

Jennifer N. Strickland. The Portrayal of African Americans in Coretta Scott King and Michael L. Printz Award Books (2000-2009) A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. November, 2009. 36 pages. Advisor: Sandra Hughes-Hassell.

In 2008, African Americans made up 14 percent of the population, yet books that contained African American characters made up only .06 percent of books published. With so few books being published about African or African Americans, it is difficult for librarians and teachers to find books that feature characters to which African American youth can relate. One way to find such books is to look at book awards. The purpose of this study was to see what types of African American characters are portrayed in award winning books, and to determine if the portrayals are authentic. A sample of thirteen fictional Coretta Scott King and Michael L. Printz award or honor books between the years 2000-2009 that contained at least one African American character were chosen to be analyzed. Using content analysis, all thirteen books were analyzed in general and seven were chosen to be analyzed in depth. The results of the study found that between 2000 and 2009, there was no difference between the portrayal of African American characters in Coretta Scott King Award winning books and Michael L. Printz award and honor winning books. There was also no difference between the portrayal of African Americans by African American award winning authors and the portrayal by White award winning authors.

Headings:

Young Adult Literature

Content analysis—Young adults' literature

African Americans

Minorities in literature

THE PORTRAYAL OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN CORETTA SCOTT KING AND
MICHAEL L. PRINTZ AWARD BOOKS (2000-2009)

by
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INTRODUCTION

From October 12-October 20, 2001 during Teen Read Week a survey was distributed by SmartGirl and the American Library Association asking teens about reading. Of the approximately 2,800 teens who responded to the survey, 29.3% of girls and 39.3% of boys stated that they didn't read because it was boring (Jones et al., 2006, p. 206). Heflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) note that one of the primary motivations for reading fiction is the pleasure received from relating to characters, their lives, their problems and their experiences. When readers do not encounter characters that they can relate to, they are likely to become frustrated with reading. With repeated frustrating experiences the reader may never gain a love of reading. This is especially true for children of color who are less likely than white children to find their lives reflected in the literature (Heflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). As African American author Sharon G. Flake (2008) stated:

Black youth aren't just a minority on the pages of books, they are an endangered species. They are practically invisible; missing in action from the written word. I believe this is one of the reasons it's difficult to get many Black boys engaged in reading. They don't see their place, or their faces, in literature. One of the solutions to the problem, however, is simple, really: give them stories about people who look like them, who behave as they do... we've got to give them

books that remind them of home--of who they are. When this happens, they fly through books--even the most challenged readers (p. 204).

Since 1985, the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education has been documenting the number of children's books published in the United States each year that were written and/or illustrated by African Americans and other people of color. While the CCBC does not receive every book published, according to their website they do receive most of the hardcover books for children and teens from the major trade book publishers. In the year 2000, of the approximately 5000-5500 books published, only 99 were written by African Americans and only 201 were written about African Americans. Four years later in 2004, there were still only 99 books created by Africans or African Americans and of the nearly 2,800 titles received at the CCBC only 143 books had significant African or African American content (Cooperative Children's Book Center). The most recent publication statistics showed that of the approximately 3,000 books the CCBC received in 2008, 172 books had significant African or African American content and 83 books were by Black book creators. (Horning et al., 2009)

This lack of titles published by African Americans stands in sharp contrast to the demographics of the United States. According to the 2008 National Projection Press Release for 2008:

Minorities, now roughly one-third of the U.S. population, are expected to become the majority in 2042, with the nation projected to be 54 percent minority in 2050.

By 2023, minorities will comprise more than half of all children. The black population is projected to increase from 41.1 million, or 14 percent of the population in 2008, to 65.7 million, or 15 percent in 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau News, 2008).

This means that in 2008, African Americans made up 14% of the population, yet books that contained African American characters made up only .06 percent of books published.

With so few books being published about African or African Americans, it is difficult for librarians and teachers to find books that feature characters to which African American youth can relate. One way to find such books is to look at book awards. One of the most influential and best-known book awards is the Coretta Scott King book award, which just celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2009. The purpose of this award is “To encourage the artistic expression of the African American experience via literature and the graphic arts, including biographical, historical and social history treatments by African American authors and illustrators” (ALA). In order for a book to receive the Coretta Scott King award, it “must portray some aspect of the African American experience, past, present, or future and must be written/illustrated by an African American” (ALA).

The Michael L. Printz award, which was first awarded in 2000, is another tool to find books for youth. This award is given annually to young adult literature that is either fiction, nonfiction, poetry or an anthology. One of the aims of this award is to recognize books that have a wide audience with readers between the ages of 12-18. Since its

inception in 2000, a number of the books which have received this award have featured African American characters.

Awards like the Coretta Scott King and Michael L. Printz are used by librarians in both collection development and recommending books for young adults. For example, to be included in the *Core Collection for Children and Young Adults* a book has to have won at least one award (Schwedt and DeLong, 1994, p. ix). In regards to the development of a young adult section, the Young Adult Library Services Association stated that “award-winning books will change the shape of your collection forever” (Official YALSA Awards Guidebook, 2008, p. 3).

A book title can win multiple awards. In fact, Deborah Taylor, the current chair of the Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee wrote an article highlighting some of the book titles that have won both the Coretta Scott King award and the YALSA’s Best Books for Young Adults or the Michael L. Printz award. She stated that by looking at the titles that have won multiple awards, the scope and variety of the Coretta Scott King awards can be seen.

The purpose of this study is to see what types of African American characters are portrayed in award winning books, and to determine if the portrayals are authentic. This study will specifically look to see if African American main characters are portrayed differently in Coretta Scott King author award winning fiction books than in Michael L. Printz award and honor books in the years 2000-2009. Another goal of this study is to gain an understanding of the genres in which African American characters are being portrayed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While many researchers have studied the portrayal of African Americans in children's books, most of these studies have focused on African Americans in picture books. Ussery (2006) conducted a descriptive study of the portrayal of African Americans in award winning picture books. In the study, she looked at both the written text and illustrations of Caldecott Medal award and honor books, as well as Coretta Scott award and honor books from 1996-2005. The questions she sought to answer included:

1. Does the book transcend stereotypes; does the author avoid offensive or degrading vocabulary?
2. Are the illustrations authentic and non-stereotypical?
3. Do the illustrations present positive images of African Americans in esthetically pleasing ways?

The sample size was 28 books. Ussery concluded that African Americans were portrayed positively in the written texts and illustrations in the overwhelming majority of the Coretta Scott King award children's picture books and the books distinguished as Caldecott Medal and Coretta Scott King award honor books from 1996 through 2005.

Berry (1999) conducted a content analysis of the contemporary portrayal of African Americans in children's picture books. She evaluated 30 books selected from the reference source *A to Zoo* and found that "the portrayal of African Americans over the past 20 years has been consistently positive in its portrayals, realistic situations and exclusion of stereotypes" (Berry, 1999, p. 25). Her study found that African Americans have complex characterizations with realistic language use that did not stereotype differences in speech between the African American and white characters. Interestingly,

her study found that the stories were universal and that they could have been the experience of any child.

Wilkin's (2009) recently published a book entitled *African and African American Images in Newbery Award Winning Titles*. This book looked at all titles which had won the Newbery from its inception in 1922 through 2009. The author's purpose was to:

1. Examine the books receiving the nation's top award for children's books for images of African and African Americans.
2. Evaluate those materials containing such images.
3. Offer opinions about the presentation of African American images in the context of societal events and views.
4. Inform teachers, librarians, parents, counselors, and so forth about these images.
5. Participate in continuing discussions and dialogues regarding the perpetuation of racial prejudice.

One section of the book was dedicated to evaluating Newbery award winner and honor books that portrayed persons of African descent as the main focus or as secondary characters. Of the books reviewed, those in the years ranging from 1989 to 2009 were found to provide the best presentations of African Americans. For example, Wilkin (2009) stated that the 1989 Newbery Honor Book *Scorpions* by Walter Dean Myers offered "knowledge and insight about life in the city, especially those on the lower rungs of society. He [Myers] presents a poignant family story with elements of the complex necessities of everyday life" (p. 101). In his review of the 1999 Newbery Award Winner *Holes*, Wilkin (2009) concluded that "the African American characters are far from

stereotyped. Even though Zero can't read, he is extremely astute at math. The African Americans are not the main characters, but they emerge strongly" (p. 107). Similarly, for *Bud, Not Buddy*, which won the Newbery in 2000, Wilkins (2009) noted that the book had "no heavy stereotypes in the character portrayals or the language, though some of the language of musicians is rightfully used" (p. 108).

These three books, along with the other books identified by the author as providing the best presentations, portrayed African Americans in a positive way and avoided using stereotypical language or descriptions which had been seen in some of the earlier Newbery Award winning and honor titles. For example, when the author reviewed the 1930 Newbery Award winning title *Hitty, Her First Hundred Years* he pointed out that Car'line an African American child was described as resembling Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and spoke using the phrase "dat ma chile" (Wilkin, 2009, p. 39)..

According to Smith (2001), it was only recently that African American children's and young adult literature has improved and stopped leaving readers with the impression that all African American youth "grow up in one parent homes located somewhere in a ghetto, leading an impoverished existence, actively engaged in criminal activity, moving slowly yet inexorably towards a no-hope future" (p. xix). As Johnson-Feelings stated, "for too long African-Americans have been represented in the literature as a monolithic group with whom the only distinction made is between the rural experience and the urban experience" (cited in Smith, 2001, 144).

METHODOLOGY

Book Selection

In order to be included in this study a book had to:

1. be a Coretta Scott King (CSK) or Michael L. Printz award or honor book for the years 2000-2009,
2. contain at least one African American character, and
3. be a work of fiction.

Overall, there were 13 books included in the study (see Table 1). It is important to note that *The First Part Last* by Angela Johnson received both awards in 2004, and Bud Not Buddy not only received the Coretta Scott King award, but also the Newbery award in 2000 .

Table 1: Books Included in the Study

Title	Author	Award
The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation, Volume II, The Kingdom on the Waves	M.T. Anderson	Printz Honor
The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation; v. 1: The Pox Party	M.T. Anderson	Printz Honor
Chanda's Secrets	Allan Stratton	Printz Honor
Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy	Gary D. Schmidt	Printz Honor
Monster	Walter Dean Myers	Printz Winner
The First Part Last	Angela Johnson	Printz Winner CSK Winner
Elijah of Buxton	Christopher Paul Curtis	CSK Winner
Copper Sun	Sharon Draper	CSK Winner
Day of Tears: A Novel in Dialogue	Julius Lester	CSK Winner
Bronx Masquerade	Nikki Grimes	CSK Winner
The Land	Mildred Taylor	CSK Winner
Miracle's Boys	Jacqueline Woodson	CSK Winner
Bud, Not Buddy	Christopher Paul Curtis	CSK Winner Newbery Winner

Content Analysis

All 13 books were analyzed using the general questions in Appendix B. After each book was analyzed using the general questions, seven books (see Table 2) were selected for further analysis using the questions in Appendix C. *The First Part Last* was chosen because it was the winner of both the Printz and Coretta Scott King awards, and because it was written by an African American author. *Monster* was chosen because it was the only other Printz Award winner written by an African American. *Chanda's Secret* and *The Pox Party* were chosen because they were written by White authors. Three additional books were selected, each of which had won the Coretta Scott King award. *Miracle's Boys* was chosen because it is the story of a mixed race boy. *Bud, Not Buddy* was chosen because it was the only book set during the Great Depression and because it was the only book in the sample that had also won the Newbery Medal. Lastly, *Elijah of Buxton* was chosen because it features slavery.

Table 2: Books Chosen for Further Analysis

Title	Author	Award
The First Part Last	Angela Johnson	Printz Winner CSK Winner
Chanda's Secrets	Allan Stratton	Printz Honor
The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation; v. 1: The Pox Party	M.T. Anderson	Printz Honor
Monster	Walter Dean Myers	Printz Winner
Miracle's Boys	Jacqueline Woodson	CSK Winner
Bud, Not Buddy	Christopher Paul Curtis	CSK Winner
Elijah of Buxton	Christopher Paul Curtis	CSK Winner

The questions used for the content analyses were adapted from a thesis entitled, *A Content Analysis Of The Contemporary Portrayal Of African Americans In Children's*

Picture Books (Berry, 1999). In this thesis, Berry used criteria developed by the Council on Interracial Books for Children and Latimer (1972) to evaluate picture books based upon language, illustrations, authorship/illustratorship, character and story line/perspective. Her criteria were modified so that they could be used for novel-length books.

All of books were gathered from the University of North Carolina School of Information and Library Science Library. After each book was read, the general question form was filled out. The books identified for further analysis were then reread, and the form in Appendix C was completed for each title.

RESULTS

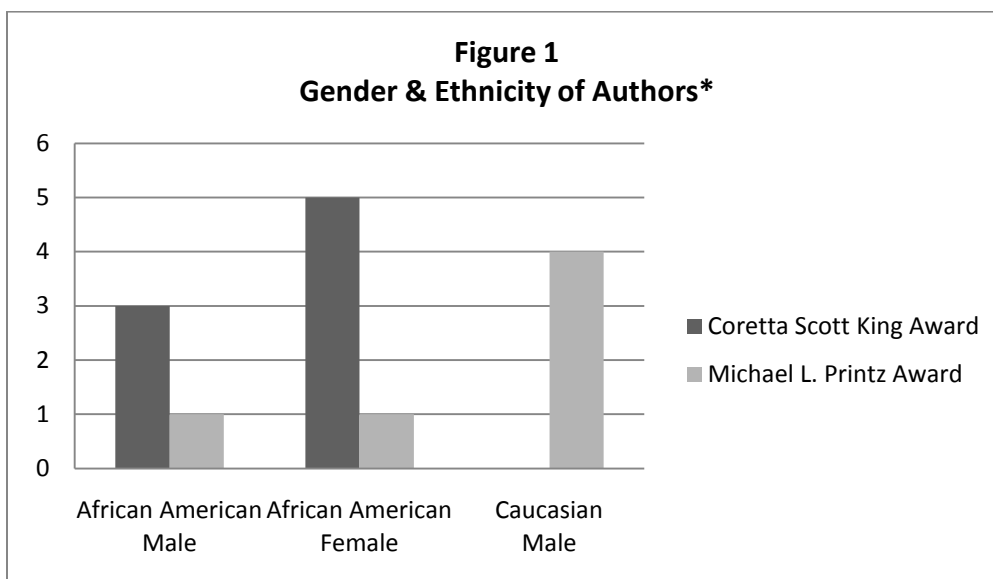
General Question Results

For the purpose of this study, the data from book *First Part Last*, which was a winner in both award categories, is included in both the Coretta Scott King and the Michael L. Printz categories. This is why it may appear that there were fourteen books in the study.

Authors

The thirteen books examined in this study were written by 11 different authors. Figure 1 shows the gender and ethnicity of the author. Of these 11 authors, three were White. As stated above, one of the selection criteria for the Coretta Scott King award is that the book be written by an African American. This explains why there were such a large number of African American authors in the sample. Just looking at the Printz

award, there were only two African American authors that won the award and no African American authors had books honored. M.T Anderson, author of the *Astonishing life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation* series, won Printz Honors with both volumes of his series, and Christopher Paul Curtis won the Coretta Scott King award for two of his books.

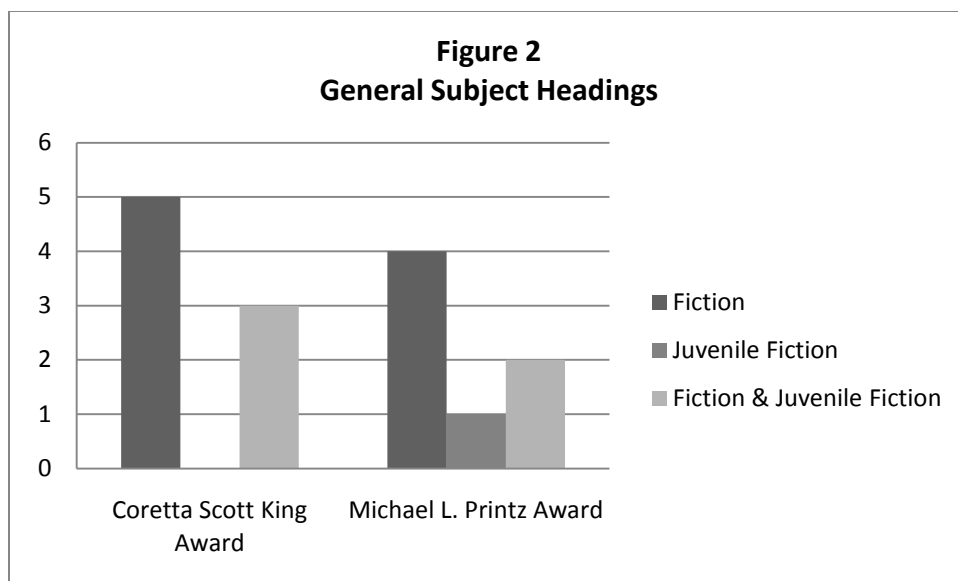


*Note: Authors M.T Anderson and Christopher Paul Curtis were counted twice since they each had two award winning books. Angela Johnson was placed in both award categories for her book *First Part Last*.

General Subject Headings

Nine of the 13 books analyzed, did not have Juvenile Fiction subject headings on their online card catalog record despite the fact that all of the books analyzed came from the Juvenile section of the UNC School of Information and Library Sciences Library (see Figure 2). There was only one book, *Chanda's Secrets*, that contained only Juvenile subject headings. Of the five books with both Fiction and Juvenile Fiction subject headings, there were always more Fiction subject headings than Juvenile Fiction and the

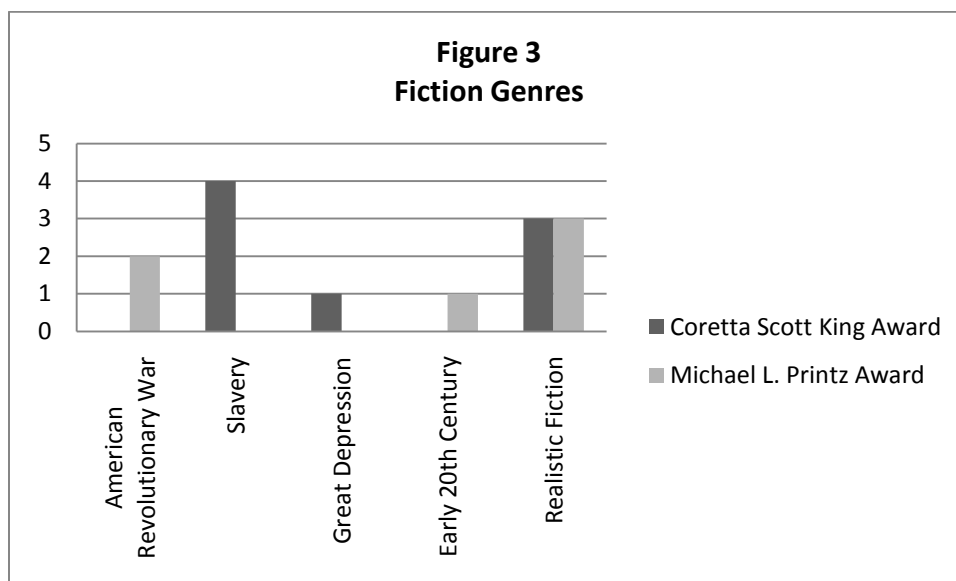
Juvenile Fiction subject headings tended to mirror Fiction subject headings. For example, *Elijah of Buxton* contained both a “Slavery—Fiction” and a “Slavery—Juvenile fiction” subject heading. There was only one book, *The Land*, which had only one juvenile fiction subject heading.



Genre-Related Subject Headings

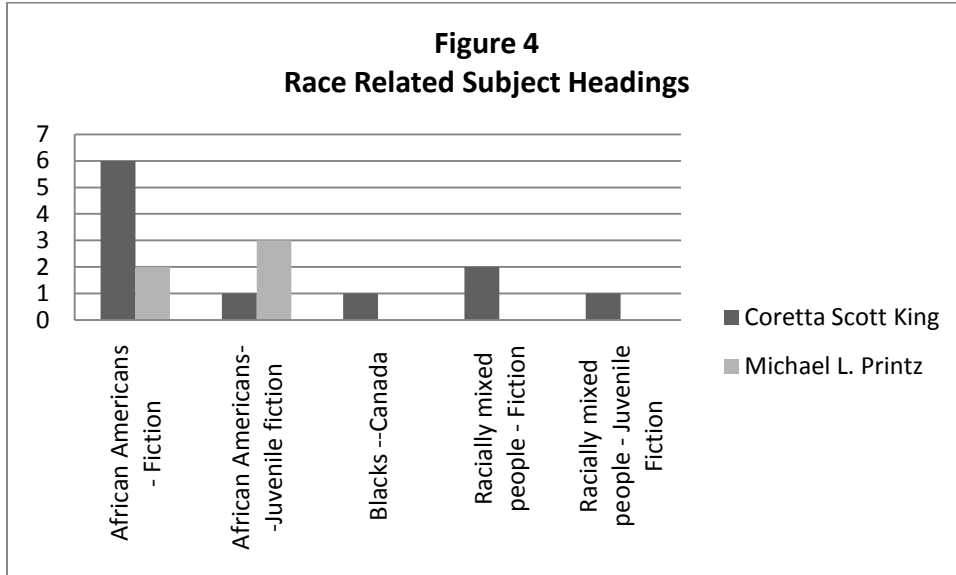
As Figure 3 shows, of the 13 books in the study, six were realistic fiction and eight were historical fiction. Four of the eight historical fiction books focused on slavery, two took place during the era of the Revolutionary war, one took place during the Great Depression, and one took place during the early 20th century after the end of slavery. The Printz Award books were split evenly with half of the books being historical fiction and half being realistic fiction. Of the Coretta Scott King award winners, half of the books were historical fiction dealing with slavery. The two American Revolutionary War era

books were both volumes of the *Astonishing life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation* series and the main character had experienced life as a slave.



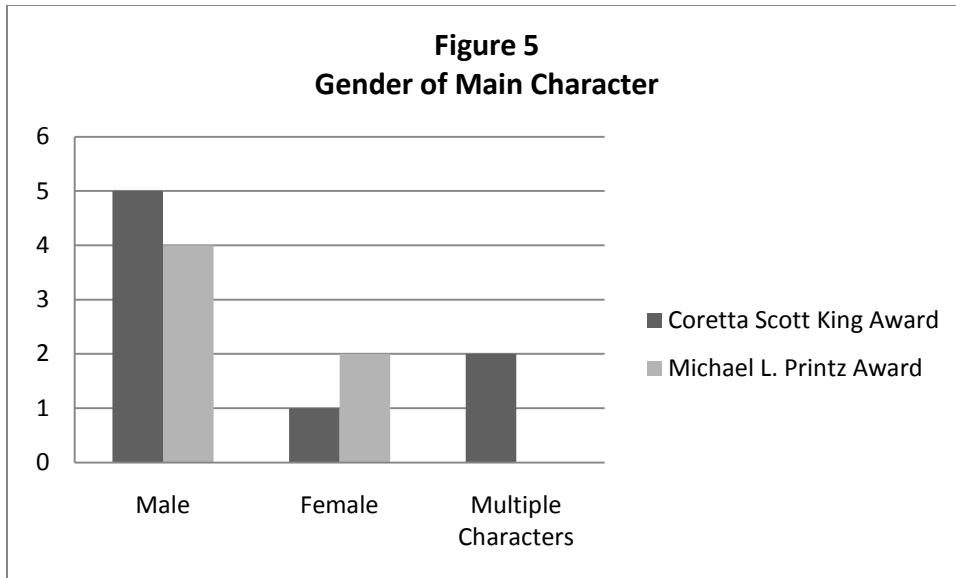
Race-Related Subject Headings

The subject headings for ten out of the thirteen books studied contained only one racial category and of those ten, eight were classified as African Americans (see Figure 4). There were three books that had subject headings for both African American Fiction and African American Juvenile Fiction and two of those three were Printz award honor books. *The Land* was the only book with both racially mixed and African American subject headings. Of the thirteen books, only two did not have any form of race related subject heading and both of these were Printz Honor books. The first was *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* in which the story is told from the perspective of a White boy but an African American girl plays an important part in the story. The second was *Chanda's Secrets* which is told by an African girl.



Gender-Related Subject Headings

As Figure 5 shows, in the Printz Award winning books, there were twice as many male main characters as there were female main characters. In the Coretta Scott King award winning book, the majority of the main characters were also male. In *Bronx Masquerade* and *Day of Tears* both male and female African American characters played notable roles.



In Depth Analysis

As mentioned earlier, seven books were selected for further analysis. To aid in the discussion of the analysis which follow, the names of the main characters of each book are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Main Characters of Books Chosen for further Analysis

Title	Main Character
The Pox Party	Octavian
Chanda's Secret	Chanda
Monster	Steve
First Part Last	Bobby
Elijah of Buxton	Elijah
Bud, Not Buddy	Bud
Miracle's Boys	Lafayette

Setting

Chanda's Secret which took place in a fictional African city and *Elijah of Buxton* which took place in Buxton, Canada where the only two of the seven books set outside of

the United States. The remaining five books were set in northern United States cities and of those five, three took place in New York City. Just because the stories those five books were set in urban communities, the characters were not all poor. For example, in *First Part Last*, which is set in New York City, Bobby mentioned that although his father Fred said they were poor, he and his brothers had been to places like Africa, Spain, Venezuela and Malaysia, and his father owned a restaurant. In contrast, in *Miracle's Boys*, Lafayette stated:

I tried not to think about how poor we were, but when we got off at Fourteenth Street and walked up the stairs, all the lights from the stores hit me... As we walked along Fourteenth Street, I remembered the first time I realized we were poor. I was in third grade (Woodson, 2000, p. 62).

Language

Only two of the books used heavy dialect and both of these were historical fiction. In the *Pox Party*, which took place during the American Revolution era, 17th-century English was used appropriately throughout the book. For example, when Octavian went through the forbidden door and made his discovery, he said:

And so the answer to my perplexities, which must appear in all its clarity to those who look from above, was finally clear to me: that I too was the subject of a zoological experiment...I took new interest in the torpedo-fish with their

crackling shocks; in the turtles that paced besides yardsticks...They were my brethren” (Anderson, 2006, p. 51).

In *Elijah of Buxton*, which is set in 1859, almost all of the characters speak substandard English. This fact, suggests that not only did African American slaves use improper English, but even the educated free children whose parents had been born slaves spoke improper English. For example, Elijah who was sent to Chatham to pick up the mail for Buxton described his ride back from Chatham this way:

My ride back from Chatham weren't a good one. It weren't that the road had gone bad or the skeeters were heavier than they were afor or that Jingle Boy was bouncing more than regular, but the fancy writ envelope in the pouch made the ride home long and sad” (Curtis, 2007, p. 187-188).

And when Elijah tells his mother about a letter she replied, “We gunn go together to tell her.” (Curtis, 2007, p. 189)

In *Miracle's Boys*, Lafayette, the main character, and his brothers used words like ain't and cuz when talking to each other but the overall narration used standard English. This was also true for *First Part Last* and *Chanda's Secret*.

In *Monster*, the story was presented as a move script. For example:

CUT TO: INTERIOR: STEVE'S BEDROOM. He is lying on his bed, eyes open but not seeing anything. We hear first the doorbell ring and then his mother calling him, but he doesn't react.

CUT TO: MRS. HARMON, who wipes her hands on a towel and heads toward door. She stops and looks through peephole. CU on her face. There is a worried look as she opens the door." (Myers, 1999, p. 123)

The main character, Steve, used little dialect although movie lingo and abbreviations are used such as in the above example where CU stands for close up. The guys from jail who testify against Steve, however, did use dialect. For example, Bobo who also took part in the robbery stated, "What you saying? Am I trying to cop a plea? I just told you I was trying to cop" (Myers, 1999, p. 187).

Although Bud often responded to adults with sir and ma'am, he did not use dialect. The musicians he ended up working with, however, did use it on occasion. For example, after the band had chosen Bud's nickname, The Thug said, "What can I say but bang!" Dirty Deed said, "You nailed him!" Doo-Doo Bus said "that is definitely smooth." And Steady said, "My man!" (Curtis, 1999, p. 196).

Family Structure

Of the seven main characters in the books, three of them (Steve, Bobby, and Elijah) lived with both their mother and father. In *Bud, Not Buddy* and *Miracle's Boys*, Bud and Lafayette both lost their mothers early in the story. In *Chanda's Secret* and *The Pox Party*, Chanda and Octavian's mothers had both died by the end of the story. The

main characters in *Miracle's Boys* and *Chanda's Secret* knew their biological fathers, but their fathers died early in the story. In contrast, the two main characters in *The Pox Party* and *Bud, Not Buddy* did not know the identity of their fathers. Only two of the main characters spent most of their lives living with someone other than their parents. The main character in *Miracle's Boys*, Lafayette, is under the guardianship of his oldest brother and the main character in *Bud, Not Buddy* ended up going to live with his grandfather.

Education

All of the seven main characters attended school and knew how to read and write to some degree. In *Elijah of Buxton*, Elijah attends school to learn subjects like math, reading, writing and Latin. When asked about how good he was in math he stated, "I'm tolerable good long's it don't get stretched into geometry" (Curtis, 2007, p. 50). He wasn't, however, as good in Latin. For example, one day Elijah and his friend Cooter ran into his teacher, Mr. Travis, after church. Mr. Travis said, "in vestra Latina maxime laborate" (Curtis, 2007, p. 202). Elijah responded with:

Uh-oh. I didn't have notion the first what that mean. Seemed like he was thanking us for lying 'bout his sermon. I said 'You're welcome, sir.'....Emma Collins coughed out a little laugh and I knowed right away we'd messed up" (Curtis, 2007, p. 203).

Octavian who is the main character in *The Pox Party* is well educated. One of Octavian's tutors stated, for example:

The boy is extraordinarily gifted... His grasp of sciences would be enough to recommend him as an excellent student; but his achievements in Classical literature and music suggest genius. He speaks Latin like a native of Augustus's Rome, he speaks French and Greek passably, and we are endeavoring to form him as an English prose stylist as well" (Anderson, 2006, p. 129).

And the runaway slave notice on Octavian stated, "He plays excellently well upon the violin and speaks Latin, Greek, and French" (Anderson, 2006, p. 237).

In *Bud, Not Buddy*, right after Bud runs away from his foster home, he stated, "The only hope I had was the north side library" (Curtis, 1999 p. 26). At the library he hoped to get help from a librarian named Miss Hill. Unfortunately for Bud, Miss Hill was no longer at that library but there was another librarian who remembered him and helped him out. She even surprised him by giving him a book entitled *The Pictorial History of the War Between the States*. Bud's response was:

"I took the book back to my table. I didn't want to tell her that I wasn't really interested in history, it was just that the best gory pictures in the world came from the Civil War. And this book was full of them. It really was a great book." (Curtis, 1999, p. 90)

When the librarian later approached Bud and said, “I am very impressed, you really devoured that book didn’t you? But it’s time to close now, you may start up again first thing tomorrow!” Buddy’s response was, “I couldn’t believe it, it’d happened again! I’d spent the whole day reading” (Curtis, 1999, p. 91).

In *Monster*, the main character Steve viewed his experience in prison as a movie script because he enjoyed his film class so much. Bobby, the main character in *First Part Last*, still attended school even though he was often exhausted from taking care of his daughter. For example, one day he stated:

I can hardly keep my eyes open in Brit Lit. I got so much drool on my arm I can’t even try to wipe it on my shirt. I seriously need a tissue or a paper towel. I was up all night with Feather, who thinks two in the morning is party time” (Johnson, 2003, p. 41).

Although Lafayette, the main character in *Miracle’s Boys* does not spend time reading and writing, when he described his brother Newcharlie he stated:

He’s three years older than me but only a little bit taller, and at the rate he was going school-wise, come this time next year, I’d be almost caught up with him. I’d just started seventh grade and Newcharlie was repeating ninth, but he didn’t seem to care one way or the other” (Woodson, 2000, p. 3).

Lafayette’s older brother Ty’ree had graduated from high school and been offered a scholarship to MIT. Lafayette stated:

I knew that was good, 'cause people made all kinds of fusses about the school and about Ty'ree at his graduation. Every time we turned around, he was going up onstage to get another award. He was good in science and stuff." (Woodson, 2000, p. 43-44).

After their mother died Ty'ree said, "he didn't really care about not going to college, that keeping his little bit of family together was the most important thing" (Woodson, 2000, p. 44).

Chanda, the main character from *Chanda's Secret*, discussed her school this way:

It wasn't like the cattle post school where I sat under a tree and my aunties taught me how to sew. And it wasn't like my school in the village either-a school with only a blackboard, and a schoolmaster who used hard, white hyena droppings when the chalk ran out. No this school came with a library, a science lab, geometry kits, a set of encyclopedias and working pencil sharpeners" (Stratton, 2004, p. 12).

Mr. Selalame, Chanda's favorite teacher, even believed that Chanda could win an overseas scholarship and he loans her books that he thinks she might like and she reads them quickly.

Interactions with White Characters

There appeared to be little interaction between African American main characters and Whites in the books, although since most of the authors did not explicitly describe

the physical characteristics of the secondary characters, there may have been more interaction than was detected.

In both the *Pox Party* and *Elijah of Buxton* there were negative portrayals of Whites. Since both of these books deal with slavery, this portrayal is not unexpected. In *The Pox Party*, the main character, Octavian, who is still a slave, has frequent negative interactions with Whites. Octavian lives at the Novanglian College of Lucidity and interacts with Whites on a daily basis. The Whites treat him first as one of their experiments, and later as a laborer. Throughout the story, he is treated in a cruel manner, as demonstrated by this excerpt from the book.

Mr. 03-01 said to me, "Prove that it is so. Through the exercise of logic. Is the daddy longlegs a spider?" I hesitated. He nodded to his manservant, who came to my side and picked up my food, not yet touched, and passed it to 03-01, who held it suspended across the table and waited for my reply (Anderson, 2007, p. 10).

When Octavian answered the question wrong 03-01 fed his dinner to the dog and told him "you might as well retire to your bedchamber... You will get no food tonight at this table" (Anderson, 2007, p. 10).

Octavian was the only character in the seven books who was subservient to Whites. However, he was not willing to accept his role as a slave and ran away. When Octavian was recaptured and treated cruelly he stated, "It is not entirely clear why the College of Lucidity held me so long in such brutal conditions, hobbled and yoked, save to break my will so I should no longer attempt to flee even this scene of desolation"

(Anderson, 2007, p. 329). When Mr. Sharpe, Octavian's owner, came to visit him an argument on slavery broke out. During the argument the following exchange occurred between Mr. Sharpe and Octavian.

“You must understand, God has determined that some creatures are less and some more potent on earth and has given to us the stewardship of all, according to our place in the Great Chain of Being.” “I need not be informed, I said, “about chains.” “It is common sense.” “There is nothing commonsensical about what you have done to me.” “We have all done what we needed.” “Needed for what purpose?” “To maintain the stability of the nation, boy. You do not understand the subtleties of business.” “This is not business.” “If a nation's profits shrink, then it is every man's business.” “Where is my profit?” “In the common good, which is common sense.” Kindness is common sense” “Kindness is nothing of the sort. Kindness without the promise of profit is an impossibility”(Anderson, 2006, 335-336).

More interactions with Whites can be seen in *Bud, Not Buddy*, in which a man that is assumed to be White told Bud, “Son, there just aren't too many places a young Negro boy should be traveling by himself, especially not clear across Michigan, there're folks in this state that make your average Ku Kluxer look like John Brown.” (Curtis, 1999, p. 143)

Later in the story, when Bud asked Eddie why there was always a white person in the band, Eddie explained it this way, “Bud, Mr. C. has always got a white fella in the band

for practical reasons.” Deeds, the white member of the band stated, “It’s the way of the world, Sleepy. It’s against the law for a Negro to own property where the Log Cabin is so Mr. C put it in my name.” And Eddie said, “That, and a lot of times we get gigs playing polkas and waltzes and a lot of these white folks wouldn’t hire us if they knew we were a Negro band so Deeds goes out and sets up everything” (Curtis, 1999, p. 205).

What makes *Bud, Not Buddy* unique among the seven books is that due to the circumstances caused by the Great Depression, there were many poor unemployed Whites and thus, the African American members of the band were actually better off than those Whites because they had a job and an income that allowed them to eat out at restaurants. Deed stated, “Take a look out the window, baby there’s a depression going on. How many folks you see living like us, Negro or white? Not many” (Curtis, 1999, p. 205).

Monster is the only realistic fiction book in which a White person plays a significant role. In this book, when Steve was on trial for murder, he had to count on his White lawyer to defend him. His lawyer is described as “petite, red-haired, and freckled” (Myers, 1999, p. 12). At one point the mother even mentioned that maybe they should have hired an African American lawyer. The relationship between Steve and his lawyer is strictly business and there is little emotional interaction between the two. There was one example in which the lawyer crosses out all of “Monsters” Steve had been writing and stated “you have to believe in yourself if we’re going to convince a jury that you’re innocent. In the end when Steve was found not guilty he described her response as “Her lips tense; she is pensive. She gathers her papers and moves away” (Myers, 1999, p. 276).

In response Steve stated “When Miss O’Brien looked at me, after we had won the case, what did she see that caused her to turn away?” (Myers, 1999, p. 281)

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that between 2000 and 2009, there was no difference between the portrayal of African American characters in Coretta Scott King Award winning books and Michael L. Printz award and honor winning books. There was also no difference between the portrayal of African Americans by African American award winning authors and the portrayal by White award winning authors. This may be due in part to the increased call for multicultural literature and the growing awareness of the need for literature which portrays African Americans, and other people of color, to be authentic and free from stereotypes.

The major differences arise when looking at what genres of books are being given awards. Of the thirteen books, 61% are works of historical fiction. Millner (2008), the African American author of *Hotlanta*, stated that publishing houses should “be publishing more books about and for African-American teens, and not tomes about slavery, the ghetto and growing up in impossible conditions” (p. 54) . Yet half of the Coretta Scott King Award winners and two of the Printz honor books in this study were about slavery.

The Coretta Scott King award winners and Michael L. Printz award winning books are a good way to get positive African American characters to African American youth. However, due to the lack of a broad array of topics, these books should not be the only ones recommended. If African American youth are to be enthused about reading, it cannot be assumed that the only good African American authors are those that have won the Coretta Scott King award or the Printz award.

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APPENDIX A: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOKS ANALYZED

(Annotations taken from NoveList Plus)

Coretta Scott King Author Award Winners

Curtis, C. P. (1999). *Bud, not buddy*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Ten-year-old Bud, a motherless boy living in Flint, Michigan, during the Great Depression, escapes a bad foster home and sets out in search of the man he believes to be his father--the renowned bandleader, H.E. Calloway of Grand Rapids.

Curtis, C. P. (2007). *Elijah of buxton* (1st ed.). New York: Scholastic Press.

In 1859, eleven-year-old Elijah Freeman, the first free-born child in Buxton, Canada, which is a haven for slaves fleeing the American south, uses his wits and skills to try to bring to justice the lying preacher who has stolen money that was to be used to buy a family's freedom

Draper, S. M. (2006). *Copper sun* (1st ed.). New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

Two fifteen-year-old girls--one a slave and the other an indentured servant--escape their Carolina plantation and try to make their way to Fort Moses, Florida, a Spanish colony that gives sanctuary to slaves.

Grimes, N. (2002). *Bronx masquerade*. New York: Dial Books.

While studying the Harlem Renaissance, students at a *Bronx* high school read aloud poems they've written, revealing their innermost thoughts and fears to their formerly clueless classmates.

Johnson, A. (2003). *The first part last*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

Bobby's carefree teenage life changes forever when he becomes a father and must care for his adored baby daughter.

Lester, J. (2005). *Day of tears :A novel in dialogue* (1st ed.). New York: Hyperion Books for Children.

When gambling debts and greed enter into the Butler household, Pierce Butler decides to host the biggest slave auction in American history and breaks a promise by selling Emma, his most-valued slave and caretaker of his children--a decision that brings about unthinkable consequences.

Taylor, M. D. (2001). *The land*. New York: Phyllis Fogelman Books.

After the Civil War, Paul, the son of a white father and a black mother, finds himself caught between the two worlds of colored folks and white folks as he pursues his dream of owning land of his own.

Woodson, J. (2000). *Miracle's boys*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Twelve-year-old Lafayette's close relationship with his older brother Charlie changes after Charlie is released from a detention home and blames Lafayette for the death of their mother.

Michael L. Printz Award and Honor Books

Anderson, M. T. (2006). *The pox party* (1st ed.). Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press.

Various diaries, letters, and other manuscripts chronicle the experiences of Octavian, a young African American, from birth to age sixteen, as he is brought up as part of a science experiment in the years leading up to and during the Revolutionary War.

Anderson, M. T. (2008). *The kingdom on the waves* (1st ed.). Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press.

When he and his tutor escape to British-occupied Boston, Octavian learns of Lord Dunmore's proclamation offering freedom to slaves who join *the* counterrevolutionary forces.

Myers, W. D., & Myers, C. A. (1999). *Monster* (1st ed.). New York, N.Y.: HarperCollins Publishers.

While on trial as an accomplice to a murder, sixteen-year-old Steve Harmon records his experiences in prison and in the courtroom in the form of a film script as he tries to come to terms with the course his life has taken.

Schmidt, G. D. (2004). *Lizzie bright and the buckminster boy*. New York: Clarion Books.

In 1911, Turner Buckminster hates his new home of Phippsburg, Maine, but things improve when he meets Lizzie Bright Griffin, a girl from a poor, nearby island community founded by former slaves that the town fathers--and Turner's--want to change into a tourist spot.

Stratton, A. (2004). *Chanda's secrets*. Toronto: Annick Press.

Chandra struggles with the deaths of those around her and the shame of being molested as she continues her education and cares for her siblings and friend Esther, amidst the poverty and AIDs epidemic that plague her African homeland.

APPENDIX B: GENERAL EVALUATION FORM

Author _____

Author's Race _____

Bibliographic Information

Book Title _____

Award Won _____

Publisher _____

Publication Year _____

Subject Headings _____

Literary Genre _____

Main/Major Character _____

Physical Traits

Sex _____

Description _____

APPENDIX C: IN DEPTH QUESTION ANALYSIS**(abridged from Berry, 1999)****Language**

Is dialect used?

If yes does it serve a legitimate purpose and why/why not

Does the language reinforce myth of Black inferiority or use of substandard English?

Does the language work within the story?

Is there a difference in language between white and black characters?

Character

How are Black characters shown in relation to whites? Is either submissive, inferior, passive or subordinate?

Is the success/survival/well being from the generosity or concern of white people?

Are Blacks seen as devoid of skills and in need of instruction by whites? Are characters only portrayed as living in the ghetto or poor neighborhoods?