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Interracial books for children. Volume 2, No. 3 Summer 1969

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Summer 1969

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The Role of Books at Ocean Hill- Brownsville

*Children's Book Editors
Study Needs of Ghetto Schools
In Experimental District*

by Margaret Davidson and Bradford Chambers

Photos by Frank Grunberg

Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn's famous experimental school district, has been marked by a short, stormy history. Reported in all the media, it was protest against the district's decentralized status that culminated in the city wide 1968 teacher's strike.

But despite the publicity, questions of deepest interest to the children's book publishing world have remained unanswered. What are the special book needs of the pupils in this demonstration school district? What books are favored by the black and Puerto Rican children there? What books do they still need?

Last April, a group of children's book editors from sixteen publishing houses went to Ocean Hill-Brownsville to find the answers. It was part of a program organized by the Council on Interracial Books for Children to open up direct lines of communication between publishers and inner-city schools.

During their trip, the editors visited five of the district's eight schools, observed primary and secondary grade classes at work, lunched with teachers in two of the school cafeterias, talked with District Supervisor Rhody A. McCoy, and conferred all afternoon with the librarians and curriculum personnel, who serve the daily needs of the nearly 9,000 students of this ghetto area, almost 80 per cent of whom are black, the rest being Puerto Rican.

Their guide throughout the day was Harriett Brown, Supervisor of Librarians for the district. Mrs. Brown was formerly a librarian at the central headquarters of the Board of Education. Before she came to Ocean Hill-Brownsville, she said, her attitudes could be readily described as "middle-class Negro." She eschewed the term "black" and was less than enthusiastic about the concept "Black is Beautiful." Today, she is equally at home with "Negro" and "black" and knows that black very definitely is beautiful.

From the start of the visit, Mrs. Brown set the tone and pace of the day—enthusiastic and brisk. She directed the editors to waiting cars, which carried them to their first stop of the day, an elementary school. For most of the editors, this was their first trip to Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Perhaps, as Editor Ruth Hannon of Western Publishing said later, she had been expecting something like Harlem—chaotic but full of vitality. It did not take

long to see that here was another kind of ghetto. Instead of the crowded big-city sense of life, there was a feeling of emptiness everywhere. Two-, three- and four-story buildings lined each street. Many were partially boarded up. Others were gutted by fire. Where were the grocery stores, the pizza stands, bars, restaurants, dress shops, beauty parlors? In the entire school district there was hardly a one to be seen.

Multi-Media Library

At the first stop, the library of P.S. 144, the editors were greeted by a poster on the library door which announced "BE ALL YOU CAN BE—READ." Entering, they saw on one wall a brilliantly colored travel poster depicting a pastoral scene, its slogan "Puerto Rico—As Close to Paradise as Man Will Ever Be." On another wall, under a sign reading "Black Like Us," were posters of Martin Luther King and Eldridge Cleaver.



"Books fill the void."

About 40 children were in the room. Most sat at oblong tables, quietly reading. Others crowded around the end of a long table on which a sign was propped: "Today's Record Selection—Ashanti Folk Tales from Ghana, by Courlander." A turntable spun slowly, and six boys and girls, plugged in by earphones, were listening intently. In another part of the room, seven boys and girls clustered around a filmstrip machine. They took turns reading the film captions, and when one did not know a word, another student would say it for him.

continued on page 2

Interracial Books FOR CHILDREN

Published by the Council on Interracial Books for Children

VOLUME TWO..NO. 3

SUMMER 1969

Indian Association Attacks Lies in Children's Literature

by Jeffrey Newman

Why is it that so many Americans know so little about the American Indian? One reason is clear. Most information found in books, movies, newspapers, television, and legend is inaccurate.

The problem is particularly accentuated in children's books. Year after year, authors and publishers grind out mistaken, insensitive, and bigoted works directed at young minds everywhere. About a hundred new children's books—plus how many reprints!—on American Indians flood the market each year. Some are as obviously backward as a Tom Mix movie. Others are more subtly but equally distorted. And of course, children, who regard a book as almost inviolate, are unlikely to question information found on the printed page.

Distortions can often be traced to a cultural myopia among writers. Such authors have not been able to rise above their own culture when writing about American Indians. Apparently, they are unconscious of their own cultural conditioning. American Indians and their ways of life are comprehended only in terms of how they measure up to Anglo-American criteria. This is, of course, ethnocentrism of the most tragic kind.

Responsibility for the inordinately low quality of children's books on American Indians should not be laid only on authors. Some must be assigned to historians.

An unfortunate practice among historians has been to follow a double standard in writing about Indian-white relations. For example, although historians duly record the violent acts committed by the Indian toward the white man, they ignore the seamy story of white violence, cruelty, and broken promises. All too often, the authors of children's books reflect this initial dishonesty.

The Association on American Indian Affairs regularly reviews children's books about American Indians. The organization has long felt the need for a list of recommended books in this field and has recently published a *Preliminary*

continued on page 8

COUNCIL ANNOUNCES 3rd ANNUAL CONTEST FOR AFRO AMERICANS, AMERICAN INDIANS AND SPANISH AMERICANS

*Second Annual Contest
Still Open for Submissions*

Interest has mounted in the Council's annual writing contest. During the past two months, more than 350 letters have come from Afro Americans, American Indians, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans inquiring about contest procedure and eligibility. This correspondence represents all sections of the United States. Indicative of the ramifications of the inquiries is one from Senator Ted Stevens asking if the contest is open to Alaskan Natives, Eskimos and Aleuts, with a subsequent request from the Alaskan Senator that these minority groups be eligible as American Indians. An activist in the women's liberation movement asked to join as a member of *her* minority.

Because of the widespread interest, the Council has expanded eligibility and is now announcing the Third Annual Contest, which will officially begin on September 1, 1969—when the Second Annual Contest closes. The new contest will be open to Afro Americans, American Indians, and Americans of Spanish-speaking origins. Deadline for the Third Annual Contest will be September 1, 1970. New rules and the names of the judges will appear in the September 1969 issue of this bulletin. Manuscripts already submitted that are not eligible for the current contest will be held for the new

one, unless the writers specify otherwise.

Second Contest Nears End

Meanwhile, the Second Annual Contest is drawing to a close, but there is still time for Afro American writers and aspiring writers to enter. The contest offers \$500 cash prizes for manuscripts in each of three age groups—3 to 6, 7 to 11, and 12 to 16. Contestants should not have previously published in the field of children's books, but they may have worked in any other literary form. Subject themes are unlimited.

Judges are authors John O. Kilens and John Williams, and illustrator Tom Feelings, who will make their final decisions before the end of 1969. Winners will be honored at a public reception.

Publishers, please note: When the judges have made their final decisions, a list of the names of winners, runners-up, and contestants who have demonstrated writing talent will be available at the Council headquarters, 9 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y. 10016. The exact date will be announced by telegram to any children's book editor who indicates interest in the contest *in writing*. Editors should send the Council a letter or postcard requesting notification.

Information Clearing House

Books for the Chinese American Child, a Selected List, compiled and annotated by Cecilia Mei-chi Chen, is available gratis from the Cooperative Children's Book Center, 411 West, State Capitol, Madison, Wisconsin.

The 1969 Summer Program in Broadcast and Print Journalism for Members of Minority Groups has been initiated by Columbia University. Publishers interested in graduates of the program should write to Richard Kwartler, Administrator, Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University, N. Y.

The Interstate Research Associates, a non-profit consulting firm specializing in bi-cultural programs, writes us that at their disposal are writers, published and unpublished, who are qualified to write on Mexican American themes. IRS has an office at 1826 Jefferson Place, N.W., Washington, D.C.

continued on page 4

Council Publishes Compendium of Recommended Book Lists

Special Supplement Features 125 Annotated Titles Emphasizing Books on Black Themes; Other News of Council's Expanding Activities

Twelve lists of recommended books for children are analyzed in a special supplement of *INTER-RACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN*, to be sent during the summer to regular subscribers. The supplement also annotates and codes all books that appear on three or more of the lists. A total of 125 books are listed for various age ranges, thus providing a valuable compendium of books judged outstanding by compilers of recommended books for children.

Facts are presented on who compiled the lists, brief criteria for selection, and how the lists may be obtained. Included are such major lists as the Atlanta University's "Bibliography of Negro History and Culture for Young Readers," the American Friends Service Committee's "Books for Friendship," Charlamae Rollins' "We Build Together," Augusta Baker's forthcoming "Books About Negro Life for Children," and the special list compiled for the Detroit Public Schools.

All the books selected were published between 1965-68. Some outstanding 1969 titles are included. The books recommended by Augusta Baker, coordinator of children's services of the New York Public Library, are a preview of an updated revision of her popular 1963 list, to be published later this year.

The lists also include books recommended by several professional organizations and trade journals, such as the American Library Association and the *School Library Journal*.

Recommended Lists for Other Minorities in Preparation

The special supplement was prepared under the direction of David Cohen, Chairman of the Council's Criteria and Book Review Committee. Sent free of charge to regular subscribers, it is available to non-

continued on page 8

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continued from page 1

The Role of Books At Ocean Hill-Brownsville

Librarian Richard Lewis, a young man in his early twenties, and an assistant librarian answered student's questions here, gave a suggestion there, and offered words of praise. Then they moved on. Richard Lewis, a white man, had transferred to Ocean Hill a year ago from another school in Brooklyn.

Experiment in Ungraded Learning

The children in the library seemed to be of third or fourth grade age, but this was not easy to determine. P.S. 144 is an ungraded school. Each student is permitted to choose his study subject for specified periods. He signs a daily card or "contract," on which he indicates what curriculum centers he plans to attend, how much time he plans to spend at each, and what he hopes to achieve that day.

At each center, a teacher marks on the card whether the student has fulfilled his contract there. When the day is over, the card is reviewed with the student's homeroom teacher, and the next day's "contract" is made out. Should a student neglect his contracts, the privileges it gives him are denied until he is ready to fulfill them again. The boys and girls whom the editors saw in the library that morning were there because they had contracted for it, for an hour and a half.

At the time of decentralization, one of the schools, Mrs. Brown said, had no central library at all. Others had central libraries but lacked professional personnel. Today, the district's staff numbers ten librarians, and more than thirty "paraprofessionals" — community people of limited education who are given in-service training and who are paid limited salaries. Volunteer parents aid the staff.

The eight schools of Ocean Hill-Brownsville all are within walking distance of each other, and when Harriett Brown makes her routine rounds of the school libraries, she can cover the entire district, if she hurries, in a single morning. The editors had been driven to the first school they visited, and now as they walked to P.S. 178, Mrs. Brown made the comment that the physical proximity of the schools promotes a psychological proximity. "Since I came here," she said, "the word 'community' has taken on a new dimension for me."

On their way to visit a second-grade class at P.S. 178, the visitors stopped to look at the front hall display. A bulletin board, decorated with posters of Afro-American and Puerto Rican leaders, was mounted atop a long table covered with children's books. Each school in the district has similar exhibits in the front hall, and books are an integral part of all of them, Mrs. Brown said. In most of the schools, these exhibits change monthly, focusing on a specific aspect of the heritage of an ethnic minority. The April display at P.S. 178 featured *Crispus Attucks*.

"A Country Like Ocean Hill-Brownsville"

In the P.S. 178 classroom there

was the same air of relaxed business that the editors had observed in the P.S. 144 library.

"What books do you like best?" Caroline Greenberg, Golden Press editor, asked the six and seven-year-olds. Hands shot up everywhere.

"Three Billy Goats Gruff!"
"The Red Balloon!"
"Good Morning, Mr. Sam!"
"Five Chinese Brothers!"

Harriett Brown, perhaps trying to get some more ethnically grounded answers, said, "Close your eyes and try to see a book you want that you've never seen before."

"A book on space..." "A book about our school..." "A book about when we go on trips in the bus..." "I'd like one about a country like Ocean Hill-Brownsville..." "I'd like one about a Teratorosaur dinosaur!"... "No, no — one about skunks!"... "I want one about a porcupine!"

Mrs. Brown tried again. "What would you tell about yourselves to someone who's never met you?"

"I have a colored face..." "I have big eyes and a face..." "I have a big mouth and a little nose..." "I don't want to describe myself..." "I'm a girl..." "I have long hair..." "I wear dresses..." "I have black hair, brown eyes, and I'm a boy."

In another classroom at P.S. 178



Communication through books

the editors watched children make a book of their own. Titled "Boys and Girls at Work and Play," it was being constructed from photographs cut out of magazines and newspapers. The children had been collecting the photos from *Ebony*, the *Amsterdam News*, *El Tiempo*, and *El Diario*.

Did this mean, Harriett Brown was asked, that Ocean Hill-Brownsville was not receiving any of the good trade books being published during the past two or three years that portray black and Puerto Rican children?

"No, it doesn't," said Mrs. Brown, "We're beginning to get the books, but you must remember that our school district is not so decentralized as the public thinks. We still select books from the approved list provided by the Board's Central Committee in charge of standards and adoptions, and from the time we order a book to when we actually receive it is usually a year to eighteen months." (She did not include the time before a book appears on the Board's approved list, which may amount to still another year to eighteen months. Thus, as much as three years may elapse from when a book is published until it reaches the library shelves of a school in Ocean Hill-Brownsville or in any other school district of New York. This distribution time lag was to come up again in the editors' discussions with District Superintendent Rhody McCoy.)

As the visitors left the P.S. 178 classroom, Mrs. Brown observed: "I remember when the first books to depict black children in a realistic way were published. Black children giggled with embarrassment and turned away from these books. They had become so accustomed to seeing themselves portrayed, either not at all, or in humiliating roles, that when they saw themselves as real persons they were terribly distressed."

The Heart of It All

Across the street from Rhody McCoy's office in the Atlantic Towers Building is a cluster of six or seven Quonset-style huts. Each is the administrative nerve center for some aspect of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district. The visiting editors headed for one that serves several functions. It is the School Library Center, the Resource Center, the Reading Hut, or just plain "the Hut." The editors learned that whatever one calls it, as far as books are concerned this small two-room structure is the heart of it all.

Here books are received from the Board of Education for distribution to district schools. Movie equipment, slides, filmstrip machines, tape recorders, records — audio/visual equipment of all kinds are stored or used here, or loaned to individual schools. Librarians

come for two hours a week of in-service training. Paraprofessionals receive instruction before being sent out on their special assignments. Puerto Rican children come to the Hut from P.S. 155, where experiments with bilingual classes are taking place. Here they see movies in Spanish, read books in their native tongue, or work with structured bilingual materials.

Daily storytelling sessions for the children of Ocean Hill-Brownsville are held in the Hut. Sometimes the children are read to, sometimes they watch storytelling filmstrips or movies. Sometimes a child chooses a book he particularly likes and reads to the others.

Seven-Day Library

The Hut also serves as a seven-day library for the entire district — for in the planning stages, Mr. McCoy had requested that besides regular school hours it be open in late afternoons and on weekends, so that children could do homework there when they couldn't do it at home. On Saturdays, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., and on Sundays, from 1 to 4 p.m., the boys and girls of Ocean Hill-Brownsville, and their parents, can come there to take out books.

"But we're not so interested in books going out," Ronald Simmons, one of the young paraprofessionals said, "as we are in the kids coming in. That way we can get a fix on

continued on page 3

College Language Group Hits "Instant" Experts

Members of the College Language Association, most of whom have spent many years teaching in predominantly black institutions, issued at their April, 1969 meeting a strongly worded statement of condemnation aimed at the publishing industry as a whole. The expansion into the field of black studies, the CLA stated, has not caused the abandonment of an essentially colonialist attitude held by too many of the industry in respect to black teachers and scholars. Far too many books, especially in the textbook field, it was noted with indignation, seemed to have been prepared by "instant" experts — and apparently were checked only by other such experts before publication. The CLA calls for the use in all areas of publishing of black men and women whose talents, backgrounds, and experiences would automatically bring to an end this subtle and condescending form of racism.

Founded 33 Years Ago

The CLA was founded 33 years ago, at a time when the Modern Language Association barred black membership. Today the CLA represents nearly 200 teachers of English and foreign languages in predominantly black colleges throughout the South, as well as several state universities in the North. It publishes a quarterly, the *CLA Journal*, which may be obtained from the editor, Dr. Therman B. O'Daniel, Morgan State College, Baltimore, Md. The current summer issue focuses on the author Richard Wright.

continued from page 2

Ocean Hill-Brownsville

their individual problems."

Programs originate in the Hut that reach out beyond the eight schools into the neighborhood itself. One such program is the At-Home Reading Program. Paraprofessionals are each given a caseload of first graders. Their assignment is to visit children in their homes and to organize parents into weekly reading-training sessions.

Storytellers in the Streets

The Hut did not officially exist until fall, 1968. In preparation, throughout the preceding summer, ten teams of roving storytellers took to the streets. On street corners, in doorways or parks, wherever they found a group of children, the storytellers would set up shop. While one person told the story, the other drew pictures of the action in the story. Afterward, the pictures were given to the boys and girls to take home. Whenever they could, like pied pipers, the storytellers would lead their bands of children back to the Hut to watch filmstrips or movies in the room with signs on the wall "Books Are Fun!" and "Be All You Can Be, READ!"

Avon Book Editor Bob Wyatt remarked that he found it difficult to conceive that so many activities can go on in two small rooms—often at the same time. "You'd be surprised how well it works," Ronald Simmons said. "The kids are accustomed to noise. Actually, it often helps. One of our experiments involves teaching them how to read to music with a very strong pop beat—and it's working. Besides, we want to get as many things going in the same room at the same time as we can. We want to bombard these kids with a sense of life."

It was lunch time now. "I wish I could take you to a nice restaurant," Harriett Brown said. "There just aren't any in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. By far the best places to eat are the school cafeterias."

A few minutes later the editors were inside IS 271, on their way to the teachers' lunchroom. Mrs. Brown said, her eyes twinkling, "This is the place—the famous or infamous 271!" For it was here that the parents of Ocean Hill-Brownsville had first put up the human blockade to keep unsympathetic teachers from entering the building. Here, for days on end during last year's strike, were the riot police, the newsmen and the television cameras.

Children's book author and Parents' Magazine Press Editor Alvin Tresselt commented how calm the schools were now. The editors had observed no policemen in or around the schools during the morning visits. Mrs. Brown said that the same was true of all the Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools. Attendants at the entrances of the schools were volunteer parents, paraprofessionals, persons from the local community. This was a contrast, observed another editor, to some schools in other districts of New York City, where police are stationed at entrances and exits and inside the school corridors.

Alvin Tresselt added that he was also impressed by the youth of the teachers and by their wide racial mix—teachers in Afro attire, others in gray flannel suits; black teachers of separatist persuasion and black teachers who see things otherwise; white teachers with long hair and beards, and white teachers with short hair and clean-shaven faces. Paraprofessional Ronald Simmons, who joined the luncheon

continued on page 5

Critics Respond to "Soul Brothers and Sister Lou"

by Rosa Lee Nash

Reviewers across the nation reacted with enthusiasm to Kristin Hunter's book, *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*. Miss Hunter's book for teenagers was last year's winning 12 to 16 age entry in the annual competition sponsored by the Council on Interracial Books for Children. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons, it is now in its second printing, and the paperback edition is to be published by Avon Books in October.

The book was praised for telling it like it is in the black ghettos of the North and for the author's sensitive revelations of the pain and joys in a young girl's growing up. Marion Simon, reviewing the book for the *National Observer*, said that "Every young teen snuggling into fresh pajamas in a private bed in a private bedroom in a very private house on a quiet suburban tree-lined street should read *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*."

Reviewers for *Saturday Review* wrote:

"Actually, the plot is of less importance than the depiction in the book of the maturing of a young girl who learns to appreciate her racial heritage during those difficult years when self-acceptance and self-identity are problems of adolescents."

For the reader who is not familiar with the harsh realities of life in the ghetto, the book carries a high degree of credibility. *The Chicago Tribune's* review stated: "... taut, fast moving, absorbing and believable as it probes with honest realism the problems of a wide range of unforgettable characters." Susan O'Neal, of the New York Public Library, reviewing the book for the *Library Journal*, phrased it differently: "The language, music, family relationships, joys and problems will be familiar to many readers from the ghetto and will give others insight through the sympathetic and believable characterization of Lou." Other accolades include: "This powerful book deserves wide reading."—*Washington Post*. "A vivid portrayal of what it means to be a Negro living in an urban ghetto."—*Bridgeport Post*. "... there is real joy in the book, Lou's joy in finding out who she is and what really matters."—*Read*.

Aspects of the story which aroused controversial responses among a few reviewers involve an encounter with the police and the fatal shooting of a black boy. Disillusioned, Lou turns toward militancy for support. But at a stomping, shouting funeral, Lou discovers the true meaning of soul to which she and her friends give expression in musical lament for their dead friend. According to the *Kirkus Service*: "The story could end here and perhaps should." This is one of 4 negative critical remarks expressed in 21 otherwise positive reviews which have thus far come to our attention.

But the story does not end here. Lou and her friends become successful recording artists. Overnight the boys become very different people. Militancy dissolves. Success solves their problems, about which *Kirkus* said: "The quick success of Lou and three of the boys as a singing group... is no more than an appendage that allows for a few extra ironies." The *Saturday Review*, in an otherwise glowing tribute, thought the ending "too pat for a book that is honest, convincing and incisive." And *Commonweal* concurred: "Unfortunately the ending undercuts the admirable frankness of the book."



Jacket design of Avon's forthcoming paperback of *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*

Susan O'Neal, however, whose overall review was positive, is critical of the manner in which militancy was dealt with: "Unfortunately, militancy is unpersuasively made to seem the result of personal failure, merely a stage to be passed through, and militants are portrayed in superficial terms which reinforce fears aroused by the mass media: girls wear Afros and 'huge earrings swinging like knives,' men are 'hairy figures,' the friend's death is not regretted by Fess who thinks it beneficial to the movement. Though militancy plays a large part in the story, it is a fictional fragmentation, far from a complete presentation of the philosophy or the motivations of its adherents. Such a flaw is especially regrettable since this is one of the few juvenile books attempting to present the culture of the ghetto rather than merely its economic impoverishment." Granted the validity of the negative interpretation which may be given to these comments by some readers, what must not be overlooked is the fact that these comments are contained in reviews which are all, nevertheless, of a positive nature.

About the Author

ROSA LEE NASH is a teacher of speech communication in the elementary New York City public schools. She is completing her doctorate in communications at Yeshiva University. Miss Nash is Co-Chairman and Secretary of the Council on Interracial Books for Children.

UNESCO REPORT URGES LANGUAGE SLURS BE DROPPED

Panel Finds Terms Like "Native," "Tribe," "Race" Objectionable

In an effort to combat prejudice, a group of United Nations experts urges that some widely used terms be re-evaluated for racist overtones. As currently used, the U.N. study group contends, numerous expressions do carry racist implications. Such words as "backward," "pagan," and "native" have come to be derogatory and often convey a negative sense, even when the user may not consciously intend them to.

Meeting in Paris under the auspices of UNESCO, a ten-man committee has issued a report on racism in language that is directed particularly to teachers, authors, textbook publishers, and professionals in the mass media. The report urges prudence and precision in the choice of terms used to describe people of differing ethnic, religious, or other groups, especially formerly colonized peoples.

Words like "primitive," "tribe," "underdeveloped," "race," "savage,"

"colored," the report stresses, "are so charged with emotive potential that their use, with or without pejorative intent... generally provokes an adverse reaction."

Many such terms became part of the everyday language of the colonizing nations, and because of this colonialist origin they "carry overtones of racial superiority... could implant the seeds of racialism [and] in any event, offend the susceptibilities of peoples who were once colonized."

The report concedes that it would be hard to dispense entirely with terms such as "race" or "tribe." It recommends that "race" be used with particular care, since its scientific validity is debatable and it often serves to perpetuate prejudice. The word "tribe," the experts suggest, should be used sparingly, since most of the groups referred to by this term have long since ceased to be tribes or are losing their tribal character.

Mr. A. Babs Fafunwa, of Nigeria, whose speech given in Paris supplied much of the substance for UNESCO's official report, remarked feelingly in connection with the word "tribe": "How an ethnic group with two or ten million people in East or West Africa, with a parliamentary government, can be described as a 'tribe' and not the Irish, the Scots, the Welsh, the French, or the English, still baffles the non-European."

As long-range measures to combat prejudice and racial discrimination in the communications fields, UNESCO proposes:

- Regional or international conferences of authors and publishers for the improvement of textbooks, journals, magazines, and other teaching and information materials;
- Encouragement to learned societies in the areas of history, geography, civics, anthropology, and sociology to devote a part of their conference programs to a discussion of bias in text materials;
- A conference of religious leaders—Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, Bahai, etc.—to discuss the religious aspects of prejudice.

NOTE: Copies of the comprehensive "Report on a Meeting of Experts on Educational Methods Designed to Combat Racial Prejudice" can be obtained on request from the UNESCO Liaison Office, United Nations, New York, N.Y.

Bilingual Programs Offer Hope To Nation's Second Minority

by Margaret Davidson

Before a child can learn to read in English he must be able to speak English. This is a simple, almost meaningless fact — to everyone except Spanish-speaking parents who too often must watch their children struggle and stumble and fail their way through the U.S. school system.

In five states alone—Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico and Texas — there are more than 5.5 million Spanish-speaking people. This figure is swelled each year by immigration from Mexico. Add to that the other Spanish-speaking people — Cuban, Puerto Rican, Central and South American, and Spanish—who live in Florida and the industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest, and the United States has a very substantial and too often forgotten second minority group (over 7 million people).

Peoples from so many lands bring to the United States vast cultural heritages of their own. But what happens then? Armando Rodriguez, chief of the U.S. Office of Education's Mexican-American Affairs Unit, remembers his own introduction to the American way of life. "I was nine years old when we settled in San Diego in an extremely poor but well integrated community of Mexican-Americans, Negroes, and poor Anglos," he writes. "The trouble was in school. I knew only a dozen words of English, so I just sat around the first few weeks not understanding a thing. I was not allowed to speak Spanish in class."

Of course, a child does not have to be very subtle to soon sense that his native tongue is considered a second-class language, that he had best forget it, pretend it never existed. To make matters worse, the overzealous teacher often changes her pupils' very name. "You are Michael now," she says sweetly, "not Miguel." So even his name is

second-class.

"To make the situation even more ridiculous," Rodriguez continues, "these children are often asked to take Spanish as a foreign language later in school."

So these children who are surrounded by the richness of two languages and two cultures all too often are forced to grow up semi-illiterate in both. Of course, they manage to pick up a smattering of English on the streets and playgrounds. But a smattering is not enough for any kind of success in school. One failure follows another in a downward spiral until the day of the inevitable conference with the guidance teacher who in turn must say, willingly or unwillingly, "Forget your dreams of going to college. Forget about becoming a doctor or an astronaut or a teacher. There's your future over there — as a domestic or a farmhand or a stoop laborer. That's the picture."

What's being done to change this? Too often little or nothing. In many places, efforts to right this deep cultural wrong are limited to an occasional Mexican Week or Puerto Rican Day, or to a motley collection of books on a shelf in the corner of the library labeled "Books in Spanish."

But in a few scattered areas more meaningful programs are being developed. San Diego, San Antonio, Ann Arbor, New York City—in certain schools in these towns one of the answers is the bilingual class.

The various bilingual programs differ in detail. But the main thrust is the same—with special effort, techniques, and teachers, to teach children to communicate effectively, and equally important, to develop a pride in themselves and their own backgrounds.

The program begins in kindergarten or, in places that lack a kindergarten, in the first grade. Oral

language is heavily emphasized from the beginning. Spanish and English are used interchangeably. The teacher drifts from one language to another, seemingly at random. The children, with perfect ease and confidence, language-hop after her. A deep enrichment in both languages — and both cultures — naturally follows.

These children almost always conceptualize and think — however badly — in Spanish. So Spanish is used exclusively for reading and writing. A basic assumption of the program is that by the time the child reaches about the third-grade level he will be ready to switch to reading and writing in English. From now on he is truly bilingual, a citizen of two cultures.

How are the bilingual programs working? Most are too new to have gathered conclusive evidence. But the program in San Antonio, Texas, has been running for three years in nine schools. The first group of youngsters are now at third-grade level. All are equaling the national norms in reading. Some are even achieving fifth-grade level. This is particularly interesting because traditionally, Mexican-American boys and girls in southern Texas have lagged at least a year behind national norms.

And an observer in a bilingual class at P.S. 155, a grade school in the black and Puerto Rican ghetto of Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn, noticed that the children seemed confident, absorbed, happy. Their attention spans were much longer than the average suburban child's. Very few seemed lost in daydreams, or locked up inside themselves.

When told of these impressions, Louis Fuentes, the Puerto Rican principal of P.S. 155, smiled proudly. "Yes," he answered, "it is true. You'll find no cultural wall-flowers here."

continued from page 1

Information Clearing House

A "Soul Quiz" pamphlet on *Famous Black Americans* is available free, in any quantity, from the Foundation for Change, Inc., 1619 Broadway, New York, N. Y. 10019. It has valuable information yet is compact enough to use in the mailing of any organization.

Of interest to proponents of bilingual education: the Treaty of Guadalupe, by which the U.S. took the Southwest from Mexico in 1848, guaranteed bilingual schooling to all Mexicans who became U.S. citizens as a result of the land transfer.

The Black America Workshop of the Bergamo Center in Dayton, Ohio, publishes an excellent bulletin, gratis, listing news of books and A/V materials for teachers of Black History. The Bergamo Center address is 4100 Patterson Road, Dayton, Ohio 45430.

Natachee Scott Momaday, mother of Pulitzer Prize-winner N. Scott Momaday, and author of *Owl in the Cedar Tree* (Ginn), is currently writing a biography of a teenage American Indian girl.

A handsome calendar featuring Afro-American history is available for \$1 from Buckminster Enterprises, 160-08 Jamaica Avenue, Jamaica, N. Y. 11432.

Dial Press offers free reproductions of illustrations by Tom Feelings, suitable for framing, from Julius Lester's *To Be a Slave*. Also, reproductions of the Allan Cober illustrations from *The Fire Plume: Legends of the American Indian*, edited by John Bierhorst. Free bookmarks are also available for both books. Send self-addressed, stamped envelope to Dial Press, 750 Third Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Games and recipes derived from many cultures, abroad and in this country, is the theme of a booklet currently being compiled by the American Friends Service Com-

mittee. Mary Esther McWhirter, Director of the AFSC Children's Program, is searching for favorite games of American Indians and Mexican Americans and other cultural groups. She has some from Appalachia but needs more from all sources. If you can help, write to her at 160 North Fifteenth Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102.

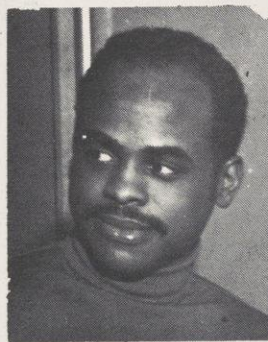
"What is Black and White and Read All Over" is the title of a talk given by our Executive Committee member Dorothy Sterling at last November's convention of the National Council of Teachers of English. Part of a panel discussion on Negro literature in secondary education, it includes a checklist of books for use in courses on black culture. The talk and checklist will be published in the September 1969 issue of the *English Journal*. Free reprints will be available about December from School and Library Promotion Department, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, L.I., N.Y. 11530.

Projecto Leer (Project Read in Spanish) provides sources of reading materials for the 5 to 9 million Spanish-speaking residents of the United States. It is a bibliographic service, to identify and obtain copies of Spanish books for review by experts, and to compile and issue quarterly lists of new selections as well as annual lists of selected titles and editions. The quarterly *Projecto LEER Bulletin*, which is distributed free to interested parties, lists some 200 titles in each issue, with annotation and retail price. Titles are listed only after large quantities are available in the United States for purchase by schools and libraries. For more information on selection and bibliographic services, including the *Projecto LEER Bulletin*, write to Miss Martha Tome, Director, Projecto LEER, La Casita, Pan American Union, Washington, D.C. 20006.

continued on page 6

Art Directors, Take Note

Interracial Books is proud to present more of the work of Afro American Illustrators who have enriched children's literature. We shall in succeeding issues bring to the attention of art directors the graphic creations of many other outstanding artists who represent various ethnic groups.



ROBERT CARTER is currently teaching at Nassau Community College in Garden City, New York. He has served as a scenic artist for WHAS (a affiliate of C.B.S.) and has done free-lance magazine illustration.



ALVIN HOLLINGSWORTH teaches at the High School of Art and Design. I Like the Googenheim, the first children's book that Mr. Hollingsworth has both written and illustrated, will be published in Spring, 1970 by Reilly & Lee.

Nancy Bloch Award Presented to Author-Illustrator Team; News of Other Awards

At a reception held at the Downtown Community School June 16, this year's Nancy Bloch Memorial Award was presented to Julius Lester for *To Be a Slave* (Dial) and to the book's illustrator, Tom Feelings. Downtown Community School, 235 East 11th Street—with the highest proportion of minority group enrollment of any private school in New York City—has been giving the Nancy Bloch interracial award for the past 10 years. Lester's *To Be a Slave* was also runner-up for the 1969 Newbery Medal.

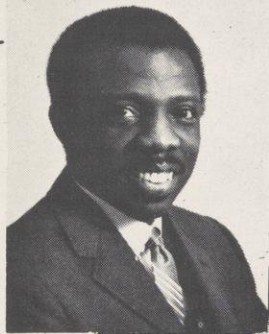
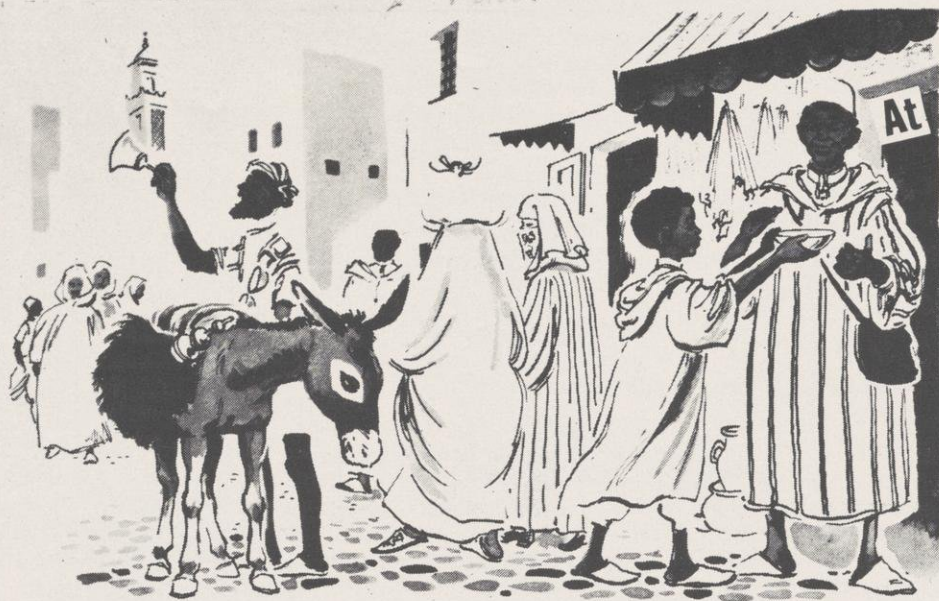
Another recent contest of interest to our readers is the Gold Medal Award in non-fiction, awarded to William L. Katz for *Eyewitness: The Negro in American History* (Pitman). Given by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, this was the first textbook ever to receive the award.

continued on page 6

Art Directors, Take Note



ROBERT LOUIS JEFFERSON studied painting and drawing at the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere. He has illustrated a number of books for children, including *The Galloping Ghost and Other Stories*, *Little Thunder* and *Go to It, You Dutchman*.



LEO CARTY is now illustrating his first book for children, *Where Does the Day Go?* by Walter Myers. Mr. Myers' book won first place in the 1968 Council on Interracial Books for Children contest in the age category 3 to 6 years. The book will be published by Parents' Magazine Press Fall 1969.

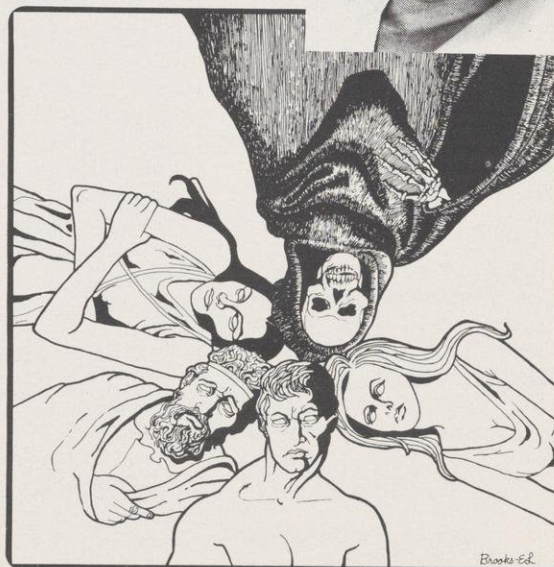


ELZIA MOON is Senior Principal Illustrator, Office of the Mayor, New York City. Among the titles that he has illustrated for children are *Fist Against the Night* and *Some Things that Glitter*.



LEE JACK MORTON is a graduate of Wayne State University and the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts. His first book for children, *A Birthday Present for Kathryn Kenyatta*, will be published in September 1969 by McGraw-Hill.

ORASTON BROOKS-EL studied at Hunter College, School of Visual Arts and Pratt Institute. His one venture to date into the field of illustrations for children is a film strip on the life of Booker T. Washington.



Ocean Hill-Brownsville

party, said: "Many of the teachers here are idealistic Vista and Peace Corps returnees. Many are young teachers from other parts of the city who asked for reassignment to our district."

Questioned about the racial composition of the teachers, Simmons answered that 30 per cent of the teachers are non-white; 70 per cent are white.

It was also at IS 271 that, four years ago, the first groups of concerned parents met. Prior to World War II, the area had been Jewish and then Italian; now it had become almost entirely black and Puerto Rican. At this time the schools were part of a much larger district that included Brooklyn's Brownsville and Bedford Stuyvesant areas. The first step toward improvement was to change the area's name, to dissociate it from the crime-ridden reputation of Bedford Stuyvesant. Ocean Hill was an arbitrary choice, but respectable. The original group of 30 parents, ministers and community workers grew. Two years of meetings with officials of the Board of Education brought only promises, and the group sought help elsewhere. The Ford Foundation involvement with \$40,000 to form the schools into a decentralization experiment came in August, 1967. Rhody McCoy was chosen District Supervisor in September, and Ocean Hill-Brownsville became an official school district.

"Just Tell It Like It Is"

After lunch, the editors gathered again at the Atlantic Plaza Towers, in a small conference room adjoining Mr. McCoy's office. As they took their seats, New American Library Editor Jim Trupin was making this observation: "All morning I haven't heard a phrase I usually hear in schools. *Nobody* has once said: 'That's not the function of the school.'"

A door opened, and a middle-aged, middle-sized man slipped into the room, a pipe in hand. Harriett Brown introduced District Supervisor Rhody McCoy. A new dialogue began.

"So many white people have been illustrating interracial books for children," began Lillian McClintock, Consulting Editor at McGraw-Hill. "Wouldn't these books really be better handled by blacks?"

Mr. McCoy smiled. "I'll admit I'm ambivalent," he answered. "But we've got to face the fact that plenty of whites are sensitive, good illustrators. And some blacks aren't. I do think it would be wise to check a book's credibility in a black area before publishing it, however."

One of the editors took up Mr. McCoy's suggestion. "Would it be possible," asked Editor Eunice Holsaert of Hawthorn Books, "for us to submit manuscripts to you when we receive them on black and Puerto Rican themes?"

Mr. McCoy said that the persons who could best evaluate manuscripts would be Harriett Brown and her staff, and when Mrs. Brown said that she would be glad to check out manuscripts sent to her, the editors were enthusiastic.



Letters to The Editor.

Publishers, Please Help

I am teaching 3rd grade in a poor, rural segregated school in South Carolina. There are no supplies available at all. Every textbook we are given is orientated to white, middle class children. My pupils cannot understand these books, and they should not have to.

Can you offer me any suggestions or material that might be of some help. The situation is quite desperate. Anything that I purchase, is with my own money, therefore I am limited in the amount I can spend.

Thank you for any help you can give me.

The editors deliberately omitted the signature to the above letter, out of concern that school authorities and townspeople might take reprisals against the writer. We receive numerous letters from the South, with the same desperate call for books. Publishers, please take note: the Council will channel books or offers of books at reduced rates to the writers of this and similar letters.—Editor

Help!

Honestly, all I can say is HELP. . . My daughter is aware of her nationality as well as her immediate ethnic background since my husband was Negro and I am Caucasian. However, I find that I am as unaware as the next American when it comes to factual Negro history and I feel I do need help not only for myself but also for my daughter to allow her to achieve the pride in her ancestors which so rightfully belongs to her as well as to others.

Mrs. Kay F. Coleman
Phoenix, Ariz.

. . . It is essential to encourage black writers today if old imbalances in U.S. publishing are to be corrected. True, black Americans are only one of our minority groups, and racially distorted books are only one part of the larger racial problem. Yet improvement in this field — I mean more honest, informative, sensitive books — will soon filter into our national life with only good resulting for all. I note that you now limit your book competition to black authors but am sure no noxious exclusivity is intended — and judging from your first novel award . . . no lowering of standards, literary or other.

Mrs. E. Rice
Highspire, Pa.

Overseas

. . . A debate is now going on about the picture of the Negro child in Swedish children's books. . . I would appreciate it very much if, through sending me regularly your quarterly newsletter and other material within the children's book field, you could keep me informed as to developments.

Mary Orvig
Head
The Swedish Institute for
Children's Books
Stockholm

Dr. Dolittle, Pro and Con

. . . As a teacher of children's literature, I have decried that series for years. Now, at last, there appears a close analysis of it *in print!* Congratulations to you for printing it and to her [Isabelle Suhl] for writing it.

Grayce Scholt
Flint Community Junior College
Flint, Mich.

. . . While I am fully aware of the rightness of all the data and contention in "The Real Doctor Dolittle" and other such articles, and I know it will be necessary to bring pressure to bear on these outrages in our literature and history books, I still feel most strongly that the space and emphasis given "Negro Artists Acclaimed" . . . has a greater vitality. We must acclaim — oh yes, I know declaiming is a valid ingredient of revolution—but even more we must ACCLAIM . . . The black poets and artists and scientists and legislators must be recognized for what they are doing now. There should rise up a top-ranking Negro publishing house for this very purpose. And I think the day is not far off when this will be.

Eunice Smith
Mishawaka, Ind.

. . . I believe your article attacking the story of Dr. Dolittle will do nothing but hurt your cause. As a school librarian, I would like to say I have never known a child to be the least bit aware of any racial overtones.

Unsigned
Atlanta, Ga.

. . . When I first read this book years ago I was completely uncritical of the stereotyped presentation and supposed only that this . . . was essentially a true picture of Africans. At that time I was unacquainted with any black people—also completely unaware of the effect such a book would have upon them. So—black and white—we were all cheated or hurt.

Gertrude H. Overton
Pontiac, Mich.

Useful

. . . Your publication is an invaluable aid in my preparation for classes in literature for children. I heartily approve of the expanded format.

Donald W. Protheroe
Assistant Professor
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pa.

Reprint of Bulletin Illustration

. . . The illustrations can be taken from our copy of the magazine without difficulty and they will be a welcome addition to the next issue of *Negro American Literature Forum*. Thanking you for the permission . . .

John F. Bayliss
Editor
Indiana State University
Terre Haute, Ind.

continued from page 5

Ocean Hill-Brownsville

A question asked more and more often was expressed by Editorial Coordinator of Garrard Publishing Co., Eve Tulipan. "How much stark realism should we be putting into children's books?" she wanted to know.

Harriett Brown said, "Just tell it like it is. Don't you see, our children *must* be able to see their lives portrayed in books — with utter realism. They must be able to read that other children have lived with garbage, violence, and narcotics—and survived!"

This might be fine for older boys and girls, another editor suggested, but what about the little ones? How much does this theory of stark realism hold true for them?

"Until very recently I would have said No, protect youngsters for a while," answered Mrs. Brown. "But we can't protect anymore. Even very young children—youngsters of three, four, five—see what's happening today on television. Violence, racism, drugs, war—we can't pretend it's not going on. The youngest children are asking some pretty stiff questions these days. Questions like 'Am I black? Is that bad?' Well, sometimes parents and teachers are just too emotionally involved to cope with these questions. Books are the answer. Children believe in them. Books fill the void."



Youngsters discover their heritage

"At the same time, shouldn't we have books with positive images, too?" questioned Macmillan's Juvenile Marketing Director Janet Schulman.

"Indeed, yes," said Mrs. Brown. "Every ghetto has its islands, and books should discover these islands of hope, in addition to the violence surrounding them. Then the children can find the islands for themselves."

Rhody McCoy had been leaning back in his chair, listening. Now he broke in. "But spare us those happy-ending books. They give false hope to our kids. You tell them if they're good they can grow up and go to college or whatever the American dream is. Our children see their older brothers and sisters dead-end in the streets. It's as simple as this: if some very basic American institutions don't change, our children won't have happy endings."

The "Happy Slave Bit"

Then Mr. McCoy brought up an experience he had had only that morning with the representative of a textbook publisher. The methodology of the book the man had been selling had been really imaginative and first-rate. But the content . . . McCoy shook his head. The

book had absolutely no relevance to the lives of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville children. The book could have been about men from Mars, he stated, for all the good it would do the children in his district.

"And mind you," McCoy commented, "this was a good textbook. Too many of these books still haven't got past the happy slave bit."

"Oh, surely we have got past that," exclaimed children's book author and Scholastic Books Services Editor Lilian Moore. Someone pointed to the wide gulf between textbooks and trade books, and it was agreed by most of the editors that whereas publishers of trade books are beginning to catch up with the times, textbook publishers still have far to go. At least, it was pointed out, trade books have gone beyond the superficial coloring in of faces to make them appear interracial. Textbooks, though they are beginning to depict ethnic minorities and inner-city life with some sense of realism, said one editor, are just emerging from the "coloring book" stage. Meanwhile, more and more teachers are abandoning the old-fashioned Dick and Jane texts in preference to the more current and relevant trade books.

Miriam Cohen, Educational Consultant at Doubleday, said she thought publishers could do much, much more than they are to build up the images of ethnic minorities. She cautioned that editors who are developing lists of relevant books not be misled into assuming that other publishers possess the same awareness. A debate on how far publishers have advanced in this regard was cut short by Harriett Brown's comment:

"If there are 20 good ethnic books, we need 200. If there are 200, we need 2,000."

The conversation veered to the inordinate time it takes for a published book to reach the library shelves of any New York City public school, and this led to a discussion of the facts of bureaucratic life in all strongly centralized school systems.

"You will understand why we are fighting so desperately for community control of schools," said Mr. McCoy, and he added, "When that comes, publishers will benefit, too."

The Most Popular Books

It was nearly three o'clock, and the editors were past due at another meeting in nearby P.S. 55. There — in the large basement library with wall mountings of African masks glowing brilliantly in acrylic colors—the editors met with the district librarians, assistant librarians, and some of the curriculum task force personnel.

"What are the most popular books at Ocean Hill-Brownsville?" was the first question the editors posed.

The librarians singled out *Sam*, by Ann Herbert Scott (McGraw-Hill) as a great favorite in the schools. The illustrations by Symeon Shimin of the black family members fascinate the children, they said. Other favorites are the Ezra Jack Keats' books *Snowy Day* and *Whistle for Willie* (Viking) and Ann Grifalconi's *City Rhythms* (Bobbs-Merrill).

continued on page 7

continued from page 4

Nancy Bloch Award

Virginia Hamilton, who last year won the Nancy Bloch Memorial Award for her first book *Zeely* (Macmillan), has been awarded an Edgar for the best juvenile mystery of 1968 from the Mystery Writers of America for her second book, *The House of Dies Drear* (Macmillan). Runner-up for this award was Frank Bonham's *Mystery of the Fat Cat* (Dutton).

The version of an African folktale by Elphinstone Dayrell, *Why the Sun and the Moon Live in the Sky* (Houghton, Mifflin) was a runner-up for the 1969 Caldecott Medal.

continued from page 4

Information

A *Psychology Today* 17" x 22" poster showing how it is to be black in a world where "white is right" is available for \$2. Write for "White Man's World" to CRM, Inc., Poster Division, Del Far, California 92014.

A comprehensive list of "Scholarships Offered to Black Students" is available gratis from Community Services, Reader Development Program, Free Library of Philadelphia, 326 North 23rd Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103.

BEQUEST TO COUNCIL

As we go to press, a letter has arrived announcing that a writer of children's books and her husband, a retired school teacher (they wish to remain nameless) have revised their wills to provide for a most generous bequest to the Council on Interracial Books for Children, Inc.

We deeply appreciate the far-sighted generosity of this couple, who have told us in a very practical way that they want to help our work to go on as long as it may be useful to children. As a result of our country's racist past—and present—there will be work for this Council to do for a long time. Years of steady activity will be needed before publishers provide an adequate, balanced offering of books that grow out of the lives of America's ethnic minorities.

We hope the example of these two benefactors will inspire others to make provision in their wills for bequests to the Council. Our treasurer, Stanley Faulkner, is an attorney. He will be glad to suggest suitable terminology for use in making bequests of whatever size to this tax-exempt organization.

New Books by Council Members

Milton Meltzer's book, *Langston Hughes. A Biography* (published by Thomas Y. Crowell), was especially honored by being nominated for an award in the new Children's Literature category of the National Book Awards.

Frederick Douglass Fights for Freedom, a new biography written for younger readers by Margaret Davidson, was published this year by Scholastic Book Services.

Four Winds Press has just issued a new picture book by Ann McGovern, which celebrates in poetic words and pictures the single thought: *Black Is Beautiful*.

Ocean Hill-Brownsville

For the intermediate grades (the Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools do not go beyond the eighth grade), favorites are Frank Bonham's *Durango Street* (Dutton), Kristin Hunter's *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou* (Scribner's), Lorenz Graham's *North Town* (Crowell), and Philip Durham's *Adventures of the Negro Cowboys* (Dodd, Mead).

"The Puerto Rican children have the same need for books about their lives and the problems they face in the city," remarked another librarian. All agreed that two of the most popular books with the younger Puerto Rican readers in the district are Sue Felt's *Rösa-Too-Little* and *Barto Takes the Subway* (Knopf). Favorites among the intermediate graders are Susan Thaler's *Rosaria* (McKay), Charlotte Mayerson's *Two Blocks Apart* (Harcourt, Brace & World), and Yetta Speevack's *Spider Plant* (Atheneum).

In addition, it was stated that Puerto Ricans want books about their own heritage, history, legends, and folk tales. And because there is so much experimentation in bilingual classes in the district, they need books with both Spanish and English in the same text—but, as several librarians pointed out, it must be Western Hemisphere Spanish. One suggestion for Spanish American youngsters was an elementary text in Spanish that gradually introduces English words and phrases and ends up almost completely in English. Possibly, it was pointed out, this could be used as a double-ended book—children proficient in English would read the chapters in reverse order as part of a program in learning Spanish.

Another librarian stated that in the non-fiction area, especially on the younger levels, almost nothing is available about such urban realities as drugs, welfare, sanitation, police-community interaction. "And for heaven's sake, we don't mean books like 'Meet Your Friendly Policeman,' or 'The Happy Garbage Collector' kind of thing," one librarian snapped.

Said still another librarian: "A third grade teacher came to me the other day. She wanted a book on drugs to read to her class. We didn't have any—not a one. We have several good U.S. Public Health Service pamphlets for the older kids, but the government, and I assume, the publishers seem to feel that the problem doesn't exist for little ones. Well, it does. It exists here, and it exists in the suburbs. Let children learn and read about drugs as a fact of life early enough, and drugs won't hold the lure they do now when the children are older."

A related suggestion was made that if publishers are willing to take on such topics for very young children, the books should be left open-ended—all sides of the problem presented and discussed—but the conclusion left up in the air for the child to deduce for himself.

A highly popular book at Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the editors were told, is A. Lamorisse's *The Red Balloon* (Doubleday), both for the universal enchantment of its story and for its realistic photographs.

H. A. Rey's *Curious George* (Houghton Mifflin) is another perennial favorite among the younger children. On the other hand, the librarians said, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville children have no patience for the completely middle-class, Anglo-Saxon books like *Charlotte's Web* and *Stuart Little*. "These books simply do not move from our shelves," they added.

Adult Books Adapted

"The slow readers naturally want to read what their peers are reading," said a librarian. Their peers are reading about Malcolm X and Julius Lester and Eldridge Cleaver. "They feel only shame when I have to lead them to a shelf of 'kid stuff' picture books, because those are the only books they can handle." An editor suggested that this is an area the publishers are covering with the "high interest/low



Harriett Brown at the Hut

level" books with advanced subject matter and concepts, illustrated for older readers, yet written on a simplified second, third, or fourth grade word level.

Wide Gulf Between Trade and Text Books

A solution the editors and librarians also discussed was the simplified adaptation of popular adult books. Until very recently, it was pointed out, professional book people scorned easy-reading versions of any book. But if the reactions of the professionals meeting at Ocean Hill-Brownsville that afternoon are indicative, there has been a radical change in attitude, for everyone agreed that easy-reading adaptations of books that the boys and girls are already intensely motivated to read would be of inestimable value — adaptations of books such as *Malcolm X*, Warren Miller's *Cool World*, Piri Thomas' *Down These Mean Streets*, and Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land*.

"Many of the boys and girls of Ocean Hill, in their search for their own identities," said the librarian of P.S. 55, "borrow esteem from fantasies of being doctors, scientists, great athletes or astronauts, in order to tolerate a bleak present." She added that books are being published about Afro-Americans and Puerto Ricans who have broken into glamorous fields, but many more are desperately needed. She took as an example *Jim Brown, the Running Back*, by Larry Klein (Putnam). Her library has five copies of this book, and she observed that it is considered a very hard book for most of the students to read. But, she said, she can't keep copies on the shelf.

A request was made that the librarians indicate which of the lesser-known historic black and Puerto Rican heroes receive the most requests from the Ocean Hill-Brownsville students. The following is a list

of the names most frequently asked for: Black — Benjamin Banneker, Crispus Attucks, Phillis Wheatley, Onesimus, James Lafayette, Peter Salem, Lucy Terry, Charles Drew; Puerto Rican — the rebel Alvizu Campos, the poet Jose de Diego, and the philosopher Eugenio Maria de Hostos.

The librarians said that students request biographies of the following contemporary politicians, entertainers, artists, and sports figures:

Dick Gregory, Adam Clayton Powell, Huey P. Newton; Sidney Poitier, James Brown; Tom Feelings, James Baldwin; Muhammad Ali.

"What about biographies of people who are not famous at all?" another librarian suggested. "Persons who were born in a ghetto like Ocean Hill and who got out to become teachers or doctors or something a little more possible for most kids. And what about biographies of people known or unknown who came back to work in the ghetto? Aren't they heroes, too?"

Middle-Class Objections To Today's Black Heroes

"Too often publishers reject subjects for biographies because of middle-class white prejudices," said still another librarian. She mentioned as examples of biographies that children's publishers shy away from (as contrasted to adult publishers) H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael. "And what about Paul Robeson?" she asked. "A man way ahead of his time, ignored by the white middle-class today. He and the others I have mentioned are our kids' greatest heroes. You say you are writing books for our children. Are you?"

Mrs. Brown raised an interesting point. "Too many biographies," she noted, "dwell on a person's life after he's become successful. For our children the stress should be laid on how he got there."

Simple science books for younger children were still another expressed need. Mrs. Brown said that she was bothered by the fact that so many more purely imaginative tales now available are still, as she put it, "snow white." She hoped that publishers in the future would exploit more African and Caribbean legends. Collections of this kind that are popular at Ocean Hill are Harold Courlander's *Anasi Tales* (Harcourt), *The Coconut Thieves*, edited by Catherine Fournier, (Scribner's) and *Tales From the Story Hat*, by Verna Aardema (Coward McCann), and Benjamin Elkins' *Why the Sun Was Late* (Parents').

A librarian from one of the two intermediate schools expressed the universal problem librarians face with teenage girls, who, although they can read any book they want, often refuse to read anything except fictionalized, romanticized love stories. Why not, she suggested, slip into these essentially lightweight but always popular books themes of more social value or confrontation with reality?

The Ocean Hill boys and girls are quite fond of poetry, the librarians noted, pointing to a number of good anthologies of black poets now in their libraries. The Langston Hughes' anthologies are all-time favorites, they said. Another popular anthology is Charlemae Rollins' *Famous American Negro Poets* (Dodd). But where, the librarians

asked, are the integrated anthologies—black and white poets together, with talent as the only criterion? Harriett Brown stated that there was not one such book in any library in the district. And another librarian asked that Spanish American poets also be included in integrated anthologies.

Nationwide Symbol of Community Control

It was after five o'clock, and the day was drawing to a close. The editors who had come to Ocean Hill-Brownsville, to see for themselves this experimental demonstration school district, were the first representatives of the publishing

profession to take such a step. It is possible that they will be one of the last. For as this article goes to press, news has come of the New York State legislature's "decentralization" bill. Ocean Hill-Brownsville's days are effectively numbered. Under the new legislation, Ocean Hill-Brownsville is to be incorporated into a larger district and the children are to be absorbed into a student population more than double their present number.

But as a demonstration in its own right, Ocean Hill-Brownsville has become the nationwide symbol of communities intent upon controlling the education of their children.

About the Authors

Margaret Davidson is the author of eight books for children, mostly biographical. Her next book *Helen Keller: A Biography for Younger Readers*, will be published in November by Scholastic Book Services. She is Associate Editor of the Council on Interracial Books for Children.

Bradford Chambers is Editor of the Background Books for Young People, the series published by Parents' Magazine Press. He is author of *Chronicles of Negro Protest* (Parents'). Mr. Chambers is Chairman of the Council on Interracial Books for Children.

AN OPEN LETTER TO OUR READERS

The Council's activities are expanding on many fronts. The annual contest is about to enter its third year, and as reported in this issue of the bulletin the contest's scope has broadened dramatically. In addition, a special supplement of the bulletin, featuring lists of recommended interracial books, is now off the press and ready for mailing. Now a new need has been dramatized: to open up direct lines of communication between publishers and inner-city school districts, in ways described in our feature article on Ocean Hill-Brownsville.

To expand our activities the Council needs your support. If you have not yet contributed, act now. Use the coupon below. If you know of foundations, organizations and individuals in positions to financially support our work, let us know.

THE COUNCIL

BULK RATES

INTERRACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN is available at the following reduced rates for bulk purchases:

25 copies	30¢ each	100 copies	15¢ each
50 copies	20¢ each	250 copies	10¢ each

Limited supplies of Vol. I, No. 1 and Nos. 2-3 are available. They may be purchased from the Council for \$1 per copy. Copies of Vol. II, Nos. 2-3 are available for 50¢ per copy.

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BOOK REVIEWS

by Ethel Richard

Frequently implied but seldom spelled out in book reviewing is the dynamics of "social consciousness"—the alertness in man to man's humanity. To be real, social consciousness is, or ought to be, manifest in all forms of communication, but especially it should be present wherever influences are subtle.

We all realize that the impact of a book on a reader cannot be judged fully or accurately, but that a reviewer can discover some general clues as to what that impact may be. First, he honestly considers his own emotional responses to the book under consideration. Second, he puts himself mentally in the place of its most troubled character (or characters). He may discuss the book with other people who regularly read and review. Finally, he may test the book on members of its intended audience for their reactions.

Other criteria are useful in judging books, to be sure, but they are secondary in appraising the emotional climate that a book will create in the individual reader. Factual accuracy is one such criterion. Yet how "accurate" is such a cold standard if the social atmosphere in the context of which the facts are exposed is not also recreated?

Many books produced today deal with themes of major concern for all of us. The authors evidence social concern and social consciousness. Yet some writers are too advanced for certain reader groups in our society; some are too obscure in how they say what they say; and some are too honest. Some reviewers miss the point, or are themselves unaware, or they fear to launch what may be mistaken as an attack instead of a goal for honesty.

Two titles on the 1968 juvenile book lists have aroused considerable comment. They are Jacob

Lawrence's *Harriet and the Promised Land* (Simon & Schuster; \$5.95) and Polly Greenberg's *Oh Lord, I Wish I Was a Buzzard* (Macmillan; \$4.50). We all realize that a book should be evaluated on its own merits, yet these two titles have had the misfortune of being linked and compared.

The Lawrence book was on exhibit during the 1968 national convention of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. There it raised quite a stir, most of which was antagonistic.



Cover art of *Harriet and the Promised Land* (Simon & Schuster, \$5.95).

The symmetry of text and illustration in *Harriet* is symphonic. This book is a landmark among juvenile titles dealing with black history. But in its art work it is so sophisticated that it hurts many black children who handle it. What is more, it hurts their parents. The hurt is expressed as resentment by black parents and as plain rejection by black children. The chief objection seems to center on the deathlike skulls or bony appearance of the heads, the agony of which is heightened by stark-white teeth. Another disliked feature is the grotesque shape or disproportionate size given to parts of the body, especially the hands. White characters in the book are repre-

sented by the same graphic treatment, yet even when this is pointed out, black reactions do not change.

These responses have been observed in readers from a community of some 85,000 people. About 40 per cent of the population is black, and mostly lower middle class. While the town is near New York City, its people show little appreciation of the art style used in *Harriet*, whereas New York City black people seem to like the book. One is reminded that there is still more hinterland than big city in our U.S.A.

Recommendations that must be made with reservations are unsatisfying. What can be done with the *Harriet* book? It belongs, I think, in a library's adult collection, so that parents will have a hand in its exposure to themselves and to their children. Also, teachers and others who work with children may profitably use the book once they have prepared their children to appreciate its art style. Our times reflect unevenness of tempers. A part of this is due to the absence of blacks in all aspects of American life. Mr. Lawrence's book can meet a need, but the person handing it out had better know his reader well. For this book expresses some of the pain of the black experience in America almost too eloquently. It is so well done that for the black child it recreates black experiences to the point of being intolerable. The book comes too close to him to accomplish its intent, and the black child's spirit is quickened to new depths of misery. Of course, the book can also add tinder to existing resentments, because it gives white children some false impressions—and for what seem to be exactly the same reasons. Young white readers also cannot appreciate the style of the art work. Perhaps to hide embarrassment, they laugh or raise questions in ways that their black peers just can't take, since the pain is for the blacks. Thus dialogue at the juvenile level is blocked.

To damn this book would be to act as a censor. But if one is aware and conscious of social responsibility, any book that is approved and permitted to reach out and harm the spirit or mind of even one child rests as a liability on the

whether authors gave an accurate and honest picture of Indian problems; (3) whether the authors of books about contemporary Indians were sensitive to the problems inherent in being Indian in the United States today.

It is the Association on American Indian Affairs' hope—and a goal toward which we are working—that publishers will begin to be more selective in choosing books about Indians. In fact, it would be well worthwhile for editors to encourage and to aid American Indians in writing their own books about Indian history, culture, and life today.

At the very least, publishers should strive to have all books about American Indians read for accuracy and fairness by someone knowledgeable in the field. For until books, and particularly children's books, are made accurate and unprejudiced, no understanding of the American Indian can be had—and no true progress can be expected.

While it is certainly true that one of the larger objectives of the Association's bibliography is the American Indian child, it is also important that this list reach the white community. For, by and large, it is white ignorance and lack of interest in Indian existence that has caused many of the problems American Indians face today. Elementary school teachers tend to treat Indians, if they treat them at all, as a quaint but small group of people who were an anachronism 100 years ago and who today are hardly worth a second thought. Thus it is that this bibliography is directed towards white teachers, white students, and white school systems, just as surely as it is directed towards American Indians.

NOTE: Readers wishing to obtain the current A.A.I.A. list should write to the Association on American Indian Affairs, Inc., 432 Park Avenue South, New York, N. Y. 10016.

approver.

Greenberg's *Oh Lord, I Wish I Was a Buzzard* must have been difficult to illustrate. It has one picture that causes one to look closely and think twice. That one picture—and the text supports it—really expresses childhood's universal love



Illustration from *Oh Lord, I wish I was a Buzzard* (Macmillan, \$4.50).

of a trick. But many readers react to it as to a stereotype. The art medium is seemingly a combination of tempera, water color, crayon, and pen and ink. Moderately stylized pictures evoke concern that beauty of field and people can be tied to misery of heat, grueling work, and small reward. The text is poetry. Based on a real person's childhood experience, it was used in mimeographed form in the 1965 Mississippi Head Start program. Mississippi children couldn't relate to middle class *Little Bear*. They did know of hound dog, buzzard, partridge, etc. Rather than

knowing about birthday parties, they knew about work. This book tells of a rural-slum black child in the Delta, as *Jazz Man* tells of an urban black child. In many ways, Greenberg's book is a pioneering endeavor. It utilizes familiar vocabulary and setting and animals, and strives to incorporate all with empathy for the black child of the rural slum. Yet it tries to do so in a way that will be meaningful to the child who has never seen cotton. There is communication here, especially if a skillful adult is in on the reading.

The Greenberg book has been adversely criticized by the jump-on-the-bandwagon people. What really is disliked about it is its title. That a black child wishes to be a buzzard, a carrion-eater, is repugnant. The title and the one picture have branded this book as marginal.

To repeat, it is unfortunate that the Greenberg and Lawrence books have been compared, but since this has been the case, let us make a definite statement. More children love the Greenberg book than the Lawrence book. The experience in Greenberg is generally one generation removed for them. Lawrence's book brings experience of a distant past into their souls. We must educate them to appreciate Lawrence, surely, but we can only start where they are. And children aren't ready for him—not in large numbers. They are ready for, and so can take, Greenberg.

About the Author

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continued from page 1

INDIAN BOOKS ATTACKED

Bibliography of Selected Children's Books About American Indians.

More than 200 books were read for the compilation of the Association's 63-book list. Approximately two out of every three books had to be rejected because of inaccurate, unrealistic, ethnocentric statements about Indians. All books included in the bibliography were read, reviewed, and recommended by American Indians. The list is only a preliminary version of a larger bibliography to be published in 1970 that will include titles selected from over 600 books considered.

The criteria used in selecting books for the current list were: (1) whether authors presented a realistic picture of American Indians without being patronizing, sentimental, and emotional; (2)

continued from page 2

Council Publishes Compendium of Recommended Book Lists

subscribers for 50¢ to cover postage and handling charges. The list is sent gratis to parents and students who request it.

The Council is preparing similar lists of recommended books relevant to Mexican Americans, American Indians, Puerto Ricans, and other ethnic minorities. Reports of the lists will appear in regular editions of the Council bulletin *INTER-RACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN* and in future special supplements to be sent to subscribers.

Council Sets in Motion Nationwide Membership

At the June meeting of the Council's Executive Board, plans were set in motion for the Council to become a national membership orga-

nization. Under the chairmanship of Khalleel Azar, a new membership committee will look into practical ways to unite parents, school librarians and teachers into an effective force to influence the publication and distribution of truly relevant books for children of all ethnic minorities.

The Council on Interracial Books for Children is entirely voluntary and consists of editors, authors and other persons involved in the publication of children's books. By broadening membership, the Council hopes to enlarge its base of support, in order to continue and to expand activities. Readers are requested to send suggestions on the membership drive to Mr. Khalleel Azar at the Council headquarters, 9 East 40th Street, New York,