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## ABSTRACT

The child entering nursery or elementary school is aware of his own race and of racial differences among other children and adults, is likely to have evaluated different races, has probably questioned his own skin color or that of others, and has possibly behaved prejudicially. Until very recently the question of race was ignored in children's literature; blacks have been virtually nonexistent as far as the publishing industry was concerned. Although publishers and editors contend that large numbers of books involving black people are available today, they do admit that the sales problem largely determines how many get published. Few people seem to question how many so-called integrated books actually exist: yet a search for fiction picture books involving black people located only 56 published between 1939 and 1971. Almost half portray black people only. Of those showing both black and white people, the illustrations in at least half of them make skin color indeterminate. With one or two exceptions, no book mentions race. Of the 56 as listed in the annotated bibliography included in this report, just four were published before 1950, only seven during the fifties, almost all the remainder during the sixties, together with seven 1970 books.

(Author/JM)

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BLACK REPRESENTATION IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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ERIC INFORMATION RETRIEVAL CENTER ON THE DISADVANTAGED

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May 1971

Selections from Some of the Days of Everett Anderson by Lucille Clifton

FRIDAY      WAITING FOR MOM

When I am seven  
Mama can stay  
from work and play with me  
all day.  
I won't go to school,  
I'll pull up a seat  
by her and we can talk  
and eat  
and we will laugh  
at how it ends;  
Mama and Everett Anderson-  
Friends.

FRIDAY      MOM IS HOME      PAYDAY

Swishing one finger  
in the foam  
of Mama's glass  
when she gets home  
is a very  
favorite thing to do.  
Mama says  
foam is a comfort,  
Everett Anderson  
says so too.

SUNDAY MORNING      LONELY

Daddy's back  
is broad and black  
and Everett Anderson loves to ride it.  
Daddy's side  
is black and wide  
and Everett Anderson sits beside it.  
Daddy's cheek  
is black and sleek  
and Everett Anderson kisses it.  
Daddy's space  
is a black empty place  
and Everett Anderson misses it.

SUNDAY NIGHT      GOODNIGHT

The stars are so near  
to 14A  
that after playing outside  
all day  
Everett Anderson likes to pretend  
that stars are where  
apartments end.

No child is born prejudiced. He "has to be carefully taught, before he is six or seven or eight." Research findings support this Rogers and Hammerstein proposition that children are born free of prejudice, that they learn it before they are eight years old, and that society performs this instructional task in a fairly systematic, if not completely overt, manner. Although these ideas are becoming more and more widely understood and accepted today, most people, teachers included, are still shocked to find out the very young age at which this education to prejudice becomes apparent. In his now-classic brief for the 1954 Supreme Court school desegregation case, Kenneth Clark cited one of his studies in which "Among three-year-old Negro children in both northern and southern communities, more than 75 percent showed that they were conscious of the difference between 'white' and 'colored'."<sup>1</sup> After reviewing the literature in this field, Betty Atwell Wright concluded that "As early as two and one half, many children are aware of racial differences and begin to associate darker skin color with being 'dirty'..."<sup>2</sup> Robert Coles writes: "By the third year of life the child is asking the kinds of questions that ultimately will include one about his skin color."<sup>3</sup> And on a more concrete level, one preschool teacher cites a very typical question, in this case from a child who is very dark and whose mother is quite light: "Why did God make some people brown and some people white?"<sup>4</sup> Clark summarizes the situation: "The findings clearly support the conclusion that racial awareness is present in Negro children as young as three years old. Furthermore, this knowledge develops in stability and clarity from year to year, and by the age of seven it is a part of the knowledge of all Negro children. Other investigators have shown that the same is true of white children."<sup>5</sup>

Once we accept that very young children are aware of racial differences (at least skin color), we need to ask what attitudes result from this awareness. One thing seems both certain and logical. "As children develop an awareness of racial differences and of their racial identity, they also develop an awareness and acceptance of the prevailing social attitudes and values attached to race and skin color."<sup>6</sup> In studying children of the South, Coles concluded that "...long before a white child goes to school he has learned that good and bad can find very real and convenient expression in black and white skin. Negro children are described as bad, ill-mannered, naughty, disobedient, dirty, careless, in sum everything that the white child struggles so hard not to be."<sup>7</sup> Needless to say, the black child has learned much of this same lesson too. A good part of this he may even have learned from his parents since for generations the Negro has known (and taught his children) that in order to survive, they must appear subservient to the white man. The result for the white child is "moral conflicts, guilty feelings, the false and unhealthy sense of superiority and the resulting damage to character structure..."<sup>8</sup> Black children "react with deep feelings of inferiority and with a sense of personal humiliation. Many of them become confused about their own personal worth...[they] develop

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conflicts with regard to their feelings about themselves and about the value of the group with which they are identified."<sup>9</sup> Although all of these characteristics are not readily apparent in all preschool children, the beginning indications are there and are commonly discussed today under headings such as "negative self-image" and "unrealistic self-evaluation." In the child's early school years these labels blossom into more clear and more disturbing manifestations like prejudice and discriminatory behaviors. A study referred to by Wright brings home this point. Four hundred Philadelphia children, aged five through seven and of various races, religions, and nationalities, were studied. "Nine percent expressed open rejection against Catholics, 27 percent against Jews, and 68 percent against Negroes."<sup>10</sup>

We may know that very young children are aware of race, that they are influenced in this by their environment, and that they often assign positions of inferiority or superiority on the basis of race, but we are much less certain about what the construct race really means in their eyes. In his discussion of the growth of the ego, Erik Erikson comments that "White children may feel that colored people have become dark by a dirtying process, colored people may consider whites a bleached form of colored man. In either case there is the idea of a washable layer."<sup>11</sup> This contention is supported by a story quoted by Thomas Curtin. Nine-year-old Brian of Boston tells a reporter: "Once I was supposed to shake hands with a colored man--but I was afraid... I thought the color would come off on me... I did--and it didn't."<sup>12</sup> Although the child in this case is nine years old, we may venture a guess that younger children might have the same fear but be less capable of expressing it verbally.

Coles relates another experience of a child's confusion about skin color and racial differences. Coles asked a seven-year-old white boy how his black schoolmate was different: "'Could you draw a picture that shows how Johnnie is different--or is it because his skin color is different and that's it?' 'No,' he shook his head, 'it's more than skin color, because if I get a sunburn, I get tan, but I'm still not like Johnnie'."<sup>13</sup>

Children have ideas, feelings and fears about race and skin color. Given an open and conducive environment, they will express themselves. In a recent book, Coles and Maria Piers describe an experimental nursery program at the St. Agatha Home in Rockland County, New York. One teacher in the St. Agatha program, Mrs. Joan Bodger, writes: "I discovered several years ago that to deny or to ignore a child's Negro-ness was to deny perception. The first time I started a conversation with a small boy about the color of his skin I was filled with trepidation, then struck by the relief that poured over his face. Suddenly I realized that he had thought me stupid because I had not noticed his darkness. He evidently felt that even I might one day realize he was a Negro and not love him anymore. He also inferred that being black was so terrible that no one ever mentioned it."<sup>14</sup>

This need for open discussion was made even clearer soon after when Mrs. Bodger had finished reading to the children a story about a black boy playing in the snow. Since it had just snowed in the children's neighborhood too, she remarked: "We were all like Peter [the book's lead character] this morning." One of the children responded immediately: "No, No. Only Ulysses [the black boy in the class] is just like Peter!"<sup>15</sup>

What we have been saying is that the child entering nursery or elementary school is aware of his own race and of racial differences among other children and adults, is likely to have associated value statements with his notion of race (white is good and black is, at the very most, questionable), has probably raised questions about his own skin color or the skin color of, for example, people on television, and has possibly exhibited discriminatory behavior (even if it is only to fear joining a group of children of a different race).

What might this still very impressionable child find out about race at school? First, he will see that race is an important basis on which to group children. The vast majority of schools in all parts of this country are segregated by race. Those that are not de jure segregated are de facto segregated, and those that are neither usually practice segregation within the school building itself. Second, except in southern black schools (where the power of blacks is strictly superficial) he will see that black men are rarely in positions of authority and that black women are rarely in positions of authority above that of teacher. Most principals, assistant principals and supervisors are white, while many menial employees (janitors, kitchen help) are black. Third, he will most likely have a teacher who has had little preparation in how to handle her own feelings on the subject, no less the children's questions. Fourth, he will rarely see a black face in any book that he reads. To judge by his books, history was made by whites only (except for an occasional supercilious treatment of a Negro slave) and the fantasy world is populated by whites only; even the newer so-called inner-city texts present only a scattering of insipid "color-me-brown" type faces.

Until very recently the question of race was ignored in children's literature; even worse was the fact that blacks were virtually nonexistent as far as the publishing world was concerned. One could open almost any children's book and be sure to see white faces only. As Nancy Larrick wrote in the September 1965 *Saturday Review*: "...one of the most critical issues in American education today [is] the almost complete omission of Negroes from books for children. Integration may be the law of the land, but most of the books children see are all white."<sup>16</sup>

"The All-White World of Children's Books," Larrick's article referred to above, presents an excellent overview of the children's publishing industry as of mid-1965. After surveying more than 5,000 trade books published for children in 1962, '63 and '64 and questioning 63 publishers, Larrick concluded that "...the vast majority of recent books are as white as the segregated zoo."<sup>17</sup> To be specific, "...of the 5,206 children's trade books launched by the sixty-three publishers in the three-year period, only 349 include one or more Negroes--an average of 6.7 percent."<sup>18</sup> The 6.7 percent figure may seem excruciatingly small for the enlightened era of the mid-60's, but it appeared that little improvement was in sight. "According to reports from editors, about nine percent of their 1965 books will include one or more Negroes. This is 1.5 percent above the average for 1964."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, even that low figure was probably deceiving because "Of the books which publishers report as 'including one or more Negroes,' many show only one or two dark faces in a crowd. In others, the litho-pencil sketches leave the reader wondering whether a delicate shadow indicates a racial difference or a case of sunburn."<sup>20</sup>

The reaction to Larrick's article was mixed, but most people agreed on one thing--there were shockingly few children's books which centered on or even included black people. Many writers felt that this situation could and would be quickly corrected despite Larrick's conclusion: "It is no accident that Negro history and Negro identification have been forgotten....Publishers have participated in a cultural lobotomy....Our society has contrived to make the American Negro a rootless person."<sup>21</sup>

For quite some time articles abounded that deplored this vacuum, and every time a new "integrated" or "multiethnic" book was published it was greeted with much literary discussion as well as advertising. Basal readers began to appear with a sprinkling of black faces, some photographic essays highlighted black children, and a few dark people appeared in some fiction picture books. All this discussion and publicity occasioned a strange leap of faith among the public, professional as well as general, so that today we are all rather complacent in our assurance that the world of children's books is at last racially balanced.

Articles and bibliographies keep appearing that lead one to believe that the number of such books is quite adequate. A few examples follow. The introduction to The Negro in Schoolroom Literature, an annotated bibliography prepared at the Center for Urban Education, stated that "...publishers in effect are competing among themselves to represent American society as a community of many ethnic groups, multiracial and socially complex."<sup>22</sup> Another bibliography prepared at Bank Street at Harlem comments that "Teachers on every grade level--from pre-Kindergarten through to the high school years--can find inexpensive texts that will build self-concept of the

Negro child and aid the white child in gaining an understanding and appreciation of the Negro race."<sup>23</sup> "Guidelines for Black books: An Open Letter to Juvenile Editors" by Augusta Baker, Coordinator of Children's Services for the New York Public Library, assumes that so many manuscripts are being submitted and published that editors need some advice on quality control. Interestingly, she adds that "One of my pet irritations today is the whole idea that the great interest and upsurge in books about black life has just come along. 1937 and 1938 were the years when the interest in this whole subject was born."<sup>24</sup>

Although articles and bibliographies rarely focus on picture books, they do include them in their lists. Publisher's Weekly in January 1970 recommended 18 fiction books involving black people, of which a grand total of four were appropriate for the preschool child.<sup>25</sup> Integrated School Books published by the NAACP lists nine books depicting blacks which might be used with the preschooler.<sup>26</sup> The CUE bibliography mentioned earlier cites eight picture books and the Bank Street one cites three. These figures are small enough in absolute terms, but it must be remembered that most of the books cited in one list appear on the others as well.

Although publishers and editors alike contend that large numbers of books involving black people are available today, they do admit that the sales problem has been a major determinant of how many books get published; i.e., are whites willing to buy books with black people in them and do blacks seek out such books or have enough economic power to influence the industry? Larrick wrote that: "...the sad fact is that many publishing houses are catering to such mothers [anti-integration in any form] of the South and of the North. As one sales manager said, 'Why jeopardize sales by putting one or two Negro faces in an illustration?' Caroline Rubin, editor at Albert Whitman, tells of three books brought out in the 1950's. . . 'The books won favorable comment. . . but the effect on sales was negative. . . this tempered attitudes toward further use of Negro children in illustrations and texts'."<sup>27</sup> In July of 1969 Publisher's Weekly reported that: "27 firms said bookstore sales of books concerning race relations was rising; 5 said it would and 10 could not answer definitely at the time. . . . The marketing chief of Bethany Press, which is just moving into this area said he was hopeful, but was a bit pessimistic because he could 'easily imagine parents shielding their children from books which examine unpleasant subjects. . . .'"<sup>28</sup>

Although marketing and sales problems are admitted in certain circles, few people seem to question how many so-called integrated books actually exist; indeed an almost self-congratulatory attitude is often taken in writing about the subject. People have come to assume that many of these books exist and thus do not demand that a complete list of which books there are be presented. As mentioned before, bibliographies cite four, five, six books, but that is hardly an impressive enough figure to cause such euphoria. Feeling

that the evidence was by no means in, I made a serious attempt myself to accumulate the names of all fiction picture books involving black people. I was able to find 56. That includes books published in the years 1939-1970--a 31-year span! This is in comparison with the hundreds of thousands of picture books published during that period!

Although its brevity is the most telling thing about my list, it is also significant that: (1) Almost half of these 56 books portray black people only. Whether this is admirable or not is a separate question, but it is certain that to label them "integrated" or "multiethnic" as they are commonly called is inaccurate and misleading. (2) Of the books which show both black and white people, the illustrations in at least half of them make skin color indeterminable. (3) With one or two exceptions, no book mentions race nor uses words like Negro, Caucasian, Afro-American. (4) Of these 56, just four were published before 1950, only seven appeared during the '50's, and almost all of the others came out during the '60's (seven 1970 books are listed). Thus, the answer to our original question--has literature for young children assisted in the development of an unprejudiced and realistic understanding of race--must be "not very well." Before the 1960's, so few books existed depicting black people as to be negligible. If the pre-1960 preschool child were to judge reality by his books, he would not even know that black people existed. In the last 10 years the situation has improved but not very significantly. Although more such books exist, they are still comparatively few in number, one has to search them out, many are vague in their representation of black skin, and practically none addresses itself to the subject of race.

Literature, like all the arts, reflects the attitudes and mores of the society in which it appears. In a time of rapidly changing attitudes, such as ours, artists of all kinds must be one step ahead just to keep pace. Children's literature, by and large, has not been able to keep abreast. In terms of our focus here, in nearly any picture book published in 1970, we would see a fairly accurate representation of the racial attitudes of the early 1960's, i.e., stress on the sameness of all people and avoidance of explicit references to race, emphasis on integration. Part of this 10-year gap may be explained by the amount of time it takes for a completed book to be published and then to be circulated. The book which appears in the bookstore in 1970 will most likely not reach the library until 1971 and was probably written in 1968.

Other reasons for this gap may be the general lack of courage found among children's authors, editors and publishers, the widely shared belief that no "unpleasant" topics should be approached in picture books and the fact that most juvenile authors are in closer touch with professional journalism than they are with live children and the latter's very accurate reflection of a changing society. If writers spent more of their time among their readership,

they might come to see that young children are affected by and vitally concerned with the problems of the larger society; even the preschooler does not live in a fairy tale land of cabbages and kings. One other very important reason for the behind-the-times attitude of children's books as concerns race is the historic exclusion of black people from the writing, illustrating and publishing industry.

If one looks back to children's books in the late 1930's and 1940's, one might assume that the Civil War had never been fought. In those years, "it was unheard of to portray a black man as anything other than a servant."<sup>29</sup> Not only were the few blacks that did appear in children's books portrayed as servants, but also they were usually shown as lazy, servile and ignorant--in short, clearly of a different species from the rest of the characters in the story. A revolutionary (though by today's standards unexemplary) exception was Stella Gentry Sharpe's book about a young Negro boy. Tobe was published in 1939 and was unusual both because the lead character was not a servant and because the photographs by Charles Farrell saved the book from the disparaging illustrations of blacks common to that period.

The pattern for children's books until the 1860's continued to be the exclusion of black people or the stereotyped and derogatory portrayal of them. Three much-heralded exceptions to this trend are interesting in what they tell us of the more liberal-minded and forward looking people of those years.

My Dog Rinty written by Ellen Tarry and Marie Hall Ets came out in 1946 and like Tobe used photographs as its illustrations. (One wonders if artists were reluctant to try their hands at picturing black people.) The tale takes place in Harlem and is more important for the view it gives the reader of black people in all walks of life and at various economic levels than it is for the rather dull and routine story line. Nowhere is it mentioned that the characters are black or that their neighborhood, Harlem, differs from other neighborhoods in any way. What is the child, white or black, used to books showing only white people supposed to make of this?

Jerrold and Lorraine Beim wrote two books, Two is a Team published in 1945 and Swimming Hole published in 1950, which were extraordinary in that they showed black and white boys playing together. Two is a Team, a moralistic story about the benefits of cooperation, has been acclaimed for the fact that no one would know, except for the illustrations, that one of the boys is Negro. This point is driven home so hard in the book as almost to reveal its absurdity.

Very few authors took even the modest lead as fashioned by the Beims, and books continued to ignore the existence of black people. In 1950 Jerrold Beim's Swimming Hole took the most courageous (and indeed necessary) step of

bringing the question of skin color out into the open.\* Here prejudice was acknowledged and proved to be simply foolish! The point was made by the white boys' realizing that their skin too becomes a different color when they get sunburned. In light of the undisputable fact that a sunburn fades and a Negro's skin remains constant in color, Beim's moral would be confusing even to an adult. It must be totally perplexing for the young child who, as pointed out earlier in this paper, associates skin color with such changeable conditions as being dirty, with the idea as Erikson says of a "washable layer," and is capable of realizing (as one white child said to Robert Coles) "if I get a sunburn, I get tan, but I'm still not like Johnnie."<sup>30</sup>

It was in the mid-1960's that awareness and shock over the treatment of black people in children's literature became widespread. Writers and publishers responded to this public cry for the depiction of black people by what has come to be known as the "color-me-brown" style of book. Here is Beim's (and others') position that all children are alike carried to its extreme. Looking at the text and trade books of this persuasion, one would guess that the illustrators went through "every third page and painted one child and every fourth family black to integrate the book."<sup>31</sup> Even Dick and Jane got their brown counterparts!

As blacks in all walks of life were asserting their own separate and different racial identity (emphasis on their African heritage, on soul music, soul food, on self-help, black power, and in some cases on black separatism), children's books were still reflecting the "all children are the same," ignore race, school of thought.

The Bank Street Readers, heralded as the new and correct kind of basal readers and as particularly relevant for the inner-city child, showed black people but made no distinction as to race. John Nieneyer, President of Bank Street, expressed the position of the Readers as well as most of the publishing industry when he wrote: In these books the child "will meet people who--whatever their skin color, social status, or economic position--think, feel, and dream just as he does."<sup>32</sup> The influential children's editor of The New York Times stated a similar position. Writing about his speech at the University of Mississippi, he noted: "The review of Ezra Jack Keats' The Snowy Day which appeared in The New York Times was read to the audience. It was pointed out that nowhere did the reviewer mention that Peter was a Negro child. It was my feeling that such a fact was immaterial, that the book possessed an artistic merit, an excellence over and above what the characters happen to be."<sup>33</sup>

\*Although this book is not technically classed a picture book, I include it here both because of its importance and because it can be used with young children.

In this climate of opinion My Dog Rinty, Two is a Team and Swimming Hole remained popular, i.e., appeared on bookstore, library and classroom shelves. Other popular books of this period were Gabrielle and Selena, the Ezra Jack Keats books (see below), and Sam. Gabrielle and Selena by Peter Desbarats is the story of two girls who "were like sisters. Although they had lived in the world for eight long years, neither of them could remember a time when they had not been together."<sup>34</sup> Gabrielle is white and Selena is black, but nowhere in the text is this noted. Although the illustrations by Nancy Grossman are engaging and realistic and show Selena with an Afro haircut and with closely sketched pencil lines to suggest her black skin, nowhere in the text is the reader's guess that Selena is black corroborated. Even the introductory description of the two girls ignores it. The two sets of parents go along with the game, and Gabrielle eats dinner at Selena's house pretending to be Selena all the while and Selena eats at Gabrielle's house. The implication is that the girls are so alike (in soul if not also in body) as to be interchangeable--except for some minor food preferences on which the resolution of the story relies. Nowhere is any problem even hinted at. One would assume from reading this book that an intimate relationship between a black and a white child was common, that there was no discomfort on the part of either family, and that there was no community response to it.

Ezra Jack Keats' books have been and continue to be bestsellers. The Snowy Day (winner of the 1963 Caldecott award), A Letter to Amy, Peter's Chair and Whistle for Willie are each a simple story of a young Negro boy, Peter, and are much acclaimed for their lovely collage illustrations. Although practically all the characters are black, no mention is ever made of the fact. The implication clearly is that black people are "just like everybody else."

In a letter to the Saturday Review editor, Keats made it clear that the omission of racial identification or discussion was no oversight on his part. "In a book for children three to six years of age, where the color of one's skin makes it clear who is Negro and who is white, is it arbitrarily necessary to append racial tags? Might I suggest armbands?"<sup>35</sup>

Another popular book representing this black as every-child point of view is Sam by Ann Herbert Scott. Like Gabrielle and Selena and the Keats' books, the illustrations in Sam show that he and his family are Negro. Nowhere, however, is the fact made explicit. Rather, Sam is just like children everywhere; he wants to play but "Everyone in his house was too busy, and no one wanted to play with him."<sup>36</sup>

What message do these books bring to young children? If we accept the position that the child as young as three is aware of skin color differences and is beginning to ask questions and form opinions about the subject, then what is

he to make of these books? The message conveyed to him, I think, is that race is a taboo subject, that we do not use race-related words, that there is no difference between Gabrielle and Selena, and if he thinks there is a difference, he is wrong.

In October 1967 Charlemae Rollins, writing in a librarians' journal, was in tune with the publishing industry when she lauded Keats for not mentioning color in his books, but she also opened the door to the future when she meekly suggested in another part of the article: "Nowadays ignoring color is perhaps no longer necessary..."<sup>37</sup> Two years later in the same magazine Judith Thompson and Gloria Woodard were taking this position strongly and confidently. (Although those two years had seen vast changes in the attitudes and strategies of the fight for racial equality in this country, there had been little change in the attitudes and strategies of librarians and children's authors as concerns racial prejudice.) "Certainly, integration and assimilation are not possible until the recognition of and respect for these differences are fully realized....[Black Americans] refuse to make invisible that one attribute which connotes their unity, culture, and heritage....When a writer lacks...black consciousness and creative ability, the result is too often a kind of verbal minstrel show--whites in blackface--rather than the expression of a real or imagined experience....[Books should] lead children naturally to the conclusion that differences--in personality, abilities, background--are desirable among people."<sup>38</sup>

After extensive searching, I have been able to find only three books which imply that racial differences exist and are desirable. These are Stevie by John Steptoe, Some of the Days of Everett Anderson by Lucile Clifton, and Black is Beautiful by Ann McGovern.

Some of the Days of Everett Anderson is a group of mood poems, one for each day of the week. They are appealing for their catchy rhythms, their repetitions (so important to young children), their lovely images, and their sensitivity to universal feelings. The poems are unique for their honest avowal of the identity of Everett Anderson ("Who's black and runs and loves to hop? Everett Anderson does."), for their racial pride ("Daddy's back is broad and black and Everett Anderson loves to ride it...Daddy's cheek is black and sleek and Everett Anderson kisses it"), and for their sensitive depictions of real feelings ("When I am seven Mama can stay from work and play with me all day").<sup>39</sup> They are both lovely and revolutionary, in terms not only of the past but also of the present of children's books.

Black is Beautiful by Ann McGovern is a difficult book to deal with. The author's intent is in keeping with the times (and thus ahead of most children's books)--"I want every black child to know he is beautiful. I want every white child to know that black is beautiful."<sup>40</sup>

Few critical appraisals of picture books involving black people have appeared. Most bibliographies and lists of recommended books seem to accept all but the most flagrantly racist books. This vacuum of serious criticism may be partly explained by the fact that many compilers of these lists are looking at books for all age levels and have no particular knowledge of or contact with preschool children; this should tell us then that their recommendation of any book, not only black books, may be of minimal value. Another explanation, though hardly a justification, may be that the compilers of these bibliographies who know something about children's literature have little experience in race relations, and those who have experience in race relations have little knowledge of children's literature.

A critical discussion of some of the most frequently mentioned and commonly seen picture books follows. Many people ask if these books should be judged on the basis of what is quality children's literature or on the basis of what will help children develop a healthy perception of racial differences. The either-or choice tends to be misleading because what is really high quality literature must deal in an age-appropriate way with all the stimuli it presents to the reader. The book that presents the very important stimuli of skin color differences and then ignores this as a critical issue is simply not attuned to the perceptiveness or needs of the young reader. Such a book confuses the child rather than enlightens him. That a book can present black people and by the fact of not saying they are black thus make their blackness unimportant, unnoticed, or even invisible is an impossibility and worse still, a denial of the very things we are trying to teach the preschooler.

As we give children a handle to deal with night fears or sibling jealousy, why cannot we give them a handle to deal with their fears and illusions about skin color? The child who talks about and reads about nighttime fears will soon give his awesome monster a name, thus enabling him, we hope, to cope more successfully with that illusion. The writer who does not understand that words are important to the preschooler precisely because they make his own feelings less frightening, less powerful and more manageable will not be able to reach the young reader very well. As the teacher quoted earlier in this paper (see page 2) wrote: "We had lots of books around with pictures of Negro children, but that was not enough. We had to put it into words."<sup>41</sup>

In the same way that it would be unnatural for all books to include Negroes (for black people are only about 10% of the population of the United States; also they have no place in stories taking place in most Western European or Far Eastern countries), it would be unnatural if all books that did include Negroes were to deal specifically and explicitly with the fact of, and the problems related to, being black. The dilemma is that hardly any picture book does so; therefore, none can get away with the explanation that this problem is dealt with in other books. The teacher or parent who wants black

in even some of his children's books has few to choose from. Worse off is the teacher or parent who wants some books that show blacks as something more than a darkfaced version of white and/or deal in some way with race-related problems; he has almost none from which to choose.

Given the limitations discussed above, one can still find several useful, though not in all ways exemplary, books which include or focus on black people. These are cited in the accompanying bibliography and are marked by an asterisk. Prior to the bibliography is a critical discussion of some of the most commonly found of the so-called "integrated" picture books; I am giving these attention more because of their popularity than their quality. This discussion and the annotated bibliography, hopefully, will prove useful to teacher and parent alike.

Sam<sup>42</sup> is a very carefully structured story about a young Negro boy who cannot find anyone in his family to play with him. His mother is cooking and warns him to keep away from her knife, his brother is reading and yells at Sam for touching his book, his sister is playing with her dolls and will not let him near them, and his father is typing and tells him to "get your hands off that typewriter...that typewriter is not a toy for children." Sam's response to all this is to sit down and "he cried and cried and cried." The family soon realizes the problem, and mother provides the solution--with the left-over dough from the pie she is preparing, she tells him to make a little pie of his own.

One might say that despite the specific clothes in which it is dressed, the problem of Sam not having anyone to play with is a universal theme. But it is difficult for the child-reader to get this far since there is nothing in the first place to engage him--Sam has no ideas, no schemes, and except for crying, no apparent feelings. The only really appealing thing is the illustrations. From the pictures, it is clear that the family is Negro, attractive, neat and well-dressed. Because the pictures too show so little action, they would have to interest the reader in the people per se rather than in what they are doing. And there is nothing really to involve us with them, except for perhaps their blackness.

This leads to another question about the book. It is only through the illustrations of the family that we know they are black. There is no mention in the text nor is any cultural uniqueness shown. The lesson then is that Sam's family is just like every other family in children's books, and through extrapolation, that black families are just like white families and like them encourage passivity and reward dependence.

The lyrical, warm and reassuring tone of *City Rhythms* is set right at the beginning. The almost poetic contrast of children's and adults' thinking attracts both young and old reader immediately: "It had all begun that

morning when he heard his father saying, 'This city moves so fast--if you don't keep up with it, you're left far behind.' Jimmy had thought and thought. How can you keep up with a city? It wasn't moving. What did his father mean?" The illustration of Jimmy's father standing behind him with his hands on the boy's shoulders repeats the stimulating yet supportive attitude. Like Sam, Jimmy has a problem to solve. Instead of crying though, he thinks about it, watches for clues, and investigates his environment. Jimmy and his friends travel through their world with confidence and curiosity. With their environment, not in spite of it, they find "the rhythm of the city made up of all the thousand city sounds."

City Rhythms is much more successful at presenting how it is to live in a poor part of a city than it is at presenting how it is to be black or to be a black boy living in a city.

Ezra Jack Keats is perhaps the most prolific and most popular children's author producing black books. Although originally famous as an illustrator, Keats has recently been both writing and illustrating his stories. Seven of his books depict black people. Five of these have blacks in lead roles--The Snowy Day (1962), Whistle for Willie (1964), A Letter to Amy (1968), and Goggles (1969). One other is about a black historical figure, John Henry (1965) and another has a sprinkling of black faces, Jennie's Hat (1966).

As early as 1963 (and this was early for a white illustrator), Keats made his concerns known. "As an illustrator, I have been particularly aware of the perversion of art work to perpetuate the pretense that a race with whom we live out our lives does not exist--illustrations, for instance, of John Henry, portrayed with his back to us, gloves on his hands, collar up, and hat pulled down over his face, so that there would be no indication that he was a Negro--or illustrations of children sitting on the levees on the Mississippi River--all white. This is a formula that is preserved, oddly enough, so that no one will be offended."<sup>45</sup>

The Snowy Day was the first book in Keats' series about Peter. It was awarded the Caldecott Medal as "the most distinguished American picture book for children" in the year of its publication. Eight years later, it is still considered an excellent book, exemplary for its lovely illustrations, its sensitive handling of a boy's play in the snow, and its sympathetic rendering of a Negro child.

Nicholas<sup>46</sup> is a young black boy, but he is every child. The story is interesting, very relevant to city life, but it has nothing that says what black is or that it is. Aside from this important shortcoming, the story is appealing

because Nicholas has likes and dislikes, courage, and also fears. Although Nicholas is overwhelmed in many ways by his environment, he exerts some influence on it and tries hard to be in a position of control.

Nicholas wants very much to "see how the subway looks inside, and how it feels to ride on it. But Mama says I can't go on the subway without her." While trying to look in the train window ("I was just going to walk up to the train and look inside. So I ducked down and walked under the turnstile!"), he gets swept into the train by the crowds. The story is all in the first person (which makes Nicholas more alive and more in control), and his descriptions of how it feels to be on the subway alone, to exit onto an unfamiliar street ("I'm not afraid of other people's streets, but my stomach felt funny..."), to ask help from the balloon man, to follow the man's directions for getting home on the subway, and finally to be home and safe on Mama's lap ("She hugged me and kissed me and asked what I did all day while she was downtown. 'Oh, nothing much,' I said.") are generally real and humorous. It is a welcome surprise to find a picture book that deals with feelings and action rather than action alone.

Although The Tuesday Elephant<sup>47</sup> is in many New York City libraries, it is not found in many stores or schools. It is a shame that it is not. "There once was a boy of ten named Gideon who lived in a tribe called the Kamba in the country of Kenya...each morning Gideon dressed in his kaniki, a black loincloth, and walked to the Athi River." As in these opening sentences, the book gives us many descriptions of rural Kenyan customs and speech presented not as oddities but as facts. They are a natural part of the exciting story of Gideon's friend, the Tuesday Elephant. Gideon plays with the baby elephant, talks to him and explores with him. The child-reader will likely be enthralled by Gideon's love of his friend, his river and his countryside as well as his opportunity to be around a wide variety of animals. The fact of the elephant's growing up and leaving is handled intelligently and makes a fine conclusion for the story.

The illustrations are by Tom Feelings, a black artist who has traveled and worked in Africa. They are warm and appealing although in some cases too symbolic to be grasped by very young children.

The Tuesday Elephant is a very much needed book about life in rural Africa. Now we need some books about life in urban Africa.

Evan's Corner<sup>48</sup> has two parallel themes. The first and most obvious to the child-reader is a little boy's need for privacy in a large family and his resourcefulness in creating a private spot for himself. The second and perhaps more striking to the adult-reader is the depiction of everyday life of a quite poor but warm and considerate family.

Evan's Corner breaks down the myth of the unstable, neglectful child-rearing patterns of the lower-class black family. Evan's mother and father are not only present but also they are sensible, understanding and concerned. They are a large family in cramped quarters, but they make the best of what they have. They are concerned with cleanliness, routines, homework, and household jobs. While Evan's neighborhood and home are clearly economically disadvantaged, they seem advantaged in terms of friendliness and support.

Although Evan's need for personal expression, independence and privacy take a particular form (and a charming one thanks to his mother) due to his crowded home, his developmental stage of decreasing dependency on his mother and increasing sense of personal identity is universal. The author thus achieves the admirable combination of specificity and universality. The only detractions from the book's overall quality are the formal language style used by all the characters. (Contrast this with Stevie and the failure to deal with race.)

Oh Lord, I Wish I Was a Buzzard<sup>49</sup> is the story, as told by a Mississippi woman (Gladys Henton), of her childhood experience picking cotton. It has the structure, simplicity and dialect of a folk tale. Placed in rural Mississippi, it is one of few books to describe a black child's experiences in the South; although it is as distant from children's life experiences in urban centers as fantasy would be, this does not make it any less important or exciting. It will expose some children to an unknown way of life, for others it may be very close to their own style of living, and for still others it will provide a link with their parents' experiences.

The back flap of the jacket cover admits that "the story is based on a childhood recollection told by Gladys Henton of Greenville, Mississippi." Therefore, one would expect that the book's authorship would be listed as "Gladys Henton with the assistance of Polly Greenberg" or as "told to Polly Greenberg by Gladys Henton." Surely Mrs. Henton deserves a larger share of the credit than she is getting, and a share of the royalties as well.

Although it is implied throughout the text of this paper, I would like to make explicit, and emphasize, that I am not suggesting that what we need is a literature of propaganda but rather some books that relate honestly to human experience, and more precisely, to that part of our experience having to do with race and skin color. What is called for are not preachy moralistic tracts (no matter how subtly written) but the acknowledgment of an integral part of human existence. The author writing a book like Gabrielle and Selena has to seal himself off in a hermetic cage and imagine another more beautiful world in order to conceptualize his story; what we need instead is that author to remain in the real world, open his eyes and have a look around him, and by telling his story "like it is" thereby help the child to understand

and cope with reality. Harriet Brown, the Supervisor of Librarians for the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experimental school district put it so well: "Don't you see, our children must be able to read that other children have lived with garbage, violence, and narcotics--and survived!...Until very recently I would have said, 'No, protect them,' but we can't protect them anymore. Even very young children--youngsters of three, four, five--see what's happening today on television. Violence, racism, drugs, war--we can't pretend it's not going on. The youngest children are asking pretty stiff questions these days. Questions like 'Am I black? Is that bad?' Well, sometimes parents and teachers are just too emotionally involved to cope with these questions. Books are the answer. Children believe in them."<sup>50</sup> Mrs. Brown's statements apply to all children, black and white, rich and poor.

In order for the writer or illustrator to "tell it like it is," he must know how it is. This necessitates leaving his desk or drawing board and getting to know neighborhoods and children. How can a white writer expect to depict a black child when he really knows, not just sees on the street, few if any black children? How can an editor criticize a manuscript when he hasn't been near a child, black or white, for years? In the same way that we need honesty of depiction as discussed above, we need honesty of conception.

At the same time as we encourage writers to become involved in some meaningful experiences with black children and black families before they attempt to write about them, we must encourage black writers (and those black people with the skill and potential but without the means and connections to become professional writers) with intimate knowledge of and personal experiences with young children to become involved in the world of children's literature.

It may take much time and effort for white professionals to develop the perception and understanding needed to produce the kinds of books alluded to above, but the expenditure will certainly be worthwhile. In the meantime, there exists an untapped source of such knowledge, i. e., black people with ability to become writers, illustrators, editors and publishers. A large-scale effort is needed to provide such people with the money, time and facilities to develop their skills and to find for those blacks already prepared to produce children's books immediate access to editors and publishers. For the same reason that blacks were virtually invisible in children's literature, they are even today rarely found in the publishing industry. In the interest of improved quality of children's books--if for no other reason--this must be corrected.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The ages noted below are those listed on the books' jackets.

\* recommended

\*A Letter to Amy by Ezra Jack Keats. Harper and Row, 1968. preschool-grade 3.

This is one of the later books in Keats' Peter series. Peter has invited only boys, except for Amy, to his birthday party. Because of a series of mishaps, he worries if she will come. Perhaps the best of the Keats' books on Peter because it deals with emotions and age-appropriate problems. No mention, however, that Peter, Amy, and all but one of Peter's friends are black.

A Week in Robert's World: The South by Nancy Roberts. Photographs by Bruce Roberts. Coward-McCann, Inc., 1967. ages 4-8.

One in a series about foreign countries; are we to understand that the South is a foreign country too? The book ignores the most important feature of the South--its problems of integration. The intricacies of black Robert's world go unexplained; e.g., an integrated class but an all-black church. Still, some good photographs and a stable black family. Charlayne Hunter did a short review of the book in the New York Times Children's Book Review, November 9, 1969. "Here is young Robert, family intact, with a modest income, going to an integrated school in the small town of Huntersville, North Carolina--with no apparent repercussions. All sounds fine, but the photographs tell a little something different, for the integration ends at the exit of the school bus that brings Robert back to his black community."

\*City Rhythms by Ann Grifalconi. Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc. ages 4-8.

Lyrical and imaginative story of urban life. Emphasizes advantages of city living. Illustrations lovely but confusing as to race. Recommended because of poetic quality of language, encouragement of symbolic thought, and active resourceful child-hero. No mention of race although Jimmy and many of his friends are Negro.

\*Corduroy by Don Freeman. Viking Press, 1968.

Corduroy is a toy bear whom a young black girl wants for her own. But her mother says no because Corduroy doesn't look new; he has a button missing. At night Corduroy "comes alive" and accidentally explores the department store while searching for his button. His slapstick experiences will probably amuse children. Although no mention is made that the girl is Negro, this seems appropriate. Recommended because it is one of the few animal stories that has a black child as the central figure.

\*Evan's Corner by Elizabeth Starr Hill. Illustrated by Nancy Grossman. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967.

Evan is resourceful in developing a private spot for himself in a crowded home. Realistic presentation of low-income life. Sensible, supportive family. Age-appropriate.

Fun for Chris by Blossom Randall. Albert Whitman and Co., 1956.

"Other than a few references to a life, family and environment of his own, Toby [the black boy] has no identity except as Chris' [the white boy] playmate, as the beneficiary of Chris' largesse...the story gives a white child no insight into the real life of a black child, and it gives a black child no real reflection of himself. The perspective is that of a white world..." Thompson and Woodard writing in the Wilson Library Bulletin, December 1969.

Gabrielle and Selena by Peter Desbarats. Pictures by Nancy Grossman. Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1968. ages 5-9.

Two eight-year-olds, one black and one white, best friends for years, decide to switch homes and selves. No mention that Selena is Negro, that Gabrielle is white, or that tensions could be expected in girls, families, or community because of this interracial friendship. Illustrations are quite nice.

Hooray for Jasper by Eetty Horvath. Pictures by Fermin Rocer. Franklin Watts Inc., 1966.

This book is a good example of the games writers and artists play. The story is about Jasper who was "too little." When he asks people how to grow bigger, they give such useless answers as "By working hard," and by doing "something wonderful." Even at the end, Jasper doesn't really understand nor will the reader. The pictures are equally evasive. Sometimes it appears that Jasper and his family are Negro and at other times one cannot be sure. At any rate, the word is never mentioned.

\*I Wonder Why by Shirley Burden. Doubleday and Co., 1963.

A book of photographs each captioned by "I like..." e.g., the rain. Final page is a picture of a black girl with caption: "I wonder why some people don't like me." Although the book raises the question of racial prejudice, it drops it right in the reader's lap. Recommended to teachers or parents comfortable with handling discussion of prejudice.

My Dog Rinty by Ellen Tarry and Marie Hall Ets. Photographs by Alexander and Alexandra Alland. Viking Press, 1946.

Good photographs show a functioning, alive Harlem. Story is of young Negro boy and his dog. Although no mention is made that people are Negro, a very broad representation of economic levels and occupations makes the point that blacks are not all poor and menial workers.

No Mules by William Papas. Coward-McCann Inc., 1967. ages 4-8.

Weak story of a black boy in South Africa who wants to shop in a store whose entrance sign says NO BLACKS. He shows no indication of being annoyed or offended by this. Out of naivete (is the author implying primitiveness as well?), he sends his mule into the shop in his stead. As a result of the mule's clumsiness, the shopkeeper changes the sign to NO MULES. No mention of discrimination, morality, or tactics. The story ends with the shopkeeper chasing the boy who rides away atop his mule singing his happy dialect song.

\*Nicholas by Carol Kempner. Simon and Schuster, 1968. ages 4-8.

Story of young black boy's adventures on subway. Deals with feelings and emotions as well as actions. Intelligent, sympathetic child-hero. Illustrations disappointing. No mention that Nicholas is black.

\*Oh Lord, I Wish I Was a Buzzard by Polly Greenberg. Illustrated by Alike. Macmillan Co., 1968.

Folk-tale-like story of rural Mississippi girl's thoughts and dreams while picking cotton. Vocabulary and images are ones rural children might identify with. Illustrations sophisticated and slick in comparison with the story.

Peter's Chair by Ezra Jack Keats. Harper and Row, 1967. ages 4-8.

Peter, a young Negro boy, has to adjust to a new baby in the house. All his old furniture is being repainted for his baby sister. Peter decides to run away but gets only as far as the front of the house. There he realizes that he is now too big for his old chair and other furniture and volunteers to paint his blue chair pink for the baby. Rather abstract and goody-goody; avoids the real problems of sibling rivalry. No mention of Peter's color. As in the other books in this series, nothing identifies Peter as black (e.g., customs) except the illustrations.

Sam by Ann Herbert Scott. Drawings by Symeon Shimin. McGraw-Hill, 1967. ages 3-6.

A black family that just might as well be white; no effort is made by the author to understand what characterizes Afro-American; no mention that the family is black. Strongest point of book is the depiction of stable (though not very imaginative) black family. Sam unfortunately is passive, dependent, unresourceful.

\*Some of the Days of Everett Anderson by Lucille Clifton. Illustrated by Evaline Ness. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970. ages 4-8.

A group of excellent mood poems, appealing for their catchy rhythms, lovely images, and sensitivity to universal feelings. Unique for their honest avowal of the identity of Everett Anderson ("Who's black and runs and loves to hop?") and their racial pride. Most of the illustrations are imaginative, but some are too abstract and confusing.

\*Stevie by John Steptoe. Harper and Row, 1969. preschool-grade 3.

A serious attempt by a black teenager (Steptoe was 19 when he wrote and illustrated Stevie) to present a realistic and age-appropriate story of a black boy, his mother, and the younger child who comes to stay with them. Dialect ("Could I have somms that? Gimme this!"), evidence of feelings ("Sometimes people get on your nerves and they den't mean it or nothing but they just bother you. Why I gotta put up with him?"), and beautiful Roulalt-style illustrations.

\*The Tuesday Elephant by Nancy Garfield. Illustrated by Tom Feelings. Thomas Crowell, 1968.

Set in rural Kenya, this is an exciting story of Gideon and his friend, a baby elephant. Refers to tribal customs and mores. Relates beautifully to nature and wildlife.

Tobe by Stella Gentry Sharpe. Photographs by Charles Farrell. University of North Carolina Press, 1939.

One of first picture books to have black child in leading role. Photographs and jump-Spot- jump type text of farm life in North Carolina. No mention that people are Negro.

Two is a Team by Lorraine and Jerrold Beim. Pictures by Ernest Crichlow. Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1945.

Revolutionary for its time but should not be used with children today. Illustrations are stereotypes. Moralistic story of how two friends (one black and one white though this was never said) learn to cooperate not compete.

Whistle for Willie by Ezra Jack Keats. Viking Press, 1964.

Another in the series about Peter, the young Negro boy; here Peter tries to whistle by putting himself in situations that usually call for whistling. This doesn't work for quite some time; then miraculously he succeeds. The collage drawings are attractive and Peter's family is supportive, but the book is confusing because it never explains what whistling is and how one manages to do it. No mention of Peter's color and nothing that makes him distinguishable from any white child in children's literature.

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