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INTERRACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

# BULLETIN

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**Children of Interracial Families**

# BULLETIN

VOLUME 15, NUMBER 6

1984

**SPECIAL ISSUE ON INTERRACIAL FAMILIES**  
**GUEST EDITOR: KATE SHACKFORD**

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Photo by Hildegard Adler

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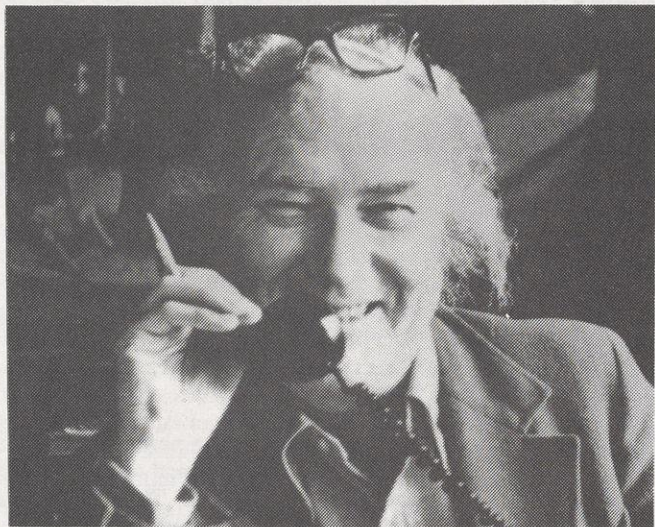
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# Bradford Chambers, 1922-1984



Family, friends, colleagues and supporters of the CIBC were shocked and saddened by the sudden and untimely death of Bradford Chambers on Saturday, September 22, 1984. For eighteen years "Brad," as he was known, gave unstintingly of his time and energies to directing the work of the Council, which was shaped by his vision of a free society dedicated to establishing and maintaining humane values.

It was Brad's firm conviction that "it is the value system of our society—with values like acquisitiveness, competitiveness, aggressiveness—that are at the root of our societal ills." Under Brad's leadership, the CIBC *Bulletin* broadened the scope of its concerns to consider the societal values reflected in children's books and other learning materials. In a recent interview that appeared in *Sipapu*, Brad explained the expanded thrust of the *Bulletin*: "We believe that in reflecting the values of society, children's learning materials perpetuate them, and we want to see those values changed. I agree . . . that children's books cannot change society. That would be expecting too much. But children's books can provide content that questions traditional assumptions and role models, and so help achieve a more equitable and just society."

Nothing in Brad's early education at an all-boys school in Cambridge, England, where his father was conducting research, prepared him for his ultimate role as a leader in the fight against racism and sexism. Rather, his early formal education was designed to instill the belief that, as the son of a white, privileged family, he was automatically superior and entitled to certain privileges.

Brad began his career as a social activist at Amherst College in Massachusetts, where he organized a four-college conference to consider what might be done to build a more just society in the post World War II years. This conference, which involved Amherst, Mt. Holyoke, Smith and the University of Massachusetts, earned him the hostility of the administration and resulted in his taking a year's leave from Amherst. Brad went next to New York University, where because of one of his professors, he became interested in the teenage gangs that were

then becoming numerous in the New York area. His investigations into the origins of these gangs convinced Brad that white racism played a significant role in the formation of many of these gangs, and his research on this phenomenon formed the basis for his master's thesis.

Brad's involvement with the street gangs continued after his graduation from New York University. Working with gangs on their own "turf," he attempted to channel their talents and energies into positive activities. He was supported in this work by a fellowship from the American Philosophical Society and the active encouragement of Saul Alinsky.

As a free-lance writer, Brad produced many articles and books, and he also served as juvenile editor at Parents Magazine Press. Brad's political consciousness was raised to new heights by his involvement in the civil rights movement of the 60s. It was his concern that young people understand the historical context in which the civil rights struggle was taking place that led to his ground-breaking anthology, *Chronicles of Black Protest*. This highly acclaimed volume, which brought together historical documents highlighting the Black struggle for social justice, received the 1969 Brotherhood Award of the National Council of Christians and Jews.

It was while researching *Chronicles of Black Protest* that Brad became involved with CIBC in 1967. Under Brad's leadership, CIBC campaigned for the hiring of minority personnel in editorial capacities by major publishing houses. The CIBC's annual contest for unpublished Third World writers became one means by which writers of color could gain access to publishing houses, and numerous writers—Mildred Taylor, Sharon Bell Mathis, Walter Dean Myers and Kristin Hunter among them—did come to publishers' attention through the contest. This *Bulletin* expanded from a four-page stapled newsletter to a magazine that is published eight times a year and that may run as many as 48 pages. Brad was also instrumental in the establishment of the CIBC Resource Center to assist educators in countering racism and sexism in school and society.

It was Brad's hope that all oppressed groups would come to see the interrelatedness of their particular oppressions and work together toward their common goals. As Brad saw it, with "whites seriously confronting racism [and] males seriously confronting sexism, social change will surely follow."

Hundreds of friends, CIBC supporters and others whose lives had been touched by Brad joined his widow and associate Lyla Hoffman and his family in a celebration of a life of commitment and struggle on September 25, at the United Nations chapel in New York City.

The CIBC staff, greatly saddened by the death of our director, Bradford Chambers, is committed to continuing the fight against racism, sexism and other forms of bias in children's materials. During this difficult time, we appeal to friends of the Council—to all concerned with social justice—to help us continue the work to which Brad was so dedicated. Your financial support will help us ensure the Council's survival. Please send your tax-deductible gifts to the CIBC, 1841 Broadway, New York, NY 10023.

# **Interracial Children: Growing Up Healthy in an Unhealthy Society**

**By Kate Shackford**

They came from all over the country—New York, Houston, San Francisco, Chicago, Portland—with a variety of viewpoints and a myriad of questions. Still, the 175 people, primarily parents and scholars, attending the CIBC-sponsored conference on children of interracial families had one overriding concern: How do parents of interracial children raise normal, healthy children in a society which views interracial unions as abnormal and harmful?

The conference, held June 15-16 in New York City, was the first of its kind to address the needs of interracial families.\* A series of presentations and panel discussions, outlined in the last *Bulletin*, was devoted to the development of positive self-identity in interracial children and to the need for the creation of resources which reflect the interracial reality. (Excerpts from a number of the presentations follow this article.)

The lack of support, materials and information for interracial families was noted time and time again. Parents described over and over how good it felt to be in an environment where they felt neither shunned nor ignored, where they, for once, were the norm. As they shared positive family experiences, a reporter asked, "Why the need for conferences and interracial parents' groups, if you're just normal families?" A parent's answer was simple: "We are not the

problem, but because society sees us as a problem, it creates problems for our children."

Panelist Marie Guidice, who is of Black-Hispanic and Italian background, elaborated on this issue: "When I was thirteen, a friend called me a mutt. I always knew I was mixed, but the term upset me. I said, 'What do you mean? I'm not like some stray dog you find in the street.' That really started me thinking about what it means to be interracial." Interracial children have been called "zebra," "mulatto" or "chocolate chip"; the only thing about their families which seems important to others is that they are interracial. Conference participants also often spoke about the fact that interracial families—which have a high visibility in our society—are virtually invisible in literature, curricula and the media. When interracial children open storybooks and textbooks, they find no families like their own; for the publishing world, they are invisible.

While the number of interracial marriages has increased by over 100,000 in

the past decade, the percentage of such marriages has remained at about 1.5 per cent of the U.S. total. The 1983 Census cites 632,000 interracial marriages in the U.S., of which 125,000 are Black/white marriages. (These figures reflect only current interracial marriages; they do not include divorced persons or interracial unions not resulting in marriage.)

Despite the relatively small percentage of interracial marriages, the topic raises strong feelings in all communities. The history of legal and social opposition to interracial unions could fill the pages of this publication and still not do justice to this complex topic. However, it is important to note here that when the Supreme Court struck down all legal barriers to interracial marriage in 1967, there still were laws prohibiting such unions on the books in 16 states!

Although legal prohibitions to interracial marriages no longer exist, racism continues to cause problems for interracial couples and their children—no matter what their racial mixture. It is within the context of U.S. racism that interracial children struggle to form a sense of identity.

Racism has led, for example, to U.S. society's limited and irrational definition of race. For instance, children with one white parent and one parent of color will generally be identified with the parent of color; their biracial identity is ignored. Children with one Black parent and one parent of another Third World background usually are perceived as Black; in most cases, their biracial identity is also ignored by the wider society. In this context, questions of identity are complex.

Racial identity is influenced not only

## **Terminology**

There are various viewpoints on what terminology should be used to describe children of interracial families: *interracial*, *biracial*, *mixed*, *brown* and *rainbow children* have been suggested. Our use of the term "interracial" throughout this article in no way negates the ongoing discussion of terminology. It is used uniformly to avoid confusion and because CIBC feels that it is inclusive of families with a variety of heritages: African, European, Asian/Asian American, Native American, Hispanic, etc.

\*We would like to acknowledge gratefully the contributions of the following funders, without whom the conference would not have been possible: New York Council for the Humanities; Church Women United; National Division of the United Methodist Church; Disciples of Christ; and Consolidated Edison.

by the perceptions of white society, but also by the tendency of cultures of color to be more accepting of children of interracial unions than white society. (Interracial children face different problems depending upon the race of their parents, but because 90 per cent of the conference participants had a Black/white background, most of the conference focused on children with that heritage.)

All interracial children must cope with the manifestations of racism affecting other children of color. In addition, they must cope with outsiders who view their normal, loving, strong families as pathological, unstable and peculiar. Teachers, social workers and psychologists often view interracial children's problems as a result of the interracial nature of their families. The education of these professionals encourages the view of interracial families as pathological and unstable, and they generally have little contact with interracial families to counter that view. Because of the lack of support in this area, parents also can begin to view all problems as race related, when in fact they may be due to developmental stages or other areas with which the child is having difficulty.

### White Standards

Interracial children must also cope with a society that has white standards of beauty. This affects all children of color as well as all children of interracial unions but can be particularly painful for children who have a white parent with whom they identify strongly, but to whom they bear little likeness. (Such children often are asked if they are adopted or why they don't look like their white parent. Children wanting to identify with *both* parents can be hurt by society's rejection of that dual identification.) Interracial children may have the added strain of wanting to identify with a white parent who often has very different hair texture and skin color. This can be particularly difficult for a girl with a white mother, even when the mother constantly affirms the beauty of the child's hair and skin.

Interracial children need the same coping skills that all children of color learn to survive societal racism. At the conference, many white parents of interracial children expressed anxiety about being able to give their children these coping skills. As one white mother stated, "I am more sensitive to racism now that I have mixed children, and I



*Emily Leinster, Co-Director of the "Children of Interracial Families" Conference, shown with husband Colin and daughter Sasha. (Photo: Kate Shackford)*

want to protect them from the racism I see every day when I'm with them. Yet I know I can't protect them, and since I don't go through life as a Black person, I've never had to learn how to react to racism directed at me personally. How do I help my children cope with this daily reality?"

These parents face the same task that faces all parents with children of color: to make their children feel secure and loved *and* prepare them for the harsh reality of racism. In addition, many white parents of interracial children fear that their children's experience with racism, particularly as adolescents, will turn them against the white parent. White parents in particular are concerned that their children will blame them for the difficulties they face. Interracial adult panelists addressed this issue.

All agreed that they did not blame either parent even though there were times, particularly during adolescence, that they had been angry about having to defend their background while trying to develop a clear sense of themselves.

In regard to their heritage, all panelists stated that they ultimately felt proud to have a mixed background. Panelist Marie Guidice stated that if there was any resentment, it was because her parents hadn't given her a clear grounding in either culture, so that she'd had to learn about both cultures on her own. Panelist Helen Brody, raised by her single white mother, shared that her

mother's fear of being rejected by her daughter kept her from preparing her daughter to live as a Black-identified person. Brody said she was more understanding now of her mother's dilemma, but she stressed that white parents need to be clear about society's racism and how it would impact on the children (see excerpt, p. 12).

Given the intense feelings about racial issues in our society, it is not surprising that there is tremendous debate about how interracial children's identity should be handled. There are a range of approaches being used by parents of interracial children, and conference participants reached no consensus on the best approach in a society that is totally illogical about racial identity.

### Suggestions Given

Several helpful suggestions were given however:

- Perhaps the most important factor panelists suggested was that parents be comfortable about their own identities and that they talk through issues relating to their child's identity—both between themselves and with the child.

- Parents should understand that they cannot completely share the experiences of their children. As Eve Troutt, a young interracial adult, stated, "I was sometimes angry with my parents because they could not understand what it was to be mixed. They understood the

## Starting a Support Group

Although interracial parents' groups exist (see p. 16), many areas have no support services for interracial families. CIBC has had many requests for pointers on starting a support group and/or organization. Here are a few suggestions.

- Post notices on community bulletin boards and church/synagogue bulletin boards asking those interested to contact you (you may want to establish a post office box to maintain your privacy).
- Place ads in local newspapers, being sure to give a contact address.
- Talk to other parents with interracial children about the establishment of a support group.
- Contact a few of the interracial membership organizations listed on p. 16; find out how their groups got started and ask for their input and suggestions.
- Once interested people have contacted you, arrange for a meeting, possibly in a church or synagogue or community center, which often will give space rent-free.
- After an initial core group of parents has been meeting regularly, you will need to discuss the structure and purpose of the group and whether to become a formal organization. Again, other interracial membership organizations can be very helpful.
- Subscribe to the newsletters of other interracial membership organizations for information on relevant issues and activities.
- You may want to hold a forum on interracial children or families (again in inexpensive or rent-free space). This is a good way to expand your group.

hostility toward their own marriage, and they dealt openly and honestly with me about the racism I would encounter. They were strong and loving, but they could not know my identity. Parents must remember that they will never know what it is to be mixed."

- Parents must compensate for their children's "invisibility" in this society. They must take on the task of providing biracial children with an environment in which they can raise questions, express anger and work through feelings that may seem to threaten the family's sense of security.

- Deal openly with racism. Panelists noted that whatever their experiences as young children, all encountered racism during adolescence when they began to date. Like other children of color, they encountered the deep resistance of most white families toward interracial dating. They were also confronted with the pervasive sentiment that their families were not normal. Since all children tend to see their own families as the norm, this can be particularly confusing. If they are not prepared for this reaction, they can become quite angry with their families for putting them in this situation.

Panelist Philip Spivey described his shock when white girls with whom he'd played as a child would not date him in adolescence. He had assumed that white friends' acceptance meant that the interracial nature of his family was accepted. His Black friends were amused by his

naïveté and had to "teach him the facts of life." He was angry because he was unprepared for this rejection, "but my parents were strong and supportive, and I got over my anger in time."

- Several panelists suggested that it was helpful to live in a mixed community, so that children could have friends of all races and become comfortable with a variety of children.

## Children Decide Identity

Ultimately, interracial children decide for themselves the identity with which they are most comfortable. As one adult from a Black/white background put it, "I am comfortable living as a Black adult, but I also am proud that I am a mixture. My Black identity has plenty of room for my white heritage." Echoing this, the Black father of three grown interracial children said, "I wasn't sure what identities my children would choose as adults, and I was sometimes surprised by their choices. But they're just fine, and they're all happy and accepting of their mixed backgrounds."

While the problems faced by interracial children are real and must be addressed, the overall picture of children of interracial families that emerges from recent studies is very positive. Panelists Dr. Alvin Poussaint and Dr. Philip Spivey recently completed studies of interracial children from Black/white backgrounds: Dr. Poussaint of interracial adults (see p. 9) and Dr. Spivey of in-

terracial adolescents.\* Both studies indicate that interracial children tend to be achievers with a strong sense of self, comfortable in predominantly white or Black situations, proud of their mixed background and tolerant of other people's "differences."

Although studies indicate that interracial children grow into happy, well-adjusted adults, it is in spite of a dearth of resources for parents. Conference attendees noted that they lacked parenting material directed to their needs as well as organizational support systems. Parents particularly decried the lack of children's books reflecting their own experiences. While many stressed the value of materials about the culture of *each* parent, they also regretted how few books depicted interracial families or biracial children. (The few existing books are discussed in the article beginning on page 13.) Parents said that children's books with interracial families would be an important and valuable way to reinforce the validity of their children's lives. Many participants noted that such books would be helpful in generating discussion around issues of racism and cultural differences. Storybooks about the hurts of racism or about mixtures within families can create the climate for discussions in which the children can work through their feelings. Parents of interracial children were urged to find those few resources available and to create their own. Participants also discussed ways they might convince publishers to help meet their needs.

Interracial children must work through the conflicts of being a mixed child in a society that theoretically promotes pluralism while rejecting interracial unions. That process will be easier if parents present the situation realistically and work with other parents to make institutions more responsive to their children's needs. Interracial children can grow to be strong adults with a positive self-identity. Ultimately, however, the problems interracial children face will be solved only when racism is eradicated. □

\*Information about Dr. Spivey's study is available through the Council; an excerpt from his presentation appears on p. 11.

## About the Author

KATE SHACKFORD is Co-Director of the CIBC's Project on Children of Interracial Families, which organized the conference described in the above article. The mother of two interracial children, she initiated the project to address the need for support and resources for interracial families like her own.

*A sociologist discusses ways to assist interracial children in developing a healthy self-identity*

## Providing a Healthy Environment for Interracial Children

By Joyce Ladner

Much of my work as a family sociologist has focused on the socialization of children, primarily Black children. I have seen that children of interracial families face special—but not insurmountable—problems.

Some years ago I did a study on transracial adoption. Although families that adopt children of different races do not face exactly the same problems as interracial families, some issues are the same for both groups of children. (It should be noted here that 90 per cent of the adopted children I studied were of biracial parentage.)

First of all, oftentimes the greatest problems for transracially adopted families often come from other family members. It is often grandparents and other relatives who, because of their prejudices, do not want to accept the child. They do not want the family name to be passed on to a biracial child or they are concerned about an inheritance and so on. (Friends sometimes present problems, though these are generally less severe, since we choose friends who have similar values.) I have also found that children of Black/white families experience far greater acceptance within the Black community than within the white. One mother summed it up by saying, "If I were in a strange neighborhood [with my children] God forbid that it were white. I'd rather be in a strange Black neighborhood, and let it be low income rather than any other type." Her experience has been that older Blacks were more likely to accept her children, because they love children, are very child-centered, and do not hold so-called "sins" against the children.

We live in one of the most racially di-



Photo: Hildegard Adler

vided societies in the world, and it makes all of us acutely aware of racial differences on a daily basis. Racial awareness comes as early as three years of age [see Vol. 11, Nos. 3 & 4] and all children know that their race influences how they are categorized by others. No matter how racial issues are handled at home, biracial children find that society designates them as members of one group. Society does not permit them to be mixed. Children also receive, from their parents, certain messages attached to being a member of a particular race, and parental socialization may be at variance with the messages that they receive from society at large. Black parents, for example, very often teach their children to grow up to be Black and proud, but society teaches that to be Black is to be an inferior person. One of the great problems with socializing children who are, as one of my colleagues put it, of "dubious racial heritage" is that society does not know how to regard the child.

Parents tend to deal with racial iden-

tity in one of three ways. Some parents say "my child is a human above all else, not Black or white; color is totally irrelevant." I think there is a high correlation between people who say that and people who are not facing reality. They are refusing to confront the fact that their child is in fact categorized—and seen by society—as Black. A second group says that they socialize their children to have a biracial identity. This sometimes leads to difficulties. One of the most poignant comments I heard was from a white mother who lamented, "I am proud of that part of my child which is white. Why can't I teach my child to be proud of being white just as much as I am told I must teach him to be proud to be Black? I have nothing against teaching him Black pride, but I am a white person. I'm not going to try to be Black. In this racist society, I'm not even permitted to feel good about being white and teach my child that it's okay that he has a part of whiteness in him as well." That sums up one of the real paradoxes that many of these parents face.

In the third category are parents who teach their children that they have a Black identity, and many of these parents immerse themselves totally in Black communities. (Sometimes they go overboard—there are white parents who try to be Black, which is ridiculous.)

I believe that it is possible for a parent in interracial families to have a bicultural approach, and I think that it occurs pretty much anyway.

Because most of our children are socialized primarily by their mothers, biracial children with white mothers generally acquire what in this society is seen as white culture, although I'm not sure

always what that means. At the same time, it is extremely important that children of Black and white parents learn to cope as Black people, because society is ultimately going to categorize these children as Black. White parents of biracial children usually have to learn these coping skills themselves—and this can be particularly hard for white single parents.

Despite the problems I have noted, biracial children *can*—and do—grow up in

a healthy environment. There are a number of things parents can do to help. First and foremost is being a good parent, part of which has to do with being consistent with love, expectations, nurturing and so on. Also, parents must not be prejudiced. (Once in a while, we do find prejudiced parents in interracial relationships—a Black parent who doesn't like whites or a white parent who doesn't like Blacks; that has to be dealt with very squarely lest it harm the children.)

Parents must also face their own motives and how they feel about race; if that is not done, it will pose serious problems for the children.

Parents should also be sensitive to their community; all-white neighborhoods and all-white schools pose a lot of problems for a biracial child, as the child's difference becomes magnified. Many children only begin to face problems when they go off to school. Someone calls them a "nigger," for instance. Now if they have not been prepared (and I've met children who didn't even know what the word nigger meant), it can be devastating.

Parents can also help children by talking about racial differences. Telling your child that everybody is a human being and that that is all they have to worry about is tantamount to denial. To treat everyone simply as a "human being" is a noble thing—and would be sufficient if we lived in a perfect society. We do not. The larger society makes distinctions which we may choose to ignore, but we—and our children—are constantly bombarded with these distinctions.

### Love Is Not Enough

It is important to make sure that a child learns about the culture of the parent of color. Children with one Black parent, for example, should learn about Black culture and identity, since many interracial adults choose to function within the Black community and they need to be prepared culturally. Parents need to realize that ultimately love is not enough. You can love your child, but you must also prepare them to cope. This is increasingly difficult, whether we're same race parents or an interracial family. Interracial parents worry, for instance, about adolescence, as all of us do. They wonder if they will be faced with difficulties, with rebellion, because they are of a different race or because they're parents. It may be some of both, or it may be either. This is true for a wide variety of issues a parent must face.

Race in this society is an extremely complex issue, and for interracial families, it is an infinitely complicated subject. We do what we can, and hope for the best. □

### About the Author

JOYCE LADNER is Professor of Social Work at Howard University. Dr. Ladner is the author of *Mixed Families: Adopting across Racial Boundaries* (Doubleday, 1977) and numerous articles on child welfare and the family.

## What Do Interracial Children Need? Suggestions for Parents and Teachers

Children in biracial families need everything that all other children need. However, in some ways their needs are unique. The following points are intended to be a guide for parents and teachers interested in providing maximum support to children endowed with the richness of a multicultural heritage. Biracial children need:

- Love, support, acceptance.
- A clear sense of both—or all—parts of their identity. Knowledge of and involvement in the cultural heritages of *both* parents is important.
- An atmosphere of openness where racial issues can be discussed; children can freely discuss questions about such issues as skin color, hair texture and the complexities of cultural identification; and children can talk candidly about their feelings and share their reactions to difficult and upsetting experiences with adults.
- Support from adults in handling difficult situations and guidance in learning how to stand up for themselves, protect themselves and maintain pride in who they are.
- Accurate information—discussed in age-appropriate ways—about racism in our society and the ways in which it may affect them. Topics to be discussed include name-calling, prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination, hierarchies based on skin color and exclusionary group behavior.

Young children must be helped to understand that they are good and beautiful just the way they are, and that anyone who is hostile or disapproving has a problem.

- Assistance in sorting out their own unique identity. The complexities of dealing positively with both the definition imposed by society, with its current racism, and with one's self-identity are quite difficult. Children need help with this, and each family will find its own ways of tackling the issue.

Teachers should meet with parents of interracial children and discuss—in addition to the issues affecting all parents and children—the parents' feelings about the children's cultural and racial heritage, how the parents support the child's heritage at home, and how they would like to see this heritage supported at school. How, for example, do parents handle their children's questions about racial identity? How do they respond to any derogatory comments made by other children or adults? (Vol. 11, Nos. 3 & 4 of this *Bulletin* has some valuable information about the formation of racial identity and how related problems can be handled.)

- On-going experiences in multiracial, multicultural environments where many cultural/racial heritages are celebrated. Teachers should include in the curricula people of varying cultural and racial heritages, while at the same time examining the interplay of heritages.
- Role-models—older children and adults—who are proud to be from interracial families and other interracial families with various, different combinations of people.
- Books which portray interracial families and materials which enable children to role-play their own families or see themselves reflected.
- Exposure to individuals and groups combatting racism and working to create a society with racial justice and freedom for all people to be who they are.

The preceding suggestions are based primarily on "What Do Bi-Racial Children Need?" by Paula Phillips, Director of Bi-Racial Families Resource Center (see p. 16), with suggestions from Dr. Francis Wardle.

*Study reveals that, contrary to common myths, children of interracial families are likely to be a rather successful group*

## Study of Interracial Children Presents Positive Picture

By Alvin F. Poussaint

People ask, "Where are the interracial children?" I found that a lot of them are at Harvard. When I undertook a study in Boston of the offspring of interracial families, most of my sample consisted of Harvard undergraduates. I was very surprised: clinically speaking, there was a disproportionate percentage of children from interracial unions at Harvard. There is a lot of reason to suspect that it is an advantage—and not a disadvantage—to come from an interracial background in this country.

I have interviewed some 37 subjects. I wanted to look at grownups, in part because it is very difficult to get parents' consent to talk with their children. They feel (not without reason) that the mental health field tends to look at them as pathological. One reason for the paucity of literature on this topic is that the number of interracial families is small, and they themselves are resistant to the studies. Of course, there has also been a lack of interest on the part of professionals.

For these reasons, I decided to do something less scientific. I would bypass the issue of parental consent, and I would do a retrospective study, looking at those who were between seventeen and thirty-five and asking them to talk about being a biracial child—how it affected their outlook, how their families functioned, what the advantages and disadvantages have been, and so on. I must note that I do not have a scientific sample; the group was self-selected in that it includes only those adults who were willing to talk to me. (It may also be limited to interracial adults who cannot pass for white.) I interviewed offspring of Black/white, Black/Asian and West Indian/white unions, but not any children of Hispanic/other backgrounds.

My sample included males and females from various backgrounds: white female/Black male; Black female/white male; Black/Asian (mostly Black male and Asian female). Most respondents were originally from the Northeast and West Coast; a few were from the Midwest and there were some from Ohio. Not many subjects came from the South, because until recently, few interracial kids were raised in the South. Most—but not all—came from middle-class backgrounds (this would be an interesting area to explore).

Doing such a study highlights the whole question of race, which enters into the question of identity, because the definition of race in America is racist in that anyone with any Black ancestry is a Black person. Blackness, therefore, is very strong stuff—one drop makes you Black. Blackness is impurity and whiteness is purity, and any impurity introduced into purity makes the whole thing impure. In that way, whites preserve white supremacy and relegate the tainted ones to a lower caste. It's very confusing to us as Americans, although we accept the definition, and it's also very confusing to biracial children.

Further, although there is a statistic indicating that 75 per cent of Black Americans have mixed ancestry, we tend to think of biracial as current. If, for example, your maternal grandmother was white but the rest of your forbears Black, and your mother marries a Black man, that is not considered a biracial union. It's seen as a Black marriage. This makes no sense scientifically. We are very mixed up about the race issue, and it is an issue which impacts on so-called biracial children.

All of the subjects in my study identified as Black. They felt that they had

no other choice. This was also true of those of Black/Asian backgrounds. They were not accepted as Asian by the Asian society, but the Black community did accept their definition as Black. Also, many of the Black/Asian kids were raised in the Black community, which contributed to their strong identity with the Black community. At the same time, many of these respondents who identified as Black also said that they sometimes did not feel that they were totally and authentically Black. For instance, if they were at a meeting with Black students and talking about Black issues, they sometimes felt reluctant to speak out. Even so, many of the students were very active politically, but this may be because such activists may have felt more comfortable about responding to my survey.

An interesting find was that quite a number of biracial kids who identified as Black also said that on occasion they identified as biracial or mulatto or mixed. Sometimes the strongest push to identify as Black came when they reached adolescence, because they encountered racial problems at that time, particularly around the issue of dating. In particular, biracial youngsters would encounter difficulties when they tried to date white kids, regardless of whether the community was mixed or predominantly Black or white. Even if the biracial youngsters looked almost white, they inevitably encountered hostility from the white families. I should note here that the subjects were asked to rate themselves on how they looked (white to Black) on a scale of one to five. No one rated themselves a five (totally Black), but there were some 4.5s and ones, and people's experiences were influenced by their complexions, whether they were

identifiably Black or not. You see how complicated it is. The ones who could pass moved in and out of the white world and had different experiences than those who were identifiably Black.

### Disadvantages Cited

Let me mention some of the things the subjects cited as disadvantages or problems about being biracial. Some said sometimes they felt paranoid or special; they had the feeling that they were always being looked at or scrutinized because they were biracial. They felt they didn't belong to one group or the other. People acted surprised or titillated that they were from a mixed union. Occasionally, they were teased by both Black and white youngsters, though many felt more accepted among Black kids. This helped them to identify as Black, as did the fact that society also saw them in that way. Most parents also taught them that they were Black youngsters, that society saw them as that and that the parents supported that identity. There were some few examples where this was not true, where the white spouse was bigoted. There were parents who would not let the biracial teenager date Black youngsters. There were a few reports of white spouses making racist remarks in front of their children. There was even one youngster who overheard his white mother use the term "nigger" in talking to a white friend. It was shattering to the child. Most of the families, however, came within the range of healthy. All too

often psychiatrists label interracial relationships "pathological" because they only see the troubled families. (Very few of my subjects had ever even seen a psychiatrist.)

Some subjects said that they grew up feeling insecure about themselves. Sometimes these feelings appeared developmentally, sometimes they disappeared only to occur at a later time, and some subjects didn't have these feelings at all. Most of the students came through the Black militancy period, and some reported that during that period, they were ashamed and would hide the fact that they had a white parent. Some said they felt embarrassed to be seen with the white parent, particularly if they were in a Black situation, as they felt this would make them less authentically Black or cause them to be rejected by Black youngsters. This occurred continually on campuses. Respondents were particularly uncomfortable in Black groups when the discussion turned anti-white, and this was true even if they spoke up about differentiating between "all" and "some" whites. They felt uncomfortable even if they didn't say anything; they felt that to join the discussion would be a betrayal of one parent, and that they couldn't do that.

Respondents also talked about what they felt were advantages. Repeatedly, subjects reported that coming from interracial marriage made them more objective—more objective toward life and less prone to strong biased feelings toward groups of people. Dealing with two par-

ents from different racial groups, they said, made them more tolerant, objective and nonjudgmental people. I didn't anticipate that, and that was voluntarily reported over and over again. Respondents also felt that the exposure to two cultures was very important; they could move easily in both worlds and have all different kinds of friends. Some felt that having a white parent helped them to be less intimidated in the white world. Some subjects also said very candidly that their fair skin was an advantage, that people responded to them better because they were closer to white looking, which they understood to be a facet of racism. Some felt they were sometimes treated with a kind of favoritism because they were biracial.

### Dating Patterns Varied

I asked respondents if they would consider marrying interracially, which is a dumb question. Universally, they said "yes." I asked if they would feel comfortable raising a biracial child, and they said "yes." When I asked if they had a preference about their partner's background, many said they would prefer marrying Black, while others said they had no preference. What about their actual behavior? A lot of them were dating on both "sides," though some dated only one group or the other. (Some of the biracial women who were very fair-skinned and dating only white men would tell me that Black men had too many hang-ups.) There were so many different answers that it was impossible to draw any firm conclusion in this regard.

In summary, all of the notions about "mongrelization" and stereotypes about biracial people with enormous identity problems were just not true in my sample, and even though my sample is biased, I think it represents a lot of what the biracial experience is. It seems clear that a lot of the myths that a lot of people have about these children, their chances of success, their ability to cope, the capabilities of their parents, are just that—myths. All in all, they represent a rather successful group in this society. □

### About the Author

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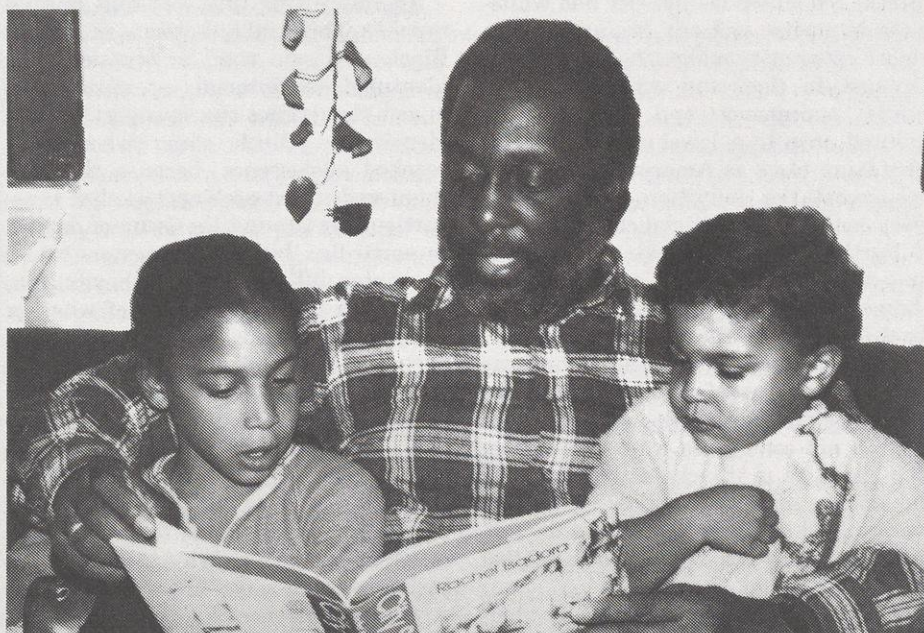


Photo: Kate Shackford

## Growing Up in Interracial Families

### Communicating Is the Key

By Philip Spivey

When I was growing up in the 1950s, there were a few other interracial families in my neighborhood—a predominantly Black, predominantly working-class section of Queens, N.Y. As a family we encountered little hostility or rejection there—perhaps what we met with was more an indifference.

A well-traveled commercial avenue served as a dividing line between the Black and white members of this community. (The non-Black families were primarily Italian-American.) My elementary school sat directly between the two sectors and so had a fairly well integrated student body. Often, the “smartest kid” in the class was Black, and so, at least through grammar school, it never occurred to me that Black kids were supposed to be less capable or whites more so.

I can now cite two factors which were probably instrumental in helping me deal with the dilemma of knowing who I am. One concerns the manner in which my parents handled *their* differences—especially differences of gender and culture. The second factor had to do with my parents’ world view, *i.e.*, the kinds of values which guided their evaluation of social experience.

In terms of the first factor, both my parents were, and remain, comfortable with their own cultural heritage; differences between them are neither exaggerated nor minimized. My father’s rich southern Black American heritage and my mother’s Jewish heritage—with roots in both the U.S. and Europe—have become very much my own. Possibly because I never felt the need to choose one over the other, I was able over time to comfortably embrace both cultures.

My parents consider me Black and I always identified myself as a Black person. Today I might, however, qualify this label by saying I am a Black person from

an interracial family. This notion is not confusing or contradictory for me because I have always lived with that reality. Moreover, I have come to realize that the Black community is not the monolith that racial stereotypes often suggest. Rather, American Blacks encompass a broad range of cultures, customs, physical characteristics and thinking.

A second crucial factor—my parents’ world view—was communicated through their ideals and activities. Through this value system my parents were able to communicate and translate social experience into something that made sense to me. Thus, when we, as individuals, were occasionally victims of racism, it was clear to me that *we* were not the problem. Racism is a social reality, but it was not a reality of family life and it was important that my parents made this distinction—the distinction between what is inside and what is outside the family. I think I began to think about social justice when I was still a child. I think other families provide their children with a coherent system of values which are connected to some larger social institutions or traditions, *e.g.*, involvement in a religious community, neighborhood action groups and the like.

Of course my childhood was less than idyllic; few if any children’s are. My parents made mistakes; I made mistakes. In the daily work of living circumstances seem often to conspire to catch us off guard and cause the best of our intentions as parents, as children and as people to be lost. Nevertheless, I think it was my parents’ ability to consistently communicate to me, for better and for worse, who they are in their various identities as parents, partners, male, female, Black and white that has ultimately proved most helpful. □

#### About the Author

PHILIP SPIVEY has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the City University of New York. He has conducted research on interracial adolescents and has a broad interest in the therapeutic and developmental issues con-

fronting interracial families. Dr. Spivey is on the staff of the Bellevue Hospital Center in New York.

### Growing Up with an Asian American Heritage

By Clarence L. Chen

Asian Americans’ distinctive racial characteristics make us a highly visible and ostensibly homogeneous minority group, yet we number only 3.5 million (about 1.5 per cent of the total U.S. population) and consist of more than eight distinct ethnic groups (of which the Chinese Americans are the largest). We are a diverse group—some born and acculturated in Asia; many first, second or third generation American-born, knowing no language other than English.

For all our diversity, our common experience is to be seen as “Asian” first and only, and we all have attributed to us the prevailing cultural stereotypes about Asians. Some of these notions—that one automatically knows karate or mathematics, for example—may not appear blatantly racist, yet since they are often inaccurate, they may lead to discomfort and confusion about one’s identity.

Such stereotyping may be particularly disturbing for the children of Asian American/white unions who are entirely “American” in culture. These children are often expected by teachers or by peers to know about an Asian culture with which they have no familiarity at all. Young children may come to feel that something is wrong with them for their ignorance, rather than understand that the expectation is at fault. I recall the discomfort of my New York born and raised daughter, who has never learned Chinese, when her teacher asked her to “write some Chinese characters” on the blackboard.

Most Asian American/white couples (including my wife and I) have under-

gone the agony of learning that their children have been the objects of racial epithets from their peers. Such racist name-calling and hostility may culminate, if unchecked, in a sense of discomfort, even shame, about their Asian American identity.

Two polar extremes of identity development may result from such experiences. The first involves a complete denial of one's Asian background, which often leads to an avoidance of other Asians and constant eagerness to demonstrate one's complete "Americanness." This is the so-called "Banana" response—yellow on the outside, white on the inside. The other extreme can involve a radical Asian-only identification, with a complete rejection of the values of the dominant American culture.

The potential damage that racism can inflict must be prevented. Parents can instill a sense of pride in their children in a number of ways. Among these are to foster the children's contacts with Asian relatives and friends and especially to promote exposure to other Asian American children. It is also important to help one's children learn to identify racism, lest its negative images be incorporated into their developing self-concepts.

I feel some success in this effort with my own children as I hear my six-year-old son respond to the recurrent question of "Where are you from?" with the reply that he is from New York City, and then proudly add that he is both Chinese and American. □

#### About the Author

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## An Hispanic Perspective on Biracial, Bicultural Families

By Irma Garcia Rose

In order to talk about Hispanics' attitudes toward intermarriage, we must start by pointing out the complexity inherent in the term Hispanic. We come from many different Spanish-speaking nations, each with its own cultural herit-

age, racial composition, patterns of immigration and of emigration. In addition, intermarriage for Hispanics in the U.S. is a complex issue. For instance, such unions may involve Hispanics from very different cultural backgrounds, or first generation Spanish-dominant Hispanics and second or third generation English-dominant Hispanics (who may or may not share a similar cultural background), or Hispanics and people of other races.

In order to help our children develop a positive self-image and pride in their identity, it is crucial that parents deal with their cultural and racial differences. This should be an on-going discussion in which the children participate. Both cultures should be presented to them with equal respect and parents should discuss both cultures fully—their positive and negative aspects, their complexities, their contradictions and the ambivalent feelings they may evoke. Presenting a simplistic and unidimensional view of either culture will most probably alienate the children.

It is also important to look openly at cultural attitudes toward intermarriage. For instance, when I was growing up in Puerto Rico, I saw very few biracial, bicultural families. Most people married people with similar skin tones from within their own cultural background and social class. Puerto Rican mothers would often warn their daughters about marrying men of a different race, not because they were racist, they would say, "but because children born of this union suffer." I have observed a similar situation among the Puerto Rican people in New York City.

It seems to me that one of the most difficult concerns for Hispanics involved in marriages with Anglos is our attitude toward the Spanish language. All Hispanics have been influenced by negative messages about our common language. Our Spanish is constantly being measured against the mythical perfection of our first colonizer's language. English is presented as a superior, economical, precise and scientific language. Spanish is presented as the language of emotion, imprecise and easy to master. These attitudes, coupled with the educational system's attitude toward learning and using foreign languages, are very harmful to the development of our children's identity. When negative messages are also present in the family, the child learns that the Anglo heritage is superior.

Many biracial and bicultural families

have an added problem of isolation as their friends and families often have difficulty accepting a person from another culture. In many instances, I have heard Puerto Ricans grant "honorary Puerto Rican citizenship" to someone they had at first rejected. This phrase embodies a basic Hispanic attitude toward intermarriage: once accepted, a stranger ceases to belong to his/her own culture and is granted "citizenship" (in the case of the Puerto Rican, this is a citizenship that does not exist).

Raising healthy children in our society is a very difficult task. In interracial families, adults have to model a basic acceptance and pride in their own culture and that of the spouse. When cultural conflicts arise, family members should use a problem-solving approach, where all sides are respected equally.

Bicultural, biracial families can play a very important role in today's world. With hatred, fear and oppression of others the order of the day, we can become models of a truly peaceful and creative co-existence. □

#### About the Author

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## Suggestions for Single Parents

By Helen Brody

As an interracial child, a feeling of uniqueness has followed me through most of my life. It has been as much a source of contentment and pleasure as a source of pain. Finding myself at a conference with three others "like me"—for the first time in my life—my immediate reaction was that I wanted to talk to those people who would understand in a way that no one else would. It was gratifying to hear from Dr. Poussaint's survey (see p. 9) that many other interracial children had often felt as I had felt: at times isolated and without a place in the world; at other times, at a distinct advantage both in relating to both Blacks and whites and in having a broader, less limited view of the world.

Speaking to parents of interracial children about making their children's lives

Continued on p. 15

*There are very few books about interracial families—and even fewer get top ratings*

# The Interracial Family in Children's Literature

By Margo Alexandre Long

There are fewer than a dozen children's books that mention interracial families. This is certainly not surprising, given the history and emotions that surround interracial unions in the U.S.\* What messages do these few books convey to young readers?

## Picture Books

Only four children's picture books show an interracial theme. They are *The Rabbits' Wedding*, *The Train*, *Black Is Brown Is Tan* and *All the Colors of the Race*.

*The Rabbits' Wedding* by Garth Williams (Harper & Row, 1958) was the first picture book to suggest an interracial theme in both story and illustrations. This is a charming tale of two rabbits, one white and the other Black, who frolic happily together in the forest. The Black rabbit often pauses during his play to wish that he and the white rabbit could be together forever. A wedding between the rabbits takes place and they live "together happily in the big forest, eating dandelions, and playing Jump the Daisies."

As might be expected, *The Rabbits' Wedding* caused much rage when it appeared in the late 1950s, especially among staunch segregationists. In Montgomery, Alabama, a weekly paper attacked the "bunny book" as integrationist propaganda, "obviously aimed at children in the formative years of three to seven." The book was quietly re-

moved from the open shelves of Montgomery's state library to reserve shelves—out of harm's way. In Florida, a similarly vigilant editor denounced the book as brainwashing, declaring, "As soon as you pick up the book and open its pages you realize that these rabbits are integrated."

In response, author Garth Williams replied: "I am unaware that animals with white fur were considered blood relations of white beings." The debate threatened to multiply, rabbitlike, until one astute Florida politician put things in perspective. "This book will have to go," he told fellow legislators. "I won't have my daughter grow up and marry a rabbit."

My only criticism of *The Rabbits' Wedding* is that the Black rabbit wanting to marry the white rabbit hints at the stereotypic notion that Black men prefer white women. Still, this is a pleasant story that would certainly captivate many young readers. The delightful illustrations, alone, give an important message that Black and white (albeit rabbits) can play happily with one another.

Robert Welber's *The Train* (Pantheon, 1972) tells of a child overcoming her fear of the unknown to fulfill a dream. Young Elizabeth yearns to watch the train pass, yet she is dreadfully frightened of the field of tall grass which must be crossed to get to the train tracks. After much encouragement by her family, Elizabeth decides to traverse the field.

The delicate black and white sketches by Deborah Ray show a family that includes a Black father, an Asian mother and four children varying in their physical (racial) characteristics. The drawings are the only indication of an interracial situation. This approach is an effective

way of incorporating the interracial family into more children's literature.

*Black Is Brown Is Tan* (Harper & Row, 1973) and *All the Colors of the Race* (Lothrop, 1982), both by Arnold Adoff, are the most recent picture books with both the text and illustrations depicting an interracial family. These beautiful story-poems express the love and good times a family shares. Throughout the books, there is explicit discussion and joy in the celebration of a biracial heritage.

Adoff has captured the "spirit" of family life in his prose, and illustrators Emily McCully (*Black Is Brown . . .*) and John Steptoe (*All the Colors . . .*) have adeptly presented a visual image of this "spirit." In addition, the illustrations and text clearly convey a nonsexist lifestyle—with mother chopping wood as well as reading stories and cooking dinner, and father playing the piano and tucking children into bed. All children would benefit from listening to and reading these celebrations of an interracial family. Relevance to one's own interracial family experiences will be readily apparent, and discussions about similarities and differences should flow.

## Books for Young Adults

There are eight young adult novels that deal, to varying degrees, with interracial families. However, three of these titles (*Pastures of the Blue Crane*, *What It's All About* and *The Truth about Mary Rose*) do not directly focus on an interracial theme—that is, the biracial heritage of the main character is of secondary importance.

*The Truth about Mary Rose* by Marilyn Sachs (Doubleday, 1973) is the story of a young girl's search for the truth

\*This article focuses on children's books which include interracial families. Although there are a few books on transracial adoptions, they are not discussed in this article as the issues are not entirely the same.

about her aunt Mary Rose, after whom she is named. The girl idealizes her aunt, who died in a fire, and treasures the legend of how she saved her brother and neighbors before the burning building collapsed. Little is mentioned about young Mary Rose's biracial heritage. That her father is a struggling New York artist is developed more than the fact that he is Puerto Rican. On the other hand, her white mother is a successful dentist, which adds a nonsexist touch.

This story treats the tender topic of death matter-of-factly and concentrates on the development of family legends. The author emphasizes that we must remember people as we see them, with all their faults and strengths, their joys and sorrows.

*What It's All About* by Norma Klein (Dial, 1975) is problem-laden. Eleven-year-old Bernie tries to come to terms with a divorce between her white mother and Japanese-American father; next she tries to understand the dynamics between her white stepfather (who moves out) and her mother; and finally she tries to adjust to life with a newly adopted Vietnamese sister, Suzu.

Unfortunately, Klein tried to incorporate too many troubled relationships into a relatively short novel, and little in-depth discussion is given to any of the family conflicts. For example, in talking about the adoption of Suzu, Bernie explains that "one reason Mom wanted to adopt a Vietnamese child was so we both could have an Oriental heritage. She says when I'm older, maybe I can visit Japan and China with Dad so I'll know more about it."

This passage raises many questions. Are the Japanese and Vietnamese cultures similar? Would a visit to China help a child understand either culture? Does the mother have the "right" reasons for adopting a racially different child? Why must the Japanese father shoulder the responsibility of imparting Japanese culture? Isn't that also the responsibility of the mother, no matter what racial group? Must one travel to learn about one's heritage? Aren't there ways of experiencing a Japanese heritage in New York? None of these issues are discussed.

*Pastures of the Blue Crane* by H.F. Brinsmead (Coward-McCann, 1966) also treats the relationships in an interracial family as a subplot. Ryl, the daughter of a wealthy Australian, has never seen her mother (who is dead) and sees her father rarely. When her father dies, Ryl and her paternal grandfather, Dusty, inherit a

sizeable amount of money and a tumbledown farm on the North Coast of Australia. It is here that Ryl's father was raised, and it is here that she and Dusty set about making a life together.

In a surprise ending, the last 25 pages are devoted to Ryl's discovery of her family background. She learns that her mother was Black and died shortly after her birth. Because Ryl "looked completely white," her father took her away to Brisbane, leaving her brother—who had had a darker complexion—to be raised by his maternal grandfather.

Several issues are suggested by the content of this story. First is the sense of shame apparently felt by Ryl's father. Why didn't he share Ryl's background with her? Why did he abandon her? Why would a father leave behind a darker child? There is also the question of extended family relations in interracial families. Why did Dusty take no interest in his grandchildren until he was an old man? And last, what does this book say about societal values? Why were so many people afraid of telling Ryl the truth?

Ryl's adjustment to her racial background is sensitively developed, although perhaps a bit too naively and quickly. Before Ryl finds out about her own background, she briefly discusses "people of mixed parentage" with a friend, saying, "Well, I suppose they can be the best of two worlds—or they can be

the worst. It's just what they make of themselves." This same unquestioning adjustment appears in Ryl's acceptance of her boarding-school existence. How realistic are these easy adjustments? Still, this is an intriguing novel that would certainly be of interest to many teenage readers.

The remaining five young adult novels have as a central theme the experiences of interracial family members. These five novels are *So, Nothing Is Forever*, *All It Takes Is Practice*, *Arrilla Sun Down*, *Squaw Man's Son* and *I Hate to Talk about Your Mother*.

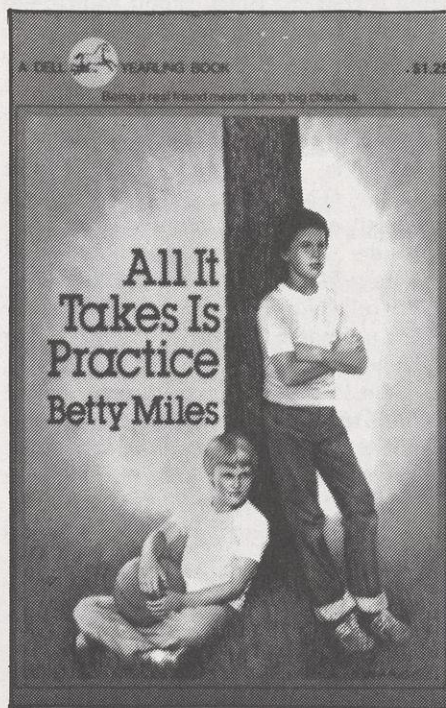
*So, Nothing Is Forever* by Adrienne Jones (Houghton-Mifflin, 1974) is a sensitively told story of three children of a Black father and a white mother who are suddenly orphaned. When it seems that a social worker may separate them, the children decide to run away to their maternal grandmother's farm in Northern California.

The grandmother had not spoken to her daughter in 16 years, ever since her daughter decided to marry a Black doctor. (The children see her for the first time at their parents' funeral.) The grandmother's loneliness, the family's shared grief, the hardships of running a farm and a near tragedy all help to slowly bridge the gap between the grandmother and children. Their adjustment to a new life, coping with change and handling hard times reveal the true meaning of the book's title.

*So, Nothing Is Forever* is a powerful contemporary novel which deals with several issues. First is the question of extended family relationships. The grandmother had completely separated herself from her daughter and grandchildren. Was this self-imposed exile necessary? As the story unfolds, one guesses that the grandmother would like a second chance. Secondly, the different physical characteristics of the three children are compared throughout the story, an important point since the question, "What will the children look like?" is often asked of interracial couples.

This book shows what a creative and skilled author and illustrator can accomplish in the area of racial awareness and understanding. Teenage readers and even some adults will be captivated by this poignant tale.

*All It Takes Is Practice* by Betty Miles (Knopf, 1976) tells of two eleven-year-old boys in a small Midwestern town. Stuart is the only child of two "liberal" parents; Peter, the new boy in town, is part of a family which includes a Black mother



and a white father, an older brother and a younger sister. Peter's family has moved from New York, buying a house with a swimming pool on the "most expensive street in town." The community's reaction to Peter's family and the building of a friendship between the two boys are the main themes.

Many examples of stereotypic racist thinking are described, including the questioning of the wealth of Peter's family, Stuart's confession that he initially thought that Peter's mother was the maid, and the eventual attack on both boys by the town bullies. The author's realistic approach to the prejudice of "small-town America" is revealing, although discomforting. Perhaps this book will encourage some much needed introspective thinking about racial attitudes.

Virginia Hamilton's *Arilla Sun Down* (Greenwillow, 1976) is a dramatic novel dealing with adolescent self-discovery. Arilla tells her own story—that of a seventh grader who fights with her older brother, complains about homework and sometimes disobeys her mother. But with a mother who is a Black dancer, a father who is part American Indian and part Black, and a radical sixteen-year-old brother who strongly and positively identifies with his Indian heritage, Arilla is not typical.

Arilla's awakening to who she is and where she fits within her interracial family is sensitively told. At one point she muses:

I'm not sure Sun is serious about being Indian. I mean whether he for certain believes what he pretends. I know I don't believe it, but I don't really know what he is either. If he's an Indian (I mean American—he usually will call himself an Amerind), then what am I supposed to be? I don't much look like Mom and I surely don't look like my Dad. I just have Mom's coloring. I'm a throwback to someone else I guess. Or secretly adopted.

Hamilton skillfully interweaves past and present. The mood is intense and the story compelling. The characterization of Arilla is written with an understanding and compassion rarely seen in children's literature. Perhaps the author was able to capture this mood from her own experiences, for she, too, is part of an interracial family.\*

*Squaw Man's Son*, by Evelyn Sibley

\*A Native American reader has noted that the book might reinforce a common stereotype—that one can easily "become" an Indian. (Many non-Indian children "play" at "being Indians," and many adults believe that it is relatively simple to assume an Indian identity.)—Editors

Lampman (Atheneum, 1978), tells of thirteen-year-old Billy Morrison's search for his identity. After a very harsh and inhumane series of encounters, Billy leaves the small, parochial town where his father (who is white) serves as sheriff to join his mother, who has reunited with her Modoc people. When the Modocs and the U.S. military troops have a confrontation, Billy again finds himself in a very conflicting situation. His solution is to leave the Modocs to make a life for himself.

Although this book starkly describes the cruelty that Native Americans have experienced from whites, it offers little compassion. (The author's sensitivity is indicated by the book's title; "squaw man" is a racist and sexist term.) This story of a young boy who feels he just doesn't fit is extraordinarily negative and not recommended reading.

Finally, Hettie Jones' *I Hate to Talk about Your Mother* (Delacorte, 1980) is a young adult novel which attempts to deal with the issues of ethnicity, single-parenting, sexism, alcoholism and racism, all at the same time and all poorly. Thirteen-year-old Alicia's Dominican father leaves his daughter and Polish wife to return to his homeland. Alicia's mother becomes a sexually permissive alcoholic and Alicia begins to imitate her mother's attitudes and activities. Racist stereotypes are validated throughout the story. For example, Alicia's dark, athletic features are viewed as exotic and sexy by most of the men she meets, and she states, "Being a Polaminican [Polish and Dominican] meant she would have to be fast . . . it was a built-in situation." Indeed, the book supports, rather than refutes, the many erroneous assumptions directed at interracial families, single parents and low-income groups.

Clearly, the interracial family is one subject that, with very few exceptions, has been largely ignored or mishandled in children's literature. The implications of that omission are serious. Monocultural children—and white children in particular—lack exposure to a valid interracial experience that will broaden their perspective on and understanding of our society. Interracial children, on the other hand, are denied the validation of their families and life-style that children's literature should provide. □

#### About the Author

MARGO ALEXANDRE LONG is the principal of Oakwood Elementary School in North Hollywood, CA. She is also a doctoral candidate at Claremont Graduate School.

#### Growing Up

Continued from p. 12

easier caused me to look closely at my own childhood. The joys and difficulties of growing up are many, and it becomes a challenge to try to separate normal parent-child issues from those we can blame on being interracial.

I spent my childhood in Brooklyn, where I lived alone with my mother, who is white, Austrian and Jewish. My father, who was Black, Baptist and from North Carolina, was more a frequent visitor than a regular family member. On looking back, I realize that his absence left me not only without a male presence, but without any Black influence. My mother raised me as best as she was able according to her perspective and her cultural background. However, my view of Blacks was mostly limited to what I saw through the eyes of my white friends and other influences, which, however well-intentioned, were usually stereotypical, inaccurate and negative. As a result, after identifying totally with whites for a while, I went through a period of rejecting the white race and trying to compensate for what I felt was lacking by totally immersing myself in Black culture (or what I thought was Black culture). This was no solution either. Eventually I came to accept myself as a product of both races and realized the futility of trying to fit anyone's expectations of me.

Therefore, to those wanting to enrich their children's lives—and especially to single white mothers—I would emphasize the importance of providing loving, supportive positive people—both Black and white, adult and child—to be role models for their children. Though it is tempting to hide behind a "we're all the same" outlook on the world, we cannot pretend that differences don't exist. Children's natural curiosity will lead them to want to learn all they can about all people, and especially about the different cultures of which they are a part. To put it another way, though society will always try to put labels on people (whether sexual, racial or otherwise) and stereotypes are hard to shake, no child should have to lose any part of his/her heritage to fit an imposed category. If we attempt to do this to ourselves or to our children, we severely limit ourselves and our children's growth and their potential for happiness and self-satisfaction. □

#### About the Author

HELEN BRODY works in the health-care profession with the elderly in New York City.

## Resources for Interracial Families and Children

**Biracial Family Network**, P.O. Box 489, Chicago, IL 60637; (312) 667-5505.

A membership organization giving support to interracial and intercultural families and relationships by: (1) facilitating communication; (2) encouraging self-help activities; and (3) protesting inappropriate judgments and assumptions about biracial/bicultural unions or backgrounds. Publishes bimonthly newsletter and sponsors activities for families and children.

**Biracial Family Resource Center**, Paula Phillips, Director, 800 Riverside Dr., Suite 5G, New York, NY 10032; (212) 928-7601.

A membership organization for biracial families (biological and adoptive) which organizes support groups, events for children and seminars. Produces periodic newsletter and pamphlets on biracial issues.

**INTERace**, Charles Byrd, President, P.O. Box 7143, Flushing, NY 11352; (718) 961-4581.

This non-profit educational membership group for interracial couples and persons of mixed racial heritage provides (1) a forum for discussing problems encountered by persons of mixed heritage in U.S. society; (2) advice and counseling through lectures, seminar programs and group sessions; (3) social and entertainment programs; (4) a monthly publication to foster communication among individuals with a mixed racial heritage.

**Interracial Club of Buffalo**, Mary C. Murchison-Edwards, P.O. Box 146, Amherst Branch, Buffalo, NY 14226; (716) 839-5080.

A membership organization founded in January, 1983, as a support group and social organization for interracial relationships and children (including

adoption). Members share problems and concerns and discuss how to best care for the children involved. Monthly newsletter, bimonthly club meetings and social activities.

**Interracial Family Circle**, P.O. Box 53290, Washington, D.C. 20009; (301) 261-9066.

A child-oriented group in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area with a strong focus on role-modeling for positive self-identification as well as the creation of a mutually supportive environment. The Circle also provides a forum for the enrichment of the lives of members through study, reading and free discussion of subjects of concern to the interracial family.

**Interracial Family Alliance (IFA)**, P.O. Box 16248, Houston, TX 77222; (713) 749-1211 or (713) 749-7192.

IFA is a non-profit organization serving families throughout the U.S. Its purpose is to strengthen and support the interracial family unit and promote its acceptance by the public. IFA sponsors a family support network, research program, resource library, educational program and a newsletter, the *Communique*. IFA has affiliate offices at the following addresses: (1) Janet Brenner-Carroll, IFA Philadelphia, P.O. Box 42684, Philadelphia, PA 19101-2684 and (2) Freddie and Horne Hines, IFA Atlanta, P.O. Box 20280, Atlanta, GA 30325; (404) 433-2051.

**Interracial Families, Inc.**, Day-spring Christian Center, 700 Second Ave., Tarentum, PA 15084; (412) 224-5715; (412) 828-8807.

This Christian social agency in the Pittsburgh area promotes Christian evangelism and provides private counselling for individuals in interracial families or relationships. Counselling services, newsletters, occasional semi-

nars by pastors and counselors give support to interracial families.

**I-Pride**, 1419 Walnut St., Berkeley, CA 94709.

This is a Bay area group of interracial and intercultural families and people interested in the well-being and the development of children and adults of more than one racial or cultural heritage.

**Multi-Racial Families of Colorado**, Donna Lindsay, Chairperson, 600 South Dayton, #14-110, Denver, CO 80231; (303) 377-9438.

A non-profit membership organization that provides socialization and support to families consisting of more than one race. Holds three activities per month—one for adults, one for families and one for single-parent families. Activities range from social events to mini-workshops to holiday events for children.

**Parents of Interracial Children (PIC)**, Penny Parker, MSW, Child Saving Institute, 115 South 46th St., Omaha, NB 68132; (402) 553-6000.

An informal group for sharing ideas, information, experiences and support; also serves as a social and support group for parents. Conducts three structured children's groups to discuss identity issues.

**POLY**, M.S. Leftwich, Editor, P.O. Box 475, Commerce, TX 75428.

Produces bimonthly newsletter, *POLYethnic Life*, for racially and ethnically diverse couples and families, with profiles of "poly" people, information on interracial organizations and relevant issues. \$9.50/yr.; sample, \$2.

**Rainbow Circle**, c/o First Baptist Church, 17 Sansom Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

An informal support group which meets the third Monday of each month.

## CIBC on the Road

Since our last On the Road entry, the CIBC staff has conducted numerous workshops and presentations. Among them were presentations to the board of directors of People for the American Way, meeting in Washington, D.C.; to the staff of the Washington, D.C.-based National Education Association and to the presidents of that organization's state affiliates, also meeting in Washington, D.C.; to members of the Chicago Children's Books Roundtable in Chicago, Ill.; and to the staff of the Education for Ministers Unit of the Episcopal Church Center in conjunction with the Coalition for Human Needs in New York City.

Recently, presentations were made to a membership meeting of Interracial, a New York organization of interracial parents; to the coordinators of the School Volunteer Program of the New York City Public Schools; to the annual convention of the National Association of Women's Studies and to the Black Women's History Conference, both meeting at Rutgers, N.J.; and to the annual convention of the African American Women's Political Caucus, meeting at Morgan College, Baltimore.

CIBC staff also conducted workshops and participated in discussions at a conference on "Perspectives in Children's Literature" at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst; at the annual conference of the Southeastern Educational Psychological Association meeting in New Orleans, La.; at the Early Childhood Education Council Conference entitled "Families and Children: Meeting the Challenges of Change," held at Fordham University in New York City; at the Conference on American Comedy, sponsored by Pennsylvania State University in State College, Pa. (*Bulletin*, Vol. 15, No. 4); at the conference on "American Literature: What Should Our Children Know?" sponsored by the University of Virginia's Center for the Liberal Arts held at Charlottesville, Va.; at the seminar, "Sensitivity Issues in the Teaching of History," conducted by Educational Testing Service in Princeton, N.J.; and at the Urban Reading Consortium's Sixth Annual Conference on "Strengthening Communication: The Time Is Now," held in New York City.

CIBC was a member of the Planning Committee for the September 29 anti-Ku Klux Klan rally in Raleigh, N.C., "Hate Poisons Kids: Positive Responses for Schools and Communities," sponsored by the North Carolina Association of



## BULLETIN BOARD

Educators. The Council is also working with the Center for Constitutional Rights to prepare material for the forthcoming 200th anniversary of the Constitution.

The work of the Council was also the subject of a recent interview that *Sipapu* magazine conducted with Bradford Chambers; the interview appeared in Vol. 13, No. 2 of that magazine.

The conference on "Children of Interracial Families" presented by CIBC in June, 1984 (and covered in detail in this issue) resulted in a flurry of media coverage and follow-up efforts. Articles in *The New York Times* and the *New York Daily News* were reprinted in hundreds of papers nationwide, and CIBC has received numerous requests for additional workshops, resources, conferences and

help in creating and/or strengthening interracial parents organizations. Accordingly, follow-up workshops will be held in Portland, Houston, Chicago and, possibly, in Atlanta and Washington, D.C. CIBC staff and conference panelists have appeared on post-conference programs on BZD-TV 4 (Boston), Manhattan Cable, Cablevision of Connecticut, Straight Talk (New York), and the Today Show. People involved in academic research and research for media events now regularly contact CIBC for resources and statistics on interracial families, and CIBC has become, in effect, a clearinghouse for interracial families and people interested in interracial issues.

## Conference Held for Asian American Interracials

A conference on interracial dating, marriage and parenting for Asian Americans was held in New York City on September 29, 1984. Both adults who have been involved in interracial relationships and the offspring of such unions were present for an all-day series of panel discussions and small group workshops.

Requests for information packets from the conference; resources on Asian American history, demography and psychology; or details about a support network for Asian American interracial parents and children should be sent to: AmerAsian Tamashii, P.O. Box 1545 Madison Square Station, New York, NY 10159, or call Philip Tajitsu Nash at (212) 966-5932.

## Library Literature Indexes Bulletin

*Library Literature* is now regularly indexing the contents of the *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin*. The indexing began with the *Bulletin's* Volume 15, Nos. 1 and 2 ("Huckleberry Finn and the Traditions of Blackface Minstrelsy") and first appeared in the June, 1984, issue of *Library Literature*. The CIBC wishes to thank readers who urged *Library Literature* to include the *Bulletin*.

For indexing of prior issues, see the *Bulletin*, Vol. 13, No. 8, which contains an index for Volumes 7-13, and/or Vol. 15, Nos. 1 & 2, which contains an index for Volume 14. The former is \$10; the latter, \$4 from the CIBC, 1841 Broadway, New York, NY 10023.

## Interviewees Wanted

For a book on biracial children, Dr. Amanda Houston-Hamilton is conducting research that focuses on developmental experiences and parenting issues for interracial families. She is interested in interviewing families with children three years of age or older and also biracial teens and adults. Dr. Houston-Hamilton, who is on the faculty of the University of California in San Francisco and in practice in the Bay area, can be reached at 726 Broderick St., San Francisco, CA 94117 or c/o Mittelstadt, 33 Perry St., New York, NY 10014.

In the BOOKSHELF, a regular *Bulletin* department, all books that relate to minority themes are evaluated by members of the minority group depicted.—Editors.

## First Came the Indians

by M.J. Wheeler,  
illustrated by James Houston.  
Atheneum, 1983,  
\$9.95, 32 pages, grades 1-5

This collection of verses is filled with problems that begin with the title. "Came" suggests that someone arrived from somewhere else, and most Native Americans will tell you that they have been in this country all their life and that all of their ancestors were here, as well. The use of the word "Indians" continues the stereotypic lumping together of over 300 different indigenous peoples and their nations.

Almost all the text is written in the past tense, which reinforces the false notion that "Indians" have disappeared. Specific information is also therefore often inaccurate; for example, the Iroquois Confederacy of six nations still exists.

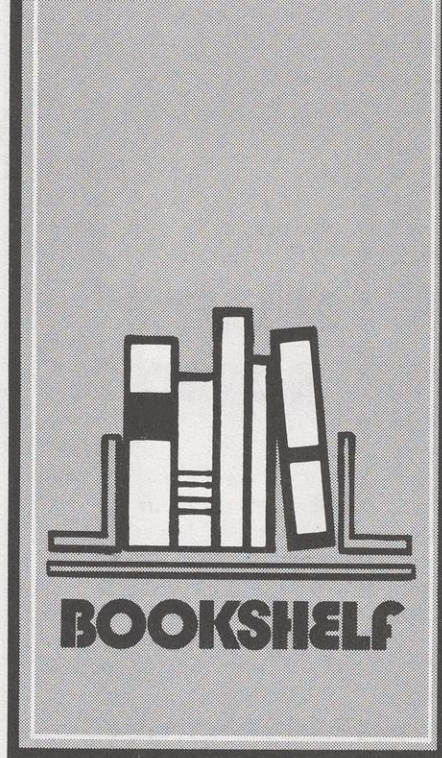
Stylistically, the book leaves much to be desired, as the following excerpt indicates: "Sometimes the wind did not let the smoke get out through the roof, and it made tears run down people's cheeks, but they were warm and dry and full of laughter." Even more serious, the author is describing a sacred ceremony which should not have been treated this way. The author has done an injustice to the Iroquois.

The art work is a hodgepodge and, in some cases, rather frightening and stereotypic. Not recommended. [Jacquelyn M. Dean]

## Secret Places of the Stairs

by Susan Sallis.  
Harper & Row, 1984,  
\$10.95, 158 pages, grades 8-up

*Secret Places of the Stairs* tells how Cass Durston discovers the secret her parents have kept from her—that she has a severely disabled younger sister. Through her search for her sister, Cass learns to better understand and accept her di-



vorced parents and, ultimately, to feel better about herself. Along this less-than-primrose path, the author manages to present racist and sexist stereotypes and just about the worst handicapistic stereotypes this reviewer has seen in eons.

The handicapist tone is set in the first chapter when Cass and her best friend are shopping. To relieve the boredom, Cass imitates a retarded adult—hardly a mature or sensitive activity for a seventeen-year-old. Perhaps most offensive is the author's "use" of disabled people to prod along this confusing, poorly written soap-operaish tale. Dierdre, Cass' severely retarded sister, dies two days after Cass finds her (in an earlier book the author also "killed off" a disabled woman, hardly beneficial to the acceptance of people with disabilities). Pulling out all stops, the author describes Deirdre as follows:

Inside the crib was a human being. It had dark spiky, mongoloid hair . . . like I had had when I fingercombed mine in the [supermarket]. It had no arms. Hands with not enough digits protruded from its shoulders. It was curled into a ball, so that the hands seemed to be holding the knees. It was turning its head from side to side. The head grinned when it saw me, and a voice croaked "Dearie!"

Such grotesque descriptions are offensive and degrading; they make it impossible for readers to accept people with disabilities.

The many ugly stereotypes about

people with disabilities are joined by racist touches (for instance, Cass has a sexual fantasy about a Black performer who she imagines would "roll the whites of his eyes" and make love 20 times a day; another character, eating rice, "pushed the edges of his eyes up into slits" and says, "Lice always dericious"). There is also considerable sexism, typified by the depictions of both Cass' mother and step-mother as fluffy, weak women unable to cope with stress.

This book doesn't deserve the paper it is printed on. [Emily Strauss Watson]

## Apples on a Stick: The Folklore of Black Children

collected and edited by  
Barbara Michels and Bettye White,  
illustrated by Jerry Pinkney.  
Coward-McCann, 1983,  
\$10.95, 53 pages, grades 3-6

This collection of African American "playground poetry" should help set the record straight about the contribution of African American children to the oral literature of childhood. In the past, European traditions have often been described as the sole source of Black art forms, although it should be obvious that cultural forms overlap as people come in contact. One can observe the use by Blacks of *some* European forms, but unique African American innovations have usually been silently appropriated and claimed as "American" (read white American). *Apples on a Stick* stands on its own as an African American collection.

Many of these chants (and most are intended to be chanted or "sing-songed") and verses were created by African American girls. These verses are fun. Some are brash. They rock with traditional African American rhythm and reflect an openness about the topics commented on. (One is reminded of the political candidness of Caribbean calypso artists.)

Children's lore is usually either created by them or has become theirs as a result of long custom. (British nursery rhymes, originally covert political satire, are examples of the latter.) In both cases, children use the material to express *their* own understanding of adult values and

the realities of life they consider significant. Adult values, both negative and positive, therefore usually appear in the verse of children. For example, two or three of these verses refer to an object or person as being "too black." There may be righteous concern about such verses ("White, white/you're light as a kite/brown, brown, you're a clown") by those who don't recognize that children in any society recognize and reflect the realities of the society in which they live. They do not create the "isms."

However, the verses in this book also tell us how African American girls (and boys) see *themselves* in a world in which white people have defined them variously as "pickaninnies," "culturally deprived" and "retarded." Here are verses in which the children define themselves as self-confident, assertive and powerful. ("So if you see me/just step aside/Cause mighty Aniesha don't take no jive" or "So if you see me/just step on back/Cause mighty Katrina don't take no slack.") Those who have conducted mediocre "research" have overlooked this reservoir of literature which is one valid indicator of children's positive Black self-concepts.

The verses are marked by the poetics, the rhythm, the potential for performance, the improvization that are characteristic of most traditional African American art forms. Children are carrying on ancient traditions yet psychologists, teachers, speech therapists, education directors and parents have excluded these wonderful innovative rhymes from

the classroom curriculum (in some cases the school yard as well), from the literature of childhood and even from some homes. Let's hope this book helps change their perceptions of the children and African American culture.

The illustrations by the veteran African American artist Jerry Pinkney are wonderful. The cover shows a group of children in a range of skin colors, and the inside drawings depict children in all their variety, striking the various stances characteristic of African Americans. Enjoy! Value the book as children's literature and as the anthropological contribution that it certainly is. [Geraldine L. Wilson]

## The Great Computer Dating Caper

by T. Ernesto Bethancourt.

Crown, 1984,

\$10.95, 146 pages, grades 8-up

Eighteen-year-old Eddie Ramirez is drawn into a money-making scheme by his friend Jody McCracken. Jody wants to earn a living without joining the Marine Corps, as his father suggests. Eddie wants to finance his unemployed mechanic father's latest get-rich-quick idea.

The two boys concoct an elaborate computer dating service—Data-and-Dates (but also known to the boys as Date-A-Dog). The boys promise the girls at least two dates—a promise they intend to keep by being the dates themselves. After almost 100 girls from the high school across town respond, Eddie and Jody get into academic trouble and lose a lot of sleep as they attempt to fulfill their business obligations without letting anyone find out what is going on.

Eventually one of the girls tells her father about the dating service, and the boys are brought up on charges of running a teenage sex-for-profit ring. As the story draws to a close, the boys are cleared of the charges with help from Eddie's grandfather. New insights are gained by everyone involved and Eddie's bond to his grandfather's Latino culture are strengthened as he prepares to enter an apprenticeship in the adult business world. In addition, Eddie's father's engineering skills seem about to make him rich.

Unfortunately, this appealing and sometimes funny tale is told at the expense of the girls and women in the story. The girls dated by Eddie and Jody are caricatures, losers who find themselves through Eddie's wise insights into their problems. Mrs. Ramirez and Mrs. Grosshan, the school librarian, are sympathetic and helpful women but very traditional stereotypic portraits. The author has a paternalistic attitude toward his female characters and would do well to explore the complexities of modern women in greater depth.

This book can stimulate discussion of the problems faced by teenage boys—employment, future paternal responsibilities, questions about the armed forces, need for skills training, relationships with other men—but it is definitely written from a heterosexual male perspective with an unquestioning acceptance of the values of Marine Corps training. (Jamila Gastón-Colón]

## The Hot and Cold Summer

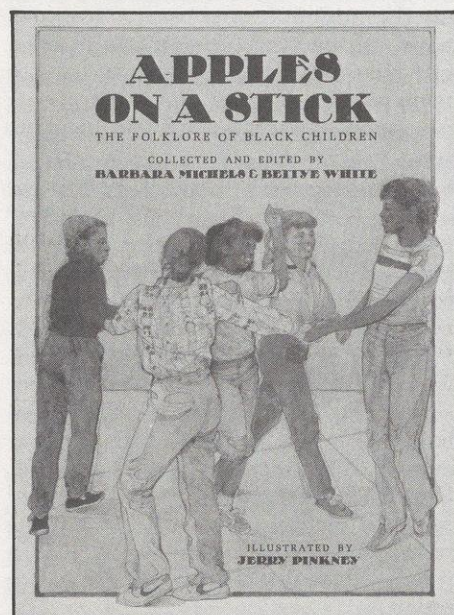
by Johanna Hurwitz,  
illustrated by Gail Owens.  
Morrow, 1984,

\$9.50, 158 pages, grades 3-5

This is a mildly entertaining, essentially feminist story about two ten-year-old suburban boys who are called upon to confront their stereotypes about girls. Best friends Rory and Derek have planned to spend the summer together, in each other's exclusive company, when a neighbor invites her niece Bolivia to spend the summer, with the clear intention of all three children becoming fast friends.

With predictably stereotypical expectations of girls as boring and unworthy of male friendship, the boys plan to ignore Bolivia. They are taken by surprise when they realize that she is as capable of having a good time as they are, if not more so. Bolivia also plays an important role in teaching Rory something about equality in friendship, as he has been playing a somewhat bullying role with Derek.

There is nothing exceptional about this book, and all the characters are white and apparently middle-class, but it does provide a good alternative to stories



that imply that preadolescent boys and girls cannot communicate seriously or become close friends. The book could, in fact, be a useful teaching tool with a third or fourth grade class, particularly one in which boys and girls seem noticeably divided along sex-biased lines. [Leonore Gordon]

## A Handful of Stars

by Barbara Girion.

Laurel-Leaf, 1981,

\$2.25 (paper), 179 pages, grades 7-up

This extremely well written and well researched novel explains epilepsy, in all its forms, thoroughly and accurately. Epilepsy's social implications can be difficult for people both young and old to accept, and this book discusses many of the psychological hurdles a person has to get over in order to live a full life.

Julie Meyers starts having seizures when she is fifteen. For Julie, there are changes in her relationships with all of her high school friends as well as changes in her relationships with various family members. In addition to its sensitive portrayal of Julie's coming to terms with her epilepsy, this novel offers other strong points—a warm depiction of a Jewish family, a non-ageist portrait of a wise and active grandmother, a refreshing perspective on the dating scene.

*A Handful of Stars*, recommended for all young adults, would be especially useful for young epileptics and for their parents. The book touched me—a thirty-one-year-old epileptic woman—deeply; it can be a learning tool for all readers. [Nina E. Yahr]

## There's No Such Thing as a Chanukah Bush, Sandy Goldstein

by Susan Sussman,

illustrated by Charles Robinson.

Whitman, 1983,

\$6.95, 48 pages, grades 3-7

Robin, a young Jewish girl, is surrounded by Christmas celebrations. She wants a Christmas tree, but her parents refuse to have one in the house. Robin is upset and confused, especially because

her friend Sandy, who is also Jewish, has a "Chanukah bush." Robin's mother counters that there are many ways of being Jewish, making her point in terms of what men wear on their heads during religious services: Robin's father "covers" his head during prayer (Orthodox); Uncle Bob wears a hat (Conservative) and Uncle Marshall prays bareheaded (Reformed). In addition to being superficial and irrelevant to the central issue, this explanation needlessly defines religious beliefs through masculine symbols.

A brief description of a very bland Chanukah celebration—a lonely lighting of red, white and blue candles—is followed by several chapters on "The Tap-dancingest, Tree-trimmingest, Chimney-eatingest [sic] Christmas Party Ever," when Robin's grandfather takes her to a Garment Workers Union Christmas party he helped arrange. Eventually, grandpa helps Robin to feel "it wasn't so tough to be Jewish at Christmas if you had friends who shared with you." (But if sharing is so crucial, one wonders why grandpa didn't help arrange a Christmas *and* Chanukah celebration for his Union.)

Here a truly poignant conflict that minority parents must often tackle—maintaining one's group identity and integrity in the face of tremendous pressures—is trivialized. What could have been an important book for the many children who face such pressures in our society turns out to be a let down. [Albert V. Schwartz]

## Just Another Love Story

by R.R. Knudson.

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983,

\$10.95, 201 pages, grades 7-12

Dusty Blaisdale, a lovelorn white suburban high school boy, drives his car into the ocean because he has been rejected by the golden-haired, golden-eyed Mariana Fleming. He nearly drowns, but is rescued by members of the Iron Club, a group of teenage bodybuilders who train there on the beach. The club members, led by Frank (aka the Black Prince), an older Black bodybuilder and trainer, adopt Dusty as a member. At first Dusty doesn't think that *anything* will help him get over his broken heart, but he finally decides to pump iron in hopes that a new

Charles Atlas body just might make Mariana take him back. While training, Dusty develops solid friendships with the Iron Clubbers and helps Frank shed the outward arrogance that has kept him from a national bodybuilding title in the past.

Dusty suffers and suffers over Mariana, thinking of her with every lift. Why, oh why, the reader wonders, did she leave this idyllic relationship with this incredibly attentive boy? Finally the answer—he tried to Go Too Far with her. So why does he think that a beautiful body will bring her back? Well, it does; but then I never understood Gidget movies very well either.

However, this book is not so much about traditional heterosexual romance as it is about male bonding. The young men of the Iron Club are co-workers in the cult of bodybuilding, with a staunch loyalty to Frank and to each other. Girlfriends, even the marvelous Mariana, fade from view in the face of their brotherhood and their mutual admiration for each other's bodies. (Oddly enough, with all this admiration, there is not one word uttered or thought about any sexual attraction between club members.) They invite their girlfriends to their competitions, but they remain absolutely homosocial. The boys share warmth, support and camaraderie, but their turf is clearly off-limits to girls, except as spectators. This outlook is especially disappointing because (1) girls *are* going in for bodybuilding these days, and (2) the author has written a series of novels about Zan, an athletic teenage girl who fights male prejudice to play team sports.

Aside from the love story, the plot concerns Frank's struggle to capture a major bodybuilding title. In the past his unsmiling cool brought out the racism of white judges, so he now attempts to let his icy demeanor thaw enough to appeal to the judges without appearing deferential. The messages about race are mixed. Frank is first portrayed as a Black weightlifting Lone Ranger, a supercool superbody. And it takes Dusty, a white boy with a broken heart, to teach him emotional honesty. On the other hand, Frank's former defeats are seen as the result of racism, and, as the book progresses, his new warmth makes him a positive role model to this racially mixed group.

It is unfortunate that Knudson didn't stick even more with the bodybuilders and even less with the romance. The love story and the female roles are *very* traditional. What is less traditional and more successful is a story about male friendships that cross age and racial barriers. [Christine Jenkins]

## A Rag, A Bone and a Hank of Hair

by Nicholas Fisk.

Crown, 1982,

\$8.95, 123 pages, grades 6-8

*A Rag, A Bone and a Hank of Hair* takes place in the 22nd century after an accident at a nuclear power plant has nearly sterilized the human race. The Seniors who rule the western world have decided to use their advanced science to create people who are capable of reproducing. These new people are called Reborns, for they are literally that: people who died centuries ago and have been re-created, "the scientific answer to a problem caused by a scientific disaster."

The Reborns are not like the other people of the future, who have devices implanted in their brains to make them "successful, social, civilized"—and above all, non-violent. The Seniors set up a "scenario" to test how useful the Reborns "can be ... as parents and founders of new generations," and they involve Brin, an extraordinarily bright twelve-year-old boy, in their experiments.

We share Brin's experience as he begins to see this future world as it really is—superficially peaceful but actually based on the Seniors' ruthless control. Early in the book, a conversation occurs between Brin and Tello, one of the Seniors, after they encounter a hostile guard:

"But I thought the whole idea of our society was ..." Brin began, then gave up.

"Sweetness and light?" Tello said. "No violence, no aggression?" He chuckled. "Well, that's what you see. And Maisie [the armed guard] is what you don't see. But she's there all the same."

Eventually we see just how little humanity has actually advanced in three centuries of high technology. When the Reborns break out of the scenario the Seniors planned, they are destroyed, just as others who defied the new society were destroyed. Discussing how to ex-

plain the fatal bomb blast used to kill them, a Senior asks, "What did we say last time? When we had to dispense with those agitators, those dissidents?"

This is a powerful book despite the weak ending so common to this genre and a few rather stereotypic remarks about people of color. Although the author paints a grim picture of a world where conformity, elitism, materialism and escapism are the norms, the book itself does not reflect the needs of those who dominate that society or our own. On the contrary, it provides a sympathetic and empathetic portrayal of Brin and the Reborns in their struggle to escape from a destiny devised by those both powerful and inhumane.

The author's message is clear: those in power can and will destroy those who do not conform, but the spirit of those killed will live on. This book should inspire young readers to think about their role in shaping the future. [Barbara Pritchard]

## The Talking Earth

by Jean Craighead George.

Harper & Row, 1983,

\$9.95, 151 pages, grades 6-up

Billie Wind, a Seminole Indian girl, is a doubter of the Seminole legends; during a council of elders' meeting, she chooses to go into the Everglades until she hears the animals talk and sees the little people.

Unfortunately, what could have been a beautiful story about a young teenager trying to understand nature is marred by its poorly handled "Indian" trappings. The opening chapter, for instance, suggests that Indian elders send children out into the wilderness without any care. Also, characters' names are unrealistically overworked, since everyone is always referred to by their whole name. (The protagonist is always Billie Wind, never just Billie.)

Still, this adventure story with a female protagonist makes interesting reading if you try to forget that Billie is supposed to be of Native American ancestry. She could be anyone who's heard legends or folk tales and is curious enough to check them out. Her scientific knowledge, reasoning, and common sense make this book worthwhile. [Jacquelyn M. Dean]

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## "Purple Rain" Misrepresents Mixed Marriages

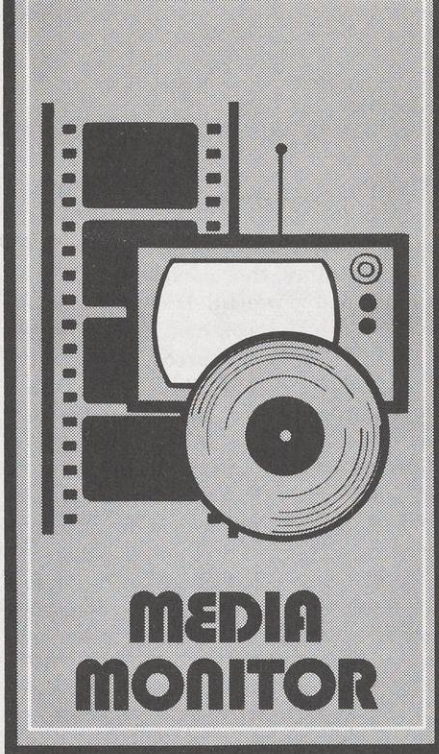
The new movie "Purple Rain," a current box office hit with young audiences, concerns itself with several days in the life of a young singer played by popular singer Prince. A major dramatic aspect of the film is the relationship between the singer's Black father and white mother. The father is a failed musician who relieves his bitterness by violent attacks on his wife. The woman is portrayed as too weak either to help or leave her husband. The one scene between the couple which is not abusive is a fleeting and voyeuristic moment of drunken, lewd intimacy.

One danger of the film's portrayal of a Black-white marriage lies in the fact that most of the young people flocking to see it have no counter for this portrayal, no realistic, positive picture of a mixed marriage. "Purple Rain" can encourage viewers—particularly young ones—to characterize interracial marriages as abusive and salacious.

The likelihood of viewers getting an inaccurate notion of interracial marriages is encouraged because this movie has been described as autobiographical, leading viewers to believe that whatever the realities of most interracial marriages, this one at least is based on fact. However, this is apparently not the case. An article on Prince in the November issue of *Ebony* cites an interview with Prince's father, who states that both he and Prince's mother are Black. (Prince's



Above, popular singer Prince, in a scene from the movie "Purple Rain," which contains a stereotypic portrayal of a troubled interracial marriage.



interracial background seems to be that one of his "great-great maternal grandparents is American Indian and a great-great paternal grandparent is white.") Prince's father also notes that he doesn't drink or handle guns as does the father in the movie.

"Purple Rain" is fast becoming *de rigueur* viewing for young adults throughout the country. Concerned parents should take this opportunity for a serious discussion about interracial marriage. [Nina Goss]

**Resurgence: The Movement for Equality vs. The Ku Klux Klan;** 16 mm; color; 54 minutes; \$100 rental; First Run Features, 144 Bleecker St., New York, NY 10012.

Juxtaposes footage of the contemporary Klan with that of Black workers on strike in Laurel, Mississippi, to show the Klan's role in spearheading reaction against the movement for equality. The economic, political and social concerns and struggles of the primarily female Black workforce in Laurel provide a dramatic counterpoint to the bigotry, scapegoating and violence of the Klan.

**Gods of Metal;** 27 minutes; 16 mm; color; \$325 purchase, \$25 rental (order five weeks in advance); Maryknoll Films, Maryknoll, NY 10545.

A documentary about the nuclear

arms race and people who are trying to stop it. The arms race is analyzed from a Christian perspective, showing the economic and social effects on people in the U.S. and the Third World, especially the poor. The film shows what individuals and groups are doing to halt the arms build-up and gives practical suggestions on what individuals can do to help create a world of peace and understanding.

*Gods of Metal* is an excellent resource for peace education among church groups, high school and college students.

**Mel on Wheels;** color; 19 minutes; purchase: \$375 for 16mm, \$340 for videocassette; rental: \$40 plus shipping; Churchill Color Films, 662 North Robertson Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Mel Manger lived at home for the first 49 years of his life, but when he got his electric wheelchair, his world suddenly changed. *Mel on Wheels* beautifully tells of Mel's everyday life, his hopes, wishes and joys.

Mel's story is told by his cousin, a friend and his attendant, but most eloquently, it is told in his own words. A music lover, Mel is gregarious by nature; he clearly expresses this when he says, "I am a human being. I belong out with other people. Maybe I can't walk but my heart and my mind are the same as yours out there." Combining music and words, the film describes Mel's full life—the nitty-gritty of everyday details, his relationship with friends, his joys and pleasures—in a clear, upbeat, unsentimental and exciting film. Highly recommended. [Emily Strauss Watson]

**Myself, Yourself;** 16 mm, 30 minutes; \$475 purchase, \$50 plus \$5 handling charge rental; Mobius International Film Library, P.O. Box 315, Franklin Lakes, N.J. 07417.

*Myself, Yourself* is an enlightening film about racial bias in education and in educational materials, related through the personal experiences of people of African, Indian, Asian and East Asian backgrounds. Sponsored by the Toronto Board of Education, the film is a fine example of the Toronto Board's efforts to counteract racism in education. The perceptive comments about individual and institutional bias and the examples of bias in materials make this an excellent resource for pre- and in-service workshops with teachers, librarians and administrators.

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The second part offers specific strategies for adults to help all children become consciously anti-racist—secure in, and proud of, their heritage. There are also techniques for helping children of color learn to cope with racism when it crops up in their lives and for helping white children overcome racist behaviors. Suggestions for anti-racist role models, environments and resources are included.

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*"Through the use of these filmstrips adults can begin to question some of their attitudes and learn ways in which to eliminate sexual stereotyping from schools, day-care centers and playgroups."* Linda Lusskin, Mt. Pleasant School, Livingston, N.J., *School Library Journal*.

**Contains:** 2 sound-color filmstrips and 2 automatic and manual cassettes. The first strip is 93 frames and 12 minutes, the second is 118 frames and 15 minutes. A booklet is included with scripts, research studies and recommended reading, plus an 8-page Report Card. LC 81-730652.

Cost for set of filmstrips is \$45. (Slideshow not available.)

Send check or purchase order to  
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For a free catalog listing anti-racist, anti-sexist materials, write the CIBC at the address given above.

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4290 Helen C. White Hall  
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CIBC is a non-profit organization founded by writers, librarians, teachers and parents in 1966. It promotes anti-racist and anti-sexist children's literature and teaching materials in the following ways: (1) by publishing the *Interracial Books for Children BULLETIN*, which regularly analyzes learning materials for stereotypes and other forms of bias, recommends new books and provides consciousness-raising articles and alternative resources; (2) by operating the Racism and Sexism Resource Center for Educators, which publishes reference books, lesson plans and audio-visual material designed to challenge and counteract stereotypes and to develop pluralism in schools and in society; and (3) by conducting workshops on racism and sexism awareness for librarians, teachers and parents. For more information about CIBC and a free catalog of its Resource Center materials, write us at 1841 Broadway, New York, NY 10023.

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