing about that tree was it could grow anywhere. And keep growing. And that was the *metaphor* (sic): that even when things got really hard for everyone in that story—even when the dad died and the mom had to scrub more and more floors to make money, even when the kids didn't have anything to eat for days and the apartment was freezing—the tree kept growing. The main character, her name was Francie—she was like that tree. Ms. Laverne said that all of us—Esteban, Tiago, Holly, Amari, Ashton and even me—we're like that tree too. (Woodson 2018, p. 2)

To her students, Ms. Laverne is an engaging teacher who encourages their intellectual and personal growth. Because of these character traits, she and the school administrators have noticed the educational needs of these particular students and have taken action to meet those needs by creating an experimental fifth/sixth-grade classroom.

As Haley remembers,

> We had all been in the big classrooms before, and our learning felt like a race we were losing while the other kids sped ahead. We made believe we didn't care that we learned differently, but we knew we did. And the school knew we did. The school knew we got laughed at and teased in the big yard and that some days we faked stomachaches and sore throats to stay home. (Woodson 2018, p. 6)

When Ms. Laverne takes students to the room and introduces the space to them for the first time, she says: "Every Friday, from now until the end of the school year, the six of you will leave my classroom at two p.m. and come into Room 501. You'll sit in this circle and you'll talk. When the bell rings at three, you're free to go home" (Woodson 2018, p. 16). Although the students are reluctant to take the opportunity, Ms. Laverne convincingly explains the merits of the new spaces and the chance to talk to one's peers. She gives the students the framework, explaining the purpose and function of the space, setting the standards/parameters that the students should meet. As Woodson states,

> I think it's so important that teachers know that they set the tone in their classrooms and they decide what's safe and what's unsafe for their students. Whatever their backstory is will come into that room, so it's important for all of us [writers, librarians, and educators] to do the work and think about our biases and think about what our ideas are around race and economic class and gender and sexuality and what our dreams are for our students. When I walk into a class and I see a first-grade Black boy, I'm like, 'Okay, college professor, go do that, dream big, dream hard, don't dream along the lines of stereotypes'. When I go into classrooms, I just see so much potential and power and possibility in the young people. And my hope is that teachers continue to do that. I know there are so many teachers out there who are doing that work and are truly, truly seeing this in the way Liz Laverne saw her students. And I just hope we keep on. (Bishop 2020, p. 35)

Woodson has created her ideal version of a contemporary teacher in Ms. Laverne.

As the students begin to understand the room's purpose, they warm to why Ms. Laverne is setting up the space. Haley says, "That day, Ms. Laverne pushed us out-from the Familiar to the Unfamiliar" (Woodson 2018, p. 21). Moving into the "unfamiliar" can cause discomfort, so it is useful when one can have the support of others while dealing with those circumstances. The students assist each other through "unfamiliar" emotional territory—the complexities of it—throughout the academic school year by listening to their peers' stories about personal and familial problems.

As an example of the students embracing the space, Amari, an African American student, renames the space: "Okay . . . I'm vibing it. The old art room is the new A-R-T-T room y'all" (Woodson 2018, p. 19). Ms. Laverne affirms the new name, saying, ". . .yes, Amari- the A-R-T-T room is beyond clever" (Woodson 2018, p. 19). Over the novel, each classmate shares their concerns and fears about home and school with one another and offers each other support. From Esteban's fears over his father's detainment and possible deportation to Ashton's worries due to bullying for being white at a predominantly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) school to Hayley's unease over her father's re-entrance into her life after his incarceration for killing her mother in a car accident, the students become increasingly comfortable with one another, develop community, and bravely share with one another.

The students also trust each other with their dreams. Haley ruminates, "I miss Tiago's dreams of the sea and Esteban's poems and all the stories we finally trusted each other enough to tell" (Woodson 2018, p. 3). Their community encourages trust and validation of their lived experiences. Haley thinks back: "Once we circled around each other, and listened. Or maybe what matters most is that we were heard" (Woodson 2018, p. 3). Sometimes, students listen as another tells their story; other times, one of the former listeners becomes the speaker. Each encourages the other to find their voice, and each does so at their own pace. In "From 'safe' to 'brave' spaces: pedagogical practices of exclusion to promote inclusion within & beyond skateboarding", Robert Petrone and Becky Beal suggest that brave spaces are "social spaces that not only offer a greater sense of inclusivity but also the recognition that participants may always have to re-negotiate and navigate the terms of participation" (Petrone and Beal 2024, p. 2). Throughout the novel, the students set the parameters of the space, and Haley records their stories within the space to document their year together and to ensure that they will be remembered.

There is some resistance to Ms. Laverne's pedagogical strategy. For instance, one parent complains and has her child removed from the course at the beginning of the academic year. In this current sociopolitical climate where elements of fear and bigotry are couched as "parents' rights" and teachers' expertise have become points of contention, this fictional depiction represents current realities like curriculum battles during district school board meetings, local school board meetings, instances of book banning, state rejections of the Advanced Placement (AP) African American Studies course, and misinformation about Critical Race Theory on the national political stage. Jainia Hoover, a high school teacher, says the following:

> This is one reason why I get so frustrated at all the bad takes circulating among politicians, social media, and the news related to critical race theory and the teaching of America's racial history in K-12 classrooms. The reality is that kids are talking about race, systems of oppression, and our country's ugly past anyway—from media coverage to last summer's protests to even this very controversy itself, my students are absorbing these conversations and want to know more. (Hoover 2021)

Hoover goes on to say the following:

> Most of the people discussing critical race theory aren't really discussing the theory itself, which is something taught in some law schools, but not—as far as I know—in most or any K-12 schools. Instead, what these critics seem to be talking about is a brain dump of unrelated buzzwords related to hot button topics in society, such as racism, privilege, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Never mind that most haven't been in a K-12 history classroom since they were enrolled. (Hoover 2021)

Even though Hoover's statements indicate that mass conservative hysteria surrounding Critical Race Theory and parents' rights is unwarranted and ill-informed, the current sociopolitical climate still has had an incalculable impact on student learning. In a recent BBC story by Ana Faguy, "Trump's pledge to axe the Department of Education explained" (Faguy 2024), the reason offered by Republicans to eliminate the department is that the department has been "pushing what they describe as 'woke' political ideology onto children, including on gender and race. They want the agency's authority handed to the US States, which run most education Matters". One can only speculate on how the student would have benefited from Ms. Laverne's classroom experiences. To better explore how the classroom improves the lives of African American children, I will focus on the stories and outcomes of the two African American students in the BIPOC classroom: Haley and Amari.

5. Textual Analysis: Haley's Story

There is a good reason why Haley loves stories; it is the main way that she has been able to connect with her deceased mother and her incarcerated father. When she first introduces the recorder to her classmates, some think of the recorder as a joke, and others are reluctant to speak. Holly, Haley's best friend, lets them know the purposes: "*It's for stories*", Holly said, grabbing the recorder from me, turning it one and speaking into it. "*It's for us getting remembered when we're not here anymore*" (Woodson 2018, p. 40). Esteban even says "*I like that it's for memory*", which harkens back to a Woodson trope (Woodson 2018, p. 40). As the reader learns throughout the novel, Haley holds few direct memories of her parents since she has been separated from them since the age of three. Woodson even highlights the distance quality of Haley's relationship with her father by never revealing her father's name to the reader. It is only through stories her uncle, Steve, relays to her. Later, after befriending Holly, she learns additional information about her mother through Kira, Holly's mother.

The death and subsequent absence of Haley's mother has a major impact on her life. She says when her uncle asks if she remembers her mother, "Just that picture . . . The one where it's the back of her and I can see her hand and nails" (Woodson 2018, p. 29). She wants to identify with her mother, seeking to find and use the same shade of red nail polish that her mother is wearing in the photograph. Another way Haley connects with her mother is through her hair. Haley says she got her red hair color from her father and her kinky hair texture from her mother. Steve has difficulties managing her hair and is relieved when, one day, Kira approaches him after school and offers to do Haley's hair. In a Euro-centric dominated society, "Black/African American youth have described their experiences and emotional pain" associated with their natural hair, and parents must be aware that "[t]hese experiences [can] [impact] their self-image, engagement in physical activity, and emotional well-being" (Henning et al. 2002, p. 76). Even so, Haley shows a positive attitude toward her hair; in fact, her hair journey leads her to Holly and Holly's mother, Kira. The Friday nights Haley spends with Holly and Holly's mother while Holly's mother does her hair leads to Haley and Holly developing a deep friendship. The ARTT peers do not know that they have known each other for years until Haley shares her story. During one Friday night, Haley learns that Kira knew her mother and shares information about her mother with Haley. Haley remembers, "*[S]he talked about my mother—what she remembered, how they lost touch, how she heard about the accident*" (Woodson 2018, p. 156). Through Kira's stories, Haley feels nearer to her mom.

After Holly encourages Haley to share her story with their classmates and to stop hiding behind her recorder, Haley finds her classmates quite supportive, and they tell her that her story gives them strength and makes them feel thankful for their own parents. Through growing perspectives and comparisons, the ARTT peers continue to develop

in understanding and maturity through listening to one another's stories. Overall, with Haley's story, Woodson explores many of the same tropes examined in her novels: the loss of parents, the role of mother (parental) figures, and the place of memory and forgiveness in the lives of African American children and young adults. Here, the value and utility of the "third place" is demonstrated.

6. Textual Analysis: Amari's Story

With Amari's story, Woodson directly addresses issues that affect African American children/young adults, especially boys. She depicts "the talk", which is the time when African American parents must sit their Black children down and discuss racism and discrimination, how it will affect their lives, and how they must act safely in such situations. Most recently, the talk has centered around interactions with police officers. Tracy R. Whitaker and Cudore L. Snell state, "Contrary to popular thought, "the Talk" is not about avoiding criminal behavior; rather, it is about avoiding the *perception* (sic) of criminal behavior. Unlike other important parent–child conversations, "the Talk" is not about helping the child take responsibility for the child's own actions; rather it is about preparing a child to take responsibility for the actions of the adults [they] may encounter (Burnett 2012; O'Neal 2015; Williams 2014)" (Whitaker and Snell 2016, p. 304). It is obvious that Woodson is referencing the 2014 case of twelve-year-old Tamir Rice of Cleveland, OH, who was shot by police while playing with a toy gun, in *Harbor Me*. While sharing his story about his father's "talk" with him, Amari says, "*The cops who shot that kid in the park didn't even ask him any questions,* Amari said. *Just came in the park and shot him right away. And then when his big sister tried to run to him, they didn't even let her go to him*" (Woodson 2018, p. 68; Stone and Socia 2019). Additionally, one cannot overlook the slight similarity in the names Tamir and Amari. It has been well documented that African American children are treated as adults due to negative stereotypes. This adultification of African American children then justifies the mistreatment and overreactions of adults towards them. Whitaker and Snell note that "[t]he time for 'the Talk' generally occurs at the onset of adolescence, or in the space when Black boys morph into 'being seen as suspect instead of sweet" (Whitaker and Snell 2016, p. 304). As Amari shares his story with the ARTT Room peers, he is in despair and even shows some anger toward Caucasian Ashton, who cannot understand the depth of his plight in America as a Black boy. Amari "didn't say anything to Ashton" (Woodson 2018, p. 69) when he tried to include himself with Esteban or Tirage as a possible target of the police.

Amari is beginning his initiation into double consciousness, and his childhood is beginning to fade away. Author and sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois coined the phrase in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) as follows:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois 1903, p. 694)

While Amari sees himself, the police could see a dangerous "adult" thug, a stereotype connected to the Black Buck stereotype derived during American slavery. In many African American children's and young adult's books, African American characters experience this moment of recognition for the first time and begin pondering how and what it will mean for them to grow up Black in America. When Amari has difficulty explaining to Ashton that he does not hate him, he explains that he believes it is not fair how they have to maneuver in the world differently due to "race". Haley empathizes with Amari and expresses the

words for him: "*It's not fair. It's not fair that you're a boy and Ashton's a boy and he can do something you can't do anymore. That's not freedom*" (Woodson 2018, p. 70). Unlike Haley and Holly and, to an extent, Esteban and Tiago, Ashton has difficulty sympathizing with Amari because of his "racial" background. The others seem to have already experienced double consciousness directly or indirectly through their parents—Esteban's father being seized by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Tiago through the public denigration of his mother being yelled at for speaking Spanish. Holly has Black parents, and Haley is a half-Black, biracial child. Amari and Ashton are upset with one another because Amari believes Ashton does not understand his plight and has an advantage in life due to his whiteness. Here, the "third place" is showing characteristics of physical ritual grounds, and tensions are present.

In "Irony and Parody in Jacqueline Woodson's *Harbor Me*: A Postmodernism Study", Aulina and Hanifa posit "that irony and parody are used for illustrating and social condition" (Aulina and Hanifa 2021, p. 44). They argue that Holly's statement "This is supposed to be America. The land of the free and the home of the brave" (Woodson 2018, p. 121) is ironic:

> Holly's expectation about America is not in accordance with the real condition. It is because, (sic) the six children who are not American have to study in another classroom from American students. They cannot play with children who have white skin. That situation prove (sic) that America is not free, (sic) in this land there are some rules which make them cannot feel the freedom as like other kids. Therefore, they take an interpretation from those irony, (sic) that American is not the land of the free for them. (Aulina and Hanifa 2021, p. 48)

I do not agree with their argument. I can agree that Holly's statement sarcastically addresses the hypocrisy of the ideal of America versus the actual experience of African Americans living in America. Woodson's texts are typically rooted in the realistic, lived experiences of African American children, not in irony and parody. According to Magoon, "Woodson's work [is] groundbreaking because it [brings] us to the present, into the homes, lives, and hearts of young Black people living through ordinary days, juggling fear, joy lost, laughter, and love in ways that people do" (Magoon 2021, p. 4). Additionally, Aulina and Hanifa mention that the students "cannot play with children who have white skin" and that the students are separated from other students in the school because of skin color. In fact, Ashton is in the classroom with Holly and the others. Still, the writers may be suggesting that the students' actual school is separated by socioeconomic barriers, which means that the majority of the student population is Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; even so, the authors seem to be focusing on the actual classroom, not the school as a whole.

Woodson also uses Amari's story to critique racial profiling and white privilege. This appears when Amari (and the others) confront Ashton, the only white kid in the room, about his white privilege. In fact, Ashton is being bullied by older students at the school and experiences here in a BIPOC space what African American and BIPOC children often experience—social isolation and alienation—in predominately white spaces. He says that "*. . . on my first day here, almost every kid seemed to be some shade of brown. I had never seen so many brown .. and black people*" (Woodson 2018, p. 95). These encounters potentially allow him to partially identify with Amari, Esteban, and Tiago as boys of color in a predominately white society. Interestingly, he experiences his own version of double consciousness. As Haley explains to him, "*You got the white pass, Ashton. Until now*" (Woodson 2018, p. 96). He is learning about his white privilege—how it impacts his life and those around him. Through conversations in the ARTT Room, the children witness each other's perspectives on serious social issues and conduct complicated discussions. The integrity of the community that they have built in the third place withstands the tensions. If they did not have a "third

place", these issues would not have been talked about nor directly addressed; consequently, they would not have grown from the incident.

Further, the ARTT peers show that they are taking their shared experiences and growth into the world—beyond their third place. Amari, Esteban, and Tiago (and sometimes Haley and Holly, too) start walking with Ashton to protect him from the eighth-grade bullies. Haley recalls the following:

> That day, I remember all of us in the ARTT room leaning in toward each other. But what is frozen in my mind, even more than that, is later the same day, Ashton, Amari, Esteban and Tiago left the school together walking four across. Me and Holly walked behind them. A double wall against the neckers [the eighth-grade bullies] who were waiting right outside the school yard. (Woodson 2018, p. 98)

In the face of a unified front, the eighth graders back off. This illustrates not only friendship but also solidarity beyond "race" and class, as well as the powerful impact of the "third place" on their lives.

7. Conclusions

As a writer, Woodson does not shy away from difficult issues in her texts. She embraces the role of brave writer, explaining the following:

> I guess it's an interesting question because I see the situations as troubling only in connection to the way our country is set up so that we have issues of mass incarceration, education disparity, and even economic disparity. Even if we look to the present day, we can see the issue of deportation and young people in prisons because of their immigration status. I think young people, and hopefully all people, are thinking about these issues and having questions about them. To me literature has always worked as a way to help begin a dialogue Through story and help create understanding. (Bishop 2020, p. 31)

Consequently, Woodson is calling us—the readers, the teachers, the librarians, the parents—to create these third spaces for African American children in our schools, homes, and communities for the benefit of our children.

Because Ms. Laverne and supportive school administrators recognize that the social dynamics of a classroom can induce physical ritual ground characteristics—positive and negative outcomes—for students, she offers an experimental space to them. This third place within the school enables Haley and her classmates to build a community and feel safe enough to face their current circumstances, be brave, be themselves, and grow toward their full potential. As Richard Kyte, in *Finding Your Third Place: Building Happier Communities (and Making Great Friends Along the Way)*, states, "Communities with a high degree of social capital have people who are more likely to participate, share ideas, and work toward the common good than those in communities with low social capital. People in such communities also report that they trust one another and the institutions upon which they depend" (Kyte 2024, p. 51). Increasingly, in elementary and secondary classrooms, and even higher education lecture halls, both students and teachers are facing the elimination or marginalization of "safe spaces". This will likely only increase in the foreseeable future. Hence, we must resist this movement and make our classrooms "brave spaces". Within these brave spaces, "social transformation, especially within potentially fraught 'brave' spaces, occurs through an iterative process of learning *about* (sic) social systems and acting *upon them* (sic)" (Petrone and Beal 2024, p. 5). African American ancestors have done their part, risking their lives for Black livelihood and prosperity. Now that Black people are being pushed backward in society, we must forge a new way forward. This is African American educators' moment, and we must be on the right side of history. This is our time.

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Notes

[1] "Depression and anxiety symptoms as well as suicidal ideation have increased in recent cohorts of adolescents (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2023; Parodi et al. 2022 in (Samek et al. 2024)) and college students (Duffy et al. 2019; Lipson et al. 2022; Perez et al. 2023). Though much attention has been given to student mental health especially related to the global COVID-19 pandemic (Czeisler et al. 2020; Czeisler et al. 2021; Salimi et al. 2023), there was prior attention to the increasing rates (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020)" (Samek et al. 2024, p. 216).

[2] See Chapter Two of Oldenburg's book, *The Great Good Place* for more details.

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Editorial

An Author Writing to Remember and Celebrate Black Children

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Short Biography of Author[1]

With an undergraduate degree in sociology from Morgan State University (Baltimore, MD) and a master's degree in Library Science from the Catholic University of America (Washington, DC), Sharon Bell Mathis is a librarian and a multiple award-winning children's and young adult book author. Among her awards are Child Study Association of America's Book of the Year for her early middle-school novel *Sidewalk Story* (1971). *Teacup Full of Roses* (1972), another middle-school novel, received a notable recognition by the American Library Association, and in 1974, Bell Mathis won the Coretta Scott King Award for her picture book *Ray Charles* (1973). Her book *The Hundred Penny Box* (1975) won a Newberry Honor in 1976. Bell Mathis "writes stories that celebrate the fortitude, resilience, and beauty of African Americans."

Sharon Bell Mathis was one of the featured speakers at the inaugural African Americans and Children's Literature Symposium in Washington, DC (2 March 2024) that the Guest Editor of this Special Issue attended. Here is Bell Mathis' interview, "In Conversation," with poet and memoirist E. Ethelbert Miller about her writing for Black children audiences. See their recorded conversation at the following link: https://tinyurl.com/4743wkef. For this Special Issue, Bell Mathis reflects on her commitment to writing for children, especially for Black children and youth.

Vivid Memories...

For me as an author, the beginning of a book occurs in quiet moments. A solitary character enters my thoughts and settles there, allowing me to seek openings and closings amid a myriad of paths backward and forward—and on and on and on.

I simply wait. Other figures enter. I feel anxious. Will I be able to write this story? What must I say? There is a responsibility to write carefully—to show the love that children take for granted—or love they have not known. My words must gather them close, show their extraordinary strength amid extraordinary pressures to break them down and down and down.

The children must realize their strengths when it seems there are none.

African American children are among the bravest youngsters in civilization. Taking care of one another, they step up to the plate and hope for miracles, sometimes praying, sometimes not. Dependence on self, however young, is the rule.

Happily, most children have ordinary lives filled with the silliness they love and enjoy. Other children are not so "lucky," if you will.

My story begins. I hope that my words pay homage to them.

I was young and hurt by a teacher who was paid to bring about my intellectual growth. As a young Black girl, I knew our class was fearful due to what seemed like the teacher's swiftly changing moods. Her words were often scary and harsh. When I write, I think of youngsters like me, a second grader at PS 70 in Brooklyn, New York. I know what it

feels like to be young and vulnerable. I know how it is to feel that you are less than other youngsters due to learning difficulties, subjected to an unfeeling, cruel teacher who was not African American. I remember. I remember. I remember.

My professional career began as a Special Education instructor in the DC Public School System—teaching youngsters with special needs. I remember. I remember. I remember. We had small classes under a track system. It was ideal. The students went to regular Physical Education, music, and arts. Other than that, the students were in classes with youngsters like themselves. They were insulated, celebrated. They could have straight "A" grades in all their classes if they worked hard enough. Report cards listed an "A" (with the letters SP printed).

Then the Washington, DC Schools shattered the track system as a result of a decision by Judge Skelly Wright. A disgruntled parent sued the system and won! What happened then? All children had to be mainstreamed. They had to be in classes with other children, never to be separated again. The regular teachers were overwhelmed. They now had a class within a class. The former Special Education teachers wrote plans and hoped the children would have the attention they were used to getting. These children were now subjected to bullying, laughter, and whatever. Gone was the small class that centered them, gone was the class store where they could buy empty boxes of cereals using real currency. No such thing in regular classrooms. Large regular classes became even larger. Many teachers did their very best in less-than-ideal situations. I was heartbroken. I took a sabbatical leave and earned a master's degree in Library Science at Catholic University. I re-entered the school system as a library media specialist.

As a writer, there is a responsibility never to mislead the children. You embark on a journey with them. On the path, you want laughter and joy, mixed perhaps with some uncertainness. I want to celebrate them, to remind them of their formidable strengths, of triumphs to come, and to trust their capabilities.

My characters are never perfect human beings. They are growing and learning, standing tall, and looking out for one another. The adults are child-centered. Yes, I do have adult villains in my tales. There are others, however, who see them through awful moments. In *Listen for the Fig Tree* (1974), there is Mr. Dale for Muffin. In *Sidewalk Story* (1971), a journalist has a hunch and acts upon it. In *Teacup Full of Roses* (1973)—a *New York Times* Outstanding Book of the Year—Joe wants to take care of his brilliant, younger brother. Perhaps joining the United States military will help. In *Running Girl: The Diary of Ebonee Rose* (1997), Ebonee comes to realize that her track and field team is better even with a very prickly teammate. Ebonee reaches out to her and magic happens. In *The Hundred Penny Box* (1975)—recipient of the Newberry Honor Book Award, the *Boston Globe* Horn Book Award and an American Library Association Notable Children's Book recognition—Michael loves his elderly aunt so much that he stands up to his overwhelmed mother. He is determined that his Aunt Dew has everything she needs. He understands that she would rather be in her own house where there is a "yard way bigger than this!"

When I am creating a story, I try to hold these children and young adults close in my arms. I want them to feel safe, to feel important, to know that in an imperfect world, they are valuable. I wrote the nonfictional biography *Ray Charles* (1973)—recipient of the Coretta Scott King Award—to show Black youngsters that they can not only overcome difficulties, but they can also triumph!

The children I create are on a journey that will have "ups and downs and turnarounds," but they will survive their trials, somehow.

Today, African American children are being saluted by some of the greatest writers of all time. There are the celebrated late authors, such as Eloise Greenfield, Virginia Hamilton, and Walter Dean Meyers. African American authors specializing in children's literature

are extraordinary, best-in-the-business, standard-bearers! A few others include Kwame Alexander, Vera Ahiyya, Derrick Barnes, Winsome Bingham, Tami Charles, Christopher Paul Curtis, Matthew Curry, Sharon Draper, Lamar Giles, Nikki Grimes, Rita Lorraine Hubbard, Ty Allan Jackson, Leah Johnson, Amina Luqman-Dawson, Amber McBridge, Kwami M'balia, Ibtihaj Muhammad, Dwayne Reed, Jason Reynolds, Christian Robinson, Nic Stone, Angie Thomas, Carole Boston Weatherford, Natasha Williams, Julian Winters, Jacqueline Woodson, and Nicola Yoon.

The age of Scottish author Hellen Bannerman's *Little Black Sambo* (1899) is over. Forever.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] **Sharon Bell Mathis** "Sharon Bell Mathis," "Biographies" in event programme *African Americans and Children's Literature: An Examination of the Role of DC Writers in Building Canon and Community—1970s through the Present,"* published and presented by Esther Productions, Incorporated, The Black Student Fund, and The Institute for African American Writing. Washington, DC. 2 March 2024.

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