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INTERRACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

BULLETIN

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Toys Are Political, Too: A Guide to Gift-Giving the Year 'Round

An Analysis of *Words by Heart*

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Toys, like children's books, reflect and perpetuate the values of society. An article on toys begins on page 5.

Indexed in
Education Index
ERIC *IRCD*

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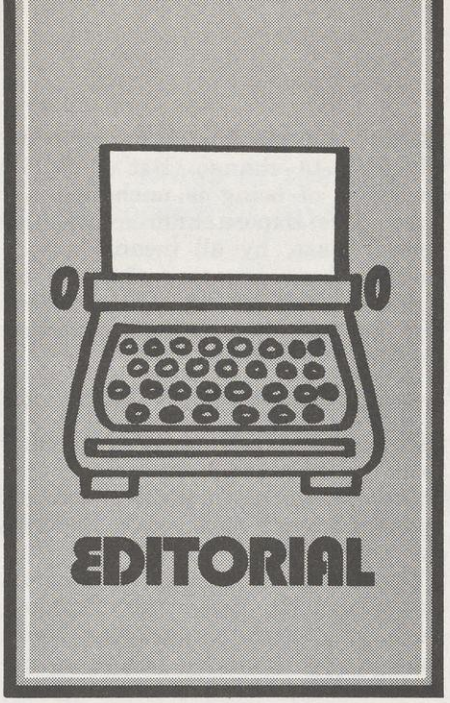


ON CENSORSHIP

Mary Poppins is at the center of a current controversy. On October 7 a front-page story in the *Los Angeles Times* charged that the book had been "banned" from library shelves in San Francisco. The story was labeled "Censorship Issue."

Censorship is not, however, at issue in this case. Nor are the facts as the *Times* presented them. What the article does not make clear is that some nine years ago a library committee, performing its professional function of maintaining the library collection, reviewed the book; it found that—in addition to being racist—*Mary Poppins* was unpopular with children, poorly written, out-of-date and full of stereotypes about women. The committee decided, therefore, not to replace copies as they wore out. As Joan Dillon, Assistant to the Acting Coordinator of Children's Services of the San Francisco Public Library, has stated: "San Francisco Public Library has not banned the works of P.S. Travers. To my knowledge, the library has never banned any books. It is wise *not* always to believe everything one hears or reads in the media."

Given the facts, it would seem that the American Library Association (ALA) would rush to support the librarians who, after all, have been doing the job they were hired to do. Instead, the ALA, represented by Judith Krug of the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom, has been just as eager as the LA *Times* to cry "censorship." In the *Times* article, Krug talks about "censorship from the left" (the implication being that that is what the librarians were engaged in) and states, "Everyone wants to protect the children. The problem is, they're going to be so protected that they won't be able to function in the year 2000." (We hate to think that reading racist books—not to mention poorly written ones—is what will enable children to function in the next century.)

Although the *Los Angeles Times* was asked to retract its story, it refused to do so. Instead, it offered space for an Op-Ed article on the subject. CIBC's article, entitled "On the Right Not to Purchase Racist and Sexist Books," was published in the *Los Angeles Times* October 24 and reprinted in other papers, including *Newsday*. The Op-Ed article appears below since the issues raised go beyond "The *Mary Poppins* Case."

On the Right Not to Purchase Racist and Sexist Books

In the name of freedom of speech, a dangerous and misleading campaign is being waged. This campaign may have a chilling effect on open discussion and criticism of children's literature. This is among the important issues raised in the current controversy over the decision of some branches of the San Francisco Public Library that *Mary Poppins,* the children's book about an English governess who can fly, should no longer be carried.

The professional judgment of San Francisco librarians not to replace worn copies of *Mary Poppins* has been met by cries of "censorship" and "book banning." But no one crept surreptitiously into darkened rooms and removed copies of the book. No one ordered children to stop reading the book. It remains on the shelves of other San Francisco branch libraries and is in the reference section of the main library.

Library officials have said that they did not "ban" the book. As long as nine years ago they found that the book was unpopular with many children because it reflected many of the racist values of British colonialism. The book was not in demand and, therefore, constrained by a limited budget, San Francisco library officials decided not to replace worn-out copies.

The San Francisco incident is part of a much larger problem: deciding what constitutes good education, what constitutes respect for children, what constitutes censorship and what constitutes freedom. Extensive research suggests that children's attitudes about sex roles and race are affected by the books they read. Books influence a child's self-image and help to shape life aspirations. Studies also show that children's literature and school textbooks abound with stereotypes. Females have been depicted as generally dependent, fearful, incapable of many roles in life; males are shown as being independent, brave, capable of all things. As for people of color, they simply did not exist, or else were uniformly depicted as comical, incompetent or evil.

Mary Poppins is a case in point. Here is one passage: "On the knee of the Negro lady sat a tiny black picaninny with nothing on at all. . . . Its mother spoke. 'A bin 'specting you a long time, Mar' Poppins,' she said

Subscribers, Please Note

The next issue of the *Bulletin* (Volume 11, Number 8), which completes the current volume, will be published early in January. We apologize for the slight delay in publication.

smiling. 'You bring dem chillun dere into ma li'l house for a slice of watermelon right now. . . . '" And, a few pages later: "There were four gigantic figures bearing down towards him [a white boy]—the Eskimo with a spear, the Negro lady with her husband's huge club, the Mandarin with a great curved sword, and the Red Indian with a tomahawk. They were rushing upon him . . . their huge, terrible, angry faces looming nearer and nearer."

Although written 34 years ago, *Mary Poppins* cannot be excused as merely dated. The author rewrote some of the above in 1972 for a paperback edition. She took out the dialect, she said, because a schoolteacher friend reported that "it always made her shudder and squirm if she had Black children in her class." Unfortunately, the author didn't revise enough, as portions of the text still make children of color cringe and sensitive teachers squirm. The many racist illustrations remain intact. It should be noted that the movie version of the book, starring Julie Andrews, was not racist.

Mary Poppins is just one of hundreds of examples of such books. Of course, removing all books containing race and sex bias would nearly empty library shelves and is hardly a solution. Before solutions can be found it will be necessary for all of us, especially librarians and others who select books, to become more sensitive to issues of race and sex.

The Freedom Not to Buy

Of course, authors have the freedom to write racist and sexist books and publishers have the freedom to publish them. But librarians, too, have the freedom to exercise their professional judgment and *not* buy such books. Under the "equal protection" clause of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, librarians may decide that racist or sexist books deny minority and female children "equal protection." In addition, many librarians believe that, while no controversial idea must be kept away from children, attacks on a child's person, such as on his* sexual or racial identity, are quite different from attacks on his ideas.

Children's ideas, like adults' ideas, should be challenged in order to develop or to change. But a child's condition of being is unchangeable, irrevocable. Expose children to controversial ideas, by all means, but be careful about exposing them to attacks on their sex, their race, indeed any part of their human condition that they cannot change.

There are constructive ways of using potentially damaging books. For example, they can be used as teaching tools to help children explore the values presented in them and to develop children's ability to make critical judgments.

Organizations such as the Council on Interracial Books for Children have long been encouraging books that present minority people as human beings capable of dignity, strength, individuality and richness of culture. Such groups have been urging educators and parents to look at children's books in terms of the self-image they teach a minority child as well as the image of minority people that they project to a white child. Feminist groups, such as the National Organization for Women, have urged concern about the negative image of females portrayed in many books.

"Censorship" as a Buzzword

Against these modest efforts the cry of "censorship" is being increasingly raised. It is a false cry, a demagogic cry, which seeks to play on the genuine American aversion to censorship. The writers and intellectuals who lived through McCarthyism, who struggled to publish works critical of American society, are particularly and rightfully concerned by any talk of censorship. But "censorship" now has become a buzzword, used to block the examination of children's books for bias.

Such charges are intimidating to some librarians and others who want the freedom to consider the way minorities and females are depicted in children's literature. These concerns are especially important now that the Ku Klux Klan and other such groups are on the rise.

Advocating bias-free books is not censorship. Criticizing biased books is not censorship. Developing criteria and guidelines for selecting bias-free books is not censorship. Americans should not be misled, but should join with all those who are working for a democratic society free of racism and sexism.

THE VIEW FROM THIS CORNER

An article on "Minorities in Publishing" by Thomas Weyr printed in the October 17, 1980, *Publishers Weekly* deserves a careful reading and analysis. Unfortunately, the writer approached the subject with a conceptual focus on "the minority problem" in publishing, rather than on "the white problem" in the industry. This led him to give undue emphasis and credence to a host of tired, worn-out rationalizations about why the industry has so few people of color working anywhere above the mail room. These victim-blaming myths are worth reading, however, for they're repeated daily in every white-controlled institution to justify a lack of significant change.

More informative are the scattered statements that highlight some of the institutional policies and practices which inhibit Third World hiring and which directly contradict many of the victim-blaming myths. ("Short of going out and advertising for minority people, which we and other publishers don't do, I don't know where to look.") Comments by Black editors are particularly enlightening in this regard (Weyr dismisses them as "Black rhetoric"). The author doesn't label as rhetoric, but repeats as fact, such totally unsubstantiated statements as the one that newspaper staffs generally reflect the make-up of their community. His final assertion that class and "background" hold primacy over race in an industry "as fundamentally liberal and tolerant as publishing" would be laughable, given so much that precedes it, were it not for his use of the myth of Asian Americans as a "model minority" when he cites their "effortless transition" and "phenomenal" success as "proof" of his assertion.

PW would do well to commission an investigative reporter with at least a modicum of interest in analyzing why the industry has done so badly, rather than someone so intent on whitewashing the failure and blaming the victim. The fact that a number of racist policies and practices are apparent in spite of the biased reporting only heightens the sense that there's a real story waiting to be told.

*Our manuscript was, of course, nonsexist; this is one of several editorial changes made by the *Times*.

Like children's books, toys reflect the values of society and thereby perpetuate them. A survey of stores in the toy industry's world capital reveals the politics of toys

Toys Are Political, Too: A Guide to Gift-Giving the Year 'Round

By Geraldine L. Wilson

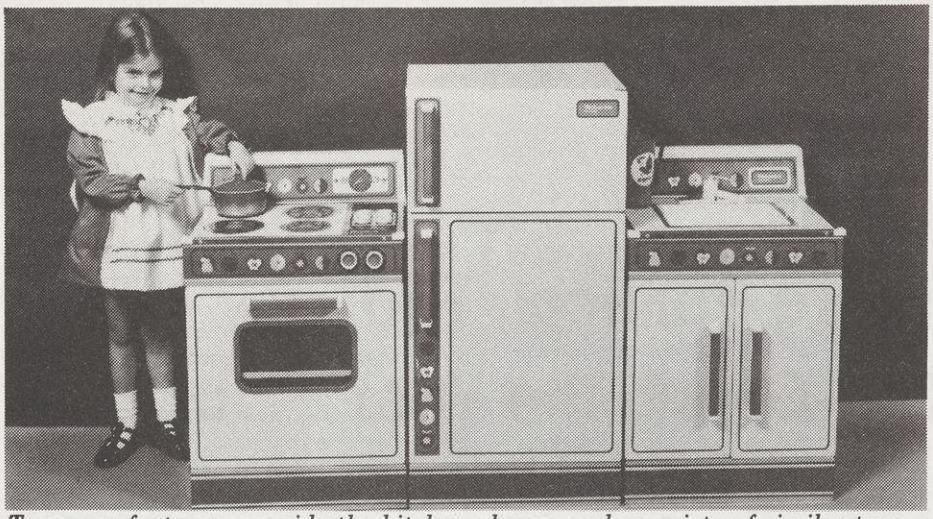
Geraldine L. Wilson recently surveyed a number of stores to see what toys are available to children this year. She visited a variety of stores ranging from the well-known F.A.O. Schwarz to numerous neighborhood stores, including those in Black, Puerto Rican and Asian American neighborhoods. Most of the stores she visited are in New York City, but since this is the capital of the U.S. toy industry, it is safe to assume that what she saw—or at least a sampling of what she saw—will be available in stores throughout the country.

The toys on sale made it clear that there is a political-economic context in which toys are conceived, manufactured, promoted and displayed in toy stores. Understanding the politics of toys and the climate of the toy store, says the author, "may help you hurdle the Miss Piggy toys, sprint past supercompetitive games, climb the mountain of Sesame Street trivia and tunnel through the barricade of Star Wars toys to find toys that one can give, confident that children's involvement with the toys you choose will add to their healthy development."

It is "bad vibes" I get in toy stores. I mean the Spirits of Evil be steppin round those places quite briskly. Draped in the stained clothing of our war dead, one set of spirits ushers you to the war games table; with leering grins they urge you to buy The Third Reich, Luftwaffe or The Assault on Crete. Female spirits, clanking chains of male domination and Euro-American cultural vanity, offer you Black and white Barbie Dolls and other adult female dolls sporting breasts and long blond hair. Tearfully they try to seduce you into buying a Perfume Maker or a Dream House in which to imprison the doll. Deadly spirits of colonialism, swathed in white, sporting diamonds and baubles bought with unpaid labor and exuding odors of torture and death, drift through the toy department carrying a dramatic red, white and blue box labeled "BRITISH SQUARE: The Strategy Game." Its box caption states: "Defeat your opponent with the tactics that forged the Empire." BAD VIBES!

Do you want toys that engage and fire children's imagination in constructive ways? Do you want toys that encourage thoughtful, rapt involvement? Do you want children to become independent and actively involved? If you think toys ought to embody and/or symbolize values that are human, anti-racist, anti-sexist and cooperative and that encourage and reinforce justice and concern, then you will have to *have a sharp eye* and *choose carefully,* for most of what you would like to buy, most of the gifts that will do those things might not even be in toy stores. But, look carefully at what is in toy stores. One, you will receive an education; two, most toy stores do have some surprises—toys that you can give children in good conscience.

Obviously, the amount of money available or budgeted for toys plays some role in their purchase. If you have more money to spend, you can—sometimes, not always—buy toys that are more attractive and well-made. If you are poor or choose to spend less money on toys, you can buy more toys that are badly made and ugly. I am not sure if the "ugly" that is visited on poor people is a matter of economics or disrespect, but it is pervasive and abundant. Take two similar dolls. The more expensive one is called, most elegantly, Sindy (I mean, check out the spelling). She's advertised as a pedigreed doll and is made in the Euro-American motherland—Kent, England. She is, in fact, a royal Barbie doll. You can purchase—each separately boxed—a tartan plaid formal, a queen's dress (white, of course) with a tiara, riding clothes (no bowling, please), and you can—look out now—buy her The Horse, an equine accessory for the equestrienne, if you will. I would not buy Sindy for the same reasons I wouldn't buy Barbie, even though Sindy looks better and is well made. Both dolls contribute to sexism and classism, but Barbie is ugly and cheap, particularly when compared to Sindy. There can be expensive ugly, but it is not pervasive like the ugly that is sold to the poor. It *does not* follow, however, that if you spend more money you can buy more toys that (a) foster attitudes of justice between boys and girls, (b) engender



Toy manufacturers provide the kitchen above—and a variety of similar toys—for the "little homemaker." Barbie dolls have been reinforcing sexism for 21 years; a panorama of models—from the earliest swim-suited model (center) to the newest "Beauty Secrets Barbie" (top)—is shown below.

cooperation among various racial and cultural groups, (c) uproot colonial attitudes, (d) strengthen attitudes of peace in children. So, be careful in expensive stores as well.

When it comes time to shop, wear a jack or marble round your neck for protection. Cloak yourself in the spirit-robe of Good Toys for Children, go off to the stores and look for gifts for the children on your holiday list. The information below, gathered during my visits to the toy stores, may help. Here's wishing you selective and careful shopping!

Cultural Repression in Toys

By and large, games and toys are Euro-American in origin—or they are presented as if they are. None of the games whose origins are rooted in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean or in the cultural groups native to North or South America are so credited. One apparent exception is Chinese Checkers, but that game did not actually originate in China! The word "Africa" does not appear on the packaged version of Owari, the mathematical game that can be found—with different names—in almost every African country. The U.S. version of the game is labeled *Kalah,* but there is, of course, no caption that says: "Play Kalaha and build math skills like the Africans do." No indeed-y. Nor does the package have any graphic symbol that faintly resembles anything African. Not one baseball game proclaims, "Hit that ancient Taino Indian ball; pretend you're in Puerto Rico before Columbus came."

One can find "Chinese puzzles"—complex knots and/or small metal or wooden constructions to take apart and re-assemble. Most of these puzzles on the market are well-made. Some are handsome, made in combinations of beautiful wood, leather and rope—but there is no indication of their origins, even though Chinese children and adults have used them or similar puzzles for centuries.

Not one doll is named Rachel or Sylvia, Johnnie Mae or Amina, Luce or Carmen, Yoshiko or Ginlin. Dolls' names are inevitably Anglo or Anglicized versions of Gaelic or Celtic names. In a whole floor to ceiling wall display of jigsaw puzzles, I saw no box with a scene or person from Africa, the Caribbean, South Pacific or Asia. In no toy store did I see games or toys that would say to U.S. children, this toy comes from this

particular culture which is very different from ours; it can contribute to your growth. Children not from those areas need to know these countries exist, and children of color need such "cultural mirrors."

Packaging

Many, too many, toys are expensively packaged. Most packages show photographs or drawings of people or situations. The drawings are either realistic or cartoons. (The cartoons are sometimes positive, but often they are negative caricatures, almost ridiculing the people, animals or situations they portray.) In general, packages are both racist and sexist.

Most packages show only white children—or, at best, a single Black child with one or more whites. On the rare occasion when more than one Black child appears in a group of white children, the Black children are placed off to one side and they are never together. A white child or two always stands between them. About four or five years ago a new trend began very quietly and slowly in children's picture books and adult publications. The Black male began to be shown "in the company of" the white female. The package for the game Chutes and Ladders provides a classic example. The box shows a total of 17 children; although women make up more than half the population, ten of the children are male. There are two Black children. They are not near each other. At the foot of one chute in the center of the box a Black boy and a blond girl are shown holding hands. At the top of the chute sits a Black girl by herself. It is as though the white children have surrounded—or captured—the Black boy.

In all cases, when only a boy and a girl are shown together, they are white. If a girl is shown with a boy, she watches while he plays with the toy. Most companies apparently believe girls should watch boys. I saw few active girls, but some women (not girls), Charlie's Angels, Wonder Woman and the like are running around packages doing things we hope no men would do.

Nowhere did I see a Black adult with a child on a package. I saw no Asian adults (with the exception of two women depicted in demeaning, suggestive roles on Master Mind and Clue), no Asian children, no Latinos or Native Americans (children or adults). Blonds are overwhelmingly shown. It's as though most people have decided to bleach rather than fight. At this point, I would not particularly like to see people of color on packages unless a major change occurs. Themes are superficial, often insulting.

The Gabriel Company is to be encouraged (not congratulated, for they also produce war games) because they seem to be the firm most serious about including Black children on packages. Some Gabriel boxes have a comparatively representative sample of Black children, boys and girls. Gabriel also shows more girls on packages than other companies, though not necessarily in a non-sexist way. However, Gabriel packages carry a highly visible Child Guidance Pledge to parents about the safety and durability of the toy. Bravo!

Bravo also to the Pressman Company. Most of the boxes of games they manufacture show a large photo of the toy. Period. Much packaging is unnecessary. What is necessary should be simple and bias-free.

If there is one place where we can expect to find Black people shown it is on packages for sports-related games and sports equipment, yes? No! I'm not talking about equipment for polo or lacrosse, which still remain upper-class, white sports; I am referring to baseball, football and basketball, sports in which people of color predominate or at least make up a sizeable minority. Here again, packaging conveys the sports world as all-white.

There are several different kinds of basketball games (even one you can play in the pool) and several brands of back stops. I saw only *one* box with a Black basketball player—and he was in the background (a blond man had captured the rebound). That kind of racism is gross. The boxes for basketball hoops and/or backboards all have suburban scenes on them. Not one features an urban playground in a Black community. None show any of the settings in which Black men (who make up 80-90 per cent of the professional teams) learned to play.

Baseball is another sport dominated by African Americans and Latinos (often of African descent) from Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Toy manufacturers show only white players. All players who endorse games are white. Apparently nobody asked record-breaker Willie Mays Aiken or Manny Trillo to endorse a product.

I did see one boxing game that featured Muhammad Ali, but interestingly enough, I saw it in only two stores and it was not well displayed, even though Ali is an outstanding athlete.

Girls—and women—are also not given enough visibility on sports equipment packages, though they are more visible than Black boys. I saw one white girl on a basketball game package—and a few (usually alone) on baseball games. White girls do appear in representative numbers on the boxes of tennis games (no Black children were shown).

If manufacturers can't resolve their racism and sexism, it would be better to see just the sports equipment displayed on the box. The use of photographs or drawings that include a variety of races using the equipment seems like a goal for 2084.

War Games and Other War Toys

What can be said about the startling display of war games and toys, particularly in F.A.O. Schwarz? Those who believe in the immediate threat of war (or even the long-term threat) might say, "War games will

Money! Money! Money!

Toys are *big* business. There are an estimated 150,000 toy products on the market, including 3-4,000 new items each year. An estimated 5.8 *billion* dollars will be spent on toys this year (sales at the manufacturing level were 4.2 billion dollars). These sales didn't just happen, of course. According to the LNA Multimedia Report Service published by Leading National Advertisers, advertising for toys, games and hobbycraft material amounted to $243,292,500 in 1979, with the overwhelming bulk of this sum going to TV.

Among the best-selling toys are electronic games (many of which are purchased for adults); sales of these games increased over 300 per cent last year—from 112 *million* dollars in 1978 to 375 *million* dollars in 1979. We can imagine what 1980 will bring. Other categories that showed strong growth in 1979 included board games, doll houses, furniture and "housekeeping toys," space toys, science toys and what the industry calls "fashion dolls."

Lego construction sets provide children with the opportunity for creative, imaginative play.

put steel in the spine of those youngsters; it will get them ready to fight in the possibility of war." There are also those who believe that providing war games and toys helps create a climate in which war is an "acceptable alternative."

The names of the war games that are being shown this year sound like a litany of death. No war is appropriate content for games, but many stores are carrying Luftwaffe, The Third Reich, Victory in the Pacific, Panzer Blitz, Tobruk (tank battles of WWII), Afrika Korps, Stalingrad (a "realistic WW II game"). The Longest Day is one heavy game (it must weigh ten pounds) and the caption on the box reads: "Assault, Build-Up and Break Out from Normandy. June-August 1944. 5 scenarios. Russian troops, etc." It's frightening.

There seem to be fewer guns around, perhaps because of New York's recent law against handguns for adults. But they are available in most toy stores. They seem to be more visible in poorer communities, probably because the citizens there have less control about what is sold in their neighborhood stores. There are military and western type rifles, pistols of various kinds, cap repeater guns, "space guns" in many space toy sets, and some B-B rifles. In smaller neighborhood stores, there are distressing numbers of cowboy pistols in holsters.

There is every indication that guns are even more widely available outside of the New York City area. The magazine *Toys, Hobbies & Crafts* states in its May, 1980, issue that the "Sales of all types of guns—from western to space to detective—are on the upswing again" and that guns and holsters, a "category that bordered on extinction during the anti-war movement, has made a significant comeback." It is perhaps not surprising that toy stores continue to display—if not push—such weaponry. "We can double our money with this category," enthuses one merchant. Of course, the problem is adults who insist that guns make nice gifts for children.

Those who think war games are harmful for children, adults and other living things will probably cry desperately, "Where are the games about peace? Why don't manufacturers make and market them?" Do people really celebrate peace? Can't children play peace? Peace is quiet, though, isn't it? Busy, but quiet. Because peace does not explode warm bodies, spill blood and defoliate lush forests, is it considered dull? Why are building schools and hospitals or starting farms considered humdrum, boring?

Perhaps guns and war games are the legacy of decades of Cowboys-and-Indians, which is, after all, a war game. Adults have to decide what kind of world they want—and manufacture toys accordingly. Sweden has banned war toys, guns and other such "toys." This nation would do well to follow.

Dolls

In a society that has made having children a low priority, baby-to-toddler age dolls can fill an important function. Caring for baby dolls can encourage caring behaviors that both boys and girls need to develop.

But there are serious problems with dolls. The dolls that fill the stores are like Ivory soap—99 44/100 per cent pure . . . white. In all but one store that I visited, that statistic held up. Brunettes should picket Rappaport's in New York City, which featured 12 dolls in one window. All but one of the dolls were blond—even Miss Piggy. The exception was a nice Black Effanbee doll, barely visible as she peeked out from a far corner. Maybe she was oppressed by that unrealistic proportion of blondness.

Although few stores stock them, good Black dolls *are* available. F.A.O. Schwarz carries a representative selection of Black dolls. Those by Effanbee are particularly nice, for they make baby dolls with cloth bodies and hard rubber heads, hands and feet. The Gerber line also includes Black dolls (gussied up in pink and blue; buy them, then change their clothes and write Gerber a protest letter). Amore, an Italian line, makes a beautiful Asian, a Black and an olive-skinned southern European or Latino-looking doll, in addition to the light northern European doll. Bravo! Bravo! It's a pity that they are expensive and that the Black doll does not have "natural hair." (The Effanbee dolls are more reasonable and more widely available.) The Sasha dolls (which look more like young teenagers) come in Asian, African and European flesh tones (and one of the dark brown dolls has an Afro). But the Sasha dolls are bothersome because they *all* look alike—white, Black, yellow, brown, boy and girl. It's a 1984 doll. The clothes are great, though—walking

shoes, backpacks, skirts, ponchos, jeans. Not found in F.A.O. Schwarz, but available elsewhere, are Black, Asian, Latino and white dolls produced by the Shindana Company.

Most dolls are not anatomically correct. I don't feel they necessarily have to be, even if you want to teach children constructive attitudes about birth and reproduction. The public display of and the exploitation of sex in advertising and other media, coupled with ill-considered societal perspectives and attitudes about sex, make it unlikely that adults can handle questions that children will have about anatomically correct dolls in a constructive way. In any case, Archie Bunker's grandson is the only "correct" male baby doll that I saw prominently displayed. Well! No further comment!

Probably the ultimate in U.S. classism, racism and sexism in dolls is the Calvin Klein doll, who comes as either a blond or brunette (both white), with all kinds of designer clothes, including a sleek black formal with red feathers around the bottom. That doll is not about children's play. Choose the doll you give carefully!

At another time and place a long treatise should be done about dolls and their role, often destructive, in children's play. For now it is enough to say that dolls are quite political in their function. They are carriers of societal values and most often reinforce both racism and sexism. White dolls in this society are culturally and racially repressive because they symbolize European and Euro-American values. The continued use of white dolls in families of color and in preschools, especially those that children of color attend, is dangerous to children's development. The dolls that stress wardrobes, dating and popularity, etc. reinforce sexism as well.

Vehicles

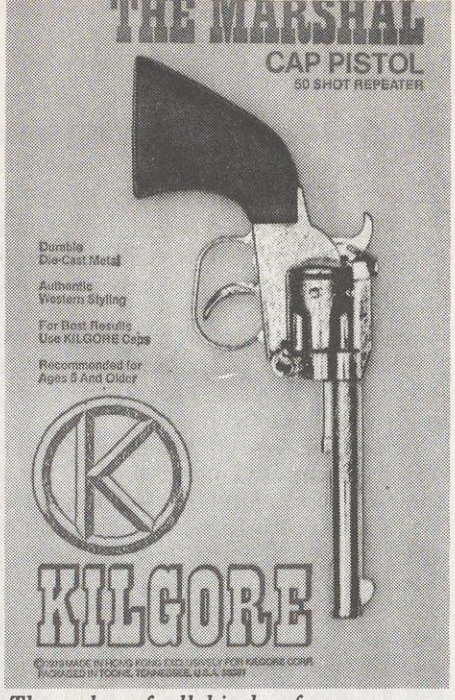
Toy stores have lots of vehicles: chariots, carriages, motorbikes, trucks, construction vehicles, trains of all kinds and Cars! Cars! Cars!—big ones, middle-sized ones, small, smaller and tiny ones. In the midst of an energy crisis, how many cars do we want children to have? That's a question of values, yes? Moreover, the packaging of even the smallest cars usually conveys questionable values: great speed (although the speed limit in most states is 55 MPH), white male superiority, the police presence and the concept of "The Machine." Toy cars seem rooted in and expressive of a Euro-centric superiority. Their packages show symbols of white U.S. male power symbolized by (1) TV police characters (representative of oppression to people of color) and (2) superheroes like Superman (symbols of paternal power who roar out of the sky like God and save good, usually white, people). For instance, one kit includes figures of Starsky and Hutch frisking a suspect who is sprawled against the car (a lovely gift for a Latino child in the South Bronx). Or you can buy Kojak who has just leaped out of his car with his gun drawn.

Salespeople I spoke with said almost no one buys cars for girls, and only a very few girls buy cars or trucks on their own. (Maybe that's a blessing.) Boys carry three and four cars in their pockets and mount collections in their bedrooms (one store offers a $3,000 Mobile Habitat for children; for less, you can buy a Rollaway Room, a box that unfolds into a 76-inch square room).

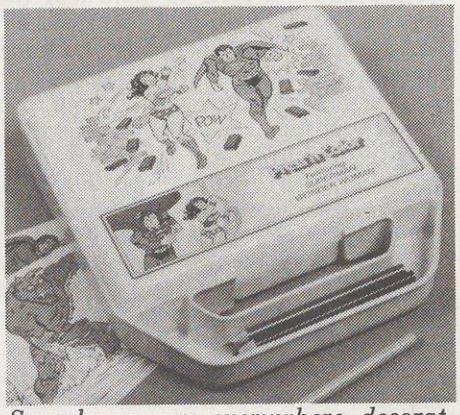
The vehicles that come with figures (or that have them affixed) always have a male in the driver's seat—and a white male at that. I saw no Black, Latino, Native American or Asian men in any vehicle (though Fisher-Price, whose trucks have men drivers, does have a couple of "swarthy" men with big, handle-bar mustaches). If you're a fan of Barbie or Charlie's Angels—how could you be?—you *can* find them with cars, but here the emphasis is on the personality and not on the vehicle. (In other words, these are still "girls' toys," and in any case, they express the same values as the rest of the cars.)

Women—usually blond—show up in the vehicle category primarily in relation to horses or other animals. I saw a Dolphin-Arium on the flat-bed of a tractor trailer with a tiny blond lady on top of the cab enticing dolphins through a hoop. Women are in the covered wagons of the Pioneer train. Queen Elizabeth sits primly beside Prince Philip in an amazing replica of the Silver Jubilee royal carriage drawn by six white horses. There are only a few—very few—women astride a horse here and there when the animal is included with a vehicle (often a circus or train).

All kinds of trucks and construction vehicles seem like a lot more fun than



The sales of all kinds of guns are on the up-swing again, after a slowdown during the anti-war movement.



Superheroes are everywhere, decorating a multitude of products. A "portable light-up drawing desk" is shown above.

The packages for toy cars usually emphasize symbols of white power, as do those shown at the left above.

Ten Points to Consider about Toys for Children

• Play is very important for children. It is critical for the development of imagination, creative thought, problem solving and other related skills. Play also contributes to the development of positive attitudes about self and others. In addition, concerned adults can see to it that play builds positive attitudes toward those who are different racially and culturally.

• In spite of some theories of infant behavior and early childhood development (particularly those of the past 30 years), very few toys are required for children's optimal development.

• Too many toys teach children about the excess accumulation of property, result in superficiality rather than depth, and militate against the development of attention, concentration and problem-solving.

• Poorly made toys become a battleground for adults and children, especially when money is scarce or a toy is expensive. Such toys are easily broken when played with in normal fashion. It is not fair to punish children for the sins of the manufacturer and of a careless shopper.

• Some toys actually trigger aggressive and/or violent play in children. Such play should not be punished if you purchased and/or permit their use. Decide if you will accept violent play from children. If you won't, then select appropriate toys.

Children may use "non-violent" toys in a violent way. Develop constructive ways of making clear to them that violence and aggression are self-destructive and harmful to others. If the child is often violent, check his or her television habits! There is a relationship. Of course, set reasonable limits for the use of all toys when appropriate and necessary.

• Manufactured toys have come to be preferred by many adults and children. There is a quiet movement growing in the country that is working to legitimize, once again, toys and gifts made by hand. Begin to make or buy handmade playthings for children. Do not join children in disparaging handmade or homemade toys. Contribute to the child's understanding of the importance of skilled labor and what it means when someone "spends" time to make a toy.

• Careful choice of toys can help children develop responsibility, accountability, cooperation. Look for such toys; they are beginning to be produced, usually by small manufacturers, co-operatives and/or peace organizations.

• Do not use toys to bribe children. Do not permit children to extort toys or shake you down for what they want. Do not feel badly or guilty if you do not buy and give them toys they expect. Television has made some children demanding consumers. (Overheard, one little boy whining, "Mommy buy me this. It's only $29.95.")

• "Toys Are Us" says Letty Cottin Pogrebin in *Growing Up Free,* which contains a useful chapter on toys. More precisely, they are expressions of the values of any society. Very often the toys and/or their packaging convey racist, sexist, classist, and, often, urbanist values; remove such packages before giving the child the toy. Be sure that your child's toys emphasize constructive values.

• Plan to spend time assisting children in the use, care and maintenance of toys. Be sure there's adequate space (no raggedy box, please) for storage. Be sensitive to the kind of lead time children need in order to complete play and put toys away, as carefully as clothing and books are put away. The process of completing play and putting toys away is one in which children learn important skills and processes.

Before shopping, make a list of the children for whom you plan to buy gifts. Think about their toy collections. Are there too many? If so, buy that child a non-toy gift—a book, a Folkways or Spoken Arts record of children's songs or stories from African, Asian or Caribbean cultures.

If you are buying toys, consider what toys would be a constructive addition to the child's collection. (Remember that a collection should inform, instruct, inspire and provide what used to be called "wholesome fun." Toys from different cultures of color and that result in life-affirming, imaginative play should be included.) What toy would enhance the child's life and extend his/her play? Try to decide what you want to buy before you go shopping. Take your list with you. Then, good luck!

cars to me, and they can inspire thoughtful, cooperative play. Many are sturdy and well-made. They can be used to do constructive things like carry food, rescue people, put out fires, deliver books to schools, build new housing for everyone. Consider trucks for girls too. And consider passing by the cars; children often use them to chase other cars with demonic speed in deadly play, plotting make-believe crashes in which people are killed.

Superheroes

Superhero toys are everywhere, and superhero emblems and symbols are affixed to everything imaginable: cars, a variety of games, phonographs, toys, clothing, school bags and on and on. In addition to being almost always white males, these superheroes are not part of a family, they're not married, have no friends, don't eat or sleep. Ain't even got no girlfriends.

Questions of sexism and racism are certainly relevant in a discussion of superheroes. Not many superheroine toys have been created, although one sees a few Wonder Woman toys and symbols. However, Wonder Woman is an after-thought, like the *ine* on the word *heroine.* Like, oh, we forgot. Pardon us, oh, of course we'll include you. There are almost no Black superheroes, but that's not so bad. (I saw a Black "superman" type person on one box. He was shown head-on with arms spread out, kind of floating. The white superheroes were diving down or diving up, obviously going somewhere to do something. Ho hum!) The characteristics of white male superheroes are hardly worth emulating. Superheroes don't challenge the status quo, promote equality, root out the Klan, assist in voter registration. A superhero is benevolent, paternal, saves helpless people and solves problems while ordinary humans look on paralyzed with awe. One Black mother of a three-year-old, who vows she will never buy or permit her boy to accept superhero toys, says that she wants him to know that societal problems are solved collectively by people in communities that are concerned.

Encouraging Constructive Play

The point, of course, is the recognition that girls and boys can begin to change their perceptions, responses and attitudes about the racism, sex-

ism and classism they learn in this society *if* we can encourage constructive play. That kind of play—and the toys that support it—can contribute to positive attitudes about (a) the different kinds of people in the society, (b) the different kinds of work people do, (c) the variety of beliefs people have, (d) the cultural orientations of people of Southern Europe and people of color and (e) the need for equality between men and women. In addition, play can encourage children—if they have some time, some space and appropriate toys—to become adults who work and struggle against those ideas and practices that are destructive in the society.

It would seem important, for instance, to give girls and boys all kinds of materials (clay, logs, blocks—items hard to find in toy stores!) so that they might "play at" building houses (an involving activity) rather than giving girls doll houses or mansions that they can fill with furniture (a passive activity). House play then could involve construction and also care and maintenance rather than acquisition and decoration. (But where are the games, toys and children's books that inform children about building schools, hospitals or decent low-cost housing and that emphasize concepts of cooperation, mutual support, ecology, healthful living, taking care of older people?)

We must consider the range of interlocking systems that affect how our children learn racist, sexist and other negative values. We must be persistent in our analysis. The O. J. Simpson doll has been recommended as one that serves as a self-concept builder for Black children and an anti-racist doll for white children. However, O. J. Simpson has publicly indicated in profound ways—like making derogatory remarks about the struggle to save Black colleges—a disturbing lack of commitment to change. The choice of toys is often—not always—that tough, that painful. Analysis is that necessary for African American, Caribbean, Latino, Native American, Asian and white parents.

But, take heart. There are some great toys. Look for them, ask for them at the toy store *or* make them. How about tops, gyroscopes (young parents may not even know what they are!)? How about kaleidoscopes? Or jacks (I found them behind doors in two neighborhood stores). Rappaport's has pogo sticks. What about a Rotary press with rubber letters? Children could print a family newsletter. Bean bags; make them, or buy them if you must. Consider toys made from household items. There are good chemistry and biology sets.

My big vote goes to the Lego construction set. Also, there's a marvelous set called Sprocketeers, which is like a plastic Tinker Toy set; because its vari-colored tubes are flexible and of different lengths, they add a dimension to play missing from wooden Tinker Toys. Such toys help children become flexible, creative, imaginative. Marvelous colored markers and pencils can be found. Alphabet games. In Rappaport's, I saw a marvelous unadorned (no racist or sexist cartoons plastered all over it) wooden rocking horse with smooth runners; I also saw an "old-fashioned" sit-in-and-pedal fire truck. Bravo! Stamp and coin centers are getting shoved around or put out of some toy stores, but look hard if coins or stamps interest you or the child you're buying for. Ring toss sets, rubber horse shoes, shuffle boards (some of us city adults *must* be willing to buy these and then accompany children outside so they can have vigorous play. Or we must set aside areas in apartment buildings where children can play with these toys.) There are great jigsaw puzzles. (Look carefully though! Avoid racist, sexist and class-coded ones. Make some!)

Consult the Tupperware catalog; its small toy collection carries no racist or sexist symbols and are not classist. They are safe. They are fun. Run, do not walk; fly, do not run, to the Metropolitan Art Museum, the Brooklyn Art Museum, the Museum of Natural History, the Studio Museum of Harlem or El Museo del Barrio. There are some wonderful things in the museum gift shops, although everything they carry is not necessarily anti- or non-racist or non-sexist. Some of the items are expensive. But I also saw enough reasonably priced, attractive, delightful gifts—toys, books, games, dolls from different countries, origami and other kinds of craft sets—to make me rejoice. Send for museum catalogs. If there are no major museums where you live, call or write to the museums mentioned above for assistance.

Holiday celebrations ought to be planned so that children learn the history and experience the spirit of the holiday; they should also have opportunities to practice and participate in the important traditions and ceremonies. Shop carefully, wrap or tie the gifts for children with your concern and give these gifts with love and warmth! □

PACT (Public Action Coalition on Toys) works to encourage the development of safe and sensible quality toys and to discourage toys that injure, exploit or limit a child's growth, safety and welfare. The group has issued guidelines on selecting toys. For further information, write PACT at 222 E. 19 St., New York, N.Y. 10003.

Do We Need This?

As if all the discouraging news in the accompanying article weren't depressing enough, we have just learned (thanks to Sandy Berman of the Hennepin County Library) about a new game called Public Assistance.

According to an AP dispatch, this $15.95 game features "able-bodied welfare recipients" who collect money by snatching purses, having illegitimate children, stealing hubcaps, drug dealing and engaging in prostitution—all this while trying to avoid entrapment in the "working person's rut."

Carl Snowden, an Annapolis, Maryland, community activist, has charged the game with being "obnoxious" and "bordering on racism." (We're not so sure it only *borders*.) The NAACP regional office for Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C. is opposing the game and asking stores in the area to refrain from distributing it. So far Hutzler Brothers, a Maryland department store chain, and Hechts, a national chain, have agreed not to carry the game. Readers may wish to mount boycotting actions as well.

About the Author

GERALDINE L. WILSON, former director of the New York City Headstart Regional Training Office at New York University, has worked for many years with parents and children as a teacher. She is presently completing her doctorate in teacher training and curriculum development.

Once again, praise and awards have been given to a book that supposedly depicts the Black experience in a positive way—and once again the book has been found to convey racist messages. Words by Heart *is examined in the article below and in those that begin on page 16 and page 18*

Words by Heart: A Black Perspective

By Rudine Sims

The following pages are devoted to an extended examination of *Words by Heart,* a skillfully written novel for young adults that has won wide acclaim, received the International Reading Association's Children's Book Award and was nominated for the American Book Award. At a time of increasing racist attacks on Black people (white violence is central to the story) and white society's continuing retreat from earlier commitments to confront racism, the enthusiasm for *Words by Heart* is distressing. In addition, the favorable response may encourage more books with similar themes and perhaps lead to TV and movie versions of the book. We are grateful to the various writers who have contributed their special insights, which serve to raise the consciousness of all of us concerned about children's literature.

Words by Heart is the latest book honored by the literary establishment even though it perpetuates negative images and stereotypes. An American Book Award nominee and winner of the 1980 International Reading Association's Children's Book Award, it has been praised in many publications (see box). It joins such books as *The Cay, Sounder* and *The Slave Dancer* in purportedly presenting a sympathetic picture of Blacks even as it misinforms readers and reinforces racist attitudes. Like the other prize winners, it has been honored for the excellence of the author's craft, but it is flawed because it presents an outsider's perspective on Black lives and fails to recognize the political, racial and social realities that shape the Black Experience in this country. And like *The Cay,* it features the death of a "noble" Black man, that very expendable literary creation.

Based on a short story published in 1968, *Words by Heart* shares with other late sixties children's fiction about Blacks the implied purpose of raising the consciousness of white readers to racial injustice. *The Horn Book* suggests that "it dramatizes the Black people's long struggle for equal opportunity and freedom," but the dramatization fails because the statements the book makes about the human condition are fallacious. Unlike books written from a Black perspective—Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry,* for example—*Words by Heart,* for all its literary artistry, fails to do more than evoke pity and compassion through heartrending sentimentality. (*School Library Journal* labeled the book "a finely honed heartwrencher.")

On the surface this is a well-written, poignant story, offering such time-honored themes as "Love thy neighbor" and "Overcome evil with good." (A plot summary appears on the next page.) The Sills family is portrayed as warm, close and strong. The father is, in many ways, admirable—wanting a better life for his family and placing a high value on education. However, the portrait of this Black family, supposedly seen from its center (Lena's point of view), is out of focus. The viewpoint remains that of an ethnocentric outsider. In its totality, the book perpetuates some negative images, some tired stereotypes and some implicit themes that are, from a Black perspective, questionable at the very least. There are both major and minor problems.

One problem, indicative of the

Words by Heart Praised by Media

The following children's book review journals gave high praise to *Words by Heart*:

Booklist of the American Library Association (ALA): "A moving story of triumph over hatred. . . ." (April 15, 1980). Selected as an ALA Notable Children's Book of 1979 and also as one of ALA's 1979 Best Books for Young Adults.

School Library Journal: " . . . a finely honed heartwrencher" (May, 1979). Selected by *SLJ* as one of the Best Books of the Year.

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books: " . . . an impressive first novel about race relationships and non-violence" (June, 1979).

Horn Book Magazine: " . . . poignancy without sentimentality, tragedy without melodrama" (June, 1979).

The following newspapers and general magazines also gave the book high praise: *The New York Times* (August 26 and December 4, 1979) and selected as one of the *New York Times'* Best Books of the Year; *The Chicago Times* (September 9, 1979); *Christian Science Monitor* (July 9, 1979); *The New Republic* (June 23, 1979).

A brief analysis of the reviews listed above is instructive. Nine of the 12 reviews acclaim passivity as an answer to oppression; none of the reviews question it. Racism is not mentioned in any of the reviews. The following are the euphemisms used: *personal misfortune, prejudice, hostility, resentment, hatred, bigotry, bias, discrimination,* and *fear and animosity.*

In addition, the book was nominated for an American Book Award and given the Children's Book Award by the International Reading Association (the IRA award is given annually to a writer whose first or second published book shows unusual literary promise).

It is worth noting that the only critical view of the book that has appeared to date was by a Black reviewer. Kristin Hunter's review, "Blurred View of Black Childhood," appeared in the June 10 *Washington Post;* an excerpt appears on page 14.

book's perspective, is the tendency to associate things black with things negative. There is the minor incident when Ben takes one look at a new kitten and names him Old Nick because he is "a little black devil." There are uninviting descriptions of the Black characters. Ben Sills' hands are "perched on his knees like spiders ready to jump." Lena sees in her reflection "spiky plaits and a rascal face." At the contest, "Then everybody looked at Lena, smiling behind their eyes because she was different and comical looking, oozing like dark dough over the edges of last year's Sunday dress." No matter that *everybody* in this case includes her family, who would hardly view her that way. The rest of the audience is "an orchard of pink-cheeked peaches," and the standard of beauty that is invoked reflects their ethnocentric perspective.

The main problem with Scattercreek, too, seems to have been that it was all Black. While the move west represented potential freedom from the oppression prevalent in the South of that era, the book suggests that Scattercreek also provided refuge, but was inferior because it was an all-Black town. Sills explains that because they could not live in some Southern towns, Black people made "their own communities like Scattercreek, with their own schools and churches and stores. It eases some of the trouble." And "She [Claudie] felt safe when we moved to Scattercreek." But then he says, ". . . it was easier there, but I wasn't proud of myself." Earlier he had said, "I wanted *more* for us than Scattercreek" (emphasis added). What is not clear is what Bethel Springs offers that is more, and why he was not proud to live in an all-Black town. He does cite his right as a U.S. citizen to live where he chooses, but the implication is that he chose an all-white town because there was something shameful about living in an all-Black one. This attitude contrasts to positive descriptions, like those given by Zora Neale Hurston of the richness of life in Eatonville, Florida, the "pure Negro" town in which she was born.

It is through Sills' talks with Lena that the most insidious messages about the nature of racism occur. Sills stubbornly refuses to acknowledge racism as the motivation for the hatred the Haneys—and others—express. There are threats and name-calling, the mysterious death of the Sills' dog, a knife thrust through a fresh loaf of bread the night Lena wins the contest. Yet Sills insists: "This is a good town we've come to . . . they took us in." He attributes whites' behavior to their fear of change or to their hopelessness and frustrations with being poor sharecroppers, rather than to racism. He proposes that the white people's actions be met with understanding: "It's not your place to judge people," he tells Lena. "That's for God." When Sills' wife Claudie urges him to tell Lena about racism and about the family's earlier experiences in the South, Sills softens the telling with the suggestion that the isolation Claudie experiences in a white town exaggerates her fears that those "bad old times" could happen again. Although Ben does recognize that, even in Bethel Springs, some cannot accept them, for the most part Claudie's fears are made to seem almost unreasonable in this "good town." (Moreover, the "bad old times" were hardly past since this story takes place during the period historians call "The Nadir" because it was a time of intensified violence and brutality against Blacks; there is no sense of this reality in the book, however.)

When discussing the family's history and the Black Experience in general, Sills refuses to place the blame where it belongs: "They reconstructed us—one little loss at a time. . . . Somehow we got put in our place again." The anonymous, unspecified forces at work are never labeled, never named. The violence that Black people experienced in the post-Civil War period is only touched on in one brief paragraph and, in fact, some of the historical information given is not correct. (Black people did not, for example, only *begin* to read and write after the Civil War; freed people aside, many slaves learned to read and write, even when it was illegal. And to say about the Civil War, "all those people fighting for our rights," as Sills does, is to minimize the role that Black people played in fighting for their own freedom.) The entire section is clearly a contrived bit of writing designed to bring in some historical information.

The most overtly racist behavior comes from unsympathetic characters whose behavior can be "explained away" in large part by their situation or personality traits. The Haneys are stereotypes of poor-white Southerners—lazy, hard-drinking, irresponsible, gun-toting males, dirty children and women kept barefoot, pregnant and silent. Another prejudiced person in the story is Mrs. Chism, the woman for whom both Sills and Haney work and from whom Ben Sills rents his home. She is an eccentric elderly woman—lonely, unhappy, seemingly oblivious to the effects of placing Sills and Haney in

WORDS BY HEART: PLOT SUMMARY

Words by Heart by Ouida Sebestyen (Atlantic Monthly Press/Little, Brown, 1979) takes place in 1910. Ben Sills and his family, who are Black, have moved from Scattercreek, an all-Black town in the South, to Bethel Springs, an otherwise all-white town in the Southwest. Ben Sills rents the property on which he lives and grows cotton as a cash crop. Hard-working, Bible-quoting, dependable, he also earns extra money by doing odd jobs for the landowner. Some of these jobs had previously been done by Henry Haney, a poor, hard-drinking, lazy and bigoted white who sharecrops for the same landowner.

Sills' daughter, twelve-year-old Lena, wins a school contest involving the recitation of Bible verses (words by heart) and otherwise displays a quickness of mind and hunger for learning that is disquieting to the local residents. Sills, in return for the loan of some books to Lena, agrees to mend the landowner's fences, a job that had once been Haney's.

Haney's teen-age son Tater follows Sills when he goes to mend the fences and shoots him. Then Tater is himself seriously injured when thrown by his frightened horse. Lena arrives and finds her dying father desperately trying to keep Tater alive rather than trying to get help for himself. Before Sills dies, he extracts from Lena a promise that she will help Tater and, by implication, not hate him. Lena delivers Tater to his family and takes her father's body home. She refuses to identify her father's murderer, saying she will "let God handle it."

competition with each other and indifferent to the effects of her sharp-tongued barbs on other people. Neither her own children nor her neighbors like her, and only one person attends what was meant to be her large and elaborate dinner party. The pompous school teacher at one point asserts the inferiority of Blacks and is disputed by Lena and a white boy whose father then forbids him to associate further with Lena. Predictably in a book of this type, at the end of the story the boy openly and publicly defies his father to befriend Lena's family, an act which lacks credibility. In any case, the portrayal of the "bad guys" as mostly atypical or unlikeable people projects a picture of a utopian town where racism is an aberration.

Moreover, the cumulative picture of Ben Sills is the prototype of the "good Negro"—hard-working, Bible-quoting, understanding, passive, loving and forgiving towards whites, and willing to "wait on the Lord" until whites are ready to accept his family. (Sills' favorite Bible verse is "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. . . .") Sills lives to serve others—and those others (outside of his family) are white. When Lena asks why her family must always work for others, Sills replies: "What's wrong with working for people? That's what we are here for, to serve each other. . . ." That is a questionable generalization, since no whites "serve" any Blacks in the story. This stereotypic portrait of passivity does not advance the art of writing about the Black Experience, and in the late 1970's it need not have been perpetuated.

The characterization of Sills will be justified by the fact that he had wanted to be a minister, but it is false to equate godliness with passivity. Furthermore, Black ministers have been in the forefront of the struggle for freedom. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was non-violent, but not passive. His counsel was not to "wait on the Lord," but to recognize "why we can't wait."

Many works, both fictional and historical, provide alternative portraits. Nate Shaw's story, told in *All God's Dangers*, and even the popular *Roots*, suggest that Ben Sills is unreal. Even James Weldon Johnson, a staunch integrationist, wrote in 1934 in *Negro Americans, What Now?*, "There come times when the most

"Ben Sills of *Words by Heart* could exist only in white fiction. By creating such a creature the author perpetuates the myth of the 'docile Negro' who turns the other cheek, leaves vengeance to the Lord, etc. This does a disservice to young readers—Black and white alike. It is a danger to young white readers who may grow up believing that such mythical creatures exist. And it is insulting to Black children who know instinctively how they would have dealt with the realities of the situation."—Harlem Writers Guild.

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"It seems strange that a book so filled with racial stereotypes, with ignorant, evil, prejudiced white people and their racist treatment of their Black neighbors, should be chosen for special honors by the literary establishment. The book is plastered with verses from the Bible—and that is all right! But all the 'love thy neighbor' and 'they that wait upon the Lord' verses are in the mouths of the Black people in the story; the white people continue to break the law and 'prosper.' We know this does happen, but this is hardly the story that we want to 'honor' in the 1980's."—Emily V. Gibbes, Executive Director, Division of Education and Ministry, and Associate General Secretary, National Council of Churches.

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"The most puzzling and distressing aspect of Lena's character development is that she begins as a proud fighter and ends as a model of meek Christian forbearance, exactly, as Claudie observes with resignation, like her saintly father. The Bible contains, along with everything else, counsel for both modes of behavior, making Lena's transformation from sword-wielder to cross-bearer especially difficult. . . .

One of the author's best phrases is: 'Something always comes to fill the empty places. . . . Something comes to take the place of what you lose.' But if Sebestyen's brand of meek, turn-the-other cheek Christianity is supposed to fill the voids left by Malcolm and, yes, Martin, then we Blacks and our youngsters will be in even deeper trouble."—Kristin Hunter, author of *Guests in the Promised Land* and other books for children and adults, in her review of the book which appeared in the *Washington Post* June 10.

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"The reason that Jesus Christ could forgive his enemies was because he was God and God does not die. *Words by Heart* pretends to deal with real people, ordinary Black people in the south. But in fact it perpetuates the evil concept that the victim should strive for nobility of spirit under the axe of the executioner."—June Jordan, poet, author of *Fannie Lou Hamer* and other children's books.

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"In 1969, I wrote in the *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin* about William Armstrong's book *Sounder* in a statement entitled 'White Authors and Lack of Authenticity.' I wrote: 'Truly meaningful writing about the Black experience must come, of course, from those who have lived and know it—from Black people. That's what *authenticity* is about. Anything else, though possibly of merit, is *synthetic*.'

Now ten years later, Ouida Sebestyen, a white author, publishes a story focused on a young Black girl. The jacket copy states that *Words by Heart* grew out of the author's familiarity with the west and her own family's struggle against hardship. Why didn't the author write *that* story? That sense of her *specific* life in white rural America would have allowed the reader to find out more about poor whites, their class differences, their struggles. I believe by forcing the story into a Black context the writer substantially weakened the value of her work; there had to be distortions and omissions when the book dealt with a Black life style because the author had not lived it.

If you do not deal with that which is closest to you, your deepest inner feelings, pain, joy and fears, it will be just that much more difficult to balance and combine all those opposing forces and make them sing."—Tom Feelings, illustrator of *To Be a Slave* and other children's books.

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"It saddens me greatly that the International Reading Association would not be more sensitive to the needs of Black children. The book they honored gives white children a false picture of Black families and, therefore, does a disservice to white children, too."—Sharon Bell Mathis, author of *The Hundred Penny Box* and other books for children.

"Another in the long tradition of books that belie history, belie reality, that depict Black people as altruistic to the point of masochism, *Words by Heart* is so extreme that it is ludicrous. (Was it written tongue in cheek? Picture a Black man, bleeding and dying, crawling desperately through the brush to save the life of the white man who shot him.) This book should have been laughed into oblivion. Instead its glorification by the critical establishment has made it a danger to children and a challenge to all who care about them."—Eloise Greenfield, author of *Honey, I Love* and other books for children.

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The author of *Words by Heart* may have intended a tribute to the human spirit. What she actually does is mindlessly celebrate the gradual disintegration of a spirit. One feels that Lena will forsake her drive for success—not because she is weak, but because she is Black. This makes the book racist.

The IRA award to this book implies that it in some way illuminates the implications of race in our lives. The only thing this book and its wide acclaim really reveal is the general legitimizing of a long and insidious tradition. That is to say, it has finally become admirable to promote—in the name of the Lord—the mindless destruction of Black ambition wherever and however it makes its appearance."—George Ford, illustrator of *Paul Robeson* and other children's books.

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"Ben's religious style is clearly that which Dr. Benjamin Mays has categorized, in his signal work, *The Negroes' God*, as accommodationist. It was survivalist in nature and compensatory in that it substituted spiritual blessings for justice. Papa faces his 'boss' fully docile. He is the living portrait of the Biblical injunction, 'Servants obey your masters.' The characterization of Ben does not show acquaintance with that phase of God of which the Apostle Paul wrote when he penned, 'For freedom Christ has set us free; do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.' Ben's sacrificial love puts to rout the admonition of Martin Luther King to 'Not participate in evil.' It blinds the reader to the good news of Christ the liberator.

Lena, in spite of her struggle to grow into a meaningful, liberating religious faith, is at the end securely captured by her Papa's religious style. At the opening of the book, Lena is ready to move into a style of Christianity that allows her to be assertive, perhaps even aggressive. The words that she learns by heart are invitations to the fullness of life. She wants to become the most effective person she can possibly be. Some of us would perceive that salvation is precisely the becoming of what God has created a person to be in spite of self and society; when one becomes fully herself by the grace of God, she is *saved*. It is then that the Gospel has made full impact upon a life. Underclass peoples who have enjoyed such an experience come into conflict with those who consider themselves 'the establishment.' Lena is thus embarked on a collision course with the establishment when her developing faith is subverted by the inappropriate, survival oriented, accommodationist religion of her beloved Papa.

I view the religious aspect of this book as extremely pernicious. Destruction is portrayed as victory. It holds out that which was a religious necessity for slaves and their immediate offspring as a model for Christian living in today's world. Let the reader beware."—Wilbur T. Washington, Consultant for Black Christian Education, Reformed Church in America.

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"In *Words by Heart*, the admonition of Dr. King to 'Love your enemy' is distorted and taken completely out of context. Dr. King's 'Love' is a revolutionary slogan calling people to struggle against racism and oppression. It precipitated a confrontation with evil. No so with *Words by Heart*, which advocates an abject submissiveness and complicity with oppression. I've known some uncle toms and gunga dins in my day, but none were so demeaningly humble as Lena's people."—John Oliver Killens, author of *A Man Ain't Nothin But a Man* for children and other books for adults.

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"I find this story unbelievable. The characters and their reactions to the situations are unreal. Ben's cowardice is demeaning. Readers will feel pity for Lena and others of the Sills family, and the pity will be smudged by contempt."—Lorenz Graham, author of *David He No Fear* and other books for children.

persistent integrationist becomes an isolationist, when he curses the white world and consigns it to Hell. This tendency toward isolation is strong because it springs from a deep-seated, natural desire—a desire for respite from the unremitting, grueling struggle; for a place in which refuge might be taken." It is the recognition of this truth that is glossed over in the portrait of Ben Sills.

The most disturbing aspect of this book is its ending. Given the characterization of Ben Sills, it is entirely consistent for him to crawl, though fatally wounded, a considerable distance to help Tater, his attacker. (Sills doesn't even try to leave to get help for himself; that option "never occurred to him.") Given the described relationship between Lena and her father, it is also consistent for her to help Tater—for her father's sake and for the sake of her own humanity. But only if one can equate justice with vengeance can the message implicit in Lena's decision to lie about her knowledge of her father's murder be seen as consistent behavior—or acceptable. The message is that if a white boy, as part of his rite of passage into male adulthood, even goes so far as to kill a Black person, the proper Christian response is to "let God handle it." (Can you imagine literary prizes bestowed on a book in which a rotten Black boy murders an angelic white man and is forgiven by the white man's daughter?) That message remains untempered despite the intimation that Tater may eventually be healed both physically and morally, and despite the closing scene in which Tater's father silently picks the cotton of the family his son has made fatherless. He knows that the cotton crop represents money the Sills family will need to survive, but the question of whether his helping is motivated by remorse, guilt or a desire to buy Lena's continued silence is left unanswered. Given the characterization of Haney as hate-filled and lacking in hope, Lena's hope that he has acquired a new sense of morality is totally unfounded.

The message is certainly untempered by Claudie's speech to Mrs. Chism and other white town leaders. Says Claudie:

> "We know how to earn our keep and we know how to knuckle to you. Only we mean to work and knuckle the way we

Continued on page 17

Religious teachings play an important role in Words by Heart; *this aspect of the book is analyzed below. Other articles on this junior novel begin on page 5 and page 18*

Words by Heart: An Analysis of Its Theology

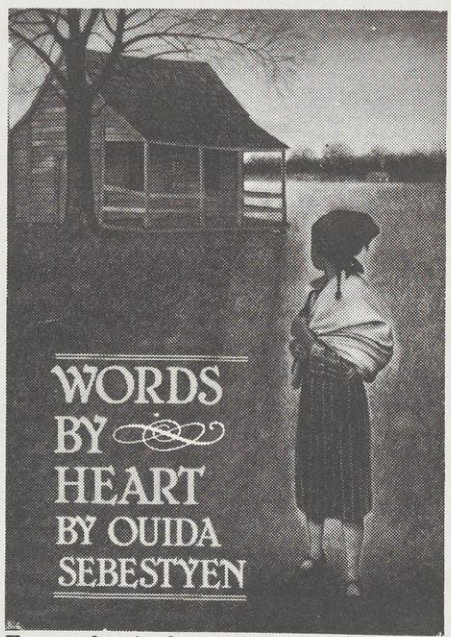
By Fay Wilson-Beach and Glyger G. Beach

Ouida Sebestyen's novel *Words by Heart* will strike a responsive chord in the hearts of anyone who has ever believed that mobility is achieved not by skin color but by hard work (the Puritan work ethic), God's favor (Full Gospel Businessmen's Association) or intelligence. All three elements are embodied in this tale of a young Black girl growing up in the all-white town of Bethel Springs. Lena Sills ("magic mind") is convinced that by winning a Scripture-verse reciting contest she will be "somebody" in this town. Her father, Ben Sills, is sure that Bethel Springs is already receptive to him and his family's presence and that Lena's intelligence will further solidify their position there. Claudie, Lena's stepmother, is not so sure that her husband's perceptions are accurate. The other Sills children are apparently too young to know or care.

By the end of the novel it is evident that Lena's "magic mind" has not won her any significant number of friends or increased her stature in the neighborhood or school. Ben's hard work and dependability earn him the hatred of his neighbors and eventually his murder. And what we are left with is God's favor, which according to this book is worse than nothing at all.

We see the author extolling the virtue of forgiveness but not that of justice. Instead of calling for justice, the author calls for passivity in the face of injustice. The quest for justice is ignored, as is an authentic use of the scriptures. During the Slave Era Black preachers preached liberating messages for Black people, likening their plight to the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. They worshipped a God who believed in resistance. When Black men and women sang "steal away to Jesus," they weren't talking about heavenly things; they were planning to go North, to escape to freedom.

After the Civil War, many Blacks formed separate Black communities, like the Scattercreek described in *Words by Heart.* Although the author acknowledges the existence of such Black communities, she suggests that everyone was looking for a chance to leave them. There is no recognition of the fact that Black communities were formed out of choice, that they were cultural havens as well as alternatives to oppression in white communities. In portraying Scattercreek in a negative way, by giving it a negative name, the author obscures the positive strengths of these Black communities.



From the jacket, it's difficult to tell that the protagonist of Words by Heart *is Black.*

In addition, the author gives Ben Sills a theology that is closer to that of a plantation master than to those families he left behind in Scattercreek. It is objectionable, therefore, to see the words of Bible-wielding oppressors put in the mouth of a Black man whom the author could have developed as a free-thinking, freedom-seeking Black man. From the time he "explains away" the first sign of violence—the stabbing of a loaf of bread with a butcher knife—Ben Sills speaks of forgiveness, patience, love and understanding for those who would harm him and his family. Ben speaks of the love expounded by Christ in the New Testament—"love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." He has no understanding of the radicality of Christ's strategy. Christ's intent was to stir the people in order to bring order and justice to the community.

Words by Heart does not use scripture to encourage change. The book quotes scripture that would have people give control of their lives to a benign God; it blatantly ignores scriptural admonitions that would support people taking responsible actions in their own affairs as well as those of their neighbors, and yes, those of their country. The author uses what is called eisegetical methodology; she uses the scripture for her own objectives by creating powerless Black people. She chose not to use an exegetical method.

Good theology leads one to ask questions and probe the quality of human life. Good theology does not serve the vested interests of a few, but of the whole. Good Christian theology does not allow death without resurrec-

A Matter of Convenience?

In an interesting article entitled "The Bleached World of Black TV" that appeared in *Human Behavior* (December, 1978), Pamela Douglas makes a point that is relevant to an examination of *Words by Heart.* Discussing the TV production of Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," Douglas notes, "One might wonder whether this and other tales of life in the rural South of the past, especially those featuring children, are becoming convenient ways for the networks to avoid dealing with the realities of contemporary black [sic] lives." One might wonder if the same is true of children's literature.

tion, as this book does. Ben Sills' death does not stir this community to any redemptive acts. After Ben's murder, the white characters indulge in post mortem trivia; there is no move to see justice done. There is no place in the book where the white characters are held responsible or accountable for Ben's death, either individually or collectively. The book only hints at the possibility that Mr. Haney, father of Ben's murderer, may be picking the Sills' cotton because he's sorry for the trouble his family has caused the Sills family. (He might just be stealing it.) There is no renewal of life and no justice in this story. Mr. Haney is not saved, Tater is not saved, no one is saved. Why does the death of the only Black man in the story end in tragedy and insignificance? (And even if the Haneys had been saved—or experienced some kind of renewal—nothing would redeem the racist injustice and brutality of Ben Sills' murder.)

It must be stated that *Words by Heart* is not a book for Black children but for white racists. The author wrote a book extolling outdated, oppressive theologies at a time when the world is crying for liberation and models to point the way.

The author wrote a book about love, a passive love, that in no way resembles the love that civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. got from his forebears. King preached a nonviolent love that would propel men and women to agitate and confront an unjust society. The author advocates and portrays a love so distorted by her own perspective that it is inactive and unresponsive, narrow and restricted.

We need a book to show Black children what it was *really* like to live in 1910 when *Words by Heart* takes place. For starters they could read *An Old Woman Remembers* by Sterling Brown about the Atlanta Riot of 1909. It will help them understand present-day realities for the times are similar. They know Black children are disappearing and being killed in Georgia. They know that the KKK never died, that it is now up and rising among white youth their own age. They know that a sadistic murderer is killing off Black men in Buffalo, cutting out their hearts. They know how many Black men and women are sitting in prisons unjustly. They know about the blood of teen-agers, shot in the back by policemen, policemen acquitted of any wrongdoing. The children know that crosses are burning again, that people's houses are being set afire and that gasoline bombs are being thrown into lighted living rooms.

The cry of liberation has been lifted up by Black, feminist, Latin American and other theologies. This book is an insult to all these efforts to achieve human liberation.

We do not need a repetition of history's ugliness. Rather, we need to know how resistance, confrontation and negotiation can change attitudes and laws and, hence, behavior. We need books that expound a theology of liberation and not oppression. We need to see the plantation theology condemned, not lifted up. Lena, in refusing to tell her stepmother who killed Ben, contends that she was holding to the first law, "forgive your enemies." We must always choose God's law over man's law only if we properly interpret or understand God's law. Lena obviously did not. The scripture also says: "let justice run down like rivers of water" and "thou shalt not kill."

About the Authors

FAYE WILSON-BEACH is a staff writer with the Board of Global Ministries. DR. GLYGER G. BEACH is the pastor of St. Stephen's United Methodist Church in Manhattan. Both received their theological training at Drew Theological School. She holds a master's in theological studies, he, the master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees.

Continued from page 15

> choose to, and where we choose to. I have two boys coming up to be the same threat to you all that Ben was. You better be ready for them because I'm going to have them ready for you."

The idea that hard work and submission and gradualism will overcome is untenable. Hard work is no threat to people on whom one depends for one's livelihood. Hard work was never a defense against oppression; it is not today. This is an irresponsible message to give to any young readers. In addition, Claudie's dramatic speech misses the point, touched on earlier in the book, that it is Lena's facile mind and her thirst for knowledge that are the real potential threat.

"Love thy neighbor" and "overcome evil with good" are worthwhile themes. In an ideal world, where racial differences don't count, it wouldn't matter which characters exemplify those themes. However, in a book set in the real world, where racial differences *do* count, when the responsibility for loving, forgiving and overcoming evil with good lies solely with the book's Black characters, the action takes on racist overtones. The implication is that white people should be understood and forgiven, even for violent racist acts. In all likelihood, many aware young Black readers will reject this message, and the book with it. They understand that passivity will not cure racism. Others may not be so aware. If they, along with young white readers, come away with the message that passivity is acceptable and that whites are to be forgiven rather than held accountable for racist actions, the damage will be doubly done.

In these troubled times, when the KKK still operates on the assumption that they can threaten and kill with relative impunity, it is important to recognize that *Words by Heart* invokes a third Judeo-Christian tenet—"Thou shalt not kill." A prize-winning book that plays "overcome evil with good" against "thou shalt not kill" has a responsibility to see that the latter receives equal time. □

About the Author

RUDINE SIMS is Professor of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She teaches graduate courses in reading, language arts and children's literature. Dr. Sims is currently writing a book on children's fiction about Afro Americans.

The ways in which Words by Heart *reinforces white myths is examined in the article below. Other articles on this junior novel begin on page 5 and page 16*

Words by Heart: A White Perspective

By Kathy Baxter

Words by Heart brings back childhood memories of family reunions in my parents' native state of Texas. It was during the post-Depression years, at those gatherings of white cousins, aunts and uncles, that my earliest impressions of the nature of Black/white relationships were formed. The world I encountered in that small Texas town was completely white on the surface. Although Black people were about one-third of the population, for my family they were in the background, seldom mentioned, rarely heard and little seen. My memories of them are dim. Yet all the attitudes and actions of my relatives were influenced by the nature of their relationships to Black people. If any one trait characterized that relationship, it was silence. It was not until I was an adult—and then only through my mother—that I learned of my uncle's Klan activities, that one of our grandparents had been a slave owner, that the tree I had climbed in the town square was "the hanging tree." Those things—and many more—were simply not discussed. They did not exist.

Silence is good soil for the raising of myths. Was my uncle really one of the night riders who strung "rowdy niggers" from the hanging tree? Not even my mother was ever certain of her brother's involvement in those Saturday night rituals. Surely the aunts and uncles and grandparents whom I loved were good people. Where was the evidence to deny it? In that world of unspoken exploitation and violence, my relatives were nurtured on myths about good whites, contented Blacks, and an orderly way of life that suggested that things were as they should be.

I think my relatives, as I knew them in the late 1930s, would have liked *Words by Heart* because it nourishes their myths. Here is the story of Black people who, above all else, want to protect white folks. The white community can absorb reminders that Black people are intelligent—as long as the basic hierarchical nature of the social system is undisturbed, as it is in Sebestyen's fantasy of Black/white relationships.

Not only has she made Blacks nurturing of whites, she has also projected onto them the *desire* to be, with a few rumblings of discontent held in control by the gentle Black man whose wisdom is unquestioned. After his death, his wife tries to assert herself, not with the threat of rebellion, but with the implication that her children will make changes in the future. This kind of talk is not very disturbing. After all, deep inside ourselves, we whites know that Blacks harbor desires of rebellion. But dear Lord, please not now. White folks profess the need for change, but pray that it will be postponed until some indeterminate time in the future. Sebestyen's message is reassuring.

Mythology is further promoted by the portrayal of white people who seem to behave oppressively only because of prejudice on the part of certain individuals. Nowhere is there a hint of the deeply entrenched racism in the society at large that makes oppression inevitable. The author has invented a way of life that hides the ugly truth, and created characters who bear little resemblance to real people. The reader could easily conclude that exploitation of Black people in the U.S. results from individual prejudice which can be overcome if only Black peole will continue to be loyal, passive and forgiving.

The final insult to reality comes in the scene of the Black-hating, self-hating white man picking cotton for the Black family whose husband/father has been murdered. Perhaps that is the ultimate fantasy in the mythological land of white goodness and Black helplessness—and the need to say that things are really not so bad, after all.

That *Words by Heart* has been highly praised by many white critics is a disheartening sign of the continued need for mythology. As white people, we cling to the myths because we want so much to convince ourselves that we are good people. What clearer indication could there be of the destructiveness of racism to white people than the unrelenting need to be reassured of our basic worth as human beings.

Racism nurtures a spirit of violence through its suppression of people, ideas, behavior, speech. White people are just as surely victimized by the violence of racism as Black people, for we have paid a high price for maintaining a racist society. We have been censored and repressed so that we would not disturb the system, our thought and behavior molded by numerous influences, our education distorted. In all of this, mythology has played a pivotal role, for it keeps us from understanding that unconsciously and unwittingly we are acting against the very principles we value most highly—freedom, independence, equal opportunity, justice.

Only when we as white people recognize that we too are damaged by racism will we be prepared to see the muzzling effect of books like *Words by Heart*. However well-intentioned the author, she does us no favor to perpetuate mythology, for it is like an addiction. The more we behave in ways that support racism, the more we hang onto mythology in order to ease the pain and guilt and to avoid taking action. And the mythology in turn perpetuates the racism. Writers who help us are those who break our needles instead of supplying us with more narcotics. □

About the Author

KATHY BAXTER writes teaching materials for classroom use; the co-chair of the Racism Committee of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, she is also a member of the Children's Book Award selection committee for the Jane Addams Peace Association.

Boston Third World Festival

A Third World Children's Book and Film Festival will be hosted by Children Are Many Colors, in conjunction with the Massachusetts Foundation for Humanities and Public Policy, from December 13-21 in Boston.

A display and sale of Third World children's books will be available throughout the Festival. In addition, workshops will be held on December 13 and 20 on "Racism in Children's Books," "Traditional and Nontraditional Approaches to Literature and Reading for Children," "Multicultural Approaches to Children's Literature" and "TV Images of Third World Communities: Their Effect on Children."

The event is free. For more information, contact Candelaria Silva (617/442-8855) or Judy Richardson (617/965-1952) or write the organization at P.O. Box 264, Boston, Mass. 02123.

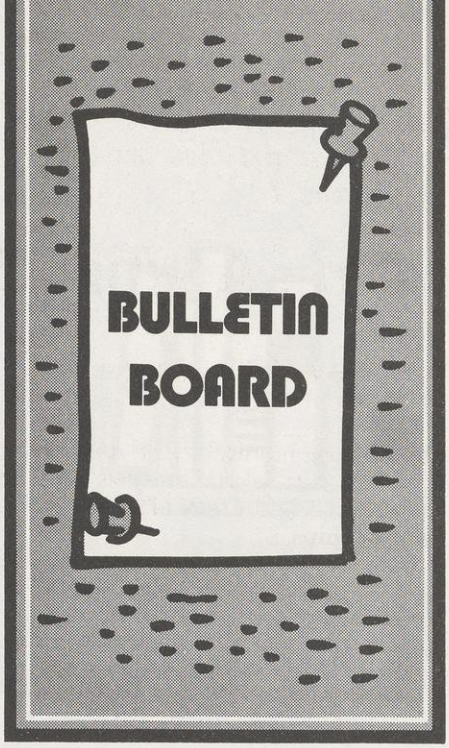
Council to Develop Feminist Basal Readers

Under a new grant from the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA), the Council on Interracial Books for Children is developing mini-models of feminist basal readers for grades three and five.

The Council is looking for stories that make young readers aware of the educational, economic and social problems faced by females, minorities and disabled people; counteract stereotypes about these groups; encourage youngsters to think critically and develop respect for themselves by standing up for their rights.

Project directors Beryle Banfield, Ed.D., president of the Council, and Ruth S. Meyers, Ph.D., believe that, "When children learn to read they also learn to think about themselves, their values, their future roles and aspirations. Stories can help to make children believe they can alter society by demanding change or stories can socialize children to accept inequities in society. We want to give children a vision of a feminist future, meaning a future of caring, sharing, respecting equals."

Interested writers should contact the project coordinator, Jamila Gastón, at the Council, 1841 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023.



CIBC on the Road

A request from the Women's Educational Equity Program in Reidsville, N.C., that CIBC conduct workshops with teachers and participate in local radio and TV programs was especially welcome since CIBC has wanted to increase its outreach in the South. Patricia Campbell, co-author of the *Bulletin* article, "How Books Influence Children: What the Research Shows" (Vol. 11, No. 6), was CIBC spokesperson at the September 17 and 18 North Carolina program.

At the September 22 meeting of the Media Committee of the White House Conference on Aging, Brad Chambers spoke on CIBC's work in counteracting ageist stereotypes. An outcome of that meeting is that the role of children's books in perpetuating bias against older people will be a focus of the White House Conference on Aging to be held in November, 1981. Ageism will also be discussed on November 20 at 10 A.M. when Brad Chambers will be interviewed on radio station WNYC about the roles of stereotypes in maintaining oppression of older people. The hour-long program features phone calls from listeners.

Faculty members of Mt. Holyoke College participated in sessions September 26 and 27 in preparation for an up-coming college-wide forum on racism. Dr. Robert Moore, director of the CIBC Resource Center, conducted the sessions.

At the annual meeting of the Black Council of the Reformed Church in America in Newark, N.J., CIBC President Beryle Banfield addressed the plenary session on October 11 on "Bias in Textbooks and Tradebooks." Dr. Banfield also conducted a workshop on "Racism in the Media."

For the third consecutive year, CIBC was invited to make a presentation to members of the New York City School Librarians Association. The meeting took place October 18 with a presentation on sexism in children's books by Dr. Moore.

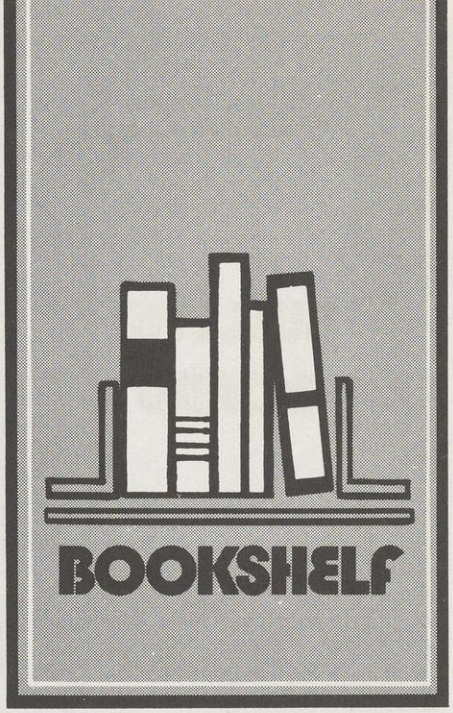
On November 18, 19, and 20, the Indiana State Department of Education is sponsoring workshops on racism and sexism in educational materials to be led by Dr. Moore with staff from Franklin, Warren and Lawrence township schools.

The question "Do guidelines constitute censorship?" which has generated controversy among librarians will be the topic of a major symposium on November 22 at the annual convention of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in Cincinnati. Dr. Moore will present CIBC's position and respond to charges of "censorship" levelled against organizations that prepare selection guidelines. On November 23, Dr. Moore will conduct a workshop with Twiss Butler, Education Coordinator of Texas NOW, on participation in textbook selection processes.

At the coming annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), to be held in San Francisco, a workshop titled "Challenging Racism in Children's Books" will be conducted for CIBC by Louise Derman-Sparks. Derman-Sparks is co-author of the *Bulletin* article, "Children, Race and Racism: How Race Awareness Develops" (Vol. 11, Nos. 3 & 4). The workshop will be held November 30.

CIBC has been asked to discuss its work before the plenary sessions and also participate in special workshops on "Racism in the Media" at each of the United Methodist Women's 1980-81 regional World Development conferences. The North Central Jurisdiction took place August 19-23 at Detroit. The schedule for CIBC participation at future jurisdictions is: Southeastern (Knoxville, Tenn.), November 14 and 15; Western (San Francisco), December 12 and 13; South Central (San Antonio), February 20 and 21, 1981; Northeastern (New York City), mid-February (dates to be announced).

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



Women Working: An Anthology of Stories and Poems

edited by Nancy Hoffman
and Florence Howe.
Feminist Press, 1980,
$5.95, 271 pages, grades 9-up

Divided into categories of Oppressive Work, Satisfying Work, Family Work and Transforming Work, this collection of 34 short stories and poems (with photographs of the authors) captures an all-important part of women's experience.

While most of the contributing authors are female, a number of men are also represented. Many of the authors are Third World women. Some are well-known, others less so. The stories are varied as to historical period, class of women portrayed, paid or unpaid work, racial group portrayed.

The editors provide biographical information about each author, along with comments on the piece which are not only of interest to readers, but also helpful to teachers using this book as a class assignment or project. Valuable for women's studies or literature courses in high schools or colleges, this moving collection is another fine contribution from the Feminist Press. [Lyla Hoffman]

The Big Dipper Marathon

by Jerome Brooks.
E.P. Dutton, 1979,
$7.95, 134 pages, grades 7-up

In *The Big Dipper Marathon,* a story about a disabled adolescent out to prove himself, the author has managed to reinforce just about every handicapistic stereotype around.

The product of guilt-ridden, overprotective parents, Horace (Ace) is "one of the rare ones," a teen-ager for whom polio and its consequences are a reality. His parents, however, are intent on creating a showcase handicapped person and deny his disability. Their overprotectiveness extends to violating their son's right to privacy and opening his personal mail, and they are unsympathetic caricatures in a situation that demands sensitivity and understanding.

Considering Ace's background, it's easy to see why he carries a chip on his shoulder. Forced into "the mainstream," Ace is so busy "showing them" that no time or energy is left to enjoy himself or life. Ace sees himself as "a noose around his parents' necks, spending all their time, along with the rest of the world, pretending he was as normal as everyone else." In one melodramatic incident Ace tries to will himself into standing without braces or crutches, all the while muttering, ". . . I'm going to take these damned braces off and I'm going to stand on the two of you [i.e., his legs] alone—like a man. . . ." Equating disability and lack of "manhood" is abhorrent.

It's not until Ace visits relatives in Chicago that he realizes that there's more to life than being a "Super-Crip." While in Chicago, Ace also experiences a shock, when he finds he can talk about his disability and still be accepted. Sixteen years of denial, however, cannot be unlearned in one week. Ace sets out to prove himself by riding the Big Dipper, a super-speed roller coaster. And ride he does, but only to find himself trapped on the roller coaster, unable to get off unassisted. Humiliated, Ace finds himself once more punished for trying to "soar with the gods." Ace finally does learn that it's o.k. to ask for help, and in the end, he learns that he can be accepted and liked, disability and all. At home, however, the fight still remains, and much unlearning needs to take place as Ace and his parents grope to find a realistic acceptance of Ace's disability.

The author probably had good intentions, but *The Big Dipper Marathon* reinforces handicapistic and sexist stereotypes. Ace's Mater (that's what he calls her!) is portrayed as overprotective and guilt-ridden, and Clarissa, a friend of Ace's cousin, is shown as an easily scared, flighty "butterfly." Only Ace's aunt comes off as a sensitive, understanding female, but she tends to be somewhat dominating. While the author does attempt to explore the concept of acceptance of individual differences, his attempts are patronizing innuendos, hints that the average junior high reader can easily miss or worse yet, misconstrue. No positive role model is presented, only an "I told you so" attitude that is an insult to all people, including people with disabilities. [Emily Strauss Watson]

Aging

by Alvin, Virginia and
Glen Silverstein.
Franklin Watts, 1979,
$6.90, 86 pages, grades 5-7

The Silversteins, who have written a number of competent books on human disease and other scientific subjects, give aging a once-over-lightly. In seven brief chapters, they define the aging process, discuss aging in the natural world, give an account of some of the ways in which people have tried to stave off old age, summarize modern research on aging, and point to changes and problems in a world where the average life-expectancy is fast increasing.

Throughout, they mention people who have achieved on a high level at a very advanced age—from Albert Schweitzer to Margaret Mead, from Pablo Picasso to George Bernard Shaw, not to mention Michelangelo, Grandma Moses and Winston Chur-

chill. They discuss the reports about the startling numbers of people living to well over one hundred in high-mountain areas of the Kashmir in northern India, Soviet Georgia in the Caucasus and Ecuador in South America. Although they discount these reports because they feel the information has been exaggerated and inaccurate, not all authorities would agree with their opinion.

The final chapter discusses forced retirement as a mixed blessing not only for the retirees, but also for society in general, which loses labor and experienced wisdom. This chapter also deals very briefly with the problems of illness in old age and the horror of many nursing homes. The book closes with a paragraph about older people as an organized minority, with a kind word for the political activities of the Gray Panthers.

It's all there—the conventional material in a conventional format. The point of view is generally humane and enlightened, although somewhat limited by the arrogance of the medical establishment. Yet the presentation is, on the whole, rather dull. Often there is simply a recital of names, dates and facts without much sense of continuity and direction. This is a frequent flaw in books of this kind for young readers—the effort to be clear and simple results in a colorless style and circumscribed presentation of the data.

On the other hand, the book does give deep and obviously sincere respect to older people and their achievements. It points to their roles and their contributions—not only of the famous people it cites so frequently but also of ordinary men and women. Unfortunately, this aspect of the book is weakened by a serious omission, which becomes especially evident in the photographs of older people scattered throughout. Every single older person mentioned or pictured is white. There is not a darker face among them. It would not be hard to think of any number of Asian, Black, Native American or Latino people whose pictures would have given perspective and inspiration and a truer sense of reality to young readers. Such racist insensitivity is most unfortunate in a book that, despite its faults, performs a useful function. [Betty Bacon]

I'm Busy, Too

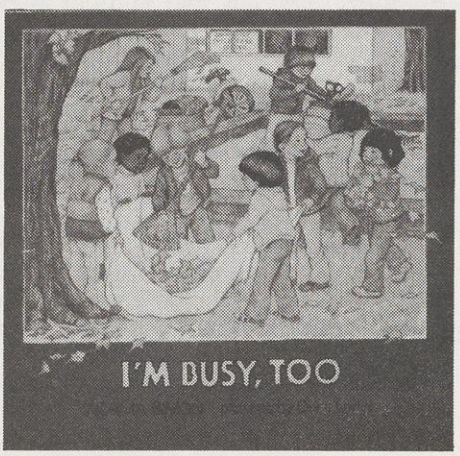
by Norma Simon,
illustrated by Dora Leder.
Albert Whitman, 1980,
$6.25, unpaged, grades p.s.-1

I'm Busy, Too is a book that many young preschoolers in day-care centers and nursery schools will find delightful because it will help them associate themselves with the world of work in which significant adults in their lives are involved.

The main characters in this book are Charlie, Mikey and Sara, three preschool children. Charlie, a white boy, lives with his father, who has his own TV repair shop. Charlie goes to and from his child-care center by bus. Mikey—also white—lives with his mother, who is a dental assistant. She drives Mikey to and from the center in her car. Sara—who is Black—lives with her mother, father, older sister and baby sibling. Sara's mother works at home and Sara's father has a restaurant. Sara's sister walks Sara to and from the center. Teachers are interracial and as warmly drawn as the parents.

The illustrations augment the text, which is written in a repetitive, simple poetic style. The colorful pictures show the diversity of children attending the child-care center and the range of clothing they wear. The depictions of children working in the classrooms and busy together in the center's playground on a fall day are very accurate.

As Norma Simon writes about her book, "For many children, attending school often results in the first long separation from parents and home. On their own in school, boys and girls have the opportunity to develop a sense of themselves as people apart from their families. They find they have independent abilities to work, communicate, make friends, create, explore and discover.



"Parents and teachers should build strong bridges between home and school. When children sense that the adults around them value their schoolwork, they place greater value on it themselves. The whole family can establish positive attitudes toward school and make an effort to participate in school life." [The Multicultural Project, Cambridge, Mass.]

Teepee Tales of the American Indian: Retold for Our Times

by Dee Brown,
illustrated by Louis Mofsie.
Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979,
$7.95, 174 pages, grades 5-up

I have read Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* four times and refer to it constantly for verification of material in other books. When I learned that Brown was not a Native American, I was absolutely dumbfounded. Such compassion, understanding and, above all, respect from a white historian was unusual, to say the least. This makes it doubly difficult to explain *Teepee Tales,* not because the book is so horrible, but because it has been done with so little sensitivity.

Brown has chosen 36 stories from collections made in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by such ethnologists and folklorists as Frank Cushing, Henry Schoolcraft and George Bird Grinnell. He has arranged them into categories: Before the White Man Came, Allegories, Tricksters and Magicians, Heroes and Heroines, etc. In the introduction, Brown cites the "archaic" language, disconnected incidents, and obscure plots and meanings of the first English versions, as a reason for retelling them. I disagree. Most early collectors cared deeply about the people whose tales they recorded; they shared their lives, learned their languages and they were zealous about getting it down and

getting it down straight. George Grinnell, for instance, spent some 40 years visiting the Cheyenne people every summer, and his material is about as authentic as a person from another culture can get it.

In general, I find Brown's versions of the tales to be less satisfactory than his sources. Perhaps the least successful story in the collection is "The Cheyenne Prophet" (Sweet Medicine). I am not sure what Brown was trying to do with the story, but I think he was trying to make it "make sense," to account for the supernatural aspects in a way that might seem more logical to non-Native readers. In any case, he has made additions, rearranged some events and telescoped others. The original Sweet Medicine stories carry much meaning; for a much better shortened version see "Sweet Medicine and the Arrows" in Grinnell's *By Cheyenne Campfires* (University of Nebraska Press, $3.95). By and large, Brown has done better with the animal and trickster tales, but everything seems flat somehow.

I am disturbed that in the introduction and the brief lead-ins for each category, Brown refers to Native Americans primarily in the past tense, and that he finds it necessary to say things like: "Had it not been for a few far-sighted anthropologists, ethnologists, folklorists . . . we would now have almost no legends of these people," and "Many of the stories were chosen because they are sprinkled with the delightful touches of fun and humor that are characteristic of American Indians." Thanks a lot. Again in the introduction, Brown says that he has ". . . retold most of them as I believe they would be told by an English-speaking American Indian tale teller of today." Never.

How to account for this from the author of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*? It seems obvious Brown simply hasn't taken Story seriously. I would guess he has not understood that stories are not always just entertainment for people from an oral tradition. They are also for teaching about the world, and they carry the whole history and Spirit of the People to whom they belong. There is no evidence that Brown spoke to Native Americans about these tales. He seems to have gone through the literature, lifted out whatever appealed to him, and set it down in a fashion that seemed to him to be O.K. (If some old Indian on a reservation can tell a good story, surely a person of Dee Brown's background and intellectual attainments shouldn't have any trouble with it. . . .)

Teepee Tales of the American Indian may very well be useful to students who have to deal with teacher assignments to read a "Creation Myth," a hero tale, a trickster tale and such, but for stories as they might *really* be told by Native people today, some better choices would be: Joseph Bruchac's *Stone Giants and Flying Heads* (Crossing Press, 1979, $6.95) or his *Turkey Brother and Other Tales* (Crossing Press, 1975, $6.95), Richard Erdoes' *Sound of Flutes and Other Indian Legends* (Pantheon, 1976, $6.99), Gerald Hausman's *Sitting on the Blue-Eyed Bear; Navajo Myths and Legends* (Lawrence Hill, 1976, $10), or Rosebud Yellowrobe's *Tonweya and the Eagles and Other Lakota Tales* (Dial, 1979, $7.95). Also, the Montana Council for Indian Education has done some excellent pamphlet-size publications. They are available from Montana Reading Publications, Level 4 Stapelton Building, Billings, Montana 59101. [Doris Seale]

Maudie and Me and the Dirty Book

by Betty Miles.
Knopf, 1980,
$6.95, 144 pages, grades 4-up

The issues of censorship and prejudice as they relate to two sixth-graders and a small Massachusetts community are explored in *Maudie and Me and the Dirty Book*. Betty Miles has written a relevant, coherent novel that is realistic and easy to relate to.

Kate White, a central character, is beginning sixth grade at a new middle school, where students from several elementary schools merge. Her primary concerns center around feeling secure in her new environment and maintaining a friendship with the girls from her old school.

Kate volunteers for an English project and discovers to her dismay that she must work with Maudie Schmidt, an unpopular, chubby girl who is disliked because of her weight.

Through the project, Kate and Maudie become good friends, and Kate recognizes that her snap judgment of Maudie was unfair and incorrect. The two girls become closer allies when they unite, along with their English teacher, to defend their selection of a book to read to the first graders involved in their project.

The book they select is *The Birthday Dog,* which depicts a six-year-old boy's yearning for a dog. His wish comes true when some puppies are born and he receives one. The story sounds innocent enough to Maudie and Kate and the town librarian, but when Kate reads the book to the class, the birth of the puppy sparks a discussion in which reproduction, mating, penises and vaginas are mentioned by both Kate and the children!

When several families hear from their children about the discussion, a small but vocal part of the community is outraged. After meeting with the principal, Kate and Maudie are disturbed to find out that the issue will be discussed at the School Committee meeting. With the consistent support of her parents, Kate eventually finds the courage to defend herself at the meeting, making an impressive, brave speech. The opposition is defeated, partly due to Kate's eloquent defense, and the English project continues.

Miles depicts the trauma the two girls go through when an innocent choice becomes a disgrace to members of their community. Both Kate and Maudie are strong characters who are able to be non-conformists, and who face their problems head on, without avoidance. The book encourages young people to speak up for what they think is right, and proves that adults, though older, are sometimes wrong. Kate deals not only with the community's prejudice, but also with her own against Maudie.

This book could be read by individual students, or used with a group of young people. It could stimulate a good discussion on censorship, and also the prejudices inflicted upon children by their peers. *Maudie and Me and the Dirty Book* encourages the reader to think and make value judgments, and this in itself makes the book quite worthwhile. [Jan M. Goodman]

A Major New Teaching Tool from the CIBC Resource Center

WINNING "JUSTICE FOR ALL"

A Curriculum Unit for Grades 5-6 on Sexism and Racism: Stereotyping and Discrimination

This curriculum, with three accompanying filmstrips, was developed by the Council on Interracial Books for Children for the Women's Educational Equity Act program of the U.S. Office of Education. The curriculum content goes far beyond what is ordinarily presented to elementary (or secondary) students and squarely tackles sex and race oppression as practiced by business, schools, government, literature and TV. The curriculum was tested in 13 classrooms across the nation and it was found to achieve a reduction in students' stereotypes about "proper" sex-roles and an increase in students' knowledge of why and how to combat sexism and racism. Teachers unanimously reported that both they and their students learned a great deal while enjoying curriculum activities.

Content includes U.S. history with a focus on women of all colors and on minority peoples, current social practices, language arts and some math. The 35 lesson plans can readily fit into regular reading or social studies periods. The many exciting activities provide opportunities for successful integration into the entire school curriculum.

Recommended for classroom teachers, Title IX coordinators, curriculum developers and teacher educators. The unit contains:

1. A Teacher's Manual of 114 pages, with background reading, glossary, student and teacher bibliographies, and 35 detailed lesson plans.

2. Three sound-color filmstrips described at the right.

3. A Student Workbook of 145 pages, with readings, activities and questions.

Entire unit (1,2,3 above): $70.00. Additional Workbooks: 1-29, $3.25 each; 30 or more, $2.50 each.

THE SECRET OF GOODASME: a sound-color filmstrip on sex and race stereotyping
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Creatures from outer space discuss stereotypes with a white girl, a Black boy and a Cherokee boy, convincing the children that (1) stereotypes are not true; (2) stereotypes cause harm; and (3) stereotypes are used to justify unfair treatment of women and minorities.

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AN EQUAL CHANCE: a sound-color filmstrip on historic and current barriers to sex/race equality
Grades 5-8 $27.50

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Available with supportive lesson plans excerpted from the curriculum unit described at the left.

FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION: a sound-color filmstrip on strategies for overcoming sexism and racism.
Grades 5-9 $27.50

A boy dreams that Sojourner Truth visits his older sister's high school. Tactics useful in winning justice through the years—marches, strikes, lobbies, boycotts, etc.—are presented. Sojourner Truth helps the students make plans to achieve sex equity in their school.

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