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# Investigation into the portrayal of the Black in adolescent literature

Ellen Jo Boyance

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PORTRAYAL OF THE BLACK  
IN ADOLESCENT LITERATURE

by

Ellen Jo Boyance

A RESEARCH PAPER  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

I am an invisible man. No I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe, nor am I a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids--and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.<sup>1</sup>

For more than the last one hundred years of American history, the Black has been an invisible man. For many people, the Black simply did not exist. Unfortunately literature on all levels continued to perpetuate this myth.

It seems, however, many people were not actively aware of literature's omissions. The majority of American children were able to see themselves growing up in and through books. They looked at the illustrations and saw themselves. They were able to find numerous reflections of their families, customs, and life style in literature.

In the last ten years social changes have prodded all aspects of life into allowing the Black to become highly

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<sup>1</sup>Myra P. Sadker and David M. Sadker, Now Upon A Time: A Contemporary View of Children's Literature (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 130.

visible and competitive. Unfortunately the arrival of the Black into prominent places in adolescent fiction has been at a slower pace. Larrick, in a survey of 5,206 trade books published over a three year period, found only 349 which included one or more Blacks.<sup>2</sup> Publishing traditions long adhered to must be broken down. Vested interests must be shown the financial feasibility of the venture. And as in all other fields, the bottom line, prejudice, must be met head-on.

Books, however, are our hope for the new generation. As Whitney Young expressed.

There is no better way to reach the black child than through his books, as he is, as he can be . . . . Omission of these crucial images in books, tells the black child . . . . you have no image today and no future tomorrow.<sup>3</sup>

Omission of the Black also has a message for the white child. It can only serve to hinder the enlightened generation that school integration is producing. It can only push us backwards down the road that has been such a long and tedious climb.

Adolescent fiction needs to speak to and for today's readers--all of them.

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<sup>2</sup> Nancy Larrick, "The All White World of Children's Books," Saturday Review 48 (December 1965):64.

<sup>3</sup>Sadker, Now Upon, p. 130.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this paper was to examine the depth of the writer's own misconceptions and misinformation regarding the portrayal of the Black in recent adolescent literature. Assuming that teachers are all products of the society in which they live, they must diagnose their own shortcomings so that growth can occur. If an educator is to help adolescents avoid negative attitudes and behavior, he must see himself as part of the problem in order to be part of the solution.<sup>4</sup>

### Extent and Limitations

In selecting the books to be read and analyzed in this paper, certain limitations had to be imposed. Since the writer's purpose was to examine the extent of progress in this area, current materials were necessary. To collect a representative sample of forty books, the copyright span was gradually extended, and finally ranged from 1970-1977.

Accessibility also imposed a limitation. Only books readily available from libraries, teenage book clubs, paperback book stores in Southeast Wisconsin, or North Central Book Distributors, Hales Corners, were used.

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<sup>4</sup>Masha Kabakow Rudman, Children's Literature: An Issues Approach (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Company, 1976), p. 173.



The books utilized had to be designated as adolescent or junior novels by the author and/or publisher. Specifically they needed to serve the needs of the junior high student, as the writer intends to utilize the outstanding books as recommendations to this age group.

The books do represent a large range of reading levels. Not every student in the junior high reads at the same grade level, and the writer attempted to provide for individual differences, including both the remedial reader and the accelerated student.

It was not possible to locate a representative sample composed only of fiction books. Therefore biographies and autobiographies were added to achieve a sample of forty books.

Finally, this writer faced the critics of a white person undertaking this type of study. Tinney states that all who travel this road must "share in a black mentality."<sup>5</sup> To ensure that this awareness is reflected in this review, Ms. Loretta Life, librarian at Stephen Bull Elementary School, a black woman, agreed to read and evaluate a portion of the sample independently from the writer. A comparison of responses can be found in Chapter IV of this paper.

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<sup>5</sup>James S. Tinney, "A Unit on Black Literature," English Journal 58 (October 1969):1028.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

Young children are early told that books open doorways into another world. Reading is sold to youngsters as the means to visualize, meet, and experience people and activities they never would otherwise.

And for at least the last one hundred years, books have been misleading and prejudicing readers of all ages as to the true identity of the Black. Misunderstanding, rather than its positive counterpart, has been fostered. Damage has been done.

Millender quickly points out that "books are just a mirror of the times . . . they present life as it is interpreted to be by authors who can convince publishers that they have something that will sell."<sup>6</sup> Books do not appear out of a vacuum. They must be created by a human being who has hopes, feelings, and prejudices.

In the early 1900's books provided the only vehicle between races. Unfortunately the authors of this period

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<sup>6</sup>Dharathula Millender, "Through a Glass, Darkly," Library Journal 92 (December 15, 1967):4571.

often had no first hand experience with the Blacks their stories were portraying. Millender points out that Blacks depicted in this period "lived little better than his plantation days, that he wanted nothing, had nothing, and looked like nothing that resembled other humans of the day."<sup>7</sup> Few realized that Blacks lived a similar life, with hopes and aspirations for their families.

Literature in this period did nothing to assist race relations. Indeed it set progress back by/or for years. The media portrayed the Black speaking a dialect only intelligible to the brothers and as a person "afraid, lazy, docile and unambitious."<sup>8</sup>

Authors, basing their credibility on having played with Blacks as children, or on Southern residence, ground out plantation stories through a large part of the 1930's. Two examples would be: Across the Cotton Patch (1935) and Honey Chile (1937). Although plantation life made up the majority of stories available, the reader could also explore Civil War days, deprivation in the South, and generally poor living conditions.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

It was during this period that Arna Bontemps began to write children's books with Black characters and themes. He did not want his children to feel the same void he did as a child. On the shelves then was "nothing more inspiring than Our Little Ethiopian Cousin. . . I read almost every book in the room to make sure. Moreover, Our Little Ethiopian Cousin was not me and his world was not mine."<sup>9</sup> Bontemps provided many offerings, including You Can't Pet a Possum and Sad-Faced Boy.

In 1936 the Friendship Press began to accept material on the Black. This was a major breakthrough at the time, and some people glimpsed what the future would be. Elementary histories of the Black for children, plus photo-stories began to appear.

Some myths began to crack. Blacks lived in clean homes. Blacks went to school.

The 1940's heralded the arrival of nonfiction biographies which continued to break down the myths--of laziness and non-achievement. However only the exceptional--good or bad--showed up in print. The average citizen was non-existent in literature.

The turmoil of the 1940's exerted some pressure on both literature and people. World War II intervened and provided the vehicle for the races to actually meet, work, and

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<sup>9</sup>Dorothy Sterling, "The Soul of Learning," English Journal 57 (February 1968):167.

fight together. Men who stood side by side Blacks on the battlefield learned first hand of the bravery and dedication of individuals. Many were forced to re-examine past feelings and beliefs. The war also provided educational possibilities for Black veterans to improve their lot and become more visible in society. Near the end of this decade new themes, more plausible plots, and illustrations began to surface on the market. Two examples are Bontemps' We Have Tomorrow, a biography of Blacks for youths, and Jackson's Call Me Charlie.

The decade (1940's) also saw the first edition of We Build Together by Charlemae Rollins. This publication recommended only two dozen books that were identified as portraying the "true" Negro. It was a small start.

By the 1950's real progress in titles can be seen. Publishers were now willing to accept a different type of story about Negro life. Youth were "given a variety of backgrounds for stories . . . school stories, sports stories, desegregation stories . . . and stories of getting along with others, not all Negro in the community."<sup>10</sup>

The 60's still heralded many authors writing about Blacks, rather than an expansion of Black authors. The Supreme Court decision has made some inroads. Realistic portrayal was the rule rather than the exception. Unfortunately

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<sup>10</sup>Millender, "Glass," p. 4575.

stories of broken homes, violence and street life still predominate the lists. The spectacular still tends to cash in at the book store.

Millender points out that the books of the 70's benefit from the increased physical contact among the races. She adds,

Today illustrations are good, the customs and modes of living are being described more or less normally, and stereotypes are gradually disappearing, as editors and publishers detect the subtle ways in which some are introduced.<sup>11</sup>

Statistics seem to indicate that this revision of publishing policy is only in its infancy. An actual count by Sterling indicated that in a seven-year period from 1960-1966 at best one percent of the total output of books for young people were devoted to the Black.<sup>12</sup>

Are the 70's offering a better proportion? What chance does a Black reader have to find himself in books?

#### Stereotypes

Negro children have generally been written of in the same terms as their mothers and fathers, as quaint, living jokes, designed to make white children laugh.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 4576.

<sup>12</sup>Sterling, "Soul," p. 171.

<sup>13</sup>Dorothy M. Broderick, Image of the Black in Children's Fiction (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1973), p. 3.

Webster's New World Dictionary defines stereotype as "an unvarying form or pattern; fixed or convention expression, notion, character, mental pattern; having no individuality, as though cast from a mold."<sup>14</sup>

The basic stereotype white readers learned was "blacks are lower creatures and in need of superior white's care."<sup>15</sup>

The actual inferior qualities varied from book to book, but gradually became recognizable as part of a central pattern. No illustrations were needed to alert the reader to the identity of the character in question. Brown in his 1933 Negro Characters As Seen By White Authors identifies seven specific stereotypes found in children's literature.

They are:

- (a) The Contented Slave
- (b) The Wretched Freeman
- (c) The Comic Negro
- (d) The Brute Negro
- (e) The Tragic Mulatto
- (f) The Local Color Negro
- (g) The Exotic Primitive<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Webster's New World Dictionary, rev. ed. (1962), s.v.

<sup>15</sup>Broderick, Image, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

Many critics, as Broderick, have used Brown's categories for guidelines in their work.

The first--Contented Slave--portrays slaves as "accepting without complaint, with good grace, and enthusiasm. They were dumb, but loyal, grateful to their masters for providing for them, and proud to belong to a man of quality."<sup>17</sup>

Authors minimized the explosive issues by selectively filtering the slave experiences the reader encounters. The horrors of the auction block with families separated at will is conspicuously missing from children's books. Authors stress that slaves were born on the plantation.

The characters tend to be house slaves, whose lot was often better than the majority who spent grueling hours in the fields. In effect a miniature caste system develops with the house slaves feeling and exhibiting a superiority over not only the field hands, but the overseer and poor whites also.

The only method to express unhappiness was to run away. Broderick adds that out of the books analyzed, only eight contained run-aways. Of these, only one ran away because he wanted to be free. The others only desired to have a say in what happened to them. In addition these run-aways were not married, nor did they have a family.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 36.



Another stereotype--Wretched Freeman--only expanded the first. To be a Freeman was most often a totally undesirable condition. "As miserable as a free nigger"<sup>19</sup> was often expressed by the Black characters themselves! Indeed they often occupied positions lower than white people. Many books ended with free Blacks creeping back to the plantation, and often drunk.

The stereotype of the Exotic Primitive was probably the most demeaning encountered in literature. Blacks were portrayed as "unaffected by civilizing influences."<sup>20</sup> Blatant inferiority was portrayed. Blacks were credited with tracking ability in the woods, like animals.<sup>21</sup> Idolotry and witchcraft were emphasized in books, along with a tendency towards violence.

Brown points out that the Comic Negro is a very "familiar procedure when conquerors depict a subject people."<sup>22</sup> Two facets that authors seem to agree on were: "he was ludicrous to others, and forever laughing himself."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>22</sup>Sterling A. Brown, "Negro Character as Seen by White Authors," The Journal of Negro History (1933):188.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

Physical attributes seem to have the greatest attraction for a condescending white audience. With the use of "his love for watermelon and gin, for craps, his haunting of chicken roosts, use big words he doesn't understand . . . loud clothes, and bluster"<sup>24</sup> the Negro wandered into children's and adult literature, causing an hysterical white reaction.

The Brute Negro does not appear consistently until Ku Klux Klan days. Then the stock description was "a gorilla-like imbecile, who springs like a tiger and has the black claws of a beast."<sup>25</sup>

Since this characterization was often used in conjunction with a rape, it does not appear frequently in children's literature.

The Tragic Mulatto was based on two premises: "The mulatto is a victim of a divided inheritance; from his white blood come his intellectual strivings, his unwillingness to be a slave; from his Negro blood come his baser emotional urges, his indolence, his savagery."<sup>26</sup>

It is unbelievable that a proportion of a person's blood could be responsible for his character. However this stereotype still exists in the real world of the 70's.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

Brown uses the Local Color Negro in other overlapping stereotypes. Primarily it is revealed in speech, song, and dance.

Existing concurrently with these stereotypes are additional facets common to the Black experience. Music provided one of the first avenues of recognition for Blacks. People like Sammy Davis, Jr. made great strides for all Blacks because of their talent.

Music was an avenue of personal expression. It was a meager compensation for the lack of educational possibilities available. This popularity led many people to think of rhythm as an inherent gift. Many times though, the Black man did the innovating and the white performer made the big money and headlines. Books have Blacks singing even when it was no relation to the plot of the story.<sup>27</sup> In addition, for years the Black had no choice but to perform whatever music the white wanted.

The Black is Beautiful movement of the 70's grew out of a real need because for years society had said that Black is ugly. Appearance received such emphasis that it instrumented "a people without pride."<sup>28</sup> Color alone determined that Black characters were unattractive. Physical portraits

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<sup>27</sup>Broderick, Image, p. 133.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

in children's books were consistently derogatory.

Uncle Remus did nothing to enhance the concept with his explanation of why some people are Black. He claimed that once all people were Black and went to wash off in a pool. The last people who got there had only enough water to "paddle about wid their foots en dabble in it wid der han's."<sup>29</sup>

Skin shade effected further discrimination amongst the Blacks themselves. A relationship between light skin and intelligence, success, and desirability began to emerge. The blacker skins were less desirable and received a connotation of being slow. Broderick expressed the feeling that many Black men prefer light or even white women.<sup>30</sup>

It has been this writer's experience that Black students hesitate to describe themselves as being Black. In their seventh grade autobiographies they identified themselves as being brown.

Broderick found only two categories of favorable physical descriptions. The first was the superspecimen, the buck of the field hands, strong and muscular. The

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

other is the light brown coloring, usually attributed to being an offspring of the master of the plantation. This caste often gave the child some educational and play privileges, while it embarrassed the white mistress to observe her husband's features in slave offspring.<sup>31</sup>

Religion and the church played a visible part in the life of Blacks in literature. The concept of the soul, however, undermines the Southern's argument for slavery as mere property. The Christian religion teaches that one's reward will come in the next life, and perhaps that was the only thing that kept many slaves going when all else seemed lost.

Yet here we have a God with blond hair, pale skin, and blue eyes. One might understand that a Black might have some problem feeling a true child of his. "He loves me just the same as if I was white."<sup>32</sup>

Literature also twisted religion to its advantage. Sins which brought eternal damnation to Blacks were passing white folks or slighting one's work. It was permissible though for a white child to talk back to a Black adult. The churches available were generally some distance away, and if mixed racially, the Blacks knew their place in the back pew.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

Authors found preaching a possible occupation for literature's Black man. The text implied though that preaching was a cop-out for people who did not want to work with their hands.<sup>33</sup>

Even occupations fell into a stereotyped pattern. Children were encouraged to "choose occupations that would help their race rise."<sup>34</sup> In one case a girl was discouraged on all sides from developing her talent as possible concert pianist, which was portrayed as a selfish goal. Instead she capitulated and became a teacher, to perform a greater service and aid to others.

As Booker T. Washington pinpoints, "The chief ambition among a large portion was to get an education so they wouldn't have to work with their hands."<sup>35</sup>

Broderick's survey identified the following occupations for Blacks in the literature: carpenter, mailman, horse trainer, railroad porter, field hand, show business, and preacher.<sup>36</sup> Professional jobs were virtually nonexistent.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

Dialect has eroded much understanding among races solely on its own merits. Many children encountering Black dialect as portrayed in literature literally could not understand what the character was saying! Did this person who looked different speak a foreign language too? Many found it quite strange that a Black could quote Scripture in perfect English, and then immediately revert back to thick, unintelligible dialect for normal conversation.

Two types of problems cause concern in this area. The first aspect is the tendency to portray all Blacks as speaking in dialect, regardless of their educational progress or geographic location. "The colorful speech of all who share the same economic, regional, or historical background should be reproduced as faithfully as possible in order to give flavor to the story, but never at the expense of any individual in the group."<sup>37</sup> The second is the tendency of an author to make up his own dialect without any actual basis and full of grammatical inconsistencies.

The recent interest in linguistics as a subject has revealed real regularities and patterns to the true Black dialect. These should not be misrepresented or minimized.

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<sup>37</sup>Charlemae Rollins, ed. We Build Together (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1970), p. xiv.

In addition, some words have attached themselves to the vocabulary patterns of both educated and uneducated whites, regardless of geographic location. Some examples are: nigger, darkie, Sambo, and spook. These words have been found to be offensive to members of all races. Rollins sees the author's responsibility "to deemphasize words which, particularly in certain contexts, may strain relations between individuals and groups."<sup>38</sup>

#### Latimer-Syndrome Patterns

Latimer attacks the stereotyping problem from a slightly different angle. The syndromes (traps or flaws) she identifies vary in intensity from one book to the next.

Sometimes the presence of a syndrome seriously impairs the overall quality of the book . . . . At other times it is merely a minor distraction. A book of this type would be recommended with certain reservations spelled out.<sup>39</sup>

Latimer points out, "it has been our observation that most books which attempt to deal with racism or discriminatory situations fail almost miserably, chiefly because they are burdened down with the white perspective."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. xvi.

<sup>39</sup>Bettye I. Latimer, Starting Out Right: Choosing Books About Black People for Young Children (Madison: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1964), p. 13.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.



This white perspective has been identified as revealing itself in the following syndromes.

The Romantic Syndrome results "when a book tends to glorify situations on the one hand and to ignore and gloss over realities on the other."<sup>41</sup> If only the virtues are mentioned, a continuously happy storyline emerges. The reader is misled into believing that every situation has a happy ending.

Latimer finds this syndrome occurring mainly in illustrations and biographies.<sup>42</sup> In both situations the glamorous is hard to keep in perspective. A biography is often written to acquaint people with accomplishments completed over great obstacles. Illustrations are basically to embellish the storyline. Neither should be misleading.

An example is the treatment of slavery in children's literature. The horrors are minimized, if not totally ignored. The child reads of the kind master, and of what he provides for his slaves, rather than of the slave block, physical punishment, or starvation.

The Avoidance Syndrome builds on this. "There is a denial of the harsh and oppressive conditions under which Blacks have functioned."<sup>43</sup> Since slavery is often presented

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Latimer, Choosing, p. 14.

as a natural economic state, few authors lead their readers to question its existence on moral grounds. "We must recognize it as part of the sociology of racism wherein Blacks are thought of as something other than people."<sup>44</sup> The authors are "reluctant to identify bigots and bigotry, and the extreme to which white America has gone to make life miserable for generations of Blacks."<sup>45</sup> Often this is justified on the grounds that children are not capable of dealing with these realities. Could it be that it is really an adult problem?<sup>46</sup>

In the Bootstrap Syndrome an author maintains that "success is guaranteed if one is properly motivated, if he helps himself, strives for an education and perseveres."<sup>47</sup> Generally this premise tends to hold true for a white person, but it fails to take into consideration the existence of a very real negative attitude on the part of employers against Blacks, based on their color alone. There are no inevitable rewards for the underdog, only for vested interests. This syndrome attempts to make a sham of the very real blockades in the way of equality for all.

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 15

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 14

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

The Oasis Syndrome could be renamed "token integration. When a story involves a number of people, these are traditionally white."<sup>48</sup> This generally tends to surface in fictionalized stories. Latimer points out that "A child's picture world should be moving away from appeasement to genuine integration; away from token to multiple integration. Brown (i.e. Black) faces should be shown acting out various roles in life."<sup>49</sup> This syndrome only reinforces the apparent importance of whites in our society and encourages the belief that only small numbers of Blacks are acceptable.<sup>50</sup>

Finally the Ostrich-in-the-Sand Syndrome oversimplifies the whole idea of prejudice in our society. Two basic problems typify this syndrome. First, some books portray prejudice as a normal and natural state! Second, Black characters are frequently portrayed as at one end of the spectrum, i.e. either extremely passive or violently aggressive.<sup>51</sup> Often when encountering prejudice, they are told to ignore it or attempt to walk away from the situation.

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

There is usually no explanation of what happened or chastizement of the person who caused the affront. "The Black youngster must deny their own identity to become accepted."<sup>52</sup>

The existence of even one of these syndromes in a child's book subconsciously plants the seed for the misunderstandings of a lifetime.

Classic Examples of Misrepresentation of  
the Black in Children's Literature

Many people would be startled to realize that several of the better known children's stories, some considered to be classics, are packed with either Black stereotypes of syndrome patterns.

The reincarnated Mary Poppins of recent Disney fame seems to contain a section of controversial storyline. The problem seems to revolve around a sequence in "Bad Tuesday" which contains a trip to Africa. The section contains some slanted illustrations and questionable dialect including the term "picaninny."

The author, P. L. Travers, when questioned on the background of her vocabulary choice, claimed to have no idea how she had chosen this terminology. She stated

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

that she had known no Black people at the time of the writing, although she was familiar with the stories of Uncle Remus and Little Black Sambo.<sup>53</sup>

"To me, even now the word 'picaninny' is very pretty. I've used it myself time and time again to children. Not to Black children, because life has not brought me in contact with Black children, but I've used it time and again to small children."<sup>54</sup>

Travers claims that no Black teachers have even mentioned or complained about the above-mentioned sections. She admits that the illustrations are stereotypes but feels they are not her responsibility. In addition, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich has never considered changing them.<sup>55</sup>

As a footnote, this author's new book, Friend Monkey features a deaf Black child fed to a crocodile because his parents do not want him. The author claims this is an actual practice of the Fan tribe in Africa.<sup>56</sup>

Cohen examined four books of the popular Bobbsey Twins series authored under the pseudonym of Laura Lee Hope. His study utilized books published in 1904, 1908, 1954, and 1968.

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<sup>53</sup>Albert V. Schwartz, "Mary Poppins Revised," edited by Mary Lou White (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1976), p. 75.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

Although the books span a sixty year period, the characters remain constant with Dinah and Sam, the Negro servants, in all books of the series. Dinah is the cook and Sam, her husband, is the handyman who takes care of the outside work.

In the 1904 book various stereotypes are apparent. Dinah is a large, black, kinky-haired mammy. Both Sam and Dinah speak in a heavy dialect.

Although the servants are treated kindly, even a Black doll given to the white child was kept separate from the rest of the collection. "Flossie always took pains to separate Jujube from the rest by placing the cover of a pastboard box between them."<sup>57</sup> The Blacks were quietly listed as inferior.

The 1908 volume modifies the dialect somewhat, but introduces superstition, as Dinah interprets the appearance of a strange bird in the mist. This reflects popular opinion at the time.<sup>58</sup>

Almost fifty years pass between volumes, and more modifications appear. The servant role is reduced; they appear only four times in the volume. Sam is now the truck driver for the lumber yard, and his dialect has disappeared!

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<sup>57</sup>Laura Lee Hope, The Bobbsey Twins on Merry Days Indoors and Out (Akron, Ohio: The Saafeld Publishing Co., 1904), pp. 82-83.

<sup>58</sup>Sol Cohen, "Minority Stereotypes in Children's Literature: The Bobbsey Twins, 1904-1968," Educational Forum 34 (November 1969):124.

The 1968 volume reduces the servants' role even further (three appearances). Sam adds a surname (Johnson) and the couple is moved from the rooms over the stable, into the third floor of the main house.<sup>59</sup>

Over sixty years the Black couple could only progress to a semi-skilled laboring class. In addition, they are still seen as comic characters by the adolescent readers. "The cumulative effect may well be that the negative stereotype is accepted as truth, and that the interaction between Caucasian and Negro on the basis of the stereotype may take on the character of a self-fulfilling prophecy."<sup>60</sup>

Presently Nancy Drew mysteries are enjoying a successful revival via the medium of television. Jones acknowledges that these more recent episodes deal more fairly with minorities of all types. He points rather to those published prior to 1957 and to the stereotypes rampant in these publications.

For example: in seventeen mysteries seventeen Blacks are identified. Only four affect the action and are

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

given names. Their occupations are: five maids, four porters, two cooks, one caretaker, one butler, one elevator started, one servant and two men who frequent criminal activities.<sup>61</sup>

Text language abounds with double negatives, slang, and slurred or dropped endings. No Negro uses correct grammar, reinforcing the concept of inferiority.<sup>62</sup>

In addition the physical descriptions when found, picture the Blacks as people who "smiled a great deal . . . waddled and shuffled . . . and slovenly and sullen."<sup>63</sup>

This produced a far from favorable initial impression for the youthful reader. "How simple for the young reader of 1935 to bristle on seeing a fat Negro woman five years later. After all she did look like the 'old negress' a terrifying character who had threatened blond, blue-eyed Nancy."<sup>64</sup> A lasting impression was born.

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<sup>61</sup>James P. Jones, "Negro Stereotypes in Children's Literature: The Case of Nancy Drew," Journal of Negro Education 40 (Spring 1971):121.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 125.



### CHAPTER III

#### LITERATURE'S ROLE AS A CHANGE VEHICLE

What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore--  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over--  
Like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags  
Like a heavy load  
Or does it explode?<sup>65</sup>

The path that history itself followed in the United States greatly affected the portrayal of Blacks in literature. People who had been treated as second class citizens in life tended to surface in the same way in literature.

Why did change take so long to come? This is a multifaceted problem.

Millender comments on the frustrations pursuing the Black authors, especially in the early 19th century. The point has already been made in this paper that to be published one had to convince publishers of the demand for one's material. This is evidence of Black writing during

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<sup>65</sup>Langston Hughes, Montage of a Dream Deferred.

this period, but little was published. It was rejected as "having nothing of value for the market of the day."<sup>66</sup>

Adult authors had slightly better success, but many deserving and enlightening manuscripts were left unread.

Eventually Blacks found the only road to authentic representation was to have a Black owned publishing company. Carter G. Woodson formed his own publishing company, Associated Publishers, which is still in existence today. This enabled more realistic portrayals of the Black to reach the reading public.

Sadker and Sadker point to plain discrimination in all social, political, and economic areas.

Blacks were restricted to certain areas of town, enjoyed only limited voting rights, and mainly menial jobs. Literature painted them the same way.

Even today the composition of the publishing world is one-sided. In 1970 only four top-level editors in New York were Black, and there are fewer than thirty in the whole book publishing world.<sup>67</sup>

Today we still have mainly white authors writing to and for Blacks. The question is frequently raised, can whites "reflect sensitively and accurately the lives of

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<sup>66</sup>Millender, Darkly, p. 4573.

<sup>67</sup>Time, April 6, 1970, p. 100.

Blacks?"<sup>68</sup> Julius Lester emphatically denies this. "Could you take seriously a history of Jews written by an Arab?"<sup>69</sup>

Tate seems to second that by stating, ". . . on a subject as critical as race, authors must follow one of the first rules of writing, 'Write what you know about.' White authors have permeated the field of black literature with books born of guilt and wish fulfillment. Good intentions are not enough."<sup>70</sup>

Goddard, a colleague of Tate's, balances the scales however by countering that Blackness is not a panacea in this issue. "Black authors also must be challenged to recognize their white attitude as they affect writing for children. Several have already been challenged on this account by black youth."<sup>71</sup>

Sterling points out that economic reprisals also curtailed production. Where some succeeded in getting a title past a publisher without revising the color of the characters, sales were not guaranteed. "The books won favorable comment, but the effect on sales was negative.

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<sup>68</sup>Myra Pollack Sadker and David Miller Sadker, Now Upon a Time, a Contemporary View of Children's Literature (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 130.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Binnie Tate, "In House and Out House," Library Journal 95 (October 1, 1970):99.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

Customers returned not only these titles, but also all stock from the company. This meant an appreciable loss and tempered attitudes toward further use of Negro children in illustrations and text."<sup>72</sup>

The only bright note here is that trade books saw change and progress much more rapidly than texts. School texts were purchased in such large numbers that huge amounts of money were riding on their acceptability to school boards and popularity among teachers.<sup>73</sup> Most schools do not purchase new texts each year either. Publishers, out of economic motivation, were reluctant to be innovative. Consequently a Black child did not tend to read about himself in his school texts, but had some opportunities in his independent reading sources.

#### The Responsibilities of Literature to the Black

The age of the 70's finds a large segment of society being forced by law or conscience to provide equal opportunities for all regardless of race, color, sex, or creed. Again this direction will eventually surface in the literature

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<sup>72</sup>Dorothy Sterling, "The Soul of Learning," English Journal 57 (February 1968):169.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

of the period. Hopefully the enlightenment of some will raise the general level of quality reading material.

Tate enumerates responsibilities literature has to its readers, and suggests that books begin to be weeded out on this basis. Initially she calls for "providing authentic situations and palatable illustrations which realistically reflect black images and experience."<sup>74</sup> A Black child should have the same opportunities to open a book, see himself, and read about a life similar to his, and realistic to his experiences. This is a call for books set in both the inner-city and countryside; dealing with both blue collar families, and professionals. A Black is multi-dimensional, not cut from a mold.

Secondly, literature must start to fill "the void of positive materials with which Black children can identify."<sup>75</sup> Too many current offerings still center on the crime and violence found in the lives of some minority people. The emphasis needs to switch to the positive lives led by steadily increasing numbers. What about the professional's family? Where do they live? What's life like for them?

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<sup>74</sup>Tate, "In House," p. 100.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

Emphasis also is needed in "giving black children a new cultural and historical awareness in an African heritage of which they can be proud."<sup>76</sup> Children need to know about the proud, strong and glorious kingdoms of Mali, Ghana, and Songhai. There was life before slavery, and it was filled with achievements, riches, and power.

Tate emphasizes that "bridging the cultural and social gaps between black and white children"<sup>77</sup> is paramount. Literature needs to tell about both races encountering and learning from each other. Both need to be side by side, sharing, giving and taking, resulting in a "new humanism which can be heard throughout the world."<sup>78</sup>

Thompson and Woodard speak to the role of literature in understanding the importance of ethnic consciousness.

Conscious of the inequalities suffered even after many Blacks became "just plain Americans," blacks today refuse to erase the "black" from Black American. They refuse to make invisible that one attribute which connotes their unity, culture, and heritage. Certainly, integration and assimilation are possible until the recognition of and respect for these differences are fully realized."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Judith Thompson and Gloria Woodard, "Black Perspective in Books for Children," Wilson Library Bulletin 44 (December 1969):417.

Literature must help us stand in each other's shoes. Literature must allow us to see each other as we really are.

In addition, the Black child needs to step forward into the mainstage of the plot. If, as often happens, the white child dominates the story, "The black child is then necessarily placed in a subservient role. He is the passive character. He is the problem which causes the white child to act. He literally waits for the white child to invite him in, to figure things out, to be enlightened."<sup>80</sup> This type of format only perpetuates the notion of a white world, with the Black child loitering around the fringes. White supremacy is quietly reinforced.

Thompson and Woodard further point out that in literature change is rarely effected by Blacks for Blacks. White characters dominate as the change agent; they make things better. "The Blacks . . . are presented as ineffective, whether as individuals, American citizens, or an ethnic group."<sup>81</sup>

Literature rarely condescends to make change a composite Black/White effort. A working partnership is infrequent; generally "the happy ending or successful

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 418.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

endeavor is usually due to the intervention of a white benefactor."<sup>82</sup> These roles need to be reversed.

Unfortunately the Black characters are often made to feel responsible for the unpleasant realities of their lives.<sup>83</sup> They are asked or even expected to ignore the blatant prejudices of ignorant people. The text often not too subtly implies that extreme poverty and segregation is their due lot.

In the last analysis, literature must fulfill its responsibility to provide visibility--for all. It must open its doors wider to assure each child "that he is important enough to be reflected in that literature which has always been made to seem too cultured to admit him."<sup>84</sup>

#### Curriculum Implications

Educators must come to realize that it is not sufficient for changes in literature to occur in a vacuum, silently populating back shelves of libraries and storage rooms. Assuming that literature is heeding the call to task, the next step is the visible involvement of these advances into the daily curriculum diet. "It is hoped

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 423.



that the teaching of Black literature or Black culture may help to create a genuine spirit of brotherhood in the minds and hearts of everyone, that it will lead to a spirit of honesty about ourselves; our own fears, limitations, weaknesses, prejudices and motives."<sup>85</sup> It is to provide a meeting ground to encounter each other. It is a chance to question, clarify, shed false illusions, and grow in true understanding.

The need is undeniable. Prejudice is visible, in varying degrees, depending on one's geographic location, educational background, and economic status.

Studies show that the closer a school is to racial turbulence, the more attention is concentrated on curricular considerations. However, an Illinois investigation was vocal as to the futility of hiding from the issue in the quiet country corn fields. The mobile society of the 70's has permanently destroyed that myth. U. S. News and World Report contends that 42 percent of all twenty to twenty-four year olds move in a one-year period. Fifteen percent of twenty-five plus year olds move in the same period.<sup>86</sup> The

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<sup>85</sup>Wilmer A. Lamar, Black Literature in High Schools in Illinois. Urbana, Illinois: Illinois Association of Teachers of English (May 1971), p. 7.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

company man of today is hired knowing that upward movement is often contingent on bouncing from one coast to the other. Gone also is the concept that success is based on serving one's entire business career with one company. The children of the Iowa salesman can be entering school in Detroit two weeks later.

Black literature in the school is needed by Blacks. It is necessary for Black youth searching for self-identity, self-worth, and self-respect. It makes him visible. "For millions of Black students what they are taught in school forces them to confront over and over again the fact that the white man's world is not theirs."<sup>87</sup>

"If it is not too late English teachers must become leaders, political activists if you will, leaders in the fight to help our white colleagues see that right, not majority rule, must prevail. Black students must have a curriculum more relevant to their lives."<sup>88</sup>

As the tide begins to turn, and curriculum doors start to open, controversy grows as to the actual implementation of the change. Conservatives deplore the assumption

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<sup>87</sup>Miriam Ylvisaker, "Our Guilt," English Journal 58 (February 1968):193.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

that if there is not a separate course suitably titled then no Black literature is being taught. This group would favor an integrated approach.<sup>89</sup>

Perhaps Tinney represents a more liberal opinion in designing "a whole year's program of Black literature interwoven with other aspects of communications."<sup>90</sup> He does specify this as a motivational tool for schools with high minority populations. Opinions regarding length and breadth of the course span the continuum between these extremes also.

Another controversial area revolves around the instructor. This writer has already indicated that many, especially amongst the Black populace, feel that this area can only be correctly handled by a Black. "After all how can a white man adequately interpret literature based on social experiences he knows little or nothing about?"<sup>91</sup>

Tinney calls for the mandatory possession of a "black mentality." "He cannot hope to relate adequately to black

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<sup>89</sup>Lamar, High Schools, p. 6.

<sup>90</sup>James S. Tinney, "A Unit on Black Literature," English Journal 58 (October 1969):1031.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 1028.

literary forms if he suffers the usual racial hang-ups of white middle-class society."<sup>92</sup> Included in Tinney's teacher prerequisites is "a proper attitude about all the environments which have produced Negro art-in-writing. It would be just as well to neglect this vast body of literature, as to emasculate it by carefully omitting references to sex, policemen, religion. . . ."<sup>93</sup>

Tinney also lists as hindrances to teaching excellence the failure to: (a) accept usage of substandard patterns of English; (b) listen to soul music; and (c) read current Black periodicals or be well-acquainted with Black history.<sup>94</sup> Collectively these traits tend to make a white person more sympathetic to and aware of the Black consciousness.

The procedure of the course will vary depending on time limitations. The historical background of this people seems to be an essential ingredient, as many Black students themselves have no concept of the glorious days of their race prior to enslavement.

Tinney has some guidelines which are certainly worth some thought, as one approaches the actual teaching assignment.

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 1029.

His principles of operation are:

1. Writings about Blacks by white authors are omitted.
2. Three weeks is the minimum time period suggested for adequate coverage.
3. All book reports during this time-span are to cover only books written by Blacks.
4. The teacher must refuse to manipulate discussions or interpretations into the area of "racial piety." Let the materials speak for themselves; and let the students identify with whomever they please.<sup>95</sup>

Materials are of paramount importance, and in most cases should be as contemporary as possible. All areas of media can intertwine to make literature come alive, maybe for the first time for some. Current book lists, magazines, movies, and albums should be consulted in setting up a syllabus. Solicit and include student suggestions.

As students share, explore, and grow, our nation goes another step closer to:

The land that never has been yet--  
And yet must be--  
The land where every man is free.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Sterling, "Soul," p. 180.

## CHAPTER IV

### EVALUATIVE PROCEDURE AND RESULTS

#### Organization of Project

The original criteria for inclusion in the evaluative portion of this study was fiction written for the junior high school student as indicated in Bogart and Carlson's Jr. High Library Catalogue. The books were to be copyrighted in 1976, and feature at least one Black character. A sample of fifty books was considered representative.

Bogart and Carlson's edition was found to be too limiting. It did not consider the vast range of reading levels found in today's junior high classroom. Therefore Fidell and Rosignolo's Children's Catalogue 1977 Supplement and Wilson's Subject Guide to Children's Books in Print 1977-1978 were also utilized.

In addition a large number of the sample were located by chance while systematically checking aisles at North Central Book Distributors.

The final product is a total of forty books, which is the maximum this writer could locate using the sources established initially: Racine Public Library, Cardinal

Stritch Children's Library, North Central Book Distributors, Tab Books, and Walden Book Stores, Milwaukee.

In addition, the copyright criterion was extended to 1970-1977 inclusive. This was necessary to collect a representative sample. Although the catalogues indicated more recent publications, in at least eleven cases the book itself could not be located. In most cases the book was not part of the library's collection; some were in circulation. Black History Month occurring during this period also increased the difficulty of locating specific titles. In addition, many recent titles have not yet been released in paperback format.

A wide range of reading levels is found in the sample; approximately grade three through adult. This should realistically accommodate the wide range of reading ability and interest which characterizes this age group.

The sample does include books whose story line deals with topics that some parents might find objectionable reading for this age group. It was not the purpose of this paper to censor the books on this basis.

It was also necessary to include biographies and autobiographies to reach a total of forty books. These provided some of the most informative and enlightening reading for this writer.

Development of an Evaluative Instrument

The finalized evaluative instrument was a combination of examples located in research. Four sources were utilized. The Council on Interracial Books for Children provided two: a Values Checklist for Human and Anti-Human Values in Children's Books and Ten Quick Ways to Analyze Books for Racism and Sexism. Rudman and Latimer were also influential. All four sources overlapped considerably.

An effort was made to make the instrument as efficient as possible, yet a vehicle for details, plot summary, and relevant quotes also. Therefore the checklist concept was combined with a series of relevant specific items for the evaluator to zero in on. Adequate room was provided for comments. The form was printed on legal size paper to enable the evaluating to be completed on a single sheet. The back side was utilized for the plot summary and relevant quotes.

CIBC's Ten Quick Ways to Analyze Books for Sexism and Racism formed the basis of the instrument. Items pertaining to sexism were deleted. The final form also reflected Rudman's research in the deletion of items pertinent to text-book evaluation and the addition of item eight where the family relationships were spotlighted. ("Is the Black



mother always the dominant member of the family? How intact is the nuclear family? If the family is separated, are there reasons given that indicate society's responsibility?"<sup>97</sup>

Evaluation Results: Biographies and Autobiographies

Although added belatedly to the study, these books provided fascinating reading and excellent background for this writer. A total of eleven books fell into this category: three deal with entertainers, four with sports figures, and four fall into a miscellaneous category. The copyrighted dates range from 1971-1977.

All eleven portray the common characteristic of successfully challenging the white establishment. All subtly encourage today's generation to do the same.

The biographies also have the advantage of a title and cover illustration reflecting exactly what the reader will find in the book. There is no doubt in the Black child's mind. He will see himself in this book.

The three which deal with entertainers provide realistic information on the climb to the top. Although many different socio-economic groups are represented, the majority still had to deal with white control of recording companies, clubs, theatres, and bookings. And they succeeded.

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<sup>97</sup>Rudman, Children's Literature, p. 181.

The books are all illustrated mainly with photographs which are contemporary, true to life, and attractive to today's adolescent.

Black Star Fallin' Mama deals directly with tokenism. The singers were solicited to sing in the best of places, but reminded of the back door entrance--a sing for us, but don't touch us or eat with us attitude.

The book traces stars from Ma Rainey through Billie Holiday and Aretha Franklin in their climb to the top. It does not minimize the problems however. "Driving eight or ten hours trying to make a gig and being hungry and passing restaurants all along the road, and having to go off the highway into some little city to find a place to eat because you are black,"<sup>98</sup> was a common problem.

Famous Black Entertainers deals with a wider range of entertainment fields, how they got to where they are today, and many times their personal opinions on today's current issues. The book's spotlight ranges from Ailey, a director of dance to O'Neal the actor, and Watts, a concert pianist. The individuals come from varying economic backgrounds--Diana Ross from Detroit's ghetto and Andre Watts, the German born son of his father's army bride.

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<sup>98</sup>Hettie Jones, Black Star Fallin' Mama: Five Women in Black Music (New York: Viking Press, 1974), p. 124.

It is unfortunate that most children would not read this book from cover to cover. Hopefully the need for research information would lead them here, for the book has much to say in addition to simple Black success stories. In addition to making your mark, these artists point out you need to be comfortable with you and what you are.

Arroyo counsels, "Another thing is you should keep your mind free and don't worry about being black. That's no problem--it's a simple fact . . . . Just let it be and don't try to change it."<sup>99</sup>

Ailey makes a strong point for racial cooperation when commenting on blacks and whites performing together . . . "eight black ones and four white ones--and the audience is applauding for everybody. And whether they know it or not, they are applauding the idea that people should get together."<sup>100</sup>

The author of Stevie Wonder concentrates on documenting his meteoric rise to fame, rather than white establishment pressures. For a child born into the ghetto, premature, and blind due to incubator problems, things eventually almost miraculously fall into line. He picks up music almost

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<sup>99</sup>Raoul Abdul, Famous Black Entertainers of Today (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1974), p. 35.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

incidentally and has the mixed benefit of the sponsorship of a Black orientated recording company, Motown. Stevie stayed with them because,

It is a Black company and I felt we as a people needed something, and had something we could be very, very proud of; and that it was representing a kind of music, a kind of contribution that we had to give to the world . . . It didn't have anything to do with prejudice. It just deals with pride."<sup>101</sup>

Three out of the four sports books considered fall into the same category--the celebration of the triumph of a single sports event.

Ali deals with his see-sawing chase of the World Boxing Championship, O. J. Simpson: Football's Record Rusher details his pursual of Jim Brown's yardage achievements, and Hank Aaron enumerates the extenuating and anecdotal circumstances of Babe Ruth's demise.

All three encourage the reader to take on the odds. All emphasize that hard work and determination make things happen.

Although none of the three books concentrate on early childhood disadvantages, O. J. does comment, "Coming out of the ghetto, everything is geared to athletics . . . but it was always sports that kept us out of trouble."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>C. Dragonwagon, Stevie Wonder (New York: Flash Books, 1977), p. 40.

<sup>102</sup>Larry Felser, O. J. Simpson: Football's Record Rusher (New York: Scholastic Books, 1974), p. 10.

As a kid, O. J. personally told Jim Brown that the record would someday be his. He ought to know.

Wilma documents one personal struggle to overcome a physical handicap (polio crippled leg), a child out of wedlock, the pressures put on a person who achieves some success, and finally the void of what after the Olympics. Where does one go now?

Wilma crosses all racial lines and geographic boundaries. It is a book that not only provides a model for Black girls, but for any girl living and competing in today's world.

The last category was probably the most interesting to this writer. Here one gets to experience a day to day existence and walk in the shoes of ordinary individuals.

Slave to Abolitionist: Life of W. W. Brown traces the path of a half-breed born into a privileged level of house slave. His status provides him with travel opportunities and he successfully escapes. Eventually he becomes literate, helps innumerable others to freedom, and becomes a prominent lecturer in England.

To truly succeed in this time period however, one truly did need to be white. On Brown's return to America, after his freedom had been duly purchased from his master, he still was denied the normalities he enjoyed in England. He was still told that only whites could ride.

Always Movin' On: The Life of Langston Hughes jolts one immediately with the fact that his family's problems were rooted in the fact that both parents had some education; his father was a lawyer and his mother a law clerk. Who was able to pay for a Black lawyer? Hughes life consisted of being bounced from spot to spot: Mexico, New York (Harlem), Europe, and Russia. He never saw much of his father's eventual wealth, but made a formidable contribution to literature on his own merits; true to his beliefs.

The tape recorded recollections of a black woman who lived 110 years, from slavery through the 60's, is the basis of The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman.

Although technically in a secondary position to whites most of her life, Jane takes on the white establishment individually as she speaks her mind with her sharp tongue.

Life becomes more balanced for her after her charge Ned goes west to school. She takes a husband, responsibilities are shared, and together they raise his two daughters as a family unit.

Ned, returning as a preacher/teacher, promotes professional aspirations amongst the children, in addition to B. T. Washington's emphasis on trades for their people.

The scent of change and promise permeates the book. Jane differentiates among her people too. "Our own black

people had put us up in pens like hogs, waiting to sell us into slavery."<sup>103</sup> She calls it as she sees it, regardless of a person's color.

Ned echoes her feelings, "A Black American cares, and will always struggle. Everyday that he gets up he hopes that this day will be better. The Nigger knows it won't. That's another thing about a nigger: he knows everything."<sup>104</sup>

For the very mature reader there is All God's Dangers, the life of Nate Shaw. Even randomly selected pages recognize injustices for what they are, interspersed with a tremendous source of humanistic philosophy. Selected sections might be serialized for classroom use.

All eleven sources deal with the humanity and personality of the individual in addition to their accomplishments. The individuals are real, believable, and touchable.

These sources have quantities to say to everyone--white or black--young or old. They are a plus for the world of literature.

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<sup>103</sup>Ernest J. Gaines, Autobiography of Miss Jane Pitman (New York: Dial Press, 1971), p. 108.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

Fiction--Black as Secondary Character

Eight books of the fiction sample treated a Black character as a segment of the story line, but other than the main character. In most cases the Black character was then subject to the wishes of the white characters, and his outcome was decided by the white establishment.

Integration comes to town in The Preacher's Kid via busing Blacks from a neighboring area. Linda's father, the preacher, is eventually forced out of his parish for refusing to support the boycott of the school. Blacks are definitely portrayed as the problem, causing property values to go down. Violence is about to break out as the School Board backs down and they are sent to another town. Linda is one of the few who went to school and learned, "that if everything is quiet and everyone wants to learn, it doesn't matter how many kids there are in your class or what color they are. You can learn just the same."<sup>105</sup> A point is made, but at what price?

In To The Green Mountain, Kath helps her mother to see the futility of an unhappy marriage and later escape to Grandma's house in Vermont. The Black friends, the head waiter, Grant and his wife Tish are destroyed by the help Elizabeth tries to provide. In providing law books for

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<sup>105</sup>Rose Blue, The Preacher's Kid (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1975), pp. 34-35.



Grant's lifetime dream, Elizabeth unknowingly destroys the young couple's marriage, fostering what Tish feels are hopeless dreams.

All Blacks in the book are regarded as secondary citizens by most of the population, as lazy, existing mainly to have babies.

The hotel itself was characterized as "full of crazy niggers who either never report on schedule or get drunk on the job and cut each other up."<sup>106</sup>

Although neither Kath nor Elizabeth let this type of comment go unrebuked, they indirectly were the cause of their unhappiness, and the author leaves one feeling they would have been better not befriending them.

The current television show, "James at 15," is the basis of Friends' plot. James is relocated to Boston due to his father's job. He must make all the necessary adjustments in the middle of the school year when cliques have already formed and teams have already been picked.

Sly enters the picture with "Have no fear, Brother Sly is here."<sup>107</sup> A walking stereotype with jive talk, flashy clothes, and imitation marijuana cigarettes to sell, he finds acceptance from neither racial group. The other Blacks are bussed; he is not. He drops that his parents are into music, giving the reader visions of Ike and Tina Turner.

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<sup>106</sup>Eleanor Cameron, To The Green Mountains (New York: Dutton, 1975), p. 7.

<sup>107</sup>April Smith, Friends (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1978), p. 25.

In reality, his home is a warm modern apartment, his parents educated, traveled, and gracious. "The music his parents were into heavy turned out to be a Haydn string quartet."<sup>108</sup>

Even James and Marlene, considered good friends, expect he could defend them with a blade. "Sure any pale kids figure a Black has a blade. Think he was born with one on him."<sup>109</sup>

James ties Sly into the group, makes him a part, and tries to see him as he really is, when Sly lets him.

The Black character in Dog Days of Arthur Cane does briefly but directly affect the action and then never reappears. Arthur makes some derogatory comments regarding the music and shaman beliefs of an African foreign exchange student. Offended, the African replies, "It may not have entered your mind, but all things you've been calling crap and superstition are a basic part of my religion."<sup>110</sup> A little bit of dust, some chants, and the next morning Arthur wakes up as a dog, and lives as one for a month.

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>110</sup>Ernesto T. Bethancourt, The Dog Days of Arthur Cane (New York: Holiday House, 1976), p. 6.

A Black family briefly harbors him since the dog stopped a burglary in progress at their home. Their home is identified as being on the wrong side of the tracks, the father is a jack of all trades, who realizes that "nobody up in Manorsville was going to trust a Black man with a thousand dollar color TV combo, no matter how many diplomas he has."<sup>111</sup>

The Thank You, Jackie Robinson, is for a signed baseball for Davy, the Black cook, who is dying of heart problems. The hotel owner's son, Sammy, is befriended by Davy, and they share their common love, baseball.

Unfortunately the story of this warm friendship treats segregation as normal, calmly passing restaurants they cannot enter, and sending Sammy in for ice cream while Davy waits in the car.

Virginia Hamilton's Arilla Sun Down intersperses white and Black characters without much identification. Arilla's mother is a Black woman who runs a dance studio very successfully. She is portrayed as graceful, attractive, and creative. She is also the more stable of the two parents. Father retreats to his Indian home periodically and someone goes to bring him back.

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

This writer is unclear as to the author's purpose in the portrayal of one Black parent. It does not seem to add or detract from the story.

In Sour Land Moses Waters buys two acres of land near his new job teaching in the local Black school. He earns the friendship of the Stones, his neighbors, rebuilds his house, and makes the surrounding land bloom.

Even though he plays down his presence and his achievements, minds his own business, and ignores insults and damage, his success is too much for the local crackers to bear. He is killed in his own home, set up to look like a suicide.

Trying to avoid a confrontation solved no problems, but rather cost him his life and the Stones a precious friend.

The last selection to be considered in this group almost demands a category of its own. For in Mary Dove, a man falls in love, weeks later realizes he loves a "nigger," almost succumbs to the pressures of the righteous Christian world, but in the last analysis recognizes he loves a person, not a color.

Mary Dove asks a timeless question of Red, when he explains about "niggers" and whites. "But is it God's law? . . . Or is it people's law?"<sup>112</sup> Red cannot answer her question. He does stand by her as they leave to find a place where someone's law will recognize their love.

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<sup>112</sup>Janes Gilmore Rushing, Mary Dove (New York: Avon-Herst Corp., 1974), p. 180.

Four out of the sample of eight, portray the Black as inferior to the white character, and the cause of the problem.

Non-Racist Fiction--Black as Main Character

The remaining fiction in the sample features a Black as the main character or a totally Black segment of society. They are situations in which the Black reader sees many of his people and sometimes can recognize himself.

Fifteen of these this writer felt could be classified as non-racist. This must be qualified by adding that in some cases, individual specific aspects of the book might be objectionable, but when viewed as a total entity, the book performed a positive service for the representation of Blacks in literature. Specific objections will be noted as they apply.

Mathis' Listen for the Fig Tree is a touching story of a blind girl left to take care of a despairing mother after the Christmas Eve murder of her father.

The book makes a strong case for pride in Blackness featuring the celebration of the African holiday, Kwanza. At the same time that Muff realizes that it was Blacks who killed her father, and attacked her, there are the many who make her strong. "To be Black was to be strong, to have

courage, to survive. And it wasn't a alone thing. It was family."<sup>113</sup>

A family extremely aware of being Black is found in Boss Cat. When Mom objects to a black cat on the basis of bad luck, Dad explodes, "People like us have no business saying anything is bad 'cause it's black.' It's them other people who are always talking about:

blackball

blackmail

blacklist

blackmarket . . .

We ought to know better!"<sup>114</sup>

And the cat wisely catches the mice and wins the right to stay.

"I think I'll name him Pharoah, after the royal kings of Egypt who were black like us."<sup>115</sup>

This writer found the mention of superstition the only drawback to this book. Mom announces, "I will just run down to the House of Occult Help and get me some All

<sup>113</sup>Sharon Bell Mathis, Listen for the Fig Tree (New York: Viking Press, 1974), p. 170.

<sup>114</sup>Kristin Hunter, Boss Cat (New York: Camelot Books, 1971), p. 10.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

Purpose Jinx Removing Spray."<sup>116</sup> It seemed an odd contrast to the previously mentioned awareness statements.

A positive, though atypical situation surrounds the reader on the Planet of Jr. Brown. Buddy takes his overweight, pathetically unhappy and emotionally disturbed friend under his wing to protect him from an overly-possessive mother and the truant officer. This involves setting him up in a deserted building with other homeless boys under the protection of their "Tomorrow Billy" who coordinates the food, available clothes, and money.

Although the situation is unlikely, the organization and detailed plan make it easy to believe. One can't help but respond to the warm feelings for each other, and the common bond of caring.

A book totally unique in the sample is Fitzhugh's Nobody's Family Is Going to Change. Emma's father fought his way out of the ghetto into law school and "rescued" her mother from a family of dancers. His family seems determined to thwart his plans for them. His son, who father directs to be a lawyer, wants to dance professionally. Emma, the overweight bookworm, wants to be the lawyer! This forces Mother out of a docile submissive position to challenge William on Willie's right to dance.

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

This book does provide a mirror for the middle and upper economic class Blacks who must get very tired of reading about a ghetto they have never seen.

The last book of Graham's trilogy falls into this study's copyright limits. Return to South Town finds David Williams ready to open a family practice in his old home town. He is thwarted by old family enemies who try to prevent his licensing in the state.

David takes on the white establishment and succeeds with the help of both local Blacks and whites. He proves that time has changed some things and some people.

Wendell Scott also took on the white establishment and had many a laugh on them too. In Greased Lightning he uses the profits from running moonshine to support his family and his race car. Wendell becomes one of the first Black stock car drivers where he had to deal with whites who felt that "the worst insult of all was to be behind a nigger in a hometown Plymouth."<sup>117</sup>

Unfortunately the officials manage to deny him the fanfare of being declared winner of the big race. A timing error is blamed, and although he does receive the full dollar amount in prize money, the reporters and fans had long ago gone home. The white establishment won again.

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<sup>117</sup>Kenneth Vose and Lawrence DuKore, Greased Lightning (New York: Warner Books, 1977), p. 129.



Hey Big Spender provides another unlikely but positive situation. Breathing Man decides to dispense his inheritance to those in need. Free money is available to whoever is the neediest of the day. Sore losers become violent however, and Auntie saves the day by directing the money into foster homes to help kids when they most need it.

Three books deal with a child taking matters into his own hands to solve an immediate problem. Written for the below average reader, all three encourage action and being your own person. JD is wise beyond his years in caring for himself and his friends in the housing project. Lilly Etta summons a reporter to rescue her friend's furniture from where the evictors dumped it on the street. (Sideway Story). And Dolph's project to rescue a stray dog and her six pups eventually rehabilitates a drifter and involves the entire neighborhood in a clean-up project. (Cockleburr Quarters).

One's heart is easily stolen away by Beth in Philip Hall Likes Me--I Reckon Maybe. True love motivates her to allow Philip to be best at everything until a scholarship to veterinarian school is in the offering. Capturing the turkey thief and winning the prize for the best calf at the 4-H Fair are only two of her feats. She is a positive person who makes things happen.

Marcia deals with a fourteen year old tottering on the brink of adult problems. The book would be questionable by some due to content--mainly premarital sex. There are strong points however in that the problem is discussed openly with her mother, and Marcia knows she is deciding some items which will affect her future. "I'm gonna defend myself by waitin' till I can give my child the things I want easily before I have one. I'm gonna wait till I go to school and wait till I live with a good man that wants what I want and will help me get it."<sup>118</sup>

The book ends with her mother promising to take her to the doctor for contraceptives.

Hamilton's M. C. Higgins the Great is located on Sarah's Mountain where Grandma fled to escape slavery. M. C. spends a good part of the story contemplating life from the top of his flag pole and hoping for a miracle to wish them all away to the big city.

By the end of the summer he realizes that people need to make things happen as he works to protect the house from the strip miner's spill, and plans a job for next year.

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<sup>118</sup>John Steptoe, Marcia (New York: Viking Press, 1976), p. 76.

Hamilton deals with superstition but attributes the power to the redheaded Killburns, the neighbors. Jones, M. C.'s father, is adamant that a Killburn should not touch his family. M. C. learns that there is nothing to fear, and eventually stops hiding his friendship with the family.

The Logans are a family who walk a thin line their entire life. Taylor's Roll of Thunder: Hear My Cry portrays a Black family who owns their own land, whose mother is a teacher, and who yet must fight to retain what they have all their lives. The whites have the best school, the only buses, and run the stores. An attempt by the Logans to divert the tenant's shopping into another town only furthers the white wrath, and causes foreclosure of their mortgage.

Although the Logans always do survive, and bounce back, the indignities they are subjected to are demeaning and definitely racist.

All books in this section of the sample generally present a positive experience for the Black reader looking for a mirror of himself, and for the white reader who is exploring a new section of the world.

As long as the reader, regardless of race, has some guidelines in mind while reading, some awareness of human prejudices, the total reading experience will be a positive one.

Racist Fiction--Black as the Main Character

Since the evaluation sheet dealt with nine individual areas, difficulties arose when deciding at what point a book passed over the line into a racist portrayal. The final decision is largely directed by what is personally offensive to the reader, as an individual.

This writer based the final decision on three points:

1. The characters portrayed were unbelievable or unrealistic to the Black of today's world. The characters portrayed were demeaned and treated as less than a human being.
2. The story line revolved around and reinforced the hopelessness of the Black situation.
3. The non-Black reader would receive an unrealistic and unjustifiably derogatory picture of what a Black person is. The book increases prejudice and worsens stereotypes.

These, combined with unfavorable ratings in multiple categories, eliminated the book.

Donahue's Spitballs and Holy Water dealt with the days of Black League baseball in a hypothetical best of seven series with the New York Yankees. The Klu Klux Klan and the Catholic Church have heavy bets riding on the outcome. The secret is a Black nun who has the power to stop time, and the baseball. This writer questions where a child of today's generation could see himself in this storyline.

Even though the underdogs have many laughs along the way, the reader is dragged through segregation of teams, trains, hotels, and private parties, loaded vocabulary sprinkled with nigger and constant remarks on their laziness and pride in submissiveness, and even reflections on the sexual superiorities of the race.

The adolescent reader of the 70's does not need to be told "Niggers supposed to be barefoot, boy."<sup>119</sup>

One wonders at the 1977 copyright. It cannot be a celebration of the good old days.

Peaches lives in Harlem with an extended family; her grandmother is closest to her. She perpetuates stereotypes as she steals with her cousin, justified as everyone does it, and learns to live her life around the fortunes of playing the numbers. Superstition is tied in as dreams are diagnosed in the book.

"I dream about fish, when you dream about fish means someone pregnant. . ."

"Fish, give 554, Ma . . ."

"554, I'll play it for a dollar combination."<sup>120</sup>

Although she is a fine student, and a good artist, she is constantly discouraged from that field. Not only

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<sup>119</sup>James F. Donahue, Spitballs and Holy Water (New York: Avon Books, 1977), p. 87.

<sup>120</sup>Dindga McCannon, Peaches (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1974), p. 73.

will she starve she is told, but "for a black girl you've chosen a peculiar profession."<sup>121</sup> Does this imply unskilled labor is the norm?

Although Ludell and Willie's strong love and respect for each other are commendable, the rest of the book seems to conspire against the reader.

This is one of the few books whose illustrations are questionable, bordering on white people colored gray.

The lifestyle is contrasted unfavorably with white suburbia, making poverty, sporadic electric and water service, and multiple children sleeping in one room commonplace.

Money is identified as the norm to limit one's goals. But calmly accepted are wealthy (Black and white) getting undeserved better grades and honors, and the better schools plus priority time on the football fields go to the whites. No one seems to question this procedure.

All speak in a deep dialect and slang, which at several points was difficult to follow.

But the bottom line is the lack of change attempted by the characters. They pledge their togetherness, but Ludell's writing ambitions and Willie's physical education coach dreams go calmly down the drain. And the cycle goes on . . .

Finally the following four books lump one hopeless situation on top of another to the extent that realism suffers.

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

If Beale Street Could Talk, it would tell of the hopelessness of Tish's love for her struggling artist, Fonny. Almost immediately after they plan to marry, he is arrested and jailed for rape, she finds herself pregnant, the rape victim returns to Puerto Rico preventing an immediate trial, his parents separate, and his father, caught stealing, commits suicide.

The odds are staggering. Is this realistic? We don't need to prove again that, "The kids had been told that they weren't worth shit and everything they saw around them proved it."<sup>122</sup>

Teacup Full of Roses dwells on a mother's devotion to one son to the total exclusion of two others and a disabled husband. In an effort to free Paul from heroin, Joe's savings are squandered and the brilliant David is senselessly killed in a street fight with the junkie.

Although Joe tries to point out that "everybody black got a heavy need,"<sup>123</sup> Davy prefers to ignore the positives and dwell on "You tell nice stories. But it's never going to help you for real, when you're black--it'll just be something you can do! . . . Black talent, even Black genius talent, may get you nothing!"<sup>124</sup> Could it also get one everything?

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<sup>122</sup>James Baldwin, If Beale Street Could Talk (New York: Signet-Dial Press,) 1974), p. 45.

<sup>123</sup>Sharon Bell Mathis, Teacup Full of Roses (New York: Viking Press, 1974), p. 58.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

Drugs also make for a thirteen year old junkie in A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich. However Benjie himself attacks Blacks--"My people, my people, y'all some bad luck sad ass niggas."<sup>125</sup> Later, "Nobody digs niggas either, not even other niggas."<sup>126</sup> Not true.

In addition, the setting is solely the ghetto, with all undesirable aspects emphasized. What about the majority of Blacks today? What about where they live?

His Own Where is exactly that--a place where reality cannot touch and the reader finds it near impossible to follow. Again the situation builds in negatives, her father beats her, his father is dying in a hospital. Her mother wants no part of her; his mother ran away.

Somehow today's reader seems too aware to fall for the escapism created here. The problems still will have to be dealt with someday.

#### Contrast of Black/White Perspective

Loretta Life, a Black librarian at Steven Bull Elementary School in Racine, agreed to read and evaluate ten

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<sup>125</sup>Alice Childress, A Hero Ain't Nothin' But A Sandwich (New York: Avon Corp., 1973), p. 91.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., p. 88.



books from the sample. The books were selected by random, to include both fiction and biographies.

When Ms. Life's evaluations were compared with this writer's, great similarities were found. Her comments did shed light on the topic and were thought provoking.

Representing autobiographies was Wilma and Henry Aaron. Both writers concur in the positive portrayal of these two individuals, and in the wide appeal of these books for all races. Also noted by both was the quality and abundance of photographs which made the books both attractive and clear as to content.

Although Ms. Life rated both books as positive for a child's self-esteem, she noted, "The biographee's relationship to the power structure is equivalent to that of all Blacks' relationship. Aaron succeeds as do all of his Black brothers and sisters--through hard work and a lot of suffering."<sup>127</sup> This writer submits that this is a white affliction also.

Ms. Life had no major objections to the majority of the books evaluated by her. She concurred with this writer's ratings unless specifically indicated.

Philip Hall Likes Me--I Reckon Maybe received special praise as "Beth's problem could be the problem of any child her age."<sup>128</sup> We concurred in the need for universal statements for all readers, books that speak across color lines.

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<sup>127</sup>Loretta Life, Henry Aaron, evaluation sheet.

<sup>128</sup>Loretta Life, Philip Hall, evaluation sheet.

Rated superior by both writers was Nobody's Family Is Going To Change. Cited especially as presenting a strong proud family, this book presented an alternative to the ghetto or southern setting.

Three books, Listen For the Fig Tree, Return to South Town, and Roll of Thunder: Hear My Cry, although ranked high by this writer, were qualified because the storyline portrayed the power in the hands of the white establishment. Ms. Life concurred with this observation, but maintained it was "only as appropriate for the time and place of the story."<sup>129</sup> Since at least one situation was fairly contemporary (Fig Tree), this writer was hopeful that less of this would be found in future publications.

Ms. Life pointed out that all three books provided some examples of fairness and equality triumphing. "Acts of racism always leave one feeling negative about oneself if the acts are persistent, however, it is a 'positive' to see a victim win over racism."<sup>130</sup> These books provided that opportunity.

The discussion of the shamen in Dog Days of Arthur Cane received special note on both writers' forms. This writer was impressed with James' pride in his culture,

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<sup>129</sup>Loretta Life, Roll of Thunder, evaluation sheet.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

willingness to stand up for it, and the obvious responsibility he felt to return, in this hereditary role, to his people. At the same time, one questioned whether the author was slipping into the superstitious negro stereotype and the so-called Black magic.

Ms. Life discounted this. "To me, the African, James N'Gaiveh, did an excellent job of defining for the reader the role of the 'witch doctor' in his culture and comparing him (favorably) with the medical doctor as we know him."<sup>131</sup>

Earlier this writer had objected to the menial position and inferior attitudes lavished on the Blacks in To The Green Mountain. In one of her stronger statements, Ms. Life pursues this. "The name-calling and stereotypes should not have been passed over as just 'unacceptable.' Why they are unacceptable should have been made clear. Otherwise the reader is left to believe that these things are just socially incorrect, but are not offensive. This particular novel makes no attempt to eradicate the stereotypes."<sup>132</sup>

The final book in Ms. Life's sample was Marcia, which dealt heavily with a girl's decision regarding pre-marital sex. Ms. Life did indicate a positive reaction to the book and its affects on a child's self-image.

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<sup>131</sup>Loretta Life, Dog Days of Arthur Cane, evaluation sheet.

<sup>132</sup>Loretta Life, To The Green Mountain, evaluation sheet.

This writer questioned what affects this selection would have on the white reader. Although Marcia makes some strong points, which are well thought out, one wonders if a generalization on the morals of a racial group might inadvertently be promoted.

Out of the ten books jointly evaluated, only one revealed a notable difference in reaction. This was in response to the shamen in Dog Days. Could this writer be suffering from oversensitivity to the subject? This writer would prefer that to the other alternative.

## CHAPTER V

### WHAT CAN WE DO TO EFFECT CHANGE?

We ask that each of you begin to consider what you can do to create an environment for children that will promote a better understanding of the white relationship to Black people and to other minorities. None of us can afford to be complacent. It is not enough to convey to our children the rhetoric of respect for all human beings when so much of their experiences in the real world and the world of books inculcates a belief in the natural superiority of white people. We must each begin, in some small way, to try to change the nature of that experience!<sup>133</sup>

People generate change. Change does not and cannot occur in a vacuum. Individuals must now take the realistic literature available, and deliver it to the young readers of this generation.

As the home is the source of the child's attitudes and habits, the home is the logical place for generating wide reading habits. The concerned parent has many means at his disposal to promote the discovery of Blacks in literature.

Latimer makes specific suggestions:

1. Ask yourself what you can do in your own home to ensure that your family is exposed to a culturally diverse environment. Consider ways of integrating the visual experiences of your children and

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<sup>1</sup>Latimer, Starting, p. 26.

yourself--not only through books, but also through pictures, magazines, and toys.

2. Make an effort to ensure that your local libraries have multiple copies of good books involving Black people . . . at every age level. This could involve children through book discussion groups. Choosing Books About Black People for Young Children is suggested as a guide for exceptional books on this topic.
3. Be sure that multiple copies of good books involving Blacks are available in your schools. The Parent-Teacher Association would be an effective arm to implement this suggestion.
4. When you come across a particularly good book involving Black people, write a letter to the publisher letting him know that you value and encourage such efforts. It is equally important that you inform publishers if they have published a book that is particularly harmful.
5. Organize a book club which can make a concerted campaign for better and more integrated literature for the young. Interracial Books for Children is an excellent source for new titles and related activities.
6. Take advantage of whatever opportunities are available to increase your own understanding of the history and experiences of Black people through courses in Black history, lectures, movies, and discussion groups.<sup>134</sup>

Tate builds on this by adding that teachers, librarians, and parents should "read adult titles to understand some of the complex and varied levels of racial consciousness existing among Blacks."<sup>135</sup> She infers here that the white reader needs to build background in order to

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<sup>134</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-27.

<sup>135</sup>Tate, In House, p. 3598.

evaluate children's books effectively. Otherwise subtle prejudices will be perpetuated rather than eradicated.

Tate also speaks to the pressures we can bring to bear as consumers. If we demand Black periodicals in suburban libraries, and book stands, they will become available. Much of the effectiveness of these magazines is lost if their reading audience is limited to predominantly Black segments of society.<sup>136</sup>

Consumer pressure can also bring about increased exposure for Blacks in magazines such as Vogue, Mademoiselle, and Glamour. Children need to consistently see Blacks as part of the mainstream of our society, not just waiting in the wings. This would include the appearance of more Black models and articles by and about outstanding Negroes, who are identified as such.<sup>137</sup>

Sadker and Sadker emphasize the importance of being honest with young readers. Caution is expressed as to censorship. Television and all related media have more than made children aware of the world they live in. This same realistic portrayal should be found in the books they read. The reading material of young adults should honestly

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<sup>136</sup>Binnie Tate, "Integrating Culture: A Credo for Believers," Library Journal 94 (May 15, 1967):2053.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

reflect the social situation of their time.

Sadker and Sadker urge adults to "share with kids the progress we've made. These mirrors of the past provide educators with potential learning experiences."<sup>138</sup>

A practical suggestion here is to teach children/or/ adolescents to check publication dates when selecting literature of any type.<sup>139</sup> Young readers need to realize that just as a 1930 publication date restricts information for their social studies report, it has some implications for their recreational reading also.

This calls for genuine involvement in and awareness of what one's children are reading. It also calls for parents to put aside some personal prejudices. It is a call to:

Dare to face reality. And then: dare to deal with it. Parents must analyze their own fears and inhibitions about race and color, then do their utmost not to pass them on to their children. This is not easy. It takes courage. It takes good will. It takes a strong belief in the inherent goodness of man.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Sadker and Sadker, Now Upon, p. 135.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

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Phyllis Harrison-Ross and Barbara Wyden, The Black Child: A Parent's Guide (New York: Peter H. Wyden Inc., 1973), p. 319.



## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Generalizations Based on Evaluative Instrument

The formality of an evaluation sheet did have some disadvantages for this writer. The format became cumbersome in the need to deal with several pertinent questions in a small space. In addition, the check columns were restrictive and frustrating in some borderline cases.

However the questions presented were relevant, and did produce some worthwhile generalizations.

With few exceptions the illustrations were true to life, and realistic portrayals of African characteristics. The scarcity of illustrations was apparent however. Only the biographies contained large numbers of photos. The publishers need to be reminded that adolescents are still highly attracted to a book by its cover. When the cover and/or the title gives little or no indication of the characters within, a large potential reading audience walks right by.

Although the storyline presented adequate chances to observe Black society, white power still shines through.

This writer is aware of the certain amount of truthfulness to this; however one wonders why the Black mayors, businessmen, professors, and policemen are hidden, never to surface.

More objectional to this writer is an author's tendency to present the Blacks in extreme situations. Not only is the reader alerted to junkies, rapes, blindness, poverty, pregnancies, and street wars, but often one character is submerged by three or four of these problems in as many chapters. This writer does not doubt that a certain percentage of people, Black and white, live lives like this, but who is speaking to the growing middle class? What are these books saying to the white reader who is encountering Blacks for the first time? Does this tell the ghetto child of the options to be had elsewhere?

An adolescent gleams his goals from what he sees around him. An itemization of the occupations attributed to Blacks found in the fiction sample, found only five characters out of forty identified holding professional positions. The remainder fell mainly into a menial labor category. This writer submits that this does nothing to encourage goals as realistic and attainable. The fiction often cited professions as the goal of the child, but rarely made visible an adult success story.

One of the main contentions of the research was that only a Black person could realistically portray the Black

experience. Out of the twenty fiction authors Something About The Author provided information on, twelve were either pictured or identified in the text as being Black. It is this writer's observation that the Black author tends to base his storyline on the ghetto life. Is this the totality of the Black experience?

One can also conclude that some encouragement is being given to Black authors, as they make up more than half of the groups for whom information was available.

The necessity to enlarge the copyright span to have a representative sample points out that books with Black characters are still few and far between. This writer doubts that the typical adolescent would spend the time she did to locate a mirror image of themselves. Few book racks in stores even today contain a title for this segment of the reading public.

After discussing the void of materials produced in this decade with Thomas J. Ziegler of North Central Book Distributors, he advised that the "movement is dying out."<sup>141</sup> This writer feels very strongly that this cannot be allowed to happen. The law of supply and demand can reverse these tendencies. The consumer must begin to demand!

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<sup>141</sup>Interview of Thomas J. Ziegler, North Central Book Distributors, 7000 South Lover's Lane Road, Hales Corners, Wisconsin, 31 March 1978.

Ironically, a more recent copyright date did not necessarily indicate a quality approach or enlightened storyline. One of the books this writer found most offensive, Spitballs and Holy Water, has a 1977 copyright.

One stereotype which the majority of the books in the sample support is that of the dominant single female head of family--either an abandoned mother or a grandmother who is raising a second or third family. The children even comment on the subtle feeling of abandonment or the father's rationale for leaving. There is a strong need for more dual parented families.

Dialect seemed to come and go in the fiction sample. Characters often spoke to each other with dropped verbs or suffixes, and then moments later reflected silently to themselves in standard English. Rarely was dialect overplayed or unintelligible.

"Nigger" did reoccur, probably most sadly in Mary Dove where Red is insulting her without either of them realizing it. Unfortunately in most usages it went unrebuked or as Ms. Life pointed out, unexplained. This stronghold of slave days too frequently creeps back into contemporary literature.

Perhaps the strongest point of the books in the sample is that they take issue with and confront the white establishment. Sometimes they win--not often enough--but sometimes. It is our hope for tomorrow.

### Conclusions

In summary, three conclusions are apparent.

First, as the literature indicated for previous reading generations, there is still a large void of books which feature Black characters or a segment of the Black society. An adolescent venturing into a library still will encounter problems finding a mirror of himself.

Second, the settings utilized definitely tend to prominently figure a ghetto existence. This could dangerously perpetuate a new stereotype of city slums rather than plantation cotton fields.

Third, the evaluation form of the Black and white evaluator when compared show no measurable or readily apparent discrepancies. Although this does not make a case for the credibility of the white authors, it does indicate that a non-minority person could conceivably, sensitively recommend and circulate books that are non-racist to both Black and white readers.

### Recommendations

This author's recommendations are three-fold:

1. All segments of the educational world: teachers, parents, librarians, and administrators, need to become more forceful in a demand for more books dealing with Black characters, especially in fiction. We must be more critical readers, circulating and recommending quality books, and confronting publishers with unacceptable offerings.

2. A demand must also rise for fiction which mirrors the Black who is not in the ghetto. This child wants to see himself also! In addition, the white reader deserves realistic information about all Blacks, especially the one with whom he is riding the school bus.

3. Libraries, especially in towns like Racine with a sizeable minority population, need to direct funds toward newer copyrights, rather than suggesting old stand-bys, like Souder, to today's reader. As fast as publishers make new titles acceptable, they need to be readily available to the reader.

Today's adolescent is more open-minded, and accepting than any generation before. Let's see that he can find honest food for thought.

APPENDIX

Book Title \_\_\_\_\_ Author \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

NINE QUICK WAYS TO ANALYZE BOOKS FOR RACISM

(Adopted from Council on Interracial Books for Children and Human and Anti-Human Values in Children's Books)

	Comments	Racist	Non-Racist
1. Check the illustrations.  a. Look for stereotypes.  b. Look for tokenism.  c. Look at the lifestyles. (Contrasted unfavorably with white suburbia?)			
2. Check the storyline.  a. Relationships. Do the whites have the power?  b. What does it take to succeed?  c. View point Are minority people considered to be the problem?			



	Comments	Racist	Non-Racist
3. Effects on child's self-image and self-esteem.  a. Are norms established which limit the child's aspirations and self-concepts?			
4. Consider the author's qualifications.			
5. Look at the copyright date.			
6. Note the relationships.  a. Is the Black mother always dominant?  b. How intact is the nuclear family?			
7. Watch for loaded words.  a. Watch for inappropriate use of dialect.			
8. Note the heroes and heroines.  a. Are they only ones who avoid conflict with the white establishment?			

Total Book:

OCCUPATIONS HELD BY BLACK CHARACTERS  
IN THE SAMPLE

Biographies

Entertainers . . . . .	3	Farmer . . . . .	1
Sports . . . . .	4	Speaker/ . . . . .	2
Slave . . . . .	1	Author	

Fiction

Unidentified . . . . .	4	Parks cars . . . . .	1
Soldier. . . . .	1	Steelmill worker . . . . .	1
Cleaning Lady. . . . .	2	Magazine stand . . . . .	1
Factory worker . . . . .	2	Dance school . . . . .	1
Race car driver. . . . .	1	Doctor . . . . .	1
Runs moonshine . . . . .	1	Lawyer . . . . .	1
Cab driver . . . . .	2	Baseball . . . . .	
Farmer . . . . .	3	player . . . . .	8
Railroad worker. . . . .	1	Cook . . . . .	2
Waiter/		Yardman. . . . .	1
Waitress. . . . .	2	TV Repairman . . . . .	1
Jazz Musician. . . . .	1	Teacher. . . . .	2
Concert pianist. . . . .	1	Tailor . . . . .	1
Radio announcer. . . . .	1	Work the docks . . . . .	1
Night watchman . . . . .	1		

AUTHOR QUALIFICATIONS

(As located in Something About the Author Vol. 1-12)

<u>Author</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Qualifications</u>
Armstrong	Black	Author of <u>Souder</u>
Baldwin	Black	Born in Harlem Spokesman for civil rights movement
Baker	White	Conservation
Bethencourt	Hispanic	Author of songs for inner city schools
Blue		Teaches in Bedford Stuyvesant Ten other books
Bonham	White	Author of <u>Durango Street</u> Research Los Angeles Watts area
Cameron	White	"Desire to instill magic in children" (1-43) (I:43)
Childress	Black	Born in Charleston, S.C. Grew up in Harlem American Negro Theatre--Ten years Harlem Writer's Guild
Cohen	White	English teacher
Evans	Black	Writes "Black Experience"--a weekly show. Received Black Academy of Arts & Letters Poetry Award
Fitzhugh	White	Full time author/illustrator
Graham	Black	Born in New Orleans Taught in Africa--met wife there
Greene	White	Grew up in Arkansas & Memphis
Hamilton	Black	Also author of <u>M.C. Higgens the Great &amp; Planet of Jr. Brown</u>
Hunter	Black	Lived in Philadelphia ghetto Used playmates as subjects Also author of <u>Soul Brothers and Sister Lou</u>
Jordan	Black	Born in Harlem Poet and teacher Co-founder of creative writing workshop for minority children in Brooklyn

<u>Author</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Qualifications</u>
McCannon	Black	Born in Harlem
Mathis	Black	Grew up in Bedford Stuyvesant Writes monthly column for <u>Ebony Jr.</u> "I write to salute Black kids"
Step toe	Black	Writer/illustrator "Who through his work hopes to convince children of the dignity and pride associated with all human endeavor" p. 82.
Taylor	Black	Born in Jackson, Mississippi Peace Corps--Ethiopia Structured Black Student Alliance

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