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## **Interracial books for children. Volume 3, No. 1 Autumn, 1970**

New York, NY: The Council on Interracial Books for Children, Inc.,  
Autumn, 1970

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# WHAT IS A RACIST BOOK?

Compiler of New NAACP List Explains Increasingly Rigid Criteria for Book Selections

BY RAE ALEXANDER

To what extent has the resurgence of Black pride and self-awareness been communicated to Black children?

In 1939, Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie P. Clark found that Black children evaluated Blacks negatively and evaluated whites positively. In their monumental study, Black children between the ages of three and seven were presented with a black and a white doll and asked which was "nice," which "looked bad," which they would "like to play with," and which was "the nice color." The Black children invariably preferred the white doll.

Thirty years later, Steven R. Asher and Vernon L. Allen of the University of Wisconsin, substituted puppets for black and white dolls and asked both Black and white children which they preferred. Again, the white puppet was most often preferred and the black puppet most often rejected.

If the studies cited here are valid, Black may be beautiful for contemporary Black youth involved in a new appreciation of Black ethnicity, but apparently the Black Revolution is too new and too tentative for its values to have filtered down to Black children, who are still emotionally and otherwise conditioned by the prevailing white culture.

## Books Still Insidious

Based on the books I read in the course of compiling a revision of the N. A. A. C. P.'s recommended book list,\* I feel I am in a position to draw this conclusion: Despite the growing number of books depicting the Black experience, the image they give of the Black American is still one of the more insidious influences that hinder the Black child from finding true self-awareness.

In evaluating Black and biracial books for pre-school through sixth-grade levels, a major criterion was that no book would be listed if it was considered likely to communicate to either a Black or a white child a racist concept or cliché about Blacks; or failed to provide some strong characters to serve as role models. Even one such stereotype would be enough to eliminate an otherwise good book. Underlying this criterion was my own experience with many teachers who are insensitive to the racist content of books or who are not equipped to handle such material adequately in their classes. The tragedy is that so many teachers fail to expose racist material for what it is, and they fail to make use of it as a basis for

discussing prejudice.

One might say that the basic consideration in my not including a given book in the N.A.A.C.P. list was the pain it might give to even one Black child. Naturally, there were additional criteria. The book must be appropriate for use in (1) an all-Black classroom, (2) an all-white classroom, and (3) an integrated classroom. If a book did not completely satisfy each of these criteria, I excluded it from the bibliography. To illustrate how these standards were applied, I will mention first several books that I did not include in the list and the reasons why.

## Marred by Racial Slurs

A number of poignant and stirring stories I did not list because they were marred by racial slurs. Even such an imaginative and exciting story as L.M. Boston's *Treasure of Green Knowe* (Harcourt, Brace & World) I excluded because of a derogatory description of a Black boy's hair. ("Think of Jacob's crinkly hair, hardly the length of a needle. The most she could do with it [in her embroidery] was tediously to make knots.") In contrast, the author writes elsewhere of a white person's "tresses." ("... he was a vain man with hair he was proud of ... There was enough of Caxton's hair to do the whole chimney.")

*Not Over Ten Inches High*, by Harry Levy (McGraw-Hill Book Co.), is a delightful and charming story. On the first page, one reads, "only a small tuft of kinky hair showed from one end. . . ." In *A Sundae with Judy*, by Frieda Friedman (Scholastic Book Services), the author writes, "She hadn't noticed how dark Barbara and Bob Williams were, or how much Mayling's eyes were slanted. . . ." I did not list either of these books, despite their many fine qualities. I do not know whether passages such as those quoted express prejudice on the authors' part, but I do know that in white America this is the language of racism, and it is what children hear. I freely admit that in winnowing books, I was primarily concerned with what the child would be receiving. I was on the child's side, all the way. The Black child reading passages like those mentioned here surely senses that

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\*Books for Children: Black and White—A Selected Bibliography to be published by the NAACP in December.

# Interracial Books FOR CHILDREN

Published by the Council on Interracial Books for Children

VOLUME THREE, NO. 1

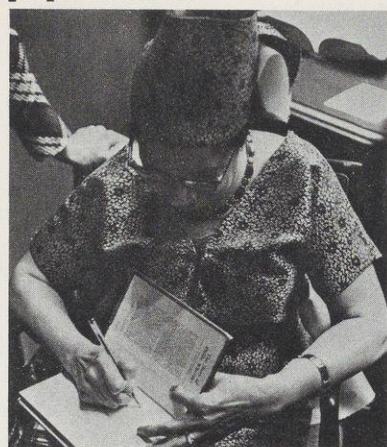
AUTUMN, 1970

## Book World Honors Shirley Graham Du Bois At Council Reception

Noted Author Pioneered Books for Children On the Black Experience

The book world honored the distinguished author of children's books Shirley Graham Du Bois at a reception October 26th at the Grolier Club in New York City. The reception, hosted by the Council on Interracial Books for Children, was attended by 250 authors, editors and illustrators.

Mrs. Du Bois, who has lived in Ghana and Egypt for the past ten years, discussed "The Role of Children's Books in the Quests for Liberation." She began her address with high praise for the Council on Interracial Books for Children and stated that the innovative work of the Council was known to many people in Africa.



Shirley Graham Du Bois

She said that when she went to Ghana in 1960 with her husband, the late Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, she was invited to revise that country's textbook curriculum. She explained that the children of Ghana, prior to independence, were taught the names and dates of British kings and queens, and that they knew the location of the Thames River, but not the Niger River. She said that the only solution after independence was to educate by means of television, because there were no relevant books and almost no teachers available.

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## STORYTELLER-ILLUSTRATOR TEAMS GO TO CHILDREN IN CITY STREETS AND PARKS

Council's Innovative Project Found To Be Potent Force In Stimulating Motivation To Read; Lauded as Model for Nation

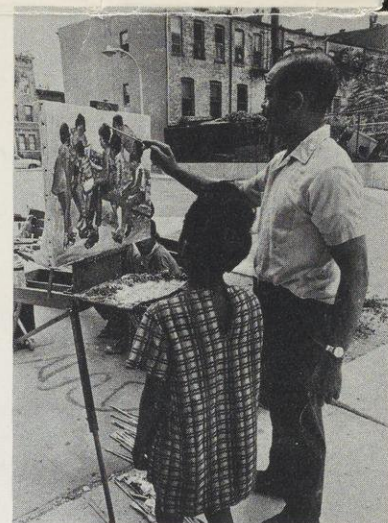
PHOTOS: BY ARNOLD HINTON

Somewhere on New York's teeming streets a wonderful scene is being enacted. Children out in the neighborhood gather as a storyteller opens the pages of a book and reads, while nearby an illustrator starts to draw scenes from the story and sketches the listening children. Teenagers and adults stop to listen and watch. When the story is over, the storyteller chats with the children about the way storybooks are made, and the illustrator talks about what it is like to be an artist. Then the storyteller-illustrator team moves on to find another group of children, and the scene is enacted again.

Beginning early in July, five teams of professional Black and Puerto Rican storytellers and illustrators have been reading and drawing for children in the streets and parks of Brooklyn, Harlem, East Harlem, Staten Island, and the Bronx, as part of an innovative community action program organized by the Council on Interracial Books for Children.

These storyteller-illustrator teams are reaching children where they are and turning them on to books

and reading in a free and personal interchange that is both fun and rewarding. The program, funded by the New York State Council on the Arts, will continue throughout the coming year.



The incentive for reading stimulated by the teams has exceeded the Council's expectations, and

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## Editorial in National Magazine Features Work of This Council

The Council on Interracial Books for Children was featured in the August 31 issue of *Publishers' Weekly*, the book publishing industry's national trade magazine. The editorial praised the innovative work of this Council and proposed that book publishers give serious consideration to the Council's proposal that the profits from books on minority themes be shared with minority communities. The editorial states:

"Is it too revolutionary to suggest that if a general publisher turns a

tidy profit on a black book, it turn over part of the profit to an organization that would be supportive of black books and black writing? Except for the Council on Interracial Books for Children, few such organizations now exist, but under the Council's aegis, perhaps one might be created. With the funds it collected from the proceeds of black books, it could do some marvelous things. It could supply black books to ghetto schools. It could

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# EDITORIAL

A recent editorial in PUBLISHERS' WEEKLY called on the American book publishing industry to honor the commitments it made nearly two years ago (1) to establish a minority recruitment program and (2) to help finance minority publishing enterprises. We are proud that this editorial was motivated by a report prepared during the summer by our Council.

Two weeks after the appearance of the PW editorial, the Association of American Publishers announced that it was honoring commitment No. 1 by hiring a director to set up an Office of Minority Manpower. We laud this action, but we consider the budget (estimated at \$25,000 to \$30,000 when the office was approved eighteen months ago) to be shamefully inadequate. How can that amount conceivably pay the director's salary, the assistant's salary, the expenses of traveling and, in addition, the costs of a national recruitment publicity program?

We also feel that a recruitment program launched at this late date will take many, many years before it brings minority talent into the decision-making positions so essential for the creation of books really relevant to minority communities.

It is with a sense of extraordinary urgency, therefore, that we call upon the publishing industry to honor commitment No. 2: to support minority publishers, which will bring minority talent swiftly to all levels of publishing.

A minority publishers' delegation from our Council is now negotiating with the Association of American Publishers to make certain that the publishing industry does in fact honor commitment No. 2. We are also negotiating with foundations on ways and means to implement the publishers' commitment.

This is just the beginning. A commitment must come from the entire publishing world — from publishers, from printers, from binders, from paper manufacturers, from jobbers — from all the other related industries.

Innovative ways can and must be found to support minority publishers now. Specific plans at all levels are imperative:

- ¶ Foundations to evolve formulas for grant-loans with matching funds to capitalize minority publishers.
- ¶ Publishers to establish a minority publishers' fund to provide immediate financial assistance and, later on, long-term loans — this fund to be built up by levying assessments on members of the American Publishers Association proportionate to each member's annual volume of business.
- ¶ Authors and illustrators to insist that the profits from the books they create be shared with the minority publishers' fund.
- ¶ Wholesalers to accept for distribution books from minority publishers at discount rates substantially more favorable than now prevail.
- ¶ Printers, binders and paper manufacturers to extend credit ranging from 90 to 120 days.
- ¶ Unions to suspend regulations that would otherwise interfere with the realization of these goals.
- ¶ Trade and library journals to provide maximum coverage to the titles of minority publishers.

We ask all our readers to make their own commitment:

- ¶ To purchase non-voting shares or make other forms of investment in minority publishers.
- ¶ To seek out the book lists of minority publishers and order books directly from them. (A partial listing of Black publishers appears on page 6 of this issue of *INTERRACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN*. An article on page 3 describes a Chicano publisher. In the Spring 1970 issue details were given on an American Indian publisher. In future issues, we will run as complete a listing as we can of all minority publishers.)

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

I have been borrowing Jeannette Wittman's copy of *Interracial Books for Children* long enough! I want to subscribe.

I find your publication very relevant to choosing books for my classroom. Special praise to the Dr. Dolittle author for making explicit my feelings about that series. And just when I needed a list of good books on American Indians, Mrs. Wittman lent me the Summer 1969 issue. I read every word of it.

Jane Van De Bogart  
Willow, N. Y.

To the Editor:

In an article entitled "The Second Sex: Juvenile Division" (*New York Times* spring children's books supplement) Elizabeth Fisher writes, "... children are indoctrinated at an early age with stereotypes about male activity and female passivity, male involvement with things, women with emotion, male dominance and female subordination." Thus the reader is suddenly viewing the span of children's

books with new eyes, perhaps for the first time.

A committee of the National Organization for Women (NOW) is looking for children's books depicting girls and women outside of their stereotyped roles, for compilation into a bibliography. This is an extensive project and one which needs cooperation not only from NOW members, but from professionals in the field of children's literature as well. For this reason, we are writing to you.

This project and the resulting bibliography will cover picture books through teenage fiction, the book titles being divided into the following groups by age: 3-8, 8-12, 12-15.

What are the guidelines for selection of such a bibliography? "Outside of their stereotyped roles" may mean one thing to one person and something slightly different to the next. In brief, the committee is looking for female characters (not necessarily human characters) who assume a balanced role during the growing-up process, characters who

display physical capability, resourcefulness, creativity, assertiveness, ingenuity, adventuresomeness, leadership...

The image of mothers and other adult characters is equally important. We are here looking for characters who work and/or fulfill their potential through a variety of creative and personal interests.

May we have suggestions from you?

PAT ROSS  
511 East 80th Street  
New York, N. Y. 10021

We urge our readers to answer the above request. Forms for book suggestions are available from the writer at the address given. Ms. Ross requests suggested biographies as well as books of fiction.

To the Editor:

*Interracial Books for Children* is invaluable to me in teaching courses in children's literature. Enclosed is a check to extend my subscription.

Margaret S. Dudley  
Professor of Education  
University of Missouri

## Council Contest Gets Results

Our readers will be happy to know that the Council's second annual contest, completed last May, has already led to highly promising results for the winners.

Viking Press has contracted with Sharon Bell Mathis to publish her Council award-winning manuscript "Sidewalk Story" next spring. Viking was one of four publishers to offer Mrs. Mathis a contract, after her story about eviction in a ghetto won this year's second annual contest for 8-12 year-olds. The Black artist Leo Carty has contracted to illustrate the story.

Another result of winning the Council award was a scholarship Mrs. Mathis received to attend the internationally famous Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in Vermont during August, at the Council's recommendation.

Mrs. Mathis has subsequently written another story, "Teacup Full of Roses," which Viking will publish in fall 1971.

Virginia Cox, author of the prize-winning manuscript in the picture-book category, "The Story of the Alphabet," has received a contract to have her book published by the

Wayne State University Press. Her contract includes two additional manuscripts, which she wrote prior to winning the Council contest.

Margot S. Webb, the third winner of this year's Council contest, is now writing elementary-school-level biographies, titled *Afro-American Pioneers and Leaders*, for Buckingham Learning Corp. Her award-winning story about the Underground Railroad hero David B. Ruggles is under consideration at the Black publishing house of Emerson Hall.

### EDITORIAL Continued

How many establishment publishers have thought of seeking out the services of minority printers? How many publishers know that minority printers do in fact exist?

When we launched *INTERRACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN* three years ago, we searched the streets of New York City for a Black printer. We could find only white printers, a few of whom hired one or two minority assistants.

Our readers will welcome the news that this issue is printed by Afro-Arts, Inc. a minority printer staffed entirely by minority personnel.

Don Holder, who started Afro-Arts in 1967, has been in printing for twenty-two years. Readers acquainted with the technical aspects of printing will appreciate the capacity of this plant when they learn that its equipment includes a 30-inch high speed Harris press. Last year Afro-Arts designed and printed a best-selling book of poetry by Nikki Giovanni. More recently, the plant printed three million pieces of literature for the successful Gibson mayoralty campaign in Newark. Many of the pieces were four-color process.

In addition to running Afro-Arts, Mr. Holder is the chief instructor for COPE (Consortium of Publishing Employers) at Cooper Union, and he is directly responsible for training the seventeen minority production personnel who will graduate from COPE's first year of operation November 19.

For Mr. Holder the COPE program has been something of a sacrifice, since teaching three and four hours a day has taken valuable time away from building up Afro-Arts, particular since Mr. Holder must teach during business hours.

We believe the publishing industry will want to support Afro-Arts for three important reasons. First, to gain the practical benefit that comes from the addition of a new printing resource at a time when establishment printers are exerting enormous pressures on publishers. Second, to make a commitment to the ideals publishers profess. Third, to show gratitude for Mr. Holder's contribution to the COPE program.

Such support is urgent, because current accounts receivable at Afro-Arts are so late as to constitute a crisis. Publishers well understand the terrible consequences when accounts receivable bulk larger than accounts payable.

We call upon all publishers to show their support by calling Don Holder at (212) 691-8030. We also ask publishers to go one step further and say, "We'll pay on delivery." The address of Afro-Arts is 37 West 20th Street, New York, New York 10011.

While we are recommending to the trade services of a minority printer, we also bring to its attention services rendered by a minority typesetter. Joe Meachem Composition, address is 309 West 20th Street, New York, New York 10011, offers Cold Type Composition, consist of setting type, layout, ruling and paste-up. We can rely upon Mr. Meachem's accuracy and ability to meet deadlines. Call 255-4266 or 4862.



## Interracial Books FOR CHILDREN

is published quarterly by the Council on Interracial Books for Children, Inc., 9 East 40th Street, New York, N.Y. 10016

### EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Bradford Chambers, Margaret Davidson, Eleanor Fogelson, Evelyn Geller, Bertha Parker, Virginia Rice, Sydney Weiss

50¢ a copy — \$2 a year

Use subscription coupon on page 8.

### INDUSTRY CONTRIBUTORS

These are the companies that to date have contributed to the Council's 1970 fund raising drive. The annual drive is continuing.

Abingdon Press  
Bantam Books Inc.  
Bergstrom Paper Co.  
Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc.  
Bro-Dart Foundation  
Coward-McCann, Inc.  
John Day Co., Inc.  
Dell Publishing Co. Foundation  
Fearon Publishers, Inc.  
Follett Publishing Co.  
Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.  
Holiday House  
Houghton Mifflin Co.  
McCall Publishing Fund  
New American Library  
W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.  
Oddo Publishing Co.  
Seabury Press, Inc.  
Stackpole Books  
Steck-Vaughn Co.  
Stravon Educational Press  
United Educators, Inc.  
Viking Press, Inc.



# INFORMATION CLEARING HOUSE

A vital publication for editors, for media people, and for all people concerned about media distortions and failure to print the truth is *Pac-O-Lies*, published by the New York Media Project. The tabloid-size newspaper is indispensable for school teachers who want to teach, out of bounds for teachers who value their jobs more than their students. The New York Media Project is a young, activist organization of publishing personnel who are caucussing within their publishing firms to demand radical changes. Subscription is by \$5 donations. The current issue is Vol. 1, No. 4, published in July. Address is P.O. Box 266, Village Station, New York, N.Y. 10014.

A weekly paper particularly relevant to the Puerto Rican community is *Palante*, published by the Young Lords Party (an outgrowth of the Young Lords Organization). The paper is already doing so well that its sales finance the really-together activities of the Young Lords Party. A years' subscription of 24 issues is \$5. Address of *Palante* is 949 Longwood Avenue, Bronx, N.Y.

Below is a listing of American Indian newspapers that we feel should be on the desk of children's book editors and be made available to young people in school classrooms and libraries. Not all the publications listed appear regularly, and the subscription prices given are for consecutive editions. The Council urges that our readers add at least several dollars to the subscription, wherever we indicate, that they notify the papers of the increased rate for renewal invoices purposes, and that they ask their order departments not to send tracking letters when the papers fail to arrive on time.

- *ABC, Americans Before Columbus*, a monthly publication of the National Indian Youth Council, 3102 Central S.E., Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106. A supportive associate-membership of \$10 for non-Indians includes a subscription to *ABC*. Add a contribution.
- *Akwesasne Notes*, a monthly collection of articles reprinted from the Indian and non-Indian press reflecting various aspects of Indian oppression and reaction. No subscription price indicated, but we suggest a contribution of \$10. Send to Jerry Gambill, Box 435, Roosevelt Town, N. Y. 13683.
- *Cherokee-Examiner* appears with this subtitle: "An International Ghost Dance Publication—No Uncle Tomahawks Here." Six consecutive editions, \$3.50. Add a contribution. Send to Jim Heilman, Optimal Omnibus, 5673 Buchanan St., Los Angeles, Calif. 90042.
- *Native Nevadan*, the official newspaper of the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, Inc., 1995 E. 2nd St., Reno, Nevada 89502. The editor is Carole Wright. Subscription is \$2.50 per year (12 issues).
- *Rosebud Sioux Herald* (Indian name is *Eyapha*), a weekly giving Sioux tribal news, some national news and includes a student newspaper. \$9 a year. Send to Box 435, Roosevelt Town, N. Y. 13683.
- *Tundra Times*, a weekly of the Eskimo, Indian, Aleut Publishing Co. This paper is not militant, but we recommend it as the only newspaper featuring news on the damnably obscene Alaskan Native Land Rights situation. One year's subscription: \$8. Send to Box 1287, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701.

The Chicano Press Association is a confederation of community newspapers committed to the Chicano Movement for self-determination and unity among Mexican Americans. (See feature article in Spring 1970 edition of *Interracial Books for Children*.) As an indication of the growing force of the movement, last year the CPA had eight member newspapers; today it lists thirty member papers. Their common symbol is Emiliano Zapata. A list of these newspapers, with addresses and subscription rates, is available from Joe Razo, 3571 City Terrace Drive, Los Angeles, Calif. 90063. This column will review various Chicano newspapers in future editions.

A highly recommended Chicano newspaper is *La Raza*. Now in its second year, it is published out of the same office listed above for the Chicano Press Assn. It merged recently with the *Chicano Student Movement* newspaper and now can offer more regular issues than in the past. Twelve consecutive editions of *La Raza* are available for \$3. Since all Chicano publications must struggle against tremendous odds to stay alive, we feel that if our readers subscribe, they should add a contribution, and if they are in a position to make out order vouchers, they should increase the subscription price to, say, \$10. The Chicanos who publish *La Raza* have also created an exciting monthly magazine of the same name, *La Raza*. The rate for twelve consecutive issues is \$10. The magazine reflects actions and aspirations of the Chicano Movement, with cultural expressions in poetry and graphics.

*Black America: Books, Films, Recordings* is a 16-page pamphlet listing titles found to be popular with the young people at Harlem's Countee Cullen Regional Library. The list features titles published in the last three years, with some recent reprints of classic works. It was compiled by a committee of Young Adult Librarians under the direction of the New York Public Library's Office of Young Adult Services, 8 East 40th St., New York, N. Y. 10016. Available free.

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Illustration from "Chicano"



## Chicanos Form Own Publishing House

The first book by an all-Chicano publishing house has been issued in Denver, Colorado. The title of the book is *Chicano: 25 Pieces of a Chicano Mind*, written by Albardo Delgado, price \$1.50. The name of the publishing house is El Barrio Publishing Company, 2142 Irving Street.

*Interracial Books for Children* highly recommends the Chicano book for school and classroom use in the 12-and-over age category. A second book by the new company, due for fall publication, is *Los Cuatro*, a book of poems by four Chicano authors, each writing ten poems and prose pieces pertaining to the Chicano Liberation Movement. The book is to be a paperback and will sell for \$1.95.

The new publishing house seeks funds from all sources that do not attach strings. Shares of \$10 each are being sold to cover printing costs of individual books until the present search for major funding achieves results. The several individuals who started the company contribute their talents, time and money. All income from books published by the company will be used to develop a substantial publishing list by and for Chicano peoples.

Ricardo Sánchez, one of the principals of the company, told *Interracial Books for Children*: "The big Anglo publishers are putting out books on the Chicano liberation struggle, and the profits they and the Anglo authors make, they keep for themselves. The Chicano community is squeezed out and gets nothing from these books. Is that right?"

Commenting on the high price of hardcover books published by the Anglo publishing industry, Mr. Sánchez stated: "How many Chicanos can pay \$6 or \$8 for a book? That money will go a long way to feed a family of fourteen. Our company will not turn a profit on the books we publish."

Mr. Sánchez explained the company's publishing goals: "We will publish virile, meaningful books that tell what we Chicanos want to define, not what the Anglos define for us. Our books will have educational value, not only to Chicanos, but to the larger Anglo community."

*Interracial Books for Children* urges all readers to contribute as much money as they can to the El Barrio Publishing Co. We also ask major publishers to channel industry profits into this and similar enterprises. Send contributions to the El Barrio Publishing Co., 2142 Irving St., Denver, Colo. 80211.

## SOUNDER: A Black or a White Tale?

Flaws in Newbery Award Winner  
Obscured by Innate White Bias

by Albert V. Schwartz

In a recent exchange of letters with George Woods, the *New York Times* children's book editor, Julius Lester wrote: "When I review a book about blacks (no matter the race of the author), I ask two questions: 'Does it accurately present the black perspective?' 'Will it be relevant to black children?'"

Since the book *Sounder* by William H. Armstrong (Harper and Row) has achieved prominence as the 1970 recipient of the coveted John Newbery Medal award for the year's most distinguished book for children published in the United States, it merits literary analysis from many points of view. Lester's two questions represent an ideological approach, and it is from this approach that I wish to analyze *Sounder*.

Shelton L. Root, Jr., reviewing the book for *Elementary English* (May 1970), states: "As important literary social commentary, *Sounder* cannot be faulted." Root feels that the injustices of the story will leave the reader "both indignant and guilty." This commentary is typical of the reviews that have appeared by white critics for white audiences. Surely this response by white people played a paramount role in the book's selection for the Newbery medal.

### Whose Story Is It?

Mr. Armstrong states in his Author's Note that the actual story was told to him by a teacher, "a gray-haired black man." The note continues: "It is the black man's story, not mine . . . It was history—his history." Thus the author claims authentic Black history originating in the perception and intelligence and "soul" of the Black teacher, casting the white author in an entirely passive role as the tale is written. This claim, while undoubtedly made in good faith, does not bear up under examination.

Tom Feelings, in the Spring 1970 issue of *Interracial Books for Children*, questioned whether a Black man could freely talk to a member of his oppressors at the time the story was first told. Mr. Feelings stated that a story of the Black Experience must come directly from one who has lived it. Authenticity or syntheticity would hinge upon that life experience.

### Style—White and Black

The style of *Sounder* is white fundamentalist; the words, imagery, and philosophy are simple, direct, and interwoven into the story are occasional religious tales offering hope of a "heavenly sanctuary." By contrast, the Negro Spirituals — "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" and "Steal Away to Jesus" — embody a struggle for freedom and a hope for a better life here on earth. The music of *Sounder's* family is more the "white spiritual" than "blues." Black language, a vital and historic means of communication for the creation of a story of Black people, is totally absent.

Whose fault is this? Did the Black teacher talk the language he thought the white man understood?

Could it be that the white man who listened failed to hear the subtle tones that were spoken to him? Or is it possible that *Sounder* is a highly commercial package at this time in synthetic garb?

### No Name, Except for the Dog

Why is no one in the sharecropper's family identified by a name, except the dog, *Sounder*? The mother is simply "mother," the father, "father," and the youth, "boy."

This would be an acceptable literary device in the hands of a Black author. For a white author to resort to it immediately raises the issue of white supremacy. Within the white world, deep-seated prejudice has long denied human individualization to the Black person. At the time of the story's historical setting, white people avoided calling Black people by their names; usually they substituted such terms as uncle, auntie, boy, Sambo; or they called every Black person by the same name. The absence of name helped to avoid the use of the polite salutation.

In *Sounder*, did the Black storyteller really narrate the story without names? Or was the unconscious racism of the white transcriber of the tale actively at work?

### Suffering, but Silent

Within the institution of white supremacy, Black people are supposed to express no resentment and suffer in silence. Black militancy today is forcing whites to consider Blacks as human beings, but at the time the story took place, white people assumed that Blacks were incapable of such a human emotion as suffering. In the literature of the Southern Tradition, Black people suffered, if at all, in silence.

In *Sounder*, only the dog expresses reaction and bitterness. The author actually calls the dog a "human animal." When the father is taken away by the sheriff, the dog angrily rushes in pursuit, and by that expressive act risks its life and is shot. The mother, the boy, and the other children say and do nothing. They are impotent, or at least made so, by the teller of the story. What if the boy had reacted and expressed anger, as he probably did in actual life? Then the writer might have had to deal with Black "activism" — perhaps even a Black Panther. While this might have intrigued the literary creative taste of a Black writer, one can see why a white author would hesitate to construct a forceful anti-white image.

Compare the forceful reaction of the children when their dog is taken away! The innuendo here seems to be that Black children care more about their animals than their parents. Or is it that the institution of white supremacy permits Black children to show human response to animals only?

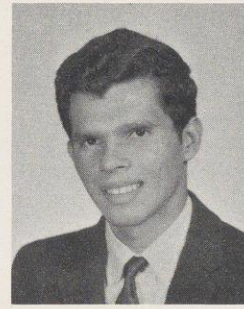
W.E.B. Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folk* in the same historical setting as *Sounder*. Here is how Du Bois presented the Black sharecrop-

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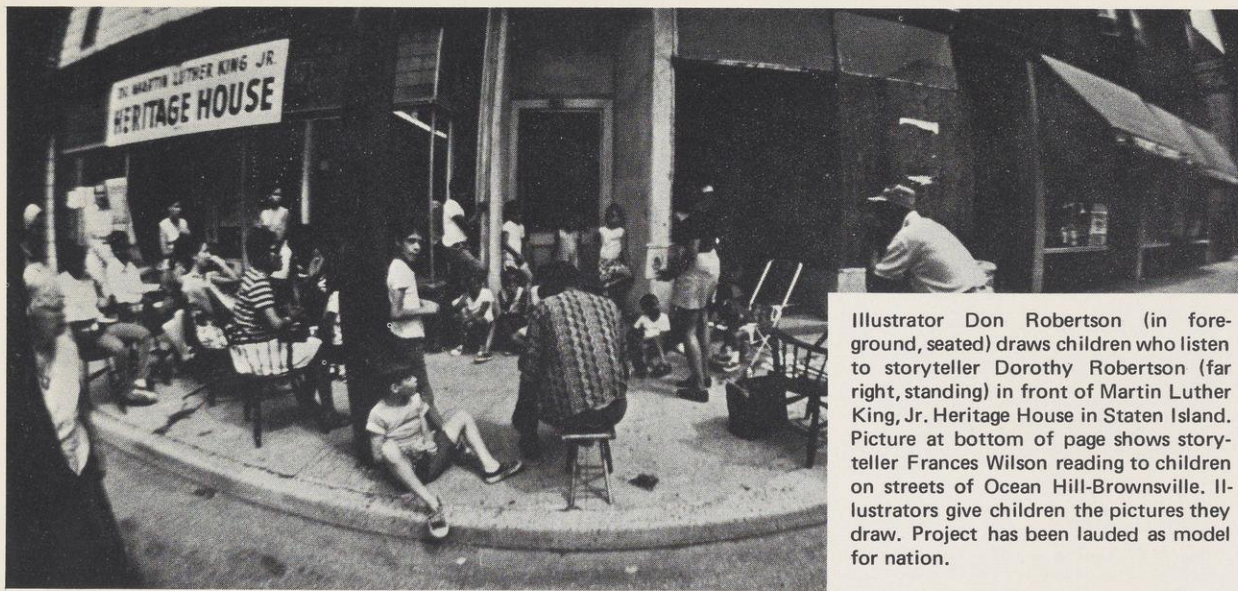


# Art Directors,

This feature has achieved outstanding success in bringing book illustration assignments to artists who are members of ethnic minorities.



**ADALBERTO ORTIZ**, a graduate of City College, attended the High School of Music and Art in New York City. Employed as a woodwork shop supervisor for the Federation of the Handicapped, he also designs sets for the Urban Corps Convocation Theatre. **Art directors, please note:** The Ortiz studio address is 1485 Fulton Ave., Bronx, N.Y. 10456. Tel.: 536-4565.



Illustrator Don Robertson (in foreground, seated) draws children who listen to storyteller Dorothy Robertson (far right, standing) in front of Martin Luther King, Jr. Heritage House in Staten Island. Picture at bottom of page shows storyteller Frances Wilson reading to children on streets of Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Illustrators give children the pictures they draw. Project has been lauded as model for nation.

## Storytellers—Illustrators

continued from page 1

after participating in the program, librarians have proposed that it serve as a model for communities throughout the nation.

At a recent meeting of representatives of the New York Public Library and the Council on Interracial Books for Children, to work out details for library participation in the program, the following statement was made by Augusta Baker, Coordinator of Children's Services of the New York Public Library:

"For book illustrators to go with storytellers into the streets is a wonderful way to motivate children's interest in books and libraries. All of us can learn from the Council's innovative program. All communities can take advantage of their local artists and storytellers to go into the streets and turn children on to the rewards of reading."

The teams report that when they first approach children on a street corner or on a tenement stoop the response is disbelief that people would come especially to read to them and draw their pictures. This changes, as the session gets underway, to insatiable enthusiasm. "The children quickly took to the lower steps and the adults to the top steps," said one storyteller. "It was difficult to say who enjoyed the stories more; the children or the adults." Some children volunteer to tell the story again, while others try sketching, but "read another story and draw more pictures" becomes the insistent demand.

For many of the children, their sessions with the teams are their first encounter with books outside of the school environment. "I didn't know reading could be fun," com-

mented an eight-year-old. The children are often amazed to discover that the pictures in storybooks are drawn by real live artists and not by machines. As the session draws to a close, children want to know where they can go to find the books the storyteller has read to them, and they ask the team to "please come again tomorrow."

During July, the storyteller-illustrator teams took to the streets of Ocean Hill-Brownsville, in Brooklyn, and used the Library Hut at 2205 Dean Street as their base of operations. The Hut, which carries a wide selection of minority-oriented children's books, was developed during the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Demonstration School Project. The idea of using this area as a proving ground for the community action program grew out of last November's famous Book Week Be-In, when a number of book publishers proposed that the innovative school district be developed as a testing area for relevant reading materials for Black and Puerto Rican children.

In August, the storyteller-illustrator teams started visiting other areas of New York City, making use of local public libraries and neighborhood centers as starting-off points for daily visits to the streets of Harlem, East Harlem, Staten Island and the Bronx.

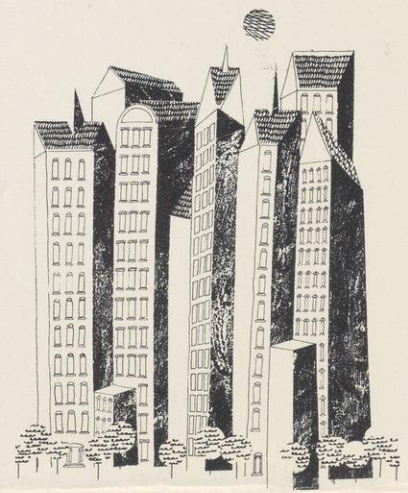
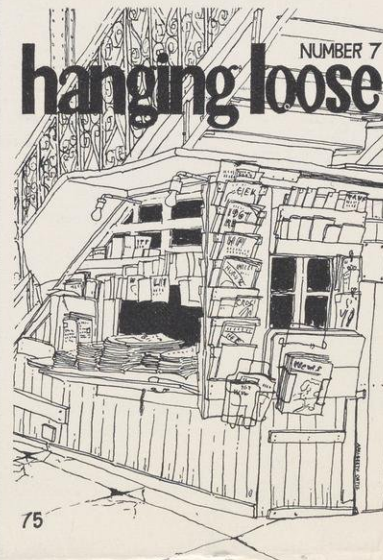
Illustrators who have been participating in the early months of the program are Leo Carty, Tom Feelings, George Ford, Don Robertson and George Wilson. Storytellers have been Joyce Carty, Muriel Feelings, Nikki Giovanni, Jeanene Gosey (who also coordinated

the Ocean Hill-Brownsville team sessions), Miguel Ortiz, Dorothy Robertson, Margueritta Rouette and Frances Wilson. Pura Belpre and Peri Thomas are expected to join the teams in the fall.

Photographer Arnold Hinton has been documenting the program and is preparing a film strip of the sessions for use in schools, libraries and community centers.

Harriett Brown, Supervisor of Librarians at the Ocean-Hill-Brownsville Demonstration School Project, is consultant to the program and directed the training sessions of the storyteller-illustrator teams preliminary to their taking to the streets.

Traveling exhibits of the illustrators' work during the summer phase of the year-round program are planned for the fall.



## AT LAST! Eskimo Children To Learn In Own Language

For the first time in the history of the Anglo-American educational system, kindergarten and first graders in a number of Alaska village schools will study reading, writing, social studies and mathematics in a language they already know — their own.

Beginning this September Yuk Eskimo will be taught in the elementary schools of four Southwest Eskimo villages — according to a report in the *Tundra Times* — as part of a pilot program of the Rural School Project of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Linguist Irene Reed, head of instructional materials for the program, told a reporter for the *Tundra Times*: "English in Alaska is the language of survival. But if this program succeeds, Eskimo will remain as a language of literature and culture, throughout the lives of the students."

### Children's Classics Adapted

For the past three years, the University of Alaska has been working on an Eskimo classroom grammar, to develop terminology that has never been standardized in Eskimo, particularly mathematical terms, such as "set", "fraction", and "equation". The schools selected for the pilot program are in villages where children know almost no English when they enter school.

Eskimo stories have been written in Eskimo-language readers, which also include children's stories considered to be universal, such as "Peter and the Wolf" and "Thumbalina", but adapted to exclude concepts totally unfamiliar to Eskimo children. These books are illustrated and directed by Eskimos to assure ethnical accuracy and cultural relevance.

Three-teacher teams, consisting of two Eskimo teachers and one English teacher in each group have been preparing for the program this summer at the University of Alaska. They will begin teaching at Napakiak, Nunapitchuk, Akiachak and Bethel this fall.

A full article on this innovative program, with illustrations from the Eskimo readers, will appear in a future issue of *Interracial Books for Children*.

The concept that schools teach children to read and write in their own language before they learn English is gaining widespread acceptance among educators. The idea is that once children receive instruction in the language that is closest to them, they not only develop skills more quickly but are able later on to translate their learning into English faster than if they had been forced to learn English at the beginning. An interesting project is being developed in the Bronx this fall by the Writers and Teachers' Collaborative. Puerto Rican elementary school children will write stories in Spanish, which Puerto Rican students in the upper grades will translate. A story on that program will also appear in a future issue of this publication.

## Council Featured

continued from page 1

make grants to black writers. It could help support black and other minority-group publishing companies."

*Publishers, foundations and readers*, please turn to page 2. Our own editorial elaborates on the above proposal. Please remember, too, that the Council on Interracial Books for Children is an entirely voluntary organization. Only through your support can we continue our innovative programs.

Book publishers support our annual contests. The New York State Council on the Arts supports our storyteller-illustrators-in-the-streets projects. But this bulletin, our workshops, and all our other innovative projects are still unfunded. We cannot count on volunteer help forever. To carry on our work we NEED major financial assistance.

## New Secretary For Council

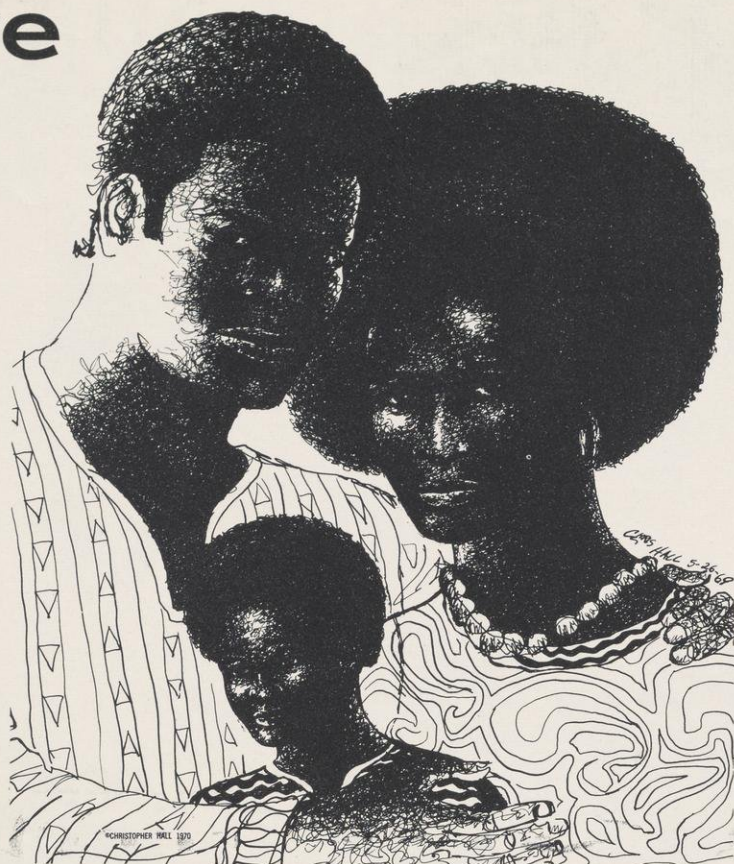
At a recent meeting of its Executive Committee, the Council on Interracial Books for Children, Inc., regretfully accepted the resignation of Rosa Lee Nash as Co-Chairman and Secretary, in order that she may devote full time to the completion of her doctoral dissertation at Yeshiva University.

David Cohen, Librarian of Plainview-Old Bethpage High School, was elected Secretary of the Executive Committee.





# Take Note



**CHRIS ACEMANDESE HALL** graduated from the School of Visual Arts. Mr. Hall has illustrated record covers, greeting cards, travel folders, and has worked in animation and advertising. He illustrated, wrote and published *Little Zeng Takes Us to Ancient Africa*. Art directors, please note: Mr. Hall works out of 143 Roquette Ave., Elmont, N.Y. Tel.: 316-328-2973.

**GEORGE MITCHELL**, a Navajo, was born in Lukachukai, Arizona, and attended boarding schools on the Navajo Reservation. He is now an elementary school teacher in the Hanford, California, public school system. He has developed filmstrips on "Navajo

Folklore" for Bailey-Film Associates in Hollywood. Art directors, please note: Contact Mr. Mitchell, c/o James Ganzer, BFA Educational Media, 11559 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90025. Tel.: 213-477-0031.



**GEORGE MITCHELL,**



**GEORGE WILSON, JR.**



**GEORGE WILSON, JR.** is an illustrator and portrait painter. He attended the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, the School of Visual Arts and the National Academy of Fine Arts. He won top honors in the 1963 Emili Lowe Competition and in the 1968 Park Gallery Competition at Cliffside, N. J. Mr. Wilson

is one of the illustrators who regularly participates in the new storyteller-illustrator-in-the-streets program of the Council on Interracial Books for Children. Art directors, please note: The Wilson studio is at 4197 Park Ave., Bronx, N.Y. 10457. Tel.: 299-9868.

## What Is a Racist Book?

continued from page 1

his appearance is being unfavorably described, which is hardly conducive to strengthening self-esteem. One has only to imagine how the child must feel when such slights are read aloud in the presence of white classmates. Equally important, how must they condition the white child's concept of Blacks?

A problem of another kind arose in connection with books that reflect the recent and entirely well-intentioned emphasis on offering children material about American life as it really is. One must consider the effect of this realism on the positive self-image we want Black children to develop. Blacks in the ghetto struggle with life from the day they are born. It is true that ghetto youngsters often find pallid fare those books that are favored in the suburbs. However, in assessing the "realistic" books, the portrayal of ghetto life is often overwhelmingly negative. There are hurtful parents, broken homes, and emotionally nonsupportive friends and teachers. These are facts of life, and the children who face them must cope as best they can. On the other hand, I believe that the constant exposure of ghetto society in this light is destructive—both of the Black child's view of himself and of the white child's understanding.

For essentially this reason, I excluded the much admired books of Frank Bonham. Two, in particular—*The Nitty Gritty* and *The Mystery of the Fat Cat* (E. P. Dutton)—emphasize a demoralizing, decadent side of Black life, which in these books is always, alas, overcome only by the direct or indirect intervention of The Man.

For much the same reason, I did not include the autobiography *It's Wings That Make Birds Fly*, edited by Sandra Weiner (Pantheon Books). Ten-year-old Otis tells his story in his own words, which Miss Weiner recorded. It is a story of a broken home, punitive adults, overcrowded housing, inadequate play facilities, harassment of younger by older children, and the eternal benevolence of whites toward Blacks. A paragraph at the end of the book states that Otis was killed in an accident while playing in the street.

### Portrayals Too Bleak

I do not doubt the human truth of this autobiography, nor, in more general terms, do I question its social accuracy. But in the unrelievedly bleak and dismal portrayal of lower-class Black life, this book takes no notice of the fact that many poor Blacks do possess personal values, that they have the will and strength to help their children strive to master their environment—qualities that, as it happens, are unnoticed and unsupported by many teachers and administrators. For the young white reader, this book supports rampant stereotypes, but it offers no insight at all into the "hows" and "whys" of ghetto life. For the young Black reader, the book too strongly affirms that all the Otises of today are doomed from birth.

Of the books that do foster a healthy self-image in the young Black reader, I should like to mention three. *Bimby*, by Peter Burchard (Coward-McCann), is an historical novel set in the Sea Islands, off Georgia, just before the Civil War. Although young Bimby has not experienced slavery directly, it is through the mature wisdom of the old slave Jesse that he comes to understand what it means to be a man, and that he must himself find his own freedom. The author's illustrations enhance the story's underlying wistfulness and sadness. Black youth will find Bimby a strong image with which to identify.

*Canalboat to Freedom*, by Thomas Fall (Dial Press), vividly portrays the life of an ex-slave, Lundius, who risks death to help his Black brothers escape to freedom via the underground railroad. He meets and befriends a white indentured servant named Benja, who is young and inexperienced in the ways of the world. Lundius helps Benja and others in practical, protective ways, but he is also for them a symbol of strength; it is his qualities as a man that so powerfully affect others and that enable Benja to carry on the work of Lundius after he has been killed.

*Bimby* and *Canalboat to Freedom* stand apart from the general fare of children's books on slavery in three important respects. Bimby and Lundius are luminous, three-dimensional characters, very real and very much alive. Both possess an inner strength that enables them to strike out at the system in a positive way. Both are figures drawn from historical experience, and they will foster respect and pride in Black children today.

### A Story of Today

*Member of the Gang*, by Barbara Rinkoff (Crown Publishers), is a story of today. The young Black hero, Woodie Jackson, feels he amounts to little at home, in school, and at the settlement house where he spends his afternoons. His father is hardworking, gruff and stern; his mother is gentle and on the overprotective side. Woodie jumps at the chance to join the Scorpions, because he thinks membership in the gang will make him important to himself and others. Following the inevitable street clash, arrest, and appearance in Family Court, Woodie is assigned a Black probation officer who gives Woodie the kind of encouragement and support that parents and teachers have failed to provide. Together they build a new perspective on life for Woodie, and for the boy the world takes on a very different meaning. The black and white illustrations by Harold James dramatically interpret Woodie's shifting moods and feelings. The merits of this book are several: there are many Woodie Jacksons in our world, and the author has captured their reality in her central character. While Woodie's parents have negative qualities, the reader is allowed to see that their attitudes are oblique expressions of their concern and love for their son. The Black probation officer projects a strong Black image.

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## Council Invites Du Bois

continued from page 1

Mrs. Du Bois, out of touch with American publishing for nearly a decade, expressed delight at finding that Black artists are now illustrating books for children in the United States, but she expressed bitter disappointment with the 1970 Newbery Award winner *Sunder*, failing to see what the book had to offer either white or Black children in these troubled times and agreeing with the critical article on *Sunder* which appears on page 3 of this issue of *Interracial Books for Children*. [The full text of Mrs. Du Bois' address will appear in the next issue of this publication.]

### A Pioneer Author

Shirley Graham Du Bois is a pioneer in depicting the contributions of Black Americans in books for children. Her biography of Frederick Douglass *There Was Once a Slave*, published in 1947, won that year's Julian Messner Award for the "Best Book to Combat Intolerance in America." She has written biographies for young people on Frederick Douglass, Phyllis Wheatley, Benjamin Banneker, Paul Robeson, and others. A listing of her children's books accompanies this article. She was one of the founders and the first editor of the magazine *Freedomways*, and she was the first director of Ghana Television.

In 1950 she won the Anisfield Wolf prize for her book on Banneker, and that same year the Institute of Arts and Literature commended her for writing distinguished children's biographies of Black people.

Considerable controversy has raged over Shirley Graham Du Bois' requested visa to enter this country. Born in Indiana, she is a citizen of Ghana and now lives in Cairo, Egypt. She was denied a visa when she applied earlier this year for permission to come to the United States to speak to students at Nashville University, and also to seek medical care here.

The visa denial was instigated by the Department of Justice, which charged that Shirley Graham Du Bois is a member of a number of "subversive" organizations. The *New York Times* in July printed the Justice Department's allegations, but a letter to that newspaper by Mrs. Du Bois denying the allegations was never printed.

It is widely believed that in labelling her as an "inadmissible alien," the Justice Department sought to punish Mrs. Du Bois for the bold act she took with her husband, the late Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, ten years ago. In 1960 she and Dr. Du Bois, who was then ninety

years of age, gave up their U.S. citizenship and became citizens of Ghana, as an act of protest against racism in America.

Dr. C. Eric Lincoln, president of the Black Academy of Arts and Letters, wrote both the Justice and the State Departments on July 1, protesting the visa denial. In his letters, Dr. Lincoln noted that the Black Academy of Arts and Letters had invited Mrs. Du Bois to attend a banquet in late September honoring her husband's enrollment in the Academy's newly created Hall of Fame.

More than three weeks passed. Then, in response to Dr. Lincoln's letter, came a mimeographed fill-in form letter, stating that American consular offices abroad are "responsible under the law for the issuance or refusal of visas." The form letter was signed by Virginia Weyres, Chief, Written Inquires Branch, Visa Office, the State Department. The letter made no mention of the Justice Department's prior decision to refuse the visa.

Commenting on this tactless reply to so prestigious an organization as the Black Academy of Arts and Letters, Dr. Lincoln told a reporter for *Interracial Books for Children*: "This is just one more instance of the Nixon Administration's utter disregard for the sensitivities of Black people in the United States."

Meanwhile, the Council on Interracial Books for Children, at its July 15 executive committee meeting, extended an invitation to Mrs. Du Bois to address a special workshop and reception in her honor sometime this fall. A copy of this invitation and a letter demanding that State reconsider its visa denial was forwarded to the State Department. Among others known to have sent similar letters protesting State's action and urging reconsideration was the NAACP, the Urban League, and the magazine *Redbook*.

On August 11 the Justice Department altered its decision and announced that it would permit the State Department to grant Mrs. Du Bois a temporary visa.

Since the above article was written, Mrs. Du Bois has come to the United States on a three-month visa.



Mrs. DuBois at Council Reception

### Books for Children Authored By Shirley Graham Du Bois

Unless otherwise indicated, the titles were published by the firm of Julian Messner, now owned by Simon and Schuster, Inc. They appear below by chronological date of publication. Only one of the books is out of print, and it figures. Readers are asked to guess which book this is. Answer appears at bottom, right hand corner of page 7.

*Dr. George Washington Carver: Scientist*, co-authored by George D. Lipscomb, 1944

*Paul Robeson: Citizen of the World*, 1946

*There Was Once a Slave: The Heroic Story of Frederick Douglass*, 1947

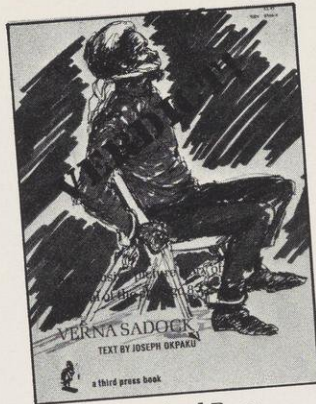
*Your Most Humble Servant: The Story of Benjamin Banneker*, 1949

*The Story of Pocahontas*, 1953, published by Grossett, Signature series

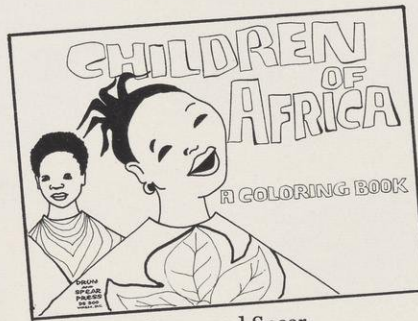
*John Baptiste Pointe De Sable: Founder of Chicago*, 1953

*Booker T. Washington: Educator of Hand and Heart*, 1955

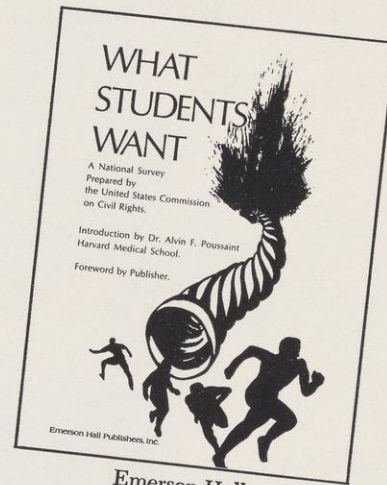
## SOME NEW BLACK PUBLISHERS



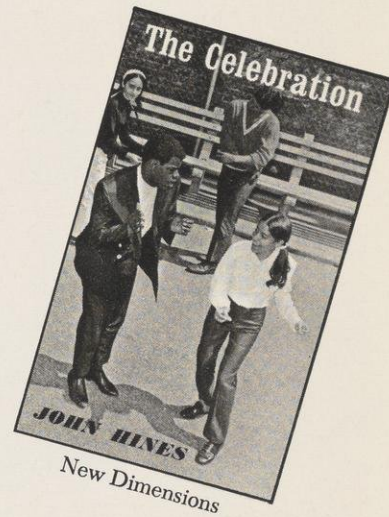
The Third Press



Drum and Spear



Emerson Hall



Buckingham Learning



### Buckingham Learning

Buckingham Learning Corporation began in 1968 with the publication of "Dear Dr. King . . .", a collection of essays, poems and drawings by Black and white grade school students, and of a teacher's manual titled *Creative Encounters with "Dear Dr. King . . ."*

Last spring Buckingham published the first of an ambitious Afro-American Multimedia History and Culture Series for schools and libraries, which includes color filmstrips, L.P. records, portraits, student workbooks and a teacher's manual. The series of kits will include "Black Americans in Government," "Black Civil Rights Leaders," and "Black Americans in the Arts."

According to Buckingham's founder-President, Oswald White, the kits are "the only comprehensive program in Black Studies for the primary and secondary school levels. They are also applicable for general history, social studies and language arts curricula." This summer, Buckingham completed arrangements with McGraw-Hill, Inc. to distribute the kits.

Prior to forming the new company, Mr. White was president of Educational Heritage, Inc., White Plains, the publishers of "Negro Heritage" series. He began his publishing career in 1961 as salesman for that firm, which is a white-owned corporation.

For catalogs, write to Buckingham Learning Corporation, 160-08 Jamaica Ave., Jamaica, N.Y. 11432.

### Drum and Spear Press

Drum and Spear, a new Black publishing house in Washington, D.C., began in November 1969 with the publication of the paperback *History of Pan-African Revolt* by C. L. R. James. This summer, the company came out with a children's simple-text coloring book, *Children of Africa*. The book includes text written for parents and sells for \$1.

Other titles of the new company are *Speaking Swahili — Kusema*

*Kiswahili*, a self-instruction manual on the college level, and *Enemy of the Sun*, an anthology of Palestinian poetry.

Drum and Spear Press distributes its own books—so far, all paperbacks — through the Drum and Spear Book Store, 1802 Belmont Rd. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009. The store has been in operation since June 1968.

### Emerson Hall

Emerson Hall Publishers, Inc. is a new house with two titles slated for fall publication. The first is *What Youth Wants*, a report on attitudes toward society of 44 students of various racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. The report was prepared for the 1969 national survey of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

The second fall title of Emerson Hall is *Race in Literature and Society* by Rebecca C. Barton. This is an analysis of literature prior to World War II depicting Black people compared with the realities of their experience.

Emerson Hall was launched by Alfred Prettyman, formerly senior trade editor at Harper & Row, coordinator for that firm's urban affairs program, and creator, editor and manager of the J. J. Harper Editions. Mr. Prettyman left Harper & Row in February to start his own company, which will feature children's books. The company is located at 209 West 97th Street, New York, N. Y. 10025.

### New Dimensions

New Dimensions Publishing Co., Inc. was founded in 1967 to produce books dealing with "figures, events and themes significant in Negro and Puerto Rican history and urban life." To date, there are nineteen titles published, essentially directed at the school and library market.

Play format is used for a series of nine readers written on a mature yet easy-to-read level: *The Boyhood Adventures of Frederick Douglass*, *The Celebration*, *The Genius of Benjamin Banneker*, *John*

*F. Kennedy*, *Aaron Ashworth*, *Harriet Tubman*, *Luis Munoz Marin*, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, and *Crispus Attucks*. Two workbooks are available that can be used in conjunction with the plays.

An Africa series includes two readers and two workbooks called *Our Friends in Africa*, and a reader and workbook dealing with African folk tales. A reader on Puerto Rico is also available.

John Hines, founder of New Dimensions, is a former school teacher. He plans to issue a new series on drug addiction in the fall, for young adult readers. For further information and catalog, contact NewDimensionsPublishing Co., 151 West 25th St., New York, N.Y. 10001.

### The Third Press

Joseph Okpaku began The Third Press earlier this summer with publication of *Verdict: An Exclusive Picture Story of the Trial of the Chicago Eight*.

The new company, whose distributor is Dial-Delacourte, has three books slated for fall. These are *Drugs: What they Are—How they Look — What they Do* by Frank Canon and Jorge Hardison; a book of African poetry titled *Song of a Prisoner* by Okot p'Bitek; and *Two Plays* by Douglas Turner Ward.

In addition to general trade books, The Third Press plans to publish children's books. Already scheduled for spring 1971 is a book on the life of Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, convicted assassin of Senator Robert F. Kennedy.

The company's founder is 27 year-old Joseph Okpaku, who was born in Nigeria. He earned his M.A. in structural engineering at Stanford University but went on to take his PhD. in Drama and Theater history. While at Stanford, he published the literary magazine *New African Literature and the Arts*, which his company continues to publish.

The address of The Third Press is 444 Central Park West, New York, N. Y. 10025.



# Third Annual Contest

for writers who are unpublished  
in the children's book field

Open to

- AFRO AMERICANS • AMERICAN INDIANS
- CHICANOS AND PUERTO RICANS

Three \$500 CASH PRIZES

For Entry Blanks and Contest Rules  
write to

## COUNCIL ON INTERRACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

9 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y. 10016

Contest Ends  
November 30, 1970

### Notice to Contestants

Deadline for submission of manuscripts to the Council's Third Annual Contest has been extended from September 30 to November 30, 1970.

### What Is a Racist Book?

continued from page 5

In considering the constructive potential of biracial books for children, one does not ask that they be antiseptic in portraying harsh realities; one hopes that increasingly, authors, Black and white, will foster awareness and sensitivity in their young readers; and, specifically, in the case of Black children, one hopes they will be helped to know better their own strength and power to bring about change.

### Postscript

When I prepared the NAACP list, the Newbery Award-winning *Sounder* by William H. Armstrong was unavailable for review. If I were to consider *Sounder* for the list, I would reject it as a racist book. I found *Sounder* offensive and demeaning to Black people, for much the same reasons as stated in the critical review of the book appearing elsewhere in this issue of *Interracial Books for Children*.

What the white author of *Sounder* has done to the Black characters is to diminish their role as instruments in effecting change. More important, the author has denied Black youth the privilege of having role models with which they can identify and find fulfillment, and on that ground alone the book fails to meet a basic criterion used in

selecting the NAACP book list.

The white author of *Sounder* renders the father and boy impotent, much as William Styron portrayed the character of Nat Turner. The mother's character pales against the strong Black women history tells us about—Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth. When you study the Black actors in *Sounder*, you wonder how Black people could have survived social genocide since 1619.

### About the Author

Rae Alexander is a graduate of Bank Street College of Education and is now a doctoral student in early childhood education at Columbia University—Teachers College. She is the compiler of an anthology to be published this fall by Random House, titled *What It's Like to be Young and Black in America*, with notes by Julius Lester.

### BULK RATES

INTERRACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN is available at the following reduced rates for bulk purchase.

25 to 100 copies ..... 30¢ each  
100 copies or more..... 20¢ each

### BACK COPIES

Copies of Vol. I are out of print, as are copies of Vol. II, No. 4. However, copies of Vol. II, No. 1 and Nos. 2-3 are available at the bulk rates given above. Individual copies are 50¢ each. Use subscription coupon on page 8.

### Editors and Writers: Stop These "Mexican American" Stereotypes!

Blacks until recently were almost totally invisible in children's literature. This cannot be said of Mexican Americans, who have appeared in children's books all too frequently as quaint stereotypes.

It is significant that Anglos have allowed, even encouraged, their children to sing Spanish songs, to don sombreros and serapis, and to use occasional words from the "foreign" Spanish language. Foreign, hell! Spanish is more American than English, for Spanish—and a multitude of Indian languages—were the legitimate languages of vast areas of this country long before the Anglo oppressors came.

Not all children's book stereotypes of Mexican Americans are unfavorable, by any means. The frito banditos are the obscene caricatures of the TV and advertising media, not of children's book publishing.

In literature for children, the Mexican American more often than not carries a guitar, and the stories go so far as to give the words and music to a song or two. The words are in English with italicized Spanish. After the story's denouement, a happy singing party takes place.

If not a singing party, then a fiesta. Quaint people dress in doll-like outfits and parade and sing all over the place. The party-fiesta is the high point of birthday and other celebrations. If the party-fiesta celebrates a father getting a job, it is never the result of a struggle, such as a grape strike, but rather because some good-hearted Anglo sees fits to perform a little charity.

The Mexican American family in children's books has a fat, dark-haired mamma, a moustachioed, menial-jobbed pappa, and many wide-eyed brothers and sisters. The family is simple, warm, childlike, sleepy. Their characteristic occupation is growing flowers—big, colorful ones. They have an uncanny ability to grow flowers out of practically anything, even sand. They do not need manure, like the Anglo. When they aren't actively engaged in any of these things, they are asleep in a siesta.

Better perhaps to have been invisible all these years than to have endured these insults.

Now the Chicano Movement is ending all this. All book editors who are unable to accept the Chicano ideology, who think Mexican American any more, will do well to search for positions in some industry for which their insensitivity will serve them well—editing publications for Lockheed Aircraft, for example.

### THANK YOU

For this Autumn 1970 issue of *INTERRACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN*, we wish to express warm thanks for the exceptional efforts of Eleanor Fogelson and Virginia Rice, without whose volunteer help this publication would not have been possible.

continued from page 3

### Information Clearing House

Books, publications and documents are being sought by the Library Project of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center, 671 Beckwith St., S.W., Atlanta, Georgia 30314. The Library is to be essentially a research institution with archival holdings and materials related to the late Dr. King, the Civil Rights Movement and African-American freedom activities since 1954.

The January 1970 issue of *Race Today* (Vol. II, No. 1) describes a study of reading programs used in infant schools of England. The study reveals that British books for children ignore "the poor, the sick and the foreign." The "foreign" refers to Britain's Indian, West Indian, and Pakistani population. The publication may be obtained from the Institute of Race Relations, London, England.

A bibliography titled *A Selected Sample of Books by and about American Indians with Special Emphasis on the Pacific Northwest* is available from the Tacoma Public Library, 1102 South Tacoma Ave., Tacoma, Washington 98402. Send 10¢ in coin or stamps. The bibliography is a cooperative project of the public library and the Tacoma Community College Library at the urging of concerned Indian students.

The *Black and White Coloring Book* is an introduction to the contributions of Black Americans, as told by "Wee Pals" and originated by the Black cartoonist Morrie Turner and writer Letha Turner. Send \$2 to 126 Folsom St., San Francisco, Calif. The Turners' *Freedom Is . . .* will be published by Judson Press in September. We at the Council have a warm regard for Morrie Turner. A story on his pioneering efforts in integrated cartoons appeared in Vol. 1, No. 1 of *Interracial Books for Children*.

In the Spring 1970 issue of *Interracial Books for Children*, Professor Lalage Bown's article "Children's Books from Africa" mentioned books published by the African Universities Press, a Nigerian company.

Our readers will be interested to know that American rights for two of that company's series (*African Junior Library* and *African Reader's Library*) have been acquired by the Africana Publishing Corporation, 101 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10003, a firm that also issues a quarterly bibliography and news bulletin, *Africana Library Journal*. Moreover, several titles from the Kenya-based *East African Publishing House* are now available from Northwestern University Press, 1735 Benson Ave., Evanston, Illinois 60201.

Scholastic has published four of a projected 26-multiracial book series called the *Firebird Books* this September. The books, designed for the intermediate grade level of elementary schools, are described in a brochure available from Scholastic Magazines and Book Services, 900 Sylvan Av., Englewood Cliffs, N. J. 07532. The September books, two on Black and two on American Indian oppression, are all by white authors, but we are informed that at least a third of the writers of the 26 books will be Black and Chicano. Our readers will be interested to know that the series was launched by Lilian Moore, a founder of this Council. Lilian Moore recently retired from Scholastic, and the editor who will be responsible for the series from now on is Barbara Walker, the only full editor in the children's book field known to this Council who is Black.

A magazine for Black children will begin publication this fall. Launched by a new Black publishing enterprise by the name of Kitabu (Swahili for "book"), the magazine will be a bi-monthly and will appear in a 64-page combined magazine-book format, with quality paper, outstanding graphics and some four-color art work. The magazine's name *Me Myself* is taken from a poem by Langston Hughes. The editor of *Me Myself* is Miss Lilian Smith, a former librarian, who told us: "The magazine-book will feature positive images that Black youngsters can relate to, but it is intended not only for Black children. White children will also benefit." The new magazine will carry a supplementary newsletter for teachers and parents. Subscription for six issues is \$6. The address is 37 West 20th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011.

### A REAL OBSCENITY

The following communication was received by the mother of a student at Long Island City High School. It was printed in the April 1970 newsletter of the New York Civil Liberties Union. The letter, dated February 25, 1970, was sent on official school stationery. It is reprinted here to indicate what the Council regards as obscene material.

Dear Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_  
You may not be aware that during the past two weeks your son has been distributing literature in support of the Chicago Conspiracy

and other radical causes on the street adjacent to Long Island City High School. His presence has been noted by the police authorities and they will be communicated to other governmental agencies.

If, of course, you approve of these activities by your son, there is nothing further to be said. If you disapprove, I would urge you to persuade him to desist from these activities outside of Long Island City High School.

Sincerely yours,  
HOWARD L. HURWITZ  
Principal

ANSWER TO  
OUT-OF-PRINT QUERY  
Paul Robeson: Citizen of the  
World



## Sounder: Black or White Tale?

continued from page 3

per: "I see now that ragged black man sitting on a log, aimlessly whitening a stock. He muttered to me with the murmur of many ages, when he said: 'White man sit down whole year; Nigger work day and night and make crop; Nigger hardly gits bread and meat; white man sitting down gits it all. *It's wrong.*'"

Never once in *Sounder* do you meet the white owner of the land. The oppression results from the poverty of the land and the cruelty of the penal institution. Yet the father is crushed, not by the mean prison guard, but by a chance "act of God."

True to the white Southern fundamentalism of the author, the "boy" meets up with no activist. His hope lies in getting an education. Suddenly, after his father is taken from him, the boy manages to go to school, where he studies the words of Montaigne. "Only the unwise think that what has changed is dead," says that author.

These words the boy is to contemplate "years later, walking the earth as a man." The message for the Black youth in the story is from Montaigne! What irrelevance!

Sounder's family is isolated; there is no relationship with other Black people, except an occasional preacher. The Bible stories the Black mother tells are exclusively white Baptist fundamentalism — and very racist. Her Bible stories have none of the qualities of Black Biblical interpretation, and so we hear the mother telling her son: "Some people is born to keep. Some is born to lose. *We was born to lose, I reckon.*" (Italics added)

The mother in the story is the Black stereotype of the Southern Tradition. Toward her children she shows no true feeling, no true compassion—strictly a Southern interpretation of Black motherhood. After her son makes great sacrifices to go to school, she even discourages him from going. After he has searched for his dog for hours, she admonishes him coldly: "You're hungry, child. *Feed yourself.*" This mother is divested of "soul," a quality a Black writer today would assuredly have given her.

When Lerone Bennett, Jr. wrote a criticism of William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, he made this statement about white writers emasculating Black families: "First of all, and most important of all, there is a pattern of emasculation, which mirrors America's ancient and manic pattern of de-balling black men. There is a second pattern, which again mirrors the white man's praxis, a pattern of destructuring the black family..." Bennett's statement applies equally to *Sounder*.

In the light of an analysis of *Sounder*, I, for one, respond negatively to the two questions posed by Lester: "Does it accurately present the black perspective?" and "Will it be relevant to black children?" I wholeheartedly affirm Lester's next contention: "The possibility of a book by a white answering these questions affirmatively is nil."

### About the Author

Albert V. Schwartz is Assistant Professor of Language Arts, Richmond College, Staten Island, New York.

## Racism in Standard Texts Decried By Media Group

Both overt and covert racism has been detected in Barnes and Noble texts by the New York Media Project, a group of activist workers in the publishing and media industries. The Project traced white supremacist bias in a two-volume history, *United States to 1877* by John A. Krout, and *Economic History of the United States* by Francis G. Walett, which include "the distortion of the roles of such individuals as John Brown and . . . the omission of the contributions of men like Frederick Douglass and even of such Uncle-Tom characters as Booker T. Washington." A few typical examples of the Project's findings:

†Characterizing John Brown as a "deluded fanatic" while treating John Wilkes Booth as "temporarily deranged."

†Writing an economic history of the U.S. which has only one mention of American Blacks—that being a discussion of the economic viability of slavery.

†Purporting to represent the development of American culture in a book which mentions Black culture only in terms of "the adaptation of Negro folk music in the songs of Stephen C. Foster."

†Relegating the role of women in history to one peripheral paragraph on the hiring practices of factory owners during the Industrial Revolution.

"In addition to these specific affronts," the Media Project reports, "there is a great absurdity in the fact that the two-volume history of the U.S.—intended as a review for contemporary students—was written in 1933 and, although reprinted frequently, draws its bibliography primarily from books written more than 25 years ago."

"It could be speculated that this editorial stance derives from the fact that Barnes and Noble has few Black people and no Puerto Ricans in editorial or management positions, although the bookbinding and mail rooms are predominantly Black and Puerto Rican—as management was proud to point out."

The Media Project, which picketed Barnes and Noble in New York last winter, is asking others to join in a boycott of Barnes and Noble textbooks and stores, and for pressure on the company to change its editorial and textbook policies. The Media Project also asks concerned people to analyze other textbooks for distortions and omissions and to demand that other publishers eliminate racist and anti-feminist biases from their texts. Send examples and other feedback—suggestions, copies of correspondence, instances of personal participation—to the NEW YORK MEDIA PROJECT, P.O. Box 266—Village Station, New York, N.Y. 10014.

A reporter for *Interracial Books for Children* was told by Barnes and Noble Vice-President John T. Wieboldt that Barnes and Noble books are outlines of pre-existing texts and that the white supremacist and anti-woman attitudes expressed in the outlines are attributable, not to Barnes and Noble, but to the publishers of the original texts! We say: Up against the wall, Barnes and Noble! — Editor.

## THE SOUTHERN RESPONSE

New Column Describes Reactions In South to Innovative Books

With the communication printed below, we launch a new column devoted to the response of Southern parents, teachers and librarians to the interracial children's books now becoming available. The Council receives numerous letters describing experiences similar to the one that follows, and we believe that a feature regularly devoted to these experiences will be a substantial contribution. We ask for positive experiences, wherever possible, that show how relevant reading and audio-visual materials can be successfully introduced into educational institutions of the South. From our readers we seek suggestions on how this column can best be carried out.

The following communication is from Jan Tinsly, dismissed as a teacher in rural Kentucky as a result of the positive effort she made. Now located in the Washington, D.C., area, Ms. Tinsly would like a position in a library setting. Can any of our readers in Washington, D.C., help her?

We are aware that reprisals will be sought against contributors to this column. Whenever necessary, we shall withhold the identity of con-

tributors for their protection. — Editor.

Some say the South shall rise again. I wonder. I have been teaching tenth grade English in rural Kentucky. The majority of students (14 to 19 years old) read on a fourth or fifth grade level; one class reads on a second grade level. Yet the literature books I was given to assign them were on the college-preparatory level! We struggled through several selections, but the books were as useful to the students as a candle snuffer to a pauper.

I found out about the Scholastic Book Services' literature program for "under-achievers" — the *Contact* series. With school funds I bought the tenth grade unit, titled *Prejudice: The Invisible Wall*. The unit considers political, social, racial, and religious prejudice.

It worked. After three days on *Prejudice*, my students became totally involved. Discussions were beautiful. The Blacks, especially, responded. Something was finally relevant, and suddenly everyone had something to say; everyone had an opinion, or the makings of one.

But our experience with *Preju-*

dice was shortlived. With amazing speed the administrators purged my classroom and my students' minds. I was told that I was trying to start a race riot, that tenth graders were too young for "this sort of thing," and that nothing controversial was to be taught in the school. And after all, said the authorities, there was no prejudice in this area any more. True, when they integrated a few years back bullets were fired, but that had all been settled. And why was the subject of prejudice being discussed in an English classroom, anyway? English is grammar and nice stories about old ladies and little kids.

I was called a Communist and promptly dismissed. Had I not resigned a month earlier over similar skirmishes, I might have been able to do something with my protest. As it now stands, I am twiddling my thumbs. And my classes are starting *Julius Caesar*.

What's happening around here now? Nothing much. If any section decides to rise again, let's hope someone forgets the yeast.

JAN TINSLEY  
7407 Lanham Road  
Falls Church, Virginia

## Black Poets and Writers: A Partial Directory

The Council on Interracial Books for Children has sent inquiries to persons on the above list to find out their interests in writing books for children. This list, including biographical information about the

### List Grows Out of National Endowment on the Arts Project

Poets including A.B. Spellman, Margaret Danner, Jay Wright, Tom Weatherly, and twelve other Black writers, have found writer-in-residence positions in Black colleges through the project "Poets in Developing Colleges." This project, now into its fourth year, is sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C. It seeks to link Black writers with Black colleges for several months, rather than several days, in order to establish a deeper relationship between writer and student, to encourage campus literary magazines, to expose teachers to new ways of teaching writing and literature, and possibly to convince the administration to hire a writer as a permanent part of its faculty.

So far, fourteen Black colleges have participated, and twelve more will participate during 1970-71. Whatever money the college puts up is matched by the National Endowment. Salaries usually average \$1,000 per month.

The project's search for available writers has led to the compilation of an important list of the whereabouts of approximately 100 Black poets and writers and miscellaneous information, and contacts concerning black writing. This list and additional information about the project may be obtained from Galen Williams, Director; Poets and Writers, 201 West 54th St., New York, N. Y. 10019; telephone (212) PLaza 7-1766.

writers, will be made available to editors of children's books, upon request. Address inquiries to Jean Reynolds, Council on Interracial Books for Children, Inc., 9 East 40th St., New York, N. Y. 10016.

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