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# The Contributions of Alternative Press Publishers to Multicultural Literature for Children

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## ABSTRACT

ALTERNATIVE PRESS PUBLISHERS make important contributions to the field of multicultural literature by providing children with information and perspectives typically not found in books from corporate presses. This article profiles several alternative presses that currently publish for children and describes the nature of the literature each publishes. Particular attention is given to independent presses owned and operated by African-Americans and Native Americans.

## INTRODUCTION

Since 1980, the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has been systematically collecting children's books published by alternative presses. For the purposes of acquisition, the CCBC has defined "alternative press" as a small, independent publisher, unaffiliated with national or multinational corporations or organizations, whose major function is book publication" (Griffith & Seipp, 1982, p. 29).

By June 1992, the CCBC Alternative Press Collection contained more than 1,500 titles published since 1970 by 317 alternative presses in the United States and Canada. This noncirculating collection includes all in-print and out-of-print titles identified by the Special Collections Coordinator at the CCBC, making it the largest collection of alternative press children's books in the United States.

In addition to collecting the books, the Cooperative Children's Book Center also maintains information files for each alternative

press. The publisher file typically includes catalogs, booklists, and promotional material generated by the press; photocopies of book reviews; articles about the publisher; and correspondence between the publisher and the CCBC Special Collections Coordinator. These files are available to anyone engaged in research at the CCBC.

The CCBC Alternative Press Collection is as rich and diverse as any collection of children's books. It includes all genres—picture books, fiction, nonfiction, poetry, folklore, and drama. Quality ranges from poor to outstanding, just as it does with the books from corporate publishers. What makes many alternative press books distinctive is their point of view. Within the CCBC Alternative Press Collection, one finds a variety of perspectives and ideas, as well as types of information otherwise unavailable to children. This is especially true in the area of multicultural literature, where publishing by and about people of color is markedly different from that of corporate publishers. While the latter strive to appeal to general markets, alternative presses often aim for a smaller more cohesive audience publishing with a strength of purpose.

#### A COMMITMENT TO MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

One of the oldest children's alternative presses still in existence, Children's Book Press was founded in 1975 in response to the dearth of multicultural materials. While visiting her son's Head Start classroom in the San Francisco Mission district in 1973, Harriet Rohmer was surprised to see that, although most of the children were Hispanic, none of the books in the classroom reflected their lives or cultures. In an interview with Beverly Slapin (1987), Rohmer said, "I remember listening as the teacher read the book to the kids. It's a nice little book but certainly had nothing to do with the reality of these children, even the few of them who were white. So I felt I had to do something about it" (p. 7).

Rohmer delved into folklore archives looking for suitable stories from Central and South America which could be retold for children in Spanish and English. She worked with teachers and community members in the Mission District, asking them for their versions of the folktales. Once the stories had been written and rewritten in the two languages, Rohmer employed a collective of women muralists in San Francisco, *Mujeres Muralistas*, to illustrate the stories in bold vibrant colors. The result was a collection of ten brightly illustrated bilingual picture books in a folktale series called "Fifth World Tales." The stories were from diverse cultures, such as the Aztec of Mexico, the Taino of Puerto Rico, and the Yahgan of Chile. Not only did they provide much needed literature from Native American and

Hispanic traditions, they also served a need for bilingual and Spanish-language materials for children.

Rohmer soon branched out and published contemporary stories such as *My Aunt Otilia's Spirits=Los Espíritus de mi Tía Otilia* by Richard García (1978), as well as folktales and original stories from African-American, Asian American, and Native American traditions. Perhaps most distinctive, within the context of children's literature as a whole, are the stories Rohmer has published from Asian and Asian American sources. For example, two bilingual stories feature refugee children in the United States. Tran-Khánh-Tuyet's (1977) *The Little Weaver of Thai-Yen Village* is based on the true story of a Vietnamese girl whose family was killed in the war and who was brought to the United States for medical treatment. Said one reviewer: "The heroine's experiences are not the type that American children are generally exposed to in literature, but her agonizing reality is broadening without being harsh" (Ecklund, 1987, p. D-1). *Aekyung's Dream*, by Min Paek (1978), features a Korean immigrant girl frustrated by English and tired of classmates who call her "Chinese Eyes." More recently, Children's Book Press has published the folktale *Nine-In-One Grr! Grr!* by Blia Xiong (1989), the first children's story published in the United States from the Hmong people of Laos. Prior to coming to the United States, the Hmong, a minority culture within Laos, had no written language. *Nine-In-One Grr! Grr!* is a story Xiong recalled hearing her elders tell when she was a child in Laos. For Children's Book Press, it was adapted by storyteller Cathy Spagnoli and illustrated by Chinese American artist Nancy Hom who based her illustrations on the traditional style used by Hmong women in their intricate needlework known as "storycloths."

In 1992, seventeen years after the establishment of the publishing company, Children's Book Press has twenty-five titles in print, seven of which are also available with bilingual audiocassettes. Not only has Harriet Rohmer accomplished her goal of providing culturally meaningful picture books for children of new immigrant groups, in many cases the Children's Book Press titles continue to be the only titles available in the United States for young children which deal with a particular cultural group.

Several other alternative presses established in the United States by white women take a special interest in publishing multicultural literature for children, often as a natural outgrowth of the publisher's commitment to feminism and social change. Ruth Gottstein, who founded Volcano Press in 1976 with a special focus on women's issues and the Pacific Rim (Horning, 1988, p. 65), began to publish children's books in 1989. The first original children's title she published,

*Berchick* by Esther Silverstein Blanc, featured a Jewish homesteading family living in Wyoming at the turn of the century. While there are many works of historical fiction for children about homesteading families, Blanc's is unique for its inclusion of Jewish cultural details and values flawlessly woven into the action of the story. The three children's books published by Volcano since 1990 originated outside the United States. Irene Hedlund's (1990) *Mighty Mountain and the Three Strong Women* is a Japanese folktale first published in Denmark and translated into English for Volcano Press by Judith Elkin. In addition to providing an amusing tale from the Japanese oral tradition, it also serves as a feminist alternative to male-centered hero tales. While the story's protagonist, Mighty Mountain, is a sumo wrestler purported to be the strongest man in Japan, he is no match for the three generations of mountain women he meets on his way to the Emperor's wrestling match. Grandma, the strongest of the three, undertakes Mighty Mountain's training to get him in proper shape for the upcoming match.

Another children's book with a feminist perspective was published by Volcano in 1991. First published in Great Britain, *Mother Gave a Shout: Poems by Women and Girls* is a spirited multicultural anthology compiled by Susanna Steele and Morag Styles which includes original poems and traditional rhymes from a wide variety of times and cultures. Most recently, Volcano has published the U.S. edition of an unusual illustrated story originally published in Sweden. *Save My Rainforest*, by Monica Zak (1992), is based on the true story of Omar Castillo, an eight-year-old Mexican boy who walked 870 miles from Mexico City to the Selva Lacadona, the last remaining rain forest in Mexico. Since his pilgrimage, Omar (who is now eleven years old) continually appeals to Mexican government officials, advocating on behalf of children who want to inherit the natural beauty of the Mexican rain forest. Omar's battle is far from over; after he marched around the presidential residence 200 times, the president invited him in to talk but has not given Omar much more than an audience. Although *Save My Rainforest* does not have the neat happy ending a fictional children's story might have, it does give children hope that they can advocate for themselves and work together to change things.

Children's Book Press and Volcano Press are representative of small independent publishers owned and operated by white women who are committed to producing anti-sexist, anti-racist literature for children. Other presses that fall into this category are Lollipop Power of Carrboro, North Carolina; New Seed Press of Berkeley, California; and Open Hand Publishing of Seattle, Washington. All of these presses have been in existence for at least ten years and were publishing

multicultural literature during a time when corporate publishing houses were saying there was no market for it. In a series of interviews about censorship conducted by Mark I. West in 1987, African-American author/artist John Steptoe cited the "no market" excuse as a subtle form of censorship:

After doing this type of work for nearly 20 years, I've concluded that the industry is inherently hostile toward blacks....When you talk with [publishers] about it, they usually squirm and make excuses. There are exceptions, of course, but most of them will say, "We would publish more books by blacks, but it's company policy to only publish established authors." Or, "We would like to, but we have not seen any good manuscripts lately." Or, "We would like to, but books about blacks don't sell very well any more." These problems may well be true, but there is more than one way to react to them. You can choose to hide behind them, or you can work to solve them....In retrospect, those years [the late 1960s and early 1970s] when publishers welcomed blacks amounted to a little more than a flash in the pan. Since then the number of black picture book authors is almost back to where it was before. (p. 108)

Statistics compiled at the Cooperative Children's Book Center from 1985 to 1992 support Steptoe's claim about the small numbers of children's books published in the mid-to-late 1980s which were written and illustrated by African-Americans. Of approximately 2,500 books published in the United States for children and young adults in 1985 and 1986, only 18 in each year were written and/or illustrated by African-Americans; in 1987, there were 30 out of 3,000 titles; in 1988, 39 out of 3,000; in 1989, 48 out of 4,500; and in 1990, 51 out of 5,000 (Kruse & Horning, 1991, p. vii).

The early 1990s showed a slight increase in the percentage of books by African-American book creators. In 1991, of the 4,000 books published, 70 were written and/or illustrated by African-Americans (Horning, et al., 1992, p. 1). A further breakdown of these statistics (see Table 1), however, reveals the significance of alternative press publishing.

TABLE 1  
CHILDREN'S BOOKS BY AFRICAN-AMERICANS

	1989	1990	1991
Total number of books by African-Americans	48	51	70
Total number of books by African-Americans published by alternative presses	9	9	16
Total number of books by African-Americans published by African-American presses	7	5	14

Although children's books published by alternative presses represent only 3 percent of the total number of children's titles published in any given year, in 1991, nearly 23 percent of the total number of children's books by African-Americans were published by alternative presses. Keeping in mind Steptoe's reference to "established authors," the alternative press role becomes even more important when one considers only those books which represent the first published work of their author and/or illustrator. In 1991, 45 percent of first books by African-Americans (ten out of twenty-two titles) were published by alternative presses.

### AFRICAN-AMERICAN PRESSES

Although African-American presses have been a force in U.S. book publishing since 1817 (Joyce & Jenkins, 1978, p. 907), Fraser (1973) claims that it was not until the early 1960s that African-American publishers began publishing books for children (p. 3422). The CCBC Alternative Press Collection currently houses children's books from fifteen active African-American presses. Of these, nine presses publish a combination of children's and adult books; six publish children's books only. All of the African-American presses which limit their publications to children's books have been established since 1987.

Third World Press was founded in Chicago in 1967 by poet Haki R. Madhubuti with an initial investment of \$400 (Dennis, 1992, p. 3). Over the past twenty-five years, Third World has published works by major African-American scholars, essayists, poets, and novelists. Today it is the oldest African-American press that publishes books in all genres. Although the focus of the press is on adult literature, Madhubuti has always demonstrated a commitment to children and children's books, publishing Third World Press's first children's book in 1970 (*Jackie* by Leuveste Lewis). In a 1984 interview with Donnarae MacCann and Olga Richard, he said of his goals for children's publishing: "I think that literature—if it's working—talks about the possibilities, about what you can become, what is beautiful in the world.... We have to think about what is best for the child, and we can do that in ways that do not compromise the intelligence or development of the child" (p. 209).

Third World Press's children's books certainly speak to the possibilities in life for African-American children. A 1974 alphabet book by Dexter Oliver and Patricia Oliver, *I Want to Be...*, uses photographs of African-American children acting out professions such as engineer, plumber, and veterinarian. The brief accompanying text stresses the contributions each worker can make to the African-American community, for example: "I want to be a mathematician

so that I can use mathematics to build a strong nation as our African ancestors did centuries ago" (p. 29). Jabari Mahiri's *The Day They Stole the Letter J* (1981) successfully combines fantasy and reality in the story of two friends, Jelani and Jerome, who play a practical joke on the neighborhood barber/storyteller by hiding a large *J* he has carved out of wood. Their joke backfires, however, when they realize that there was magic in the *J*. Once it is hidden, everything beginning with the letter *J* disappears, including, of course, Jelani and Jerome. Third World Press has also published short stories and poetry for young children by such notable writers as Gwendolyn Brooks (*The Tiger Who Wore White Gloves*), Mari Evans (*Singing Black*), and Sonia Sanchez (*A Sound Investment*). As the press enters its twenty-fifth year, Madhubuti expects to expand operations, particularly in the area of publishing for children:

Over one-quarter of our publishing schedule for 1992 will be children's and young adult material, which is absolutely necessary....In 1993 and beyond I think that our capacity to publish quality work will only be limited by what we decide to do ourselves. The sky is the limit in terms of what we can and cannot do. (Davis, 1992, p. 4)

Writers & Readers Publishing Cooperative was founded in London, England, in 1974 by an African-American man, Glenn Thompson, who grew up in Harlem and Bedford Stuyvesant (Davis, 1989, p. 31). This community-based publishing house had as its mission "to advance the needs of cultural literacy, rather than to cater to an 'advanced' but limited readership" (p. 31). During these years, Writers & Readers became best known for its ...For Beginners series, documentary comic books that introduce major thoughts and thinkers. To date they have published over forty titles in the series on topics such as black history, computers, Darwin, and Marx. The series, which makes knowledge and information accessible to both readers and nonreaders, has been translated into sixteen languages and published in more than twenty-five countries.

In 1986, Thompson returned to the United States, moving his publishing company home to Harlem. Soon after his return, he launched a children's imprint, Black Butterfly Children's Books. In a press release announcing Writers & Readers' new endeavor, Thompson said he saw it as "the beginning of a tradition of black writers, artists, and publishers, cooperating to send important messages to a new generation of young readers. We are here to produce quality children's books that reflect racial pride and cultural literacy" (Black Butterfly Children's Books, 1989, pp. 1-2).

The first children's book from Black Butterfly was *Nathaniel Talking* written by Eloise Greenfield and illustrated by Jan Spivey Gilchrist, a collection of eighteen first-person poems written in the

voice of a nine-year-old African-American boy. Nathaniel talks about his life, some of his favorite memories, and his hopes for the future. In the poem "I See My Future," Nathaniel imagines himself as a strong African-American man:

...my serious man face  
 thinking  
 my laughing man face  
 my big Nathaniel me  
 moving through the world  
 doing good and unusual  
 things. (p. 27)

Seldom has an alternative press children's book received the attention and critical acclaim accorded *Nathaniel Talking*. Gilchrist won the American Library Association's Coretta Scott King Award for her illustrations, while Greenfield won a Coretta Scott King Honor for her writing. Gilchrist and Greenfield collaborated on five books for Black Butterfly in 1991. Four of the five are a series of board books featuring African-American toddlers, a much-needed contribution to this genre. The fifth, *First Pink Light*, is a humorous yet poignant picture story about four-year-old Tyree who is determined to stay awake all night to surprise his daddy who is returning from a month-long absence. In 1991, Black Butterfly also published *Tommy Traveler in the World of Black History*, written and illustrated by Tom Feelings, in which significant events in the lives of Phoebe Fraunces, Emmet Till, Aesop, Frederick Douglass, Crispus Attucks, and Joe Louis are dramatized in a comic strip format.

In explaining why he began publishing books for children, Glenn Thompson said:

Children's publishing needed publishers who are concentrating on an Afrocentric perspective, using black writers and black artists. There always has been someone outside our culture looking in and writing about it. We are expected by the industry to accept automatically Eurocentric culture and ways of thinking. To have our books sold, we feel we have to cross over culturally in our thinking and our writing. And there are not enough of us complaining about that. (in Parrish, 1989, p. 36)

Another publishing company that focuses on afrocentric perspectives is Just Us Books in Orange, New Jersey, established by Wade Hudson and Cheryl Willis Hudson. In 1977, Cheryl Willis Hudson set out to find artwork to decorate her daughter's room. She was unable to find the sort of thing she was looking for—bold graphics that reflected African-American children—so she created them herself, drawing whimsical children forming alphabet letters with their bodies to spell out her daughter's name (Donnelly, 1987,



p. 2). The "Afro-Bets Kids" caught on locally and, after a few years, the Hudsons decided to expand their market by creating posters and T-shirts featuring the characters. In 1987, Just Us published their first book, *The Afro-Bets ABC Book* (1987a). Each letter is accompanied by three pictures of objects beginning with that letter and generally one of the three is specific to African heritage (cornrows, kente cloth, mask, etc.). "We didn't just do a book with a black face, which is what some publishers have done," said Cheryl Hudson. "We pull from African-American culture to make meaningful books. The characters in the books are different, with different color skins, faces and lips—like real kids. And real kids respond to that" (Sullivan, 1991, p. 43). A companion to the ABC book, *Afro-Bets 123 Book* (1987b), was published the following year.

Just Us Books' next publishing project was a departure from the trademark characters. Although the Afro-Bets Kids are used here as a typographical device, *Afro-Bets First Book of Black Heroes A-Z* is a straightforward book of information aimed at older children. Authors Wade Hudson and Valerie Wilson Wesley provide capsule biographies for fifty-one African and African-American men and women who have played a significant role in shaping history. Like Writers & Readers' "...For Beginners" series, this book makes information easily accessible to readers and nonreaders alike. In 1989, the Afro-Bets Kids were more fully realized by artist George Ford as children in a classroom learning about the motherland from a Ghanaian visitor. Veronica Ellis's *Afro-Bets First Book About Africa: An Introduction for Young Readers* uses an original approach and a sophisticated design to stress the richness of history and cultures of the continent, instilling young readers with a sense of pride in their heritage.

In 1990, the Hudsons launched a new series, Feeling Good Books, picture books intended to enhance the self-esteem of young African-American children. The first book in the series, *Bright Eyes, Brown Skin* was co-authored by Cheryl Hudson and Bernette G. Ford. George Ford's full-color illustrations show four children engaged in typical activities in a preschool, while the text lovingly describes the children's physical features: "Bright eyes, brown skin.../A heart-shaped face,/A dimpled chin./Bright eyes,/Cheeks that glow.../A playful grin,/A perfect nose./Very special hair and clothes...." *Jamal's Busy Day*, by Wade Hudson, the second title in the Feeling Good series, was published in 1991 as was a companion book to *Afro-Bets Book of Black Heroes A-Z*. *Great Women in the Struggle: Book of Black Heroes, Volume Two*, edited by Toyomi Igus, includes biographical sketches of eighty-four African and African-American women.

Just Us Books has enjoyed a phenomenal success in its first five years. By 1991, they had over 360,000 books in print and generated revenues of \$1.2 million (Donnelly, 1991, p. 43). Wade Hudson (1991) attributes the company's success to their familiarity with the African-American community:

Our success is directly linked to our ability to reach a market that the major publishing houses have not found. They may never reach those markets...because they don't *know* my community. I know more about the buying habits of my community than anyone else, because I live in that community. I know the institutions, clubs, and organizations in that community, and I know how to tap into them. (p. 78)

That the book-buying public is hungry for afrocentric children's literature is also demonstrated by the success of a self-published title, *Tears for Ashan* (1989). Like Cheryl Hudson, Daisy Jefferson of Memphis, Tennessee, created her own materials to share with her young children. When she was unable to find appropriate library books to answer questions her preschool-aged children were asking her about slavery, Jefferson researched the topic and wrote the book herself. With an investment of \$10,000, she formed her own publishing company, Creative Press Works, hired an illustrator for the book, and printed it with Desktop Publishers in Memphis in an initial run of 1,700 copies (Koeppel, 1989, p. 3). *Tears for Ashan* is a fictionalized account of a young African boy's emotional response when his best friend Ashan is kidnapped by European slavers and taken away in chains. The eloquent understated text begins by providing a context, describing the daily life in Ashan's village and the strong friendship between Ashan and Kumasi. When Ashan is captured, Kumasi responds at first with shock and horror and then with grief as he realizes he will never see his friend again. The author never editorializes and yet, by simply telling the painful story from an African rather than a European perspective, she provides a point of view seldom found in children's history books.

In the three years since *Tears for Ashan* was published, it has sold over 5,000 copies, and Jefferson is currently working on a sequel (Daisy Jefferson, personal communication, July 23, 1992). Although she was approached by a corporate publisher who wanted to buy the rights to the work once its success was established, Jefferson refused the offer. She had never attempted to sell the manuscript to a children's book publisher in the first place. Her reasons for self-publishing echo those of Haki Madhubuti, Glenn Thompson, and the Hudsons:

I thought it would be a challenge to publish it myself. I thought we needed to publish books and have complete control over creativity and

the thoughts that went into them. I'm not biased against white authors, but we need to do these things for our children's sakes. We've been relying on other people for too long. (Koeppel, 1989, p. 3)

All four of the African-American presses profiled earlier assert the need for books created by African-American writers, artists, and publishers. As publishers, they place a high priority on contributing to a body of authentic African-American literature for children. Each of them has succeeded in reaching a large sector of African-American book buyers, in addition to a general audience, disproving the claim that there is no market for African-American literature.

### NATIVE AMERICAN PRESSES

Most minority groups in this country have been, and are still, largely ignored by the nation's major publishing houses—particularly in the field of children's books. American Indians, on the other hand, contend with a mass of material about themselves. If anything, there are too many children's books about American Indians. (Byler, 1992, p. 81)

The books to which Mary Gloyne Byler refers are fiction, nonfiction, and folklore created by outsiders. While African-Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics suffer from a dearth of literature, Native Americans suffer from an overabundance. Of the dozens of children's books about Native Americans published by corporate presses each year, very few, if any, are written by Native Americans. In the spring of 1992, for example, the Cooperative Children's Books Center received forty-four newly published books about Native Americans; only three were by Native American writers. Inaccurate and stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans continue to abound in children's literature of the 1990s. Byler (1992) says:

Non-Indian writers have created an image of American Indians that is sheer fantasy. It is an image that is not authentic and one that has little value except that of sustaining the illusion that the original inhabitants deserved to lose their land because they were so barbaric and uncivilized. This fantasy does not take into account the rich diversity of cultures that did, and does, exist. (p. 84)

Caldwell-Wood (1992) discusses the problem of non-Native American writers relying on historical documents that were "translated and interpreted by travelers, historians, and anthropologists from the outside" rather than first-hand contact with Native American peoples themselves (p. 48). She cites the importance of alternative presses which are much more likely to publish Native American writers and artists, people who have direct experience with their subject matter. The CCBC Alternative Press Collection includes children's books from twelve Native American-owned presses in the United States and Canada. The information and perspectives these books offer depart radically from those presented in books about

Native Americans published by corporate presses. The latter are all too frequently informed by stereotypical misrepresentations prevalent in the popular culture at large. As Caldwell-Wood wryly notes: "We still exist. You may not be aware but perhaps there are Native Americans in your own neighborhood. If you are looking for buckskins, feathers and beads, you might not see us" (p. 48).

The "rich diversity of cultures" to which Byler refers is certainly the most obvious characteristic one notices in looking at the books from Native American publishers collectively. Just as alternative presses typically specialize in a particular subject area and aim for a well-defined market, most Native American presses identify with a specific tribe or culture area and publish materials about themselves for their own children. The educational centers of many of the larger tribes in the United States and Canada create resources for children about their history, mythology, and traditions (Kuipers, 1991, p. 36).

The Cross Cultural Education Center in Welling, Oklahoma, is a Cherokee-owned nonprofit organization incorporated in 1980. Their purpose is "to promote quality education for the Cherokee people through the development of bilingual and cross-cultural education programs" (Cross Cultural Education Center, 1985, p. 1). In addition to providing extensive Cherokee-language materials, the center also publishes children's fiction, nonfiction, and folklore in English. There is a distinctively Cherokee point of view in every book they publish. *Traditional Cherokee Food* (1982) by Janey B. Hendrix at first glance appears to be a simple recipe book but on closer examination it has much more depth. The author interviewed elders in order to collect the recipes and she has also included their comments on specific foods ("Both poke and cochanna are gathered in the spring...") and cooking methods ("as with many simple recipes there is controversy about how to properly prepare it"). It makes for absorbing reading even if readers do not plan to use the recipes. *Sequoyah and the Talking Leaves* (1985) by John Dameron is a one-act play that dramatizes Sequoyah's invention of the Cherokee syllabary in the early nineteenth century. The setting, characters, and events are all based on historical facts gathered from the playwright's research. Dameron's notes give helpful advice for producing the play with non-Cherokee as well as Cherokee children.

Although the books published by the Cross Cultural Education Center are primarily intended for Cherokee children in rural northeastern Oklahoma, the center recognizes that they provide valuable information about Cherokee history and culture for children throughout the United States: "Due to the great need for authentic Cherokee Indian-oriented resource materials, which are not available from orthodox commercial publishing houses, the administration

decided to make these materials available at a nominal cost to the general public" (Cross Cultural Education Center, 1985, p. 1).

Pemmican Publications of Winnipeg, Manitoba, began in 1972 as the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) Press. Their mandate was to publish educational books for the Métis people about Métis history and culture. During its first several years of operation, MMF press was staffed by volunteers and only published books when funds were available. The federation decided that the press should operate as a business, and in 1980 they applied for and received a Local Employment Assistance Program (LEAP) grant. They established a nonprofit organization called Pemmican Publications and, with funding from the grant, were able to hire writers and artists to create books and learning materials about the Métis (Loewen, 1988, p. 22).

In their catalog of publications, Pemmican defines its purpose: "to provide opportunities for Métis and Native people to tell their own stories from their own perspectives" (Pemmican Publications, 1991, p. 1). Pemmican employs a staff of five: a managing editor, a business administrator, a marketing manager, and two sales representatives. In addition to publishing fiction and nonfiction for adults, Pemmican publishes picture books, novels, and folktales for children. By 1992, they had thirty children's titles in print, most of which were picture books. One of the qualities that makes their children's books so distinctive is their realistic portrayal of contemporary Native American children. Cree author Bernelda Wheeler builds an engaging cumulative story using only simple dialogue between a mother and son in *I Can't Have Bannock But a Beaver Has a Dam* (1985). The persistent youngster peppers his mother with *why* questions, beginning with wondering why he cannot have bannock for lunch. His patient mother responds to each question, explaining that she wasn't able to make bannock because the oven wouldn't get hot because the electricity was off because the power was out and so forth. As it turns out, the power lines were knocked down by a tree felled by a beaver who was building a dam.

In *Two Pairs of Shoes* (1990) by Esther Sanderson, Maggie dreams of getting a special pair of dress shoes for her birthday and she is thrilled when her mother gets them for her. She rushes to her grandmother's house to show them off, only to find out that her grandmother has also gotten her a pair of shoes—beautiful beaded moccasins. Traditional Native American values are woven naturally into many of the picture books published by Pemmican. Their stories for young children are universal but with details specific to Native American culture. This is also true of many of their novels for older children. For example, Don Sawyer's (1988) *Where the Rivers Meet*

is the story of a teenager coping with the suicide of her best friend; what makes it unusual as a young adult novel is that the resolution lies in Native American wisdom and cultural traditions.

Daybreak Star Press in Seattle, Washington, is also particularly strong in the area of publishing about the lives of contemporary Native American children. Whereas Pemmican's contemporary stories are all fiction, Daybreak Star publishes mostly nonfiction about Native Americans in contemporary society. *Indians in Careers* by Kitty Hollow and Jeanne Heuving (1979) is a highly accessible career guide composed of interviews with sixteen Native American workers, including a bus driver, a rancher, a fisherwoman, a doctor, a bank teller, and a tribal councilman. Two books focus on traditional games and athletic activities, a highly valued part of Native American life.

While *Twana Games* (1981) is specific to the Twana people of the Skokomish Reservation in western Washington, *A'una* (1981) includes games and recipes from twenty-four Native American nations across the North American continent. *Sharing Our Worlds: Native American Children Today* (1980) includes five children from blended racial and cultural backgrounds (Salish/Filipino; Gros Ventre/Assiniboine; Klallam/Samoan/Portuguese). Black-and-white photographs of the children and their families are accompanied by upbeat first-person descriptions of how they observe their various cultural traditions. Twelve-year-old Tim says: "My mom feels it is important we learn about being Indian and Filipino. She never had the chance when she was growing up....I am proud to tell people about my cultures" (p. 11).

Daybreak Star Press is the publishing division of the United Indians of All Tribes Foundation. Because of this, their publications do not focus on a specific tribe, although, due to their location, many of their books feature Native American peoples of the Northwest Coast. The staff at Daybreak Star works with Native American tribes, groups, and individuals at all stages of creating and producing the books they publish. In describing themselves, they state: "Daybreak Star Press (DSP) publishes only those materials which accurately portray tribal cultures and histories, and the experiences of Native Americans in contemporary society. Created in response to the need for responsible materials about Native Americans, DSP assures the authenticity of its materials..." (Daybreak Star Press, 1991, p. 2).

## CONCLUSION

Accuracy and authenticity are two terms one sees again and again when alternative press publishers, and especially those owned and operated by people of color, express what is important to them in publishing multicultural literature for children. They have learned

from bitter experience not to rely on outsiders, as African-American novelist Walter Dean Myers eloquently detailed in an essay printed in the *New York Times* in 1986:

I no longer feel that the [publishing] industry has any more obligation to me, to my people, to my children, than does, say, a fast-food chain. It's clear to me that if any race, any religious or social group elects to place its cultural needs in the hands of the profit makers then it had better be prepared for the inevitable disappointment. (p. 50)

Although the alternative presses profiled in this survey are vastly different from one another, they all have a common goal: to tell their own stories from their own perspectives for their own children. Through the literature they create, they strive to give children a true picture of the past and a sense of pride in the present with the hope that they, like Eloise Greenfield's Nathaniel, will see themselves in the future, "moving through the world doing good and unusual things."

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