Brown Gold

Milestones of African-American Children's Picture Books, 1845–2002

by
Michelle H. Martin

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Brown Gold

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I dedicate this book to Grandad, my biggest fan while he was alive,
to Glenn, my spouse, best friend, and biggest fan now,
and to Amelia Holley Martin Hare, the newest member of my family,
born May 12, 2003.

Series Editor's Foreword

Dedicated to furthering original research in children's literature and culture, the Children's Literature and Culture series includes monographs on individual authors and illustrators, historical examinations of different periods, literary analyses of genres, and comparative studies on literature and the mass media. The series is international in scope and is intended to encourage innovative research in children's literature with a focus on interdisciplinary methodology.

Children's literature and culture are understood in the broadest sense of the term "children" to encompass the period of childhood up through adolescence. Owing to the fact that the notion of childhood has changed so much since the origination of children's literature, this Routledge series is particularly concerned with transformations in children's culture and how they have affected the representation and socialization of children. While the emphasis of the series is on children's literature, all types of studies that deal with children's radio, film, television, and art are included in an endeavor to grasp the aesthetics and values of children's culture. Not only have there been momentous changes in children's culture in the last fifty years, but there have been radical shifts in the scholarship that deals with these changes. In this regard, the goal of the Children's Literature and Culture series is to enhance research in this field and, at the same time, point to new directions that bring together the best scholarly work throughout the world.

—Jack Zipes

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For inspiring me through his amazing contributions to the field, I remember Tom Feelings (1933–2003).

Introduction

"Brown Gold"?

This book's title, *Brown Gold*, emerged out of my reflection on the designation of the late-nineteenth century as "The Golden Age of Children's Literature," the era when writers such as Louisa May Alcott and Mark Twain began writing novels specifically designed to address adolescent readers (although G. Stanley Hall didn't coin the term "adolescent" until 1904). During this "Golden Age," artists like Kate Greenaway, Randolph Caldecott, Walter Crane, Arthur Rackham, and Edmund Evans brought into being the picture book genre as we know it today and children's literature became widely available that no longer sought only to teach, preach, and convert children, but which took as its mantra "*delectando monemus*," "instruction with delight."

The suggestion underlying the title *Brown Gold*, then, is that a century later, African-American children's literature of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—particularly African-American children's picture books—is now experiencing the same sort of "Golden Age" that mainstream Anglo children's literature underwent in the late-nineteenth century. Several historical, professional, theoretical, and pedagogical phenomena have led me to conclude that we are now in the midst of the "Golden Age" of African-American children's picture books.

When children of my parents' generation were growing up, black parents who wanted to buy books for their children that featured black characters had choices such as Helen Bannerman's *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (1899) or Elvira Garner's *Ezekiel* books (1930s), neither of which offer a flattering view of blackness. Those who sought not just black images in picture books but positive representations of African-American life as well had even narrower choices. They could have chosen among texts like Lorraine and Jerrold Beim's *Two Is a Team* (1945) and Inez Hogan's *Nappy Has a New Friend* (1947), but parents who wanted to seek out good books about black life written by African Americans had almost no options at all. Although Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps had collaborated on picture books such as *Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti* (1932), and Arna Bontemps had single-authored books like *You Can't Pet a Possum* (1934), these texts were often absent from library shelves and were difficult to find in bookstores—if, indeed, young black readers and their parents could gain entry into the bookstores and libraries at all at that time.[1]

In its historical evolution, this genre has now expanded to such an extent that nearly every subgenre that one can find within mainstream picture

books one can also find among African-American children's picture books. Hence, young readers can enjoy Melodye Benson Rosales's *Leola and the Honeybears: An African-American Retelling of Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (1999) alongside "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" (folklore); Nina Crews's *You Are Here* (1998) alongside Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) (fantasy); Virginia Hamilton and Barry Moser's *When Bats Could Talk and Birds Could Sing* (1996) alongside Joel Chandler Harris's Br'er Rabbit Tales (fables); Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith's *Squids Will Be Squids* (1988) alongside Julius Lester and Emilie Chollat's *Ackamarackus* (2001) (fractured fables); Virginia Hamilton and Lambert Davis's *The Dark Way: Stories from the Spirit World* (1990) alongside D'Aulaire's *Book of Greek Myths* (1962); Cheryl Hudson's *Afro-Bets 123 Book* (1987) and *Afro-Bets ABC Book* (1987) alongside Bill Martin and John Archambault's *Chicka-Chicka-Boom-Boom* (1989) and Keith Faulkner and Jonathan Lambert's *Ten Little Monkeys: A Counting Storybook* (2001) (concept books for learning letters and numbers); Nikki Grimes and Javaka Steptoe's *Pocketful of Poems* (2001) alongside Paul B. Janeczko and Chris Raschka's *A Poke in the I* (2001) (contemporary poetry); and Tony Medina and R. Gregory Christie's *Love to Langston* (2002) alongside Jane Goodall's *The Chimpanzees I Love: Saving Their World and Ours* (2001) (biography). The fact that the range of picture books about the black experience continues to expand is significant because the more varied the genre becomes, the wider the audience of potential readers and buyers, and the more accessible these books are to all readers, the greater the chances of their long-term survival.

In addition, this genre has finally come into its own—its own authors, its own illustrators, and, to a minimal extent, its own publishers as well. Black children's literature no longer has to "borrow" artists who see their primary profession as writing for adult audiences, as was true in the 1920s when Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Carter G. Woodson, and Paul Laurence Dunbar were the primary writers of black-authored texts for black children.[2] African-American authors and artists can now not only write and illustrate primarily for children, but they can make a reasonably good living doing so, and many do. This stands in stark contrast to problems that many authors and artists like Wade and Cheryl Hudson and Tom Feelings had with publishers firmly and repeatedly rejecting their work because of the widespread opinion only a few decades ago that mainstream America wasn't interested in reading about black people and that African Americans, whom publishers saw as the primary audience for these books, did not read or buy books.

Related to the historical evolution of this genre is a professional phenomenon that has contributed substantially to the development of this "Golden Age" of African-American children's picture books: the contemporary emergence of African-American artistic "legacies," or children of

prominent, long time black illustrators and authors who have now entered the profession as writers and illustrators of the genre themselves. Brian and Myles Pinkney, sons of prolific watercolorist Jerry Pinkney; Javaka Steptoe, son of the late John Steptoe; Nina Crews, daughter of husband-and-wife illustrator/authors Donald Crews and Ann Jonas; Christopher Myers, son of Walter Dean Myers; and others have entered into the profession of their parents, building on a strong artistic and literary family legacy that is taking children's picture books into the new millennium.

The growing number of legacies might suggest that black authors and artists find the children's book market a more welcoming place than it once was. Though this is true to a certain extent, many black children's authors and illustrators—particularly those who have not been published previously—still do encounter many obstacles in their attempts to publish their works. The Cooperative Children's Book Center, housed in the University of Wisconsin School of Education, reports that in 1985, of the 2,500 children's books published, blacks authored and illustrated 18; of the 3,000 children's books published in 1988, 39 were by blacks; by 1992, 94 of the 4,500 were by blacks. Between 1994 and 1996, the total number of children's books remained steady at 4,500, while those by African Americans rose from 166 to 172. In 1997, the number of children's books by black authors and illustrators peaked at 216, having gone no higher than that number since, although the total number of publications has risen slightly, to 5,500 annually. Between 1998 and 2001, the number of black-authored books went from 183 down to 150, to 147, and back up to 201. The publication of black children's literature reached a plateau in 1997, experienced a slump into 2000, and seems to be on the rise again.[3]

Two conversations that I had with illustrator Jerry Pinkney about his perspective on the business end of the industry might partially explain the impetus behind these fluctuations. When I talked with him in November of 2001 and presented my idea to him that we are now in the midst of the "Golden Age" of African-American children's picture books, he said that he felt this is only a beginning: "It's going to get much better!"[4] When I talked with him the following year, however, he felt much less optimistic than he had the year before, primarily because of the "bottom line that corporations are imposing on publishers." Pinkney said that midlist writers and artists (those who are producing quality books but not necessarily ones that will turn a substantial profit for the publisher) will have more difficulty getting their works published now than they did a few years ago. At one time, Pinkney said, many publishers were committed to producing works by writers of color even if the profit expectations were low. Hence, although the market for black authors and artists who produce works about the black experience has never been and probably will never be as great as that for more mainstream books, at least those artists had a chance.[5] Now, however, as

huge publishers continue to buy out smaller presses, as larger publishing houses combine to become mega-publishers, and as the bookstore market becomes increasingly more controlled by chains that are more interested in publishing poor quality series books that sell well than higher quality books that expand the definition of children's literature and push back artistic and ideological boundaries of the genre, black authors and artists may find it harder to publish in the 2000s than they did in the 1990s. Despite this fact, I believe that the late 1990s publishing plateau, combined with the nurturing that seasoned black writers and illustrators are currently giving both to black legacies and to other young black aspiring authors and artists, will result in a relatively bright future for this genre, even given current publishing challenges.

While publishers, writers, and artists represent the professionals who *produce* children's books, a completely different and unrelated profession on the receiving end of these books has played an important role in the establishment of African-American children's literature as a legitimate field of study. Though we are still few, there are now academicians—both African American and non–African American—who study and publish criticism on black children's literature in all three of the academic disciplines that study children's literature: English Studies, library science, and education. For many years, the late Augusta Baker, New York City Public Librarian, the late Barbara Rollock, coordinator of children's services at the New York Public Library, and Rudine Sims Bishop, Education Professor (Emeritus now) at The Ohio State University, along with a handful of others, probably felt like lone "voices crying in the wilderness" in their critical discussions of this genre that was still coming into its own. Now, however, not only are those in higher education teaching children's literature at major universities, but we are also writing and publishing criticism on black children's literature in well-respected, refereed journals and placing books with reputable mainstream publishers. Nancy Tolson at Illinois State University (English/English Education), Dianne Johnson at the University of South Carolina (English/African-American Studies), Darwin Henderson at the University of Cincinnati (Education), Violet Harris at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (Curriculum and Instruction), Rudine Sims Bishop, recently retired from The Ohio State (Education), and others, all African Americans, are working to bring black children's literature the kind of critical attention that it deserves within the academy. Paralleling the situation with children's literature, non–African American scholars also publish scholarship on black children's literature: to mention a few, Donnarae MacCann has written several scholarly books about the role of African Americans in children's literature such as *White Supremacy in Children's Literature* (1998) and Katharine Capshaw Smith, currently of Florida International University, completed her doctoral dissertation on the children's literature of Arna Bontemps and continues to do research in the field of black children's literature.

Significantly, scholars of black children's literature are talking to one another and networking with black authors and artists who are actively producing books in this genre. Given the gulf that has traditionally existed between education, English Studies, and library science academicians, despite their common interest in literature for children, this fact in itself signals some monumental progress. In addition, the establishment of the Children's Books Roundtable and the Langston Hughes Children's Literature Festival at the former Alex Haley Farm in Clinton, Tennessee, by the Children's Defense Fund's Black Community Crusade for Children has provided an incredible venue in which much of this collaborative work and cross-pollination can take place. Authors, illustrators, scholars, editors, and publishers of black children's literature attend these events for some productive dialogue between those who know best how to get black books into the hands of children.[6] This dialogue, combined with the legitimization of African-American children's literature as an academic discipline through its growing presence in higher education, has sparked another positive trend: seasoned scholars of black children's literature are nurturing and mentoring younger scholars who are currently teaching in higher education as well as those who are still in graduate programs. This mentoring of the next generation of black scholars in children's literature (similar to what has happened to bring artistic "legacies" into producing black books for children) signals the emergence of a healthy profession on a number of different levels and suggests that African-American children's literature scholarship will continue to grow in depth and breadth.

These professional milestones—the emergence of a second generation of talented black picture book artists and writers, the establishment of African-American children's literature as a viable, full-time profession for some, and the nascent but fruitful dialogue between academicians of black children's literature—all contribute to my assessment of this era as the emerging "Golden Age" of African-American children's picture books. A theoretical shift is also taking place within this genre, though, that adds further evidence that black children's literature is carving out its own space within American culture. Prior to the twentieth century and even up until the 1950s, the majority of picture books that featured black images were written by white authors for white audiences. As I discuss in chapter 2, authorship over the twentieth century has shifted from whites writing about blacks for white audiences, to black authors writing primarily with an African-American audience in mind. Now, black authors are effectively addressing all audiences through their picture books and celebrating the black experience without reservation.

But what of the consumers? What of the children and parents, African American and otherwise, who buy, read, reread, and pass these books on to friends and relatives? As a scholar whom Peter Hollindale would label a "book people" critic more than a "child people" critic,[7] I prioritize the work

of the professionals above that of the children because if it weren't for the creators of these texts and the favorable sociopolitical contexts that have allowed them to carry out this work, children would have no black books to enjoy—although it's also true that if consumers didn't financially support their work, authors and illustrators would not be able to continue creating books. One significant reason for my suggesting that this historical era is worthy of being labeled the "Golden Age" of African-American children's picture books in terms of children is the overwhelming diversity of books available in this genre. Though the quantity and availability of these books might leave something to be desired, a much greater wealth of books about different aspects of the black experience is available to American readers than ever before.[8]

Black children can find affirmation about their hair in Natasha Anastasia Tarpley and E. B. Lewis's *I Love My Hair* (1998); bell hooks and Chris Raschka's *Happy to Be Nappy* (1999) and *Be Boy Buzz* (2002), and Carolivia Herron and Joe Cepeda's *Nappy Hair* (1997). They can find praise for their varied skin tones in Sandra and Myles Pinkney's *Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children* (2001), Arnold Adoff's *Black Is Brown Is Tan* (1973), and W. Nikola-Lisa's *Bein' with You This Way* (1994). They can learn of their history through Tom Feelings's *The Middle Passage: White Ships, Black Cargo* (1995), Dinah Johnson's *All Around Town* (1997), and William Hooks and James Ransome's *Freedom's Fruit* (1996). They can meet their heroes and heroines in William Miller, Cornelius Van Wright, and Ying-Hwa Hu's *Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree* (1994), Ruby Bridges's *Through My Eyes* (1999), Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe's *Daddy and Me* (1993), and Doreen Rappaport and Bryan Collier's *Martin's Big Words* (2001). They can see their own families reflected in Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard and James Ransome's *Aunt Flossie's Hats (and Crab Cakes Later)* (1993), John Steptoe's *My Daddy Is a Monster . . . Sometimes* (1980), and Angela Johnson and James Ransome's *Do Like Kyla* (1990). They can learn to appreciate their homes in Bryan Collier's *Uptown* (2000) and Walter Dean and Christopher Myers's *Harlem* (1997). They can admire black talent in Mary Hoffman and Caroline Binch's *Amazing Grace* (1991), Leontyne Price and Leo and Diane Dillon's *Aïda* (1990), and George Ancona's *Let's Dance* (1998). They can absorb the cadence of their own folklore in Julius Lester and Tom Feelings's *Black Folktales* (1992), Lester and Emilie Chollat's *Ackamarackus* (2001), Lester and Joe Cepeda's *What a Truly Cool World* (1999), Robert D. San Souci and Jerry Pinkney's *The Talking Eggs* (1989), and Faith Ringgold's *Tar Beach* (1991).

Clearly, contemporary American children have access to a much wider variety of black children's picture books than did their parents and grandparents, and although the numbers of books published per year in this genre by African-American authors has remained relatively static since 1994,

these numbers more than quadrupled between 1985 and 2000. The wide range of texts available by black authors and about the black experience attests to the productivity and perseverance of the professionals who feel it essential to make excellent literature about African-American life as widely available to readers as possible.

Who's In, Who's Out?

In the process of creating this volume, I had to decide whether to be racially inclusive or exclusive. Many who write for children about the African-American experience are not African American themselves. When critics include the work of these authors in their discussion of the genre, they tend to write about "the black experience" or "black images" rather than labeling these texts simply "African-American children's literature." In fact, one of my black colleagues who writes about this genre felt strongly that I should exclude all non–African–American authors from this volume. That sounds simple enough, but what happens when Nina Crews, the daughter of Donald Crews, who is African American, and Ann Jonas, who is white, writes *You Are Here* (1998) about two little black girls enjoying adventures inside the house on a rainy day? Should she be excluded because she's biracial or somehow "not black enough"? Or should she be included only if she identifies as African American? And how about Donald Crews's *Rain* (1978), *Freight Train* (1978), and *Truck* (1980)—all written by an African American but on topics that have little or nothing to do with humans, much less with race. Should he be excluded because so many of his books are "black" only in terms of their authorship and not in terms of their content? How about publishing teams like Leo (black) and Diane (white) Dillon? Should they be excluded because only half of the team is African American even though they work so closely together on illustrations that neither knows who has done what when the piece is finished? Or should they be included only when they illustrate content concerning the black experience? How about Ezra Jack Keats, a white author whose *The Snowy Day* (1962) was the first picture book featuring a black child to win a Caldecott Award? Or William Miller, a white author who has published excellent and important books about key historical figures such as Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, and Langston Hughes? Should Keats and Miller be excluded because they write outside of their own cultural experience? Should they be excluded also because they narrow the publishing possibilities for black authors who might otherwise be able to place more of their work about the black experience and black historical figures with major publishing houses? I struggled with all of these decisions, but in the end, I have come down on the side of inclusion. Here is why.

I read *The Snowy Day* many times as a child and many more times as an adult, having no idea that Ezra Jack Keats was white. In fact, I didn't learn this until several years into my graduate study of children's literature. All I knew was that someone somewhere had thought that I, a young black reader, deserved an image of a child in my bedtime stories who looked more like me than the blond-haired, blue-eyed Sallies and Billies who stared out at me from between the covers of the basal readers I read every day at school. And although Keats's *The Snowy Day* has been lambasted for tokenism, this author was attempting to do what few others in the early 1960s were: giving black children the chance to see themselves and their experiences reflected positively in the literature they read. Keats's visual images are not blatantly problematic as are those in *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, and the text in Keats's books says nothing about the ethnicity of its characters. Keats's Peter was, to me, just an ordinary little black boy who loved his dog and felt surprised to find a puddle instead of a snowball in a pocket. In other words, these characters were unextraordinarily black. Because non–African–American authors like Ezra Jack Keats and Verna Aardema have played such an instrumental part in the normalization of blackness in children's literature, and because picture books about the black experience by authors like William Miller and artists like Barry Moser can be just as positive a force in the lives of child readers as those books by artists like James Ransome, Nikki Grimes, and Shel Silverstein, I have included both African-American and non-African-American writers of black children's literature in this critical discussion. As librarian Augusta Baker said so succinctly in her 1971 article, "The Black Experience in Children's Books," "Blacks and whites have each, from their own vantage point, made a contribution to the 'Black Experience' in the past and in the present and they will both contribute in the future."[9] Hence, I feel that a critical consideration of this genre should include those who have made substantial contributions even if they do not share the ethnicity of the people about whom they write.

Donnarae MacCann and Gloria Woodard's *The Black American in Books for Children: Readings in Racism* (1985) also comes down on the side of inclusion. These critics articulate the concept of "'thinking Black,' or writing from 'inside rather than outside'" in their assessment of the racial ideology in children's literature.

> When a book is created from this vantage point, it is likely to be aesthetically effective, as well as socially and psychologically authentic. Whether authors are Black or white, if they do not have the perspective that places value on Black identity, they cannot create a truly individualized characterization of a Black person and the whole work suffers.[10]

Although my postmodern sensibilities make me doubt the existence of an essential "authentically black" anything, particularly given the diversity of

what "black" means in contemporary American culture, I do believe that writers write best when they write what they know. Judith Thompson and Gloria Woodard describe how authors who write outside of their circle of experiences do so successfully:

> Whether a writer is white or black, if he immerses himself in the history of a period or in the life of a man, he must to some degree "wear the shoe" to report the experience accurately. . . . The credentials of a writer who undertakes a book about blacks must include a black perspective based on an appreciation of black experience. "Good intentions" are not enough. The writer of books about black children must understand the importance of ethnic consciousness before writing about the goal of ethnic irrelevancy. Conscious of the inequities 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 not possible until the recognition of and respect for these differences are fully realized.[11]

This is the lens out of which I look as I evaluate African-American children's literature—in which I include books about the black experience as well as books that depict images of black children. Certain chapters in *Brown Gold*, such as chapter 3 on the influence of the Black Arts Movement on this genre, chapter 4 on the Coretta Scott King Awards, chapter 5 on black legacies, chapter 7 on picture books that depict black versions of heaven, and chapter 8, those which use black modes of discourse, deal almost exclusively with black authors and illustrators. But because *Brown Gold* discusses works from such a wide time span, readers will encounter texts whose non-African-American authors did "think Black" in creating books for children. Readers will also encounter historical texts that are all about black people but whose white authors deliberately excluded black readers—juvenile or otherwise—from their intended audience. Perhaps ironically, however, this volume begins with a text that is neither African American nor American but which I believe is such an important milestone in the historical evolution of African-American children's picture books that it deserves inclusion in this discussion.

What's Up with 1845?

Readers intimately familiar with African-American children's literature may look askance at the timeline for this book, wondering how I could possibly have written a critical book about African-American children's picture books with a starting date of 1845. It is true that African-American children's literature, as we know it, did not come into being until well into the

twentieth century, although black characters were frequently featured in antislavery tracts such as "The Slave's Friend," published by the American Anti-Slavery Society in the early-nineteenth century, and that early efforts at more realistic depictions of black characters began in the late-nineteenth century.[12] It is also true that turn-of-the-century books that featured images of black people were more often than not written for white children with the intention of—at best—patronizing blacks, or—at worst—depicting them as ugly, ignorant, simple-minded, humorous fools at whom readers were invited to laugh unabashedly. In 1933, Sterling A. Brown made the following comment about this literature, whose purpose was to entertain white people: "[T]he Negro has met with as great injustice in American literature as he has in American life. The majority of books about Negroes merely stereotype Negro character."[13] Because of its negative depiction of blacks, and because its intended audience excluded black readers and alienated those who did read it, many scholars do not consider this literature as part of the genre of historical African-American children's literature.

But in the same way that the oppression and abuse that the slavery system inflicted upon black Americans would never cause an African-American historian to exclude slavery from an account of American history, I do not exclude these early images from this critical examination of African-American children's picture books. I see them as important. These early black images were what Harlem Renaissance writers who wrote for children were writing *against*, and black authors' methods for creating this revisionist genre has contributed a great deal to what contemporary African-American children's literature has become.

Perhaps more objectionably, though, I have chosen as my historical starting point a text written by a man who is neither African American nor even American. German physician Heinrich Hoffmann wrote *Struwwelpeter*, a collection of stories, in 1845 as a gift to his five-year-old son, and included "The Story of the Inky Boys" among them. Wanting to give his son a book for Christmas, but finding nothing but "stupid moralizing tales" in the shops, he wrote *Struwwelpeter* for an audience of one but later, persuaded by friends, published it for the German public.[14] Never having been out of print since its initial publication, this picture book still enjoys wide popularity in Germany, although many Americans have never heard of it and, more often than not, find it both strange and offensive when they do read it. Why do I begin *Brown Gold* with "The Story of the Inky Boys" from *Struwwelpeter,* when it is neither African American nor American and which most Americans would consider obscure, at best? I begin here because apart from religious tracts, it was one of the first texts internationally that, in roundly condemning racial prejudice, attempted to deliver a positive message about a child of color. As I discuss in chapter 1, the story's racist implicit ideology completely contradicts and undermines its explicitly an-

tiracist message, but even this failed attempt put Hoffmann at least five decades ahead of white American authors who would finally begin to write positively about children of color. The racist implications of Heinrich Hoffman's "The Story of the Inky Boys" pale in comparison to the McLoughlin Brothers' *Nine Niggers More* (187–), E. W. Kemble's *A Coon Alphabet* (1898) and *Coontown's 400* (1899), and Nigger Ned and Toby's *New Nigger Nursery Rhymes for Little Folk* (19–).

Overview

The first three chapters of *Brown Gold* detail some of the important historical milestones of the genre and discuss the ways that revolutionary events within black history such as the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights Movement have impacted this genre. The second section of *Brown Gold*, chapters 4 and 5, deals with the professional aspects of black children's literature, both in terms of the most prominent award for black children's books, and in terms of the authors and artists who are helping to shape the genre in contemporary America. The next three chapters of the book, 6, 7, and 8, make use of different critical lenses to examine a number of African-American children's picture books, demonstrating the kinds of analytical academic work that is being done within this genre. In the final chapter, I address some of the pedagogical complexities of integrating African-American children's picture books into college English classes. It is my hope that this discussion of some of the historical, professional, and analytical aspects of African-American children's picture books will help to open up a more active critical dialogue about this genre. Just as these books have become more inclusive in terms of audience and authorship, I hope that the walls that segregate the different disciplines that study black children's literature continue to crumble and that the analytical discussions of these texts become more widespread than they have been in the past.

SECTION I

History of African-American Children's Picture Books

The first three chapters of *Brown Gold* discuss selected historical milestones of African-American children's picture books that helped to shape the genre into what it has become. Chapter 1 situates "The Story of the Inky Boys," a story in Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter* (1845), as a key forerunner to Helen Bannerman's *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (1899) both because of the visual similarity between Sambo and the Black-a-moor and because Bannerman read this *Struwwelpeter* story to her own children and was therefore familiar with these earlier images. Furthermore, even despite the problematic nature of Bannerman's depiction of black characters, she succeeds in giving Sambo what Hoffmann fails to give the Black-a-moor: agency that enables Sambo to defend himself and act and speak on his own behalf. Despite the visual images that many readers consider stereotypical and derogatory; despite the generic names of Little Black Sambo, his mother, Black Mumbo and his father, Black Jumbo; and even despite the fact that the geographical setting of *The Story of Little Black Sambo* is not Africa, India, nor America, I argue here that Sambo's agency makes him both an improvement on Hoffmann's story about a black child and an important forerunner to contemporary African-American protagonists. Hence, even though I have chosen background texts that are not African American at all, I will argue that the dynamics in these two stories lay the groundwork for the positivity that emerged within the African-American children's picture book when it finally did come into existence as a genre.

Chapter 2, "From *Ten Little Niggers* to Afro-Bets: Images of Blackness in Picture Books for Young Readers, 1870s to 2000s," traces changes primarily in abecendaries and counting books from the late-nineteenth century to the present to give an overview of how depictions of black children in these books have changed over the past 100+ years. From *The Ten Little Niggers*

(1875) and *Nine Niggers More* (187–) to Lucille Clifton's *The Black BCs* (1970), the Afro-Bets books, and Tom Feelings's *Jambo Means Hello* (1974), these alphabet and counting books reveal a startling story of the literary and artistic renaissance that took place within these texts over time. While the indoctrination of racism permeated texts even for the very young in books by E. W. Kemble and some of his white contemporaries, many writers of the Harlem Renaissance played a key role in developing a literature designed to encourage black children to feel proud of their heritage.

Chapter 3 discusses the influence of the Black Arts Movement on this genre. Although children's books are not an appropriate platform for some of the ideas that came out of this movement, certain other ideas have surfaced in African-American children's picture books. In fact, these ideas appear not just in books that came during and directly following the 1960s and 70s, but they also continue to show up in the children's books of some contemporary black authors and illustrators. This chapter explores both the uplifting messages that these books convey and some of the underside of life for black children who have to live with realities like poverty, incarcerated parents, and the constant pressure of trying to live their lives against a white standard.

1

"Hey, Who's the Kid with the Green Umbrella?"

A Reevaluation of Little Black Sambo and the Black-a-moor

Place the Black-a-moor, the protagonist in Heinrich Hoffmann's "The Story of the Inky Boys" from *Struwwelpeter* (1845), next to Helen Bannerman's protagonist in *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (1899), and the resemblance is obvious (figs. 1.1 and 1.2).

Both children have dark skin, curly or Afro hair, and bright red lips. Both carry green umbrellas and wear a red garment. Even their body positions look similar: the illustration of Little Black Sambo walking home after regaining possession of his clothes mirrors the image of the Black-a-moor before and after his encounter with the three ruffians.[1] The Black-a-moor wears only a pair of red shorts, and after Sambo's encounter with the tigers, he spends six illustrated pages in the same near-naked state as Hoffmann's Black-a-moor. Both amateur artists, Bannerman and Hoffmann illustrated these books with crude, somewhat surreal, and perhaps even childlike sketches.

Writing just prior to and during the "Golden Age" of children's literature, respectively, Hoffmann and Bannerman transgressed mainstream practices in writing about children of color. The fact that positive images of black children were rare in American children's literature until the 1960s makes these early images significant.[2] Sharing visual similarities, common controversial publication histories, and important ideological messages that affect the depiction of black children in juvenile literature even today, *The Story of Little Black Sambo* and "The Story of the Inky Boys" beg comparison as forerunners of contemporary African-American children's picture books.

Aside from abolitionist literature, Hoffmann's "Inky Boys" features one of the first positive European depictions of a black child in a children's text. *The Story of Little Black Sambo* bears significance not only as a revision of Hoffmann's earlier image but also as a means by which messages



Fig. 1.1. Reprinted by permission from Dover. Hoffmann, Heinrich. *Struwwelpeter: In English Translation*. London: Routledge & Kegan, 1845. New York: Dover, 1995. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1899.

about the black child were disseminated to a substantially wider international reading audience than *Struwwelpeter* reached. Despite the sixty-year controversy concerning racism in *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, Bannerman's book remains an important touchstone within historical children's literature because of its longevity and its permeation of so many facets of American society. Thus, as seminal representations, the texts of Hoffmann and Bannerman have strongly influenced American depictions of black children in juvenile literature both positively and negatively. In terms of its role within minority literature, *The Story of Little Black Sambo* substantially im-



Fig. 1.2. Illustrated by Helen Bannerman. *The Story of Little Black Sambo*.

proves upon Hoffmann's image of the Black-a-moor in its implicit messages about the protagonist's race, class, and intelligence. These two texts were written fifty-four years apart, the former at the dawn of the "Golden Age" of children's literature, the latter at the close of this significant era; hence in addition to reflecting common racial ideologies of their historical eras, they also embody the late-nineteenth century shift in children's literature from instruction to delight.

To uncover intertextual connections between *Struwwelpeter* and *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, one need only look at interviews with Bannerman's children. Robert, one of her two sons, confirms that he owned a copy of Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter* as a child and, although he did not specify the reasons, decidedly disliked it.[3] Living in India with many native house servants, Bannerman was surrounded by dark-skinned people with whom she interacted daily. Given her experience with people of color, her illustrations of Sambo could have looked less like Hoffmann's Black-a-moor, who is of

African descent, and more like the Indians she saw on a daily basis. Nineteenth-century British education clearly delineated class and race distinctions, and as Elizabeth Hay contends in *Sambo Sahib* (1981), Bannerman was too well educated and observant to confuse Africans with Indians (28). Given the resemblance between Hoffmann's illustration of the Black-a-moor and Bannerman's of Sambo, however, the similarities between the boys seem intentional on Bannerman's part. She also seems to have deliberately made Sambo's appearance somewhat ambiguous ethnically since he looks convincingly neither African nor Indian.

Home schooled in science, Portuguese, French, Italian, German, Latin, art, and music by her father, the Reverend Robert Boog Watson, Bannerman was well read due to her passion for books (6–7). As the daughter of a minister in the Free Church of Scotland, however, she also received a rigorous religious education. Critic Phyllis J. Yuill suggests that in the conservative, religious home in which Bannerman grew up, moralistic tales would probably have been highly regarded for their didacticism.[4] Although Yuill sees a resemblance between the tales of Bannerman and Hoffmann in both their violence and their moralism, I find *The Story of Little Black Sambo* conspicuously void of a moral (18).

The similarities between *Struwwelpeter* and *Little Black Sambo* go beyond their visual images and the moral values of their authors; the books also share complex publication histories. Both texts enjoyed an overwhelming reception during the years after their initial publication but both fell prey to censorship, though for different reasons. In a personal interview, Robert Bannerman said, "'My mother would not have published the book had she dreamt for a moment that even one small boy would have been made unhappy thereby'" (qtd. in Hay 155). Having created fantastic stories more for delight than for instruction, Bannerman and Hoffmann would probably be astounded at the attention these texts have received from critics. For instance, Elizabeth Hay's book, *Sambo Sahib*, offers a psychoanalytic reading of *Little Black Sambo*. Just as resistant to a critical reading of a book intended solely for enjoyment as Bannerman's son, Rosemary Dinnage, in her 1981 review, "Taming the Teatime Tigers," says that "[Bannerman] would be appalled, and more than appalled, at the flood of dizzying rubbish stimulated by her little book, but fortunately died full of years and wisdom in 1946, when the world still had sterner things on its mind."[5] Despite such resistance to critical readings of *Little Black Sambo*, this picture book still gets its share of attention from both critics and censors.

Like many challenged and banned books, both *Little Black Sambo* and *Struwwelpeter* still delight children who do manage to gain access to them. Susanna Ashton and Amy Jean Petersen state that while early nineteenth-century readers enjoyed *Struwwelpeter*, later in the century, the German audience began to see the tales as morbid.[6] Ironically, while psychiatrists have

attacked the book for its potentially damaging messages to children, Hoffmann "established and ran one of the finest and most progressive mental hospitals of his time" later in his career as a mental specialist.[7] Thomas Freeman says that nineteenth-century *Struwwelpeter* critics objected to its violence, but twentieth-century critics have challenged its authoritarian method that upholds the "prevailing attitudes of the nineteenth-century German nursery" in which fathers "expected their children to obey them without question or qualification; and severely punished any deviations from their socially acceptable code."[8] Jack Zipes claims that this text is a children's classic not because of its popularity but because it upheld nineteenth-century values of the ruling class—values inculcating obedience to adults, government, and God.[9]

The controversy over *The Story of Little Black Sambo* as a racist text began appearing in professional journals as early as the mid-1940s (Yuill 13). In addition to arguing that the "smiling darkie" caricature in Sambo had the potential to destroy the self-image of African-American child readers, some critics, like the director of Fisk University's special collections, felt that the book damaged " 'the developing minds of white children by giving them a model caricature that demeans and ridicules black children' " (Shockley qtd. in Yuill 19). However, other critics felt that while many white Americans early in the twentieth century considered black people invisible within the culture, Sambo made whites acknowledge the humanity in black people.

> In loving Sambo, unreservedly, in some way, every white had the feeling that he was also accepting the black man as a fellow human being. The nursery bookshelf was integrated, and no prejudice could exist in a home where Little Black Sambo and Peter Rabbit stood side by side on the same shelf. (Yuill 9)

Unlike opposition to *Struwwelpeter*, the controversy surrounding *Little Black Sambo* has come just as strongly from the mainstream as from minority groups.

Yet despite the criticisms of librarians, teachers, and parents, both texts have remained continuously in print since their nineteenth-century publication. Before 1870, forty-seven editions of Hoffmann's text appeared in print; by 1876, the book celebrated its hundredth edition.[10] Copyright problems prevented Twain's "freely translated" version, *Slovenly Peter*, from being published in the United States until 1935 (Ashton and Petersen 35), but by that time, the original text had been through 562 editions.[11] In 1977, Thomas Freeman cited that "five German publishers currently keep it in print, despite the fact that over 600 editions have already been printed" (Freeman 808). *Struwwelpeter* enjoys such popularity in Germany today

that certain phrases derived from the book have emerged in common speech. Dana Bernitzki, an East German resident, comments that everyone knows the text. A child with poor hygiene is called a "Struwwelpeter," and those who pay little attention to where they are going are called, "*Hanns Gluck-in-die-Luft*" or "Hans Head-in-the-Air."[12]

Like *Struwwelpeter* in Germany, *The Story of Little Black Sambo* was a "runaway best-seller" in England and the United States from its beginning. Its first four editions sold 21,000 copies (Hay 1); between 1900 and 1981, over fifty different versions were published in the United States alone (156). The image of Little Black Sambo and his plethora of permutations have permeated American culture, surfacing in such diverse places as stuffed doll patterns, a restaurant chain in Santa Barbara, California, and even in Marjorie McDonald's psychoanalytic speech at the 1974 American Academy of Child Psychiatry Conference (Yuill 31–2). Although Bannerman's book sold for one shilling and six pence in October 1899 (Hay 28), for a reprint of the only authorized American edition of that same 4¼" × 5¾" book, American shoppers will pay approximately twelve dollars. While sales of *Little Black Sambo* in the United States have dropped dramatically in recent years, the challenges to this book, as well as to *Struwwelpeter*, have failed to remove them from American bookshelves or to eradicate them from American culture. Despite the books' conflicts with contemporary Western values, children who read them still enjoy them, collectors and parents still purchase them, and scholars of children's literature continue to consider them important classics worthy of research. The 1996 publication of the picture books, *Sam and the Tigers* (1996) by Julius Lester and Jerry Pinkney and *The Story of Little Babaji* (1996) by Fred Marcellino, both close retellings of Bannerman's story, further suggests that the magic of Little Black Sambo lives on.

Anxious to test Sambo's accessibility to a contemporary African-American child reader who had recently discovered the delights of Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith's *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992), I shared *Little Black Sambo* with my niece when she was eight years old. When the second, third, and fourth tigers repeated the antics of the first, she rolled her eyes and said, "Oh, Brother!" exasperated with the repetition. Several hours later, however, she asked, giggling, "Where's that book? I like Little Black Sambo!" More recently, I have shared the stories of both Sambo and Babaji with two kindergarten children with whom I read weekly at local schools, and these books have become favorites. After many, many readings of both of the books, however, Taneal recently commented, frowning, on why Sambo's hair and lips look like they do. Perhaps Sambo's trickster antics and his ingenuity allow child readers to enjoy Sambo without regard to his stereotyped appearance—at least for a time. The conflict between instruction and delight, with reference to race issues, however, makes Hoffmann's a more problematic text than is *Little Black Sambo*.

In examining the racial ideology in "The Story of the Inky Boys" and *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, one finds that Hoffmann's story is explicitly antiracist yet implicitly racist, while the reverse is true of *The Story of Little Black Sambo*. The teacher in "The Inky Boys," called Agrippa in some translations and Nicholas in others, wags his finger at Edward, William, and Arthur, warning them to "leave the Black-a-moor alone!" Agrippa even explains the reasoning behind this directive: "For if he tried with all his might, / He could not turn from black to white." The boys, however, ignore Agrippa's advice:

> But ah! they did not mind a bit
> What great Agrippa said of it;
> But went on laughing, as before,
> And hooting at the Black-a-moor. (*Struwwelpeter* 9)

Exasperated and angry, Agrippa dunks each of the boys, kicking and screaming, into his ink pot until "they are black, as black can be" (10). After the dunking, the silhouettes of the three boys fall in line, marching behind the Black-a-moor, holding the same mocking body positions that they held on the previous page, as if they had been created with a cookie-cutter.

The message of Agrippa and Hoffmann here is clear: one should not tease others because of differences—ethnic or otherwise. As Charles Frey and John Griffith point out, however, readers must distinguish between the kind of racism that Hoffmann denounces here from that which he uncritically accepts:

> Clearly Hoffmann believes it is naughty for Edward, William, and Arthur to hoot and laugh at the black boy. Just as clearly, though, Hoffmann supposes that the boy is a "woolly-headed Black-a-moor" who would turn himself white if he could and that to be turned black is a punishment. The basic, unspoken logic of the situation is that of course anyone would rather be white than a woolly-headed black, and it is not nice for the privileged ones to tease the unfortunate about his unhappy condition.[13]

In terms of both visual images and character development, Hoffmann's Black-a-moor is a much flatter character than Bannerman's Sambo. The reader never sees a frontal view of the Black-a-moor, and his profile is only a few shades lighter than that of the three boys after they have been dipped in ink. Hence, the protagonist's name in "The Inky Boys" comments on both his race and his skin color. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term *Moor* may have come from an ancient North African language and is often used synonymously with *black.* In ancient history, Moors were native to Mauritania, which now corresponds to regions of Morocco and Algeria in Northern Africa. Moor also once referred to those of Mohammedan reli-

gion.[14] Remaining nameless, unlike his tormentors, this child of African descent is identified solely by his race and physical features: "woolly-headed Black-a-moor" or, in some, more accurate, translations of the German, "tarcoal-raven black Moor" (Freeman 814). Only his blackness and nappy hair matter for the purposes of this story—both as identifying features and as the reason for the white boys' ostracism of him. The Black-a-moor appears to remain immobile throughout the plot of the story; he never responds, interacts with his antagonizers, or even changes directions physically. Likewise, though the three boys appear in a few different settings throughout the story, their body positions do not change, which emphasizes their stasis. Frey and Griffith suggest that through drawing Edward, Arthur, and William as fixed figures, "the ultimate effect is to suggest that the three brainless boys are essentially subhuman cutouts, set in their positions and their attitudes and incapable of learning or changing" (55).

Although neither the Black-a-moor nor the white children change in appearance from the first to the last page, the Black-a-moor's muteness gives him even less character than his antagonizers have. Unlike Sambo who bargains for his own life, the Black-a-moor doesn't even defend himself. The teacher defends him. As a result, Hoffmann does not invite the reader to see his humanity but rather depicts him as a flat, static character whose only important traits are his visible, physical ones. Hoffmann's own promotion of racism, then, surfaces not in the explicit, but in the implicit ideology of this tale.

Sambo's name holds as much significance as does that of the Black-a-moor. Yuill says that the Spanish word, *zambo*, means *bow-legged*, "which in turn is believed to be derived from the Late Latin 'scambus' and the Greek 'skambos', meaning 'crooked' " (20). According to Hay, "a tribe called the Samboses were frequently mentioned in the accounts of the English sea captain John Hawkins, who made slaving trips to West Africa in the sixteenth century." In Senegalese, "Sambo" means uncle; in Hausa, the second son is called Sambo (Hay 159). *Nzambu*, a Congo word meaning "monkey," is another possible origin (Yuill 20). Harriet Beecher Stowe used the term "Sambo" as a proper name for one of the two most hated and cruel slaves on Simon Legree's plantation in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), but if this character is Little Black Sambo's literary forerunner, Bannerman transformed his temperament beyond recognition in the creation of her child character. By early in the twentieth century, the term *Sambo* came to be used as a generic name for any black male, particularly in the United States. Its use in Hollywood in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as its common reference to black bartenders and shoeshine boys, turned this once-acceptable proper noun into a derogatory, generic one (Hay 159). "Its essence was that of a childish, dependent black person who posed no harm or threat to white society."[15]

In 1899, however, it is unlikely that Bannerman was making derogatory use of "Sambo." Following in the Dickensian tradition of giving characters

odd, sometimes onomatopoeic, names that play on commonly used words, Bannerman enjoyed verbal jokes and puns, and she chose the names of her characters accordingly (Yuill 29–30).[16] In "The Inky Boys," the antagonists have names, but the protagonist does not; Hoffmann named the obnoxious Edward, William, and Arthur, but he apparently did not consider the Black-a-moor a significant enough character to warrant a name. Bannerman, on the other hand, names both Sambo and his parents, Black Mumbo and Black Jumbo. Though all three names are somewhat problematic, they give a certain amount of character to the protagonist and his parents and also suggest a higher status and respect for these humans than for the nameless though anthropomorphic tigers who live out in the jungle.

Many critics have lambasted Bannerman for her stereotyped portrayal of Sambo and his family. But all of her illustrations—those of her family and friends, as well as those in the books she wrote and illustrated—were caricatures. Hay notes that if given the chance, Bannerman would have been a much better cartoonist than she was an artist and she further argues that though they are caricatures, Bannerman's characters are not stereotypes. "A stereotype is something constantly repeated without change, a character without humanity" (158). This definition certainly describes the nameless, silhouetted Black-a-moor and his tormentors, but it does not describe Sambo, who displays wit, intelligence, and savvy in his repeated encounters with antagonists who could eat him if they chose.

Clearly, many readers interpret Bannerman's depiction of Sambo and his parents negatively. While the visual images—because they are caricatures—seem to poke fun at this black family, the family dynamics tell a different story. Not a solitary individual like the Black-a-moor, Sambo has caring parents who provide the basic necessities of food and shelter and also expend time and money to outfit him fashionably. They even buy him a pair of shoes—items that both Mumbo and Jumbo lack.

Like many other circular journeys in children's literature, Little Black Sambo leaves his parents at home, encounters a conflict that enables him—free from parental intervention—to act as an empowered individual, then returns to the safety of home and a warm parental welcome after his triumph. To celebrate his defeat of the tigers—perhaps as a rite of passage—the family eats tiger pancakes for dinner. Writing in the Victorian era when children were encouraged to be seen and not heard, Bannerman created parents for Sambo who not only value their son but give him the hero's welcome that he deserves after a long day of outsmarting tigers in the jungle.

Although Bannerman lived and wrote in India, she intentionally made Sambo's race and the book's geographical setting inconsistent with her own setting. The Indian word *ghi* (butter), the tropical setting, and the presence of tigers imply that the story occurs in India. Sambo and his family, however, look more African than Indian though not fully either. In an attempt to

explain this inconsistency, Hay says that Bannerman wrote for her own children, not for publication:

> She wanted to set her story somewhere far away and exotic; she chose an imaginary jungle-land and peopled it with what were to her daughters a far-away kind of people. To have made the setting India would have been too humdrum and familiar for them. Then, because she had a liking for terrifying tigers, she brought them in as villains. (Hay 29)

Further defending Bannerman's inconsistencies, Dinnage says:

> The Sambo adventures, of course, happen to never-never people in a never-never land that is neither India nor Africa nor—certainly—the American South; alas for Anglo-Indian Mrs. Bannerman, her head full of perfectly real exotic scenes, and real snakes and tigers, innocently colouring her figures black to suit the story. (Dinnage 834)

In 1899, Grant Richards purchased the rights to the book from one of Bannerman's trusted (but naive) friends for a mere five pounds.[17] Despite Bannerman's humble intentions and narrow target audience for the book (her two daughters), *Little Black Sambo* quickly became popular in the United States. But having lost the copyright to the story only a brief time after composing it, Bannerman maintained control over the publication of neither official nor unofficial versions of the book (Hay 26). Many Americans who read Bannerman's original interpreted Sambo as an African-American child, despite the fact that tigers are not native to the United States. But with the wealth of bowdlerized copies printed in the United States in the early twentieth century, many readers never even saw Bannerman's original but rather versions that more closely resembled blackface minstrel images than did Bannerman's original book—images of Sambo, Mumbo, and Jumbo that Bannerman never authorized or intended. And because more than thirty different version of *Little Black Sambo* have been published, American readers were more likely to encounter bowdlerized versions of the book than they were to read Bannerman's original.

Subsequent American interpretations of Sambo's African ethnicity turned Bannerman's clever entertainment choices into a social travesty. Hay asserts that had Sambo and his family been white caricatures illustrated by Edward Lear or Tomi Ungerer, "everyone would be delighted. But because there are so few books of any real character about black children, those which offer anything more than a safe, pallid domesticity are exposed to our social critics. . . ." (168). Anyone who examines Sara Cone Bryant's 1938 *Epaminondas*, featuring an ignorant black boy with no father and a dialect-speaking Mammy who constantly tells him, "You ain't got the sense you was

born with!" (6) will realize that Bannerman did not rely on minstrel images of the black child for her source material.[18] Despite these dynamics, however, many readers still find these illustrations stereotypical and offensive.

In examining illustrations of the Black-a-moor and Sambo for messages about their economic class, one will find that the illustrations of the Black-a-moor imply that this boy comes from a much lower socioeconomic class than does Sambo. Hoffmann's character wears only a pair of red walking shorts with a split (or is it a rip?) in the leg. A child might reason: "It's hot where the Black-a-moor lives." Why, then, do Edward, William, and Arthur wear long sleeve shirts, long pants, socks, shoes, and hats? Much more exposed to the elements than the three white boys, perhaps the Black-a-moor uses his green umbrella to keep the sun off and not, as does Sambo, to make a fashion statement or, as McDonald suggests, to display a status symbol (516). Although the three boys carry implements of fun (toys), the Black-a-moor's only possession, the umbrella, takes the place of an item of necessity: a shirt that could provide protection from the sun.

Sambo, much more suitably attired than the Black-a-moor, wears the same garments—minus the hat—as Edward, William, and Arthur. Like the Black-a-moor, Sambo wears shorts, but in a tropical climate where palm trees grow, shorts seem appropriate. Sambo's parents dress more warmly, but maybe shorts are more suitable for children than for adults in this setting. Losing his clothes to the tigers, Sambo obviously feels uncomfortable about his nakedness and his relief after regaining them demonstrates that he is unaccustomed to traveling unclothed in the jungle. The Black-a-moor's unresponsiveness to the boys' taunts, on the other hand, imply that this boy's bare chest, legs, and feet are the norm. His exposed upper body invites the reader to focus on the Black-a-moor's nakedness, his blackness, and the boys' criticism of both. The Black-a-moor is clearly defined as the Other.

Consistently illustrating the Black-a-moor in an outdoor setting implies not only that he belongs outside but also that he has no permanent shelter. Sambo knows the dangers of the jungle as well as the safety of home. His economically comfortable family eats a dinner of tiger pancakes on blue dishes, served on a table draped with a white tablecloth. Mumbo and Jumbo are bringing Sambo up in a cultured, European-influenced environment—even if their plaid and striped clothes hint that their sense of fashion leaves something to be desired.

In investigating whether Bannerman's image of the black child is more positive than Hoffmann's earlier image, one of the most telling tests of all is the reasoning powers of the two children. Sambo is a subject; the Black-a-moor is an object. Although Sambo fears the tigers, he demonstrates the presence of mind to take command of creatures that he cannot physically overpower; Sambo uses his verbal skills and newly acquired material possessions to bargain his way out of being devoured. The mute Black-a-moor,

notably lacking possessions and apparently unaware of his surroundings, enjoys no such privilege. Humans antagonize the Black-a-moor; animals antagonize Sambo. While Sambo's name and the title of the book call attention to his race, the tigers torment him because of his edibility not because of his ethnicity. They see him as a tasty morsel. Writing in the fairy-tale tradition of children being threatened and/or eaten by anthropomorphic, talking beasts, Bannerman focuses the conflict on the interaction between the protagonist and the antagonists. With the help of his thrifty father, Sambo prevails, not by defeating the tigers himself but by capitalizing on their self-destruction. Given the formidability of these antagonists, Sambo's choice to fight with brains rather than with brawn is a wise one.

Writing in the moral tale tradition, Hoffmann uses the Black-a-moor only as an object of ridicule so that Agrippa can preach didacticism and exact his godlike punishment on the children for their disobedience. Agrippa's height—"So tall he almost touched the sky"—(Hoffmann *Struwwelpeter*, 9)—is no coincidence. Frey and Griffith see a hint of Hoffmann in Agrippa, who "is obviously some kind of writer like Hoffmann, and, again like Hoffmann, he is responsible for turning the tables on naughty boys" (55). According to the response of Agrippa, a white defender, the poor Black-a-moor can't even fight his own battles.

Although the title indicates that the Black-a-moor is not supposed to be the focus of this story, he is the protagonist. But it seems odd to label him thus when he does, says, and thinks nothing as far as the reader perceives; throughout the story, the Black-a-moor remains unaware that he is a victim. With the lack of humanity that Hoffmann gives the Black-a-moor, the boy might as well be an ugly duckling: he is the helpless, exotic Other.

Any difference for which a character could be ridiculed—such as height, weight, or hair color—would have served the purpose of this didactic tale just as well as does race. That Hoffmann chose to focus on the character's race but not on any other features of the character makes this boy a much less appealing figure than is Sambo. Child readers can empathize with Sambo because of his humanity, but they feel little or nothing for the Black-a-moor because of his lack of personhood. The Black-a-moor is a stereotype rather than an individual.

Both Hoffmann and Bannerman were European writers ahead of their time, doing things with children's literature that had not or had rarely been done before. They wrote about minority characters at a time when minorities in society and especially in literature were marginalized to the point of invisibility. In defense of Bannerman's book, Hay points out, "Certainly the book, in all its versions, had a very powerful impact on people's instinctive images. It was one of the very few books then available which even acknowledged the existence of black people" (159). Bannerman went so far as to create a black character with an intelligent mind and an appealing personality. And given the publication of retellings of Sambo's story in the 1990s,

Bannerman must have struck a chord with many a child reader for it to have lasted this long.

Both authors bring more delight and less instruction into their texts than their contemporaries who wrote for children. Hoffmann moved away from the "stupid collections of pictures" and "moralizing stories" ("How I Came" n.p.) into the absurd where children die in five days from refusing to eat their soup or have the Red-Legged Scissor Man whack their thumbs off when they continue to suck them after having been warned to stop. Based on these absurdities, Philip Hofer attributes the emergence of the modern comic strip to Hoffmann's early text.[19] Writing *The Story of Little Black Sambo* in the nonsense tradition, Bannerman composed this moral-less tale not to teach anything but to delight readers.

Both authors used violence, and sometimes excessive violence, in their works. Hoffmann plays on the high infant mortality rate of the nineteenth century to persuade young readers to comply with adult expectations.[20] Commenting on the uniqueness of *Struwwelpeter*, Ashton and Petersen assert: "If it was a collection of subversive poetry, it was supremely entertaining. If solely a collection of cautionary tales, it deserved attention for its shameless techniques" (37). In their innovative themes and writing styles, both Hoffmann and Bannerman wrote against the sentimentalism and authoritative didacticism in the works of authors such as Sir Isaac Watts, Christina Rossetti, and even Louisa May Alcott. Hoffmann strictly supervised the lithographer who "transferred the outline drawings on to the stone and the women who colored them by hand . . . in order to prevent any hint of artificiality or sentimentality, whether in line or colour, from creeping into the pages" (Hurliman 54).

In her reluctance to sentimentalize, Bannerman also used violence to entertain rather than to teach. In *Little Black Mingo* (1902), for instance, a crocodile swallows a wicked old woman, after which both the woman and the crocodile explode. In *Little Black Quibba* (1903), an elephant and a snake are dismembered, then die after being dropped off of a cliff onto sharp rocks (Yuill 8). Following Hoffmann's lead, Bannerman, as well as her contemporary, Beatrix Potter, depicted a harsh world in which bad things can happen to young protagonists: fathers can get baked into pies or children can be gobbled up by tigers on their way home if they're not smart enough to bargain their way out of being devoured.

The two most recent retellings of Bannerman's story continue this tradition of morbid delight. Marcellino's version, *The Story of Little Babaji*, sticks closely to the original text but sets the story firmly in India by changing the characters' names and by illustrating them as "uniformly Indian" (Alderson 34). In *Sam and the Tigers*, however, Lester and Pinkney interpret Bannerman's story much more freely, turning the tale into an African-American fantasy set in a place called Sam-sam-sa-mara where everyone's name is Sam and "where the animals and the people lived and worked together

like they didn't know they weren't supposed to." Despite the differences between these two tales, readers will notice that they resolve the two most controversial aspects of Bannerman's original work—the problematic ethnic visual images and the tenuous geographical location—by turning these ambiguities into certainties.

While reviewer Brian Alderson lauds Marcellino's story for being true to Bannerman's original, he criticizes Lester and Pinkney's retelling for failing to do so. Alderson asserts that Lester's language is "overloaded . . . with unnecessary baggage," that the fantastic setting negates the mythical quality of the story, and that the anthropomorphism "makes nonsense of the whole tiger episode" (34). If one thinks of *Sam and the Tigers* as merely a retelling of *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, all of this may be true. But in his introduction to the book, Pinkney says that months of researching the multiple volumes of Bannerman's story freed him to find his own interpretation "of the young black child who could outwit tigers"—the same black child whom both he and Lester had recognized as a hero when they were children.[21] Their reconceptualization and re-visioning of the story, true to Southern storytelling more than to Bannerman's original text, offers readers a distinctively African-American hero with just as much wit and imagination as Sambo but with a whole lot more style and attitude. Pinkney's characteristic illustrations combined with Lester's fanciful language will likely give *Sam and the Tigers* the kind of staying power that many other Lester-Pinkney collaborations have enjoyed. In addition, Alderson's critique might relate to his lack of understanding of some of the black modes of discourse that I discuss in chapter 8, and readers who come to *Sam and the Tigers* with little understanding of the ways that black people have traditionally communicated with one another will appreciate Lester's linguistic play less than those who do.

So who *is* that kid with the green umbrella and the curly-toed shoes? Little Black Sambo's innocence says he's the forerunner for Peter in Ezra Jack Keats's *The Snowy Day* (1960), who mopes over the loss of the snowball that he saves in his pocket from his romp outside. His cleverness says he's the ancestor of the trickster Mirandy, who captures Brother Wind in the barn and forces him to do her bidding so that she and Ezel can win the annual Junior Cakewalk Contest in Patricia McKissack's *Mirandy and Brother Wind* (1988). Sambo's determination says he's the predecessor of the pretentious Grace in Mary Hoffman's *Amazing Grace* (1991), who plays Peter Pan in the school drama despite being told that neither black kids nor girls can play Peter Pan. His Indian-ness say he's the forerunner of Marcellino's Little Babaji, and his African American-ness say he's the ancestor of Lester and Pinkney's Sam from Sam-sam-sa-mara. In light of these newest renderings of Bannerman's Sam and the proliferation of positive depictions of children from many different ethnicities in American children's literature, perhaps

it is time to acknowledge not just Sambo's racial/gendered image as a predecessor of the nigger minstrel but also the positive contributions that Bannerman's protagonist has made within the developing canon of African-American children's picture books. For, as Julius Lester so aptly recalls in his afterword to *Sam and the Tigers*, "what other story had I read at age seven and remembered for fifty years?" With the power to make that kind of impression, Little Black Sambo and his antecedents may live on for another hundred years.

2

From *Ten Little Niggers* to *Afro-Bets*

Images of Blackness in Picture Books for Young Readers, 1870s to 2000s

The previous chapter's discussion of Helen Bannerman's *Little Black Sambo* makes clear that Sambo, problematic as he was, improved upon the flat, static, objectified depiction of the Black-a-Moor in Heinrich Hoffmann's "The Story of the Inky Boys" in *Struwwelpeter*. Despite this improvement, however, Little *Black Sambo* still sent the message to some readers that people of color should appear in children's books only to be laughed at and ridiculed. And if Bannerman was not aware of or invested in conveying this damaging message through her stories of Sambo, Quibba, Mingo, and others, many of her writing contemporaries—both in the United States and in England—were.

One cannot appreciate the cultural and historical significance of Lucille Clifton's *The Black BCs* (1970), Muriel and Tom Feelings's Caldecott Honor Award–winning *Moja Means One* (1971), or Wade and Cheryl Hudson's *Afro-Bets 123* (1987) without an understanding of the nature of the Coontown series of E. W. Kemble and the longevity and proliferation of the *Ten Little Niggers* books. One can also not fathom the importance of the work that W. E. B. Du Bois, Augustus Granville Dill, and Jessie Fauset undertook in 1920 and 1921 to bring *The Brownies' Book Magazine* into existence unless one realizes how few picture books existed in which black children could see themselves and their people positively represented even up until the 1960s.

The evolution of African-American children's picture books has mirrored the nineteenth century "Golden Age," which moved the focus of children's literature "from instruction to delight"—but this form of instruction was firmly grounded in concerns about race. During and after the Harlem Renaissance, writers such as Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps paid special attention to literature for children, while many white writers continued to create minstrel depictions of black characters in children's picture

books. Prior to *The Brownies' Book* (1920–21), children who wanted to read about black characters in children's literature could read about buffoons, mammies, Sambos, or savages, but not about the beauty of "Children of the Sun" nor about adult African Americans who had consistently made positive contributions throughout American history. In 1937, Sterling A. Brown summarized seven black stereotypes that he found common in American literature: the contented slave, the "happy-hearted Negro," the wretched freedman, the tragic mulatto, the exotic primitive, the local color Negro, and, after Reconstruction, when whites feared that blacks would get the vote and participate in American life as citizens, the brute Negro.[1] Few other literary options existed, and Brown appropriately labeled these images of black Americans in literature as gross misrepresentations created by and for white people.

This chapter's historical walk through selected children's picture books about the black experience from the 1870s to the 2000s—with an emphasis both on concept books for the very young and storybooks for elementary-age readers—will illustrate how the genre has transformed over time: from one in which whites wrote about black characters only as objects of humor, to one in which black authors began to honor their own culture and express their own realities through picture books intended not just for black children but for children from all backgrounds. I have chosen to discuss abecendaries (ABC books), counting books, and other texts that teach basic concepts to the youngest of readers because even though many consider these works strictly informational and thus void of bias or ideological freight, such neutrality has been far from the reality of picture books about black characters. Furthermore, since alphabet and counting books are designed for the youngest readers, they have the first chance of influencing impressionable young minds with the messages—explicit or implicit, edifying or damaging—that they convey. On the other hand, I have chosen to examine story picture books for young readers because, as Jessie M. Birtha articulates, "Works of fiction provide an intercultural exchange for young readers—something that is not derived from nonfiction. Fiction provides more images to the reader, and even when the setting is in a different time frame, it reflects the ideas and attitudes of the period in which it is written."[2] In addition, inaccuracies and stereotypes more often surface in fictional texts than in nonfiction.

In my analysis of some representative examples of both concept and story books from the decades between the 1870s and the 2000s, I will use *The Brownies' Book* and *Ten Little Niggers* as contrasting touchstones. I use multiple versions of *Ten Little Niggers* because its longevity (1860s to 1980s) as well as its pervasiveness in both American and British children's literature imply that its racist messages remained acceptable until late into the twentieth century. Although it is a periodical and not a picture book, I

use *The Brownies' Book* because of its centrality as a turning point for picture books and also because of its importance in displaying appealing images of black children and in spreading positive messages about black youth and their place in American society. As the authorship of and the audience for children's picture books shifted over time, the ideologies changed dramatically from a Eurocentric to an Afrocentric worldview, giving rise to a genre that has now realized and even gone beyond the goals laid out in the 1920s by the creators of *The Brownies' Book Magazine*.

1870s: Disposable Niggers

In 1875, the New York publishers the McLoughlin Brothers produced a song in picture book form called *The Ten Little Niggers*.[3] This song, written in the United States but popularized in England, became wildly popular in both countries if the proliferation of different versions is any indication. Like "There Were Ten in the Bed" and "Ninety-Nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall," this musical story tells a tale of elimination, but in the case of the *Ten Little Niggers* books, it is human beings that are successively eliminated—literally. For instance, most versions of this tale begin in this way: "Ten Little Nigger Boys went out to dine;/One choked his little self, and that left nine."[4] One of the boys gets killed by a bear when the brothers visit the zoo; another slices himself in half while chopping wood; another dies in his sleep; and still another gets "frizzled up" in the sun. In most versions of this book prior to the 1940s, seven of the ten characters meet untimely and fairly grizzly deaths.

In the McLoughlins' 1875 version, the book's cover (fig. 2.1) shows the ten characters—ostensibly brothers of the same age—in a tropical setting, wearing sailor shirts, horizontally striped socks and vertically striped leggings, enjoying the music of one of the ten who is playing the banjo. Because this picture book is also a song, readers might assume that these characters are singing the story. If this is the case, they are celebrating their own demise, perhaps further reinforcing the common stereotype held by white readers that blacks love to sing and dance, even to their own detriment. This musical theme of celebration carries over from the cover to the inside because of the book's format: an illustration appears on the top of each page, showing the events of the story, under which appears several boys' bodies, contorted into the letters that spell the number featured on that page (fig. 2.2).

On some pages, these contorted positions make the boys appear as if they are dancing—dancing above the sheet music that changes this written text into an auditory one. Both the contorted characters who spell out the numbers and those on the top of the page smile throughout the story. Even

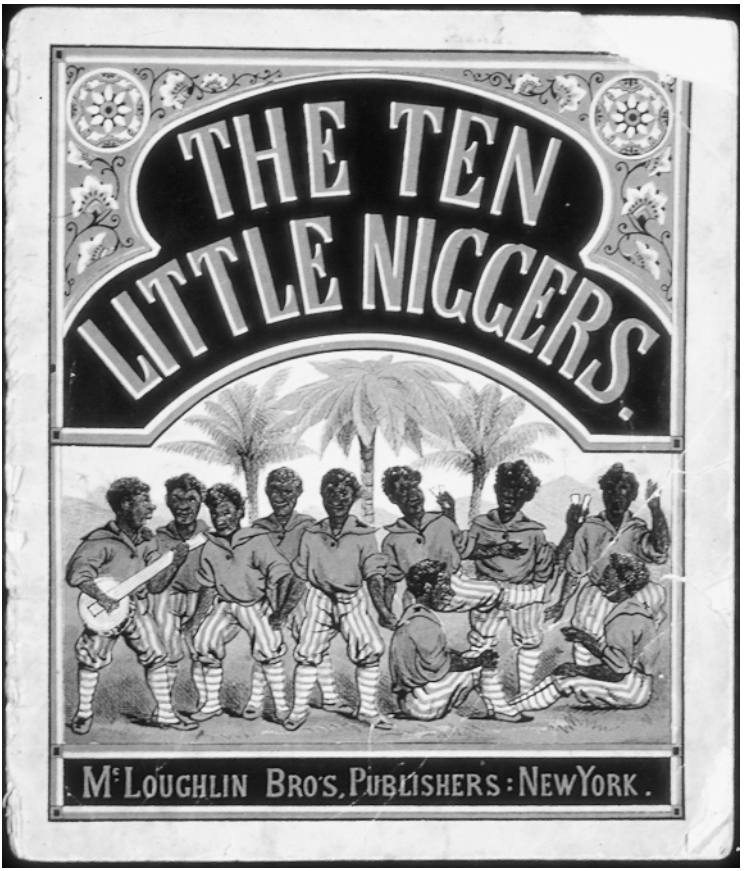

Fig. 2.1. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Ten Little Niggers*. New York: McLoughlin Brothers, 1875.

the boy who chops himself in half is still smiling after his self-dismemberment. Furthermore, in every illustration, the "ten little niggers," who wear matching clothes and similar facial expressions throughout, look more or less identical, from their knickers and shoes right down to their deep chocolate skin color and bright red lips. This combination of visual and auditory elements effectively conveys the stereotype of the smiling, singing "darkie," the stereotype that Sterling Brown called the "happy-hearted Negro" (2).

The McLoughlin Brothers' *Ten Little Niggers* must have met with enough success to warrant a sequel, *Nine Niggers More* (187–). It begins:

> You know our little nigger friends—you saw them once before;
> We brought them down to Rockaway, and left them on the shore.



Fig. 2.2. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Ten Little Niggers*. New York: McLoughlin Brothers, 1875.

> But now their parents think it time they should at school be taught.
> So to instructors wondrous wise girls and boys are brought.[5]

In this picture book, a black mother and father send their seven children, consisting of three sets of fraternal twins (a boy and a girl in each set) and one little boy, to boarding school. While there, the children learn music, reading, art, badminton, croquet, cricket (during which they break a window), and piano. And when the holidays come, they ride home in a horse-drawn carriage.

Nine Niggers More seems a much better story than *Ten Little Niggers* both because the children do not die as a result of their adventures and because, published only a little over a decade after the manumission of American slaves, this story tells of the education of a family of black children. But

one need not look far to understand that this story actually makes a mockery of educating black children. True to minstrel depictions of black characters as ridiculously overdressed, the females in this story wear long, multilayered, formal gowns with bustles, and the males wear bow ties and tails. Holding the hand of the youngest child and following the rest of the family is a tall, gray-haired white man, clearly the family's servant. This fellow, later described as "faithful John," accompanies the family on an outing when "the young folks all went out in furbelows and frills . . . to music and quadrilles" (*Nine*). This character's name, "John," not unlike the generic title, "Jim," which whites commonly used to address any black male, pokes fun at the subservient position of this character by inverting racial dynamics. Even more surprising is that at the dance to which John accompanies the family, some of the siblings dance with white children. Black men were lynched for much less intimate contact with white women from slavery times through the 1930s; this depiction of a dance could not possibly have been intended to reflect reality. John's service to this family, their biracial coupling during the quadrilles, and their attendance later at a pantomime are so far-fetched for segregated 1870s America that these scenarios could only have evoked laughter in its audience. Further emphasizing its entertainment value, the back cover of this book gives an additional clue about the McLoughlins' purpose for publishing a sequel to *The Ten Little Niggers* at the time they did. This book, which sold for twenty-five cents, was published just in time for Valentine's Day: a funny little gift that one lover could give to another.

While the visible wealth of this family and the pomp and circumstance which seem to surround all of their activities ostensibly pay respect to them, the racist ideology that underlies this musical story makes it a fantasy—a dream world in which black children can go to school, receive an education, and share a social milieu with white people. While these two McLoughlin texts taught young children to read and count, they also taught them that black people are extraordinarily fecund, disposable, greedy, ignorant, unattractive, and dim-witted.

1880s: Ten Little Niggers Again

In their attempt to appeal to young readers while improving upon the McLoughlins' editions of *Ten Little Niggers*, the Birn Brothers made the story into a rudimentary interactive book.[6] With board cover illustrations in black and white, and internal illustrations in color, this book, once opened, splits into two mini–flip books—one on the top and the other on the bottom, both with die-cut pages—that convey the story. As in other versions of this tale, the ten characters are all dressed identically. As the cover illustration shows (fig. 2.3), though, these characters resemble blackface minstrels even more than the illustrations of the McLoughlin Brothers.

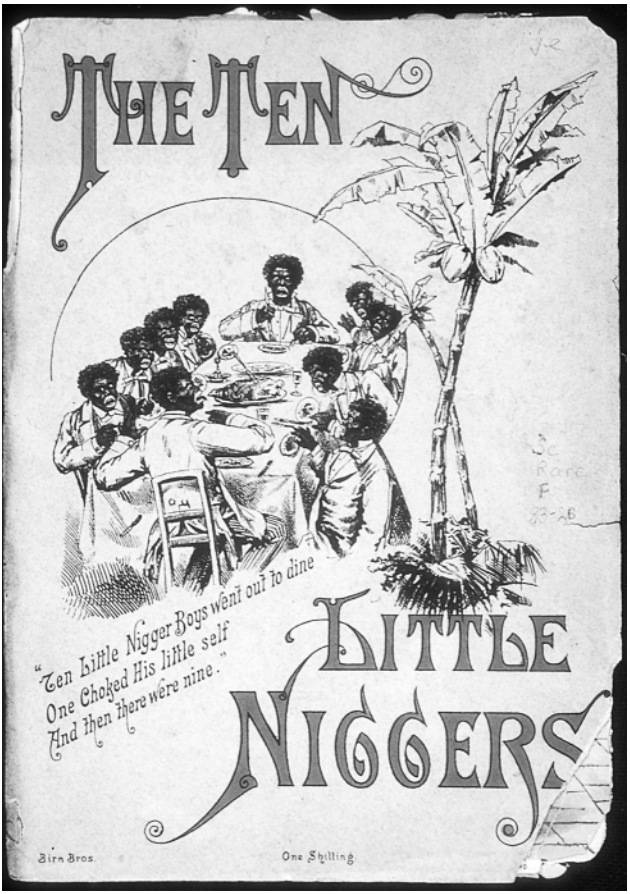

Fig. 2.3. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *The Ten Little Niggers.* London: Birn Brothers, 18—.

While in many of the previous versions of the story, the siblings seem sympathetic or sorrowful when their choking brother is dying, these nine brothers look surprised and aggravated. The brother who sits at the head of the table and closest to the distressed sibling is sticking his tongue out and sitting askew in his chair, looking more ready to attack his brother for interfering with the family's ham dinner than to assist him. Despite their crisply laundered, clean, white tails, bow ties, and striped slacks, their white-painted mouths and bulging eyes emphasize their savagery, while their unsympathetic attitude toward the choking brother reinforces both their inhumanity and—if their dinner is more important than the life of a sibling—their greed.

At the end of this version of the tale, the last boy marries and has more "little niggers . . . Whose story we will tell you another time." In spite of the fact that readers had already heard the story of the "nine niggers more" from the McLoughlins the decade prior, the potential for this story at the end of the nineteenth century must have seemed inexhaustible. Considering the additional permutations that surfaced in the following decades, perhaps it was.

1890s: Little Niggers Go from Boys to Men

In an 1894 version of *Ten Little Niggers*, the McLoughlins revised their earlier story but not its accompanying racial ideology. Different in format from the earlier books, this version places the sheet music for the song in the front and back inside covers, and it features full-color illustrations more detailed than those in the earlier books. As before, the characters wear minstrel attire, but in this rendition, the "ten little niggers" look much more like men than like boys (fig. 2.4).

This juxtaposition of the written label "boys" with the visual representation of men is, I believe, intentional, and it establishes a precedent that many illustrators and publishers would emulate in subsequent versions of this book. David Logan in Mildred Taylor's 1977 Newbery Award–winning novel *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, which is set in 1930s Depression-era Mississippi, gives his son Stacey some advice about Jeremy, a white boy who likes and tries to befriend the Logan children: "Right now you and Jeremy might get along fine, but in a few years he'll think of himself as a man but you'll probably still be a boy to him."[7] This same dynamic is functioning in these 1894 images: they illustrate ten *men* but refer to them in the diminutive—"little niggers"—which reveals how the McLoughlins saw African-American males. No matter how old they look, they will always be "little niggers."

In addition to this change, the 1894 version of this book ends differently than the earlier books: the lone "little nigger" who remains after all the others have disappeared or died gets married and lives a happy life with his new wife. The illustrator shows the wedding ceremony in progress, with all of the attendants gathered around in a living room. If seen in isolation, out of the context of the rest of the story, this illustration of the wedding looks reasonably respectful. The characters lack the big, rolling eyes and the fat, red lips that pervade the earlier renditions, and the bride and groom are both handsomely illustrated. As in the earlier versions, everyone at the wedding looks alike, but unlike the "ten little niggers," the wedding attendees are not all siblings. In her 1971 article, "The Black Experience in Children's Books: An Introductory Essay," Augusta Baker says that "An artist can portray a black child—black skin, natural hair, and flat features—and make him attractive or make him a stereotype and a caricature" (144). Because of the

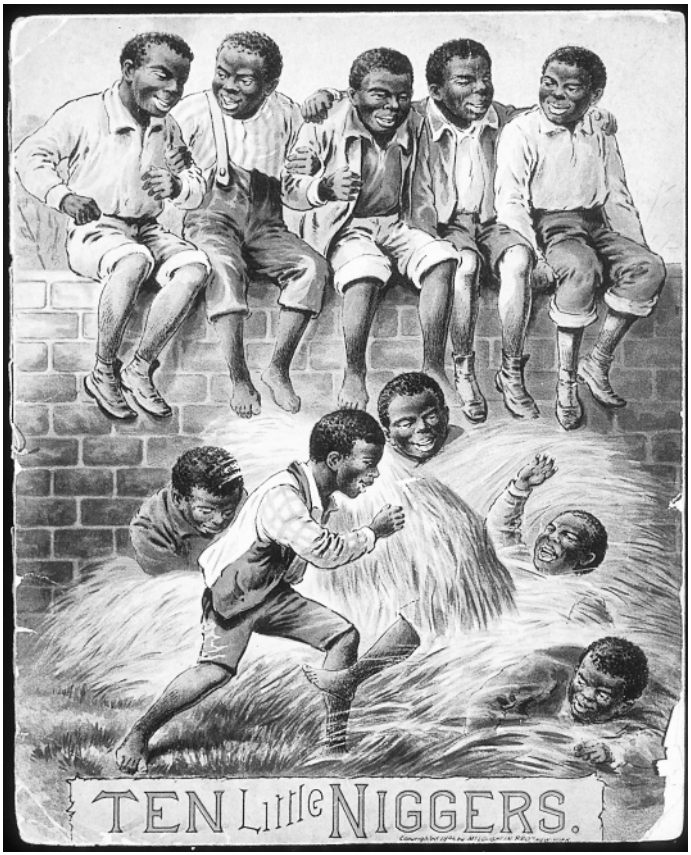

Fig. 2.4. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *The Ten Little Niggers*. New York: McLoughlin Brothers, 1894.

uniformity in the features of the black characters in this story, this depiction comes down on the side of stereotype and caricature.

One need not look far to understand the commonality of depicting black characters in this way during the late-nineteenth century. In contrast with Kate Greenaway's alphabet book, *A Apple Pie* (1886), in which well-dressed children articulate their interactions with a big apple pie ("D, dealt it," "F, fought for it," "J, jumped for it," etc.),[8] E. W. Kemble's *A Coon Alphabet* (1898) takes readers through twenty-six four-lined rhymes about black characters—both young and old—that represent African Americans as unintelligible and senseless (fig. 2.5).[9]

The book's title itself clearly identifies Kemble's racial stance. From the 1860s through the 1960s, "coon," an abbreviation of raccoon, was a

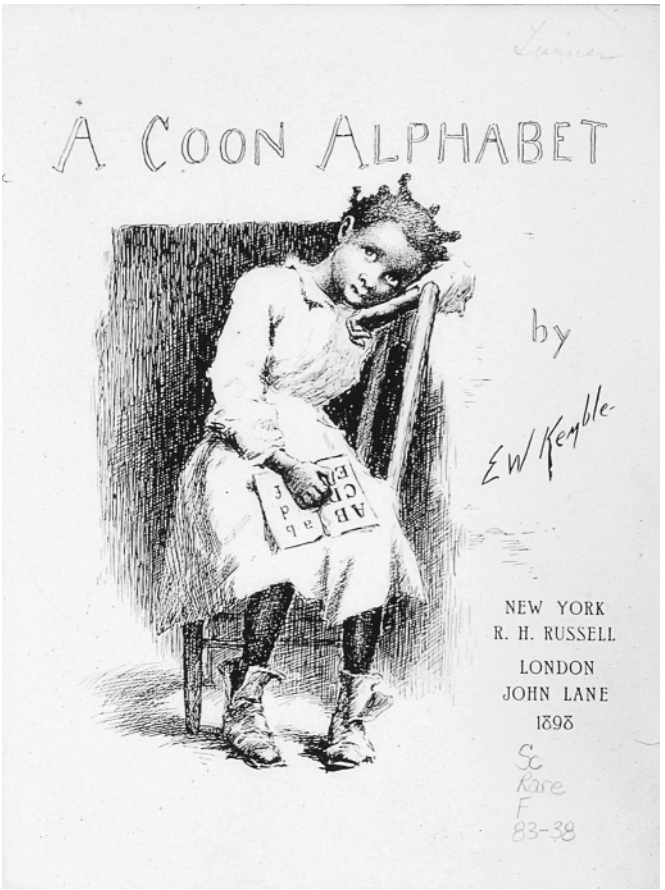

Fig. 2.5. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Kemble, E. W. *A Coon Alphabet*. New York: R.H. Russell, 1898.

derogatory label for blacks; or as a 1903 *Westminster Gazette* writer said, it was "modern slang for a nigger" ("Coon"). Furthermore, unlike the narrator in the *Ten Little Niggers* books, this book's presumably black narrator speaks with a heavy dialect nearly indecipherable to contemporary readers.

In each lettered vignette, the first page introduces a character, and the second page gives the "punch line" that confirms the stupidity or gullibility of the character(s). A few examples will illustrate the book's technique: "M is for mendicants what's bofe blind an lame,/but a common house cat—/[next page] cured 'em quick just de same." The first illustration for this poem features an elderly black man and woman, holding signs that say, respectively, "I iz blind and krippuld," and "So iz I." Despite their earlier crip-

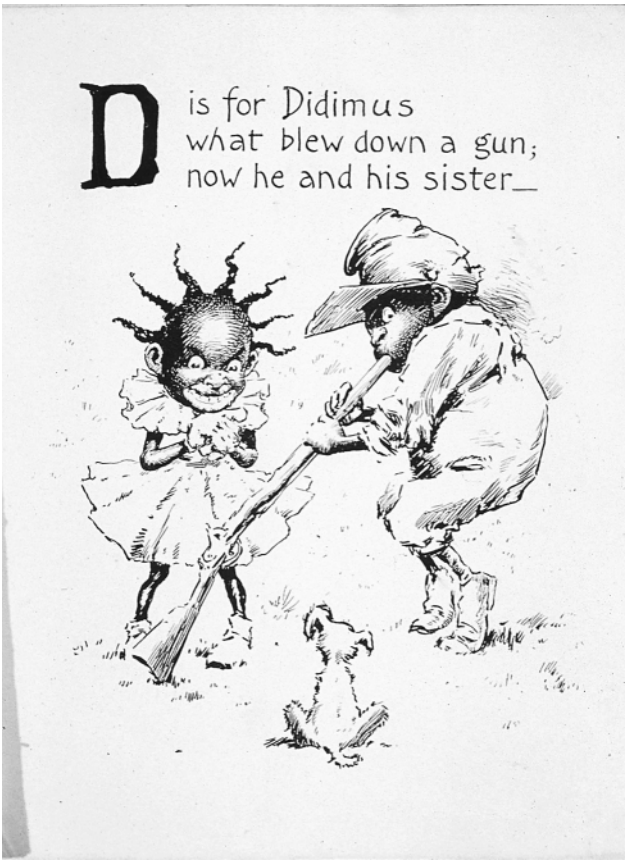

Fig. 2.6. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Kemble, E. W. *A Coon Alphabet*. New York: R. H. Russell, 1898.

pled state on the first page, on the second page, the man is running from the same cat that has scared the woman up a tree.

Letter "Q" tells of a woman named Queenie, "so coy, trim and neat," while the illustration of Queenie shows that she is grossly obese. "When she goes into de briney—/[a pond], it rises four feet." In the second illustration, Queenie's splash into the pond has caused the water to rise, threatening to drown everyone who stood around earlier admiring her. Kemble also pokes fun at dark skin later in the alphabet: "X is fo' Xerky,/de blackest dat grew,/he wished he was white—/and his wish came true." Not really. The bucket of paint that sat on a shelf above his head earlier has come crashing down, covering him with white paint. A watching dog laughs at Xerky, ears upraised. And so did Kemble's audience, apparently (figs. 2.6 and 2.7).

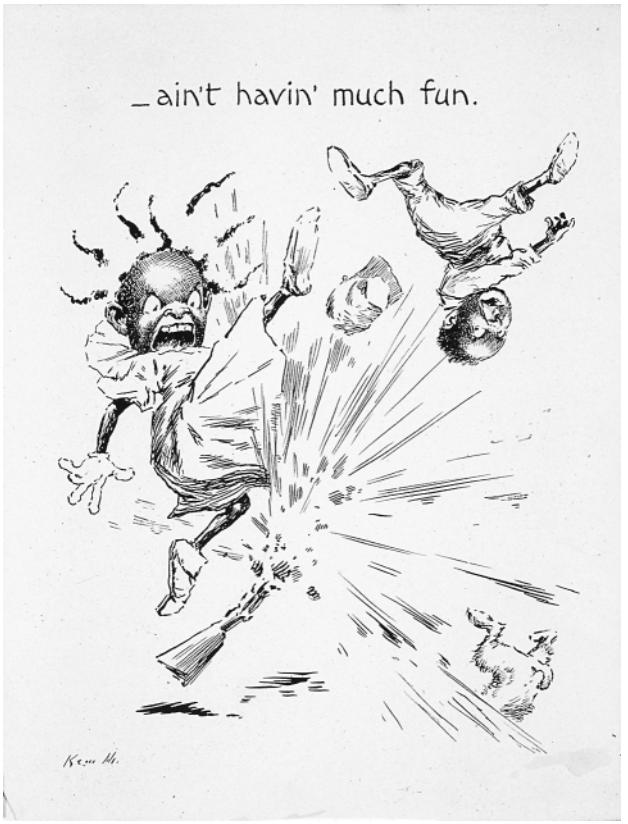

Fig. 2.7. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Kemble, E. W. *A Coon Alphabet*. New York: R. H. Russell, 1898.

The copy of *A Coon Alphabet* that I examined at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture had been "A Christmas gift for B. R. Turner." Whoever B. R. Turner was received this gift from someone who must surely have found the book entertaining.

1900s: Niggers Anthologized

The turn of the century brought the publication of many more books of this ilk. Typically anthologized in storybooks such as *Mother Goose*, *Ten Little Niggers* appeared in the 1901 book, *Nursery Numbers*, published by Frederick Warne.[10] One of twelve counting stories in this volume, "Ten Little Niggers" was popular enough to have served as advertising for the book. Ten small black figures, all dressed like Uncle Sam in top hats and tails and red



Fig. 2.8. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black *Nursery Numbers*. London: Frederick Warne, 1901.

and white striped pants, march across the bottom and side of the page underneath a little white child, reading in a chair with her younger brother and sister listening (fig. 2.8).

Rhymes such as "One, Two, Buckle My Shoe" and "Hickory Dickory Dock" teach addition, subtraction, and even multiplication. In this version of "Ten Little Nigger Boys," detailed on a double-page spread, seven of the characters meet destructive ends, and the last one gets married, leaving none. Here again, both on the book cover and in most of the illustrations on the double-page spread, the characters appear to be men rather than boys. The most significant aspect of this particular rendition of the rhyme is the context in which it appears. Their position alongside "Hickory, Dickory Dock" and other counting songs reveals how integral these stereotypes of black people were to the fabric of white society in the early 1900s (figs. 2.9 and 2.10).[11]

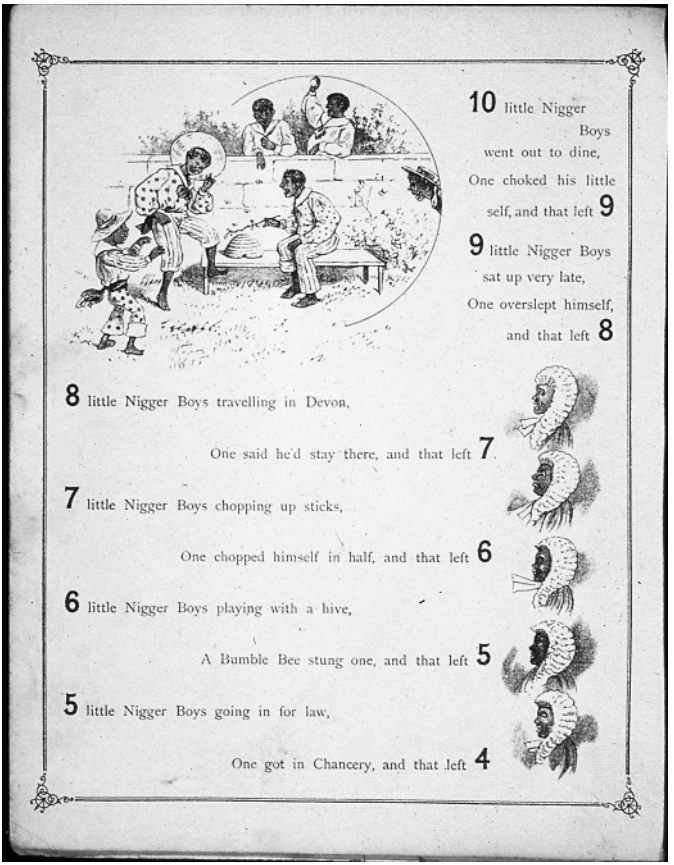

Fig. 2.9. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Nursery Numbers*. London: Frederick Warne, 1901.

Claude Kempson's 1903 oversized picture book, *The Sad End of Erica's Blackamoor*, provides an intriguing look at how attitudes toward blackness got translated into literature for children during this era, and how ideas about Africans that came out of British children's books got superimposed onto African Americans and surfaced in American children's texts about black Americans (fig. 2.11).

Published in London, this long, strange, and convoluted, handwritten and hand–drawn story tells the tale of a "toyshop blackamoor made of plaster, with arms & legs hinged on with wooden pegs" who meets his demise as a result of his mischievous and devious behavior.[12] The preface begins:

> You probably know real live black men live in Africa where: [sic.] the blackamoor so dark and hairy in the plains of Timbuctoo, shoots & eats the

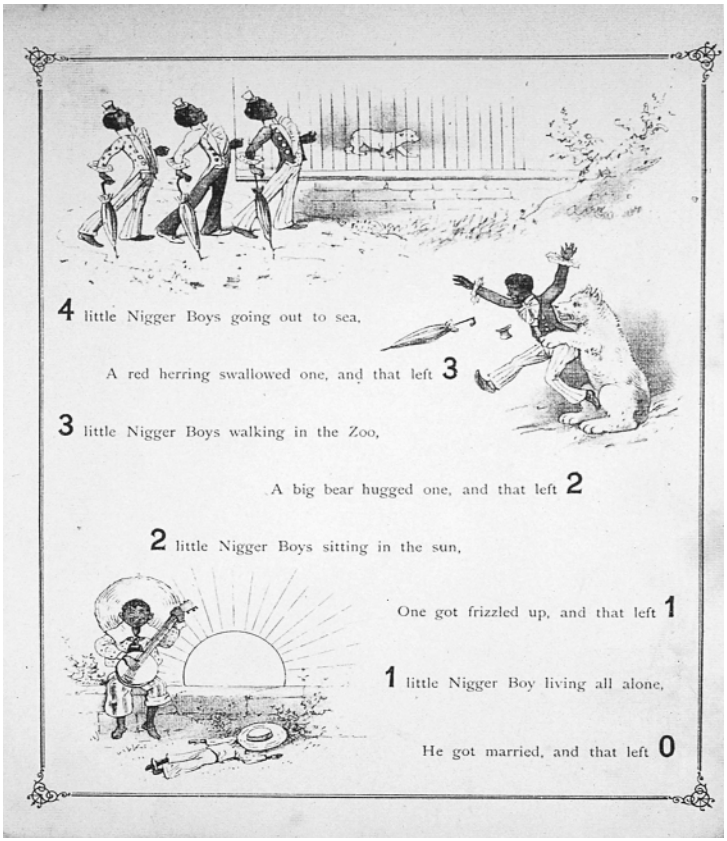

Fig. 2.10. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. *Nursery Numbers*. London: Frederick Warne, 1901.

> cassowary, Zebra, Monkey, Springbok Too! But this blackamoor is different: if you look at his portrait on the opposite page, & compare it with the two big black Africans on this one you will see the difference at once. (Kempson 3)

Erica's naughty brother, Dick, thinks it will be fun to harness their yellow puppy up to a toy cart and sit the blackamoor in the driver's seat. The blackamoor drives the cart carefully only until he rolls out of Dick and Erica's sight, and then he whips the yellow dog mercilessly, forcing him to run faster and faster until the cart tips over, breaking the blackamoor's neck (figs. 2.12 and 2.13).

And "[When blackamoors break their necks their heads come *right* off]" (23).

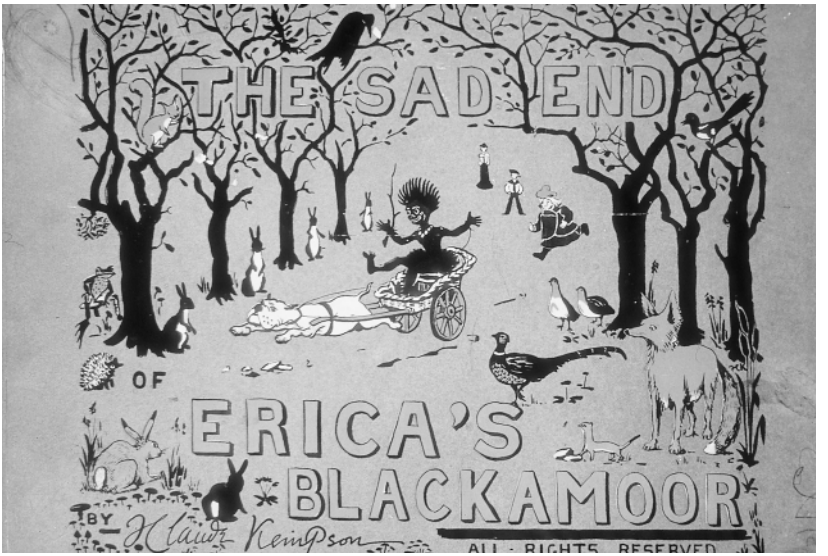

Fig. 2.11. Illustrated by Claude Kempson. *The Sad End of Erica's Blackamoor*. London: A. Arnold, 1903.



Fig. 2.12. Illustrated by Claude Kempson. *The Sad End of Erica's Blackamoor*. London: A. Arnold, 1903.

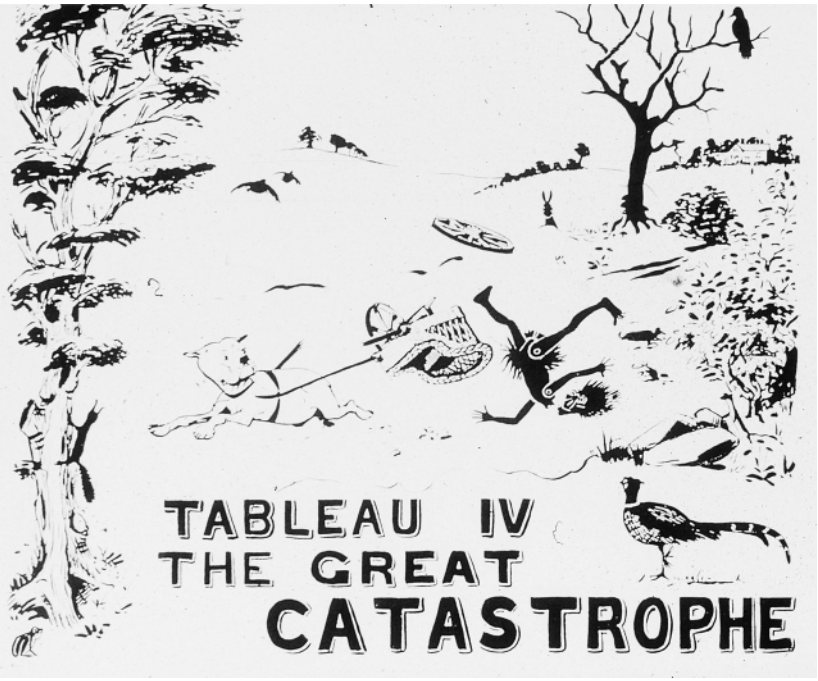

Fig. 2.13. Fig. 13. Illustrated by Claude Kempson. *The Sad End of Erica's Blackamoor*. London: A. Arnold, 1903.

As the blackamoor lies sprawling on the ground, the wild animals begin to fight over the hair that grows both on his head and around his waist—which the magpie wants for his nest—and in their bickering, the animals pull the blackamoor limb from limb. When Erica, Dick, and the Governess find him, Erica cries, "but she only shed a *very* few tears about him, for she knew now what a bad black ungrateful heart he had" (32). When Dick suggests a funeral, she dries her tears because "she liked funerals almost as much as Dick did" (32). Oddly enough, although the blackamoor is half Erica's size in many of the illustrations, he appears taller than both Erica and Dick—as if he were really an adult male—when they have reattached his body parts with string for the burial (fig. 2.14).

As Kempson promises in the preface of the book, he offers a moral at the end, directly addressing the reader in second person. This moral, however, seems much more like the self-reflexive, irreverent, postmodern not-quite-morals that Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith create in *Squids Will Be Squids* (1998) than like those indicative of the 1900s:



Fig. 2.14. Illustrated by Claude Kempson. *The Sad End of Erica's Blackamoor*. London: A. Arnold, 1903.

> You are not always told the moral of a story because morals are supposed to be rather dull; but every story *has* a moral, & if you are not told it you have to guess it for yourself & this is rather fun, sometimes. I am going to leave you to guess the moral of this story. I shall only tell you that the sadly bad end to which the wicked, foolish, selfish, reckless, ungrateful black-amoor came is an AWFUL WARNING! If now you cannot guess the moral for yourself, you will have to ask your mother to explain it . . . (37)

If nothing else, an early twentieth-century child reader could have absorbed this moral about blacks: expect the worst, and don't trust them with anything you own.

In "the appendix," which Kempson defines as "a sort of a preface at the wrong end of a book, like a pet dog with a ribbon tied to its tail instead of round its neck," the narrator says that after he wrote the story and showed it to Erica, she rejected the story as "all wrong" because

> hers was not a naked hairy wretch but a most respectable gentleman in a blue coat & red trousers more like a sea-side nigger with a banjo who plays & sings on the sands & has his tea at a coffee stall . . . than like a naked hairy African blackamoor, who hunts & cooks wild animals for his dinner. (38)



Fig. 2.15. Illustrated by Claude Kempson. *The Sad End of Erica's Blackamoor*. London: A. Arnold, 1903.

On Erica's recommendations, then, instead of changing the story, the narrator makes Erica a doll to fit the description of the blackamoor about whom he composed the story. And this doll he presents to her as a Christmas gift. Like any well-bred child, Erica writes the narrator a note, thanking him for the gift, but "she was very sorry to have to tell me that he is very naughty & tiresome" (39). Erica's old blackamoor, she says, was a good-hearted, kind one who comforted her, put her dollies to bed for her at night, and smoked by the fire at the end of the day. "But the new beast would only play tricks such as waking the dollies up & terrifying them. Poor old Uncle Darkie [Erica's original blackamoor] could not keep him in order at all & was at his wits end!!!" (39) (fig. 2.15).

Even though *The Sad End of Erica's Blackamoor* would likely have been read *to* young children rather than by them independently, I mention it for a number of reasons. First, its generic use of "blackamoor" recalls Hoffmann's story of the Inky Boys.[13] Unlike Hoffmann's blackamoor, Kempson's character acts of his own volition—but objectionably so. He seems incapable of constructive behavior. In addition, when Erica clarifies what sort of character *her* blackamoor is, to correct the narrator's misevaluation of this toy's character, she rejects the stereotype of the exotic primitive that

the narrator has created, only to embrace an alternative stereotype: the minstrel figure of the music-playing, "happy-hearted Negro"—another comic figure. Erica even calls him "Uncle Darkie." Notably, even though this story's author is British, in his conflicting depictions of Uncle Darkie and the wild blackamoor, Kempson dramatizes some key anxieties of white Americans about the role of blacks in society during this time. While Uncle Darkie represents the contented plantation slave who nurtures his charges and pleases his mistress with his personal and tireless attentions to her possessions, the blackamoor represents the uncontrollable, savage African who will not be tamed even when brought into the social arena of the well bred. Not only can Erica and Dick, the white "owners" in charge, not tame him, but even the long-suffering, well-trained Uncle Darkie can do nothing to control the blackamoor's behavior. Because American slaves who refused to be "broken" who did not manage to escape successfully were often eliminated from "the stock" through hanging or some other inhumane form of murder, it comes as no surprise that the fictional blackamoor in Erica's story ends up dead and dismembered at the close of the tale. One wonders, then, whether the uncontrollable toy blackamoor that the narrator gives to Erica for Christmas to make his story more accurate will meet the same fate as the blackamoor in his story.

Despite the plot twists and interesting asides that Kempson incorporates into this story in an effort to entertain his young audience, it, like all of the *Ten Little Niggers* stories up until this time, still results in the destruction of the black male figure. *The Sad End of Erica's Blackamoor* further reiterates how limited depictions of blackness were at the beginning of the twentieth century and illustrates how comfortable British and American audiences were with the fictional and systematic destruction of black characters that picture books such as this one dramatized.

1910s: Dem, Dat, Dose, and T'Udder

Eloise Lee Sherman's abecendary *Pickaninny Namesake* (1911) uses a familiar tactic to ridicule the black characters who are the focus of the vignettes. Named after historical heroes such as Cleopatra, Helen of Troy, Joan of Ark, and Arthur, these black characters behave in ways typical of all children. But the dialect and illustrations firmly place this concept book within the minstrel tradition: one character says that E stands "fo'" Elizabeth, "Fo' short dey calls me 'Liz'—/I don' like dat familiusness/Wid queens sech es *I* is."[14] Like Liz, many of the other characters compare themselves with their famous namesakes, but this comparison serves only to belittle the speaker. Though *Pickananinny Namesake* was standard fare in children's literature during this time, it is amazing to consider that only one year after the publication of this picture book, James Weldon Johnson pub-

lished his groundbreaking work, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912). Because so few writers—black or otherwise—had yet turned their attention to the literary needs of black children, positive portrayals of black characters were still much more limited for young readers than they were for adults. Although a few books such as *Hazel* (1913), published by white author Mary White Ovington, a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), offered a more complex and positive representation of black children during this time, like *Hazel*, these books were novels that targeted older child readers.

1920s: Something for "Children of the Sun"

The Brownies' Book Magazine, though not a picture book itself, remains a key turning point in the evolution of picture books not only because of its historical significance as the first magazine for black children but also because of its creators' articulation of their vision for this project—a vision which in some ways only began to come to fruition within the larger body of children's literature in the 1970s and later. Beginning in 1912, *The Crisis*, the journal of the NAACP, published one issue annually "devoted to issues affecting children," which Du Bois claimed was the most popular issue of each year.[15] As a result of this enthusiasm, in August of 1919, the NAACP announced the forthcoming publication of *The Brownies' Book* in January of 1920. In *The Best of the Brownies' Book* (1996), Dianne Johnson-Feelings describes the context out of which this children's journal emerged:

> They [Du Bois, Dill, and Fauset] wanted African-American children and young adults to know about the history and achievements of Negro people. They wanted Negro children to know that even though black people in America had endured many struggles, they also had achieved many goals. For them, it was important to have a magazine that taught black children about the lives of other black people, because most of the other children's magazines, movies, schoolbooks, and picture books in 1920 portrayed black people as being ugly and rarely, if ever, doing anything important.[16]

To begin to counteract this pervasive negativity, the creators of *The Brownies' Book* developed a seven-point objective for the publication:

1. To make colored children realize that being "colored" is a normal beautiful thing.
2. To make them familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race.
3. To make them know that other colored children have grown into beautiful, useful and famous persons.

4. To teach them a delicate code of honor and action in their relations with white children.
5. To turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition and love of their own homes and companions.
6. To point out the best amusements and joys and worthwhile things of life.
7. To inspire them to prepare for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifice. (Harris *Brownies'* 3–4)

Most of these objectives relate to the improvement of readers' self-concept as African-American children, their pride as members of the African Diaspora, and their daily negotiation of life within a racist society. Objective 1 emphasizes celebration; and 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 seek to instruct children about the African-American past, inform them about the present, and heal and encourage them in preparation for the future. Note that only objective 6 speaks of the magazine's function as a purveyor of pleasure. Emulating the "Golden Age" of children's literature, African-American children's picture books, firmly grounded in didactic goals about social injustice during the 1920s, would see less instruction and more delight as social justice became more of a reality in American society throughout the middle and late-twentieth century. *The Brownies' Book* did indeed embody the goals set forth by its creators, but these goals also ran through the works of the individuals who were providing a literature especially designed for "Children of the Sun."

Langston Hughes, known as the "poet laureate of Harlem" and renowned for his adult poetry, actually began his publishing career with a children's poem, "Fairies," in *The Brownies' Book* in 1921.[17] A second poem that he published in the magazine, "Winter Sweetness," contrasts sharply with many of the white-authored stories about black children that came out of this historical period. It describes a little house made of sugar with a roof piled high with snow from whose window "peeps a maple-sugar child."[18] As George P. Cunningham explains in his afterword to Hughes's *The Sweet and Sour Animal Book* (1994):

> The poem turns upon the metaphor of the 'sweetness' of *brown* sugar as an implicit critique of the ideologies of 'whiteness' that pervaded Hughes's experiences as a young African-American. In the absence of anything but caricatures of African-American adults and children in the national media, Hughes, Du Bois, and Fauset wanted *The Brownies' Book* to serve the same inspirational and instructive purposes for African-American children that *The Crisis* served for adults. In direct contrast to other national magazines of the time, *The Brownies' Book* was full of pictures of beautiful, well-dressed African-American children, wistful poetry, children's games, advice, and reports of individual achievement, racial news, and editorials.

Among these reports of successful Brownies were photographs of black high school graduates, nursing school graduates, a children's protest march, beautiful brown babies, and a baseball team. Sketches of both historical figures and fictional characters were just as abundant. Nowhere in these images were the apelike, wide-lipped, frizzy-headed, greedy, savage black characters that saturated literature and periodicals for children written by so many white authors before and even long after the 1920s. Even if mainstream children's literature on the whole negatively portrayed or rendered invisible black characters until the 1960s, *The Brownies' Book* established a standard—both visually and textually—that demonstrated a black alternative to the common children's fare of the day. Hence, long after *The Brownies' Book* Magazine folded as a result of insufficient financial resources, this journal's contribution remained significant to African-American literary history.

1930s: "Gaps" and Presences

Clearly, the visionaries who brought *The Brownies' Book* to life used the power of the NAACP and the established market of *The Crisis* to bring this publication into existence. At the same time, publishing *The Brownies' Book* themselves enabled them to circumvent existing white publishing venues that would have censored or altogether rejected this periodical. Langston Hughes's *The Sweet and Sour Animal Book* serves as an example of the fate of many texts that black authors attempted to publish during this time. Hughes wrote *The Sweet and Sour Animal Book* in 1936 and revised it both in 1952 and 1959, attempting unsuccessfully to publish it many times over. This alphabet book that features an animal for each letter of the alphabet (or nearly so) was actually published posthumously in 1994 in a collaborative effort between first, second, and third graders from the Harlem School for the Arts and Oxford University Press. I am discussing it as a 1930s text rather than as a 1990s text to illustrate what was *missing* in the 1930s that could have helped to counter the racist message of children's books like *The Ten Little Niggers.*

Langston Hughes's failure to publish this poem demonstrates the difficulty that many black authors had getting their children's works into the mainstream market to offer the American public in general and young black readers in specific some alternatives to what most children's texts of this time assumed about black people. And though *The Sweet and Sour Animal Book* talks of animals rather than people and therefore says little about race, one need only scratch the surface of some of the poems to see implications for humans. On the other hand, in this abecendary, the only text that Hughes composed for the very young, Hughes's playful approach to language for

those who are just learning their ABCs shows that he believed that even the youngest readers deserve excellent literature.

In *The Sweet and Sour Animal Book*, Hughes features the goose on the "G" page, and the speaker asks of what use a goose is "Except to quackle?" For a goose that cannot quackle is "out of whackle." His onomatopoeic neologisms, "quackle" and "whackle," embody his approach to many of these poems: they evoke laughter, help readers to think about the animals in entertaining ways, and encourage young people to celebrate life. In another poem, Hughes pontificates on the lion, but this poem could also be read as the plight of African Americans whose roots are in Africa: this poem juxtaposes a lion caged in a zoo and living with "smothered rage" against a lion that happily roams free on the plain. I believe that Hughes intentionally chose an animal native to Africa to contrast its captivity with its freedom. In so many words, Hughes is saying that he would be free to write and speak his mind if he were—as were his African ancestors—living in a culture that embraced his blackness. Ironically, though, if Hughes had not been a descendent of slaves, had not lived through the upheavals of the Great Depression and the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, and if he had not been subject to the constant rejection that was responsible for the American public's inability to access *The Sweet and Sour Animal Book* until the 1990s, he would not likely have written bittersweet poems such as this one about the lion. Regardless of the conditions that contributed to Hughes's successes and failures, children's literature of the 1930s for the very young would have been much richer with Hughes's contributions than it was without them.

While *The Sweet and Sour Animal Book*, like so many literary works by black authors, validates the black experience even if some white readers were incapable of recognizing these messages, writers of the same era such as Elvira Garner were still writing for white audiences at the expense of black characters. Author of several *Ezekiel* books, Garner published *Ezekiel's Travels* only one year after Hughes wrote *The Sweet and Sour Animal Book*. In her creation of these "cullerd folks," Garner emphasizes both their superstition and—through interspersing their impromptu songs throughout the text—their affinity for singing and happiness despite their ignorance and poverty. In all of the *Ezekiel* books, Mammy and Pappy with their children Ezekiel, Emancipation, Plural, and Assafetida [*sic*] go on several adventures, which Garner illustrated with small pen-and-ink sketches imbedded in the widely spaced text. In one of the tales in *Ezekiel's Travels*, Plural, the baby, gets the mumps. Unc' Adam puts an ax under his bed to cut the fever, and it works. But Mammy puts a pan of water "under de baid to 'sorb de sweat. But hit 'ain done a *bit* er good. She plumb wo' out wid de worryation." In her sketches, Garner makes all of the black women rotund, but fortunately, most of her illustrations of other characters are too small for her to have included many derogatory details. The juxtaposition of Garner's

work with *The Brownies' Book* and Hughes's writing demonstrates the chasm between stereotypical and honorable texts for and/or about black children in the 1920s and 30s—a chasm that remained more or less in tact until the 1960s.[19]

1940s: Brand New Niggers

After more than eight decades of negativity toward blackness in children's literature for young readers, the 1940s finally began to see the publication of a few picture books by black authors as well as several by white authors that reflected some of the goals that the creators of *The Brownies' Book* Magazine set forth two decades earlier. While some white authors were finally beginning to write against the long-standing minstrel tradition so prevalent at the turn of the century, picture books featuring black children that did *not* target black readers were also beginning to change in some interesting and telling ways. Two 1940s revisions of *Ten Little Niggers* set against a few contrasting texts by black authors and by white authors with forward-looking attitudes toward race will illustrate significant changes in attitudes towards black characters in children's concept and picture books.

Emery I. Gondor's *Ten Little Colored Boys* (1942) offers a slightly less visually offensive depiction of the ten black boys than earlier versions in that these colorful images look more like cartoons and less like exaggerated minstrel illustrations. The boys, whose heads appear on the front cover, sticking up above the rest of the book, all have curly hair, red lips, and surprised-looking eyes (fig. 2.16).

In *Ten Little Colored Boys*, a spiral-bound book with die-cut board covers and paper pages, the boys experience the following mishaps: falling off a roof, falling into a river and drowning, parachuting from an airplane while attempting to fly to heaven, getting sucked up by an elephant while putting on a circus, getting stung while trying to get honey from a beehive, getting eaten by a lion, plowing into a snowman while skiing, overeating chicken stew cooked over a campfire, and incurring an injury from playing with a loaded gun. The one little colored boy who remains at the end gets married, and "before very long, there were ten of them again"—but this time, the family consists of five boys and five girls, apparently two sets of quintuplets.[20] In his portrayal of not one but two sets of ten children, many of whom look identical, Gondor reiterates the earlier messages about black fecundity and these black children's lack of individual identities. Furthermore, even though Gondor, who alternates black-and-white with colored illustrations in this book, seems to have made an effort to improve the visual messages about blackness, the book still preserves the idea that these colored boys' lives have no value since so many of them meet disastrous ends.

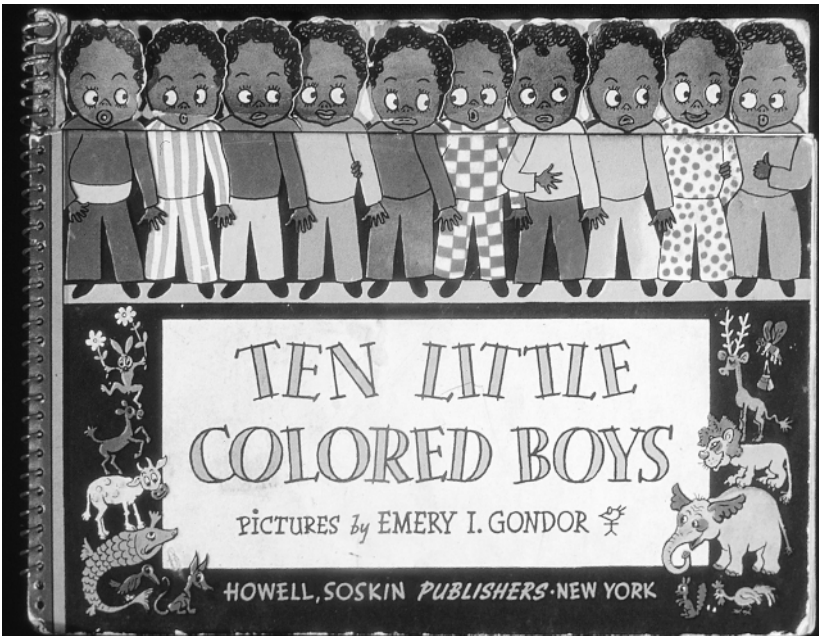

Fig. 2.16. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Gondor, Ermery I. *Ten Little Colored Boys*. New York: Howell, Soskin, 1942.

Perhaps this is the message against which Walter Trier was writing when he composed *10 Little Negroes: A New Version* (1942). Even the title suggests a shift in approach: he calls the characters "Negroes"—the term that black Americans were using for themselves by this time—rather than "niggers" or "colored boys," terms with which whites appropriated blacks (fig. 2.17).[21]

The back cover also indicates that Trier was working toward revising the familiar musical storybook (fig. 2.18):

> Notice
> (to Grown-ups as well.)
> In the original "Ten Little Negroes" the little boys all disappear, and you never hear of them again, which makes the story very sad.
> In the new version of the "Ten Little Negroes" the author decided to bring them all back again, to the great delight of all, and especially of Choc'late Sam and Ebony. This, you will agree, is a much happier ending.

Accordingly, the story begins with God sending Choc'late Sam and Ebony a son. Appreciating the gift, they were "as proud as any coons." But



Fig. 2.17. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Trier, Walter. *10 Little Negroes*: *A New Version*. London: Sylvan Press, 1942.

wanting more than one "little nigger boy," they got a turkey to lay an egg for them to make two. A thunderstorm brings the third son, Paul; Sam finds the fourth son, Joe, on a fishing trip one day, and Ebony finds the fifth son, Dave, hanging from a tree branch while she is out picking fruit (fig. 2.19). Joshua gets blown out of a trumpet; Sam rescues John from a pursuing bear; Saul climbs into an open window of the house one night; Luke comes from the basket woman, and Benjamin, son number ten, parachutes in. When all ten sons arrive, Ebony and Choc'late Sam rejoice, for they have now "realized their dream": they have enough kids to make a football team (fig. 2.20).[22]

The front and back covers of Trier's story do indeed identify what's "new" about his story: the use of the 1940s politically correct name for black people, and the addition rather than the elimination of characters. Beyond that, however, Trier has little if anything positive to say about the black characters on whom the story focuses. In using the derogatory term "coons" as well as "nigger" within the poetic text and in illustrating Sam as tall and skinny but Ebony obese and all of the characters with very dark skin, thick lips, and features closer to those of monkeys than humans, Trier simply puts new wine into old wine skins. When the family—consisting of eight biblically named children, all sporting striped overalls at this point in

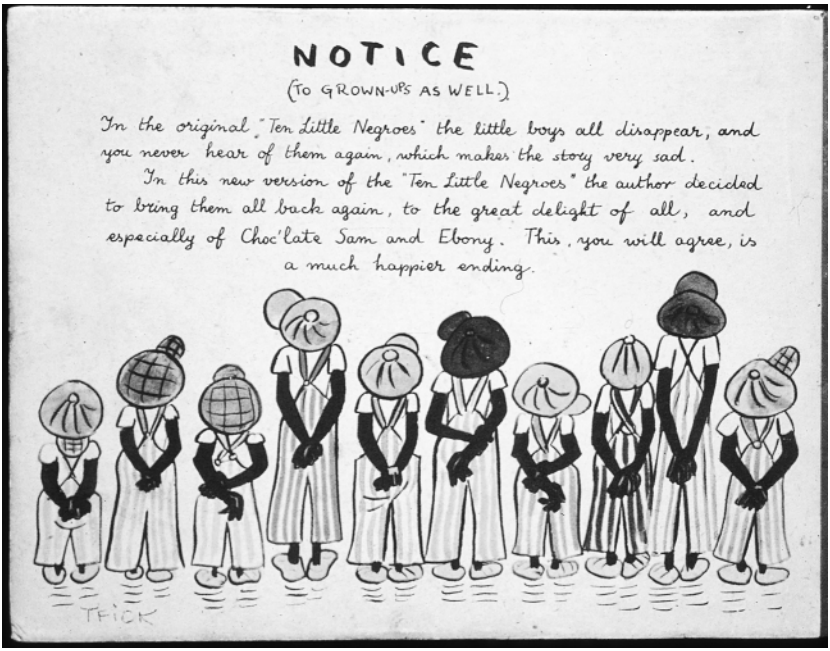

Fig. 2.18. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Trier, Walter. *10 Little Negroes: A New Version*. London: Sylvan Press, 1942.

the story—sits down to eat, the narrator points out their greed: every day, Choc'late Sam brings home one hundred pounds of food, but Ebony, the biggest one sitting at the table, only tells him politely that another hundred would be good.

Not all white children's authors embraced these negative black images during the 1940s, however. Lorrraine and Jerrold Beim's *Two Is a Team* (1945), which Birtha lauds as the "first racially balanced picture book," and Inez Hogan's *Nappy Has a New Friend* (1947), show early attempts to embrace multiculturalism in a picture book and to represent black characters honorably (202). In *Two Is a Team*, Ted (black) and Paul (white), are best friends who are "just the same": they are the same age, the same size, and enjoy playing the same games. One day, they decide to make a coaster—predecessor of the scooter—and combine their efforts to find all of the parts to make it. They argue over who gets to construct what, and as a result, they part in a huff, each determined to build his *own* coaster. Still angry with one another, they race their coasters down a steep hill, crashing into a woman with groceries, a little girl with a doll, and a man walking a dog. To pay for the damage they have done to the three people, they land a grocery delivery job, combine their wrecked coasters to construct one good one for



Fig. 2.19. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Trier, Walter. *10 Little Negroes: A New Version*. London: Sylvan Press, 1942.

their deliveries, and earn enough money to repay all three people. In the end, they ride in their delivery coaster together and learn how to drive it skillfully, "zig-zagging around anyone with bundles, carriages, or dogs," and "That was the most fun of all!" In this picture book with alternating black-and-white and colored pages, the narrator says nothing of the race of either of the two boys, but clearly, part of the Beims' agenda in this book is to emphasize that these boys are "just the same" from their size and interests right down to their cantankerous attitudes when they refuse to share. And notably, when the mothers show up in the story, Ted's mom is just as accepting of Paul as Paul's mom is of Ted.

Families also get involved in Inez Hogan's *Nappy Has a New Friend*, published two years later. Surprisingly, the focal character of the book, Nappy, is white; his best friend, Tommy, is black, and the book tells of the adventures and friendship that these two boys share. In this episodic plot, Nappy goes to the dump one day with the trashman—taking along his puppy, Mut, whom he found at the dump on a previous trip—and makes friends with a little black boy named Tommy, who is also looking for treasures among the trash. On their ride home on the back of the wagon, Nappy offers Tommy to trade his doorknob for Tommy's wagon wheel and his big sister for Tommy's big brother, but Tommy refuses. However, when Tommy

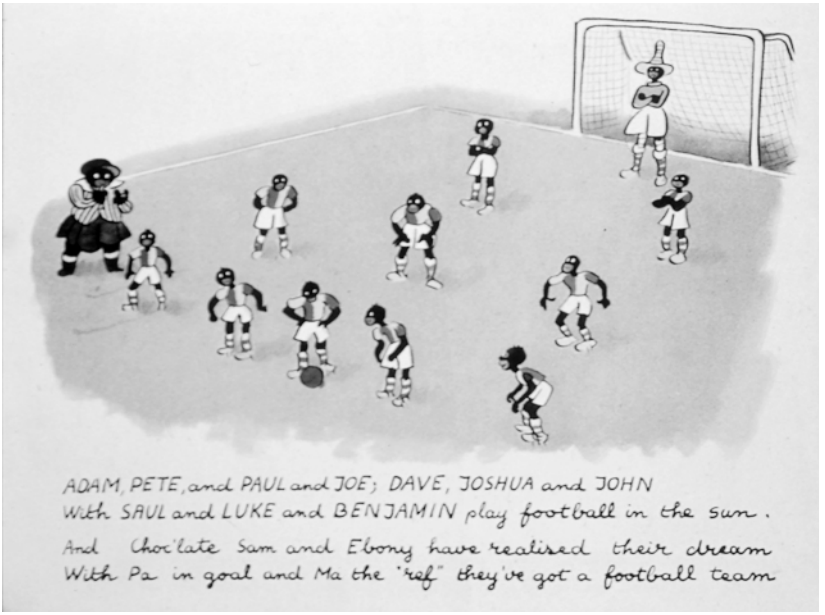

Fig. 2.20. Reprinted by permission from Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Trier, Walter. *10 Little Negroes: A New Version*. London: Sylvan Press, 1942.

sees the nifty cloth bag that Nappy's sister made for his marbles, Tommy wants one too. Nappy's sister agrees that if the boys will come blueberry picking with her, she will make the bag for Tommy.

On the foraging excursion, Nappy finds a baby raccoon that he wants to keep for a pet. His big sister convinces him to trade it to Tommy in exchange for a pair of stilts that Tommy's brother made. At Tommy's house, Nappy and his sister discover that Tommy and his brother like to play music and that his twin little sisters like to dance. When the children see what "a show" the girls put on—the only thing in the book that smacks of minstrelsy—they recruit the three tumbling Wong boys from Wong's Chinese Restaurant to be in the circus that they decide to create. Three Chinese children, four black children, and two white children perform in the circus. Just as the Beims neutralize the influence of adults by making both Tom's and Paul's mothers approving but shadowy background figures, Hogan gives the trashman the only adult role in the story—a man who has no significant authority over either of the boys. Given the lack of an adult voice of authority and the central importance of the actions of the children in the stories, both of these texts offer a refreshing change in children's literature written during this time both because of the subtlety of the didactic messages and because of the uneventful and successful integration that emerges within these 1940s neigh-

borhoods. And not surprisingly for a WWII-era picture book, the children stand and end their circus with a rousing verse of "The Star Spangled Banner" while Nappy waves an American flag for the children and his saluting dog, Mut.

Also during the 1940s, the black author Arna Bontemps collaborated with Jack Conroy to write *Slappy Hooper, The Wonderful Sign Painter* (1946), a text-heavy picture book narrated in Southern dialect with an all-white cast of characters. Something of a forerunner for John Agee's *The Incredible Painting of Felix Clousseau* (1988), this story tells of Slappy Hooper, a sign painter who makes billboards look problematically realistic. At one point, Slappy draws a loaf of bread on a billboard that looks so real that birds keep committing suicide on it. When his picture of a wood stove begins to attract all of the town's "bums," much to the chagrin of the shopkeepers, Slappy heats up the stove, which results in the incineration of a few nearby houses. Mike Flint, Slappy's only admirer and the kid whose dad initially hired Slappy for his first painting, inherits Slappy's wonderous paint brushes when the residents run him out of town. Unlike the stories by Hogan and the Beims, *Slappy Hooper* breaks no social codes and pushes no ideological boundaries. It is, in other words, a "safe" story for a black children's author such as Bontemps to write during the 1940s, particularly since it features no black characters. It is therefore no surprise that Bontemps was successfully able to publish this story at this time.

Bontemps not only wrote delightful and "safe" fiction about white characters such as the Slappy Hooper story, but he also composed many works in the nonfiction tradition that Carter G. Woodson established in the 1920s with historical works such as *The Negro in Our History* (1922), *Negro Makers of History* (1928), and *African Myths* (1928). Bontemps published *The Story of the Negro* in 1948 and dedicated it to Langston Hughes. Over the next two decades, Bontemps and Hughes, both collaboratively and individually, wrote approximately twenty-five juvenile books, which included poetry such as Hughes's *Selected Poems* (1959), biographical works about black historical figures like Bontemps's *The Story of George Washington Carver* (1954), and histories of black traditions, like Hughes's *The First Book of Jazz* (1955).[23] Many contemporary scholars of children's literature find this number surprising since most of these texts are much harder to find in used bookstores and even in special collections libraries than are many of the books that offered negative and uninformed representations of African Americans, even if the authors were much less prolific than Hughes and Bontemps. Unfortunately, the same racial climate that made publishing difficult for Hughes and Bontemps and sometimes impossible during their lifetimes has also made the survival of their work more tenuous than that of some of their white contemporaries who wrote for children. Despite this fact, however, the work of Hughes and Bontemps did accomplish the same tasks that *The Brownies' Book* undertook: it made children "familiar with

the history and achievements of the Negro race," made them "know that other colored children have grown into beautiful, useful and famous persons" and "turned their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition and love of their own homes and companions" through their numerous works of nonfiction about the black experience (Harris *Brownies'* 3–4).

Furthermore, these 1920s goals of the Harlem Renaissance writers also began to come to fruition in the works of white writers: authors like Inez Hogan and Lorraine and Jerrold Beim helped to "make colored children realize that being 'colored' is a normal beautiful thing," "teach them a delicate code of honor and action in their relations with white children," and "point out the best amusements and joys and worthwhile things of life" through their normalization of blackness in their fiction for young readers (Harris *Brownies'* 3–4). While the limitations that publishers placed upon black writers during this time still made it difficult for African Americans to place books intended specifically for black children, the fact that some white writers were beginning to embrace positive images of children of color in these books actually helped to prepare readers and the market for books by black authors that unabashedly represented blackness as beautiful and positive.

1950s and 60s: Turning Point

Few picture books about the black experience for young readers were published during the 1950s. I suspect that the racial and political upheavals that took place during this decade—the Supreme Court decision to desegregate schools (1954), the Montgomery bus boycott (1955), the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, and so on—precluded black Americans devoting time and attention to writing books for young readers. Nevertheless, because authors and illustrators whose work has been the mainstay of African-American children's literature since the 1960s, such as Jerry Pinkney, Tom Feelings, Julius Lester, Leo and Diane Dillon, Eloise Greenfield, and Virginia Hamilton, lived through these life-changing events in the 1950s that have, in large part, shaped their work, it was an important time of quiet for black children's literature.

In the 1960s, however, an exciting new era in children's books about the black experience began that sparked the momentum for what has become the Golden Age of African-American children's picture books. During this time, some professional milestones paved the way for change: the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) was established (1966), and several studies were conducted on the depiction of minorities in children's literature that revealed how little progress had been made since the beginning of the century. The attitudes of publishers also began to shift during this time: as a result of social trends and consistent feedback from black Americans, publishers finally began to search for black authors and illustra-

tors to create black children's literature. Not surprisingly, librarians had a hand in this change. Decades of vigilant insistence from Augusta Baker, children's librarian at what became the Countee Cullen Library in Harlem, that authors, illustrators, and publishers provide better books for black children finally began to bear fruit. Mainstream children's picture books also experienced a turning point during the 1960s: Ezra Jack Keats's 1962 *The Snowy Day* became the first children's picture book featuring a black child to win the coveted Caldecott Award (or any major American children's book award).

Professional discourses about African-American children's picture books also emerged during this time. For instance, librarians, authors, illustrators, and scholars of African-American children's literature split, more or less, into two camps: those who define the genre solely by authorship (i.e., only African Americans can write African-American literature), and those who define the genre by the content of the book. These two camps mirrored the cultural split between those who sought to secure civil rights through nonviolent means and those who embraced a more militant stance that advocated for revolutionary change.

Ezra Jack Keats, best known for *The Snowy Day* and his other stories about a little inner-city African-American boy named Peter, paid no attention to these lines, feeling that he simply wrote what he felt he knew best. Growing up in Brooklyn during the Depression as a child of poor Polish immigrants, Keats lived in tenement housing and interacted daily with children of many different ethnicities. In the 1950s, when he kept receiving picture book illustration jobs that never featured black children, he decided that if he ever wrote and illustrated a book of his own,

> My hero would be a Black child. I made many sketches and studies of Black children. . . . I wanted him to be in the book on his own, not through the benevolence of white children or anything else. The important thing is that the kids in a book have to be real—regardless of color. I don't like to emphasize the race thing, because what's really important is the honesty.[24]

The Snowy Day was the first book of which he was both illustrator and author and, as Keats had anticipated, the character was simply a black child. Through textured collage illustrations, Keats manages to create for child readers such a common experience of a day in the snow that any child can imagine doing what Peter does. Gone are the unintelligible dialect, the bulging eyes, and the apelike illustrations of black people; instead, this book provides a wonderful depiction of a typical 1960s, middle-class black family, at the center of which is a little boy who loves to play in the snow but who does not yet understand how easily water can change forms. While some critics have attacked *The Snowy Day* for Keats's portrayal of Peter's mother as resembling the overweight, gaudily dressed mammy figure from

earlier stereotypes of black mothers, this story—in which the narrator says nothing of the characters' ethnicity—clearly bears no malice toward its black characters and suggests instead that any child could, like Peter, enjoy a day of romping in the snow.

Painting a similar picture of "everyday blackness," Janice May Udry's *What Mary Jo Shared* (1966) tells of a little girl who is too shy to share anything with her classmates, although she wants to. After thinking of several ideas and then changing her mind for feeling upstaged by the "show-and-tell" of different classmates, Mary Jo finally decides to bring her father to school to share. Although her father does say a few words after Mary Jo's presentation, Udry emphasizes the fact that Mary Jo has finally found her voice by offering the narrative of what she says to her classmates, but delivering her father's words only through the third person narrator. Mary Jo tells her classmates about where her father grew up, that he teaches high school for a living, and she even tells them a few stories of his mischievous childhood. By the end of Mary Jo's presentation, it is clear how proud she is of him. This book validates family connections, but in representing Mary Jo's black middle-class family, her African-American teacher, and her integrated class, it also paints a peaceful picture of an integrated school system that had yet to become a reality in many parts of the United States.[25]

Ann Herbert Scott's *Sam* (1967) offers a glimpse of the inner workings of a middle-class back family. On a day when Sam's mother, father, and both of his siblings are home, he gets bored and goes in search of something to do, but "Everyone was busy, and no one wanted to play with him."[26] Sam's mother scolds him for picking up a knife to try to help her peel apples, his big brother yells at him for touching one of his school books, his big sister screams when he plays with her paper doll, and his dad sends him off in a flood of tears with his harsh response when Sam touches the keys on his typewriter. In the end, all four family members gather around Sam to comfort him and to assure him that they do care about him and want him. Finally, his mother finds the perfect job for him: rolling out pie dough for a raspberry tart. Symeon Shimin's cover illustration, a sketch rendered in black watercolor and pencil, set on a warm orange background, shows Sam looking directly at the reader, head laid in one hand, as if he is either bored with life or is burdened with cares too heavy for a boy his age. The realism in Sam's expressions throughout the book remind me of some of Tom Feelings's illustrations in which black children feel sad, hurt, or simply disenchanted with their lives in America. Because Sam's problem of feeling unwanted originates in his own household and not in the streets or in the midst of any racial battles, Scott shows that black families have the same problems and conflicts that other families have. Thus, Scott and Udry's mid-1960s picture book focuses on the realism of black family life, and in so doing, depict some of the daily realities of being a young black American during this time.

With the influence of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements also came a renewed interest in African-American nonfiction. Writers sought to uncover lost history and share with children and young adults truths about their African and African-American past that textbooks systematically ignored. The books that became award winners over the next thirty years and the proliferation of historically based picture books even today suggest that this effort to recover and re-present the past for black children is still very much alive.

1970s: Emerging Black Voices

As the genre continued to evolve throughout the 1970s and authors and artists continued the process of normalizing blackness in these books, they began to reach back to the African heritage of black Americans for picture book content. In this way, the professionalization of the field got underway as black artists and writers finally started to break into the mainstream of the children's literary market. As a result, more librarians, publishers, teachers, and parents woke up to the reality that little had yet changed in terms of the racial dynamics in children's picture books.

A few professional milestones served as catalysts for change during this time. Donnarae MacCann and Gloria Woodard published the first edition of their anthology, *The Black American in Books for Children: Readings in Racism* in 1972 in which twenty-three essays appeared that discussed many important aspects of African-American images in children's books. And in 1977 the Council on Interracial Books for Children conducted a study on racism in textbooks, the results of which appeared in 1980, among other places, in an accessible guide for educators and parents, *Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks*. In addition, *Ebony* magazine began publishing a journal for children, *Ebony Junior*.

Black picture books also experienced some firsts: Muriel and Tom Feelings won the Caldecott Honor Medal for *Moja Means One: Swahili Counting Book* (1971) in 1972 and for *Jambo Means Hello: Swahili Alphabet Book* (1974) in 1975. In 1977 author Margaret Musgrove and artistic husband-and-wife team, Leo (African American) and Diane (white) Dillon, won the Caldecott Award for *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions* (1976). Notably, all of these titles rely on African themes, pointing to the surge in interest about and pride in Africa and African Americans' origins in "the Mother Land." The Civil Rights Movement had a tremendous impact on children's literature featuring black characters, and we are, I believe, still reaping the benefits of these groundbreaking changes in the twenty-first century. Significantly, many of the authors and illustrators who began their careers in the 1950s and 60s have remained such an integral part of this field that they have largely helped to shape what African-American children's literature has become. But venturing into this career was not always easy.

Tom Feelings has discussed the difficulties that he had getting published during this time. Early in his career, he "walked the streets of Bedford-Stuyvestant with a pen and paper and drew the people and places of his community," but despite his skill, when publishers needed images of black characters, "the assignments generally went to white illustrators, who knew nothing of the Black images or experiences."[27] When a young black girl told Feelings that his paintings were ugly, he responded, "They're pretty little Black children, like you." To this, the girl quipped, "Ain't nothin' Black pretty" (*SATA* "Feelings" 57). At this point, he realized how deep self-hatred could run in African-American children and decided that he needed to be a part of the movement to get positive portrayals of black people into the hands of black children.

Following Tom Feelings's time in Africa, he and his wife Muriel published *Moja Means One* in 1974 and dedicated it "To all Black children living in the Western Hemisphere, hoping you will one day speak the language—in Africa."[28] Feelings used his experiences of Africa to speak to young African-American readers about their heritage in both *Moja* and *Jambo Means Hello: Swahili Alphabet Book* (1974). He chose Swahili because it is the most widely spoken language throughout Africa and therefore unifies the continent in some fundamental ways. To help young readers to identify with Africa as a place of beauty, important history, and ancient cultures rather than as the origin of savages like Erica's blackamoor, Tom Feelings dramatically illustrates the topography, the people—especially the children—and even the wildlife in sepia-and-white illustrations, while Muriel educates readers on words like *nane*, or market stalls, and *tatu*, coffee trees, that are integral parts of different Swahili-speaking African regions.[29] The fact that the Feelings put Mt. Kilimanjaro right alongside African instruments suggests that the cultural artifacts of these people are just as significant as well-known African geographical landmarks with which most Americans are familiar.

Jambo Means Hello: Swahili Counting Book takes a similar approach to *Moja*, but the idea that stands out the most in this picture book is the communal nature of African cultures. With only two exceptions—a young man using utensils, *vyomobo*, and a girl picking a *yungiyungi*, a water lily—none of the characters appear alone; they appear within lively social contexts in which people of the community work together to accomplish common goals. This was, I believe, an important dynamic to share with the youngest of black readers during the 1970s. Growing up in a culture where blacks were still not treated equally over one hundred years after the liberation of slaves, young readers needed to see blacks helping blacks and children of color enjoying one another. The sense of pleasure that these books exude is also an important part of Tom Feelings's agenda: while living in Africa, he felt that the children he met there were, on the whole, much happier than

American children because they did not have the scourge of slavery darkening their past. He felt, in fact, that he had to go and live in Africa for a time to discover the source of his own joy. In the introduction to *The Middle Passage* (1995), he says, "Living in Africa reaffirmed much that was positive that I had deep inside me about black people."[30] When one compares these two books, set in Africa, with Feelings's later works, such as *Daydreamers* (1981), set in the United States, the contrast between the optimism and self-confidence of African children and the dissatisfaction and disenchantment of African-American children becomes clear.

Following this same tradition of representing the integrity of African cultures to teach American children the alphabet, in 1976, Margaret Musgrove wrote, and Leo and Diane Dillon illustrated another abecendary, *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions*. For a slightly older audience than *Moja* and *Jambo*, *Ashanti to Zulu* provides a good companion to the Feelings's books because while the earlier books base their geographical coverage of Africa on places where Swahili is spoken, *Ashanti to Zulu* offers a sampling of twenty-six painstakingly researched African cultures. Musgrove was as determined as the Feelings to provide respectful and accurate information about black people to young readers. In her introduction, she says:

> This book has been prepared with great concern for accuracy and detail. The author has lived and studied in Ghana and has done extensive research there, at the University of Massachusetts, and at Yale in order to write this book. In preparing their illustrations, the artists have done considerable further research, consulting numerous publications, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the New York Public Library Picture Collection, the United Nations Library and Information Office, and the American museum of Natural History. In order to show as much as possible about each different people, in most paintings they have included a man, a woman, a child, their living quarters, an artifact, and a local animal, though in some cases these different elements would not ordinarily be seen together. Every detail has been studied and rendered accurately, then interpretively drawn together with remarkable artistic insight.[31]

The attention to detail evident in *Ashanti to Zulu* shows the differences between each culture, and it also counters the kind of negative stereotyping so prevalent in earlier depictions of Africa in American and British children's literature.

In addition, these books have "aged" well: contemporary readers can not only read and enjoy these three abecendaries about Africa, but they will also recognize some words that were not familiar to most American readers in the 1970s but now are: "*Mankala*," a game featured on the cover of *Moja*, can now be purchased at any American toy store; letter "R" in *Jambo* is

"*rafiki*," friend, the name of a character who appears in Disney's film *The Lion King*; and kente cloth, worn by the Ashanti in Musgrove's picture book, is now readily available in American fabric stores. In some ways, these books anticipated the current global economy, bringing to the attention of children the beauty and importance of African cultures and thereby shrinking the distance between themselves and those who were once represented only as alien, uncultivated, and savage.

One other groundbreaking picture book, Lucille Clifton's *The Black BC's* (1970), does not shy away from addressing political issues that touch the black community, even though this picture book targets a range of readers, from very young to upper elementary. Resulting from questions that Clifton's six children asked her while they were growing up, *The Black BC's* features for each letter one brief, four-lined poem about some significant part of African-American culture or history, followed by a paragraph that provides additional information about the content of each poem. Clifton sets the tone of the book by starting with "A is for Africa," which she describes as the ancient king of all the continents and the "land of the sun."[32] The book offers details on important historical figures like Lucy Terry, Phyllis Wheatley, Eldridge Cleaver, Lorraine Hansberry, as well as black cowboy Bill Pickett. Clifton also brings up the Freedom Rides and Freedom Marches of the 1960s and includes one poem called "G is for Ghetto," in which she counters the negativity associated with ghetto life, identifying it instead as a place where black people "can be at home/loved and free" (Clifton 14). Furthermore, Clifton assigns the Middle Passage to letter M, mentioning the importance of the *Amistad*, and she even names organizations like the NAACP, CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), and the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference). Hence, in the same way that the *Ten Little Niggers* books were laden with ideological assumptions about black people, Clifton uses *The Black BC's* to convey revisionist history and an affirmation of black life to young readers who might initially think they are reading just another simple ABC book.

1980s: The Age of Afro-Bets

The 1980s saw a greater emphasis on Afrocentric themes in black children's picture books, a sharp increase in the number of published picture books about the black experience, and the establishment of Just Us Books, an independent publisher that still remains the only one dedicated solely to the publication of black children's literature. Just as Malcolm X argued for the necessity of black-owned businesses, the existence of Just Us Books has not only enabled many black writers and artists to place work that mainstream publishers would not accept, but I would argue that the Just Us line of books has also broadened the scope of what mainstream publishers consider acceptable works for young black readers.

Black writers and illustrators commonly encounter publishing limitations, and Cheryl and Wade Hudson, founders of Just Us Books, are no exception. Cheryl's experiences with attempting to publish African-American children's literature in the mainstream children's publishing market share many similarities with those of Tom Feelings. Cheryl Hudson said that the prototype for her Afro-Bets books was rejected by "almost every children's publisher in New York," who claimed that "there was no market for it, and nobody would buy it" unless it was promoted by someone as famous as Michael Jackson because according to the publishers, "black people didn't buy books."[33] The Hudsons' solution to the problem was to establish their own publishing company. Because Cheryl had worked in the publishing industry for twenty years and had been an art director for some time, and because of Wade's experience with reporting, public relations, and marketing, they decided to produce the books themselves and get another company to distribute them.[34] "But," Cheryl said, "that was another hurdle because there was no one out there to distribute them, so a year after publishing the first title, *Afro-Bets ABC Book,* we formed a corporation, and that was in 1988" (Cheryl Hudson interview). Just Us has grown from "an infant company to a million-dollar-a-year publishing powerhouse" (Just Us homepage). Owning their own company has enabled the Hudsons to circumvent the type of censorship that they encountered from mainstream publishers either rejecting or severely editing their work. The company celebrated its fifteenth anniversary in 2003.

The Afro-Bets books, concept books for the youngest of readers, center around the Afro-Bets kids: six black child characters who lead readers through different concepts while doing the necessary acrobatics to form letters and numbers with their bodies—thus the name "Afro-Bets." Notably, the Afro-Bets kids have primarily Afrocentric names: Langston, Nandi, Glo', Stef', Tura, and Robo (the fourth and fifth being abbreviations of the Hudsons' children's names, Stephan and Katura). And while several of the Afro-Bets books are like any other concept book in many respects ("B is for balloons and baby," for instance), they all also include Afrocentric concepts. In *Afro-Bets ABC Book*, for example, alongside "balloons" and "car" sits "Africa," "cornrows" (as in the hairstyle, not the farming term), "Egyptians," "kente cloth," "Nefertiti," "sphinx," and "yam" (figs. 2.21 and 2.22).[35] In *Afro-Bets 123 Book* (1987), brown fingers display the numbers, which normalizes blackness and suggests the importance of black children teaching one another (figs. 2.23 and 2.24).

While the art work in the Afro-Bets books falls short of the quality of the work by trained artists such as Jerry Pinkney, James Ransome, or Donald Crews, these books have filled a crucial niche for young black readers and their families. Although early in their career the Hudsons constantly received the message from publishers that there was no market for Afrocentric literature such as the Afro-Bets books, the approximately 275,000 copies of

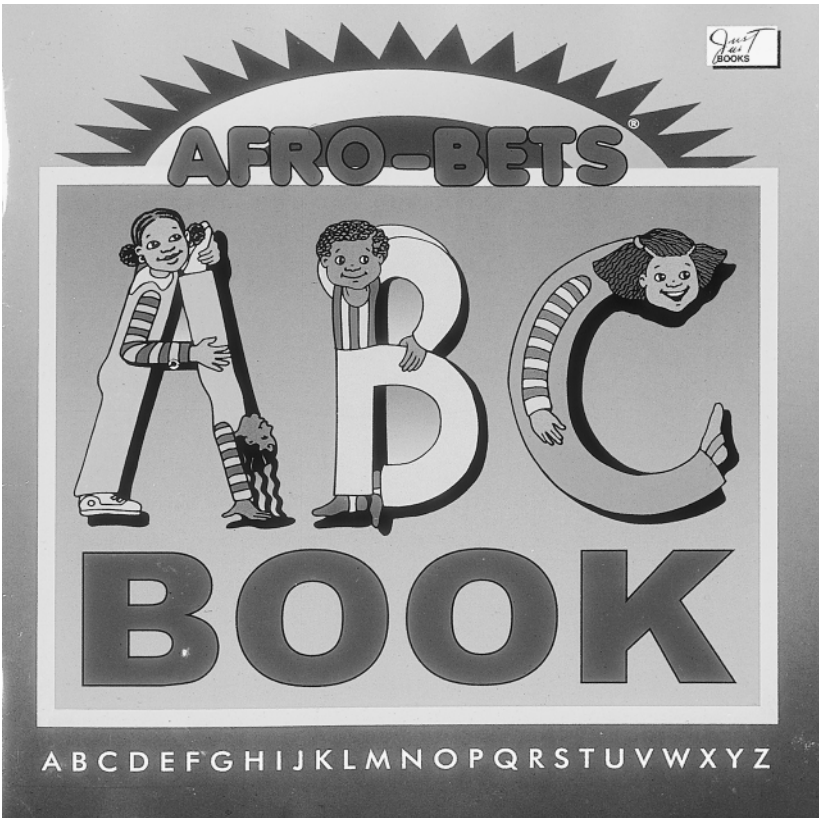

Fig. 2.21. From *Afro-Bets ABC Book* by Cheryl Willis Hudson, copyright © 2002 by Cheryl Willis Hudson. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Inc.

Afro-Bets ABC Book and the 350,000 copies of *Afro-Bets Book of Black Heroes from A to Z* (1989) that have sold since 1987 have suggested quite another story (Cheryl Hudson interview) (fig. 2.25).

While the Hudsons create an Afrocentric world in which their characters teach young readers basic literacy concepts, Claudia Zaslavsky takes the same approach as did the Feelings in calling on her personal experiences of Africa to write *Count on Your Fingers African Style* (1980). While teaching in Africa in 1970 and 1974, Zaslavsky asked both children and adults to show her how they count on their fingers. The resultant answers contributed to the content of this book. Without relying on stereotypes, Zaslavsky portrays a number of different African regions, and Jerry Pinkney's black-and-white pencil sketches add to the positivity with which the book addresses these various cultures.

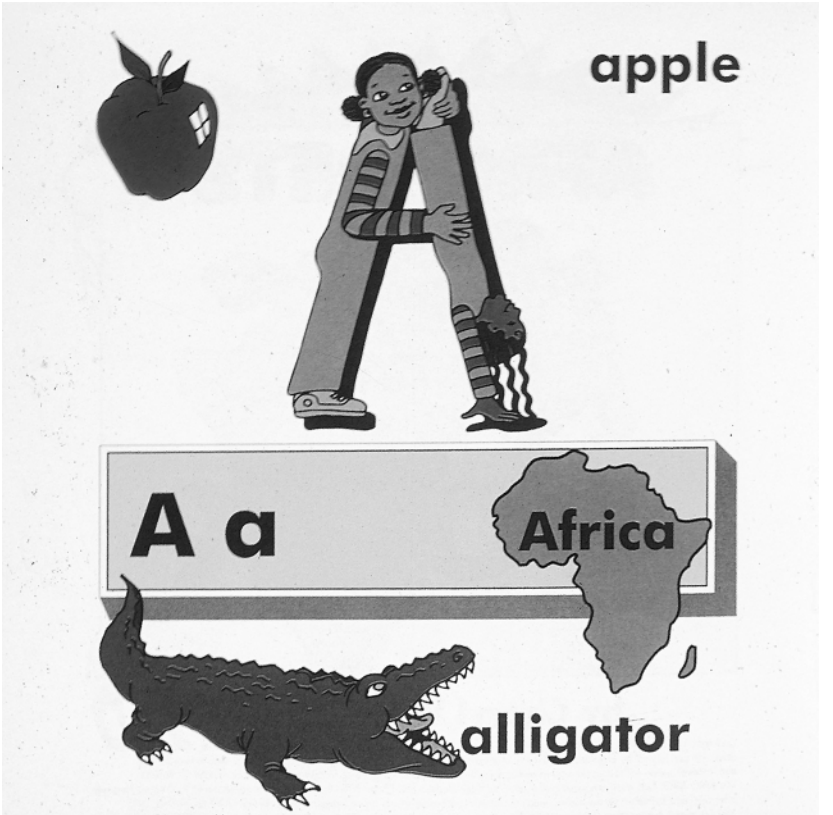

Fig. 2.22. From *Afro-Bets ABC Book* by Cheryl Willis Hudson, copyright © 2002 by Cheryl Willis Hudson. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Inc.

In the same way that the books of Feelings, Musgrove, and Zaslavsky serve as revisions of earlier picture book depictions of Africa that painted it as a place of uncivilized savagery, physician Gerald W. Deas sought to write a literary revision of the *Ten Little Niggers* story that enjoyed such incredible longevity in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[36] Deas encountered a version of this story in a *Mother Goose* book from 1896 (figs. 2.26 and 2.27).

Hence, the first half of Deas's *The Ten Little Niggers* reprints the woodcut story from the *Mother Goose* volume, and the second half of the book, which he calls "For Survival," details a cumulative story about the importance of insuring that young black males grow up in supportive, nurturing environments with strong black men as role models so that they can thrive. The story begins with one black little boy who "was loved and he grew," and

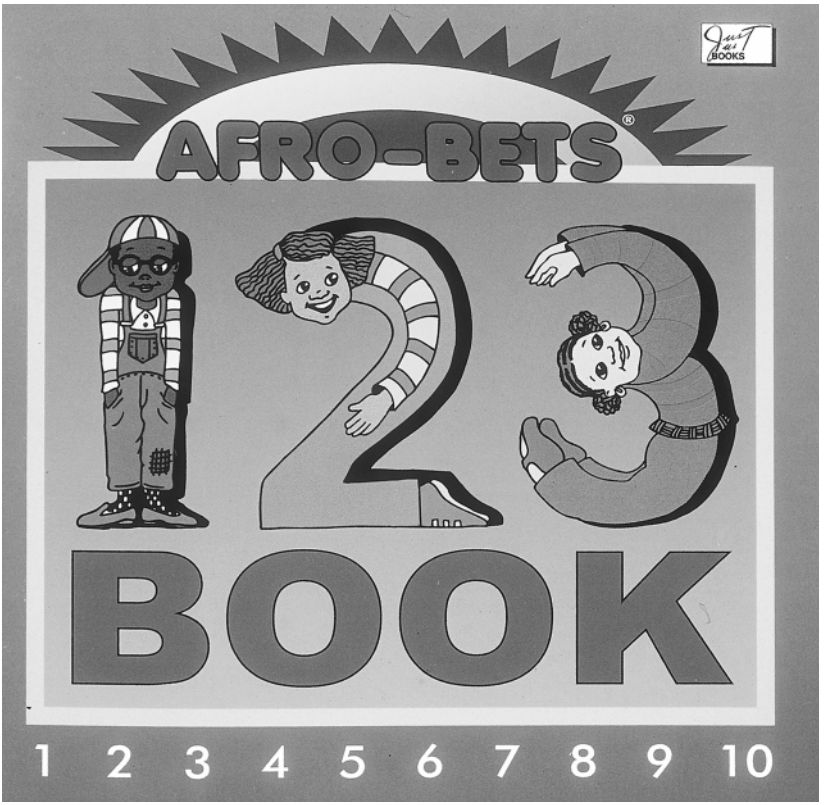

Fig. 2.23. From *Afro-Bets 123 Book* by Cheryl Willis Hudson, copyright © 2002 by Cheryl Willis Hudson. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Inc.

when he shares with another, that makes two. When the two request another black boy's help, they then become three (figs. 2.28 and 2.29).[37] The story then progresses to Black Teenage Boys, Young Black Men, Black Brothers, Black Students, Black Men, and then circles back to Black Boys. It ends when "Nine Little Black Boys became strong men;/They looked for a leader, and then there were Ten./Ten Little Black Boys are only a few;/TO BECOME STRONG MEN/WILL BE UP TO YOU."

Despite its clearly didactic approach, Deas's story is significant for a number of reasons. First, he emphasizes the "village" concept: young black children—especially males—must be supported and nurtured by caring black adults if they are to develop a positive sense of their African-American identity. Second, while addressing the child reader through the black-and-white illustrations and the child-centered story, Deas seeks to place the responsibility of *becoming* the village squarely on the reader—presumably

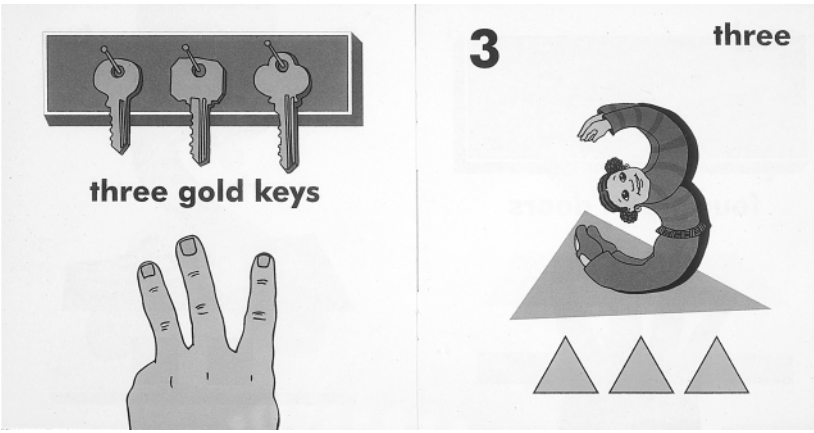

Fig. 2.24. From *Afro-Bets 123 Book* by Cheryl Willis Hudson, copyright © 2002 by Cheryl Willis Hudson. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Inc.

African-American adults and others who are reading this story with children. Unable to place this story with a mainstream publisher, Deas published it himself, and as a result, its print run was small and its distribution limited. In the same way that Julius Lester and Jerry Pinkney's *Sam and the Tigers* (1997) and Fred Marcellino's *The Story of Little Babaji* (1997) have provided contemporary culturally specific and less problematic "answers" to Helen Bannerman's *The Story of Little Black Sambo* in mainstream children's literature, so too could Deas's *The Ten Little Niggers* have provided such an answer to this widely distributed racist story. But once again, access to the mainstream publishing industry interfered with a black author's work becoming available to the general public. James Brown's pencil sketches are less than stellar, and some of Deas's rhymes are forced, but had this book been subjected to the rigorous editing that major publishing houses give stories with potential, these weaknesses would likely have been improved. Despite its literary and artistic shortcomings, Deas's work offers a long-needed Afrocentric response to a story that taught at least eight decades of American and British children that black people are unproblematically disposable.

1990s: Making a Home in the Genre

By the 1990s, the concept picture books that were being published suggested that black authors felt more at home in the genre of children's literature and felt less pressure to make overt political statements in the books

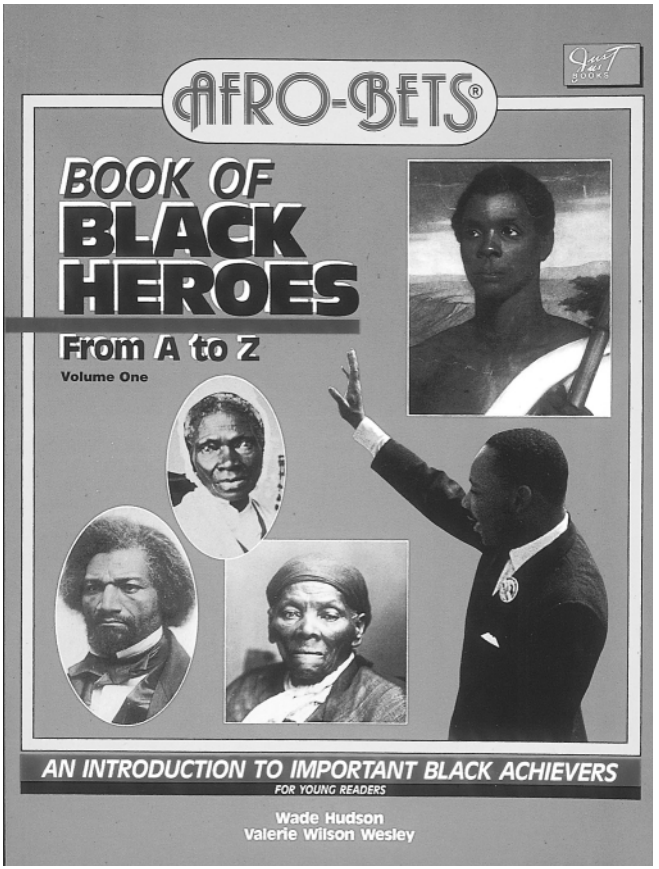

Fig. 2.25. *Afro-Bets Book of Black Heroes from A to Z* by Wade Hudson and Valerie Wilson Wesley, published by Just Us Books, Inc., East Orange, NJ. Cover reproduced by permission of the publisher.

themselves—although I would argue that much children's literature, particularly multicultural children's literature, is always already political. And although American authors felt less of a need to look elsewhere (to Africa, for instance) to validate African Americanness, globalization was also beginning to impact children's books in the increasing availability of books about black characters from outside the United States. And if the 1870s–1920s were characterized by whites writing picture books about blacks for white audiences, and the 1920s–1980s characterized by white and eventually more black authors and artists creating a greater number of these books for black children, the 1990s began a new era: black authors and artists writing black books not just for black audiences, but for everyone. By the 1990s, black writers and artists of picture books had reached the point of uncom-

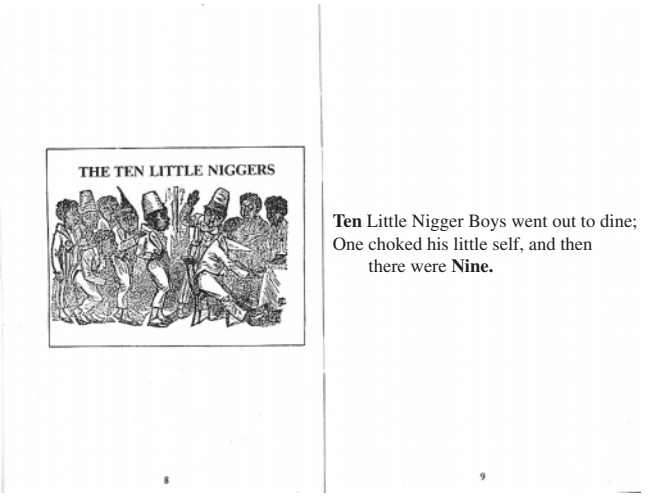

Fig. 2.26. Reprinted by permission of Gerald W. Deas. Deas, Gerald W. *Ten Little Niggers*. Illus. James Brown. New York: Gerald W. Deas, 1981.

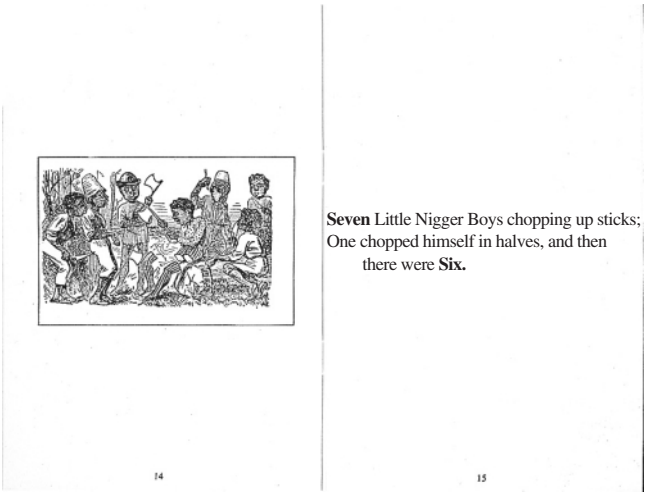

Fig. 2.27. Reprinted by permission of Gerald W. Deas. Deas, Gerald W. *Ten Little Niggers*. Illus. James Brown. New York: Gerald W. Deas, 1981.

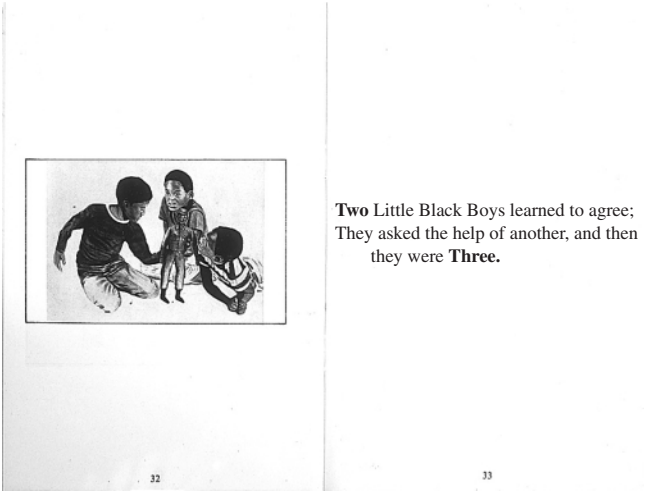

Fig. 2.28 Reprinted by permission of Gerald W. Deas. Deas, Gerald W. *Ten Little Niggers*. Illus. James Brown. New York: Gerald W. Deas, 1981.

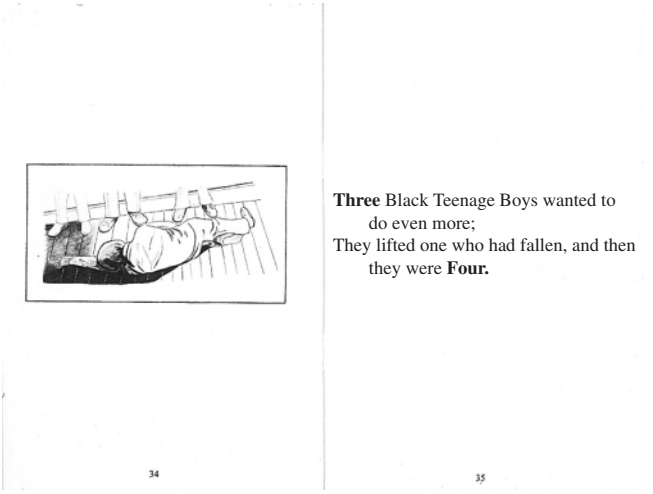

Fig. 2.29. Reprinted by permission of Gerald W. Deas. Deas, Gerald W. *Ten Little Niggers*. Illus. James Brown. New York: Gerald W. Deas, 1981.

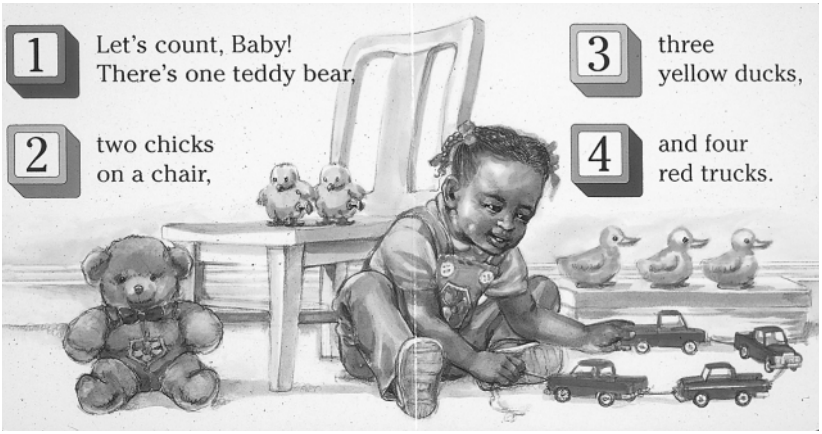

Fig. 2.30. From *Let's Count, Baby* by Cheryl Willis Hudson, copyright © 2002 by Cheryl Willis Hudson. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Inc.

promised celebration of blackness in many different genres. A Just Us publication, Cheryl Hudson and George Ford's baby board book, *Let's Count, Baby* (1995), exemplifies this shift.

Let's Count, Baby showcases black toddlers, and Ford's watercolor illustrations enhance Cheryl Hudson's rhyming text.[38] Unlike the Afro-Bets books, which are full of Afrocentric concepts, this book primarily appeals to readers through its use of an attractive brown-skinned, dimpled toddler and common objects around her that young children should recognize. The narrator gives the command at the beginning of the book: "Let's count, Baby!" then counts one teddy bear, two chicks, three ducks, four trucks, and so on (fig. 2.30).[39]

Like many other 1990s books of this genre, no conflict arises in *Let's Count, Baby*, and its focal character is unextraordinarily black. When one considers that most picture books dealing with blackness from the 1870s through the 1960s relied on racially driven conflict, and that many black-authored picture books from the turn of the century through the 1970s told stories of black heroes and sheroes and how they overcame adversity, this shift to stories of "everyday blackness" for everybody's children is significant.

More than One (1996), written by Miriam Schlein and African-American illustrator Donald Crews, provides yet another example of this dynamic. In this book, Schlein teaches that "one" can number a variety of things: one pair of shoes includes two shoes, and one baseball team includes nine players, for instance.[40] But since Crews often incorporates his own racially diverse reality into his picture books, several members of the baseball team are men and women of color—one of whom is Crews himself[41]—and two of

the families that he illustrates (a husband and wife as a family of one, and a father, reading with his two children as a family of three) are black. In all of the portraits of friends, Crews paints an array of skin tones and a variety of ethnicities. The book says nothing at all about the race of any of its characters, but that Crews chose to illustrate the characters as diverse hints at the high value that he places on visual inclusiveness that enables all readers to see themselves represented in the stories he illustrates.

South Carolina native Mary Claire Pinckney did in the 1990s what Gerald W. Deas did in the 1980s: she took a popular historical story—in this case *Epaminondas*—and rewrote it in a culturally specific way to reflect a more positive attitude toward blackness. Though not a concept book, *Epaminondas* in most of its permutations, emphasizes that the protagonist, Epaminondas, or Pammy, as he is called, is a "very little boy" who often fails to use his head, and because of the emphasis on Pammy's age, this book would likely have been read, reread, and enjoyed by very young readers. In the tradition of the Simpleton, Noodlehead, and Jack tales, *Epaminondas and His Auntie* (1976), first published by Sara Cone Bryant in 1938, tells of a young boy whose auntie sends him home with a succession of four items, each of which he wrongly assumes he should carry home the same way he was told to transport the previous item. When he carries the butter home under his hat like his Mammy told him to carry the cake, he ends up with butter all down his back and melted into his eyes by the time he arrives home. And when he dunks his new puppy in the stream until he nearly drowns it—following Mammy's directions for cooling butter before carrying it—he must again face his disappointed mother whom he so desperately desires to please. Each time Mammy realizes Epaminondas's mistake, however, she exclaims, "Epaminondas, you ain't got the sense you was born with" and tries to teach him better.[42] Even in Bryant's 1976 version, Inez Hogan illustrates the protagonist as the stereotypical pickaninny with plaits sticking out all over his head, and Mammy as the dark-skinned overweight, head-rag–wearing housemother who looks not unlike a house slave.

In her revision of this story, not only does Pinckney remove all of the derogatory references so integral to the original story, but she also rewrites the dialogue in Gullah, a creole that once constituted the primary means of communication among coastal Carolina and upper Georgia coastline slaves and which many inhabitants of those areas still speak. Finally determined to mend the error of his ways, Pinckney's Epaminondas considers his mother's last words before leaving the house: "Pammy, you seen dem nice pie I bin put on duh step fuh cool? Be kyeerful how oonuh step in dem pie!" Literally minded as he is, Pammy says, "I knows I can do dat right . . . Ma say fuh bees kyeerful how I steps in dem pie so I gots tuh be kyeerful tuh step spang in duh middul uh dey. I know Ma gwine bees too proud uh me kase I done sump'n right at last."[43] Accordingly, he steps carefully into the middle of every single pie.

When his mother comes home, all she can do is sit on the ground and cry. In Sarah Cone Bryant's original tale of *Epaminondas,* the racialized visual images encourage readers to attribute the protagonist's stupidity to his blackness. In Pinckney's revisionist tale, however, Pammy's youth, his lack of experience with the world, with language, and with independently following the directions of adults account for his "noodleheadedness."

Like Deas's revision of *Ten Little Niggers*, Pinckney's *Epaminondas: A Folk Tale Re-told in Gullah* was not published with a major New York publishing house; it was published with Bee and Boo Enterprises in Charleston, South Carolina. Serving the dual function of revitalizing a nearly extinct, long-maligned language and keeping an interesting story about a black youngster alive in a form that depicts a black child and his family honorably rather than derogatorily, Pinckney's *Epaminondas* does on a smaller scale the same recovery and "re-storying" work that Julius Lester and Jerry Pinkney accomplish in *Sam and the Tigers* and that Fred Marcellino does in *The Story of Little Babaji*. This is important not only because these picture books reach the youngest readers and influence their values concerning children of color—be the readers children of color or not—but also because the adults responsible for reading to young children are sometimes intimately familiar with the original or earlier versions of these stories which desperately need revising and "re-visioning." In acting as revisionist literary historians, authors like Deas, Pinckney, Lester, and Marcellino bring the valuable and delightful parts of these stories into the present while leaving the racist, damaging, and derogatory parts in the past.

Although I mentioned that contemporary concept books are less likely to reach back to African "roots" to validate African Americanness, it is also true that in the global economy, Africa still figures prominently in contemporary books about the black experience. Earlier in the century, as well as in *The Brownies' Book*, black artists used photographs to show the beauty of black children while simultaneously undoing some of the harm that had been done from decades of exaggerated minstrel depictions of black characters. Ifeoma Onyefulu's *A is for Africa* (1993) makes use of photographs to bring modern Africa to life for young readers. Onyefulu is an Igbo from Nigeria who now lives in London, but since this book was published in New York and is just as readily available to young American readers as are books by African-American authors and illustrators, a child might likely read *A is for Africa* alongside the Afro-Bets books. It seems appropriate that this global book's title echoes the first line of Lucille Clifton's 1970 *The Black BC's* and mentions several concepts that Clifton also touched on two decades prior. In the author's note, Onyefulu says:

> I wanted to capture what the people of Africa have in common: traditional village life, warm family ties, and above all, the hospitality for which

> Africans are famous. This book shows what Africa is to me, but it is for and about all the peoples of this vast, friendly, colorful continent.[44]

Given its wide circulation, it is for American, British, Australian, and Canadian readers as well.

A is for Africa offers readers a glimpse into a number of different African cultures, representing the multiple strata and activities of several societies: the children, the adults, the elders; the common folk, a queen, the spirit of the ancestors; storytelling, drumming, playing native games; and the making, buying, and selling of products that people produce to make a living. Just as the *Ten Little Niggers* books spread a destructive message about people of African descent by traveling from the United States to London and back again, *A is for Africa* and other books of this type that are emerging in the contemporary international children's market build important bridges between cultures by showing the beauty and uniqueness of modern-day Africa and its inhabitants. Hence, although this book cannot be called African-American children's literature, it nevertheless embraces many of the same goals that *The Brownies' Book* espoused, not the least of which is "To make colored children realize that being 'colored' is a normal beautiful thing" (Harris, *Brownies'* 3).

In the same vein, bell hooks and Chris Raschka's *Happy to Be Nappy* uncompromisingly celebrates African-American hair textures in this picture book for very young readers. This is, in a sense, a concept book, teaching readers about what "nappy" means and working toward the same goal that Carolivia Herron and Joe Cepeda target in their controversial picture book, *Nappy Hair* (1997): to revise the connotations of a word that has heretofore been derogatory. The book ends: "Happy with hair all short and strong. Happy with locks that twist and curl. Just all girl happy! Happy to be nappy hair!"[45] In a sense, this picture book is a children's version of the same message hooks offers in her essay, "Straightening Our Hair": black girls and women should not allow white supremacist ideology to determine how they feel about their hair; nappy hair is beautiful, and black women should not straighten it or change it to fit the white beauty standard. In light of "Straightening Our Hair," this picture book celebrates an African feature while making a strong political statement of resistance intended to reach young, even preverbal, children.

2000s: Celebration without Compromise

The new millennium has brought a continuation of the theme of celebrating blackness in picture books for very young children. Husband and wife team Sandra and Myles Pinkney take up this task in their Charlotte Zolotow Award–winning picture book, *Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children* (2000) (fig. 2.31).

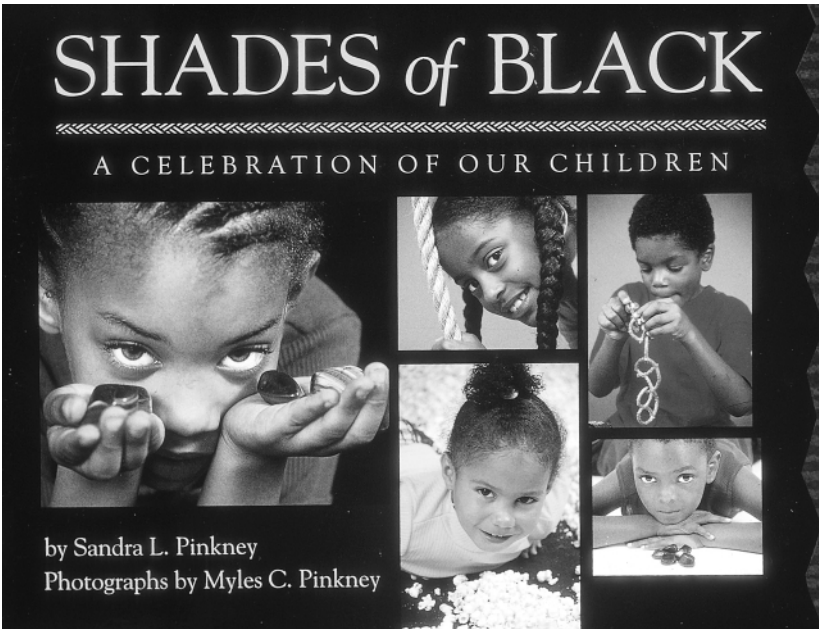

Fig. 2.31. From *Shades of Black* by Sandra and Myles Pinkney. Copyright © 2000 by Sandra and Myles Pinkney. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Inc.

Notably, according to Bernette Ford, Scholastic had initially planned a small print run for this book, feeling (still) that few Americans would be interested in purchasing and buying this book. But knowing its potential, Ford took free copies of this book to an American Library Association Convention in 2000 and was not surprised to find that it was an immediate hit.[46] Recognized for its excellence by the Bank Street College of Education, the Children's Book Council, and by Parents' Guide to Children's Media, *Shades of Black* should enjoy a long life. This concept book celebrates the truth that black people come in all different shades, have wildly different hair textures, and a wide array of eye colors. One child's skin is "the milky smooth brown in a chocolate bar," while another's is "the radiant brassy yellow in popcorn," and the refrain throughout the book is "I am black; I am unique."[47] Especially notable in the section on hair is the affirmation: "My hair is short and my hair is long. All of my hair is good." Given the proliferation of recent books on African-American hair such as Carolivia Herron and Joe Cepeda's *Nappy Hair*, bell hooks and Chris Raschka's *Happy to Be Nappy* (1999) and *Be Boy Buzz* (2002), and Nikki Grimes and George Ford's *Wild, Wild Hair* (1996), these innovative and positive snapshots of Afro hair seek to counteract many of the negative value judgments to which Afro hair has so long been subject in the United States.

One other strong point of *Shades of Black* is its linguistic complexity. While one child likens her skin color to the "gingery brown in a cookie," another compares the color of his eyes to "the warm luster of green in a Unakite" and another to the "glow of ebony in an Onyx." Hence, in this book, the Pinkneys not only challenge the reader's concept of what black children look like, but they also stretch the vocabularies of young readers. It is difficult to read this book and still hold onto stereotypical assumptions about who black children are.

Sandra and Myles Pinkney broaden their concept of diversity even more in one of their most recent publications, *A Rainbow All around Me* (2002). In this book, several children paint a rainbow of blue, red, orange, purple, black, green, pink, brown, white, and tan. It is clear that these children come from a variety of backgrounds, but in the front matter, the Pinkneys specify the ethnic groups and countries that the children represent: African American, Hungarian, Italian, Pakistani, Mexican, Aztec, Taiwanese, Jordanian, Native American, Portuguese, Dutch, German, Vietnamese, El Salvadoran, West African, Puerto Rican, Indian, and Austrian. While the explicit message of the book is that colors are everywhere and "You are the rainbow—YOU and ME!" the implied message is that each child exists as an important component to the beauty of the rainbow, and if any one child were missing, the rainbow would be less vibrant than it is.[48] Just as *The Brownies' Book* featured photographs of black children to allow readers to see how visually diverse and beautiful their readership was, Myles Pinkney uses photography in *Shades of Black* and *A Rainbow All around Me* to help very young readers understand and appreciate the infinite diversity among children.

Although I have emphasized concept books in this chapter, I will conclude with a story book that I feel best exemplifies the new millennium's answer to *The Brownies' Book*'s goal to teach black children "a delicate code of honor and action in their relations with white children" (Harris *Brownies'* 3). Jacqueline Woodson and E. B. Lewis's *The Other Side* (2001) tells the story of a little black girl, Clover, and a little white girl, Annie, who live next door to one another in the country. Both girls' mothers have told them not to cross the fence that divides their yards, and both of the girls obediently comply. Clover plays with her black friends on her side of the fence, and Annie plays alone on her side. Eventually, however, all of the girls end up sitting on top of the fence, all in a row like birds on a wire since none of their mothers have forbidden this level of togetherness. At the conclusion of the story, Annie suggests, "Someday somebody's going to come along and knock this old fence down." Clover affirms: "Yeah . . . someday."[49] Woodson implies here that even while adults are committed to building walls—even if only for the safety of their children—if children had their way, they would build bridges and cross all kinds of invisible social, economic, and ethnic bound-

aries to play with one another. The book also suggests that children can solve problems that adults create, and given the chance, they will see the value in one another with little or no help from adults or even from other children.

Conclusion

More and more, African-American children's picture books are emphasizing messages of collaboration rather than division. Before the 1920s, children's picture books about the black experience were "for them, by them" books; they were written primarily by white authors for white readers, which served to alienate black readers who were the butt of the jokes and the center of ridicule. From the 1920s through the wave of publishing that came out of the Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements, many black authors wrote "FUBU" picture books: "for us, by us," even though targeting a black audience sometimes meant being unable to place those texts with mainstream publishers. Although anyone could have read them, books like Langston Hughes's *Black Misery* (1969) and Nikki Grimes and Tom Feelings's *Something On My Mind* (1978) really spoke to black readers—as did *The Brownies' Book*—and therefore might not have appealed to white readers who didn't understand them. Since *no one* had been writing for black children for so long, this was an important time within the evolution of African-American children's literature. Increasingly in contemporary African-American children's picture and concept books, black authors are writing "by us, for everyone" literature, and both the inclusive nature of these books and the greater access to publishing that contemporary black authors now have than those who preceded them enjoyed mean a more widespread readership and a greater potential for national and international prominence than earlier books had. And though some critics would prefer to place "under erasure" authors who write about the black experience from inside their non–African-American ethnic skins, writers like Ezra Jack Keats and William Miller have made substantial and affirming contributions to the genre.

As the quality of African-American concept books and picture books for very young readers improves, and as baby board, manipulative, and story books that celebrate diversity become more readily available for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, children can start developing an appreciation of those who look different from themselves at the same time that they are learning to communicate. Given the global context in which these books are being published and the conflicts that globalization has brought to the forefront of world events at the beginning of this new millennium, the early exposure to positive messages about people of color that these books can

provide is crucial in their potential to function as catalysts for embracing difference.

If the birth of African-American children's picture books early in the twentieth century brought into being books that were designed to nudge black children toward introspection to improve their esteem about themselves and their own race in the context of a society that devalued them, the picture books of the Golden Age of African-American children's picture books take as a given the celebration and acceptance of blackness and seek to build bridges both among and between people.

3

The Influence of the Black Arts Movement on African-American Children's Picture Books

The Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights Movement both played an important role in the evolution of the genre of African-American children's literature. The Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, however, the "aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept," gave voice to many ideas that, even though they may have not translated directly into African-American children's picture books, still surface in substantial ways in this body of literature.[1] And although I defined the inclusive nature of this volume in the introduction, because of the focus on the black aesthetic in these works and on black artists speaking directly to the needs and passions of black people through these works, this chapter will deal almost exclusively with children's texts written and illustrated by African-American authors and artists that exemplify these principles. To explain the influence of the Black Arts Movement on children's picture books, I will first discuss some of the basic tenets of this movement and how these ideas show up even in contemporary picture books in a form deemed appropriate for children.

Hoyt W. Fuller identifies anger in black art as integral to the Black Arts Movement[2]—what Larry Neal articulates as "poems that shoot guns" (276). Neal further explains that in these works, black people "define the world in their own terms," rejecting the white aesthetic (272). Neal says that this is not protest literature but rather literature that speaks directly to black people with the underlying purpose of radicalizing or destroying the Western aesthetic (273). These texts also confront the historical realities of the painful past so that they are not forgotten or repeated and so that this knowledge can empower black people (286). Neal notes that the artist within this movement is intimately connected with his community and therefore intimately aware of the community's needs. And the black artist's "primary duty is to speak to the spiritual and cultural needs of Black people" (273). Both nationalism and separatism fueled this movement.

The characteristics described above might seem far afield from the content, purpose, and audience of children's literature. This may be because Americans still more or less ascribe to the Victorian notion of the child as innocent and needing to be protected from social conflicts and sheltered from adult issues such as violence, sex, and inhumanity. At the same time, however, regardless of how much Americans want to *think* of children in this way and to protect them from ideas deemed harmful to the child, the contemporary reality is that children do see violence and more and more frequently do commit violent crimes themselves; they are victims of verbal, emotional, and sexual abuse and sometimes become perpetrators of these types of abuse; and despite efforts to prevent it, many children also witness as well as participate in inhumanity toward other people. A strand of African-American children's picture books, from those that followed the Black Arts Movement historically to those being written in the early twenty-first century, acknowledges these truths.

Many of the ideas integral to the Black Arts Movement that manifest themselves in the black aesthetic are, indeed, inappropriate for texts for young children and therefore do not show up directly in picture books. For example, for the most part, African-American children's picture books do not convey ideas about separatism or nationalism, nor do they seek to radicalize or destroy the white aesthetic. But some of them do express anger at the plight of black children in America—and this anger often comes not so much in what the child character expresses but in what the narrative evokes in the reader in response to the child's situation. Many confront painful historical realities in ways that children can understand and process them;[3] and some others also speak directly to the cultural and spiritual needs of black children—not necessarily excluding other readers, but these texts do address "cultural insiders" who are experiencing life as African Americans.

Rose Blue and Tom Feelings's 1969 *A Quiet Place*, an illustrated book, incites the reader's anger because of what the book's protagonist, young Matthew, must endure before he gets a suitable family.[4] The book's third-person narrative dissipates some of the book's anger and distances the reader from what Matthew feels about his situation, but the parts of the book that narrate Matthew's early experiences paint a bleak picture of a boy who has fallen prey to the social services system through no fault of his own. Apparently, Matthew became an orphan when very young. He then lived in a children's shelter in a cottage with eleven other boys (*Blue* 10). At one point, Matthew asks the shelter supervisors if he, like the other boys, had a real mom and dad to go home to somewhere, but they only ignore him. At age six, Matthew goes to live with the Reardon family as a foster child. "The Reardons yelled a lot. Mr. Reardon would come home and make noise and Mrs. Reardon would yell at him. They both yelled at Matthew and sometimes hit him—he didn't know why" (11). When the welfare lady comes back, Matthew overhears Mrs. Reardon telling her that the state doesn't pay

her enough to make keeping Matthew worthwhile and as a result social services moves him to another home with the Grant family. This family also has communication problems, and when Matthew calls Mrs. Grant "mama" one day, she gets angry with him and tells him she is not his mama, making Matthew think that perhaps he was better off in the boys' home. Soon he gets moved again—this time into a family that loves and nurtures him. Even so, his life is far from idyllic. On his way to and from the library, bullies harass him about liking books. Though the primary plot revolves around Matthew's distress at the closing of the library in his neighborhood, and therefore the loss of his only "quiet place" for reading and thinking, the realities that surround this little boy's existence offer an unusual and realistic glimpse into black urban life during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In addition to Matthew's own past and struggles, he witnesses his big foster sister Claudia's growing pangs as she first chooses a boyfriend, Frankie, whom their foster parents dislike. Frankie, who has dropped out of school, is responsible for the police bringing Claudia home one night from a "date." Her second boyfriend, Roy, whom mama calls a "good boy," is welcome in their household anytime. The narrator says, "Roy was finishing up high school and also working part time. He talked about going to college, but he was poor and had no daddy, so that meant he would have to work during the day and go to school at night" (26). All of the difficulties that these children face establish a theme throughout the book that Claudia articulates when Matthew says he sees neighborhoods in the books he reads that have "clean streets with pretty houses and lots of trees," unlike their dirty, crowded urban neighborhood (30). Claudia responds: "They're not so far away, honey, not so far at all. . . . But they may as well be on the moon. Fat chance we've got of ever living there. When you're black you can forget it. You can't make it no matter what you do" (30). Roy confronts Claudia's negativity and tells her she has to stay in school to succeed, but having this statement of cynicism come from a young person suggests that Claudia, as a teen, already knows that her life will not follow the stereotypical "American dream."

When the local library finally does close—probably because libraries in black communities like this one tend to take the lowest priority when funds are allocated—Matthew visits the bookmobile that has taken its place. For the first time, he finds a book with a picture of a boy who has brown skin who appears to be Matthew's age. "Matthew thought it would be nice to read a book about a boy who looked so much like himself, so he picked it up and took it to the lady," who commends him on his choice (54). Notably, the librarian is black. Bent on finding a quiet place to read, Matthew tries unsuccessfully to read in his room and then in the bathroom. But the book ends with his reading under a tree on a grassy hill and deciding that even in winter he will indeed find a quiet place to read. He then opens the book with the little black boy on the cover.

While one cannot say that this book seeks to destroy the white aesthetic, it is true that the visual and textual world that Blue and Feelings create in this book consists entirely of black people. Clearly, because both the author and illustrator strive for realism, the type of diversity that exists in urban black America during this time period also surfaces in the book: the book presents the high school drop-out loser, bad as well as good surrogate parents, a teen who considers dropping out of school to "get a job and buy some real groovy clothes," another teen who wants a college education but comes from a broken home, which will make pursuing a college education tough, and a little black boy who just wants a quiet place to read (31). Feelings's black-and-white illustrations also emphasize the realities of Matthew's life: the resentful look on the face of his first foster mother who sees no financial reason for keeping him, the trashcan-lined streets, people in the neighborhood hanging out on their front stoops, and perhaps more important than all of these, facial and physical features of black characters that reflect the variety that actually exists among black people. This honest portrayal of blackness is, of course, one of the goals on which Tom Feelings based his whole career, and it certainly surfaces in this early work of his.

Another of Feelings's picture books, *Something on My Mind* (1978), in which he pairs his talents with the poetry of Nikki Grimes, who has also been publishing black children's literature for several decades, contains a number of poems in which children themselves express their anger at being "less than" in America. In one poem, several children stand by the gate, look at the city, and tell their dreams of the future to one another. Dee Dee wants to visit her relatives down South but says she "won't pick cotton. No." Ronnie, on the other hand, claims he is headed for Africa to live, but when Frankie asks him if he can "speak African," he responds "jambo means hello" and he'll learn the rest when he gets to Africa. Frankie then says that she wishes to go to a place with no name, but Dee Dee wants to know where that is. She says it's a place where she can "just be Frankie Lee and not have to feel worse than white people, or better,/and feel at home,/and happy/and not always wishing I was someplace else."[5] Ronnie and Dee Dee say they'd like to go to this place too.

This simple poem ascribes to these child speakers an awareness of the slave past, an African ancestry, as well as their abject status as African-American children. Dee Dee's desire to go South but her refusal to pick cotton not only recalls the forced labor of slaves who had no choice but to pick cotton but also the backbreaking work that was exhausting Dee Dee's relatives in the South as black laborers even during her mid-twentieth century childhood. Ronnie, who echoes Marcus Garvey's desire to leave America for the African motherland, also alludes to another of Tom Feelings's picture books, published four years earlier, *Jambo Means Hello*, a Swahili alphabet book.[6] The fact that Ronnie seems to have based his desire to go to Africa on

knowledge that he gleaned from reading black picture books is not only somewhat humorous, but it also suggests that Ronnie is both "reading black" and "thinking black" even as a child. Frankie Lee's wish makes more explicit than either of the other two speakers that she is tired of living in a country where black people have little value and where blackness is always defined in relation to whiteness—the same type of anger that Matthew's foster sister expresses in *A Quiet Place*. In addition, although historically black people have seen *Africa* as a place of refuge—a home of sorts, a motherland—Frankie Lee does not say she wants to go to Africa but to a place with no name where she can feel at home and not have to dream anymore of escaping her current existence. This may imply that she's not even certain that Africa will give her the kind of freedom and acceptance she seeks. In a small way, this poem directly confronts racism and hints at a desire for separatism where blackness can exist and thrive on its own terms.

Like *A Quiet Place*, *Something on My Mind* also takes the reader into black realities that many readers might not otherwise think about. In one poem, the speaker mentions her befuddlement at how "good" English" (versus Black English Vernacular in which the previous poem was written) can help her family to purchase more food and necessities like extra blankets, but both her mother and her teacher tell her that this is so. She suspects that the adults know how learning Standard English will help her materially; she asks, "Why won't they say?" In the same way that Frankie Lee feels that her *life* is not valued in America, this speaker knows that her speech is not valued—not at school, and not even at home. She must conform to the white standard to get not what she *wants* but the basics of what she *needs* such as food and blankets.

In a third poem, also set in school, a boy receives an assignment to write about his summer vacation. He makes the following poetic list: he went with his friend Jo Jo to Jones Beach; "Jimmy got out of jail"; he snuck into the pool across town two times; and for the second time, his daddy lost his job. Although his mother says not to worry, "he did" (which could mean that the speaker did worry anyway, or that the father worried about losing a second job, or perhaps the speaker is just reiterating that his father really did lose his job. I believe that this linguistic ambiguity is purposeful). He continues by saying that for the fourth time Sharon "hit the number." Reflecting on what he has written, the speaker then concludes: "Teacher don't want to hear that," and he asks himself what he can write. He then begins where he started: with his trip to Jones Beach.

The circularity of this poem either suggests that this boy is stuck with the realities of his life and the specifications of the assignment, knowing that the teacher is so far removed from his lifestyle that she won't accept his work if he tells the truth, or it suggests that the writer refuses to deny the reality of his summer and will tell it anyway, even if the teacher rejects it. In

addition, the poem is full of difficulties that the teacher (especially if as large a cultural and/or racial gap exists between the writer and his teacher as the boy implies) would rather not face: gambling (and a positive spin on gambling at that), rule breaking, joblessness, incarceration, visiting a black beach. But this young writer's pen is his platform, and in this poem, he teeters on the point of decision between putting his reality "in the face of" his teacher or trying to figure out a way to represent his black life to his teacher in such a way that she can digest and will accept it for an assignment. Such is the dilemma of many black children who have to bridge a gulf between themselves and teachers who have no idea what kind of lives they live once they walk out of the classroom.

Given that Rose Blue, Tom Feelings, and Nikki Grimes came of age in a racially turbulent America when blacks were still struggling for their civil rights, it is not surprising that some of the works they have produced embrace these particular aspects of the black aesthetic and reflect some of the tenets of the Black Arts Movement. Surprisingly, though, these ideas also surface in the collaborative picture book projects of much younger black artists. Tony Medina and R. Gregory Christie's *DeShawn Days* (2001) and Jacqueline Woodson and James Ransome's *Visiting Day* (2002) are two such texts.

In *DeShawn Days*, Tony Medina's first book for children, a little black boy named DeShawn gives the reader a snapshot of his family life. His first poem tells about who lives in his house: his uncle, his grandma, and his mother. Of his mother, he says: "My mother my mother/she lives in my house" and works hard all day "'cause/she don't know where my dad is at."[7] She works and goes to school, and DeShawn greets her with a kiss and a hug and helps her put her books away. As in this poem, the details in other poems inform the reader of some of the less-than-ideal conditions of DeShawn's life. His grandmother has legs like an elephant's, walks with a cane, and has a pacemaker. In his poem, "What is life like in the "Hood," DeShawn paints a picture not unlike the one that we see in *A Quiet Place*. He mentions sirens, ambulances, broken bottles, graffiti, and "dog mess smell in the air." This is the black urban ghetto of the same sort where Matthew in *A Quiet Place* gets harassed because he enjoys books. DeShawn narrates his perspective that the news is no longer boring but scary since he sees that adult fights actually kill people, and he also tells of his grief when his grandmother died: "When my grandmother died/I cried and cried."

In the same way that the books of Blue, Feelings, and Grimes come out of their lived experiences, so too does Medina's. He comments in the afterword that his childhood was much like DeShawn's; he even had a grandmother who was always there for him. The setting of this picture book, the visual element that identifies DeShawn's world as largely black, and Medina's focus on practices and ideas identified with contemporary black urban

America such as rap, remap the landscape of black childhood for a contemporary audience. Though not a book that conveys anger about the state of black American childhood, this book does speak to black readers as cultural insiders, telling the intimate details of one little black boy's life.

Jacqueline Woodson achieves this same level of intimacy in *Visiting Day.* In this picture book, beautifully illustrated with James Ransome's acrylic paintings, the young female narrator, who remains nameless, goes to visit her father in jail. The book never says why the narrator lives with her grandmother or what has happened to the child's mother, leading the reader simply to accept that that's the way this child's life is. The narrative also never makes clear what crime has landed the father in jail. But when the little girl and her grandmother go to see him, Grandma kindly takes gifts from her neighbor to her neighbor's son, who is also in jail, because Mrs. Tate can't afford the bus fare to go see her only son.

Subtle though it is, this picture book visually represents a sad reality of the American penal system: in the illustration of the inside of the bus, all of the passengers going to visit the prison seem to be black. Likewise, when the girl and her grandmother finally get to see Daddy, everyone in jail, with the exception of the uniformed guard and perhaps one khaki-shirted prisoner, all also seem to be black. Given the high percentage of black males "doing time" in American jails and prisons, Ransome makes a statement in the illustrations on which Woodson's text need not comment. According to a *New York Times* article on April 7, 2003, 12 percent of African-American males between the ages of twenty and thirty-four are incarcerated—the highest rate ever. By comparison, white males in the same age group make up 1.6 percent of those imprisoned in America.[8]

Just as Medina writes his life in *DeShawn Days*, Woodson and Ransome comment in the author and artist's notes that this story of visiting a relative in jail is a lived experience for both of them: Woodson's favorite uncle went to jail when she was a child, and Ransome's brother, who, like the man in this story, was a father, served time as well. In some ways, this story helped both the author and the artist tell a family story that they needed to tell and that children need to hear because it has become a reality for so many American children in general but so many black children in particular.

One commonality that surfaces in these stories is that in nearly all of them, food and the support of family members help the children to cope with the stresses that they are experiencing. When Matthew comes in from the street, just having escaped the bullies who harass him about his books, his foster mother's soup calms and reassures him. DeShawn talks of the smell of his grandmother's baked chicken and cornbread, while the little girl who visits her father in jail enjoys fried chicken and cornbread that her grandmother cooked earlier that morning. The passengers on the bus who ride to the jail also pass around food to share, including sweet potato pie.

This common experience of the positivity of sharing food with relatives establishes cooking and eating within the black family as a metaphor for love. Those who fill the stomachs of black children are also the ones most likely nurturing the souls of these same children.

One final text, written by Sweet Honey in the Rock member, Ysaye M. Barnwell, and illustrated by Synthia Saint James, *No Mirrors in My Nana's House* (1998), speaks of and directly to children who are living the black experience. The message that this text brings to light comes as no surprise to those who know the music and political underpinnings of Sweet Honey. Founded in 1973 by Bernice Johnson Reagon, Sweet Honey, an all-female a cappella ensemble, emerged out of Reagon's political involvement in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. She had sung in the original SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) Freedom Singers, "the historic African-American vocal and highly visual group which formed during the height of the '60s civil rights struggles."[9] The Freedom Singers performed political music and also music that came out of the black church, and many of these songs symbolically represent "the themes of freedom that had been so long denied" (Sweet Honey). Initially a quartet and now a quintet, Sweet Honey performs all over the country and all over the world, singing songs that decry oppression of all types, beginning with racial discrimination. Founder Reagon says that "Sweet Honey in the Rock is a woman born of a struggling union of Black Woman singers. . . . Sweet Honey uses her voice as a personal vehicle to call forth all that is deeply felt—from life's hopeful struggles to its long-awaited victories" (Sweet Honey).

As a part of this group, Barnwell wrote *No Mirrors* from the same platform from which she sings about justice and freedom within the group. In turning one of the group's songs into a picture book for children, Barnwell sought to reach a wider audience of children with the message that the book brings. In this picture book, the young, black female speaker tells the reader that "There were no mirrors in my Nana's house/for the beauty that I saw in everything . . . was in her eyes."[10] As in several of the picture books discussed earlier, a grandmother nurtures a black child, even protecting her from the knowledge of things that might damage her self-image. Because of her grandmother's love and care, the speaker, as a child, never knows that her "skin was too black," that her "nose was too flat," that she has misfitting clothes, or missed things that other children experienced. The second time the text says that "beauty was in her eyes," Saint James's illustration shows a little girl, dressed in a yellow shirt, socks, and hair ribbon with green shorts and shoes, staring adoringly into the face of her larger-than-life grandmother. The grandmother wears solid red, large gray earrings, and sports a short, natural haircut, dappled with gray. Although these characteristically Saint Jamesian characters lack facial features and physical details, the body language of

the two characters in this illustration suggests that the grandmother—hands on her hips—is telling the granddaughter how special she is, and the child is clearly absorbing all of these wonderful affirmations. In addition, because of her grandmother's positivity toward her and toward life in general, the little girl can make the best of the less-than-desirable conditions of her grandmother's apartment building. The child is intrigued by the cracks in the walls, interprets the noises from the hallway as music, and accepts the trash that residents throw on the floors as cushions for her feet. Even when apart from her grandmother this child takes these affirmations with her, never knowing hate and acknowledging only love from other people.

In James A. Banks and Jean D. Grambs's 1972 anthology, *Black Self-Concept*, a response to the 1965 *Negro Self-Concept*, the editors conclude that despite all of the racial and political upheaval that the 1960s saw, "black revolt *has not* significantly changed the self-concepts and self-evaluations of *most* black children and youth."[11] This is, I suspect part of the reason why ideas espoused by the Black Arts Movement are still surfacing in contemporary picture books that target, first and foremost, young black readers. Writers like Ysaye M. Barnwell know that black child readers still need to hear affirmations of blackness and see images of their own families and grandmothers represented in the books they read.

In a 1970s written exchange in *The New York Times Book Review* between author Julius Lester and *Times* children's book editor George Wood, Lester tells Wood that his book, *To Be a Slave*, garnered much more attention and many more positive reviews than did *Black Folktales*.[12] He attributes this to the fact that the former "is directed totally toward black children" ("Black and White" 30). Although he sees both of these as equally intellectual books, he acknowledges that the one that whites see as excluding them as readers cannot possibly do as well in the market as the more inclusive text. Still he chose to (and still chooses to) write those books despite their poor reception, and so do many others who have determined that part of their role as black artists is sometimes to speak directly to black readers even if that makes some white readers "want to pick up their marbles and go home" (30). As long as there are black children like Matthew who don't know a loving black family until long after he should; girls like the protagonist in Woodson's *Visiting Day* who don't know when or if their fathers will come home from jail; and young women like Dee Dee in Nikki Grimes's poem who is tired of having to measure herself against white people, there will be a need and a place for these books that translate into children's culture ideas from the Black Arts Movement that contemporary children still need to hear.

SECTION II

The Professional Evolution of African-American Children's Picture Books

Writing and illustrating for children has become a multi-million dollar industry in recent years. As a result, many more authors and artists are earning their livelihood from writing and illustrating for children than did so earlier in the century. Hence, this second section of *Brown Gold* considers the influence of some of the professional aspects of African-American children's picture books.

Chapter 4, "Pushing the Boundaries: The Coretta Scott King Award Picture Books," details the evolution of the Coretta Scott King Award and argues that the Illustrator Award winners, because of their visual element and their diversity, have pushed out the borders of African-American children's literature much more than have the King Author Award winners. While the Author Award books tend to be novels and biographical or nonfictional texts, the Illustrator Awards have come from a much wider variety of genres, both traditional and experimental.

Chapter 5, "From Margin to Center: African-American Artistic Legacies Shaping the Genre," considers the social and professional implications of the fact that the children of many longtime black authors and illustrators are now themselves making a career of African-American children's picture books. Rather than biographical sketches, this chapter offers comparative analyses between the works of several legacies and texts that their parents have written in an effort to trace how ideas from the parents' work also resonates in that of the legacy. Much of this chapter results from interviews with black legacies and their parents, all of whom bring different talents to children's literature than their parents brought, and all of whom are continuing to affirm blackness for "Children of the Sun."

4
Pushing the Boundaries
The Coretta Scott King Award Picture Books

The previous chapter examines the influence of a particular black social movement—The Black Arts Movement—on African-American children's picture books. While the previous chapter considers how forces external to the literature have helped to shape the genre, the current chapter considers a powerful force from within: the most prestigious book award for black interest books, the Coretta Scott King Award. The current discussion compares the Author Award and the Illustrator Award to explore how award-winning picture books have evolved relative to award-winning novels and longer works.

In "Criteria for Negro Art," the 1926 speech that W. E. B. Du Bois delivered at the Spingarn Medallist Ceremony for winner Carter G. Woodson, he decries the fact that black people do not embrace the works of their own artists until the white literary and artistic establishments validate them. "As it is now," he says, "we are handing everything over to a white jury."[1] Upbraiding his audience for not trusting their own cultural judgment, he says: "We must come to the place where the work of art when it appears is reviewed and acclaimed by our own free and unfettered judgment . . . until the art of the black folk compells [sic] recognition they will not be rated as human" (Du Bois 23). During the 1970s, this need to have black art for children recognized and legitimized was, in part, the motivating factor behind librarians Glyndon Greer, Mabel McKissick, and John Carrol's establishing the Coretta Scott King Award. They realized that in the forty-seven and thirty-one year histories of the Newbery and Caldecott Awards, respectively, little attention had been paid to the work of African-American authors and illustrators although black writers and artists had published a great deal worthy of note during the granting of these awards. They therefore established the Coretta Scott King Award to bring recognition to an author (and four years later an illustrator also) whose book for young people from the previous

year focusing on the black experience, promotes and encourages world peace, and honors Coretta Scott King's continuing struggle for equality—the struggle for which Martin Luther King, Jr. lost his life.[2] Because the Coretta Scott King Task Force is a unit of the Social Responsibilities Round Table, an arm of the American Library Association (ALA), the King Award has at least partially gained the kind of respect and visibility that the most prestigious ALA awards, the coveted Newbery and Caldecott, enjoy.

If the Coretta Scott King Award has identified the texts that the American Library Association deemed the best African-American children's and young adult literature from 1970 to the present, then it is important to examine how this select body of literature represents the evolution of this genre and what these changes have reflected about black life over the past thirty plus years. Since most of the Author Awards have gone to novelists and writers of the longer works and the Illustrator Awards have gone primarily to illustrators of picture books—the focus of this volume—this chapter will work toward an analysis of selected texts that have won the Illustrator Award.

Because of the generic differences between the types of books that win the two awards, the Author Award choices have—particularly for the first decade—tended to be more conservative than those chosen for the Illustrator Award. Specifically, during the first decade of the Author Award, biographies about famous African Americans such as Jackie Robinson, Stevie Wonder, and Frederick Douglass dominated. Given the paucity of accurate and honorable information about historical black leaders in school textbooks in the 1970s, one can understand the proliferation of these trade books for children and the King Award Committee's recognition of their significance. As these awards have aged, however, the diversity among the picture book winners has far outdistanced that among the winners of longer works. As a result, the Illustrator Award–winning books have expanded the boundaries of African-American children's literature much more than the Author Award winners have done over the past three decades. Although a few picture books and illustrated books have won the Author Awards, this award has been given primarily to works from three genres: fiction (novels), nonfiction, and folklore. The Illustrator Awards, however, have come from a wide variety of genres including poetry, music, opera, nonfiction, fictionalized biography, wordless picture book, mythology, fantasy, the story quilt, the black sermon, history, and both national and international folklore. An examination of a few Illustrator Award winners from a smattering of these genres will illustrate the ways that these books have been instrumental in reshaping and expanding the definition of African-American children's literature in general and black picture books in particular.

The first winner of the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award reflects the traditional approach that many of the previous Author Award books took.

George Ford's *Ray Charles*, which also won Sharon Bell Mathis, the book's writer, the Author Award, offers an entertaining but detailed biography of this determined musician. Throughout the book, Mathis emphasizes Charles's determination not to be limited either by his race or his blindness. In her afterword, she quotes him, saying, "'My eyes are my handicap, but my ears are my opportunity.'"[3] Among his unlikely accomplishments, Charles runs a race as a child (only to be tricked into running into an iron post by his sighted classmates), chops wood with an axe for his mother as a regular chore, and at the St. Augustine School for the Blind teaches himself to play every instrument in the school band. Ray Charles even test drives his cars on his own property before he purchases them, with someone sitting in the passenger seat to tell him which way to turn.

As the first King Illustrator Award winner whose author also won the Author Award for the book, *Ray Charles* falls more in the tradition of the Author Award books than it does the Illustrator Award books that follow it. The strengths of this more or less traditional biography are its depiction of Ray Charles as an unlikely hero who overcomes physical limitations, poverty, and even the death of his mother, father, and brother by the time he was fifteen years old; its validation of Charles's successes both through text and black-and-white illustrations, and its inclusion of numerous details about America's gradual recognition of Charles for his outstanding talent. Furthermore, Mathis's book clearly validates Ray's deliberate decision to represent the experiences of Black America in his music. Mathis writes that the musician had the hardest time playing classical, "But Ray knew the kind of music he wanted to play. It was music filled with the great rhythms of Black people. He gave more and more of his time to it. He'd learn a tune and then jazz it up until he had a new sound." Some of the details about his life—such as that he can hear any piece of music and play it perfectly, and that because he has perfect pitch, he can pick a wrong note out of an entire orchestra—have the power to inspire the able-bodied and physically challenged alike.

The book's weaknesses, however, limit its impact as a groundbreaking picture book and might also date the book, lessening its appeal to contemporary readers. Unlike later, more innovative biographies that would follow, this one attempts to cover *everything* about Charles's life, making it both text heavy and somewhat scattered. In fact, in the front matter, Mathis thanks over twenty individuals and organizations for assisting with the research for the book, including the Sickle Cell Disease Association of America, whose research Charles supports financially because Sickle Cell affects black children and because Charles loves children. The exhaustive nature of Mathis's research surfaces in the breadth of the book—problematically so. Weak or missing transitions in the text, sudden shifts in time periods between Charles's childhood and his adult life in the first half of the book, and

Mathis's efforts to try to represent details from every phase of Charles's life combine to make the book lengthier and more issue oriented than it would have been had Mathis not tried to accomplish so much in this one story.

Furthermore, George Ford's black-and-white acrylic and India ink illustrations depicting characters wearing 1970s clothing and hairstyles somewhat date the book visually, but perhaps that is less problematic than the book's textual weaknesses. In fact, Lee & Low reissued *Ray Charles* in 2001, and though Mathis added a foreword and an afterword that include details about awards that Charles has won in recent years, such as the 1992 National Medal of Arts, given to him by President Clinton, the book retained Ford's original illustrations for which he won the King Award. Despite its weaknesses, this first King Illustrator Award book does validate jazz, a genre of music created by African Americans and, in its representation of an important historical figure within the black arts *Ray Charles* does indeed expand the notion of what it means to be African American. Hence, this first winner, though not groundbreaking, was an important beginning that served as a springboard for the diverse winners that would follow.

The Author Awards of the 1970s featured a substantial number of biographies such as Lillie Patterson's *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: Man of Peace* (1969), Elton Fax's *17 Black Artists* (1971), James Haskins's *The Story of Stevie Wonder* (1976), and Ossie Davis's *Escape to Freedom: A Play about Young Frederick Douglass* (1978), but the Illustrator Award–winning books that followed *Ray Charles* made room for a much wider variety of genres and themes. Camille Yarbrough and Carole Byard's picture book *Cornrows*, for instance (1979), took up the topic of the historical, cultural, spiritual, and sociopolitical dimensions of African-American hair. Byard's black-and-white sketches sensitively tell the story of a mother and great-grandmother in one family who understand and appreciate the value of their distinctively African hairstyles and pass their historical knowledge of cornrows down to the youngest members of the family. As Shirley Ann, affectionately called Sister, and her little brother Mike, often called Brother or "MeToo," watch their Great-Grammaw braid their mother's hair, they listen intently while Great-Grammaw, the matriarch of the family, tells them about the "*suku*" (meaning *basket* in Yoruba), the style into which she is designing Mama's hair. Telling them of the pride of their African ancestors who came to the Americas as slaves and the significance that hairstyles had for these people, Great-Grammaw explains that people could identify the village and clan of the African because of the style of their hair and that slaves who came from the Yoruba people wore thirty or more braids, the designs of which labeled them as queens, brides, or princesses. The pattern of the braids also identified the person's religion.[4] Although this practice of hair braiding seems to be a matriarchal tradition that women enjoy, and although many of the stories that Great-Grammaw tells the children concen-

trate on the hair of the women from different African regions, Great-Grammaw includes Mike within the tradition by braiding his hair too. Both children appear on the cover of the book with Afros, but by the end of the story, they both sport a braided style. While braiding the children's hair, Mama emphasizes stories of the black past and more recent black history by encouraging the children to name their own hairstyles after important black leaders: Miriam, Dunham, Josephine, and Mary Bethune, Aretha, Nina, priestess, and queen.

Shirley Ann, the more mature of the two, names her hairstyle after Langston Hughes because she has memorized one of his poems. MeToo, however, names his hairstyle "Batman," suggesting that he has perhaps not bought into or understood this visual validation of African-American history as thoroughly as has his sister. Despite this fact, Mama and Great-Grammaw have turned an afternoon hair braiding session into an important cultural and historical lesson for both Shirley Ann and Mike, telling the children of the strength and resistance that many slaves as well as many black leaders have possessed that enabled them to survive overwhelming hardship and the role that hairstyles played in some of these historical struggles. Notably, this book emphasizes the role that black adults and elders can play in exposing young children—and young readers—to a worldview that validates Afrocentric ideas, particularly about black cultural traditions that might be poorly understood by mainstream America. Hence, in writing this picture book that sought to improve the general perception of cornrows during an era when braided hairstyles were quite popular but could also be associated with black militancy, Yarbrough and Byard express some complex historico-political ideas about hair for an audience of readers that might not have thought much yet about the cultural implications of Afro hair.

Furthermore, *Cornrows* has aged well. Given the plethora of books about African-American hair for both adults and children that has been published since this one—Bill Gaskins's *Good and Bad Hair* (1997), Lisa Jones's *Bullet-Proof Diva: Tales of Race, Sex, and Hair* (1994), Alexis De Veaux and Cheryl Hanna's *An Enchanted Hair Tale* (1987), Nikki Grimes and George Ford's *Wild, Wild Hair* (1996), Carolivia Herron and Joe Cepeda's *Nappy Hair* (1997), Natasha Anastasia Tarpley and E. B. Lewis's *I Love My Hair* (1998), to name only a few—and also given the enormous industry that has recently evolved around braids for both black women and black men, Yarbrough and Byard's book opens an important literary dialogue in children's literature that has continued to be part of a significant, ongoing cultural conversation in America throughout the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Hence, this brief work of fiction incorporates history, religion, and social activism, making this unassuming picture book a multigeneric work that bears a great deal of relevance more than twenty years after its publication.

Given the importance of the African and African-American oral tradition to black American culture, it is not surprising that many of the picture books that have won the King Award for illustration have related traditional folktales and fictionalized stories handed down through family lore. In the 1980s, Valerie Flournoy and Jerry Pinkney's *The Patchwork Quilt* (1985), John Steptoe's *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale* (1988), and Patricia McKissack and Jerry Pinkney's *Mirandy and Brother Wind* (1989) all fall into this category of tales. Flournoy and McKissack's stories demonstrate the importance of intergenerational relationships in nurturing children within the black community, but McKissack's tale incorporates fantasy and "conjure," while the earlier tale relates a more realistic story of a child's mentorship into an art form that, like slave spirituals, once served both a practical and a political purpose. Steptoe's exquisitely illustrated story, however, brings together an international setting (Africa), a folktale from oral tradition, and several fantastic elements to create a multicultural story in which goodness prevails.

In Valerie Flournoy and Jerry Pinkney's T*he Patchwork Quilt*, Grandma, who lives with Tanya's family, has decided to make a patchwork quilt. Tanya, the protagonist who offers to help Grandma, figures that making the quilt will take a few hours. When Grandma explains that the process could take more than a year, Tanya is amazed. And similar to the conflict present in Sharon Bell Mathis and Leo and Diane Dillon's *The Hundred Penny Box* (1975) between the mother wanting to keep things neat and tidy in the house, and Great-great Aunt Dew wanting to save an old, ragged object that symbolizes her past, Tanya's grandma insists on making the old quilt instead of capitulating to Tanya's mama's desire to buy a new one from the store. Eventually, however, Grandma wins Mama over, and Mama begins to help complete the quilt. When Tanya's brother Jim wears out his favorite blue corduroy pants, Grandma clips patches from them before throwing them away. When Tanya dresses up for Halloween, Grandma takes clippings from her African Princess costume. Before long, Tanya, her two brothers as well as her mother and father can all see patches from their own lives sewn into Grandma's quilt. But one day, Grandma becomes ill. No one is certain of how sick she is or how long her recovery will take. Knowing that the quilt will make Grandma feel better, Tanya takes over the quilt-making, using what Grandma and Mama have taught her.

Throughout *The Patchwork Quilt*, Pinkney illustrates the importance of this intergenerational granddaughter-grandmother relationship. At times, Tanya understands her grandmother much better than her mother does. In the end, when Grandma has recovered, she and Mama reward Tanya for her hard work and perseverance by giving her the quilt. Flournoy and Pinkney's collaboration in *The Patchwork Quilt* validates the folk art of quilting through its positive but honest depiction of the relationships between the

members of this African-American family. Like *Cornrows*, *The Patchwork Quilt* illustrates the way that all sorts of important leadership training takes place when elders share with young people bits and pieces of their own lives which they'd like to see continue after they are gone. Although African-American slaves often stitched maps into quilts to help other slaves find their way to freedom, as Deborah Hopkinson and James Rasome's *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* (1993) relates, Tanya's Grandma does not allude to this fact as she teaches Tanya her craft. The book, therefore, tells a contemporary story about an intergenerational relationship, and the story does not rely on the black past to give more meaning to contemporary cultural practices. In *Mirandy and Brother Wind*, on the other hand, McKissack recovers a family story and turns it into a flight of fancy that conveys the story of the beginning of her grandparents' relationship.

In the book's preface, McKissack points out that the idea for *Mirandy and Brother Wind* emerged out of a 1906 photograph of her grandparents, taken five years prior to their marriage. "They were teenagers at the time and had just won a cakewalk."[5] McKissack then explains that the cakewalk originated during slavery and says that she has never had difficulty imagining her grandparents participating in these flamboyant festivities. In this story, protagonist Mirandy seeks the help of three adult members of the community—Grandmama Beasley, Mr. Jessup at the corner store, and the conjure woman, Miss Poinsettia—for advice on how to capture Brother Wind to be her partner in the following night's cakewalk contest. Pinkney's depiction of Brother Wind as a smiling, translucent blue trickster figure with a top hat, coat tails, and a cane whose cape stretches over the landscape suggests that Mirandy will find him an elusive being to capture. After attempting unsuccessfully to catch Brother Wind with black pepper and a quilt and then a bottle and cork, Mirandy falls back on her own ingenuity and traps him in the barn while he is wreaking havoc on the family's hens. As legend has it, Brother Wind must do the bidding of the one who captures him. Accordingly, Mirandy apparently wishes for Brother Wind to enchant her clumsy friend Ezel's feet so that the two of them can win the junior cakewalk. Brother Wind delivers, and even weeks after the event, folks still talk about Mirandy and Ezel's fantastic footwork. Clearly, although McKissack based this story on real people from whom she descended, the magical elements combined with Pinkney's luminescent watercolor illustrations take this story out of the genre of biography and send it into the realm of fiction, folklore, and fantasy.

In another text that sits even more firmly in the folktale tradition, John Steptoe's *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale* came from a volume of oral stories recorded by G. M. Theal in his 1895 *Kaffir Tales*. Since the story comes from near Zimbabwe, Steptoe designed the illustrations to reflect the flora, fauna, and architecture of the Zimbabwe region.[6] In this

Cinderellalike tale, Nyasha, the kind sister, and Manyara, the selfish, power-hungry sister, both seek to be the wife of the king. As Manyara travels to the city, she acts rudely toward a hungry little boy, an old lady, and a man, and when she gets to the king's palace, she flees the place, having met a five-headed snake that points out all of her faults and threatens to eat her. When Nyasha undertakes the same journey, she feeds the hungry boy and accepts the advice of the old woman, offering her food in return for the guidance she gives Nyasha. When this beautiful, younger sister enters the palace, rather than encountering the five-headed snake that Manyara saw, she meets Nyoka, the little green snake that she befriended in her garden at home. Before her eyes, Nyoka transforms into a handsome, young African king who reveals that because he was the hungry little boy, the old lady, as well as the green garden snake, he now knows Nyasha to be the most beautiful and the worthiest of the two sisters. Nyasha therefore wins the hand of the king, while Manyara gets to be a servant in her palace. The king's extended family welcomes Nyasha, and the girls' father considers himself the happiest man in the land to have not one but two daughters who have made him proud.

In this picture book, Steptoe not only recovers a work from African oral tradition, but in this illustrated version of the story, he brings to life the local color (in the form of humans, plants, and animals) of Zimbabwe for young American readers likely unfamiliar with much of what the illustrations portray. Yet because this story carries motifs both from the Biblical story of Christ's separation of the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25: 31–46) as well as motifs from the widely known "Cinderella" tales, Steptoe also appeals to stories with which many young American readers are already familiar. Hence, while *The Patchwork Quilt* and *Mirandy and Brother Wind* reshape family histories into folklore for children, in Steptoe's retelling and visual representation of a story recorded earlier, he brings a beautiful foreign world of blackness alive in *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* while wrapping it in familiar motifs and vibrant images that facilitate American readers' understanding and enjoyment of the story.

Instead of affirming historical aspects of the black oral tradition, the text that foreshadows the creativity to come in the 1990s King Illustrator Awards features new oral traditions that black youth create every day on the streets and in the neighborhoods of America. In its startlingly realistic portrayal of the daily life of an African-American boy, *Nathaniel Talking* (1988), combines Eloise Greenfield's poetic first-person narrative, written in Black English Vernacular, with Jan Spivey Gilchrist's whimsical black-and-white charcoal sketches to portray Nathaniel's perspective on black music, black families, and life growing up in a black community. Nathaniel sandwiches his poetic story between two raps that do little more than announce his identity—"Nathaniel B. Free"—and assert that he's "rested,

dressed and feeling fine" and that he's got a lot to say.[7] This preface that comes in the distinctively black form of rap provides a good introduction to the book's content while it also affirms that Greenfield considers rap just as much of a valid art form as is traditional poetry. The rap acclimatizes the reader to the poetic format of the book, which not only includes traditional poems but also twelve-bar blues poems that sound much more like they ought to be sung than read. In addition, one of the poems talks about playing bones, a musical tradition descended from Africa via American slaves. Nathaniel's grandmother remembers how to jitterbug and yo-yo, but she also knows how to play the bones and does so frequently for Nathaniel's entertainment. Gilchrist even illustrates how Grandma holds the bones when she plays them, as Greenfield's onomatopoeic text simulates the "clack clack clackety" sounds that the bones make.

Not all of Nathaniel's poems relate happy stories, however. His mother dies, and although people tell him that eventually he won't feel so bad about losing her, he thinks of her every day and can't imagine not missing her. This longing for Mama becomes a motif throughout several other poems as Nathaniel remembers her kisses and taking a nap in her lap but knows that he has probably forgotten more about his past than he remembers. Nathaniel also talks about his disappointment with himself for fighting another boy and for getting into trouble at school: he says that when he misbehaves and has to stay after school, "my teacher don't like it/my grandma don't like it/my daddy don't like it" and, he concludes, neither does he. It makes him want to cry. Clearly, Nathaniel is growing up with the support of a strong extended family who cares about him and his success, even though he is motherless. And notably, his stories of struggling, grieving, and living through a number of different types of growing pains all fall between poems of self-affirmation in which Nathaniel reflects on his future, confident that he will become someone of whom his family can be proud. In the poem "I'm a Mighty Fine Fella," Nathaniel asserts that he doesn't want to be Mr. Big when he grows up, owning a hundred suits and counting his money publicly. He reiterates that he's a "mighty fine fella/and I don't need things/to prove it." Nathaniel's poems advocate valuing people over material objects and appreciating the family and resources that we do have while trying not to dwell on what we don't have. In placing rap, blues, and traditional poetic forms alongside one another in this book, and packaging them in a picture book whose illustrations are more traditional than experimental, Greenfield and Gilchrist narrow the gap between a traditional, mainstream art form (illustration and poetry) and nontraditional, black art forms (rap and blues) to suggest that all are equally valuable ideas from which young readers can benefit.

In the same way that Steptoe exposes readers to multicultural and international ideas through *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*, three of the books that

won the award in the 1990s sought to broaden the world even more for readers, while one other text shows a continued commitment to bringing the stories of famous African Americans alive for contemporary young audiences. Generic anomalies, Leontyne Price's opera-based *Aïda* (1990), Faith Ringgold's story quilt picture book, *Tar Beach* (1991), and Tom Feelings's historically speculative wordless picture book *The Middle Passage* (1995), present the world to young readers in fantastically unique ways, while Alan Schroeder and Jerry Pinkney's *Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman* makes the life of a well-known historical figure relevant and interesting to young readers.

Illustrated by husband and wife team Leo and Diane Dillon, *Aïda* transforms a well-known opera that Leonytne Price has performed all over the world into a picture book that tells of the young, beautiful Ethiopian princess who becomes a prisoner of war among the Egyptians. They take her captive and make her a slave to Egyptian Princess Amneris. Aïda fares well until she falls in love with the handsome Prince Ramades, fated to marry Princess Amneris for the future and well-being of the kingdom. At one point, Aïda must choose between remaining faithful to her father and her people and protecting the man whom she adores. Unwilling to betray her people even for Ramades, Aïda tricks her lover to save her father. But this act of self-sacrifice pales in comparison to the ultimate sacrifice that she makes to be with Ramades for eternity.

Both Aïda as a fictional heroine and Leontyne Price as the teller and performer of this operatic saga garner the admiration of readers who encounter this book. In the author's note, Price reveals her own love for the story of *Aïda* and her identification, as a woman of color, with the character of Aïda:

> She was my best friend operatically and was a natural for me because my skin was my costume. This fact was a positive and strong feeling and allowed me a freedom of expression, of movement, and of interpretation that other operatic heroines I performed did not. I always felt, while performing Aïda, that I was expressing all of myself—as an American, as a woman, and as a human being.[8]

Aïda's wit, intelligence and ability to think quickly make her more powerful—and even more dangerous—than those around her who possess much greater physical strength than she.

Leo and Diane Dillon contribute much to the readers' perception of Aïda as a strong leader and an admirable woman while their visual images also comment upon her ethnicity. Throughout the picture book, the rich golds, purples, and blues with which they chose to illustrate *Aïda* convey the wealth of the Egyptian royalty well. Further, the small friezes across the top

of each page of written text constantly comment upon and add details to the primary story unfolding in the framed illustrations on the right-hand pages. For instance, as the text narrates Aïda's capture after she wanders too far away from her father's palace, the large illustration on the right-hand page shows only Aïda shadowing Princess Amneris as she primps in a hand mirror, while another servant offers the princess a tray of beauty aids (fig. 4.1). The freize on the opposite page, however, shows the Egyptian soldiers seizing Aïda, tying her up, and delivering her to King Amonasro, who offers her to his daughter as a personal gift.

The minor events that occur in the illustrations but not in the text emphasize the daily conflicts that Aïda faces and the constant humiliation that she suffers at the hand of her captors as a slave to the Egyptian Princess. For example, when Princess Amneris decides to test Aïda to see if her perception that she loves Ramades is accurate, Amneris lies and tells Aïda that Ramades has died in battle. When Aïda "wept with the pain of one whose heart has been broken forever," Amneris knows the truth. In reaction, the text says that Amneris "hurled Aïda to the floor," furious that she, a slave, would presume to love the same man that she, the princess, loves and plans to marry. The illustration opposite the text shows Amneris's anger as Aïda stands helpless behind her, but the illustrations further emphasize her anger by showing two slaves at Amneris's feet, attempting to escape injury as Amneris kicks over a table on which sat a comb and several bottles. The clenched fists and teeth of the princess contrast with Aïda's helpless but placid expression as she watches the princess rage on.

The Dillons' choice to illustrate all of the characters with dark skin—not always the case in picture books about Egypt—may also help readers of color to identify with Aïda's life. In addition, Aïda is the only character throughout the picture book who wears an Afro, and not coincidentally, it is not a short, subtle Afro but one that makes a statement and distinguishes her not only from all of the other Ethiopians in the illustrations but also from all of the Egyptians with whom Aïda comes in contact as a captive. Although this book was published long after the Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements, I submit that despite the foreign settings in which the story takes place, Aïda's Afro gives African-American readers a visual connection with this character. This is perhaps even more significant because regardless of what hairstyle Leontyne Price wore in performances of *Aïda* all over the United Sates and Europe, the photograph that children see on the dust jacket shows her standing with a serious expression, wearing straightened, curled hair. Hence, even if Price, the reteller of Guiseppe Verdi's opera, and the protagonist of this world-renowned opera did not wear an Afro in her performances of the opera, and even if the real woman on whom this opera is based did not wear her hair in this style, Leo and Diane Dillon chose to portray Aïda in this way perhaps to suggest to young black readers that the Aïda

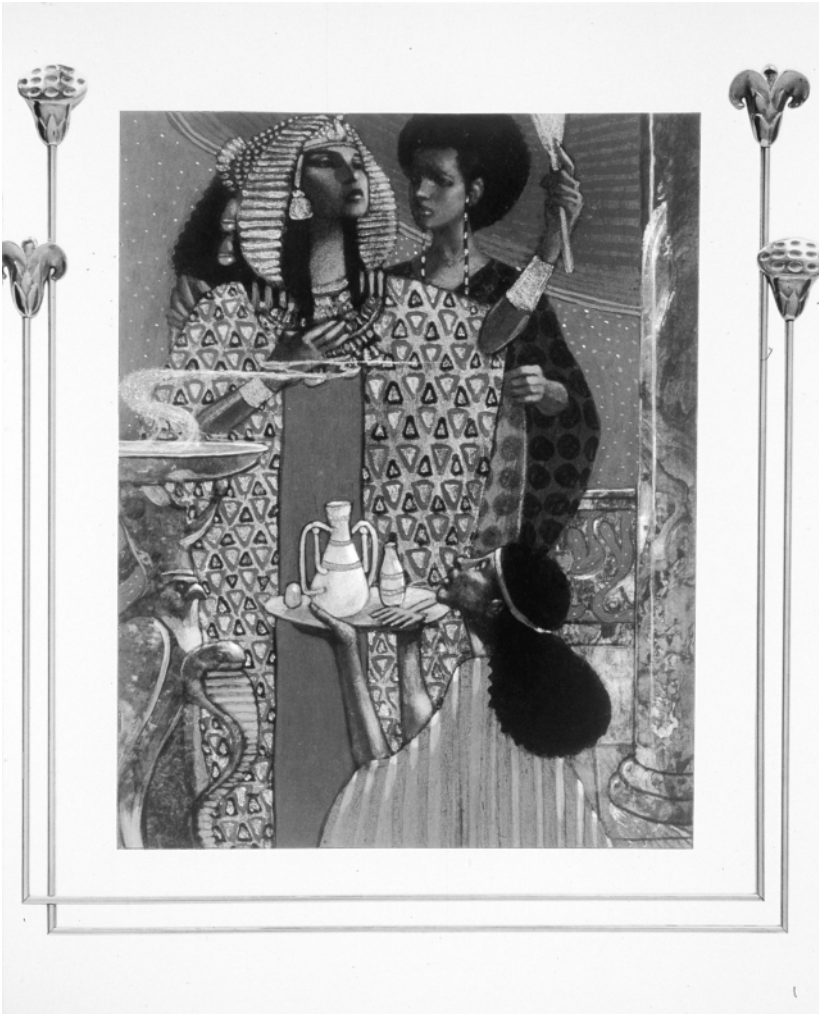

Fig. 4.1. (Reprinted by permission from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. *Aïda*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990.)

of this picture book shares their African heritage and takes great pride in a distinctly Afrocentric hairstyle. Through such subtleties as these, Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award picture books like *Aïda* provide meaningful and affirming visual images of black characters for young readers while matter-of-factly representing an historical, literary, artistic, and, in this case, theatrical past of which young black readers can easily be proud.

In yet another text that evolved from an unlikely artistic source, Faith Ringgold's *Tar Beach* "combines autobiography, fictional narrative, paint-

ing, and quilt making in one art form."[9] Having evolved from one of five story quilts in the "Woman on a Bridge" series displayed in the Solomon R. Guggenhiem Museum in New York City, *Tar Beach* tells of the life of Cassie Louise Lightfoot, an eight-year-old third-grader who claims the George Washington Bridge for herself. Harkening back to slave ancestors whom stories tell us had the ability to fly (out of fields, over the head of the overseer, and back to Africa), Cassie has developed the ability to fly over the George Washington Bridge. Although her father worked on the bridge and also worked on the Union Building, the union refuses to admit him because "Grandpa wasn't a member" and because the union considers her father "colored or a half-breed Indian." In her imaginings, Cassie makes her dad wealthy so that her mom can sleep in late like Mrs. Honey, their neighbor, and so that the family can have "ice cream every night for dessert." When Cassie returns to Tar Beach, the rooftop of her New York apartment building, the family and the neighbors dine on a meal as intimately tied to Southern and African roots as the motif of flying: peanuts, which came from Africa, fried chicken, and watermelon, Southern staples.

While Ringgold uses a rustic, angular style of illustration in which the texture of the canvas shows through many of the paintings, the book's borders reproduce Ringgold's original story quilt whose designs "echo the African influenced, repetitive geometric design characteristic of many Early American quilts" (*Tar*, afterword). In the same way that Tom Feelings's *The Middle Passage* makes gallery art accessible and available to young readers, *Tar Beach* invites readers to play in the complexity of this work of fantasy that opens a window to art, history, other literature, family lore, and even long-standing political conflicts. In granting a book with this much depth and complexity the Coretta Scott King Award, the committee, in essence, asserts not only that American children deserve such excellence but that they can and should consider some of the hard issues that Ringgold brings to light in Cassie's narrative.

Tom Feelings tackles an even tougher issue in *The Middle Passage: White Ships, Black Cargo*—so much so that this lengthy, wordless picture book more appropriately addresses young adults than children. Hence, not only does this book stretch the definition of "picture book," but it also expands what most readers consider the audience for picture books. During one of his stints of living in Africa, Tom Feelings encountered an African who asked him, "What happened to all of you when you were taken away from here?" In answer to this question, Feelings wrote *The Middle Passage*, which took him twenty years to complete. In this visually rich, appropriately oversized work, Feelings reconstructs in black and white what he feels happened to Africans when they were snatched from their villages, stuffed into the bowels of slave ships, and taken to America to become slaves. Many of the details in this book show how cruelly the Africans were treated and also identify some practices that children's books about slavery often omit. For

instance, in one illustration, traded items surround the wealthy chief of a tribe, which indicates that he has acquired his wealth by trading Africans to the slavers. Several illustrations also show Africans helping the slave traders to round up the "human cargo," and some even show them killing ones who resist. On the ship, the ghostlike slave traders brand the slaves as farmers brand cattle, force-feed those who refuse to eat, rape the women right in front of their babies, brothers, and husbands, and throw those overboard who have died. Feelings illustrates how tightly the shackled slaves were packed into the bowels of the ship, and he shows rats gnawing at the bodies of the dead ones, still shackled to other slaves. Given these conditions, readers might feel more relief than surprise at seeing the illustrations of Africans jumping overboard into the shark-infested waters rather than submitting to the torment to which the slave traders subjected them.

Even in the midst of conveying such painful history as this, Feelings still emphasizes the strength of black people. Rudine Sims Bishop describes this affirmation in her review of the book:

> The penultimate painting, showing the final landing, celebrates in some sense the survival of the black cargo of the title. A black figure looks symbolically toward the future, head high, the misery of the long passage stretched out behind him, but still a part of him. All about him, even though the shackles remain, are signs of survival, signs of hope, signs of life—a woman holding a baby, the head of a child, a pregnant woman, a man sifting soil through his hand. The final painting shows three faces, suffused with strength, facing right, looking forward, a coffle of captive Africans behind them, the sun before them, and the light of the sun reflected in their faces—a triumph of survival.[10]

Hence, while *The Middle Passage* conveys images and truths hard for any reader to face, Feelings still uses this reconstruction of the worst episode in black history to deliver an uplifting message.

Illustrating Alan Schroeder's *Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman* in the same unmistakable Pinkneyesque watercolors of *The Patchwork Quilt*, Jerry Pinkney brings alive some of the events of Tubman's childhood to emphasize her determination and leadership potential even as a girl. The story details several important conflicts in the early life of Harriet Tubman (whose "cradle" name was Araminta, from whence comes the little-known nickname, "Minty"). Born and raised on the Brodas Plantation of Maryland's Eastern Shore, Minty found herself frequently at odds with her mistress. Thrown out of the Big House for disobeying the mistress and accidentally spilling cider at the dinner table, Minty becomes a field slave and experiences hard physical labor that she never knew as a house slave. Attempting to run away several times, Minty remains defiant and determined to be free in spite of being whipped until she cannot stand up. Even

after this severe punishment, Minty remains resolute: she will not be a slave. Old Ben, her father, knowing that she will need survival skills in her quest to be free, says, "If she's planning to run away, there's some things she oughtta know first." Against his wife's wishes, Old Ben takes Minty into the woods and begins to teach her how to "read" the woods and how to swim (fig. 4.2)

Minty gets discouraged at times, but her spirit is never broken. Like Ringgold's story of Cassie Lightfoot, Schroeder's depiction of Harriet Tubman offers young readers a strong female protagonist worth remembering. Although *Minty* is not a "happily ever after" story in which the protagonist obtains her freedom by the end of the book, the author's note adds hope to the plot by detailing Tubman's involvement in the Underground Railroad through which she helped to lead many slaves to freedom.

All four of the 1990s Coretta Scott King Award winners that I have discussed tell stories of the hardships of black people, but at the same time, they do so in innovative ways that stretch young readers to think of African and African-American art and life in ways that they might not have previously considered. Furthermore, the time and energy that Ringgold, the Dillons, Feelings, and Pinkney invested in the research for these books and the painstaking, time-consuming work that they underwent to complete these exquisitely illustrated books for children and young adults attest to their belief that young people deserve the best of art and literature. And the King Award's further affirmation of the excellence of these texts increases their value to the culture at large, making them books not just for black readers but for all readers.

This tradition of excellence and of expanding the boundaries of the genre in terms both of content and form has continued into the new millennium. Two of the Illustrator Awards between 2000 and 2003 have gone to Pinkneys: Kim Siegelson and Brian Pinkney's *In the Time of the Drums* (1999) won in 2000, and Patricia McKissack and Jerry Pinkney's *Goin' Someplace Special* (2001) won in 2002. The 2001 Illustrator Award went to Bryan Collier for *Uptown* (2000). While these three texts are illustrated in completely different media and tell altogether different stories, they all share one commonality: each relies on or at least touches on a certain era of the African-American past. *In the Time of the Drums* retells a true story from slavery times; *Uptown* presents a day in the life of a boy living in Harlem who recognizes parts of history that cross his city path every day; and in *Goin' Someplace Special*, McKissack delves into her own childhood for a true story of her experience of living in the Jim Crow South.

Kim Siegelson and Brian Pinkney's story retells the legend of a group of Ibos whom the slave ships brought to America who refused to be enslaved. Instead, led by a conjure woman who was born in Africa but grew old in America, they all walked into Teakettle Creek and, so they say, walked on the bottom of the ocean all the way back to Africa. This is the same story that Irene Smalls and Jon Onye Lockard retell in *Ebony Sea*

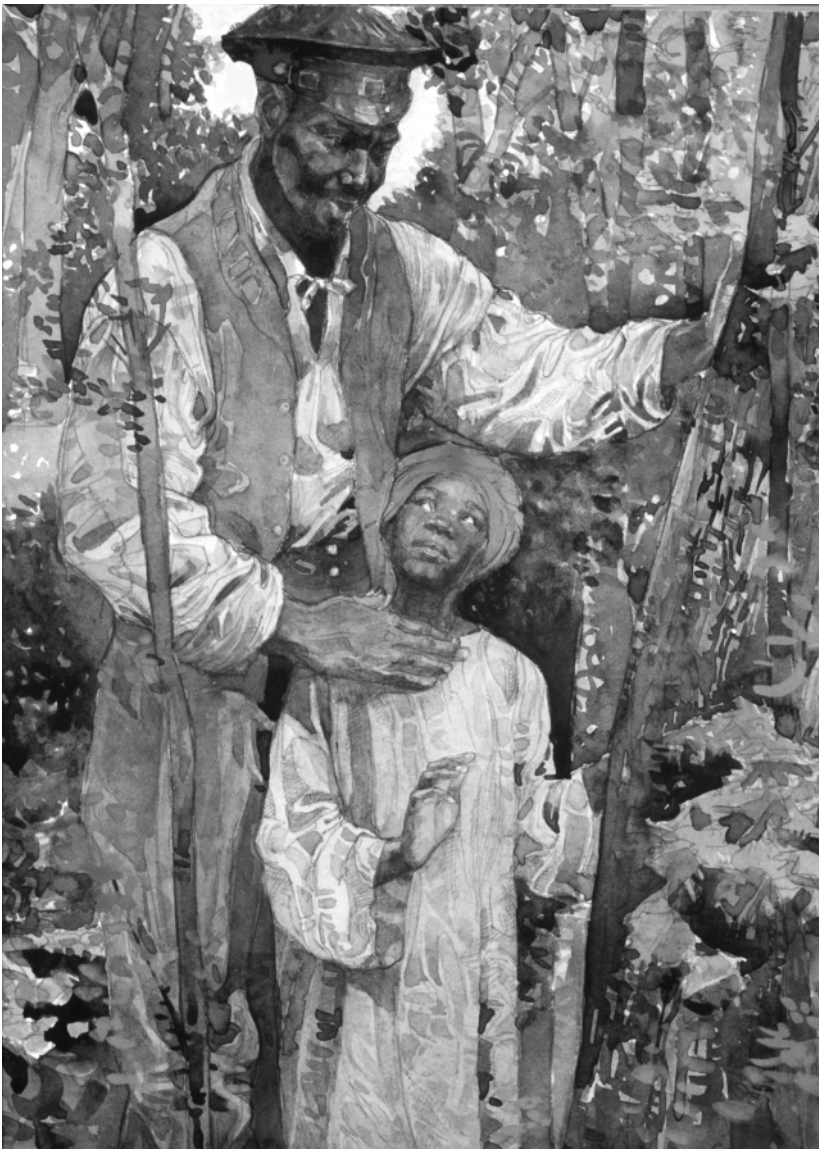

Fig. 4.2. (From *Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman* by Alan Schroeder, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. Copyright © 1996 by Jerry Pinkney, illustrations. Used by permission of Dial Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Penguin Putnam Books for Young Readers, a division of Penguin Putnam, Inc. All rights reserved.

(1995), which I discuss at length in chapter 6, but Smalls's text went out of print so quickly that it had little time for receiving critical acclaim, although I believe it to be just as good as Siegelson and Pinkney's picture book and even more powerful in some respects. In Smalls's retelling, she makes clear both that the group of slaves intentionally drowned themselves and that in Ebo [sic] beliefs, anyone who dies goes back to Africa. These Ebos' "longing for Africa had grown too great. They simply wanted to go home."[11] The fact that *In the Time of the Drums* deals more delicately with this mass suicide than *Ebony Sea* does, and, more cynically, the fact that Siegelson and Pinkney published their book with Hyperion, Disney's publishing company, as opposed to the little-known Longmeadow that published *Ebony Sea*, gives the later text a decided market advantage over the earlier one.[12] Winning the King Illustrator Award will further guarantee a much longer life for *In the Time of the Drums* than *Ebony Sea* enjoyed.

The innovative aspects of *In the Time of the Drums* are not so much in the story itself as in the swirly scratchboard illustrations that have become Brian Pinkney's signature and in the story's integration of Gullah language and culture. As in his picture books *Duke Ellington: the Piano Prince and His Orchestra* (1998), written by Andrea Davis Pinkney, and *The Faithful Friend* (1995), written by Robert D. San Souci, which he also illustrated with scratchboard, the luminescent illustrations in *In the Time of the Drums* convey a constant sense of motion. The white scratches that show through the black paint brighten the mood of even the darkest illustrations. In this story, Mentu, the young male protagonist who was born in America, lives with his grandmother, Twi, a conjure woman whom blacks and whites alike fear because of her awesome powers. She constantly tells Mentu to hold back his own strength, for the day will come when he will really need it. When it comes time for Twi to leave Mentu and lead the Ibos into the water and back to Africa, she tells Mentu:

> Twi has taught you many things, Mentu. More secrets than you think. But I will tell you one more. Your time to be strong-strong will come when your back is bent in the fields and your hands are stuck full of cotton spurs. Because then the old ways will try to grow weak inside you. Don't let 'em! Takes a mighty strength not to forget who you are. Where you come from. To help others remember it, too. Now I must leave you, my child, my heart.[13]

The musical, oral cadence of passages such as this one, indicative of Gullah speech patterns, confirm how thoroughly Twi has held onto her African past and how important she feels it is to pass some of those values on to her young grandson. In learning to play the drums with which he communicates with the Ibos on the slave ship, Mentu shows that he has indeed retained some of his grandmother's old wisdom. The story comes full circle when the

adult Mentu teaches his own children to sing Twi's old songs and tells them her African stories. Most of all, he "played rhythms on the skin drum until they felt their own hearts beat in time. Gave them their own drums and they all played together, Mentu and his children."

Unlike Siegelson and Pinkney's tale, Bryan Collier's *Uptown* brings the reader into contemporary American life. The young African-American male protagonist—who remains unnamed—gives the reader a tour of what he calls "Harlem world, my world." In addition to seeing familiar contemporary parts of New York such as the Metro, 125th Street, and rows of brownstones (that Collier makes look convincingly like chocolate), the reader also encounters aspects of Harlem that made it the cultural center of black America in the 1920s and beyond: Van Der Zee photographs, the Apollo Theater, and Harlem jazz. Other illustrations of basketball, three black sisters wearing their hair in locks, and the protagonist enjoying a dinner of chicken and waffles all evoke cultural icons integral both to Harlem and to the African-American community. And in the same way that blacks have historically made a life for themselves by using whatever bits and pieces they could gather (as in quilt-making), Collier constructs these watercolor and collage illustrations out of all sorts of bits and pieces that simultaneously recall the past and situate Collier's work among other visual images of the postmodern era. Snippets from photographs, wallpaper, Cadbury chocolate wrappers, musical scores, and newspapers all find a creative home in Collier's Harlem illustrations.

Delving into the past for subject matter as does Siegelson, Patricia McKissack tells an autobiographical story of her first trip to what she calls only "Someplace Special" until the last page of the book. On her way to Someplace Special, 'Tricia Ann must suffer through the humiliation of riding on the back of the bus when the front is still nearly empty, being run out of a hotel where "coloreds" are not allowed, encountering a "whites only" bench in a park that her grandfather, a stonemason, helped to build, and being invited into a movie theater by a little white boy who doesn't realize that 'Tricia Ann wouldn't be allowed in that place either. When 'Tricia Ann finally arrives at her destination, we discover that she has spent her day traveling to the public library, whose sign says "All are welcome."[14] McKissack tells us in the author's note that in the 1950s, Nashville's public library was one of the few integrated spaces in Nashville and that this was therefore one place where blacks were treated with a measure of respect. Given this historical fact and also given the vital connection that African Americans have always made between literacy and freedom, it makes sense that 'Tricia Ann willingly suffers a day full of humiliation and fear to reach this hallowed place.

Jerry Pinkney's watercolor illustrations, though not as visually unusual as are those of Brian Pinkney or Bryan Collier, offer a detailed look at the

Jim Crow South while clearly depicting the diversity, beauty, and pride of 'Tricia Ann and the other African Americans that she encounters. In fact, in the same way that Tom Feelings manages to illustrate the white slave traders in *The Middle Passage* in a way that conveys absence, Pinkney depicts the black characters in much more vibrant colors than he does the white characters. When the hotel manager throws 'Tricia Ann out of the lobby of his hotel, for instance, the angry white characters who stand behind 'Tricia Ann and scowl at her look pale next to 'Tricia Ann, whose medium brown skin and beautiful blue dress with yellow and orange flowers stand out even more than the colors of the flowers that sit in the lobby. This color principle, which seems to operate throughout *Goin' Someplace Special*, encourages the reader to focus on the positive energy that 'Tricia Ann exudes rather than the negativity that surrounds her until she reaches the library.

As a whole, when one considers all of the books that have won the Coretta Scott King Award over the past three decades, the picture book illustrators and authors have taken a much more experimental and innovative approach than have many of the authors of the Author Award books. In many ways, the eclecticism of the illustrated and picture books has set the bar higher for longer African-American works for older readers. Recent years have seen fewer straight biographical works among the Author Award books and more nontraditional forms as in Marilyn Nelson's Honor Award winner, *Carver: A Life in Poems* (2001), a prose poem with historical black-and-white photographs about scholar, inventor, and botanist George Washington Carver; and Walter Dean Myers's Honor Award–winning *Monster* (1999), a story of an imprisoned black teenager that Myers wrote in the format of a film script. Since both of these anomalous works are Honor Books and not Award Books, one can speculate that the King Award Committee is more likely to give the top prizes to the more conservatively written books than to those that push the boundaries of children's and young adult literature. Fortunately, this has not been true of the picture book selections. How might one account for this difference in the winners? It could be that the visual nature of picture books makes them much more conducive to nontraditional approaches. If this is true, then the Committee would have a much wider diversity of picture books to choose from every year than they would find among longer, nonvisual works for older readers. It is also likely true that as African-American children's literature has evolved over the past three decades, the number of picture book authors and illustrators has increased more than the number of writers of longer works, which would also account for the greater diversity among picture books than among novels and young adult literature.

Whatever the motivating factors behind this phenomenon, the Illustrator Award picture books have certainly outdistanced the Author Award books in terms of innovation and diversity. Although the Illustrator Award

was something of an afterthought, not having been instituted until four years into the King Author Award, these books have changed the face of African-American children's literature and therefore American children's literature as a whole. And given the current prominence of the King Awards, it seems that Du Bois's comment has come to fruition: these picture books, "the art of black folks" that is accessible to African America's youngest readers, are indeed compelling recognition. And since most of these picture books, even those written in the new millennium, dip into the African-American past for material, another of Du Bois's comments also describes perfectly this black art that has gained the recognition of the mainstream culture: "their art is as new as it is old and as old as new" (Du Bois 23).

5
From Margin to Center
African-American Artistic Legacies Shaping the Genre

In a series of letters between George Wood, children's book editor of the *New York Times*, and author Julius Lester in March of 1970, Wood expressed his lack of appreciation for a new wave of children's books by black authors that he considered separatist. Wood also complained that the authors placed a higher value on their political messages about race and equality than on the quality of the writing and the artistic design. Lester reminded Wood of the cultural gap between himself and these artists whose books Wood can neither understand nor appreciate and told him that although whites don't want to acknowledge this, "they will have to immerse themselves in what blacks have to say" because "there is no white Dante who can take them gently by their lily-white hands and lead them on a guided tour of blackness and keep them from getting a little singed by the fires." In the statement that follows, Lester encapsulates many of the goals of African-American artists. He says, "The black writer is ultimately involved in the process his people are going through—trying to recreate themselves" ("Black and White" 33). Here, Lester specifically means the efforts of African-American people to reinvent themselves, but he touches on a salient point that has now become a phenomenon in African-American children's picture book: black authors who are literally "reinventing themselves" through their children.

I feel that one of the most important historical trends taking place during this Golden Age of African-American children's picture books, which will help to nurture along a third generation of black artists and illustrators, is the proliferation of black artistic legacies. The occurrence of legacies is not, however, unique to African-American children's literature. Thacher Hurd, son of Edith and Clement Hurd; Lizzy Rockwell, daughter of Anne and Harlow Rockwell; Ian Schoenherr, son of John Schoenherr; Elena and Eva Napoli, daughters of Donna Jo Napoli; and Kaethe Zemach, daughter of

Harve and Margot Zemach; Paul Fleischman, son of Sid Fleischman; and Laurie Byars and Betsy Duffey, daughters of Betsy Byars, among others, have followed their parents into the field of children's literature.[1] But the fact that so many of the legacies who are currently writing and illustrating children's books are African American (or biracial, in the case of Nina Crews, Jaime Adoff, and Lee Dillon), suggests a concerted effort on the part of black illustrators and authors to mentor and encourage new black artists, beginning with their own offspring. Brian and Myles Pinkney, sons of Jerry and Gloria Jean Pinkney and spouses of, respectively, Andrea Davis, and Sandra Pinkney;[2] Christopher Myers, son of Walter Dean Myers; Javaka Steptoe, son of the late John Steptoe; Nina Crews, daughter of author/illustrators Donald Crews and Ann Jonas; Jaime Adoff, son of Arnold Adoff and the late Virginia Hamilton; Fred McKissack, Jr., son of Patricia and Fred McKissack; Lee Dillon, son of author/illustrator team, Leo and Diane Dillon; Monica Greenfield, daughter of Eloise Greenfield; and Katura and Stephan Hudson, daughter and son of Cheryl and Wade Hudson, have all taken up the craft of their parents.[3]

Rather than offer biographical sketches of these artistic families, which readers can find in articles such as Rudine Sims Bishop's 1996 *Horn Book* article, "The Pinkney Family: In the Tradition," her 1998 *Horn Book* article "Following in Their Fathers' Paths," and Diane Patrick's 1999 *Publisher's Weekly* article, "A Living Legacy," this chapter will choose a few works of each second-generation artist to examine in light of the parents' work and life in an effort to trace some of the influences that have shaped the creative passions of these African-American legacies. This analysis should shed light on some of the directions in which contemporary African-American children's picture books are moving—in no small part due to these artists and writers who are carrying on and expanding a family vision that they have inherited.

The Pinkney "Dynasty"

I designate the Pinkneys a "dynasty" because as far as I know, no other American family has *seven* members involved in writing, illustrating, designing, and editing children's books.[4] The Pinkneys are a phenomenon unto themselves. While Jerry fills his books with "opalescent watercolor illustrations,"[5] Brian specializes in scratchboard, and Myles illustrates with photography. Notably, both sons have found their artistic "home" quite a distance from the medium and style of their father, and from what these two young artists have said, that distance is intentional.[6] Jerry himself grew up in a family of children with interests in the arts. Brian and Myles both had the good fortune of living in a household as children where literature, music, and art were highly valued and where they were not just observers of their

parents' creative process but were often participants in it. Not only is Jerry an artist, but Gloria Jean, their mother is a silversmith and milliner (Bishop "Pinkney" 42). According to *Something about the Author*, Jerry, "who likes to reveal the personality of his characters through action, often uses his family, his friends and himself as the models for his pictures; in fact, he often takes photographs of his subjects before beginning his illustrations."[7]

Hence, art as a family occupation has come naturally to the Pinkneys. When asked why he feels that so many of the children of black illustrators and authors have begun to produce works for children now, Jerry responded:

> When I got into the business, there weren't role models, and they weren't being published in the same way that people publish now. In other words, oftentimes, African Americans were being published for the library market and that alone. There was no trade market. So now, you have young people coming up who see that it can be done. There are role models in place, and I think the restraints of where and how their work is promoted have changed.[8]

Given the centrality of Jerry's influence on the artistic development of his sons, I think that it is important to examine the type of example he has set. Unlike the work of Tom Feelings, Jerry Pinkney's art work rarely makes overt political or racial statements, although much of his work does seek to represent black American life positively. As in *Mirandy and Brother Wind* (1988) by Patricia C. McKissack and *The Talking Eggs* (1989) by Robert D. San Souci, Pinkney illustrates many picture books that tell wonderful stories of young black protagonists as they learn to live and thrive among black families and communities. Even in his books about animals, such as the *Uncle Remus* tales, Pinkney manages to include African-American stylizations in his illustrations. Furthermore, he has regularly partnered with African-American writers such as Patricia McKissack, Mildred Taylor, Julius Lester, and Valerie Flournoy, whose texts validate the African American experience through practices such as the telling of stories that remain true to the history and culture of black America, the use of Black English Vernacular, and the recovery of black heroes and sheroes.

Not surprisingly, Brian has chosen similar partnerships. In *Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra* (1998), for instance, his wife Andrea captures the cadence of the African-American sound of swing in her text: "Believe it, man. Duke taught himself to press on the pearlies like nobody else could. His *one-and-two-umpy-dump* became a thing of the past. Now, playing the piano was Duke's all-time love."[9] To accompany Andrea's text, Brian created brightly colored scratchboard illustrations that visually reflect the movement of the sounds that Duke coaxes out of his piano and out of his real instrument, his orchestra. Like Duke, Brian "painted colors

with [the] band's sound." Toward the end of the picture book, the text describes Ellington's composition of *Black, Brown, and Beige* as an expression of pride for his African-American heritage and as a tribute to their "triumphs . . . from the days of slavery to years of civil rights struggle." Hence, not only does this author/illustrator pair offer a snapshot of the life of a black musical legend in a form accessible to children, but Brian also taps into the love of music that he developed as a child and illustrates the book in a way that instills respect for and love of black cultural traditions in young readers. Just as Jerry's luminescent illustrations of Julius Lester's tale of John Henry's battle against the steam drill reflect how the talent of one man can make a whole people proud, Brian's depiction of Duke Ellington honors a black hero for what his fame and success accomplished for all of African America.

In my conversation with Jerry Pinkney about his view of the future of African-American children's picture books, he commented that although some black illustrators a few years ago said that they desired only to illustrate books about the black experience, the market is, in a sense, driving artists to be more inclusive. Although he hopes that black artists will never put themselves in the position of receiving less work because of a refusal to cross racial boundaries in their art, Pinkney says, "I never was in that place; I've always thought that it was very important for me to follow my heart and illustrate those manuscripts that appeal to me" (Jerry Pinkney interview 2002). Hence, in his depiction of *The Little Match Girl* (1999) by Hans Christian Andersen, he intentionally illustrates the girl's ethnicity ambiguously. Retelling other well-loved stories, he has also illustrated texts like Rudyard Kipling's *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (1997) in which the protagonist is clearly white. This commitment to representing the wide array of beauty and talent both within and outside of African America surfaces in Sandra and Myles Pinkney's *Shades of Black* (2000) and *A Rainbow All around Me* (2002) as well as in Myles's first book, *It's Raining Laughter*, written by Nikki Grimes (1997).[10]

In *Shades of Black*, the Pinkneys suggest the inclusive nature of black culture through their snapshots both of the child with brown skin and dread locks and the one with blue eyes and sandy-colored hair. They offer a similar message in *A Rainbow All around Me*, but these children come from so many different ethnicities that without reading the back matter, one would never be able to guess the family origins of some of these children. Furthermore, unlike *Shades of Black*, nothing in the text of *Rainbow* except the refrain, "Colors are in . . . you and me," points to the fact that this book is also about cultural diversity; Myles carries that message primarily through the book's illustrations. The text instead talks about purple jam, red valentines, and green apples. In the book's final page, a photograph of five of the multi-

colored children, wearing their multicolored clothes, raising their multicolored, painted hands, above the multicolored rainbow they've just made together appears with the text: "Colors! COLORS! They're in *everything* I see! We are a rainbow—YOU and ME!"[11] (Each letter of "YOU and ME" is a different color, and all of the text on this page sits under a rainbow much like the one the children have just painted.) At this point, any child who might have been in doubt about the underlying message concerning diversity and acceptance would see it clearly in this illustration. The child with Afro-puffs kneels next to a boy with straight, dark, short hair, who sits next to a girl with braids. And they all seem to be enjoying their collaborative art project.

If Niani, the daughter of the late Tom Feelings and Dianne (pen name Dinah) Johnson, becomes a professional illustrator or author of children's books when she grows into adulthood, and if she absorbs her father's ideology about the role of black artists in the creation of literature about the black experience and her mother's creative approach to bringing to life tales of her own family history and interests, her work will likely look much different from that of Jerry Pinkney's sons. As an artist who ended up in Boston at just the right time to take advantage of excellent job opportunities for a black artist like himself, Jerry did not experience some of the racial discrimination and constant rejection that many of his artistic contemporaries like Tom Feelings did. And I believe that these early professional experiences have largely shaped the direction of his work and, by extension, that of his sons. It is impossible to read many Pinkney picture books without seeing the beauty and uniqueness of black children, but one also need not look far to realize that the Pinkneys also all understand intimately that non-African-American children should see themselves positively depicted in contemporary children's literature as well. Hence, while Brian and Myles have purposely chosen artistic media different from the watercolor medium in which Jerry works, both of them seem to have absorbed their father's philosophy about diversity, children, and their role as artists. In a 1992 interview, Jerry commented on his creation of nine Black Heritage Series stamps for the United States Postal Service: "I was trying to use these projects as vehicles to address the issues of being African American and the importance of African American contributions to society" (*SATA* "Jerry Pinkney" 159). Of serving on the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee in the early 1980s, he said:

> I was not thinking consciously about this whole thing of becoming a role model, but when I think back on it, it was probably true. I wanted to show that an African American artist could certainly make it in this country on a national level in the visual and graphic arts. And I wanted to show my chil-

> dren the possibilities that lay ahead for them. That was very important. I wanted to be a strong role model for my family and for other African Americans (159).

And he has been.

Christopher Myers

Jerry, Brian, and Myles Pinkney are all illustrators, which has made their creation of collaborative picture books unlikely. Christopher Myers, son of prolific and longtime writer Walter Dean Myers, however, illustrates and writes picture books, while his father only writes, which has paved the way for Christopher's combining his talents with that of his father on a number of picture book projects. Both father and son have individual picture books, such as Walter's *Angel to Angel: A Mother's Gift of Love* (1998) and *Malcolm X: A Fire Burning Bright* (2000); and Christopher's *Black Cat* (1999), *Wings* (2000), and *Fly* (2001). But the two have also collaborated on the novel *Monster* (1999), the illustrated storybook, *A Time to Love: Stories from the Old Testament* (2003), as well as the picture books *Harlem* (1997) and *Blues Journey* (2003). In some of their books, a thematic overlap emerges that points to possible ways that the father's influence is showing up in the son's work.

Something about the Author credits Walter Dean Myers with "helping to redefine the image of blacks in juvenile literature" and identifies him as one of several authors in the 1960s and 70s who provided "more well-rounded portrayals of black characters than those by previous authors."[12] Myers has also earned much praise for the versatility of the genres in which he has written for children and young adults, having published adventure stories, mysteries, historical and realistic fiction, nonfiction, picture books, biographies, retold traditional stories, and poetry (*SATA* "Myers" 166).

Although Christopher is just starting his career in children's literature, he has also begun to publish with an eye toward generic eclecticism. *Black Cat* is an illustrated poem, but in *Wings*, Christopher names the outcast protagonist Ikarus Jackson, whose first name recalls Icarus, son of Daedalus of Greek Mythology, and whose last name is a common African-American surname. While Myers sets the story in urban black America, Ikarus retains a key characteristic of the mythological character for whom he was named: he can fly. But unlike Icarus, Ikarus Jackson has no father to guide him in his decisions and initially no relationships that might help him to feel a part of a larger community. Instead, he suffers ridicule and rejection from both the children at school and his teacher, all of whom find his wings objectionable and too showy for the environment in which he lives. One girl, however, the one who narrates the story, calls to Ikarus, "Your flying is beautiful" at the end of the story, and for the first time, Ikarus smiles.

This story suggests that Christopher has absorbed his father's passion for honestly and creatively depicting African-American life for young readers. At the same time, however, while the father is best known for his realistic fiction, Christopher seems to be entering the field with a more fanciful agenda, leaning more toward fantasy and mythology than toward realism. In an interview, Christopher expressed his refusal to allow society to limit what he writes about as a black artist, and he seeks to make his work reflective of the diversity that he encounters within Black American culture. Hence, Greek Mythology is just as likely to show up in his work as is blues music.[13] And the diverse origins from which *Wings* comes foreshadow that as his career develops further, Christopher may become as comfortable in a wide array of literary genres as is his father and that he may be even more likely to compose in experimental genres than his father. Thus, it may be that Christopher is "helping to redefine the image of blacks in juvenile literature" for the twenty-first century in the same way that Walter did in the late-twentieth century (*SATA* "Myers" 166).

Despite the generic differences between *Wings* and Walter Dean Myers's biography, *Malcolm X: A Fire Burning Bright,* one need not look far to see the similarities in the two contemporary stories in terms of their male protagonists' struggles with social abjection. In some ways, in fact, *Wings* is a contemporary, metaphorical version of the *Malcolm X* story with an upbeat ending. Both Malcolm and Ikarus feel unwelcome in school—Malcolm because he is an intelligent prankster who sees through the system that tries to limit what he can achieve; Ikarus because his wings make him a constant subject of ridicule. In a sense, Malcolm's intellect is his wings; it enables him to soar above others but also makes him stand out in ways that draw negative attention. Furthermore, teachers contribute to these two characters' abject status. When Malcolm's junior high school teacher discovers that he'd like to be a lawyer when he grows up, he tells Malcolm that since he is black, he should seek to become something more realistic like a carpenter. Likewise, when Ikarus's teacher complains that Ikarus is a distraction because the other kids "gawk and stare" at him and that Ikarus's wings block their view of the blackboard, he puts Ikarus out of class. Ikarus leaves quietly, "dragging his feathers behind him."[14] At the same low point in Malcolm's life, he asks to move to Boston with his half-sister, Ella, "[s]ensing that there was no future for him in Michigan."[15] Ikarus, on the other hand, goes out onto the playground and flies in front of his schoolmates for the first time, gliding through basketball and handball games. Instead of being impressed or afraid and leaving Ikarus alone, the children criticize him for being a showoff. He then flies away from school, followed by the supportive female narrator, as he struggles to stay airborne because "[h]is wings drooped and his head hung low."

Just as Ikarus has a run-in with the law when a passing policeman blows a whistle at him and tells him to come down from the rooftop on which he is

sitting and "stay yourself on the ground. You'll get in trouble, you'll get hurt," at twenty-one, Malcolm does jail time for robbing apartments with his gang while living the fast life of a hustler in Boston and New York. Notably, although Ikarus is never jailed, both picture books show an illustration of the protagonist behind bars: Malcolm, head down, reading and Ikarus on one knee, with one arm outstretched and the other gripping one of the jail bars, seeming to ask "Why am I in here?" The time of introspection that follows leads Malcolm to join the Nation of Islam, where he receives the affirmation and gains the strength that he has sought and needed all along. Ikarus's affirmation also comes from an external source: when the narrator tells him that his flying is beautiful, it seems to be all that he needs to recover and soar. Influenced by Ikarus's newfound freedom, the narrator leaps off the ground momentarily in the same way that those who followed Malcolm X found truth in his message and followed him faithfully. True to the historical record, Myers's rendition of Malcolm's life ends with his death at thirty-nine at the hands of three Nation of Islam members, "[A]nd like so many flames, he warmed many with his leadership and insight. Others he burned with his opposition and scorn. And like flames that burn too brightly, his light was too soon extinguished." *Wings*, a non–historically-based fantasy, ends with Ikarus's triumph after the narrator's second affirmation: "Look at that amazing boy!" Ikarus flies over the Brooklyn Bridge, looking not unlike Cassie Louise Lightfoot in Faith Ringgold's 1991 *Tar Beach*.

The similarities between the two books, different as they are in terms both of content and illustrations, highlight that in many ways, the younger and the elder Myers are both working with much the same thematic matter even if their styles differ substantially. The contrasting endings of these two stories perhaps comment on the differences in the environments in which these two men grew up. The positive ending of Ikarus's story perhaps reflects the reality that Christopher, having been born in the mid-1970s, has lived through much less social conflict and unrest than has his father. All of the books that Christopher has illustrated thus far, in fact, tell uplifting stories, and though darker tales may come in his future, he relates more of the positive aspects of urban black life than many of Walter's stories tell. Just as Christopher commented that "My Harlem is not my father's Harlem," so too, Christopher's America is not the one that Walter knew as a young person (Myers interview). It's also true, though, that as Christopher and Walter Dean Myers collaborate on more projects in the future, their styles and thematic choices will likely influence one another more than they would were they working independently.[16] Despite the fact that these two artists see the world out of completely different lenses, like his father, Christopher is continuing the tradition of conveying to young readers what moves him about Black America. In fact, one might look at *Fly*, one of Christopher's most re-

cent picture books, as a reflection of the intergenerational relationship that exists between this father and son.

In *Fly*, Jawanza, the friendless, lonely young protagonist, who watches pigeons from his top floor apartment in a big city, meets a tall, thin, old man, all dressed in white, named Roderick Jackson Montgomery the Three. Jawanza sometimes yells at the birds and sometimes tries to figure out what their crazy flight patterns are spelling, but he fails to understand them. "Mr. Montgomery the Three" tells him: "A city bird is the bestest kind of friend to have. They don't tell your secrets. They give good advice. In general, they're good peoples."[17] But Jawanza doesn't understand this either, telling Mr. Montgomery that birds can't talk to people and vice versa. "Boy, you need to learn how to listen with your mouth closed. We don't need to flap our lips to communicate. Watch me!" And Jawanza observes, amazed, as Mr. Montgomery begins to dance with the pigeons. At Jawanza's request, the old man promises to teach him the "dancing bird language" but says that Jawanza must know the birds first before they will dance with him. Jawanza learns the birds and gets to know one of them intimately. Only then does he begin to try his bird dancing skills. In a sense, then, Christopher has been "listening" for years, and these first forays into publishing for children illustrate that he now has much to tell.

Javaka Steptoe

Javaka Steptoe, son of the late John Steptoe has made the connections between his own and his father's art explicit in some of his recent picture books. In his poetry collection *In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers* (1997), Javaka includes a poem that he wrote called "Seeds":

> You drew pictures of life
> with your words.
> I listened and ate these words you said
> to grow up strong.
> Like the trees, I grew,
> branches, leaves, flowers, and then the fruit.
> I became the words I ate in you.
> For better or worse
> The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.[18]

In this poem, Javaka skillfully uses metaphor to explore how his father's artistic passions have become the impetus behind his own; the words of the father become seeds planted in the son, and those seeds have born plants and now fruit. Although this poem seems to talk more about words and therefore

his father's literary talents, Javaka clearly inherited his father's love for the visual arts and for producing excellent illustrations for children's books as well. The artistic and literary connections between two of the Steptoes' books about fathers, John Steptoe's *Daddy Is a Monster . . . Sometimes* (1980) and *In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers* (1997), show both author/artist's experimentation with interesting artistic styles to shed light on the inner workings of the black family.

Notably, Javaka has begun to make explicit statements about John just as John included Javaka and his sister Bweela in several of his books as characters. In *Daddy Is a Monster . . . Sometimes*, Javaka and Bweela narrate the story of how their daddy occasionally turns into a monster. The children open the narrative by introducing themselves and saying "we have a daddy. He's a nice daddy and all, but he got somethin' wrong with him."[19] Javaka continues: "Daddy gets like the monster in the scary movies, with teeth comin' out his mouth and hair all over his face." Accordingly, on the cover and throughout the illustrations, their father appears as his normal self, wearing a congenial smile, then transforms into something of a monster, with a furry face, animal ears, bared teeth, and a frightening expression. At the end of the book, the children finally ask him, "Daddy, how come you turn into an ugly old monster sometimes?" He tells them what the illustrations have told us all along: "Oh yeah. Well, I'm probably a monster daddy when I got monster kids."

In between Javaka and Bweela's narration of their daddy's transformations, the reader sees wordless illustrations of the children painting on doorknobs and walls, climbing up onto kitchen cabinets to get snacks they probably aren't allowed to have, displaying awful table manners at a restaurant, breaking fragile objects, playing music when their father is trying to talk on the phone, and trashing their bedrooms. The children's narrative gives the reader none of this information, and if one reads only the text, it's easy to believe that Daddy turns into a monster for no reason at all. After he buys the children ice cream cones and returns to the ice cream shop after the family goes grocery shopping, the children pout and complain until a kindly white woman buys them a second ice cream cone each, assuming that the father is selfishly buying himself one and leaving his children out. When Bweela drops her cone on the sidewalk just outside the shop, her daddy laughs and laughs and later tells her she had no business accepting the cone, making him look bad in front of that white woman. This Dad threatens the kids with spankings—and sometimes delivers them—and when they annoy him with questions, he sometimes tells them, "Get out of my face, 'fore I knock you out." Regardless of whether contemporary readers see these as appropriate comments from a father to his children, they do give an honest picture of how some black parents communicate with their children. And the father's anger seems completely unsubstantiated if one takes into account

only what the children say. But when we see illustrations of the children misbehaving and the wordless double-page spreads of them getting into mischief, sporting animal ears and fur not unlike their father's monster features, we absorb the truth of Daddy's comment that he is a monster dad when he has monster children. Furthermore, both this comment and the content of *My Daddy Is a Monster . . . Sometimes* echo the truth of Javaka's comment in his poem "Seeds" that "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

The first poem that Javaka includes in *In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall* is an Ashanti proverb that says "When you follow in the path of your father, you learn to walk like him." In addition to the focus on the relationship between African-American fathers and their children in both of these books, another notable manifestation of the Ashanti proverb is both artists' experimentation with interesting artistic styles and media. While John illustrated *My Daddy Is a Monster . . . Sometimes* in watercolors, he used an abstract style of illustrating in which geometrical patterns of squares and long, thin rectangles provide the "wallpaper" for the background of all of the illustrations and also appear on the faces and bodies of all of the characters. These shapes make what would otherwise be relatively realistic illustrations quite abstract. In some illustrations, such as when Javaka gets into the cookies in the kitchen cabinet as he transforms into a batlike creature, the geometrical shapes blur the lines between the character and the "monster" that the character is becoming. Each character also appears outlined with a heavy back line throughout the book. This line accentuates their monster features when they transform. But it also emphasizes their separateness throughout the book so that when they finally come together as a family and have their talk at the end, and the black line encloses all three of the characters together, their unity and ultimately their love of one another despite their ongoing conflicts become clear.

These unique visual features in *Daddy Is a Monster . . . Sometimes* set this book apart both from other works that John Steptoe wrote and illustrated and from other picture books written at this time. The black dialect that he incorporated into this book also suggests his commitment to portraying honestly his experience of black family life rather than standardizing the language and sanitizing the dynamics between a frustrated father and his mischievous children for a diverse reading audience. In making these artistic and literary choices, John Steptoe issued an invitation to readers unfamiliar with this culture to—as Julius Lester put it—"immerse themselves in what blacks have to say" and even in how they say it ("Black and White" 33). In many ways, Javaka issues this same invitation in *In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall*.

Although Javaka has only just begun to publish some of his own poetry in his books, in *In Daddy's Arms*, he collected poetry about black fathers

from a number of different poets and tied all of them together with his visually rich photographs of collage illustrations. In these collages, Javaka includes buttons, burlap, paint, crayons, fish, cut and torn paper, girls' barrettes, screen wire, as well as many found objects. Although collage is a relatively common medium for illustrating children's picture books now, Javaka strategically composes these illustrations to make comments that the text does not. Above Sonia Sanchez's haiku "My Father's Eyes" appears a scene illustrated on burlap that features a strip of several black-and-white photographs of an African celebration of some kind, overlaid with paper cut-outs of giraffes and antelope, animals indigenous to Africa. The girl, cut from burlap and drawn with simple but distinctly African facial features, wears a strip of African print fabric as a sleeveless top and a head wrap, out of which appears light brown thread, braided and rolled to look like braided Afro-puffs. The barrettes that surround the girl's head hint at her Americanness, but all of the other visual details clearly connect her with an African past—through her father's eyes.

One other poem in *In Daddy's Arms* converses well with the family dynamics in John's *My Daddy Is a Monster . . . Sometimes.* In David A. Anderson's poem "Promises," in a note to his father, a child apologizes for not having done what his father asked him to do and then asks, "If I do better/Can I still be your little boy?" The father responds:

> Dear Son,
> You will be
> My little boy
> For all of your little-boy days.
> And when
> You are no longer a little boy
> I will still be your daddy.[20]

The white lettering of "Promises" appears on a deep red background, suggesting the passion of the father's love for his son regardless of anything the child does or says. On the bottom left of the page, overlapping the red background and the yellow border that appear at the top and bottom of both the left and right pages, Javaka has included a torn paper butterfly, a symbol of happiness and freedom. And on the opposite page on a blue background, a purple-blue, torn-construction paper son (with no details or facial features) embraces his brown, torn-construction paper father, confirming the truth of the father's response to his son. In the same way that John affirms the love of a father for his children despite their faults and the children's love of their father despite his occasional beastliness in *My Daddy Is a Monster . . . Sometimes*, Javaka represents here in words and pictures that same unconditional love. In making the son blue and the father brown and illustrating both of them sans details or facial features, Javaka suggests that this promise

and affirmation ought to exist between all fathers and children, regardless of ethnicity. Including this poem in an anthology that specifically celebrates African-American fathers, however, Javaka both affirms the connection between himself and his own father and highlights the importance of a type of relationship that is becoming more and more endangered in America as more black men become statistics, ending up in prisons and other places and in living situations that preclude their having contact with—much less strong relationships with—their sons and daughters.

Hence, the legacy that John Steptoe left to Javaka is indeed about artistic training. He confirmed this in an interview in which he talked about the influence of both of his parents, who were divorced during his childhood. He says that because his father was "tighter in his approach," he learned much of the "how to" from his father. His mother, Stephanie Douglas, on the other hand, who is also an artist, "used oil paints to oils to pastels to collage, using fabrics and magazine clippings and all sort of things."[21] He confirms that both of his parents supported him and inspired him "in terms of style and materials and concepts of thinking about things," but he also feels a responsibility to educate people on who *he* is, not allowing himself to be "pigeonholed or boxed into who people might think I am or think I should be because of my father or my mother."[22]

But this father-son connection isn't only about his artistic training; it's also about the values that John passed along that have encouraged Javaka to shed light on the inner workings of the black family in his books for children. When asked why he thinks so many children of black children's illustrators have taken up their parents' craft, Javaka said, "Well, I think one thing is that if you're an artist and if you're successful with it . . . you're more apt to nurture your child's gift and ability, and a lot of times, we don't get . . . that nurturing." As an historical example of this lack of support from black families of artistic children, he mentioned a passage in Tony Medina and R. Gregory Christie's *Love to Langston* (2002) that alludes to Langston's father's disappointment with his own career and his desire for Langston to be a miner, because of which he dismissed all of his son's artistic pursuits as a waste of time. In contrast, Javaka says, "I think just because of my parents' success at it, they were able to give me the nurturing . . . I needed to become an artist in my own right." Although he feels that name recognition helped him to get started in children's book publishing, "once my foot is in the door, it's up to me to do whatever I'm going to do in the house. If I put my feet on the table, I get kicked out of the house. If I do good work, and if people are interested in what I do and what I have to say, I'll become successful" (Steptoe interview). And since *In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall*, Javaka's first picture book, won the 1998 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award, likely reaching as wide an audience as have John Steptoe's Caldecott Honor Award–winning Native American Legend *The Story of Jumping Mouse* (1984) and African tale *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* (1987), it

seems that the Steptoe legacy has managed to keep his feet off of the table and has impressed the hosts sufficiently because publishers seem to be interested in hearing more of what he has to say.

Nina Crews

Like both of Jerry Pinkney's sons, Nina Crews has chosen for her primary artistic medium a different medium than that of her father, and in this case, that of her mother as well. Nina works primarily with photographs and photographic collages, while Donald and Ann use watercolor, gouache, pen and ink, and several other media. Ann Jonas and Donald Crews met while studying art and design at Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, and they both consider themselves designers more than artists. But because they have artistic backgrounds, they provided a positive artistic space for their children. Furthermore, like Jerry Pinkney, Donald Crews affirms that he had a great deal of support as a child to pursue the arts. Since Donald's mother, Marshanna Crews, was a dressmaker and an accomplished craftswoman, the Crews children were always "involved in art-related projects."[23] Nina has also said that "As a child, [she] and her sister were encouraged by their parents in their art projects."[24] When asked in an interview why she feels that there are so many artistic legacies working in children's literature, she said:

> Perhaps it's the fact that *children's* literature . . . makes it so easy a connection to be passed down. There's . . . an attitude of caring and an attitude about family . . . within the personality that chooses children's literature and then [those artists] inspire their children. But you know I say it's like Hollywood. Come on, if you look at Hollywood there are third and fourth generations in entertainment. I think that by and large, people expect in the States, that children won't follow in their family's tradition of what they do for a living, but if you look worldwide, people often follow in the family tradition of what the career is. There's a business that the family does that continues for generation after generation. We [Americans] don't do it as often because everybody has to strike out on their own, but certainly, Picasso's dad was a pretty decent painter, too. [When young artists have] hands to hold . . . I think that the tradition of following in the arts is pretty strong.[25]

And while I believe that Nina has done plenty of "striking out on her own" in terms of the artistic choices she has made within this genre, her work does resemble that of her parents in several key ways. Like both of her parents, she writes books primarily for very young readers. Donald Crews is well known for his concept books such as *Rain* (1978), *Freight Train* (1978), and *Truck* (1980), while Ann Jonas specializes both in concept

books like *Color Dance* (1989) and books that make use of visual games such as *The 13th Clue* (1992), *Holes and Peeks* (1984), *The Trek* (1985), and *Round Trip* (1983). Nina continues the concept book tradition in *A High, Low, Near, Far, Loud, Quiet Story* (1999), a picture book that illustrates a brother and sister spending a fun day both at home and in the green spaces of their city while the text describes—in single words—concepts related to what they do together. And though Nina doesn't replicate in her illustrations the types of visual games that her mother does, she makes creative use of photographic collage images to transform common objects into elements of a fantasy world as she does in *You Are Here* (1998). When Mariah and Joy, two little African-American girls, realize that they can't play outside because of the rainy weather, they embark on a fantastic journey in which a checkerboard becomes a map, a spoon becomes a shield, and the cat becomes a monster. Crews accomplishes this by substantially reducing the size of the protagonists, making them half the size of the cat, so that everything inside the house becomes larger-than-life. In this way, her collages function in a similar way to the visual games in some of her mother's picture books.

In addition to these artistic ideas in Nina's work that resemble those of her parents, her biracial background also surfaces in her work. In an interview, when asked how her ethnic background has influenced her career, she said: "My parents didn't discuss race very directly or very often. We were who we were. Race was not really the point of it. We were just ourselves and I think that's the perspective that a lot of parents had in that generation" (Crews interview). In the same way that the work of the second generation of Pinkneys replicates the explicit ideology about the beauty and value of African-American life, the Crews's "this is just the way things are" approach to multiracial families and children also comes out in Nina's work.

Just as Ann Jonas's *Color Dance* says nothing explicitly about the racial diversity of the children who create the colors of the rainbow with their dance, Nina's *Snowball* (1997) shows children from all backgrounds in the protagonist's classroom and playing with her in the snow on the playground. Donald Crews does the same thing in *Parade* (1990) and *Carousel* (1982); the diversity among the musicians and the carousel riders, respectively, is completely unextraordinary and commonplace. Since this family lives in New York where diversity is a given, it comes as no surprise that the characters who populate their books—some of which are also set in urban environments—would reflect this multiculturalism.

One of Donald Crews's most direct references to racial conflict comes in *Bigmama's* (1991), a retrospective on his childhood summers. When his family rides the train in 1949 to Cottondale, Florida, to see Bigmama, his maternal grandmother, they ride for three days and two nights in a segregated train car. In case any young readers fail to notice the lack of diversity among the train riders, Crews posts the "Colored" sign inside of the train as

it would have been in reality. But the racial commentary ends there. Bigmama's family seems relatively affluent, and the children enjoy their wonderful summer, visiting with the farm animals and spending time with relatives. While Donald Crews often subtly includes a self-portrait somewhere in the illustrations of his picture books, and while his portrait also sometimes shows up in Ann Jonas's picture books, he draws himself purposefully into *Bigmama's* on the last illustration as the adult narrator, reflecting from his urban landscape on the closeness of these childhood memories of summers in Florida: "Some nights even now, I think that I might wake up in the morning and be at Bigmama's with the whole summer ahead of me."[26]

In sum, then, the books of all three of these artists either teach basic concepts, or tell positive stories of all different sorts of children enjoying childhood. Any social conflict that arises in these books is only secondary to the story and not the main device that drives the plot. While some scholars of African-American children's literature would exclude these books from the genre because so many of Donald Crews's books don't deal with humans at all, much less racialized humans, because this is a biracial family, and also because their books rarely, if ever, make explicit statements about race, I believe that the Crews family's work is helping to redefine and expand the genre boundaries of African-American children's literature in positive and forward-thinking ways. Nina Crews, in fact, identifies herself as a new type of artist of color. She says:

> I try and perceive the way that I'm working as a multiculturalist and not strictly writing from an African-American perspective, though I would say that my extended family that I spent the most time with was my father's family, which was the African-American side of my family. . . . But at one point, I'll figure out how to write a book which . . . approaches the biracial experience that's not necessarily specifically about the biracial experience. I'm not very good at writing that kind of a book, but I think that I'd like to make it more directly addressed in a book that I do soon . . . because there are more and more and more biracial and multiracial families and families that are actually looking at things from a multitude of perspectives around race. (Crews interview)

This multicultural lens out of which Nina Crews is looking does nothing but add to the wonderful, ever-expanding genre of children's literature.

Legacies—Up and Coming

Legacies Jaime Adoff, Fred McKissack, Lee Dillon, Monica Greenfield, Katura and Stephan Hudson, and Troy Pinkney-Ragsdale have not yet pro-

duced as much as the legacies discussed above but deserve notice for their initial forays into picture book publishing.

Jaime Adoff, son of Arnold Adoff and the late Virginia Hamilton, has certainly had excellent role modeling for the family pursuit of children's literature; between the two of them, Virginia Hamilton and Arnold Adoff have probably published in every genre of children's and young adult literature that exists. On the page of his website dedicated to his mother, who died of breast cancer in 2002, Jaime confirms that he and his sister Leigh were always surrounded by creativity as children. After their parents would work in their studies at home all day, they would gather as a family over dinner and talk about their day's work. And after playing in their fantasy worlds all day, "Leigh and I would talk about our day too. What we learned, what games we played, the meal always ending with lots of laughter. I think of all that creativity, swirling between Father and Mother, Brother and Sister. And the magic, to me, it was all magic."[27] He says that although he didn't realize the impact of "watching this creative process close up" as he grew up, he realizes now that this helped to shape who he has become. And after he decided to "join the family business," his relationship with his mother moved to a different level in which she began to mentor Jaime's writing talents (Adoff website). The "thumbprints" of Virginia Hamilton and Arnold Adoff certainly show up in Jaime's debut in children's picture books.

Given the eclecticism of his parents' interests and also given his father's dedication to poetry, it seems natural that Jaime's first picture book combines two different artistic forms: music and poetry. A musician with several CDs to his credit, Jaime represents something about which he feels passionate in his young adult picture book, *The Song Shoots Out of My Mouth: A Celebration of Music* (2002). This book offers illustrated poems about a plethora of musical genres, from reggae to rap to jazz to gospel to classical—all of which have been a part of Jaime's life since his childhood. The second poem in the book embodies the spirit of this volume. Accompanied by an illustration of an animated chef, carrying performing musicians on a platter and out of whose leg comes a musical staff as he hop-steps to deliver the "meal," "Today's Special" tells about what constitutes today's "musical buffet": "cool jazz jams on buttered toast," "hot salsa," "Fresh Squeezed Tina Turner," "a stack of Marvin Gaye," a "James Brown bag lunch," some funk, "Joni Mitchell mashed," "a tall glass of/Beatle juice" stirred in with Ice Cube (10).

> On the bus home,
> The snack formerly known
> as Twinkie is singing
> its sweet cream melody
> into my mouth.
> As the song:

booms and bumps
and
grooves and funks
and
rocks and rolls
and
tastes so good.[28]

The elision of gustatory and auditory imagery in this poem collapses the differences between music and food, perhaps suggesting that the speaker needs music of all different kinds in the way that all humans need food. What's more, rather than being like the purists who elevate one genre of music over another (such as considering classical "high art" and rap "low art"), this poem's speaker relishes the delights that all of these forms of music can provide. Hence, Jaime Adoff's first picture book seems to embody many of his interests and also reflects many of the values that he absorbed as a result of growing up in a household with two creative writers.

Like Jaime Adoff, Fred McKissack, Jr. also grew up with two parents who were actively creating, and like Jaime, Fred has also had a close creative relationship with his mother. Fred says that his mother, Patricia, was an English teacher and an editor when he and his younger twin brothers were growing up, but because she found in the traditional curriculum so few texts for her students about African-American historical figures, she started writing them herself. While Fredrick, Sr. was an engineer (like his father and male relatives had all been) when his children were small, Fred says that when he was a junior in high school and his brothers were in seventh grade, his parents sat them down and told them that Fredrick, Sr. was considering abandoning his engineering career to join Patricia in writing books for children. The boys were all for it. "It wasn't about the money; it wasn't about being famous; it wasn't about this easy life. It was just that they wanted to do this thing that meant so much to them that no one else was in this market trying to do . . . well, that so few people were trying to do."[29]

Fred feels that from his mother, he got his passion for writing—which has resulted in his current profession as a newspaper feature writer—and from his father, he absorbed an excitement about research, which has always been a part of both his father's professional and personal interests. While Fred was working as a newspaper sports writer in the early 1990s, Patricia got a call from Scholastic, asking if she'd like to write a book about the Negro Leagues. She agreed but called Fred immediately and asked him to "Tell me everything you know about baseball," which resulted in their collaboratively writing *Black Diamond: The Story of the Negro Baseball Leagues* (1994). In the same way that Jaime Adoff spoke of his shift from parent-child relationship to a colleague relationship with Virginia Hamilton, Fred also commented on this milestone in his relationship with his mother

that came as a result of their work on *Black Diamond*. He said that working with his mother was like having a graduate seminar in writing (McKissack interview). After *Black Diamond*, Fred backed off from family projects primarily because he started to feel that he wanted to make his own career path by himself and not depend on his parents' name. During this time, he solo authored *Black Hoops: The History of African Americans in Basketball* (1999).

Fred has now decided that his "I need to go it alone" attitude was foolish, but it took him nearly ten years to come to this conclusion. Echoing Javaka Steptoe's idea about this same issue, Fred said, "If you have an entrée into something, and you're good at it, I don't think you need to worry about what other people think" (McKissack interview). Accordingly, he and Patricia are completing two new book projects—one for Holiday House on the life of professional baseball player, Curt Flood, the other for Scholastic on scary stories. Given the older McKissacks' attention to African-American history and culture in both their informational and fictional work over the past several decades, it comes as no surprise that the younger McKissack places such a high value on nonfictional and historically based stories, and it seems likely that he will continue this tradition and add his voice to their substantial body of works for children.

Like Javaka Steptoe, Lee Dillon, son of Leo and Diane Dillon, also grew up with two parents working in the visual arts. Having met in college in the mid-1950s at Parsons School of Design, the Dillons are unique both in that they illustrate solely collaboratively, and in that they are the only illustrators to have won the Caldecott Medal consecutively (in 1976 for *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears: A West African Tale* and in 1977 for *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions*).[30] Leo and Diane have collaborated so much and for so long that they "describe their work as emanating from a 'third artist.'" "After a work is finished, not even we can be certain who did what. The third artist is a combination of the two of us and is different than either of us individually" (*SATA* "Dillon" 58). In one project, Leo and Diane added a third partner to their third artist: their son, Lee.

A visual artist like his parents, Lee collaborated with Leo and Diane on the illustrations for Nancy Willard's oversized picture book, *Pish, Posh, Said Heironymus Bosch* (1991), a poetic story about this eccentric fifteenth-century artist. The illustrations themselves, rendered in acrylic and oil paint, are characteristic of Leo and Diane's work. But added to this richness is a picture frame that encases each right-page illustration. Lee handcrafted this frame out of silver, brass, and bronze, and in its design, he comments upon the bizarre creatures that appear and events that take place within the illustrations. At the top of the frame, what might be a sun, a moon, or the face of an old man overlooks the action within the frame. Sitting along the upper right and left sides of the frame, protruding from it, are two creatures of some sort with human features. Both wear clothes and hats despite that their

excessively long antennae and drooping wings indicate that these are some sort of insects—just as unidentifiable as many of the animals and fantastic creatures in the framed illustrations. At the bottom left and right corners of the frame stand two musicians, one with a drum and one with a violin or similar stringed instrument. Wearing flowing robes that trail underneath and behind the frame, both of these characters look into the frame as if curious about what is happening within. Upon further inspection, we see that these two beings also have wings, though they lack antennae. This exquisitely constructed but whimsical metallic frame shows meticulous craftsmanship and seamlessly adds definition to Leo and Diane's illustrations of Bosch's frenetic household, inhabited by dragons, a pigeon-toed rat, a beehive in boots, several running cucumbers, and a pickle-winged fish. This is a promising first collaboration. Perhaps Lee will become a more regular member of the "third artist" as his artistic talents continue to evolve.

Monica Greenfield, daughter of Eloise Greenfield, has published two books thus far: *The Baby* (1994) and *Waiting for Christmas* (1996), both illustrated by African-American illustrator Jan Spivey Gilchrist. Notably, Gilchrist has illustrated many of Eloise's books as well, including her 1988 *Nathaniel Talking* and her 1995 *Honey I Love*, a picture book version of one of the poems from her 1978 volume, *Honey I Love, and Other Love Poems* (interestingly enough, illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon). Like so many of Eloise Greenfield's children's books, Monica's *Waiting for Christmas*, a simply written poetic picture book, offers a positive snapshot of the day-to-day life of a black family. In this particular snapshot, a middle-class black family is celebrating Christmas morning with the extended family. Narrated by a brother and sister, the story takes us from Christmas Eve to Christmas morning when the children wake up to candles, music, and family time together. In her illustrations, Gilchrist draws the little girl with cornrows, and when both children look into a snow globe before going to bed on Christmas Eve, they marvel at a black Santa Claus carrying a huge bag of gifts. Of these details and the ethnicity of the family, the text makes no comment, but just as Eloise Greenfield has done in many of her books, Monica must have made certain that African-American illustrations accompanied her text. Hence, following her mother's lead, Monica has entered into publishing for children with the same goal of creating books that allow black children—even very young children—to see themselves positively represented in literature.

Katura Hudson, daughter of Cheryl and Wade Hudson, founders of Just Us Books, said that she has been helping with Just Us since she was twelve years old. In middle school, she actually had scheduled working hours every week after school, and in high school, she worked in the office during the school year and participated in internships during the summers. In October of 2002, after completing a degree in American Studies at Rutgers University, Douglass Women's College, she took a full-time position as Marketing Manager and Associate Editor with Just Us.[31]

When asked about her vision for Just Us, she said that although many mainstream publishers are producing more black interest books now than they were fifteen years ago when her parents started Just Us, she feels that their mission and niche remain the same as when the company began: "producing quality black interest books for children" (Katura Hudson interview). Just Us is beginning to expand into the young adult literature market because children who grew up reading Afro-Bets and other Just Us books are now teens or even in college. "We need something just as positive for them to read . . . to keep them reading and to keep them interested" (Katura Hudson interview).

Stephan, Katura's brother, has also begun to participate in the family business even as a college student. A junior at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey, majoring in graphic design, Stephan built the Just Us website and also illustrated *Langston's Legacy: 101 Ways to Celebrate the Life and Work of Langston Hughes* (2002). Katura said that she feels this has been a natural progression for both her and her brother because they were both "raised up in the family business." She echoes Nina Crews's thoughts on family job traditions:

> When you have enterprising parents and creative parents and parents who are involved, they set that example for you . . . and I guess it's kind of a natural thing to take over the family business or to be involved in something you see as really worthwhile because you've seen people in your own family step up and take leadership where they've seen a void. If they know that there's something out there that's not being done and it's important for our community, they went ahead and did it. You feel—not even an obligation—but it's just some kind of innate feeling that you want to be a part of that and you want to contribute to the positivity of the black community, and this is one way of doing so. But as I said, growing up in the family business, it was almost a given that I would be participating in some way in my parents' mission. (Katura Hudson interview)

Katura also still sees the need for black leadership in the publishing, editing, and writing of children's books "and we want to do our part in making sure that that continues" (Katura Hudson interview).

Not only is Katura the first one to see manuscripts that come in for possible publication and intimately involved in the daily operations of the publishing company, but she is also beginning to write books for children herself. Thus far, she has *Afro-Bets Quotes for Kids: Words for Kids to Live By* (1999) and *Langston's Legacy: 101 Ways to Celebrate the Life and Work of Langston Hughes*—both coauthored with her mother—to her credit. *Langston's Legacy* combines historical information on Hughes with many different activities that readers can do, including crossword puzzles, word scrambles, word finds, worksheets, recipes, coloring sheets, map reading

activities, and invitations to write some of the forms of poetry that Hughes composed. The Hudsons have filled every page with educational activities related to Hughes's life and work. If Katura and Stephan's entry into producing children's books resembles that of many other legacies, these early collaborative family projects may well serve as important stepping stones to prolific publishing careers of their own—and the legacy tradition continues.

Troy Pinkney-Ragsdale, daughter of Jerry and Gloria Jean Pinkney, is the Pinkney to enter the field of children's literature most recently and is perhaps also the most recent black legacy to emerge. At the completion of *Brown Gold*, Troy's first project, a collaboration between her mother, her father, and her brothers Myles and Brian, had not yet been published. Troy makes her debut into the field in 2003 with her introduction to *Music from Our Lord's Holy Heaven*. Given the quality of the texts that the Pinkneys have produced, this is an exciting collaboration. And if Jerry's enthusiasm is any indication of the family's perspective on Troy's joining the ranks of family editors, writers, and illustrators, the Pinkneys are all eagerly awaiting the release of this family collaboration.

Conclusion

This look into the lives of contemporary young black legacies has led me to conclude that when those who produce African-American children's literature submerge their children in a family culture in which the arts are valued, encouraged, and nurtured, and when the ideology concerning the importance of positive representations of blackness in books for children is a given underlying everything those adult artists produce, the household climate that results increases the likelihood that those children will enter into producing books for children. And given a few observations I have made of very young children of contemporary black authors and artists, I suspect that a third generation of legacies is on the horizon.

Niani Feelings, daughter of Dianne Johnson and the late Tom Feelings, has decided at the tender age of eight that she is headed for Broadway. Having already performed in numerous local theater productions in their hometown in South Carolina, Niani already seems to have a powerful vision for the arts and her niche within it. And given that she accompanies her mother on author visits regularly, where she often "performs" and sometimes upstages Dianne, her submergence into African-American children's literature has given her a familiarity with the genre that few children her age have.

Several of the legacies in this chapter indicated that their parents often used them for models when they were children—a task which also seems to have encouraged a greater interest and involvement in children's literature early-on. Continuing this tradition, when Jerry Pinkney does author visits, he shows slides of his grandchildren, posing for photographs (sometimes

dressed in period clothing) that he has used in sketches for his books. If it's not enough for their grandfather to request this kind of participation from them, Myles photographed his and Sandra's children and included them in their picture book, *Shades of Black*. Because of this and the culture of the arts that is so alive in this family, I will be astounded if a third generation of Pinkneys does not follow Troy into children's literature.

At the Authors on the Beach Conference in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in the fall of 2002, James and Lesa-Cline Ransome presented a slide program on the children's books on which they have collaborated. They included snapshots of their working spaces at home to emphasize how important those spaces are for the kinds of research and creative work that they do. Before concluding, they showed a slide of their four children, Jaime, Maya, Malcolm, and Leila, all of whom, according to their parents, are budding artists. (Clinton, their Dalmatian, also seems to have some artistic inclinations.) And with the kind of encouragement and role modeling that they're getting from their parents, these young people are growing up in an environment that will provide them not only with excellent mentoring but also with some name recognition and access to publishers should they decide at some point to enter the field of children's literature.

Finally, this genre readily lends itself to the nurturing of future generations. If one's father is a brick mason or an engineer, or if one's mother is a computer technician or a hair stylist, these professions are not ones that translate well into children's culture either because they are dangerous for children or because most young children would find them boring. When one has a parent who writes, illustrates, and/or publishes books for children, however, nothing prevents those parents from sharing their work with their children and submerging them in it even when they are in the womb. And many of these legacies indicated that these early, formative experiences with their parents' books heavily influenced their later decisions to produce children's books themselves. Jaime Adoff says:

> One of my earliest memories was curling up underneath my Mom and listening to her read one of her books to me. My favorite, "Time Ago Tales of Jahdu." I swear for years, I really thought she was Mama Luka. Whenever she read that book to me I became Jahdu, I was transported right into the book, into the story. My mother's voice guiding me through. That is the power of words, the power of a masterfully written story, told by a master storyteller—told by my Mom. (Adoff website)

After surrounding her son with these kinds of rich literary memories, how could Virginia Hamilton have felt anything but joy at knowing that he and other legacies of his generation will shape the future of African-American children's literature—a genre that would look altogether different without all that she and her contemporaries contributed to it.

SECTION III

Criticism and Pedagogy of African-American Children's Picture Books

The first two sections of this volume situate African-American children's literature within historical and professional contexts. This final section of *Brown Gold* addresses the place of black picture books within academia. Chapters 6 and 7 offer an analysis of two aspects of African-American culture that exist as oral forms that have now evolved into entire subgenres of African-American children's picture books: history and religious beliefs. Chapter 8 focuses on the forms of black language that have begun to be represented within the genre—yet another way that black orality has become a picture book phenomenon in recent years. And chapter 9 explores a few ways that these texts can be useful in college courses in Children's and Young Adult Literature to give students a richer sense of African-American history and culture.

African Americans once passed down to their children and grandchildren not only stories of folktale heroes like John Henry and Br'er Rabbit but also tales of historical heroines like Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. During slavery, these secular stories as well as religious stories and songs were shared among slaves for entertainment, but slaves also communicated with one another through them, conveying messages of which slave masters were often ignorant. Since early in this genre's evolution, the focus on history and on faith has recurred frequently. And in the latter part of the twentieth century, the picture books that revolved around African-American history and religion began to reflect some changes in American attitudes about what child readers should take away from these books. No longer were the history books merely nonfictional tomes of admiration for particular historical figures, but these books also began to approach their subjects with more realism than ever before. "Historical America through the Eyes of the Black Child," chapter 6, discusses late-twentieth century picture books

about important figures within African-American history. Booker T. Washington, Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, William H. Johnson, and Ruby Bridges all suffered racial injustices as children, and recent picture books about them make those injustices clear. This chapter uses as a theoretical lens Louis Althusser's idea of the Ideological State Apparatus and the Repressive State Apparatus to consider how these picture books function and address their young audiences. These books, all published in the 1990s, are significant for their representation of previously marginalized people, but they also allow child readers to experience vicariously realistic and sometimes violent conflicts and thereby gain empowerment through seeing how well-known African Americans have confronted discrimination.

The texts dealing with religion, on the other hand, have taken the religious oral tradition into the realm of play.[1] Chapter 7, " 'Just Build Me a Cabin in the Corner of Glory Land': Bridges to Heaven in African-American Children's Picture Books," argues that portrayals of heaven in black picture books deconstruct and transform traditional Judeo-Christian hierarchies, integrate black culture both through historical facts and linguistic representations, and take a great deal of creative license with what the Old Testament presents as indisputable truth. Exploring the "signifying black difference" of how black writers of children's picture books construct heaven, this chapter illustrates what happens when black writers take postmodern thinking and filter it through a black lens, then shape it into entertaining discourse for children.

While chapters 6 and 7 more or less deal with the content of contemporary African-American children's picture books, chapter 8 explores the form—the language—of a few of these books. In the same way that Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote and contemporary author Sapphire writes indigenous speech patterns from their daily lives in black communities into their literature for mainstream audiences, several authors of these contemporary picture books have made excellent use of black language that serves a number of interesting purposes. First, it complements the content of the book; second, it honors speech patterns that have traditionally been marginalized and maligned in our culture; and third, it exposes non-BEV/Ebonics speakers to a type of speech that is still primarily an oral rather than a written form of communication, occurring in face-to-face dialogues and contemporary music more often than in written texts.

"Ain't I Fine!' Black Modes of Discourse in African-American Children's Picture Books," chapter 8, takes as its theoretical companion ideas from Henry Louis Gates's *The Signifying Monkey* (1988). This chapter explores the way that many recent African-American picture book authors use signifying and other modes of black discourse to make available to the general public the kind of humor, linguistic games, and verbal banter that have previously been shared exclusively between African Americans. These con-

temporary texts break out of traditional genres and venture into experimentalism in a way that both opens the books up to a wider reading audience and challenges those who encounter them.

In the final chapter, I address some of the pedagogical complexities of integrating African-American children's picture books into college English classes in Children's and Young Adult Literature. Because much of what has been written about teaching "multicultural children's literature" focuses on K-12, this chapter offers some suggestions on possible ways to incorporate this genre particularly into Children's Literature survey classes in which professors must take students from the nineteenth century or before up to contemporary children's books and must include novels, picture books, poetry, and a plethora of other genres and subgenres.

6
Historical America through the Eyes of the Black Child

Based on a true story, Irene Smalls and Jon Onye Lockard's 1995 picture book *Ebony Sea* takes place on one of the Sea Islands off the coast of Georgia on the banks of the Wateree River. The narrator tells the story of Benriver, an Ebo and a former slave who once could fly because he is part man and part spirit, who came to South Carolina with a large group of Ebos in the bowels of a slave ship. These Ebos kept so silent that the slaves on shore feared them. When the group's leader emerged, she was "A little bit of a thing, a woman. At the head of this crowd of kings and clowns, babes and brawny men, was a small woman with her head held so high and so proud it looked as if it were made of the blackest onyx stone."[1] This woman, still wearing the red handkerchief in which she was captured in Africa, led this whole group of Ebos, chained and shackled together, from the banks of the river right into the Wateree (fig. 6.1).

> They walked into that river and drowned themselves, every man, woman, and child, every infant without a whimper, without a word, without a cry. One itty bitty baby opened his mouth as if to wail. His momma softly and so tenderly suckled that babe. Everyone's head was held high. Not a face moved.

Benriver explains that these Africans believe that when Ebos die, they go back home to Africa. That day, says Benriver, the sea turned ebony. Such tragedies as this mass act of suicide are not surprising within a political system in which force constitutes the primary method of controlling its citizens.

During the 1990s, children's authors published many picture books that focused on the lives of African-American historical figures—some of them well known such as Booker T. Washington and Harriet Tubman, others of

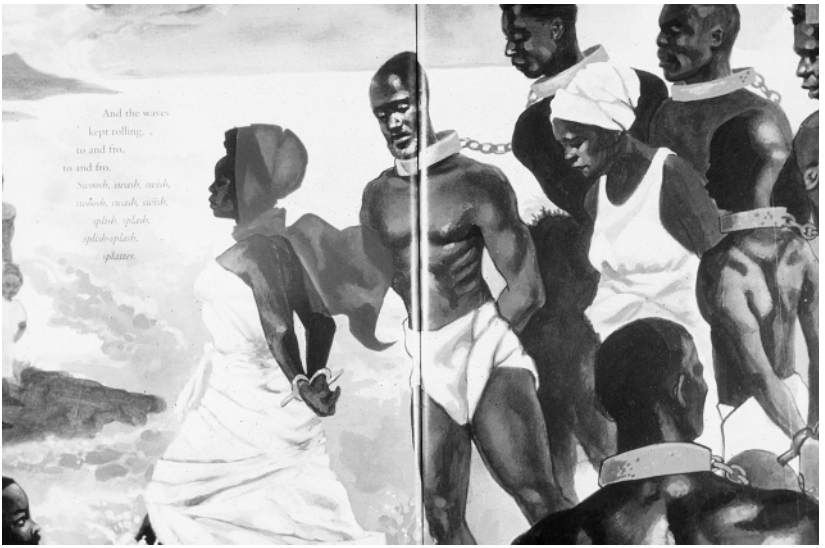

Fig. 6.1. Reprinted by permission of Jon Onye Lockard. Smalls, Irene. *Ebony Sea*. Illus. Jon Onye Lockard. Stamford: Longmeadow, 1995.

them lesser known such as artist William H. Johnson. And despite the fact that some authors and illustrators of children's literature ascribe to the Victorian notion of the child and thereby exclude from texts such as these the more violent and harsh details that were indeed a part of the historical record, most of the authors who created picture books of this genre in the 1990s rejected this conservative approach. In these books, people die, children get hurt, and cruelty surfaces regularly in everyday life. To examine the way that these authors depict injustice within the lives of the African Americans on whom these books focus, the social theories of Karl Marx and Louis Althusser provide a useful critical lens.

In Marx's theory of the State, he distinguishes between State power and State Apparatus, but he says that all State Apparatuses are repressive.[2] In his revision of Marx's theory of the State, however, Louis Althusser separates the Repressive State Apparatus (the government, the Army, the police, the prisons—institutions that function by violence) from what he calls the Ideological State Apparatus (religion, education, the family, the legal system, the political system, culture—those that function by ideology rather than by force) (Althusser 136–37). He argues that while only one Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) exists, a plurality of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) flourishes in every society, although he considers education the strongest and most pervasive of them.

In considering 1990s African-American picture books about historical figures through these critical lenses, I would argue that conflict arises most often in these books because the antagonistic forces (slave masters, racist or sexist individuals, a government that upholds segregation) either see the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatus as one in the same—not for themselves but—for African Americans within the political system, or underestimate the Ideological Apparatus under which the individual within the African-American community operates. The African Americans in these texts understand that the Repressive State Apparatuses differ from the Ideological State Apparatuses, but the oppressors' belief that these are one in the same for blacks enables the protagonists to behave subversively, often without the oppressors realizing it. Furthermore, African-American individuals and communities in these books create alternative ideological systems by which they operate rather than conforming to those Eurocentric state ideologies that undergird American society. In short, they reject Ideological *State* Apparatuses in favor of their own *Afrocentric* Ideological Apparatuses (AIAs) and revolutionary ideas that effectively aid the protagonists in overcoming or at least fighting against oppression that seeks to restrict their freedom or even to destroy them.

Ebony Sea, for instance, takes place in the pre-Emancipation South where the Repressive State Apparatus sought either the obliteration or the complete control of the Ebos' Ideological Apparatus—the success of which goal could enable Southern whites to assume that the Ebos had absorbed the ISAs prescribed by and approved of by the dominant culture. This misguided assumption and the strength of the Ebos' Afrocentric Ideological Apparatus, however, facilitate the success of the Africans in Smalls's story. Only the slave traders' underestimation of his slaves' determination to gain freedom even in death allows them to take the traders by surprise and rob them of their profit of human cargo. Further, this act of mass suicide sends a strong message to the slaves on shore about the integrity of the Ebos who would not be enslaved. They simply "wanted to go home."

Inherent in this new genre of realistic fiction for young readers is these authors' belief that children—even very young children—need to be exposed to the harsh realities of African-American history. Instances of racial hatred, blatant discrimination, and death are not uncommon within this genre. These picture books, which read much more like fiction than like biography, tell biographically based (often little-known) stories about the lives of African-American heroes and sheroes and enable young readers to witness some of the hardships that these Americans encountered before they became well-known—hardships concerning racial conflict, family suffering, poverty, and even gender discrimination.

In creating these picture books, authors such as Irene Smalls, Robert Coles, William Miller, Marie Bradby, and Floyd Cooper teach readers about

the lives of important figures like writer Zora Neale Hurston, artist William H. Johnson, and activist Rosa Parks while setting a high standard for literary and illustrative excellence. Through examining African Americans' conflicts with the Repressive State Apparatus and their cultivation of Afrocentric Ideological Apparatuses within the black community which the dominant culture systematically denies exist, readers encounter in these picture books a few important recurring themes: the fight for freedom, the struggle for literacy, and the search for home despite the cost.

Longing for Freedom

Be it literal or figurative, the quest for freedom, a longstanding motif in African-American folklore, visual art, and literature, surfaced in one of the most important forms of communication between plantation slaves: music. One Negro Spiritual says:

> Oh freedom, oh freedom,
> Oh freedom over me.
> And before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
> And go home to my Lord and be free.

Clearly, this song's suggestion that death is preferable to enslavement becomes a reality in Smalls and Lockard's *Ebony Sea*. The Ebos did not have the option of effecting revolutionary change, but they did obtain their freedom through death, while negatively impacting the system of chattel slavery that brought them to American shores for financial gain. Their legacy also lives on through the place called Ebo Landing in South Carolina, which has become the subject of focus by contemporary artists such as Carrie Mae Weems.

This theme of freedom, however, also remains strong in more contemporary settings within this genre. Detailing a fictional story of freedom, William Miller and John Ward's *The Bus Ride* (1998) takes a little African-American girl, Sara, through the same journey that Rosa Parks took on the bus in Montgomery that sparked the 1955 bus boycott and the subsequent Civil Rights Movement. Sara's mother always rides the bus to clean houses in the white neighborhoods, and after she gets off, Sara takes the bus on to school. One day, Sara decides to find out what will happen if she walks to the front of the bus where the white people are and sits down. When she refuses to get up, the bus driver stops, and a white policeman comes on and talks to her. He asks her, "What's the problem?" Sara assures him that "There's no problem." When he asks her if she knows what the laws are, she replies confidently, "Sure I do . . . We learn about them in school."[3] Clearly, Sara has full knowledge of the Repressive State Apparatus that dictates where she should sit on a public bus. But her belief in a more powerful Afro-

centric Ideological Apparatus motivates her to reject the unjust laws and sit where she feels she deserves to sit. As a result, the policeman picks Sara up out of her seat and carries her off of the bus into the police station where she must wait for her mother to come get her. The next day, Sara and her mother decide to walk to work and school, and others follow their lead. While some texts of this genre feature African-American children being affected *indirectly* by the Repressive State Apparatus, Sara gets firsthand experience with the RSA by doing time at the police station. Rosa Parks, who wrote the introduction to the book, also emphasizes this direct approach. She writes:

> I have great faith that our young people will continue to struggle for freedom as we approach a new century. I encourage all young people to believe in themselves and take a stand for what is right. It is my hope that reading this story will inspire you to learn about the past so you can help make the future better for all people. (Miller, *Ride* introduction)

The combination of Sara's story and Rosa Parks's affirmation of children's power to effect change delivers a strong message of empowerment to children reading this story.

In the same way that Alice Walker's writing about the forgotten Zora Neale Hurston in the 1970s began a "recovery" effort to bring Hurston into the contemporary literary canon, through Gwen Everett's writing about African-American artist William H. Johnson, she helped to bring attention to this little-known but important historical figure. *Li'l Sis and Uncle Willie* (1991) tells of the life of William H. Johnson, a painter born in 1901 in Florence, South Carolina, who sacrificed much to gain artistic freedom.[4] Like the father of Langston Hughes who could not practice his craft in the South, Johnson lived and painted in Scandinavia, Germany, France, and North Africa and came back to New York and South Carolina only infrequently to see family or, during WWII, to escape danger. Li'l Sis, Johnson's niece, narrates the story and illustrates it with Johnson's pictures from her scrapbook. Some of the most striking paintings feature Nat Turner hanging from a tree and a black woman in New York being carried by her feet after looting and rioting break out as a result of a white policeman killing a black soldier. These visual images reinforce Johnson's motivation for practicing his craft outside of the United States: both the RSA of institutionalized racism and the cultural ISA of race-based censorship made the ideological messages conveyed by Johnson's paintings unwelcome within mainstream American society. At the same time, the statements that Johnson makes through his blatantly political art illustrate the centrality of the AIA that gave Johnson the power to resist injustice. This resistance manifested itself both through Johnson's own self-imposed exile and through his creation of provocative, racial art.

The conflict between State Apparatuses—both Repressive and Ideological—and the Afrocentric Ideological Apparatus at work in the life of young Martin Luther King in Doreen Rappaport and Bryan Collier's *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (2001) is even more blatant than in the previous texts. The "Big Words" to which the title refers, quotes phrases from Martin's family members, his heroes, and even himself. These conclude most of the double-page spreads and contrast with the exclusionary "WHITE ONLY" signs that he sees all over town as he grows up. One quote comes from Martin's mother: "You are as good as anyone"; another from his father: "Everyone can be great"; and still others from young Martin—"When I grow up, I'm going to get big words too"—and adult Martin: "When the history books are written, someone will say there lived black people who had the courage to stand up for their rights."[5] While the text of the story appears in a small black font, the contrasting "Big Words," several font sizes larger than the other, vary in color from brown to blue to rust to green. The visual dominance of these "Big Words" reflects the preeminence of these messages in Martin's mind and in his life.

Other details in *Martin's Big Words* point to the multiple sources of conflict that King dealt with:

> In the next ten years, [1956–1966] black Americans all over the South protested for equal rights. Martin walked with them and talked with them and sang with them and prayed with them. White ministers told them to stop. Mayors and governors and police chiefs and judges ordered them to stop. But they kept on marching.

The statement that Martin "prayed with them" reveals the oneness of his religious and his political convictions. Yet, "[w]hite ministers told them to stop" reveals a direct conflict between Martin's Afrocentric religious ideology and the Eurocentric religious ideology of the white ministers. Likewise, "Mayors and governors and police chiefs and judges ordered them to stop" shows that many levels of government sought to evoke the Repressive State Apparatus to control King and his followers, to no avail. Refusing to deny the complexity of the conflicts in which King was embroiled, however, Rappaport also points out the intraracial conflict among those who followed King. The text recounts that "Some black Americans wanted to fight back with their fists. Martin convinced them not to, by reminding them of the power of love." A key aspect of King's Afrocentric Ideological Apparatus was approaching conflict peaceably and resolving conflict nonviolently. Black leaders such as Malcolm X who disagreed with this and embraced a more radical and militant ideology reveal that AIAs allow for both approaches to change. Resistance and a will to change the status quo are at the heart of both.



Fig. 6.2. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Inc. Rappaport, Doreen. *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr*. Illus. Bryan Collier. New York: Scholastic, 2001.

Perhaps the most startling and powerful image in *Martin's Big Words* is the final illustration of Martin looking directly at the reader through a large stained glass window pane, under which sit four white candles, burning in honor of the four little black girls who died in the September 15, 1963 Ku Klux Klan bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama (fig. 6.2).

While this illustration on one level represents the failure of nonviolent change since both King and the four girls died in the midst and in the crossfire—respectively—of such change, it also embodies the triumph of the ideas that King espoused. This illustration, which recalls the gospel song "This little light of mine,/I'm gonna let it shine," reminds readers of the difference that even a little bit of light can make. The importance of these four children before they died in this bombing seems insignificant compared to the impact that King's ideas and actions made. But through Collier's inclusion of them on the same page, he suggests that within an AIA, they ought to

be seen as equally significant in African-American history. The text opposite this striking image simply says, "His big words are alive for us today." It is clearly the intention of Rappaport and Collier to keep Martin's image and his big words alive for young readers who need to know that this great leader as well as four little kids who weren't much older than this book's readers both died to insure that they would not have to face "WHITE ONLY" signs in their downtowns in the 1990s.

These powerful picture books that effectively explain to child readers that the freedoms they enjoy have been hard-won by African Americans who lived between two and six generations ago deliver the message in both the text and illustrations that change is costly. And these radical changes have not only come in the form of obtaining freedom, but they have also revolved around gaining equal access to education—the focus of several other biographical picture books about African Americans for young readers.

Pursuing Literacy

In his autobiography, Frederick Douglass describes the moment when he realized the link between literacy and freedom as a result of overhearing his master declare:

> If you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy.[6]

Douglass realized then that once he learned to read, no one could ever again enslave his mind. Likewise, many of these stories that tell of the acquisition of literacy also entail stories of freedom. Marie Bradby's *More Than Anything Else* (1995), William Miller's *Richard Wright and the Library Card* (1997), Robert Coles's *The Story of Ruby Bridges* (1995), and Ruby Bridges's autobiographical picture book, *Through My Eyes* (1999), all stress the historical importance of education while making the vital link between literacy and liberty. Because all four of these books are set in segregated or pre–Civil Rights America, the Repressive State Apparatus systematically denies literacy to the protagonists. To obtain access to literacy, then, African Americans must either learn subversively or take part in the revolution that will change the unjust system. But while undermining the systems that exclude them, they depend on Afrocentric Ideological Apparatuses to sustain them.

More Than Anything Else details Booker T. Washington's realization of his childhood dream to learn to read. In the 1870s, young Booker, his father,

and brother all worked in the saltworks, shoveling salt from dawn 'til dusk, taking only a short break for lunch. Though Booker felt physical hunger, he had an even stronger desire for reading because "I think there is a secret in those books."[7] Every day, he saw men gathered around the campfire, telling stories to one another, but the man who captured his attention most was a black man who read the newspaper to other salt miners after work one day. At this point, Booker narrates: "I see a man reading a newspaper aloud and all doubt falls away. I have found hope, and it is as brown as me." On this page, as on several throughout this visually dark book, the only sources of light come from the man standing up on the wagon reading and from Booker, who looks back longingly at the man as his father and brother tug him home. When Booker gets home, his mother gives him a book that he uses to try to teach himself to read, with little success.

Interestingly, several times throughout the text, Booker compares learning to read to singing music. When his mother gives him the book, she says that she "thinks it is a sing-y kind of thing. A song on paper." And later, Booker says, "I draw the marks on the dirt floor and try to figure out what sounds they make, what story their picture tells . . . I can't catch the tune of what I see. I get a salt-shoveling pain and feel my dreams are slipping away." Booker cannot read yet, but his Afrocentric Ideological Apparatus has certainly taught him the value of story and song and the ideas that each of these traditional mediums of African-American communication can convey. These analogies therefore make reading and learning letters seem more accessible to Booker than a completely foreign skill might be.

After failing to teach himself to read, Booker desperately searches for and finds the man he has seen reading the newspaper, who explains the alphabet to him. Once he learns to recite the alphabet and spell his name, Booker likens his acquisition of literacy to religious salvation: "I jump up and down and sing it [the alphabet]. I shout and laugh like when I was baptized in the creek. I have jumped into another world and I am saved" (fig. 6.3).

This connection comes as no surprise, since the music and the oral telling of stories was just as important in sacred as in secular slave traditions. Linking literacy and religious faith here helped Booker T. Washington to overcome the poverty and ignorance in which the racist Repressive State Apparatus attempted to keep him and his people.

Unlike Washington, Richard Wright experienced his struggle for literacy primarily as a young adult rather than as a child in William Miller's *Richard Wright and the Library Card*. Unable to attend school as a child because his parents moved so often, and denied access to libraries because of his race, Richard went to work for a white optician at the age of seventeen. Cautiously finding one sympathetic white man in the office who was willing to loan him his library card, Richard checked out and read books by Dickens, Tolstoy, Stephen Crane, and many others. He soon realized that his

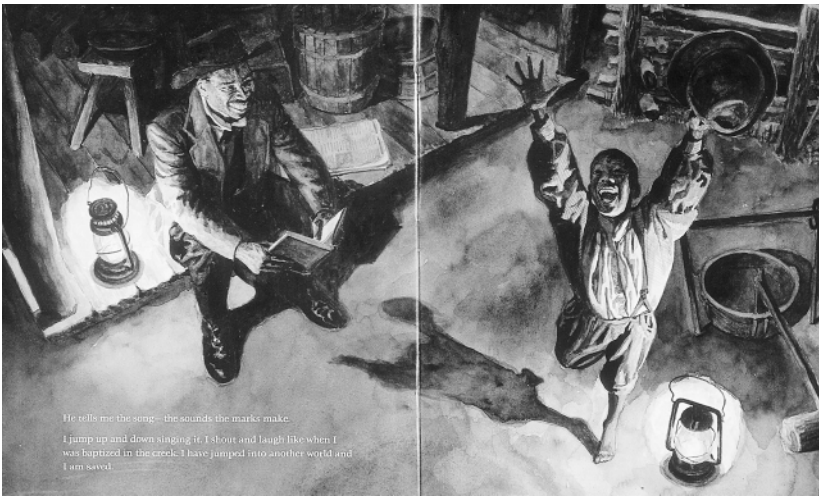

Fig. 6.3. From *More Than Anything Else* by Marie Bradby, illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet. Published by Orchard Books, and imprint of Scholastic Inc. Text copyrighted ©1995 by Marie Brady, illustrations copyrighted © 1995 by Chris Soentpiet. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Inc.

readings and his newfound cultural literacy colored everything he encountered. "He wondered if he would act differently, if others would see how the books had changed him. Richard knew he would never be the same again."[8] When he finally earned enough money to seek a new life in Chicago, he thought of the books he had read as he rode the train North: "The words came back to him, the stories more real than the train itself. Every page was a ticket to freedom, to the place where he would always be free." Since Wright was born in 1908, the narrator does not mean the institution of slavery from which his ancestors were freed but rather the Repressive State Apparatus that denied him access to an education and freedom of artistic expression.

The author's note at the end of the book which points out that Richard Wright died in France in 1960 after writing best-selling novels such as *Native Son* and *Black Boy* emphasizes that even a successful literary career did not make a black man welcome in a country which had not yet granted civil rights to African Americans. Not even extraordinary success in the ideological realm could lift the restrictions of the repressive realm for black American artists. He chose to live in France and be treated like a human being rather than remain in the United States where white people could not see past the color of his skin to recognize his literary genius. And notably, he lived in France but wrote about his people back at home, which demonstrates the power of the Afrocentric Ideological Apparatus to which he was exposed

while growing up in the United States. While the stories of Booker T. Washington and Richard Wright illustrate the restrictions on literacy for blacks in the early twentieth century, two children's books on the life of Ruby Bridges bring to the forefront the violence and hatred involved in young blacks' gaining access to a good education in the mid-twentieth century.

Robert Coles's biography, *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, as well as Bridges's autobiographical picture book *Through My Eyes* detail both the impact that her role in integrating the Louisiana public schools had on Bridges personally and the impact that her actions had on American society as a whole when she took part in this revolutionary social change. A foreword by the mother of Ruby Bridges in Coles's book introduces the first story:

> Our Ruby taught us all a lot. She became someone who helped change our country. She was part of history, just like generals and presidents are part of history. They're leaders, and so was Ruby. She led us away from hate, and she led us nearer to knowing each other, the white folks and the black folks.[9]

What enabled the six-year-old daughter of a poverty-stricken janitor[10] in New Orleans to put herself at the center of the conflict over desegregation? In 1960, a judge ordered the desegregation of New Orleans schools and, as a result, three black girls were sent to one white elementary school, while Ruby was sent to another: William Frantz Elementary School. The President of the United States ordered federal marshals to escort Ruby into school daily for her first-grade year because a crowd of angry, heckling whites stood at the entrance to the school every morning, carrying signs and yelling messages of hate in an effort to keep Ruby out. Ruby learned to read and write in an empty building because the white parents in the community refused to send their children to an integrated school. But every day, Ruby would say a prayer for the hecklers on her way to and from school, asking God to forgive them: "Just like you did those folks a long time ago/When they said terrible things about You."

The afterword says that by Ruby's second year of school, white parents began sending their children to school. Despite the physical danger and emotional abuse that Ruby suffered every day of first grade—and likely throughout much of her later education—Ruby relied on the ideological training from her family and her faith to combat the repression that she faced daily in public. Further, the conflict between two different entities within the Repressive State Apparatus (the federal marshals and the racist whites who sought to keep Ruby out of the public schools) *enabled* Ruby to succeed in her goal of acquiring an education. Not only does her story illustrate the value of seeking an education regardless of the cost, but her actions also convey the message that when faced with a worthwhile cause, children

can and should play a central role in political resistance—for it is *their* future that is being shaped during times of great political upheaval.

Four years after the publication of Robert Coles's picture book, Ruby Bridges published her own story, *Through My Eyes*. Unlike Coles and Ford's illustrated version, this picture book features documentary photographs from Ruby's integration of William Franz Elementary. These sepia-and-white images powerfully convey the degree of hatred that the hecklers outside of the school had for Ruby and the lengths to which they went to make her fear them and to influence her family to change their decisions about Ruby's schooling. In this picture book, Ruby describes her refusal to eat her mother's home-cooked food at one point because she had begun to believe one of the hecklers who screamed at her every day, "I'm going to poison you!"[11] The Walt Disney film, *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, even shows this same heckler who yells these threats holding up a miniature casket with a black doll inside for Ruby to see as she walks into school each morning.[12] While William Miller's watercolor-illustrated picture book conveys Ruby's story well, Ruby's first-person account of her experiences, accompanied by the original photographs of this time in her life, brings young readers face-to-face with the realities of racism. Despite the cost, Ruby's family—especially her mother—felt that she deserved as good an education as the white children in New Orleans. Clearly, these picture books emphasize that the advantages of obtaining literacy for Booker T. Washington, Richard Wright, and Ruby Bridges far outweighed the cost—to the individual, the family, as well as the larger society.

The final set of biographical books that I will discuss in this chapter contrasts with the previous texts in that though they tell life stories of key African-American historical figures, rather than focusing on freedom, literacy, and the acquisition of freedom through literacy, these emphasize the role that home and family play in the early establishment of an Afrocentric Ideological Apparatus, and how the AIA influences the children's actions when social conflict arises.

Searching for Home

Unlike the picture book stories about Booker T. Washington, Richard Wright and Ruby Bridges, neither William Miller's *Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree* (1994) nor Floyd Cooper's *Coming Home: From the Life of Langston Hughes* (1994) centers around racial issues. They do, however, both illustrate how the early loss of key family members—and therefore a breakdown in an important aspect of the child's Ideological Apparatus—impacts the lens through which these children see life. Born in 1891 in Eatonville, Florida, Zora loved her mother but tolerated her father. While her mother taught her to climb trees, tell stories, and dream of travel, her fa-

ther constantly reminded her to wear dresses, memorize Bible verses, and obey. When her mother became terminally ill, Zora sat at her bedside and told her all of the stories that she had gathered from eavesdropping on the storytelling sessions of the boys and men around town. "Her mother smiled and asked Zora always to remember what she had learned. Stories, she said, kept their people alive. As long as they were told, Africa would live in their hearts. Zora promised to remember."[13]

But then her mother died. Gathering all of her memories of her mother, Zora ran outside and climbed as high as she could into the Chinaberry Tree that her mother loved:

> From the top of the tree Zora saw again the world her mother had given her: the lake filled with fish, the cities where she would tell people all she had learned beside the campfires. Zora promised her mother that she would never stop climbing, would always reach for the newborn sky, always jump at the morning sun!

Most influential in shaping her daughter's ideological training, Zora's mother gave her an appreciation for the black oral tradition, encouraged a belief in herself as a strong, black woman, and fostered in her an environmental awareness and appreciation which later surfaced in many of her writings. Her father, on the other hand, sought to repress and control Zora with his conservative notions of gender and religion. Hence, Zora's Ideological Apparatus in this picture book is not only Afrocentric, but it is also feminist, and it prepares her to fight inequality both in society and within her own household. Even if it will be many years before this book's readers will encounter the literature of Zora Neale Hurston, Miller's picture book identifies the origin of Hurston's anthropological interest in the oral tradition and her affinity for writing about conflicts and celebrations *within* the black community much more than blacks' interracial struggles during the early twentieth century. This picture book's focus on a young child who not only faces the death of her closest relative but who also learns to resist oppression even under her own roof highlights both the uncertainties of childhood and the self-determination which children can possess.

While *Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree* offers a distinctively female perspective on the early loss of family, Floyd Cooper's *Coming Home: From the Life of Langston Hughes* offers the male equivalent, and Langston Hughes's childhood was even more fraught with loss than was Hurston's. Born in 1902 in Lawrence, Kansas, James Langston Hughes always chased the trains that barreled through his home town because he imagined that one of them might one day bring back his mother, who had gone to seek her fortunes as an actress in New York, and his father, who had moved to Mexico because the political climate of Kansas would not allow him to practice law

in Kansas. Langston's Grandma raised him. Despite her poverty that resulted in their often making meals of dandelion greens from the yard and whatever donated food neighbors could spare, and despite Langston's having to wear women's shoes because they were all Grandma could obtain for him, Grandma was rich in stories.

> Almost always, his grandma told stories of heroes. Heroes who were black, just like Langston.
>
> His grandma's first husband, Lewis Sheridan Leary, had ridden with John Brown and was killed in the struggle to free slaves. She still wore his torn, bullet-ridden shawl.
>
> Even on warm summer evenings, she'd pull the shawl over Langston and tell him stories of her first husband, and of the two uncles who were Buffalo soldiers, named that by the Indians because of their curly hair, and called "the bravest of the brave." And about Langston's uncle, John Mercer Langston, the first black American to hold office. He was a lawyer and later elected to Congress.
>
> His grandma herself had worked on the Underground Railroad, helping slaves flee north to freedom, and she told him those stories.
>
> Langston would hear these stories over and over. Wrapped in the torn shawl—and wrapped in the family stories of pride and glory—he'd listen and dream.[14]

Though Grandma could not meet Langston's physical needs well, she did submerge him in an Afrocentric worldview through her stories. As Grandma grew older, however, she withdrew into herself and told fewer and fewer stories. To give him more of a home and a childhood, friends of the family took him in while his grandma was still alive, and for the first time in his life, he had enough to eat. With his basic needs of food, shelter, and family met, Langston began to gain popularity with his peers at school for his storytelling abilities, and he also began to write poetry at this time. In other words, once he could be sure of his own survival, he began to share with other children the AIA to which Grandma had exposed him. As in Zora's story, the disruption in Langston's ideological training caused by childhood losses, the subsequent establishment of a nontraditional concept of home, and the invaluable gift of early exposure to the black oral tradition shaped the writer that he would become as an adult. But unlike Zora's situation, the Repressive State Apparatus was responsible for Langston's untimely loss of his immediate family—at least his father—and also for the poverty that kept his grandma from being able to meet her own and Langston's basic needs as he grew up.

What, then, is the value of this level of realism when incorporated into a genre designed for such young readers as these books target? In her 1989 article, "Happily Ever After," children's author Stephanie Tolan argues for the value of realistic endings in children's fiction. Having grown up in the

1940s, Tolan says that parents of that generation stayed busy protecting children from harsh realities about human behavior and life's daily difficulties. She continues:

> We believed. And year by year we got older, until finally we became the adults. In the process, we walked out of childhood fantasy into the brick wall of grownup reality. It took some of us longer than others (some are still watching and waiting) to learn the truth. There is not a "happily ever after." Even two paychecks aren't always enough to buy the castle. Handsome princes run off with other women. Knights don't show up in singles bars. And nobody can find the fairy godmothers.
>
> Many members of my generation feel cheated, lied to, and betrayed. Why didn't they tell us it would be like this?" a woman asked at her twenty-fifth high school reunion. "All that talk about preparing us—why didn't they say that life would *stay* so hard?"[15]

Tolan's assertion that children's literature ought to reflect reality, even if that reality involves hatred, cruelty, disappointment, and people's inhumanity toward others materializes in this new genre of African-American children's historical fiction. Many of my Children's Literature students—most of whom are preservice elementary school teachers—find *Ebony Sea* shocking because of the realism that is portrayed in a *picture book.* But exposing young readers to the many faces of racism in twentieth-century America shows them how the Repressive State Apparatus can influence Ideological State Apparatuses and vice versa to perpetuate systematic oppression. This exposure also gives them a greater appreciation for the way that oppressed people create alternative ideological apparatuses to help them survive the dominant ideological systems that restrict their freedoms.

The narrator of *Li'l Sis and Uncle Willie* asks Aunt Della why her Uncle Willie moved to Europe instead of staying with the family in South Carolina. Della responds, "Uncle Willie first went to Europe to study art, but he liked living there because people were friendlier to black people." Later, when Li'l Sis stops receiving letters from Uncle Willie, she asks Mom Alice why he no longer writes. Mom Alice tells Li'l Sis that after the death of Willie's wife, he suffered a mental breakdown and had to be committed to a mental hospital, where he lived out the rest of his days. Any answers that adults in Li'l Sis's life give her short of these honest ones would perpetuate the "happily ever after" syndrome to which Tolan so strongly objects. People die, suffer discrimination, feel depressed, and tire of fighting a system that excludes them.

In her 1990 *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* article " 'I See Me in the Book': Visual Literacy and African-American Children's Literature," Dianne Johnson argues both that illustrations make a crucial contribution to the minority reader's experience of a story and that "all young

people, from all cultural backgrounds, need to see representations of themselves both visually and verbally" in the books they read.[16] When one considers these ideas in light of Gwen Everett's inclusion of William H. Johnson's painting of Nat Turner's hanging, and an urban scene of rioting and looting after a white policeman shoots and kills a black soldier in *Li'l Sis and Uncle Willie*; John Ward's account of a white policemen arresting a black child for sitting in the front of a bus in *The Bus Ride*; and Doreen Rappaport and Bryan Collier's recounting of Martin Luther King's assassination, it becomes clear that in this new genre, which has revisionist history and the establishment of new definitions of historical literacy as its goals, authors and illustrators depict for young readers both the best and the worst of human behavior. Doing so more thoroughly prepares children to recognize injustice when it comes creeping stealthily up to their own back doors and places its bloody paws on the windowsill.

Perhaps it has taken us the better part of a century to shake off the Victorian notion of the innocence of childhood in African-American children's literature, but in a very basic way, I believe that these books in part signal some new attitudes toward black children. While the wealth and comfort that permeate contemporary American society might encourage black children to be ignorant of, forgetful of, or complacent about how America has treated their ancestors, these books offer no excuses for racism and give the reader no protection from the knowledge that people can be cruel, violent, and merciless even toward children.

After teaching *Martin's Big Words* to my college Children's Literature classes one semester, I decided to read this book to the two five-year-old girls with whom I have been reading at a local Head Start program for several years. Unsure of whether or not they knew who Martin Luther King was, and having read more fiction than nonfiction with them, I didn't know how they would react to the book. The first time we read it, they both seemed a little distracted by the busy-ness of the collage illustrations, but then when I read, "He was shot. He died," the girls stopped me. Taneal looked up at me, frowning, and asked, "Well, who shot him? I want to see who shot him." Since we often look at the back flaps of the book jackets so that they can get to know the faces of the author and illustrator, Taneal expected King's murderer's picture to be someplace in the book. I told her that he wasn't in this book. Shawndrè then asked, "Why did they kill him?" I explained that lots of people didn't like what Martin Luther King said, and that's why they put him in jail, bombed his house, and eventually killed him. These two children were mighty puzzled by the fact that somebody could kill a man just because he didn't like what he said. And when we got to the page on which King looks out at the reader from a stained glass window, they were again puzzled: "Well, if he's dead, how come he's on this page? Isn't he up with God?" "What are those lines that go across his face like

that? And how come he looks so sad?" Of the endpapers, they asked, "How come these church windows are in the front and back of the book?"

To my surprise, *Martin's Big Words* has become one of their favorite books—one that they're requesting to read every time I visit. And each time we read it together, they ask some of the same questions about why he was shot, since I guess that's the hardest thing for any of us to understand, but they also notice an increasing number of details that show they're absorbing more of the story's meaning than they did on previous readings. Sharing this picture book with them has taught me many lessons, the first of which is that I should never assume what children can or can't handle. Even if they still can't comprehend the kind of hatred that would cause one human being to kill another, they understand that Martin Luther King was a good man and that his death was unfair. I have also been impressed that this wonderfully illustrated picture book has introduced them to an important historical figure whose image they did not recognize before but now do and whose story they now remember. And finally, because this story tells about King's life when he was a child, Taneal and Shawndrè will realize from repeated exposure to this book that what they do, what they learn, and what they read even now can help them to become as great as Martin Luther King was. From this book, they are also learning the hard lesson that fame and goodness don't necessarily protect great people from danger. I can only hope that the literature to which I am exposing them is helping to build for them some Afrocentric Ideological Apparatuses that will give them the same strength that enabled Ruby Bridges to survive and thrive under incredible hardship.

7

"Just Build Me a Cabin in the Corner of Glory Land"

Depictions of Heaven in African-American Children's Picture Books

In the previous chapter of *Brown Gold*, I offered an analysis of how recent black children's picture books interpret black history for children. This chapter looks at another black cultural institution—religious beliefs concerning heaven—that also began as primarily an oral phenomenon. This chapter will explore some of the ideas that surface in the intersection between African-American Christian beliefs and children's picture books.

One old Negro Spiritual from the a capella church hymn book that I grew up with goes as follows:

> Won't you build me a little cabin in the corner of Glory Land?
> In the shade of the Tree of Life, it may ever stand.
> I can just hear the angels sing and shake Jesus's hand,
> Just build me cabin in the corner of Glory Land.

This was a favorite in the Baptist Church where I grew up, but my mom's contention was always, "Why should I want just a cabin, when other people are getting mansions in heaven?" We enjoyed the tune but never liked the song much because I, like my mom, figured that black people shouldn't settle for the kind of marginal existence that this song actively seeks.

This desire for a little cabin in the corner of heaven is only one of the many ways that black religious texts depict heaven. From "I've got shoes, you've got shoes, all God's children's got shoes;/When I get to heaven, gonna put on my shoes and walk all over God's heaven" to "If you get there before I do,/Tell all my friends I'm coming too," black constructions of heaven in different forms of black art range from reverent and respectful to humorous and unconventional.

These distinctly African-American renditions of heaven differ substantially from some mainstream Christian songs that paint heaven as a place

where streets are paved with gold, where white robes are free for the taking, and where mansions sit on every corner. This contrast comes as no surprise when one considers that the Negro Spirituals and gospel songs that created these metaphors emerged out of slavery. Because religion has been an integral part of the African-American experience from the time of slavery to the present, and also because religion for black Americans has long been a contested "space" because of the conflict between traditional African religious practices of the first African Americans and the Christian faith imposed upon them by their oppressors, examining the ways that Christianity in general and portrayals of heaven in particular manifest themselves in African-American literature uncovers some interesting contradictions. And when this contested religious space inhabits children's literature, a genre traditionally married to didacticism, some strange (and wonderful) stories result.

Arna Bontemps and Daniel Minter's picture book, *Bubber Goes to Heaven*, and Julius Lester and Joe Cepeda's *What a Truly Cool World* open windows into heaven for young readers—heaven with what Henry Louis Gates calls a "signifying black difference."[1] These black versions of heaven deconstruct and transform traditional Judeo-Christian hierarchies, infuse black culture and history into that which is sacred, employ black modes of discourse, and take a great deal of creative license with what the Bible presents as divinely inspired, indisputable truth. In the same way that the Bible says nothing about living in a "cabin in the corner of Glory Land" or walking around heaven in shoes, the authors of these books expound upon religious traditions in ways that privilege distinctly African-American ways of looking at the world.

Although Arna Bontemps wrote *Bubber Goes to Heaven* in the 1930s, he never published it. His wife published the text in 1998, twenty-five years after Bontemps's death. In his children's literature, as in his works for adults, Bontemps sought to counter America's negativity toward African Americans. He even fought such negativity from his own father, Paul Bontemps, a skilled brick mason. Disgusted with Southern Jim Crow laws in the early 1900s, Paul moved his family from Louisiana to Los Angeles when Arna was only three.[2] When Paul sent Arna off to a predominantly white Seventh-Day Adventist school, he sent his son away with the following warning: "Now don't go up there acting colored." Resenting his father's attitude, Arna commented later:

> Had I not gone home summers and hobnobbed with Negroes, I would have finished college without knowing that any Negro other than Paul Laurence Dunbar ever wrote a poem. I would have come out imagining that the story of the Negro could be told in two short paragraphs: a statement about jungle people in Africa and an equally brief account of the slavery issue in American History. (*SATA* "Bontemps" 50)

Throughout his literary career, he sought to learn about the southern "roots" from which his father had so deliberately plucked him. Contemporary illustrator Daniel Minter says that although the text of *Bubber Goes to Heaven* attracted him initially,

> I became increasingly fascinated with Bontemps's characters, who are all black stereotypes, stylized characters. Bontemps uses black language, and he does so for a reason. For a long time, black people have suffered under negative stereotypes. Blackness was—and still is—seen as threatening and despicable. By taking those black stereotypes and using them to tell a positive story about a loving, hard-working, deeply religious black community, Bontemps makes an effort to reclaim them.[3]

Remaining true to Bontemps's story while striving to appeal to contemporary child readers, Minter accentuates the "blackness" of Bontemps's characters in his illustrations:

> Carved from linoleum blocks, the faces feature large slanted eyes, wide noses, and big lips and are printed in black ink. If someone told you your black skin color and facial features made you a despicable person, you wouldn't want to see or use them in literature or art. You would want to erase them. I try to do the opposite. What I do try to do is take those very features that we have been told are shameful and embrace them. I want to celebrate the features of black people. Like Bontemps, I want to take possession of those negative stereotypes by displaying them to the fullest in my art. (Bontemps *Bubber* 11)

This goal of reclamation is at the heart of both the text and the illustrations of *Bubber Goes to Heaven.*

First, the book's seven-year-old protagonist's name is Bubber. This is an alternate name for "brother" which some African Americans nickname relatives as a term of endearment; my dad's sisters and brothers, for instance, call him Bubba. But it is also a term that whites have used derogatorily against blacks in the same way that they used "boy" or "Sambo." In this case, Bontemps's choice emphasizes the intimacy that Bubber shares with the relatives who take part in his upbringing. One of the skills that Bubber learns from his Uncle Demus, Zeke, Tom, and King is hunting—a "sport" that, though it offers entertainment, also provides food that Bubber's family needs. On the coon hunt that opens the story, the hound dogs tree the coon, and while Bubber is performing his assigned task, as the smallest hunter, of knocking the coon out of the tallest tree in the woods—a tree called Nebuchadnezzar—he loses his balance and falls from a high branch. When Bubber wakes up, he is in heaven. Two angels, whose black English immediately labels them racially, come and get him and take him to Old Peter,



Fig. 7.1. From *Bubber Goes to Heaven* by Arna Bontemps and Daniel Minter (Illus.), copyright © 1998 by Alberta Bontemps. Illustrated by Daniel Minter. Used by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.

who advises him, "Well, be good, son. Don't run wid no bad boys" (26)—which means that there must be at least a few bad boys in heaven (fig. 7.1).

Bubber's single foster mother, named Sister Esther, is described as a "fat lady angel" and illustrated not unlike the stereotypical Aunt Jemima (28). While she takes care of Bubber's needs of food, clothing, and shelter, she also makes sure that he goes to Sunday School and church every day since in this heaven, church is a daily event. When Bubber discovers that they have church in heaven, he asks Old Peter, "Church? This ain't Sunday, is it?" Peter smiles at him and says, "Every day is Sunday up here, Bubber . . . Didn't you learn that in Sunday School?" (26). Probably not, since *this* heaven is not likely the one that he was learning about at home in Sunday School.

When Bubber gets sharp pains in his back, Sister Esther tells him that he is growing his wings. To help ease the pain, she rubs Vaseline—not a fancy ointment, mind you—on his wing buds and feeds him a breakfast of "pancakes, molasses, and golden scrambled eggs" (31). These details certainly echo Bontemps's extended family's Southern roots since he was closest to his grandmother as a child. While in heaven, Bubber sings in the band (which is called a band and not a choir), performs in a children's day program, experiences his first romantic attraction, and eats his fill because—to the delight of a boy who has rarely had enough to eat while alive—all food is free in heaven. No manna, milk, or honey here. These folks *eat*! And this is not surprising, since many African Americans—particularly Southern African Americans—nurture family and friends by feeding them well and socializing around meals. And since the ancestors of contemporary African Americans did not always have enough food to feed themselves or their families, it seems reasonable that food and eating should figure so prominently in this culture and, by extension, in this story.[4]

At the end of the story, Bubber wakes up at home with two broken legs and tells his Aunt Sarah that he's been to heaven. She asks him, "'Well did you see the Lawd? Bubber thought a moment. It *was* funny that he had not seen the Lord in heaven. 'No,' he said. 'I didn't see the Lawd, but I seen the square and the courthouse.'" (And he has because he got kicked out of the courthouse yard for sleeping on the grass.) Aunt Sarah assures him: "'Shucks . . . You ain't seen heaven if you ain't seen the Lawd. You ain't had no vision neither. You is just had a nightmare'" (72). The story's ending confirms that Bubber has clearly been dreaming, but perhaps Aunt Sarah's inability to believe that he has been to heaven relates to the fact that her paradigm of heaven—the same one that *didn't* teach Bubber that every day is Sunday in heaven—conflicts sharply with the black heaven to which Bubber has just been. In the heaven where Bubber meets Old Peter, Bubber's entrance into this place (during which he sees profound blackness rather than a blinding white light), this heaven's power structure as well as its daily operations are unconventional enough and break enough of the "rules" that anyone with traditional Biblical training and beliefs would, like Aunt Sarah, look askance at Bubber's story.

As much as I wish that Bontemps had not ended this story with a dream, he did. But I don't think that this ending negates what precedes Bubber's waking up. Bontemps's ultimate decision to turn Bubber's experience into a dream perhaps suggests the author's belief that a place where black people "run everything" and have the freedom to live their lives without the interference of white people was ultimately still too much of a far-fetched utopian idea in the 1930s to offer as a reality—especially a young black boy's reality. Despite this conflict, however, the ideas that Arna Bontemps's text and Daniel Minter's illustrations bring to light in *Bubber Goes to Heaven* about black American life and an artist's ability to transport that life

into other realms set a creative precedent that has given contemporary African-American authors the freedom to suggest in their art that when black people go to heaven, they take their blackness with them.

In terms of its integration of black life into heavenly realms, Bontemps's *Bubber Goes to Heaven* is the artistic predecessor of Julius Lester's 1999 *What a Truly Cool World*, a retelling of Zora Neale Hurston's recorded story about God's creation of butterflies in *Mules and Men*. In Lester's story, God does not exist as the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent being of the Bible. He is a short, bald-headed, black man who seems to have an unjustifiably over inflated sense of self. Fortunately, as he is admiring his own handiwork of creating the world and telling himself what a wonderful job he has done, Shaniqua, the angel "in charge of everybody's business," steps in and says: "I don't want to hurt your feelings or nothing like that, but what you made looks kind of boring."[5] Not too proud to heed Shaniqua's constructive criticism, he continues to work on making the earth more attractive (fig. 7.2).

In the same way that *Bubber Goes to Heaven* reflects significant dynamics of the black community, Lester plays with the details of Hurston's original story to reflect more accurately contemporary black American life. Shaniqua, for example, is one of Lester's additions. This attractive single woman is at the heart of the decision-making process in this version of heaven. Given the high percentage of black single-parent and matriarchal households in contemporary America, this choice is appropriate. Shaniqua even plays a more important role than God's wife, whose name is Irene God. (And I suspect that if Bubber had come home saying that he *had* seen God *and* his wife, Irene God, Aunt Sarah would have committed him.) Shaniqua helps God get the names of his creations right, and she even takes over the job of creating after God has worn himself out with the task: she sings into existence the colors yellow, blue, white, red, and orange. The roles of Shaniqua and Bruce are significant because in Hurston's recorded story, God acts of his own volition, making changes because of his own boredom. But God's helpers in Lester's story point out God's mistakes and suggest ways to correct them.

God in both Hurston's original story and Lester's revision of it is fallible. Hurston describes the process of God's naming his new insects in *Mules and Men*:

> When folks seen all them li'l scraps fallin' from God's scissors and flutterin' they called 'em flutter-bys. But you know how it is wid de brother in black. He got a big mouf and a stambling tongue. So he got it all mixed up and said, "butter-fly" and folks been callin 'em dat ever since.[6]

In Lester's story, a human misnames the new insects "flutterbys," and Shaniqua changes it to "butterflies." In Hurston's story, though, God's



Fig. 7.2. From *What a Truly Cool World* by Julius Lester, illustrated by Joe Cepeda. Illustrations copyright © 1999 by Joe Cepeda. Reprinted by permission of Scholastic Inc.

changing "flutter-bys" to "butterflies" is itself a mistake. This lack of perfection in the deity makes him approachable and not unlike the humans that he has created.

While the depiction of heaven in these two picture books sheds light on some important cultural values that African Americans hold, one other text, Carolivia Herron and Joe Cepeda's 1997 *Nappy Hair*, offers a more limited—but just as telling—view into a black version of heaven than either of the other two. One of the most interesting things about Carolivia Herron and Joe Cepeda's heaven is that Brenda, the protagonist, does not get to heaven by dying. She passes through heaven before she is born. And it's not her soul but her hair that brings Brenda through heaven. Brenda, according to Uncle

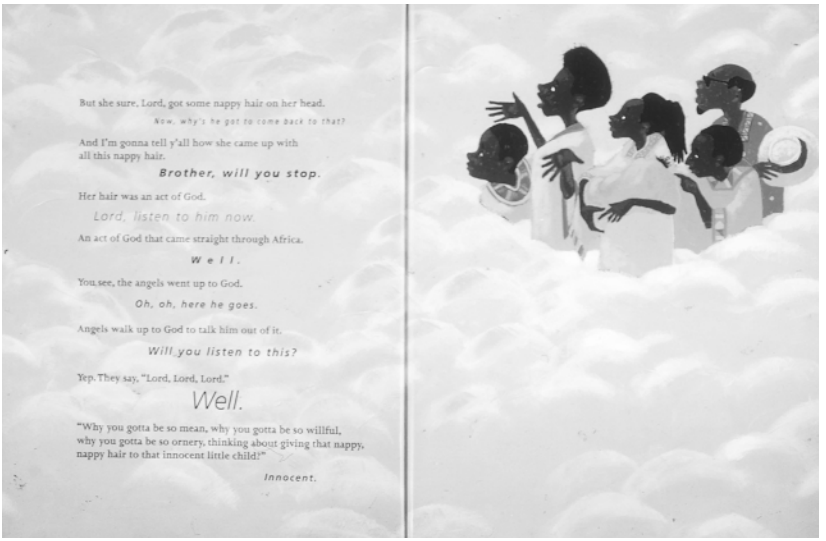

Fig. 7.3. From *Nappy Hair* by Carolivia Herron, illustrated by Joe Cepeda. Text copyright © 1997 by Carolivia Herron. Illustrations copyright © 1997 by Joe Cepeda. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of Random House Children's Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

Mordecai who is telling her story, has "the nappiest hair in the world," hair that God has blessed and declared beautiful.[7] Uncle Mordecai tells the relatives, who serve as the "amen corner," or the chorus in this book, that Brenda's hair came to America by way of heaven, where the angels tried to talk God out of giving her this nappy hair, and then through Africa with the slaves. When Uncle Mordecai describes the angels' conversation with God about Brenda's hair, Cepeda illustrates what appears to be a whole family of humans rather than angels (because they have no wings), all of whom look enough like Brenda to be her family (fig. 7.3).

In contrast with the white-robe-wearing angels that one might expect, these heavenly beings wear blue, red, yellow, purple, green, and pink clothes that look a lot like traditional African garb. And like the democratic system established in Lester's book, here, the angels talk back to God and ask him, "Why you gotta be so mean, why you gotta be so willful, why you gotta be so ornery, thinking about giving that nappy, nappy hair to that innocent little child?" In the end, God gets his way, but clearly, confronting God in this context does not bring down his wrath.

The fact that Brenda's *hair* warrants God's attention is also significant. Hair is made up of dead cells; why should God care about it? Hair is also historically seen as a source of vanity, a sin in traditional Judeo-Christian theology. But *this* God does care about Brenda's hair because he values the

same things that African Americans value, and most African Americans spend a great deal of time, money, and energy on the styling of their hair. Ever since Africans were brought to this country as slaves, their hair has been a major site of contention through which whites have labeled and controlled them. Thus, when this God calls one nap of Brenda's hair "the only perfect circle in nature," he establishes a new standard of beauty for which Brenda's nappy hair is the ideal.

While these three versions of heaven, all written by African-American authors, manage to translate black culture into heavenly habitats in interesting ways that honor the culture, Margot Zemach's 1982 picture book, *Jake and Honeybunch Go to Heaven*, attempts to do but does poorly what the previous three books do well. Because of Zemach's ethnic distance from the culture about which she writes, her insensitivity in constructing the details of the story, and perhaps also because of the timing of its publication, the book got negative reviews from a number of sources at the time of its publication. In this porquoi tale, Jake, a poor black man who lives in a town called Hard Times, and his mule, Honeybunch, get run over by a train when the ornery Honeybunch refuses to hurry off of the tracks at Jake's command. Jake walks to heaven, but God (a black man wearing a bowtie) kicks him out for flying around heaven too wildly and causing confusion (fig. 7.4).[8]

Sitting at the gates of heaven, Jake watches Honeybunch get into heaven with no trouble, much to Jake's surprise. God then invites Jake back into heaven to control his incorrigible mule that no one can catch. The pair soon earns the responsibility of hanging the moon and the stars at night and gathering them up again in the morning.

In Nancy Arnez's 1983 review of Jake and Honeybunch, she says:

> *Jake and Honeybunch Go to Heaven* is entirely demeaning to black people and is not recommended for purchase by any public school system, any public library or for any home. The book reinforces the white child's negative view of black people and destroys the black child's positive self-concept.[9]

Most of the reviews echo this sentiment. I suspect that had the publication date of *Bubber Goes to Heaven* preceded that of Zemach's book, the critics would have been less quick to condemn her for the ways that Zemach ignores conventions of traditional black lore in this story. For instance, Beryl Banfield and Geraldine L. Wilson object to a train killing Jake and Honeybunch because in traditional African-American texts, trains transport black passengers *to* heaven rather than running them down (as in the Negro Spiritual "This Train Is Bound for Glory").[10] These critics expressed outrage at things like the characters' colorful clothing in heaven as opposed to white robes and gold crowns, jazz music instead of choir music, and the fact that characters eat barbecue rather than milk and honey in heaven.

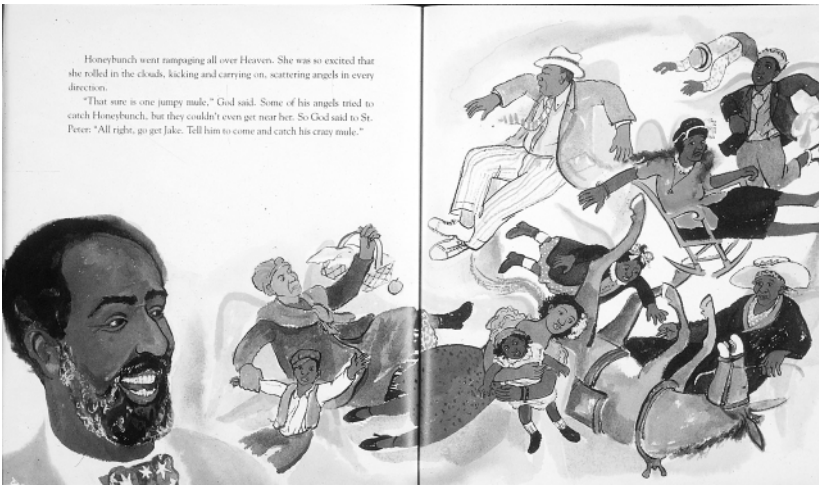

Fig. 7.4. Illustration from *Jake and Honeybunch Go to Heaven* by Margot Zemach. Copyright © 1982 by Margot Zemach. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC.

Although Minter's linoleum block print illustrations are rendered in black and white in *Bubber Goes to Heaven*, Cepeda's illustrations in *What a Truly Cool World*, like his illustrations in other picture books, are alive with a myriad of colors. Jan Spivey Gilchrist's picture book *Madelia* (1997), a story about a little girl's desire to paint the Bible in vibrant colors, also portrays a colorful version of heaven. While Madelia is in church listening to her father preach one Sunday after being disappointed that she couldn't stay home and paint with her new paints, she has a vision of heaven that helps her decide what heaven should look like when she renders it on paper.

> Madelia saw. She saw skies of vivid blues and greens. She saw streaks of gold shooting through a white opening in the sky. The clouds were luminous and a rainbow parted to make room for a glistening chariot. Men, women, and children, dressed in robes of ice blue, stood with hands raised.
>
> The chariot driver, in a purple gown, seemed to hover, open-winged, above his place at the front of the chariot. He lifted his arm to crack the long white feather whip. A multitude of horses in a multitude of colors charged forth, leaving a dust of pastel smoke.[11]

The horses, in fact, look not unlike those out of the *Wizard of Oz* movie: one is purple, one is blue, and a third hot pink, sporting a purple tail. The chariot driver wears a deep purple robe and drives a day glow green chariot. Accordingly, the final page of the picture book shows Madelia, back at home after church, painting her version of heaven primarily in blues and purples.

She wears white herself, but white seems to be the least dominant color in the heaven that she sees and draws.

Furthermore, food in black versions of heaven tends to vary widely from the Biblical menu. Bontemps had no objections to a non–milk-and-honey heavenly diet, allowing Bubber to delight in nutritional food such as pancakes, red snapper, and oranges but also "stick candy, chocolate bars, and soda pop," as well as apple pie and doughnuts during his stay in heaven (Bontemps *Bubber* 44). Minter also states plainly that he tries to create the same type of stereotyped characters visually that he believes Bontemps created in the text of *Bubber Goes to Heaven*. Would reviewer Arnez have criticized Bontemps and Minter for this artistic choice had this book preceded Zemach's, or would she have excused the white writer for using the same techniques? And although Banfield and Wilson object to the band music, Minter says in his artist's note at the beginning of the book that Bontemps's original title for the book was *Bubber Joins the Band*. Hence, I suspect that had Zemach not been a white writer, playing with the conventions of black religious beliefs while perhaps not "thinking black" in the 1980s, *Jake and Honeybunch* would have met with less controversy and more success than it did. Critics may have excused Zemach for certain details had she published *Jake and Honeybunch*at a different time in children's literary history, but they would likely have still been unforgiving of certain other details that the book includes.

Zemach's lack of variety in the facial features and skin tones of the characters shows the same disregard that Mattel has in their creation of black and Latino Barbies: they use the same mold for the black dolls as they do for the white dolls but darken the pigment. Recent picture books like Sandra and Myles Pinkney's *Shades of Black* (2000) highlight how inaccurate such practices are and how much variety can exist even in the skin tones of members of the same family. Zemach also disregards important historical facts that compromise the accuracy of the book. For example, during the historical setting of the book, Jim Crow laws did not permit blacks to ride trains, much less to conduct them, as she illustrates in the book. In sum, she failed to respect her subject and her audience enough to "do her homework" on black culture. Because she ignores so many African-American customs, symbols and beliefs, the book makes a mockery of black people rather than honoring them, and invites readers to laugh at rather than laugh with the characters in the story. Recognizing this dynamic, many libraries refused to purchase the book upon its publication.

These four texts stand in stark contrast to what one might label "straight" depictions of heaven—ones that retain the reverence and order established in the Bible and which treat theology seriously rather than ironically—such as Della Reese's 1999 picture book *God Inside of Me*[12] and Maria Shriver's 1999 *What's Heaven?*[13] In Shriver's book, when protagonist Kate's great-grandma dies, Kate's mother explains heaven in this way:

> Heaven isn't a place that you can see . . . It's somewhere you believe in. I imagine it's a beautiful place where you can sit on soft clouds and talk to other people who are there. At night you can sit next to the stars, which are the brightest of anywhere in the universe. Everyone there is happy to be in such a peaceful place where God will love them forever.

Though this insipid view of heaven might comfort a child reader who has lost a loved one, it certainly doesn't paint as lively a picture of the place as Bubber or Uncle Mordecai do. It's also true, though, that while Shriver's story has nothing to do with African-American culture, stories that do attempt to say something of value about black religious life do not always do so as successfully or as creatively as do those of Lester, Cepeda, and Herron. *God Inside of Me* is one such story.

Unabashedly connected with Della Reese's performance in the television series *Touched by an Angel,*[14] *God Inside of Me*, features a little girl, Kenisha—whose name clearly identifies her as African American, if only stereotypically so—emphasizes the importance of the music of the black church, and contains a few instances of characters speaking in dialect or wearing traditional African garb, but little else besides these details makes this an ethnically specific story. A mainstream Christian tale that happens to have African-American characters, *God Inside of Me* takes place in a neighborhood rather than in heaven, but one can easily decipher what values this story espouses in an effort to compare these ideas with those that emerge in the less traditional stories about heaven discussed earlier.

Protagonist Kenisha drags her little brother, Eli, to church on Sunday morning, and she drags him not because he doesn't want to go but because he stops along the way to appreciate the trees, the butterflies, the squirrels, and any other living thing that he sees. Exasperated, Kenisha finally gets the two of them to Sunday School, where she delights in hearing Mrs. Allswell's Bible stories, reciting Bible verses, and singing. But on the way home, she gets angry with Eli again for his slowness, and when they arrive back at home, she picks fights with her anthropomorphic stuffed animals, all of whose character flaws are immediately identifiable: Rabunny snore-whistle-snores all day, Clown can never make decisions, and Rackeroon, a richly clad raccoon, constantly asks questions. Dolly Dear, a Barbie-sized African doll and also a thinly disguised character foil for Mrs. Allswell, is the voice of reason who points out Kenisha's character flaw for her: "The thing that's got me stumped," she says to Kenisha, "is why you go to that church school every Sunday when you don't believe what they say." Kenisha, of course, declares that she *does* believe.

> Well, you're not acting like you do . . . For one thing, the last time you took me to church I heard Mrs. Allswell say that everything and everybody

> comes into the world with everything they need inside of them. Do you remember that, Kenisha?

Once Dolly Dear talks sense into her human, Kenisha asks Dolly if God wants Rabunny to be so lazy and Rackeroon to be so inquisitive and Clown so indecisive. Dolly responds: "I don't have the tail end of a clue what God wants other folks to be or not. But I do believe that if something needs fixing, the piece of God inside of them will take care of it." When Kenisha at last promises never to forget what Mrs. Allswell has been teaching her, Dolly Dear affirms her decision with the cliché, "That's right, honey! . . . Let go and let God."

Aside from the fact that a great gulf exists between the quality of the writing (and illustration) in this book and in the works of skilled artists like Bontemps, Minter, Lester, Cepeda, and even Zemach, *God inside of Me* upholds the belief that "God is in His heaven, and all is right with the world." Reese breaks no boundaries here and challenges no traditions. Rather, she constructs a God-centered parable within a modern setting and uses a flawed black child to make her point. While I'm certain that this book meets the needs of some readers and provides more collectibles for Della Reese's fans, it also "talks down" to readers in ways that books written by authors who have a deeper knowledge of and a greater respect for young readers do not. In terms of its ethnic appeal, *God Inside of Me* makes use of superficial African-American cultural markers but not much else. Thus, readers who want a Billy Graham–styled sermon might value Della Reese's picture book. But those in search of more interesting portraits of African-American religious life through stories that weave into their fabric ideas integral to what it means to have faith as an African American might do well to seek out authors who aren't afraid to break boundaries in this genre. And if I died today and had to choose between Reese's or Shriver's heaven and Bubber's, Old Peter would be showing me to my cabin in the corner of Glory Land.

8

"Ain't I Fine!"

Black Modes of Discourse in Contemporary African-American Children's Picture Books

The previous two chapters have examined two important bodies of knowledge from the African-American tradition—history and religion—that were once conveyed orally from one generation to the next and which have found a comfortable home within contemporary African-American children's picture books. The current chapter, rather than further exploring the content of different subgenres of these texts, delves into the *form* of a few of them. Namely, if there is something identifiably "African American" about these texts, then one ought to be able to trace some of those features through a number of African-American children's picture books. I submit that stylized language—and more specifically, black modes of discourse—surface as a common element in many of these stories authored by African-American writers who have lived experience with these modes of communication. Hence, while the previous two chapters have discussed the "what" of some contemporary translations of the black oral tradition into picture book form, this chapter explores the "how." How, in other words, do traditionally black modes of storytelling or "storying"[1] look when they get translated into picture book form for contemporary American child readers?

Some of the unique attributes of African-American children's picture books relate to what Henry Louis Gates calls the "double-voicedness" of black literary texts (Gates "Jungle" 3). Gates argues that because of their historically marginal status within (or outside of) the literary canon, black texts appeal to two traditions: the Western and the black. In one sense, this dual tradition also identifies the dual audience of this literature, be it for children or adults: mainstream American readers (the Western) and African-American readers (the black). Because of this dual-audience appeal, black writers like Harriet Jacobs, aka Linda Brent, had to include a white person's written "statement of authentication" at the beginning of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* so that her Northern white audience would read and take

seriously her work, even though literate blacks would also have read her book.[2] And during the Harlem Renaissance, anthropologist and author Zora Neale Hurston, thoroughly invested in putting into print the language and culture of Southern blacks whom most writers of the time would have considered unworthy of scholarly attention, also had to censor her writing to keep her white benefactress happy and to avoid offending her white readers, although she clearly desired to preserve an important part of black culture for black people.

This same dual-audience awareness exists in some black children's picture books, and I believe this to be true only of those books written by black children's authors.[3] One way that contemporary black children's authors speak directly to their black readers—perhaps sometimes "over the heads of" their white readers, and sometimes even over the heads of child readers—is through using black modes of discourse within children's narratives. Only certain of these modes, however, seem to lend themselves readily to picture book delivery. Geneva Smitherman's 1977 study, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*, explains the primary modes of black discourse: call-response, signification, narrative sequencing, and tonal semantics, the first three of which play an integral part in the narratives I will discuss in this chapter.[4]

Call-response, most familiar from but certainly not limited to the setting of the black church, is "spontaneous verbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all of the speaker's statements ("calls") are punctuated by expressions ("responses") from the listener" (Smitherman 104). A typical call-response that one might encounter in a responsive black church between the minister and the congregation of a Sunday morning might be:

> "And Jesus said."
> "Well."
> "Get thee behind me, Satan."
> "Yes, he did."
> "And Satan had to flee."
> "Thank you, Jesus."

These responses let the minister know that the congregation is still listening and "with" him or her, but when call-response is truly interactive, these responses become an integral part of the sermon that can actually alter the message. I have, for instance, heard exchanges such as this one take place in the middle of a sermon:

> "King David, the anointed one, was lusting after another man's wife."
> "Look out, now, preacher."
> "Yeah, y'all heard me right. I know some of y'all sittin' here thinkin', 'Uh oh. Preacher done stopped preachin' and done gone to meddlin' now.' But

> I'm here to tell y'all that David, the one who was blessed by God from birth, the one whom God had touched in his cradle as the chosen one, the one who had defeated the giant Goliath and made the rest of the Philistines flee, even as a little, smelly shepherd boy—this man of God, David, began to lust after another man's wife. If you think you're too holy for the devil to find a way, you'd better think on David."
> "Go on and speak the truth, brother."

In this exchange, not only is the congregation listening to the minister, but the minister is listening to his audience as well and responding accordingly. While the above dialogue takes place in a sacred context, Smitherman notes that each mode of black discourse is "manifested in Black American culture on a sacred-secular continuum," meaning that the same modes of expression that one hears from the church pews on Sunday morning—though quite different in content—can likewise be heard on the street corner in the evening (103). Jan Spivey Gilchrist's *Madelia* takes place in the black church on a Sunday morning, but Carolivia Herron and Joe Cepeda's controversial 1997 picture book *Nappy Hair* sets a call-response dialogue in the midst of a backyard family picnic.

As young Madelia sits in the audience and listens to her father's sermon, she begins to tap her shoes lightly on the floor to the rhythm of her father's preaching. After a while, the congregation begins to respond.

> He sang, "Fahh-ther . . . I am your child."
> Brother Rivers sang back, "Go 'head, Preacher!" He struck a chord on the piano. It echoed the words.
> Now Madelia's daddy was stepping with the beat. He spoke with the beat. The congregation echoed. Madelia tapped.

This passage gives a good sense of the musical quality of call-response of the black church and how everyone, including the musicians, tend to participate.

In Herron's tale, Uncle Mordecai tells the story of his niece Brenda who has the "nappiest hair in the world." As Mordecai tells the story, the relatives join in as would the members in the traditional black church: [5]

> Brenda, you sure do got some nappy hair on your head, don't you?
> *Well.*
> It's your hair, Brenda, take the cake.
> *Yep*.
> And come back and get the plate.
> *Don't cha know.*
> It ain't easy to come by that kind of hair.
> *No, it ain't.*
> You just can't blame Africa. It's willful.
> *That's what it is*.[6]

Accordingly, although Mordecai narrates this story outside at a fun family gathering, he uses the style of a black sermon to explain the existence of Brenda's amazing hair—and oddly enough, he does so in sacred terms:

> And I'm gonna tell y'all how she came up with all this nappy hair.
> *Brother, will you stop.*
> Her hair was an act of God.
> *Lord, Listen to him now.*
> An act of God that came straight through Africa.
> *Well.*
> You see, the angels went up to God.
> *Oh, oh, here he goes.*
> Angels walk up to God to talk him out of it.
> *Will you listen to this?*
> Yep. They say, "Lord, Lord, Lord."
> *Well.*
> "Why you gotta be so mean, why you gotta be so willful, why you gotta be so ornery, thinking about giving that nappy, nappy hair to that innocent little child?"
> *Innocent.*
> "Sweet little girl like that, and you napping up her hair like you ain't got good sense."
> *That's what they said.*

God tells the angels to "Get outta my way" because "He wanted hisself some nappy hair upon the face of the earth." Mordecai explains that Brenda's hair came to America with the slaves by way of Africa. Nothing that tried to stop Brenda's hair succeeded, and when she was born,

> When we look down in the cradle,
> *What did we see?*
> We all shout and jump back.
> *Did we jump!*
> Laugh and shout, because I tell you she had the kinkiest, the nappiest, the fuzziest, the most screwed up, squeezed up, knotted up, tangled up, twisted up, nappiest—I'm telling you, she had the nappiest hair you've ever seen in your life.
> *That's what it was.*

And regardless of what the family members or the angels think, God blesses Brenda's hair and declares: "One nap of her hair is the only perfect circle in nature." Notably, the angels who speak back to God as well as the family members who speak back to storyteller Mordecai do not succeed in changing the mind of God or Uncle Mordecai, but they do manage to change their "sermons."

As illustrated earlier in the church sermon about David, call-response works interactively *only* when the speaker is keenly aware of the nuances of his audience's responses. When, for example, God via Uncle Mordecai says, "There ain't going to be nothing they can come up with going to straighten this child's hair," one of the relatives asks, "What you going to do?" And God explains:

> "I'm talking about straightening combs."
> *Can it really be?*
> "I'm talking about relaxers and processes."
> *You said it.*
> "Ain't nothing going to straighten up the naps in this chile's head."
> *What you say?*
> "And it was done."
> *Ha!*

Just as God's explanations change because of what the angels say to him, Mordecai's message changes because of the relatives' interjections. The fact that this intimate connection between speaker and audience so integral to the black church experience appears in this picture book suggests that in this context, a higher value is placed on a God who is sensitive and intuitive than one who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Furthermore, by structuring the speech patterns in this book around call-response, and focusing its content on a little black girl's hair, Herron uses a secular narrative within a commonly sacred form to problematize the Judeo-Christian representation of God. In fact, it might be said that Herron's God "signifies on" the Biblical God, questioning the very definition of who and what this deity is. Specifically, this narrative of Brenda's hair highlights several important differences between this representation of God and the Judeo-Christian conception of God. First, God cares about the naps in a little black girl's hair and fights off all of the angels in defense of his having created her. Herron's strategic choice of *hair* here rather than some other physical feature is deliberate. Afro hair has been so maligned in American culture that the vast majority of African-American females above the age of eight or ten who have nappy hair process it by frying, dying, extending, weaving, or changing it in some way to make it look as though it is something other than nappy. God's affirmation in this picture book that Brenda's nappy hair is not only acceptable but beautiful shows a positivity toward African physical features of which the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob takes no special notice. Further, although God is not represented visually in this picture book, his use of call-response speech patterns from the black church ascribes an ethnic identity to God that probably takes some readers by surprise.

A second mode of black discourse, signification (also known as signifyin' or siggin') is "the verbal art of insult in which a speaker humorously puts down, talks about, needles—that is, signifies on—the listener. Sometimes signifying is done to make a point, sometimes it's just for fun . . . [but] nobody who's signified on is supposed to take it to heart" (Smitherman 119). In this "culturally approved method of talking about somebody," if the person has no "comeback," laughing along with the group is an acceptable way out (119). Here's an example (in BEV) from my elementary school playground:

> "Yo mama wear combat boots!"
>
> "Least my mama *wear* boots. I saw yo mama walkin barefooted in the Piggly Wiggly [grocery store] yesterday, buyin chitlins and fatback bacon."
>
> "Least we got fatback; yo sister say y'all didn't have nothin' but a can of pork 'n' beans for dinner last night."

The tricky thing about signifying among friends is that it can't come too close to the truth. If, indeed, the speaker's mother *had* been shopping barefooted, buying chitterlings and fatback at the Piggly Wiggly the day before, or the other speaker's family *couldn't* afford anything but "pork 'n' beans," the conversation would cease to be humorous, friendly banter, and the insulted speaker would start taking her jacket off to prepare for a fight.

Julius Lester and Jerry Pinkney's 1996 picture book *Sam and the Tigers: a New Telling of Little Black Sambo,* exemplifies this skill of signifying. When Sam (Mom) and Sam (Dad) take Sam (child) to Mr. Elephants Elegant Habiliments to buy his clothes, his mom picks out a "nice brown jacket and white shirt" for Sam, saying, "That will look very handsome on you." Sam shakes his head, declaring, "Uh-uh. That ain't me." His dad upbraids him, saying, "Don't you be talking back to your mama like that." But Sam, having meant no disrespect, replies, "I'm a big boy now. I want to pick my own clothes!" And he does. But his assertion about being a big boy is not just about clothes. He's also pushing his way into the linguistic adult community by declaring himself old enough to signify. If he is, indeed, old enough to do so, his parents can "read" his comment, "Uh-uh. That ain't me," as his first attempt to use black modes of discourse with them, rather than as a child disrespecting his parents. Signifying makes Sam and his parents equals, linguistically speaking, and this dynamic comes out in their conversations later in the story.

After Sam's shopping spree for school clothes, he prepares to leave for his first day of school, and his parents "Put on sunglasses to protect their eyes from all the colors Sam was wearing." They tell him: "You better be careful . . . You might put Mr. Sun out of business." Sam's parents have supported him in his independent decisions to buy a green tie and umbrella, a

yellow shirt, a red coat, purple knickers, silver shoes with blue bows, and dark and light green striped socks, but their comment about putting the sun out of business reveals their honest feelings about Sam's garish outfit. Instead of being insulted or feeling insecure when his parents signify on him, however, Sam, adept in the art of signifying, deals the comment right back to them. He replies, "If I knew how to sit in the sky without a chair, I would."

Since Sam and his parents have already been through an exchange like this at Mr. Elephant's shop, they do not see this comment as disrespectful this time. Rather, they accept it as a sign of Sam's ability to use this black mode of discourse effectively to defend himself verbally. In fact, Sam later saves his own life by talking five tigers into accepting articles of his clothing in exchange for sparing his life. If Sam had not understood how to bargain with his antagonists while stroking their egos, this story might have ended altogether differently. Regardless of how Sam, the signifying trickster, performs in school, he has already mastered the skill of survival in the "streets"—which, in this instance, is the wooded outskirts of Sam-sam-sa-mara.

In this story, the art of signifying is not limited to the humans. Also adept at this linguistic skill, the Tigers signify on each other. Each time Sam gives up an article of clothing to a Tiger, he strokes that Tiger's ego and responds to him respectfully because he feels threatened by his antagonists, who have all decided not to eat him—but only for the time being. When the Tigers begin to argue as equals about who among them is the finest, they do not bargain with one another in the way that Sam has so craftily bargained with each of them. While Sam hides behind a tree and watches, the following dialogue takes place between the Tigers:

> "I'm the finest," growled the Tiger in the red coat.
>
> "No way, Insect Breath! I'm the finest!" said the Tiger in the yellow shirt.
>
> "Uh-uh!" declared the Tiger with the silver shoes on his ears. "I'm finer than you two losers!"
>
> "No way!" proclaimed the Tiger carrying the green umbrella in his tail. "I'm the finest."
>
> "You make me laugh," snorted the Tiger wearing the purple pants. I am the finest Tiger that ever was, ever is, and ever will be."

Because the Tigers breach the protocol for signifying and *do* take the insults seriously, a fight ensues that quite thoroughly and literally destroys all five Tigers, turning them into tiger butter (fig. 8.1).

Having regained his position of power, Sam rescues the clothes that the Tigers have thrown down in their haste to fight, and, "holding the green umbrella up like a victory flag," he signifies on the destroyed Tigers, saying "Ain't I fine!" Sam then makes his way to school—late, undoubtedly.

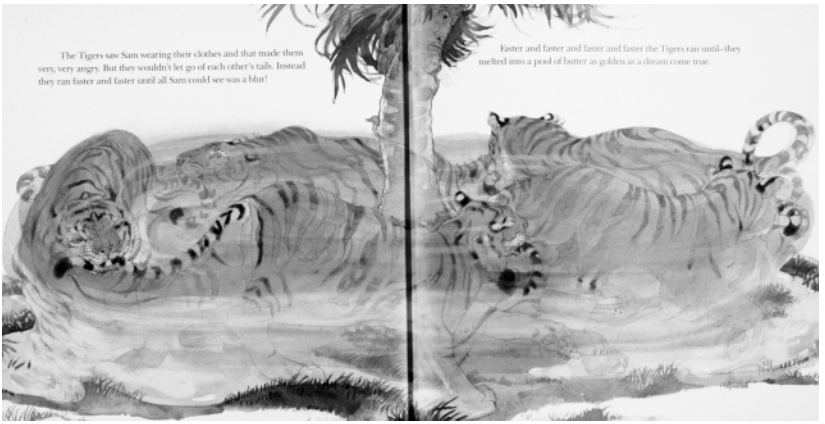

Fig. 8.1. From *Sam and the Tigers* by Julius Lester, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. Copyright © 1996 by Jerry Pinkney, pictures. Used by permission of Dial Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Penguin Putnam Books for Young Readers, a division of Penguin Putnam Inc. All rights reserved.

Modes of black discourse in picture books are not limited to individual speech acts such as call-response and signifying. Julius Lester and Joe Cepeda's *What a Truly Cool World*, which I discussed in the previous chapter, makes skillful use of a third mode of discourse related to the black rhetorical strategy of telling a story: narrative sequencing. "This meandering away from the 'point' takes the listener on episodic journeys and over tributary rhetorical routes, but like the flow of nature's rivers and streams, it all eventually leads back to the source" (Smitherman 148).

In his introduction to *What a Truly Cool World*, Lester tells the reader that this story is a re-visioning of a tale he included in his earlier anthology, *Black Folktales*, which was a re-visioning of a story he encountered in Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*. This tale's history, then, might be partly responsible for the circuitous route it takes. But I suspect that the method of its telling also ties back to the traditional African-American way of sequencing an oral narrative. In the process of telling this porquoi myth of how butterflies came to be, readers also learn about God's assistant, Bruce, God's wife, Irene God, the use of a heavenly computer, the invention of scissors, and the creation of the earth, flowers, colors, music, tears, and geometrical shapes—a storytelling route that seems less than direct.

Although one might argue that there's nothing particularly African American about the book besides its author, this roundabout narrative sequencing also occurs in one of Lester's most recent books, *Ackamarackus* (2001). In the second story of these illustrated "sumptuously silly, fantastically funny fables," in the midst of a porquoi myth that explains how flies

learned to fly (on airplanes, that is), the reader gets second-person asides like this one:

> I know you're probably thinking: What do flies need to go to school for? Well, because people are always coming up with new things like sugar-free drinks (which flies don't like), tofu ice cream (flies think it's awesome), and trout jerky (don't knock it if you haven't tried it, the flies report).[7]

And we also learn that "the flies take classes like 'Where to Find Holes in Houses,' 'Takeoffs and Landings,' and read the latest magazines and books, such as *Martha FlyStewart's Fly Living, The Gourmet Fly's Guide to Leftovers*, and *Bug Zapper: Killers of Children*" (9). It may be that the influence of postmodern ideas and the translation of those ideas into children's picture books such as Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith's *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992) and *Squids Will Be Squids: Fresh Morals, Beastly Fables* (1998), Scieszka and Smith's version of fractured fables that preceded *Ackamarackus* by only three years, might be just as responsible for the circuitous route that this narrative takes as the influence of traditional African-American narrative sequencing. But because of Lester's more widespread experimentation with this narrative style much more now, later in his career than in past decades, its presence warrants mentioning.

One final mode of black discourse that surfaces in these texts falls into a subcategory of narrative sequencing: the Toast. Smitherman defines the Toast as ritualized bragging on oneself, most often in rhymed couplets. Usually "kept alive in black culture by males," Toasts can be profane and sexually explicit—as they sometimes are in rap music—but tame, unrhymed variations of the Toast also appear in picture books (157–58).

In *Sam and the Tiger*, Sam toasts himself when he strolls through the jungle saying, "Ain't I fine!" Notably, in Helen Bannerman's original, *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, the third person *narrator*, not Sambo, says, "And wasn't Little Black Sambo grand!" Sam's present tense, self-reflexive brag, "Ain't I fine!" emphasizes his self-confidence as well as his ethnicity. "Fine," in black communities can mean "ok" as in "I'm doing fine," and it can also mean "good-looking," as in "That's a fine suit you're wearing." But in another context, it can also mean "sexy," as in, "Ooo girl, that brother was *fine!*" Hence, Sam's use of the word "fine" offers multiple interpretations—all of which are positive, and all of which imply specifics about what Sam thinks of himself. Moreover, while Bannerman's narrator comments on Sambo's appearance only before his encounter with the tigers, when Lester's Sam regains possession of and dons "his yellow shirt and then his purple pants, his red coat, and finally his silver-shiny shoes," he reiterates his Toast once again: "Ain't I fine!"

Each Tiger also toasts himself when he acquires one article of Sam's clothing and adopts Sam's self-promoting brag: "Ain't I fine!" Imitation is, after all, the best form of flattery, and the Tigers' repetition of Sam's signature phrase suggests that while they wield physical power over their potential prey, Sam has the upper hand linguistically. In his verbal affirmations, Sam reveals his confidence about who he is and his pride in his retrieved suit of clothing—an outfit of which his parents disapprove. Given that his choices run counter to those of his parents, Sam's self-assurance and his resultant Toasts attest even more to his strength of character and his belief in himself. The way Lester punctuates the Toasts further emphasizes Sam's confidence. The narrator of Bannerman's original text *asks*, "And then wasn't Little Black Sambo grand?" Although Sam's Toast could also be read as a question, which would indicate that he is seeking the approval of others, Lester made "Ain't I fine!" an exclamatory rather than an interrogative sentence. Sam *knows* he's fine; he just wants to let everyone within earshot know it too.

On a final note, Lester's Sam ultimately achieves greater power over the Tigers than does Bannerman's Sambo. In *Little Black Sambo*, Black Jumbo, Sambo's father, passes the tiger butter on his way home from work, scoops it up into the big brass pot that he just happens to be carrying, takes it home, and delivers it to Black Mumbo, who exclaims, "Now . . . we'll all have pancakes for supper!" (52). In Lester's story, Sam himself gathers up the butter on his way home from school, takes it home and asks his mother to make pancakes with it. Realizing that his family will have too many pancakes to eat for supper, Sam gets Sam and Sam to invite "Miss Cat, Mr. Elephant, Brer Rabbit, Mrs. Monkey, Mr. Giraffe, Brer Fox, and Brer Wolf" to join them for supper. In the midst of the dinner conversation, someone mentions the disappearance of the five Tigers. Trickster that he is, Sam doesn't tell the neighbors that they are enjoying his five antagonists for supper. Sam seals his victory by eating more Tiger pancakes than anybody: a hundred and sixty-nine. Hence, Sam, possessing greater agency than both his predecessor, Sambo, and his mother and father in this story, uses his verbal prowess not only to defeat the Tigers but also to erase them from existence by insuring that he and the neighbors devour them all in one tasty meal.

In *What a Truly Cool World*, the Toast serves a different purpose than it does in *Sam and the Tigers* in part because adults who already possess power do the toasting rather than a child who seeks to gain power. When God walks into the throne room, "the Hallelujah Angelic Choir of sixtillion voices started chanting like it had done every morning for the past ninetyleven tillion years: 'God! God! He's our Man! If he can't do it, nobody can!' God thinks to himself 'That's true . . . I *am* the man!'" Shaniqua also participates when God acknowledges that he needs to take her advice and work on making the world more beautiful, but she speaks her Toast

aloud, telling God: "I know I'm right. I'm always right." At the end of the story, Shaniqua and God toast each other: he tells her, "I couldn't have made the world without you" and she answers, "What a truly cool world, God! Truly!"

Clearly, call-response, signifying, narrative sequencing, and Toasts are becoming an acceptable part of African-American children's literature. Earlier in the twentieth century, these linguistic forms were not as likely to appear in picture books as they are now. Although some of the most prolific authors of books about the black experience, authors like Ezra Jack Keats and Verna Aardema, were writing positive stories about black characters even in the 1960s, these writers were white and were therefore not writing about black children from within the black experience. This practice of white authors writing African-American children's picture books is still common: as mentioned in chapter 6, Anglo author William Miller, for instance, has published picture books about Rosa Parks, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, and Frederick Douglass; and another, Doreen Rappaport, authored the 2002 Caldecott Honor Award–winning *Martin's Big Words*. Even so, a much greater number of African-American authors and artists are writing about their own cultural experiences now than in past decades. And what is the effect of their incorporating black modes of discourse into their texts?

In his 1984 essay, "Criticism in the Jungle," Gates asserts that "signifying" and "the dozens" have been "basic to black survival in oppressive Western cultures. Misreading signs could be, and indeed often was, fatal" (6). Training in the "reading" and deciphering of these complex codes of communication has always been an important part of the acculturation of African-American children. In the past, this acculturation process has been primarily limited to verbal, face-to-face communication between adults and children or even among children. Recently, however, as distinctively African-American modes of discourse that were once only verbal have begun to surface in children's literature written both for African-American and non-African-American children, a much wider audience is gaining exposure to these modes of communication. The appearance of these texts within mainstream, widely accessible children's books raises some important questions about their literary function. Namely, what purpose is being served by putting this verbal tradition into picture book form, and what message might it be sending to young readers growing up outside of African-American culture?

I would argue that for African-American children, these picture books can function in the same way that verbal training in black modes of discourse always has: to teach them linguistic skills that will help them to survive and to negotiate relationships with other people. On the other hand, this inclusion exposes non-African-American children to an important African-American

linguistic tradition. In the process of making public these modes of discourse that have previously been limited primarily to verbal communication between black people, these picture book authors dignify a practice that has traditionally been stigmatized as a sign of ignorance and its speaker labeled uneducated. Just as Carolivia Herron works toward creating a more positive image for Afro hair in the picture book *Nappy Hair* by making nappiness a part of the public discourse, using black modes of discourse in picture books gives nonblack readers a glimpse into a community of which they might know very little. If these discussions can take place in racially "mixed company," then cross-cultural dialogue can begin, which will ideally lead to thinner boundaries between African-American and other cultures.

In addition, the authors of these picture books base much of the text's humor on black modes of discourse. Doing so invites readers to laugh *with* the speakers, not *at* them in the way that turn-of-the-century picture books such as E. W. Kemble's *Coontown's 400* and the multiple versions of *Ten Little Niggers* once did. In fact, these picture books invite readers in—invite them to engage in a culture and a community through literature that they may have been exposed to only through TV shows like *Martin* and *Moeisha* that tend to stereotype black culture, or through the music of artists like Destiny's Child and Lauryn Hill. And because these picture books suggest nontraditional ways of looking at the world, they can also encourage young readers to question received knowledge about nondominant cultures. A final look at Lester's *What a Truly Cool World* illustrates this point.

In Lester's picture book, just after God finishes creating the world, Shaniqua, the angel in charge of everybody's business, enters. When God brags about his world and looks to Shaniqua to stroke his ego, she tells him, "Don't look like much to me. I don't want to hurt your feelings or nothing like that, but what you made looks kind of boring." Reluctantly, God admits that she is right. While this contemporary porquoi myth obviously relates to the Biblical story of creation, the heavenly chain of command in *What a Truly Cool World*, which places God at the top, the angels in second place and the animals, insects, and humans below the immortals, echoes the biblical relationship between God and his creations. But this is where similarities to the Western tradition end and what Gates terms "the signifying black difference" begins. The deity whom Lester and Cepeda create, also called" Mighty Maker," "Terrific Titan" and "Fearless Fixer," is quite a different Being than the one from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Not omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent, this God, a bald-headed, short black man with a wife named "Irene God," makes mistakes, sends his helper, Bruce, to consult the computer to look up what he doesn't know, and often finds himself upstaged by his female archangel who is clearly "in charge of everybody's business." And near the end of the book when God gets around to naming things, Bruce tells God he's wrong to call the colorful, flying insects that he

has created "flutterbys"; Bruce and Shaniqua both think that the name "butterflies" sounds better. This world, in which God toasts himself and his helpers, and makes skillful use of black modes of discourse, is far from a dictatorship. It is a democracy. When authors create imaginary worlds like this that turn the Great Chain of Being upside down in this way, altogether new worlds and different ways of being become possible.

9

"Why Are We Reading This Stuff?"

A Pedagogy of Teaching African-American Children's Picture Books

Given the diversity and complexity of contemporary African-American children's picture books, this genre, I am convinced, has something for everyone. The first through third chapters of *Brown Gold* deal with the historical evolution of this genre and the impact of American social conflicts on it. The fourth and fifth chapters discuss some of the professional aspects of the genre, including the importance of its most prominent awards and the role of second generation authors and artists who are creating these books. The previous three chapters offer some analytical approaches to these picture books, and because there is a dearth of published material on the pedagogical possibilities for these books within college English classes, the current chapter addresses this particular "gap."

The longer I teach and the more diverse children's picture books become, the more firmly I am convinced that this genre of literature can have a place in almost any classroom—be it primary, secondary, higher education, or alternative, indoor or outdoor, homogeneous or heterogeneous. And since one of my goals in the Children's Literature and Young Adult Literature survey classes that I teach is to give my students a broader knowledge of African-American culture and history in addition to whatever else I teach them, I always include several African-American children's texts on my syllabi. And because time limitations and the need to balance a survey course that covers many genres, and also because student budgets limit the number of picture books that I can ask students to purchase as class texts, I tend to intersperse African-American picture books as read-alouds throughout the semester. I became aware of the need to do more of this kind of integration as a result of an encounter with a student I taught in Texas in 1998.

Like most of her classmates, Sabra was an upper-class education major. And also like most of her classmates, she had attended public schools in East Texas and then come to this state university primarily attended by

residents from the region. At that time, I assigned an "Illustrator Project," for which students were to write several short analytical papers on the picture books of a particular illustrator throughout the semester, then give an oral presentation at the end of the semester, offering the class a biographical summary of the artist's life and work, an overview of the illustrator's artistic style, and an oral analysis of a particular picture book.

Throughout the semester, Sabra expressed her excitement over discovering the talents of Tom Feelings, the illustrator whom she had "adopted" for the semester. As a result of her research into his life and work, she had become something of a Tom Feelings evangelist. When her turn to present came, she could hardly contain herself. When she stood up to talk, the first thing she said was, "I didn't choose Tom Feelings for this project; he chose me." Soon after, she broke down in tears and had to pause before she continued. She then said, "I've gone to East Texas schools all my life, and until now, nobody has ever made me read anything by anybody black. I feel so cheated!" Sabra regained her composure and finished her presentation, but it was clear to both her classmates and me that the time she had spent with the work of Tom Feelings had changed Sabra's life.

"Epiphanies" like Sabra's are rare, but most of my Children's and Young Adult Literature students do finish my classes with a greater understanding and a deeper appreciation of at least some aspects of African-American culture and history because of the books that we study together. For instance, since shortly after the publication of Carolivia Herron and Joe Cepeda's *Nappy Hair*, I have begun the first class of every semester with this book. I read aloud from one copy and pass a second copy around the class so that each student becomes a member of the "amen corner," reading the lines that the relatives call back in response to Uncle Mordecai's story of his niece Brenda, who has "the nappiest hair in the world." As I explain to students afterward, we read this book on the first day of class for several reasons. First, Herron wrote *Nappy Hair* in the "call-response" style characteristic of the traditional black church, and our reading the book in the way she wrote it serves to emphasize how I conduct my classes: as a polyphonic, participatory community in which everyone has a voice and actively contributes to class discussions. Second, because *Nappy Hair* was responsible for Ruth Sherman, a first-year, third-grade teacher in Brooklyn, losing her job in 1998, this book should remind us all that regardless of how innocuous a book might seem, literature is by nature political and the teachers and aspiring teachers among us should be ever cognizant of this fact. I also want them to know that censorship, alive and well in America, can sometimes bring under scrutiny books that one would least expect subject to criticism. And finally, reading *Nappy Hair* on the first day of class opens up a dialogue about ethnicity that I try to keep open and active throughout the semester. If I, an African American who wore my hair short and nappy for

seventeen years and have recently returned to that style, can make "happiness" a topic of conversation on the first day of class, then—I hope to communicate to students—they are free to bring other ethnicity-related ideas into class discussions, regardless of what shade of skin they inhabit.

The "Why" of Teaching the Texts

The title of this chapter, "Why are we reading this stuff?" articulates the opposite end of the student spectrum from Sabra: the students who respond with hostility to ethnic texts and who would rather learn nothing more than the little they already know about African-American culture—or any culture outside their own, for that matter. Hence, as a preface to discussing the "how" details of using African-American picture books in the college classroom, I'd like to address the "why" for those students who might look askance at these texts showing up in their Children's Literature classes. I actually taught such a student at the same Texas university where I taught Sabra.

This student—antagonistic from the first day of class, perhaps as a result of discovering an African-American professor teaching the class[1]—asserted in class one day that racism in America no longer exists and asked me, "Why are you making us read this stuff anyway? *I* didn't enslave black people; slavery is a thing of the past. If you keep digging it up and talking about it, it will make situations worse." I remained quiet while his classmates vociferously offered their own justifications for reading literature of this genre, but his question is a valid one. Why *should* primary and secondary school students or college students—why should anyone, in fact—read and study African-American children's literature?

My first response to this student's question was that silence perpetuates ignorance and prejudice. In her spring 1998 essay "African American Children and the Case for Community" on Eleanora Tate's South Carolina Trilogy, Carole Brown Knuth lauds Tate's novel, *The Secret of Gumbo Grove*, for "stripp[ing] away the polite ambiguities that all too often cloak representations of slavery and discrimination; [the novel] reminds us, none too gently, that silence ultimately only reinforces existing racial stereotypes. . . ."[2] As the protagonists in the Carolina trilogy discover, silence of the oppressed is often an effective cover for deep-seated shame. When Raisin Stackhouse, protagonist of *The Secret of Gumbo Grove*, begins to uncover some of the historical "secrets" of her town, Gumbo Grove's elderly inhabitants object to her investigation. Even her father tells her, " 'Sometimes it's better to forget.' "[3] (146). Knuth says, "To many of Gumbo Grove's inhabitants, the past invokes shameful secrets; they seek to keep the fact of having slaves or prisoners in their background buried in the rundown, weed-ridden old graveyard" (Knuth 87). Raisin's perseverance in researching the past of Gumbo

Grove, however, earns her the tangible reward of a local service award but the more substantial intangible one of pride in her community's history and the knowledge that the community has begun to honor and embrace a past of which they were once ashamed.

Like the fictional Raisin Stackhouse, contemporary American students cannot possibly feel pride for a past of which they have little or no knowledge. It is difficult to foster in young people an appreciation of present socio-political and economic conditions unless they know their history—and the history of African America is *our* collective history. Tom Feelings articulates this idea well in the introduction to his 1993 picture book *Soul Looks Back in Wonder*, written by Maya Angelou. He says, "Our creativity, moving, circling, improvising, with the restricted form of oppression, reminds us that we must remain responsible to each other—we are not only individuals, but part of a collective that shares a common history and future."[4]

My second response to this student was that we risk repeating the mistakes of our ancestors if we keep ourselves ignorant of what those mistakes were. The more informed students are of the atrocities that have been committed against different people groups in the past, the more likely they are to recognize when this kind of treatment recurs in the present or could recur in the future. In her 1996 article on Feelings's *The Middle Passage*, Rudine Sims Bishop refers back to Milton Meltzer's important work *In All Times, All Peoples: A World History of Slavery* (1980), in which he says that although slavery had existed in the world ever since farming made it possible for captors to grow enough food to feed their captives, not until the dawn of European and American slavery were race and slavery linked to one another. But, Meltzer goes on to say, " 'just about 300 years ago arose the mistaken belief that whites were superior to people of any other color, and that this superior race had the right to rule others. That racist belief—shared by many of the Founding Fathers—justified the enslavement of Blacks'" (Bishop "Feelings," 438). Rudine Sims Bishop therefore concludes that:

> Because we are still living with the consequences of the widespread acceptance of that rationale, it is important for all of us to confront this painful history, just as it is important for all of us to confront the history of the Jewish Holocaust and the accounts of 'ethnic cleansing' in Bosnia. In these days, when armed hate groups are appearing more and more frequently on the landscape, we need to remember how easy it is for ordinary people, by simply refusing to see evil, to help it thrive. (438).

Blindness about the past, therefore, creates blindness in both the present and the future. The post–September 11th treatment of Americans of Arab descent and subsequent national decisions about how to treat foreign students, immigrants, and those seeking residency should perhaps serve as reminders

that race-based policies are by no means a thing of the past. Educators who are willing to take on the challenge of addressing issues of prejudice in the classroom can help to prevent the kind of cultural blindness in the future that allows prejudicial policies to thrive again as they once did.

My third response to this student was, "Most of you in this class will have your own classrooms within two or three years from now. If you've made it this far with so little knowledge of ethnic children's literature, if I don't expose you to these texts, who will?" Primary and secondary school students can intuit, through the school curriculum and their required readings, which cultural knowledges count and which ones don't. If educators never ask students to read books by African-American authors and illustrators, what are they to assume? In her *African American Review* article, "Reading in Color: Children's Book Illustrations and Identity Formation for Black Children in the United States," Jacque Roethler explains how repeated exposure to images of black characters—either negative or positive ones—can have a strong impact on the identity of black children. But what if they don't see these images at all? Roethler says that this omission conveys the message that the culture and history—and therefore the future—of African Americans are not important.[5] Some of the students whom I've taught in the past—those of European, African, Asian, and Latin descent—who have, like Sabra, had little exposure to this literature, have intimated to me that the omission of this literature in their twelve years of public school education and often three years of college has conveyed to them exactly that message. While grading one young adult literature student's essay several years ago, I ran across the following comment:

> I do believe more Black history should be taught in classrooms. I have been in college on and off for ten years. I had never even read a book by a black author until I took this class. The only Black history I was ever taught in school had to do with Abraham Lincoln setting the slaves free. The topic was covered in approximately thirty minutes and taught in about 3rd or 4th grade. I think that is part of the reason Black people are so frustrated with white people. They want history books to portray an accurate account of black history so all races can understand the hardships their ancestors endured.[6]

Facing this sort of daily challenge, I do all that I can to expose my students to ethnic texts so that they will not also perpetuate, because of ignorance or neglect, the damning message that people of color don't count. What would be shameful is for me to teach a student of one of my current students ten or twenty years from now and sit and listen while she expresses anger at the school system and her former teachers because no one ever pressed the works of Tom Feelings or Mildred Taylor or Walter Dean Myers

or Joyce Hansen or Jerry Pinkney or Julius Lester into her hands and said, "Read. You need to know these things about our America."

My final response to this student was that the United States is not a homogeneous country, and we cannot afford to pretend that it is by excluding ethnic literatures from the "canon" of children's literature. In her discussion of Ashley Bryan's four volumes of African-American folktales, Jacque Roethler lauds the excellence of the tales, concluding that "An African American child reading these illustrations would have good reason to be proud of his African heritage, and a white child would learn respect for this culture" (99). Teachers who work with multicultural classes feel justified in introducing all of their students to texts from different cultures: through this exposure, students gain respect for nondominant cultures and therefore the cultures of their classmates. But those who teach in schools with students of predominantly one culture who might not see the relevance of using texts about cultures not represented at their school have even more of a reason for teaching these texts because their students don't have the benefit of interacting with people from diverse backgrounds on a daily basis. Books can often take readers places where they might otherwise not go. If my antagonistic student had been exposed to multicultural literature as a child, it is unlikely that he would have felt the need to ask a question like "Why are we studying these texts?" He would already have known.

I have found, however, that even if students are willing to and interested in learning African-American history and culture through the texts that I choose for them to read, many of them benefit from learning some background information necessary for understanding the problems that African Americans have faced historically in this country. One would not, for instance, understand the importance of the recurring motif of flying in Virginia Hamilton's or Julius Lester and Tom Feelings's "People Who Could Fly" if one knew nothing about the Middle Passage—the journey that slave traders and their "cargo" of Africans—made from Africa to the Americas in which millions of Africans died on the way to becoming a part of an institution more cruel and inhumane than any form of slavery that had ever existed before it. Those who know nothing of the function of Negro Spirituals for many slaves on Southern plantations might not understand that flying, both in Lester's story and in songs that make assertions like "I'll fly away, Oh Glory, I'll fly away,/When I die, alleluia by and by,/I'll fly away,"—served as code language for escaping North to freedom. Students with no knowledge of call-and-response see little significance in the way that Herron wrote *Nappy Hair*. And those who don't understand the importance of jazz, emerging out of African-American musical traditions and the only form of music indigenous to the United State, see much less richness in books such as Rachel Isadora's *Ben's Trumpet* (1979), Andrea Davis and Brian Pinkney's *Duke Ellington* (1998), and Alan Schroeder and Bernie Fuchs's *Ragtime Tumpie* (1989). Because many of these ideas are key to understand-

ing African-American stories of all genres, I try to enhance students' understanding of African-American history to enable us to have meaningful analytical discussions of the class texts.

The "How" of Teaching the Texts

Once the question of *why* teach African-American children's literature is resolved, there remains the question of *how*. In the Children's Literature classes that I teach, I cover picture books, novels, both historical and contemporary, traditional stories, poetry, and the history of the genre—all in fifteen weeks. A survey class such as this does not allow much time for any one genre. The ideas that follow, therefore, have come out of several years of experimenting with different combinations of texts to expose students to a body of African-American children's literature within a limited time frame that will encourage them to further their knowledge of the history through the literature. In constantly reevaluating how to give students a rich experience of African-American literature within only a few weeks of teaching, using both picture books and novels or novellas, I have discovered some techniques that work well. I will discuss two instructional "units" that I have taught that utilize a similar pedagogical approach—one for middle grade readers (more appropriate for college classes in Young Adult Literature) and one for early elementary readers (more appropriate perhaps for college classes in Children's Literature).

First, both of these units make use of an historical progression from earlier to later historical events. Second, I generally use a combination of historical fiction and historical nonfiction and have used both picture books and novels or novellas as focal texts. Third, with Mildred Taylor's Logan family novels, I use a "constellation" approach in which all of the students read one text in common and then choose a second Taylor text (a novella usually) to read so that each student comes to the discussion of the main text with a more well-rounded knowledge of the Logan family and the conflicts that they face. Finally, to increase the number of picture books that the class has in common, I read aloud additional picture books to them as often and as well as I can. Reading aloud serves the triple function of making discussion richer by expanding the class's repertoire of texts, modeling for these future teachers that "You're never too old to be read to," and opening up something of a "green room" to the class to help them prepare for discussion prior to my asking them to contribute their ideas.

The Logan Family Saga

I have taught Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and the other Logan family novels and novellas many times, but at some point, I realized

that if my students were going to understand and appreciate the conflicts that the Logans face, I needed to move farther back in African-American history. To help them understand *why* life is the way it is for the Logans, I needed to help them gain a clearer understanding of how African Americans came to be a part of a country that did not embrace them in the 1930s, the historical setting of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

When deciding how to fill this gap—how to take them back to an earlier historical time that would expose them to some of this background—I recalled the impact that Tom Feelings's *The Middle Passage* had had on Sabra, the student who declared that Tom Feelings had chosen her. Since many readers have an emotional reaction to this wordless picture book, and also since this groundbreaking work is unparalleled for its reconstruction of an historical institution of which there were few documented records from the perspective of the captors, *The Middle Passage* works well to help ground students in the African-American historical event in which African America began. Before using this book in class, I warn them that it took me over a year to be able to push myself through the whole book and that my mother, who bought one copy for herself and one for me at a Feelings signing during its initial publication, has yet to finish "reading" the images in this book. Although I believe this book quite appropriate for older elementary age readers, it is not, by any means a "picture book" in the same way that *Where the Wild Things Are* is a picture book. In a sense, it is a young adult or adult picture book. I caution them about the book's emotional content and remind them that not everything on *my* syllabus will translate directly into their own teaching experiences when they begin teaching.

I bring enough copies of *The Middle Passage* to class to enable them to divide up into groups of fours or fives. I then ask them to go through the book slowly enough for everyone to be able to see all of the images well, and I encourage them to talk about visual details that they don't understand or find confusing. I circulate and look on with the various groups both to slow some of them down and take more time with the details and to help them address questions that they have. Typically, their questions revolve around confusion over seeing Africans helping the slave traders capture other Africans, the illustration of the traders force feeding and another of them branding a slave, and several illustrations in which Africans hurl themselves overboard.

After we move though the Middle Passage, I try to encourage students to make connections between the social, political, sexual, and power dynamics that *The Middle Passage* suggests were firmly established by slave traders, and those same dynamics to which American slaves were subject—evidenced in books such as Andrea Davis Pinkney's *Silent Thunder: A Civil War Story* (1999); Joyce Hansen's Dear America novel, *I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, a Freed* Girl (1997); Patricia

McKissack's Dear America novel, *A Picture of Freedom: The Diary of Clotee, A Slave Girl* (1997); and Gary Paulsen's *Nightjohn* (1993).[7] For instance, I ask students to consider how the sexual control that the slave traders on the slave ships exercise over the African women manifests itself in *Nightjohn.* Sarny fears getting "the troubles" (her menstrual cycle) because she knows that Master Waller will then consider her a breeder and force her to mate with one of the slaves on the plantation.[8] Having watched Alice's destruction when Waller attempts to force this mentally unfit slave into his inhumane system of reproduction, Sarny understands her economic potential as a sexually mature slave and she dreads the day when she must fulfill her sexual obligation as a female slave. (And her search for her sold children in Paulsen's sequel, *Sarny* (1997), confirms that she does eventually birth two more pieces of "property" that Master Waller uses to increase his wealth.)

Close observation of the way that the ghostlike slave traders treat their female "cargo" in *The Middle Passage* offers an even more overt snapshot of the sexual control than *Nightjohn* reveals. In one illustration, on a staircase into a lower level of the ship appears either a progression of a single rape of one woman or multiple rapes of many women, taking place all the way down the stairs. At the bottom of the stairs sits a little black infant, crying and helpless, with no mother or father to protect it. The absence of an African male—or even a female—to help fight off the attacker(s) in this illustration echoes the powerlessness of the male breeders on the plantation where Sarny lives; slaves like Pawley, who try to choose a sexual partner and wife of whom the master does not approve, receive the punishment of castration—after which this particular slave bleeds to death on the ground where the master has cut and left him. And even the "studs" who obey the master's commands and mate with the women who have been chosen for them have as little power as the slaves on the slave ships do to control their own sexual decisions. Although readers get little information about the breeder who must mate with Alice, one can imagine the pain involved for both parties in a forced mating between a male slave and a mentally unfit teen. *The Middle Passage* and *Nightjohn* present excellent opportunities to discuss issues of literacy; the role of physical violence, abuse, dismemberment, and lynching in slavery; the practice of whites pitting Africans and African Americans against one another for their economic and social benefit; and the constant fear concomitant with being human chattel. Students who grasp the inhumanity of the slave system understand much more about how individuals and families operate in the next texts we study together: Mildred Taylor's Logan family novels.

Set in Mississippi during the Depression era, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* as well as its sequels and prequels, tell fictionalized stories of Mildred Taylor's ancestors. While many excellent works of children's nonfiction

exist that detail the struggles of African Americans during this historical period in the South, I prefer to teach history with fiction because nothing draws most readers into history like a connection with a round and dynamic protagonist. Hence, I ask that all of my students read the Newbery Award–winning *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and then I order enough of the other various Logan novels and/or novellas for each student to purchase one. Chronologically (by events rather than by publication dates), these texts are *The Land* (2001), *The Well: David's Story* (1995), *The Song of the Trees* (1975), *Mississippi Bridge* (1990), *The Friendship* (1987), *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* (1981) (sequel to *Roll of Thunder*), and *The Road to Memphis* (1995).[9]

This series, narrated by Cassie Logan with the exception of *The Land*, the most recent installment in the series, *The Well: David's Story*, and *Mississippi Bridge*, details the struggles that the Logans face between the late 1800s and the 1950s as a proud, landowning Mississippi family who must sacrifice to obtain and fight to keep their land. Reading *Roll of Thunder* in common introduces students to the pressures that the Logans face as a result of the Great Depression, the social conditions under which they must live, the humiliations they suffer even as a result of simple actions such as grocery shopping, and the ways that some African Americans learned to retaliate against racism and injustice in ways that were safe but effective. The additional novella or novel that each student reads of the Logans gives them a more well-rounded perspective of the family and a deeper understanding of their historical context. I typically ask students to discuss their novella in a group with the others in the class who read that particular story to uncover what the peripheral text contributes to their knowledge of *Roll of Thunder*. Though discussing eight texts at once may sound like a perfect recipe for class chaos, the richness of the discussion that results from this assignment in combination with *The Middle Passage* and *Nightjohn* has led my students to make some critical observations of African-American culture and history that I find rare when we study individual texts in isolation.

For instance, the same anger, rebellion, and self-sacrifice that Cassie, her siblings and even her father David exhibit in *The Song of the Trees* when Mr. Andersen, a white man, intimidates the family matriarch, Big Ma, into allowing him to harvest a grove of old trees on their land for less money than it is worth, also surface in *The Middle Passage* when the captives throw themselves overboard to drown in shark-infested waters or attempt suicide by starvation as an alternative to becoming slaves.[10] And the drive to learn to read and to teach others to read for which Nightjohn loses two of his toes to the master's axe blade and for which Sarny's Mammy gets publicly flogged, is the same impetus behind Little Man Logan's valuing his Christmas books above all of the other gifts he gets during that holiday. The Logan children receive clothes, fruit, and candy for Christmas, but the books that

Papa brings home from Louisiana are their real treasures. Cassie narrates Papa's story of how he came by the books:

> "Man sold me them books told me these two was written by a black man," Papa said, opening my book and pointing to a picture of a man in a long, fancy coat and wigful of curly hair that fell to his shoulders. "Name of Alexander Du-mas, a French fellow. His daddy was a mulatto and his grandmama was a slave down on one of them islands—Mar-ti-nique, it says here. Man said to me, they right hard reading for children, but I told him he didn't know my babies. They can't read 'em now, I said, they'll grow into 'em" (Taylor *Thunder* 153).

And because of the high value placed on literacy in the Logan household, they do.

Little Man Logan also stomps on his first-grade reader when he discovers the designation "nigra . . . poor [condition of the book]" in the front cover of the book and realizes that the books are rejects from the white school after many years of use. The strength of the Logan family and the slaves who live on the plantation with Sarny reflect the same strength that enabled the Africans to survive the long, arduous Middle Passage under cramped, filthy, and unsanitary conditions. Hence, this set of books, taught together, offers excellent opportunities for comparative analysis and for exploring several different eras of African-American history together.[11]

A Lesson on the Civil Rights Movement

Although the length and reading level of Mildred Taylor's novels range from second or third grade to high school and above, I have suggested that the previous unit is for older students in part because of the difficult emotional and sexual content within *The Middle Passage* and *Nightjohn*. The current unit, on the other hand, is designed more for younger readers. I have chosen Irene Smalls and Jon Onye Lockard's *Ebony Sea* as the read-aloud picture book text for this unit for three reasons: it tells the true story of a group of Africans who refused to become slaves; the repetitive, auditory motifs lend themselves well to reading aloud; and since *Ebony Sea* went out of print shortly after its publication, it would be nearly impossible to obtain a class set of the books to use as a syllabus text.[12] For the focal novels, I have used both of the slave novels from the Dear America series and Andrea Davis Pinkney's *Silent Thunder*. I use these background texts to lay the groundwork for studying the Civil Rights Movement through Doreen Rappaport and Bryan Collier's *Martin's Big Words* (2001), Ruby Bridges's autobiographical picture book *Through My* Eyes (1999) and Walt Disney's film

adaptation of Bridges's integration of William Frantz Elementary School, *Ruby Bridges: a Real American Hero* (1998). These later texts specifically detail what the Civil Rights Movement meant for a few specific *children* of that time.

Like the unit discussed earlier, this set of texts provides some wonderful discussion of overlapping themes and ideologies and gives readers a number of different perspectives of black children's experiences of injustice. Smalls and Lockard's picture book *Ebony Sea* is something of a porquoi tale that explains how the place called "Ebo Landing" on one of the sea Islands off the Georgia Coast came to be. After this particular group of Ebos survived the horrible Middle Passage, the ship docks, and the Ebos come out of the bowels of the ship, "in chains, shackled, yoked, tied, fettered, wrapped, and choking." They were so quiet that the slaves on land didn't know what to think.

> The Africans from the ship moved slowly at first, slowly, sluggishly. Until, out from the bottom of the crowd, the leader came. A little bit of a thing, a woman. At the head of this crowd of kings and clowns, babes and brawny men, was a small woman with her head held so high and so proud it looked as if it were made of the blackest onyx stone.

This woman, whom the existing slaves figured must have been a queen in Africa, wears a red head kerchief. "She wanted to go home. Her yearning toward Africa had grown so great." And without a sound, she leads her people right into the Wateree River. "They walked into that river and drowned themselves, every man, woman, and child, every infant without a whimper, without a word, without a cry." Benriver, the ship's cabin boy, wants to go with them back to Africa, but because he is part spirit, he cannot go into the water. When he screams and pleads to follow his people, an old slave, Auntie Louisa, convinces him that he is "the keeper of the dreams, the stories, the hearts, the souls, the cries and the voices" and that there's no shame in living. Today, Benriver, now the old "eyeservant," the one who always looks like he's working "when he ain't doing nothing at all," sits at Ebo Landing to tell children the story of the Ebos who simply wanted to go home and took their own lives rather than become slaves.

While Feelings's *The Middle Passage* shows Africans jumping off of the ship to drown themselves in the Atlantic, *Ebony Sea* explains the religious significance of this choice within an Ebo worldview. This wonderfully tellable and true tale also emphasizes the economic impact of the Ebos' decision. The only comical illustration in the book highlights the shock on the faces of three of the wealthy slave masters. The text says, "Then they started ranting and raving, screaming and crying about all the money they had just lost." Their emphasis on the loss of income, not the loss of life, reminds

young readers that though slaves may have been more valuable than some other "goods," to the slave traders and slave master, these Africans were no different than a cargo load of grain or animals.

Coming to Andrea Davis Pinkney's *Silent Thunder* after reading *Ebony Sea*, students have a more thorough understanding of the fear and anger that young Rosco harbors as he considers that he could be sold off of the plantation and away from his sister and his mother at any moment without warning. Although the legal slave trade ended in the United States in 1807, smuggling was widespread until the early 1860s, and selling slaves from one plantation to another was legal until the Emancipation Proclamation. And since slave masters often split families up purposely to keep them better under control, Rosco justifiably expects that he will be sold. And because Rosco is a young male with a temper, he has a good chance of being sent to the Deep South, where slave drivers and masters notoriously treated slaves more cruelly than they did in states such as Virginia.[13]

Similar conflicts surrounding family dynamics arise in both of Scholastic's Dear America Series novels on slavery: Patricia McKissack's *A Picture of Freedom: The Diary of Clotee, A Slave Girl* and Joyce Hansen's *I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, a Freed Girl*, both published in 1997. Based on historical figures, these two books give readers an insider's view of slavery and its impact on two more children who were victims of it. Throughout Clotee's story, she longs to become what she initially calls an "abolistine," and as her literacy as well as her knowledge of the abolitionist movement grow, she eventually takes over the Underground Railroad Station at Belmont Plantation, Virginia, and helps hundreds of slaves escape to the North.[14] Patsy lives through the time of emancipation, and readers come to appreciate her ambivalence about being free: an orphan with no known relatives, she is torn between remaining in the safety and security of the plantation where her meals and lodging are provided, and following the example of many other freedmen from her plantation who pack up and leave with nothing but the clothes on their backs and enough food for a few days' travel. The literacy that Patsy has gained while taking care of the master's children not only helps her decide what she will do with her life and her freedom, but it also gives her the confidence that she needs to overcome her physical disabilities, unattractiveness, and speech impediment. Part of Patsy's process throughout the novel is deciding on a new name for herself so that she can shed the slave name her former master gave her and start her new life as a freed girl. She names herself Phillis Frederick, after Phillis Wheatly and Frederick Douglass, a black heroine and hero of whom she learned through her reading of the *The Liberator,* the newspaper published by abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison between 1831 and 1865. After students spend time with Patsy, Clotee, Summer, and Rosco and their struggles, most feel confident that they will remember these round,

dynamic protagonists and their historical contexts much longer than they retained previous grade school textbook lessons about people and events of this historical era. Fiction peopled with well-crafted, flawed, complex characters helps to bring the past alive for readers and invites them to establish a more intimate connection with historical figures than many informational texts can.

Nonfiction also has its place, however. Doreen Rappaport and Bryan Collier's 2001 picture book *Martin's Big Words* and Ruby Bridges's 1999 autobiographical documentary picture book *Through My Eyes* capitalize on some of the themes evident in *Ebony Sea*, *Silent Thunder*, and the Dear America slave novels. Exploring this thematic continuity encourages students to consider how decisions that Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ruby Bridges made during the Civil Rights Movement originated in the beliefs of slaves who preceded them by several generations. In the same way that the Ebos in Smalls's book believed that dying meant returning to Africa, both King and Bridges embraced religious beliefs that helped them endure when they came under fire for attempting to make social change.

Notably, although Rappaport and Collier's book targets early elementary readers, and Bridges's book addresses middle to upper elementary readers in terms of reading level, neither of them shies away from depicting the violence and hatred that these two Civil Rights warriors encountered. Just as Clotee gets slapped by Aunt Tee for writing the word "cat" on the cabin floor,[15] and Summer's mother takes and hides her only book then burns her treasured doll because she is "dabbling in letters" (A. Pinkney *Silent* 199), the text of *Martin's Big Words* recounts the truth of what happened to many Civil Right leaders: "They were jailed and beaten and murdered. But they kept on marching," and later,

> Martin went wherever people needed help. In April 1968 he went to Memphis, Tennessee. He went to help garbage collectors who were on strike. He walked with them and talked with them and sang with them and prayed with them. On his second day there he was shot. He died.

Some more complex truths come to light in the illustration of the little girl whose image is imbedded in a collage of the American flag. When I read this book with the two five-year olds whom I mentioned in chapter 6, they were at first puzzled by this illustration. Shawndrè wanted to know why she looks angry. I asked her what this little girl might have to be angry about. "Well, maybe she's mad because people are so mean to Martin Luther King." "Or," I suggested, "maybe people are being mean to her?" They then seemed to make the connection that if people could "be mean to" Martin when he was a kid by putting "White Only" signs all over town, then maybe this little girl has experienced similar injustices. They both felt indignant

about this, and one day when we discussed the page on which Rosa Parks is sent to jail for refusing to give up her seat at the front of the bus, Tandi demanded, "*Who* made her go to the back of the bus?" "The white people," I told her; "In the 1960s, black people had to sit on the back of the bus if a white person got on and wanted their seat." Tandi put her hands on her hips and said, "Well she oughta make *them* go to the back of the bus and see how they like it!" Although the three of us may read this book together for several more years before they grasp how a man can be murdered just because of the "big words" he spoke, and although it might be even more years before they understand the power that whites wielded over blacks historically in this country that made it impossible for Rosa Parks just to "send *them* to the back of the bus" when she didn't want to go there herself, their exposure to *Martin's Big Words* at age five has, I think, changed their world view—even if only slightly—and helped them to understand a little bit more about what it means to be an African American.

The combined impact of studying the sparse text and the striking images in *Martin's Big Words* and discussing both *Through My Eyes* and Disney's *Ruby Bridges* with my students helps them to recognize not only how racial prejudice changed children's lives but also how children impacted the Civil Rights Movement. Unlike most film/book pairings, the Disney film preceded Bridges's picture book, and I suspect that her involvement in the making of the film influenced what she included in the picture book. Surprisingly accurate and well written, the Disney film adds some elements to Bridges's story that the book omits. First, although *Through My Eyes* offers a first-person narrative that brings readers into close encounter with what Bridges faced as a first grader, viewers get to know a much rounder protagonist in the film than readers do in the book. We also get a clearer understanding of the extent of the conflict between Ruby's parents over whether or not she should even take part in this integration process. Bridges mentions in the book that the strain of this conflict precipitated her parents' divorce, but watching the film helps readers to understand why. The emotional impact of the film is also greater than that of the book. Bridges describes the hecklers who lined the sidewalks of William Frantz Elementary for the better part of her first-grade year, but when movie viewers hear the woman scream, "I'm gonna kill you" while she brandishes a small coffin that holds a black doll, and see a tall, thin man walk over to the police barricades and spit on Ruby as she walks into school, sandwiched between federal marshals, they more thoroughly absorb what she means by "hecklers."

At the same time, however, while viewers could potentially watch the Disney film as just an interesting story of a little black girl who behaved bravely, the photographs that Bridges includes in *Through My Eyes* from her integration experience serve as a constant reminder to readers that all of these events actually happened. And though Bridges narrates her story

somewhat innocently, the details that she includes in this picture book reveal the ripple effect that her actions had on many aspects of American culture. For instance, she did not know until she was an adult that Norman Rockwell had crafted a painting of her, walking behind the federal marshals on her way into school. She also didn't realize that John Steinbeck had written her into *Travels with Charlie* when he visited Louisiana, caught wind of the racial conflict in this region, and saw the little black girl at the center of it. And not until she found and reunited with her first grade teacher did she understand the hardships that Mrs. Henry suffered because of her choice to teach the black child whom none of the other teachers would. Using both of these Ruby Bridges stories gives students a rich perspective of one small part of the Civil Rights Movement that not only offers accurate information but that also evokes the kind of empathy in them that will cause them to remember and care about this historical event.

Conclusion

It's true that we have a harder time of understanding our present if we don't know our past, and the pedagogical approach that I've suggested in these two units attempts to give students at least a snapshot of the distant African-American past to help them grasp the more recent African-American past. Anytime I combine texts in this way, I hope that one text illuminates ideas within another, and I also seek to further students' critical awareness of the content within the stories by raising analytical questions such as:

- What sorts of ideological messages does this text convey about individual African Americans or African Americans as a people group?
- In what way do the illustrations in these African-American picture books uphold or attempt to dismantle racial stereotypes?
- What can you surmise about African-American cultural values after reading this book that you might not have concluded before your exposure to it?
- Who do you think is the audience for this text, and why? If you are not the intended audience for this text, how might your response to it differ from the response of its intended readers?
- What difference does the ethnicity of the author and/or illustrator make to your reception of the text?
- And how has one text in this unit "spoken to" other texts in this unit?

One result of this approach to teaching African-American children's literature is that students soon begin to recognize the myriad motifs and overlapping themes that recur within this body of literature, helping them to understand some important ideas that surface and resurface in many differ-

ent genres of African-American art. For instance, characters in many of these books express a high value of and longing for literacy and a good education. Clotee of the Dear America series hides her diary in a tree, knowing that she will be whipped severely if the master discovers that she has taught herself to read and write. Even Aunt Tee, Clotee's surrogate mother, slaps her when she learns that Clotee is learning letters, telling her, "Don't bring trouble to yo' own front door," and "Don't you tell another living soul that you got this little piece of knowing" (McKissack *Clotee* 84). Patsy, the protagonist of Joyce Hansen's Dear America novel, also keeps her literacy a secret until long after she obtains her freedom, since it was illegal to teach slaves to read and write when she learned. Both narrator Sarny and abused slave Nightjohn of Gary Paulsen's *Nightjohn* suffer discrimination and violence from other slaves who acknowledge only the danger and not the power that comes with literacy. This same high regard for education emerges in Taylor's novels: Mary Logan's father sacrificed much to send his daughter away to teacher's college, and Mary takes her job of revisionist historian for her black students at Great Faith Elementary School so seriously that she loses her job for teaching that which the district administrators know is excluded from the history textbooks. And for this same acquisition of literacy, Ruby Bridges and her family sacrificed Ruby's childhood and—for a time—her happiness so that she and other black children could attend better schools.

Another idea that students will inevitably gain from reading a number of African-American children's literature texts is the integrity and strength of black people and their ability to endure and even prosper under seemingly insurmountable hardship. In the introduction to Feelings's *The Middle Passage*, John Henrik Clarke cites that approximately one-third of the Africans who were taken from their homeland died in the Middle Passage, "while ten to twenty million arrived in the New World alive" (8). Considering the lack of food, water, space, and sanitary conditions and the brutality and inhumane treatment they suffered, it is miraculous that any Africans survived the voyage at all. This fact alone speaks for those who later became African Americans. This same strength of spirit under duress comes out in characters such as Mr. Tom Bee from Mildred Taylor's *The Friendship*. When Tom Bee, an elderly black man, refuses to begin calling a white man, John Wallace, "Mr. Wallace" because Tom saved John's life years before and raised him as his own son, Tom chooses to suffer the consequences of his actions rather than play the role of compliant Negro. Miss Lee Annie, an elderly black woman in Taylor's *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, risks her life attempting to vote; her father had voted during Reconstruction, and she feels that it is her right, even if none of the whites in town are willing to allow her to cast a ballot.

The importance of the oral tradition also surfaces and resurfaces in these texts. David and Hammer Logan and Mr. Morrison tell stories to the

children of their childhood, the most striking of which is Mr. Morrison's explanation of why he is so big: his folks were bred as field hands just like cows or mules; they were bred for strength. Patsy loves listening to the plantation's storytellers, and Clotee feels distraught when her master beats to death the primary keeper of their stories because Master Henley feels that this slave has been responsible for his son's injury on an untamed horse. Clotee recalls Uncle Heb's stories and feels his absence daily. And the little boy, Benriver, who wants to but can't drown himself in the Wateree with his Ebo people in *Ebony Sea*, assumes the role of storyteller that Auntie Louisa has ascribed to him. The fact that Benriver, as an old man, sits at Ebo Landing and tells the children, "First you must remember so you can never forget" suggests that his job of keeper of the stories is worth living for.

Readers will perceive other ideas that these texts share such as the frequency of intraracial conflicts and backbiting that result from jealousy among blacks and the attempts of some to find favor with the master and his family. Clotee struggles constantly to keep the other house slave, Missy, ignorant of everything that she knows because Missy prides herself on her role as spy for the plantation's mistress. Until Clotee trusts her secret of literacy to two of the field slaves, she trusts no one. These instances force readers to see the way that slavery depended on the divisiveness of the slaves and the way that slave owners often brainwashed individuals into believing that it was in their best interest to remain ignorant, dependent, servile, and divided. Descriptions of cruelty put readers in touch with the realities of physical, emotional, and mental abuse that many slaves suffered, and the round, dynamic characters in these children's novels, novellas, and picture books put a face on the past—a face with which many contemporary readers can identify.

Notes

Introduction

1. With Oxford University Press's recent rerelease of these books through the Opie Collection, the children's works of Hughes and Bontemps may be more readily available now than they ever were, even during their time of publication.
2. Contemporary black authors of adult literature such as Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker have written books for children, but these authors of adult literature do not constitute the core of black writers for children, as once was the case.
3. Cooperative Children's Book Center Website. www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/pcstats.htm. 30 October 2001.
4. Jerry Pinkney, telephone interview with author, 26 November 2001.
5. Jerry Pinkney, telephone interview with author, 31 July 2002.
6. The Children's Books Roundtable first took place in November of 2000 at the former Alex Haley Farm in Clinton, Tennessee, and continued in November of 2001. One of its primary purposes is for the Children's Defense Fund to gain input on the best way to choose and teach the books that will be used in the Freedom Schools summer programs established by the Children's Defense Fund in 1995. A by-product of this weekend symposium has been ongoing discussion between academicians of black children's' literature, many of whom, because of geographical distance and the separation of the disciplines, had had no personal contact with one another prior to the roundtable despite familiarity with each other's publications. Another outcome has been the planning of the Langston Hughes Children's Literature Festival, the first of which was held in August of 2002 at the Haley Farm.
7. Peter Hollindale, "Ideology and the Children's Book," *Signal* 55 (January 1988): 3–22. Rpt. in *Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism*. Ed. Peter Hunt. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 26.
8. Many African-American children's picture books go out of print shortly after their publication date. For instance, Irene Smalls's *Ebony Sea*, illustrated by Jon Onye Lockard, a wonderful and beautifully illustrated picture book about a group of Ebos from Africa who chose to drown themselves in the Wateree River rather than remain alive and become slaves in America, went out of print only a few months after it was published. Smalls says that both the painful and therefore controversial nature of the book's content as well as its African-American authorship doomed the book to a short publication life. Other black authors and illustrators of children's picture books have confirmed that a short shelf life for African-American children's picture books is not uncommon.
9. Augusta Baker, "The Black Experience in Children's Books: An Introductory Essay" (New York: New York Public Library, 1971). Rpt. in *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 75.3 (1971): 145.

10. Donnarae MacCann and Gloria Woodard, *The Black American in Books for Children: Readings in Racism* (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1985), 8.
11. Judith Thompson and Gloria Woodard, "Black Perspectives in Books for Children," in *The Black American in Books for Children: Readings in Racism*, Eds. Donnarae MacCann and Gloria Woodard. (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1985), 41.
12. Violet J. Harris, "African American Children's Literature: The First One Hundred Years," *Journal of Negro Education* 59, no. 4 (1990): 540.
13. Sterling A. Brown, "Negro Characters as Seen by White Authors," *Journal of Negro Education* 2 (1993): 180.
14. Heinrich Hoffmann, *Struwwelpeter: In English Translation* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1845. New York: Dover, 1995).

1 "Hey, Who's the Kid with the Green Umbrella?"

1. Helen Bannerman, *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1899), 45; hereafter cited in text. Heinrich Hoffmann, *Struwwelpeter: In English Translation* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1845. New York: Dover, 1995), 12, 14; hereafter cited in text.
2. Violet J. Harris, "From Little Black Sambo to Popo and Fifina: Arna Bontemps and the Creation of African-American Children's Literature," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 14 (1990): 109.
3. Elizabeth Hay, *Sambo Sahib: The Story of Helen Bannerman Author of* Little Black Sambo (Edinburgh: Paul Harris, 1981), 174; hereafter cited in text.
4. Phyllis J. Yuill, *Little Black Sambo*: *A History of Helen Bannerman's "The Story of Little Black Sambo" and its Popularity/Controversy in the United States* (New York: Racism and Sexism Resource Center for Educators, 1976); hereafter cited in text.
5. Rosemary Dinnage, "Taming the Teatime Tigers," rev. of *Sambo Sahib: The Story of Helen Bannerman, Author "Little Black Sambo,*" by Elizabeth Hay, *Times Literary Supplement* (24 July 1981), 834; hereafter cited in text.
6. Susanna Ashton and Amy Jean Petersen, "Fetching the Jingle Along: Mark Twain's *Slovenly Peter*," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 20, no.1 (1995): 37; hereafter cited in text.
7. Bettina Hurliman, *Three Centuries of Children's Book in Europe*, translated and edited by Brian W. Alderson (Cleveland: World, 1959), 55; hereafter cited in text.
8. Thomas Freeman, "Henrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter*. An Inquiry into the Effects of Violence in Children's Literature," *Journal of Popular Culture* 10, no. 4 (1977): 814–15; hereafter cited in text.
9. Jack Zipes, "Down with Heidi, Down with Struwwelpeter, Three Cheers for the Revolution: Towards a New Socialist Children's Literature in West Germany," *Children's Literature* 5 (1976): 164.
10. Heinrich Hoffmann, "How I Came to Write *Struwwelpeter*," The English *Struwwelpeter*: *Pretty Stories and Funny Pictures* (London: Griffith, Farran & Browne, n.d.); hereafter cited in text.
11. Heinrich Hoffmann, *Slovenly Peter*, translated by Mark Twain (New York: Marchbanks, 1935), 6.

12. Dana Bernitzki, interview by author, Illinois State University, Normal, IL, 1 November 1995.
13. Charles H. Frey and John Griffith, "Heinrich Hoffmann," *The Literary Heritage of Childhood: An Appraisal of Children's Classics in the Western Tradition. Contributions to the Study of World Literature* 20 (New York: Greenwood, 1987), 54; hereafter cited in text as Frey and Griffith.
14. "Moor." *Oxford English Dictionary*, 8 May 2003. http://dictionary.oed.com/entrance.dtl.
15. Jim Crow History website. www.jimcrowhistory.org. 19 December 2002.
16. Bannerman gave protagonists in other of her picture books names such as Quibba, Squibba, Mingo, and Noggy.
17. Brian Alderson, "Meltdown," Rev. of *Sam and the Tigers* by Julius Lester and Jerry Pinkney and *The Story of Little Babaji* by Fred Marcellino, *New York Times Book Review* 10 (November 1996): 34; hereafter cited in text.
18. Marjorie McDonald, "Little Black Sambo," *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 29 (1974): 514; hereafter cited in text. For further discussion of *Epaminondas*, see chapter 2.
19. Philip Hofer, "A First Edition of "Struwwelpeter,' " *American Book Collector* 6, no.1 (1985): 10.
20. Christa Kamenetsky, "Folktales and Traditional Morality," *Children's Literature* 22 (1994): 202.
21. Julius Lester, *Sam and the Tigers: A New Telling of Little Black Sambo*, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney (New York: Dial, 1996); hereafter cited in text.

2 From *Ten Little Niggers* to *Afro-Bets*

1. Sterling A. Brown, *The Negro in American Fiction* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1937), 2; hereafter cited in text.
2. Jessie M. Birtha, "Images of Blacks in American Culture," in *Images of Blacks in American Culture: A Reference Guide to Information Sources*, ed. Jessie Carney Smith. (New York: Greenwood , 1988), 193; hereafter cited in text.
3. Although I found earlier versions of this text both as picture books and as sheet music, this is the first American version that I was able to locate. Jessie M. Birtha identifies the original nursery rhyme as "Ten Little Injuns," written by Septimus Winters as an 1860s American minstrel show song. She says that a London version followed shortly as "Ten Little Nigger Boys" by Frank Green (220). The alternating American and British publications of this work formed something of a conversation for many decades hence.
4. "Ten Little Niggers," *Nursery Numbers* (London: Frederick Warne, 1901).
5. *Nine Niggers More* (New York: McLoughlin Brothers, 187-); hereafter cited in text.
6. I am discussing this as an 1880s text because the illustrations seem commiserate with other texts of this era, although the book is listed as 18—. *The Ten Little Niggers* (London: Birn Brothers, 18—.)
7. Mildred Taylor, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (New York: Dial, 1976), 157.
8. Kate Greenaway, *A Apple Pie* (New York: F. Warne, 1886).

9. E. W. Kemble, *A Coon Alphabet* (New York: R.H. Russell, 1898); hereafter cited in text. E. W. Kemble was the first illustrator of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), handpicked and aggressively "groomed" by Mark Twain. Although many of Kemble's illustrations in this book bear scant resemblance to Twain's textual descriptions, Twain—exercising full control over each image—insisted on Kemble's toning down episodes containing violence and sexual innuendoes. At the same time, Kemble was only twenty-three years old and two years into his career when he began working with Twain (David 335). Eager to advance his career, Kemble had a vested interest in making his late-nineteenth century reader "feel comfortable" (341). Regardless of what this may have meant when he was working under the strict control of a prominent author like Twain, when he began to assume authorial as well as illustrative control of his own work, it seems likely that the more stereotyping Kemble integrated into his images of African Americans, the more his artwork would have pleased his audience. Beverly R. David, "The Pictorial Huck Finn: Mark Twain and His Illustrator, E. W. Kemble," *American Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1974): 331–51.
10. Even though this book was published in London, Frederick Warne Publishers often published their books both in London and in New York, which increased their readership considerably. I am including this book in this discussion with the assumption that Americans eventually had access to it.
11. One of the most startling discoveries that I made while conducting this research reminded me of how common and widely accepted these stereotyped images of black characters were in children's literature. In the Schomburg, I examined a children's novel called *The Heart of Happy Hollow* (1904), written by Paul Lawrence Dunbar and *illustrated by E. W. Kemble*! I was surprised to see these characteristically Kemblesque illustrations in a book written by a well-respected black writer of this era, but given that critics like Sterling A. Brown consider Dunbar's fiction neglectful of the kinds of progress that Reconstruction had made for black Americans, this collaboration is perhaps not so surprising. Brown comments that Dunbar's fear of rising poor whites may have encouraged him to idealize Southern aristocracy, the ex-planters, unjustifiably (Brown "Negro Characters" 77). This idealization clearly had implications for his treatment of black characters. Jessie M. Birtha, speaking of Arna Bontemps, also notes that black authors early in the twentieth century had to "conform to the then current acceptability" of white publishers to make the book saleable (200).
12. Claude Kempson, *The Sad End of Erica's Blackamoor* (London: A. Arnold, 1903), 3; hereafter cited in text.
13. I suspect that Hoffmann's text further influenced this one: the cats that cry for the blackamoor at his funeral look suspiciously like the cats that cry a river over the body of Pauline, who dies from playing with matches after her mother warns her not to.
14. Eloise Lee Sherman, *Pickaninny Namesake* (New York: Frederic Fairchild Sherman, 1911); hereafter cited in text.
15. Violet J. Harris, "*The Brownies' Book*: Challenge to the Selective Tradition in Children's Literature" (Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 1986), 1; hereafter cited in text.

16. Dianne Johnson-Feelings, ed., *The Best of the Brownies Book* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), 13; hereafter cited in text.
17. Notably, Hughes did not publish his first novel for adults until 1930, and Arna Bontemps, Hughes's erstwhile children's literature collaborator, did not publish his first adult novel until 1931 (Brown 155). Despite this fact, only recently have critics begun to take notice of the children's works of these two pioneers. Many of their books have been available primarily through university archives and rare bookstores until Oxford University Press recently began republishing their individual and collaborative works through the Opie Collection. This increased availability should encourage more critical attention.
18. Langston Hughes, *The Sweet and Sour Animal Book* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994), afterword; hereafter cited in text.
19. Although beyond the scope of this project, notable novels of this decade include Mary White Ovington's *Zeke* (1931), Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps's *Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti* (1932), and Arna Bontemps's *You Can't Pet a Possum* (1934). *Tobe* (1939) by Stella Gentry Sharpe, photographs by Charles Farrell, is a notable positive picture book from this era.
20. Emery I. Gondor, *Ten Little Colored Boys* (New York: Howell, Soskin, 1942).
21. Walter Trier, *10 Little Negroes: A New Version* (London: Sylvan Press, 1942); hereafter cited in text.
22. Since this is a British publication, "football" is soccer.
23. This chapter does not discuss the works of Woodson or most of those mentioned here by Bontemps and Hughes both because many of these are novel-length rather than picture books and because most are also nonfictional.
24. *Something about the Author*, vol. 57, s.v. Keats, Ezra Jack, 83.
25. Albert Whitman & Company holds the 1966 text copyright, but Elizabeth Sayles's illustrations were copyrighted in 1991. I suspect that this is a reillustrated book, but without access to the original, I cannot assess whether the racial dynamic were as forwarding-looking as they are in Sayles's pastel illustrations.
26. Ann Herbert Scott, *Sam*, illustrated by Symeon Shimin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).
27. *Something About the Author* vol. 69, s.v. Feelings, Tom, 55; hereafter cited in text.
28. Muriel Feelings, *Moja Means One*, illustrated by Tom Feelings (New York: Dial Press, 1971).
29. Muriel Feelings, *Jambo Means Hello*, illustrated by Tom Feelings (New York: Dial Press, 1974). For a more detailed explanation of Tom Feelings's complex, multistep artistic techniques in this book and his other works, see the "Note About the Art" at the end of *Jambo Means Hello*. Many readers mistakenly assume that these are charcoal illustrations, but Feelings's artistic process attests to his respect for young readers and his painstaking investment in offering them the best reproduction of his original art in picture books that he possibly can. When one considers the cheaply rendered illustrations in Golden Books and other picture books commonly found on grocery store shelves, Feelings's determination to give black children his best as early as the 1970s, before most professional artists considered illustration to be "real art," reveals why he has made a substantial contribution to black children's literature's becoming the prominent genre that it is today.

30. Tom Feelings, *The Middle Passage: White Ships, Black Cargo* (New York: Dial, 1995); hereafter cited in text.
31. Margaret Musgrove, *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions*, illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon (New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1976).
32. Lucille Clifton, *The Black BC's*, illustrated by Don Miller (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970); hereafter cited in text.
33. Cheryl Willis Hudson, interview by author, tape recording (Former Alex Haley Farm, Clinton, TN, 4 August 2002); hereafter cited in text.
34. Just Us Books Homepage, www.justusbooks.com (8 September 2002, updated 2001); hereafter cited in text as Just Us Homepage.
35. Cheryl Willis Hudson, *Afro-Bets ABC Book* (Orange: Just Us Books, 1987).
36. Agatha Christie's mystery novel, *Ten Little Niggers*, had, however, not fallen out of favor. Its publication dates range from 1939 to 1976. This book was also a popular stage play in London for many years, later becoming *Ten Little Indians* and then *Then There Were None*. The film and theater versions kept this story alive from the 1930s until the 1980s.
37. Gerald W. Deas, *Ten Little Niggers*, illustrated by James Brown (New York: Gerald W. Deas, 1981); hereafter cited in text.
38. George Ford's wife, Bernette Ford, founded Jump at the Sun Publishers, an imprint of Hyperion (Disney's publishing company), which specializes in multicultural baby board books and books for very young children. Given Bernette's efforts to reach babies and toddlers of color through this imprint, I believe that Cheryl's decision to have George Ford illustrate this book was purposeful. George Ford, interview by author, tape recording (Former Alex Haley Farm, Clinton, TN, 4 August 2002).
39. Cheryl Willis Hudson, *Let's Count, Baby*, illustrated by George Ford (New York: Scholastic, 1995).
40. Miriam Schlein, *More Than One*, illustrated by Donald Crews (New York: Greenwillow, 1996).
41. Crews seems to enjoy creating self-portraits in his illustrations, which he has done in *Parade* (1990) and in *Bigmama's* (1991), among others. His image also shows up in several books that his wife, graphic artist Ann Jonas, has illustrated. Not surprisingly, Crews and Jonas also sometimes illustrate their own biracial children in their work.
42. Sara Cone Bryant, *Epaminondas and His Auntie* illustrated by Inez Hogan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938; Chicago: Follett, 1968).
43. Mary Pinckney, *Epaminondas: A Folk Tale Told in Gullah*, illustrated by Patrick Servidio (Charleston: Bee & Boo, 1995), 14.
44. Ifeoma Onyefulu, *A is for Africa* (New York: Puffin, 1993).
45. bell hooks, *Happy to Be Nappy*, illustrated by Chris Raschka (New York: Hyperion, 1999).
46. Bernette Ford, interview by author, tape recording (Former Alex Haley Farm, Clinton, TN, 4 August 2002).
47. Sandra Pinkney, *Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children*, illustrated by Myles C. Pinkney (New York: Scholastic, 2000).
48. Sandra Pinkney, *A Rainbow All around Me*, illustrated by Myles C. Pinkney (New York: Scholastic, 2002).

49. Jacqueline Woodson, *The Other Side*, illustrated by E. B. Lewis (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2001).

3 The Influence of the Black Arts Movement on African-American Children's Literature

1. Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement" in *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. Addison Gayle, Jr. (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1971), 272; hereafter cited in text.
2. Hoyt W. Fuller, "Introduction" in *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. Addison Gayle, Jr. (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1971), xv; hereafter cited in text.
3. For further discussion of historical texts that function in this way, see chapter 6.
4. Rose Blue, *A Quiet Place*, illustrated by Tom Feelings (New York: Franklin Watts, 1969); hereafter cited in text. Rose Blue is the exception in this chapter. Though she is not African American, she grew up in Brooklyn and taught Head Start primarily to African-American children in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Because of the content of the book, she also suffered the same rejections in trying to publish her first book, *A Quiet Place*, that many African-American authors experienced during this time. Since she felt that it was important to share books with her students that reflected their daily lives, and since she found that these books didn't exist, she decided to write into this "gap" herself. *Something about the Author*, vol. 117, s.v. Blue, Rose.
5. Nikki Grimes, *Something on My Mind*, illustrated by Tom Feelings, (New York: Dial, 1978); hereafter cited in text.
6. Muriel Feelings, *Jambo Means Hello*, illustrated by Tom Feelings, (New York: Dial Press, 1974); hereafter cited in text.
7. Tony Medina, *DeShawn Days*, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie, (New York: Lee & Low, 2001); hereafter cited in text.
8. Fox Butterfield, "Prison Rates Among Blacks Reach a Peak, Report Finds, " *New York Times* (7 April 2003).
9. Sweet Honey in the Rock website, www.sweethoney.com, 7 April 2003; hereafter cited as Sweet Honey.
10. Ysaye M. Barnwell, *No Mirrors in My Nana's House*, illustrated by Synthia Saint James (New York: Harcourt, 1998); hereafter cited in text.
11. James A. Banks and Jean D. Grambs, *Black Self-Concept* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), xiii; hereafter cited in text.
12. "Black and White: An Exchange," in *The Black American in Books for Children*, ed. Donnarae MacCann and Gloria Woodard (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1972), 30; hereafter cited in text.

4 Pushing the Boundaries

1. W. E. B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art," in *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Winston Napier (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 23; hereafter cited in text.

2. Henrietta M. Smith, editor, *The Coretta Scott King Awards Book: From Vision to Reality* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1994), ix; hereafter cited in text.
3. Sharon Bell Mathis, *Ray Charles*, illustrated by George Ford (New York: Crowell, 1973); hereafter cited in text.
4. Camille Yarbrough, *Cornrows*, illustrated by Carole Byard (New York: Coward-McCann, 1979).
5. Patricia McKissack, *Mirandy and Brother Wind*, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney (New York: Knopf, 1988).
6. John Steptoe, *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale* (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1987), dust jacket.
7. Eloise Greenfield, *Nathaniel Talking*, illustrated by Jan Spivey Gilchrist (New York: Black Butterfly Children's Books, 1988).
8. Leontyne Price, *Aïda*, illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), Author's Note; hereafter cited in text.
9. Faith Ringgold, Tar Beach (New York: Crown, 1991), afterword; hereafter cited in text.
10. Rudine Sims Bishop, "Tom Feelings and *The Middle Passage*," *The Horn Book Magazine* 72, no. 4 (1996): 438.
11. Irene Smalls, *Ebony Sea*, illustrated by Jon Onye Lockard (Stamford: Longmeadow, 1995).
12. Irene Smalls, disgusted with the brevity of *Ebony Sea*'s survival on the market, has decided to bring the book back into print herself. While this is an expensive and labor-intensive way for an author to keep her books alive, it does combat what amounts to market-driven censorship.
13. Kim L. Siegelson, *In the Time of the Drums*, illustrated by Brian Pinkney (New York: Hyperion, 1999).
14. Patricia McKissack, *Goin' Someplace Special*, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney (New York: Atheneum, 2001).

5 From Margin to Center

1. Diane Patrick, "A Living Legacy," *Publishers Weekly* 246, no. 6 (8 Feb. 1999): 120.
2. Troy Pinkney-Ragsdale, Jerry and Gloria Jean's daughter, makes her debut into the field in 2003 with her introduction to *Music from Our Lord's Holy Heaven* on which Gloria Jean, Jerry, Brian, and Myles have all collaborated.
3. Some celebrity African-American families have also published together, as in Toni and Slade Morrison's *The Big Box* (1999) and *The Book of Mean People* (2002), and Spike Lee and his wife Tonya Lewis Lee's *Please, Baby, Please* (2002), but I will not discuss celebrity authors of children's books—a growing trend right now—both because these are not the people who invest their careers in the livelihood of children's literature and also because these books tend to sell because of name recognition despite the literary or artistic quality (which is sometimes quite poor).
4. Because the Pinkney grandchildren, also artistic, have appeared in a few picture books already and also serve as models for family members regularly, I suspect that a third generation of Pinkney artists is on the horizon.

5. Rudine Sims Bishop, "The Pinkney Family: In the Tradition," *The Horn Book Magazine* 72, no. 1 (1996): 42; hereafter cited in text.
6. Brian Pinkney, telephone interview with author, 2 August 2002. Myles Pinkney, telephone interview with author, 31 July 2002.
7. *Something about the Author*, vol. 107, s.v. Pinkney, Jerry, 157; hereafter cited in text.
8. Jerry Pinkney, telephone interview with author, 31 July 2002; hereafter cited in text.
9. Andrea Davis Pinkney, *Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra*, illustrated by Brian Pinkney (New York: Hyperion, 1998).
10. I will discuss the books written by the Pinkney pair rather than Myles's first book of Nikki Grimes's poetry because the Pinkneys, writing and illustrating as a team, would have had more control over the final product than Myles would have had over the Grimes book.
11. Sandra Pinkney, *A Rainbow All around Me*, illustrated by Myles C. Pinkney (New York: Scholastic, 2002).
12. *Something about the Author*, vol. 109, s.v. Myers, Walter Dean, 166; hereafter cited in text.
13. Christopher Myers, telephone interview with author. 28 April 2003; hereafter cited in text.
14. Christopher Myers, *Wings* (New York: Scholastic, 2000).
15. Walter Dean Myers, *Malcolm X: A Fire Burning Bright*, illustrated by Leonard Jenkins (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).
16. Notably, Christopher commented that even though his books with his father look like close collaborations, Walter gives him manuscripts and steps out of the way, refusing to interfere with Christopher's creative process. While Jerry Pinkney's mentorship of Brian and Myles often involves advising them during the creative process—and exchanging advice—it makes sense that this should not be the case with Christopher and Walter; the Pinkney men are all artists, while Christopher is an artist and Walter a writer. Christopher echoes what many of these legacies have said: he received encouragement and support to pursue an artistic career, but he never felt pressured to do so. He said that as a child, he saw his father writing eight hours a day, and from that learned not only that writing is a discipline rather than some kind of gift that is bestowed upon those who do it, but also that he, like his father, could make a living at this craft if he developed that same discipline and sense of commitment (Myers interview).
17. Christopher Myers, *Fly* (New York: Jump at the Sun, 2001).
18. Javaka Steptoe, *In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers* (New York: Lee & Low, 1997). "Seeds" by Javaka Steptoe from the collection titled *In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers.* Text copyright © 1997. Permission arranged with Lee & Low Books, Inc.
19. John Steptoe, *My Daddy Is a Monster . . . Sometimes* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980).
20. "Promises" by David A. Anderson from the collection titled *In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers.* Text copyright © 1997. Permission arranged with Lee & Low Books, Inc.
21. Javaka Steptoe, interview by author tape recording. (Former Alex Haley Farm, Clinton, TN, 11 November 2001; hereafter cited in text).

22. Javaka related to Rudine Sims Bishop in her article "Following in their Father's Paths," that artist Pat Cummings has also mentored him, playing a role in his success by encouraging him to take his portfolio to multicultural children's publisher Lee & Low. Rudine Sims Bishop, "Following in their Father's Paths." *Horn Book Magazine* 74, no. 2 (1998): 250.
23. *Something about the Author*, vol. 76, s.v. Crews, Donald, 43.
24. *Something about the Author*, vol. 97, s.v. Crews, Nina, 48.
25. Nina Crews, interview by author, tape recording (Former Alex Haley Farm, Clinton, N, 11 November 2001); hereafter cited in text. It is likely no coincidence that the publisher of most of Ann Jonas's and Donald Crews's books, Greenwillow, has also published Nina's first several books. As Javaka Steptoe commented, the name recognition helped him to get published initially, but he had to prove himself to become successful. It seems as though Nina has made that transition already.
26. Donald Crews, *Bigmama's* (New York: Greenwillow, 1991).
27. Jaime Adoff website. (www.jaimeadoff.com). March 19, 2003; hereafter cited in text.
28. "Today's Special" from *The Song Shoots Out of My Mouth* by Jaime Adoff. Illustrated by Martin French, copyright © 2002 by Jaime Adoff, text. Used by permission of Dutton Children's Books, A division of Penguin Young Readers Group, A member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 345 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014. All rights reserved.
29. Fredrick McKissack, Jr, telephone interview with author, 4 April 2003; hereafter cited in text.
30. *Something About the Author*, vol. 106, s.v. Dillon, Diane, 56–58; hereafter cited in text.
31. Katura Hudson, telephone interview with author, 4 April 2003; hereafter cited in text.

Section III

1. I have intentionally chosen the texts for this chapter from among mainstream children's literature and not those, such as Mary Barwick's *Alabama Angels* series, which target a religious audience or serve as proselytizing literature. I have made this choice both because books by mainstream ("secular") publishers are generally more widely available than those by religious presses—I couldn't even get a hard copy of the explicitly Christian *The Alabama Angels Join H.E.M.A.* through interlibrary loan but had to be sent a photocopy instead—and because picture books that espouse a particular religious affiliation would be less likely to be used in public schools than those that do not. Secular texts also better serve my purpose of illustrating what happens in the intersection between religious ideas and mainstream black culture.

6 Historical America through the Eyes of the Black Child

1. Irene Smalls, *Ebony Sea*, illustrated by Jon Onye Lockard (Stamford: Longmeadow, 1995).

2. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays,* trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971), 135; hereafter cited in text.
3. William Miller, *The Bus Ride*, illustrated by John Ward (New York: Lee & Low, 1998); hereafter cited in text as *Ride*.
4. Gwen Everett, *Li'l Sis and Uncle Willie* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991).
5. Doreen Rappaport, *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, illustrated by Bryan Collier (New York: Scholastic, 2001); hereafter cited in text as *MBW*.
6. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Society, 1845). Reprinted in Henry Louis Gates and Nelly Y. McKay, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 325.
7. Marie Bradby, *More than Anything Else*, illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet (New York: Orchard, 1995); hereafter cited in text.
8. William Miller, *Richard Wright and the Library Card*, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie (New York: Lee and Low, 1997); hereafter cited in text as *Wright*.
9. Robert Coles, *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, illustrated by George Ford (New York: Scholastic, 1995), introduction; hereafter cited in text as *Ruby*.
10. For reasons that I have not discovered, Robert Coles changed several facts of Bridges's life: he changed her birth town, Tylertown, to Tylerton; her father's occupation from auto mechanic/service station attendant to janitor, and her teacher's name from Mrs. Henry to Mrs. Hurley. These changes, though they make the story less accurate, do not substantially impact the plot of the factual story or Ruby's character.
11. Ruby Bridges, *Through My Eyes* (New York: Scholastic, 1999).
12. Walt Disney, *Ruby Bridges: a Real American Hero*, produced by Euzhan Palcy (90 min. Walt Disney Home Video, 1998. Videocassette).
13. William Miller, *Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree*, illustrated by Cornelius Van Wright and Ying-Hwa Hu (New York: Lee & Low, 1994); hereafter cited in text.
14. Floyd Cooper, *Coming Home: From the Life of Langston Hughes* (New York: Philomel, 1994).
15. Stephanie Tolan, "Happily Ever After," *The New Advocate* 2 (1989): 9–14. Rpt. *On Becoming Political: Readings and Writings in the Politics of Literacy Education*, ed. Patrick Shannon (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1992), 61–62.
16. Dianne Johnson, "'I See Me in the Book': Visual Literacy and African-American Children's Literature," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1990): 11.

7 "Just Build Me a Cabin in the Corner of Glory Land"

1. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "Criticism in the Jungle." *Black Literature & Literary Theory* (New York: Routlege, 1990), 3; hereafter cited in text.
2. *Something about the Author*, vol. 44, s.v. Bontemps, Arna, 46; hereafter cited in text as *SATA* "Bontemps."

3. Arna Bontemps, *Bubber Goes to Heaven*, illustrated by Daniel Minter (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 10; hereafter cited in text.
4. During the spring of 2001, my then-fiance, my parents, and I went to make food arrangements for our wedding at the facility where the wedding would be held. When we came to the decision of what to serve, Beth, the woman who communicates with the caterer, who also happens to be white, said to us, "Well, it doesn't really matter what you serve. People are coming to see the ceremony. They don't really eat at weddings." We all looked at each other knowingly, and then I said to her, "Maybe *your* people don't eat at weddings, but *our* people *eat*!" At our wedding reception, we fed a fabulous feast of prime rib to five hundred and fifty guests, many of whom still mention the reception food when we see them. Several months after our wedding, my mother came home from the wedding of a neighbor's daughter who "didn't serve a thing but cake and punch." People in the neighborhood will be bad-mouthing this bride's mother for years to come because, as my mother said, "It's not like they're poor. Look at that nice house they live in . . . and both parents with good jobs. They surely could have done better than cake and punch! And Clarence [the neighbor] went to the wedding hungry, thinking they were going to serve. Now that's a shame!" My mother was not about to be run down by neighbors in this way. This is all in support of my point about the centrality of food—especially eating as a platform on which many social events are built—in African-American communities.
5. Julius Lester, *What a Truly Cool World*, illustrated by Joe Cepeda (New York: Scholastic, 1999); hereafter cited in text as *Cool*.
6. Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), 120.
7. Carolivia Herron, *Nappy Hair*, illustrated by Joe Cepeda (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).
8. Margot Zemach, *Jake and Honeybunch Go to Heaven* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1982); hereafter cited in text.
9. Nancy L. Arnez, rev. of *Jake and Honeybunch Go to Heaven* by Margot Zemach, *The Crisis* (March 1983). Rpt. *In The Black American in Books Children: Readings in Racism*. 2nd ed. Eds. Donarae MacCann and Gloria Woodard (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1985), 208.
10. Beryle Banfield and Geraldine L. Wilson, "The Black Experience Through White Eyes—The Same Old Story Once Again," in *The Black American in Books for Children: Readings in Racism*. 2nd ed. Eds. Donnarae MacCann and Gloria Woodard (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1985), 202.
11. Jan Spivey Gilchrist, *Madelia* (New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1997).
12. Della Reese, *God Inside of Me*, illustrated by Yvonne Buchanan (New York: Jump at the Sun, 1999).
13. Maria Shriver, *What's Heaven*? illustrated by Sandra Speidel (New York: Scholastic, 1999). These two books are part of a contemporary trend—an unfortunate one, in my opinion—of celebrities who are not writers writing books for children. A long tradition exists of authors who write for adults crossing over into publishing for children: Virginia Woolf, E. B. White, Langston Hughes, and more recently Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker,

for example. But the recent trend of celebrities like Will Smith, Maria Shriver, Bill Cosby, and Dom DeLuise writing fictional children's picture books has brought a flood of painfully didactic, mediocre but best-selling titles into the marketplace. This, though worth mentioning here, is a research project for another time.

14. Taking up the entire back cover of the book is a full-color photograph of a smiling Della Reese, the caption of which pronounces, "*THE STAR OF TV's *Touched by an Angel**." In case this caption does not sell the book, the publisher adds a line about the book itself: "Della Reese weaves an inspirational story of a spunky little girl who discovers God within herself and others" (*God Inside* dust jacket).

8 "Ain't I Fine!"

1. By "storying," I mean the way that people narrate life events to one another. "Storytelling" might be an acquired or learned craft that only certain people do, but "storying" is something that we all do, and it is my contention in this chapter that the means by which "storying" happens in certain African-American children's picture books reflects the ways that African Americans have traditionally and do currently communicate with one another primarily in social—rather than business or other "official"—contexts.
2. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987).
3. Although I defined the parameters of "African-American children's literature" very broadly in the introduction, this chapter, as with chapter 3, deals primarily with books authored by African Americans, since an African-American cultural background is an important prerequisite for authors being able to integrate black modes of discourse into their work. That's not to say that non-African-American writers cannot integrate these forms of communication into their writing if they have done the "homework" of learning how, but the books that are currently being published suggest that black authors are much more likely to write this style of speech into their texts than are non-African-American authors.
4. Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977); hereafter cited in text. "Tonal semantics" relates to sound, which traditional books (without CD roms or computer chips) cannot deliver. Hence, I will not discuss this fourth mode of black discourse in this chapter.
5. From *Nappy Hair* by Carolivia Herron, illustrated by Joe Cepeda, copyright © 1997 by Alfred A. Knopf. Quotes used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf.
6. Carolivia Herron, *Nappy Hair*, illustrated by Joe Cepeda (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); hereafter cited in text.
7. Julius Lester, *Ackamarackus*, illustrated by Emilie Chollat (New York: Scholastic, 2001), 8–9.

9 "Why Are We Reading This Stuff?"

1. Since at this time, I was integrating the English Department, my presence in that department and in that class might very well have taken this student aback.
2. Carole Brown Knuth, "African American Children and the Case for Community." *African American Review* 32, no. 1 (1998), 87; hereafter cited in text.
3. Eleanora E. Tate, *The Secret of Gumbo Grove* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1987), 146.
4. Maya Angelou, ed., *Soul Looks Back in Wonder*, illustrated by Tom Feelings (New York: Dial, 1993).
5. Jacque Roethler, "Reading in Color: Children's Book Illustrations and Identity Formation of Black Children in the United States." *African American Review* 32, no. 1 (1998): 97; hereafter cited in text.
6. Stephanie Perkins, unpublished student essay, 1998.
7. A discrepancy exists between the reading level of *Nightjohn* and its content. A third grader could likely read the book with little trouble, but because the story details slaves being raped, maimed, dismembered, castrated, killed, and left to be devoured by wild animals, it is perhaps more suited to readers older than that. The publisher has assigned *Nightjohn* a "4.6" reading level designation (fourth grade, sixth month), but I doubt that many teachers would teach this book before junior high.
8. Gary Paulsen, *Nightjohn* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1993).
9. *The Gold Cadillac* is not directly connected with the Logan family saga, but the family that drives the gold Cadillac South does so to visit relatives in Mississippi—the home of the Logan family.
10. Mildred Taylor, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (New York: Dial, 1976); hereafter cited in text as *Thunder*.
11. Although I have attempted this "constellation" approach only with Mildred Taylor's texts because of the number of them, I suspect that Eleanora Tate's South Carolina Trilogy might offer a similar learning experience.
12. Even given that Smalls has recently republished the books herself, they might be difficult for bookstores to get in large numbers, and they might also be prohibitively expensive.
13. Andrea Davis Pinkney, *Silent Thunder: A Civil War Story* (New York: Hyperion, 1999); hereafter cited in text.
14. Joyce Hansen, Dear America, *I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, a Freed Girl* (New York: Scholastic, 1997).
15. Patricia McKissack, *Dear America, A Picture of Freedom: The Diary of Clotee, A Slave Girl* (New York Scholastic, 1997); hereafter cited in text as *Clotee.*

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