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Summer 1966

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Interracial Books for Children

Vol 1. No 1

Published quarterly by The Council on Interracial Books for Children, Inc.

Summer 1966

Coast Cartoonist Recounts Birth of Interracial Strip

By Morrie Turner

The creation of my integrated comic strip, WEE PALS, might be considered a study in self-therapy in the midst of the civil rights struggle.

As a free-lance cartoonist for fifteen years, I realized I was drawing an "all-white" world, thereby compounding the racial "blackout" of the cartoon-character world. For the sake of earning a living, however, I managed to convince myself that "integrated" cartoons couldn't be done, and used as proof

(Continued on page 3)

An Editor's Point of View: Enough for All

By Jean Karl, Editor of Children's Books, Atheneum Publishers

Every child has the right to see himself and life as he knows it reflected in a book. Only in this way can he feel that his culture and people have worth and a place in the eyes of others. Similarly, every child has the right to venture, through books, out of his own sphere into a wider world where he can encounter people different from himself. The wider the variety of children a young reader can meet in books, the more exciting the world can become for him.

Do You Know Who Said This ... And When?

Educate the poor white children and the colored children together; let them grow up to know that color makes no difference as to the rights of a man; that both the black man and the white man are at home; that the country is as much the country of one as of the other, and that both together must make it a valuable country....

(Answer on page 4)

Recently there has been considerable comment that children's books have not presented adequately children of minority races, children in culturally different environments, and children of mixed social, economic, and racial groupings. Certainly part of the reason is that such books have not been written. Manuscripts have been received; but with few exceptions, they have not been publishable. Some failed because they were written hastily, simply to fill a need. Others, because the situations they described were completely outside the authors' experience and understanding. Still others, because the authors, though sensitive

(Continued on page 7)

WHY THE COUNCIL?

We believe books can do much to create the will and enlarge the capacity to achieve an integrated society. Our aim is therefore to encourage the writing, production, and effective distribution of books to fill the needs of non-white and urban poor children. Through such books, we think all American children will gain a fuller awareness and a keener understanding of one another.

The Council is developing a program in several steps. The first calls for publication of this quarterly bulletin devoted to articles about and reviews of children's books that relate to Negro life. Another step is the planning of a national conference of writers, illustrators, editors, publishers, book distributors, librarians, teachers, social workers, civil rights workers, religious leaders, and government officials. We hope to establish annual cash awards for the best children's book manuscripts in this field, and eventually to offer guidance to authors whose work has merit but who need professional help. We look forward to the time when exhibitors will take intercultural books into areas where they are most needed in order to rouse the interest of teachers, parents, and children.

Segregated Textbooks

By HARRY GOLDEN

From the Carolina Israelite, June, 1966

The changing of a social order is an important step in a nation's development. We have the laws now, but racial segregation will not be completely eliminated without much soul-searching and even more wisdom.

For starters, let's just take a leading publisher of children's books, a reputable publishing house with offices in Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas, Palo Alto, and Fair Lawn, New Jersey. This firm, whose officers I am sure are people of high ideals, publishes segregated textbooks. In one textbook they integrate the society and sell this to Northern schools and in the same text they segregate the society and sell it to Southern schools.

These are standard hard-cover textbooks and they include a series of short stories for children in the lower grades. But the one edition for the North has on its cover an illustration of a white boy and a colored boy constructing a ship model and the edition for the South leaves out the colored boy but keeps the ship.

On pages 26 and 27 of the Southern edition, there is an illustration of a father and son attending a big

league ball game. The players race onto the field as the two cheer. I don't know when I've seen a major league ball team without a Negro but this new reader has because all nine players are white. On pages 26 and 27 of the Northern edition, two of the ball players are colored. Both illustrations are duplicates. One additional printing process makes the Northern world kin and the lack of the additional printing process preserves the old South.

No one is corrupt in this matter: everyone has stockholders of one sort or another. But I will not suffer an argument that it doesn't make any difference. We instruct all our children in the grade schools, "You've got to tell the truth." It is an expedient process. They should start. Not the teachers.

The truth is probably too bitter. And it may not sell as many textbooks for children.

Brotherhood

Or Some of My Best Friends

Are Martin Luther King, Jr.

By EVE MERRIAM

I carefully say "Mister",
("Miss" or "Mrs." as the case
may be)

To any person of color
Who is past the age of three.

I always look first in the bus
For a seat near a colored man
And squeeze myself alongside
him
As close as ever I can.

I never never make remarks
About watermelon or grits;
I just sit next to him and smile,
While he just sits there and sits.

I think that Sidney Poitier
Should have won an Oscar
before,
And I buy books by Jimmy
Baldwin
In every paperback store.

I think Lena Horne is a beauty,
But alas her skin is so light,
And Ossie Davis is brilliant--
He can act and also write.

When I am introduced to one,
I'm first to extend my hand,
And I'd sooner go without
pancakes
Than buy Aunt Jemima's brand.

As you can see, I'm all for civil
liberties
For each and every race in sight--
And I'm just a little grateful
That I happen

to
be
white.

INTERRACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

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Milton Meltzer
Eve Merriam

Lilian Moore
Ruth Shikes
Barbara Simon

Morrie Turner and Wee Pals (Continued from page 1)



the rejection slips from the occasional ones I submitted.

Later, after meeting Dick Gregory, I set out to do with the cartoon what he had done so successfully on the night-club circuit. Fortunately, Mr. Hoyt Fuller, of the Negro Digest, thought enough of my material to publish it regularly. Thus, my sounding board was established and the seed for the strip planted.

Some time later, I attended a gathering of cartoonists that featured Charles Schulz, the creator of "Peanuts," as guest speaker. Someone jokingly commented that he was thinking about doing a new strip called "Cashew Nut." Immediately, the thought went through my mind, "If someone says something about Brazil Nut, I'm walking out." The thought amused me, and the more amused I became the more interested I was in doing a "Peanuts"-type strip with an all-Negro cast of char-

acters for Negro readers. Soon after getting started, I realized that I was establishing a "white-out" in my approach, and this could be considered no better than the strips that ignored the non-white character. This was the start of WEE PALS, the first truly integrated comic strip.

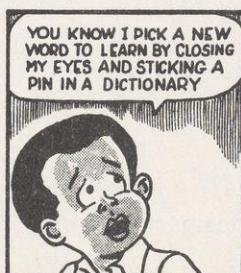
At this point, I didn't believe that the metropolitan dailies or the syndicates would be interested in such a strip and made no real effort to sell it; in fact, any approaches I did make in this area would have to be called negative. But thanks to the faith and encouragement of a man named Lew Little (Lew Little Syndicate, San Francisco), the strip was sold. In fact, he sold it within the first week to some of the largest papers in the country. And he made a believer out of me--a believer in his ability, and a believer in the courage of some editors in an era of a "let's not rock the boat"

philosophy.

Early strips were devoted mostly to racial material, usually with a message. This became taxing and the material sometimes appeared strained. And I was to learn later, it was unnecessary. We discovered the positive effects of simply exposing the public daily to the sight of Negro and white children living and playing together in harmony.

I am always pleased during my visits to school to find that the children identify with the characters of their race in the strip. I like to believe that with the acceptance of the strip, the children can feel a certain amount of acceptance in our society.

I have been pleased, also, to see what has been done in the few "integrated" illustrated books for children, but concerned about the fact that so few titles are presented. It has to be difficult for a child to identify with a world that fails to recognize him.



Quarterly Reviews of Interracial Books for Children

By MARGUERITE A. DODSON, District Children's Specialist, New Lots District
and BARBARA L. SIMON, District Children's Specialist, DeKalb District

Brooklyn Public Library

Hentoff, Nat
JAZZ COUNTRY
Harper & Row, 1965

Tom Curtis' serious ambition to become a jazz trumpeter leads him to explore the world of the professional jazz musician to find out if he really has the talent to match his ambition. This need to be appraised of his qualifications brings him into close contact with adults, both Negro and white, for whom his relatively sheltered, middle-class white environment has left him al-

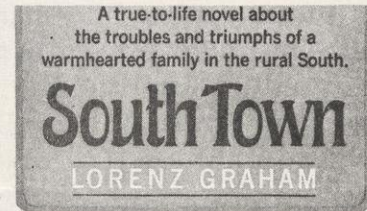
be published for teenagers in the past three years, for it presents with accuracy and understanding experiences and emotions which most young people have. True, the jazz world is foreign to all but a small minority. But the book is written with such sincerity and sensitivity to the emotions of young people that most adolescents, whether they live in the North or South, the city or country, can understand the depth of Tom's emotions and the confusion he feels when confronted by the irrational double standards and prejudices of the adult world.

Written in a deceptively simple, yet smooth-flowing style, this is a book that has been enjoyed by the more sophisticated teenager as well as by those whose reading has been more limited. The experience of a large number of people who work with teenagers indicates that "Jazz Country" is worthy of introduction through book talks and teen discussion groups. The book definitely should be included in all collections used by teenagers.

Graham, Lorenz
NORTH TOWN
Thomas Y. Crowell, 1965
SOUTH TOWN
Follett, 1960

These books also are useful in presenting for teenagers a realistic approach to the problem of integration in the United States.

In "South Town" particularly, the honesty and realism with which the author portrays both the Negro and white involved in segregation transcend the



somewhat mundane, journalistic style in which the book is written. This honesty enables the reader to feel with sixteen-year-old David Williams the impact of events which force his father to stand up to the white garage owner, and to face with David a night of terror waiting for an attack by the Ku Klux Klan.

ANSWER TO
WHO SAID THIS?
(page 1)

Frederick Douglass, May 2, 1872.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS,
edited by Milton Meltzer

A History of the American
Negro, 1865-1916.
Thomas Y. Crowell, 1965



most completely unprepared. The story ends with Tom's problems still unresolved; but he has begun to know himself, to make an accurate appraisal of the profession that he felt he must join, to consider alternatives to his youthful ambition, and finally to appreciate people as individuals.

This is one of the few really important books to

A Letter to the Council from Phyllis A. Whitney

I am very much interested in the work planned by the Council on Interracial Books for Children. A great deal can be done by publicizing the need for more books of this kind. Many editors simply have not thought about it sufficiently, I'm sure.

I was glad to read Nancy Larrick's article.* It should be an eye-opener to many people. As you know, many of my own books deal with the theme of understanding, and I have had exactly the experience she relates. Not with editors, but with book clubs. A well-known club which has taken many of my books has avoided the ones which dealt in turn with: Negro-white situation in a high school, a Mexican-American migrant workers story, a book set in South Africa with a Cape colored girl as an important character, a book in which the hero is Jewish and one of the main characters is Catholic. Now I'm wondering about the fate of my next year's book, in which a native Virgin Islands child and her grandmother are featured. I might believe that these books are not up to book club standards, except that reviewers and librarians seem to think they are among my best.

*"The All - White World of Children's Books," Saturday Review, September 11, 1965.

Of course, an important point that needs to be emphasized is that books on such subjects can earn a great deal of money (all those "recommended" lists) and stay in print for a long time, in spite of prejudice in certain quarters. Book clubs and editors (publishers, perhaps, more than editors) who discover this may grow a bit braver.

There is another aspect, however, that never seems to be talked about and which I feel needs to be pushed as much as any other. Where are these books on interracial subjects to come from? Must their main source continue to be the white writers who are doing most of them now? Where are the books that ought to be coming from these non-white racial groups? When I put a Negro child in one of my stories, I don't write from the viewpoint of that child because I don't feel I know it soundly enough. (Often books which do attempt such a viewpoint irritate the very group for which they are intended because of a slight phoniness.) In my own case, I write from the viewpoint of a white child, however important the colored child may be. And perhaps this isn't good enough. Yet how many Negro writers can you name who write fiction for children? I can think of only a few. How many Puerto Ricans, Spanish-Americans, etc., are

there? Yet these groups should be the real source for such books.

I believe something can be done about this. Wherever there are teachers dealing with non-white children, whether in primary or high school, or later in college, or library school, these teachers should be instilling in their pupils the great need for such books. (I didn't know I wanted to write until a teacher in grade school encouraged me. How many young writers may be lost simply because no one encourages them to try, or emphasizes the need?)

This is a long-term project, but it ought to be started. Even now in high schools and later, some young people of non-white racial groups ought to have their eyes opened to the need for writers. Your organization may be the very one to put this particular aspect across. There are many white writers who have made fine contributions in this field and who will keep on making them-- but with all the good intentions possible, they can't be at the real heart of things. Sometimes we have needed perspective, but we don't always have enough experience in the things we write about. I'm sure the writers are there -- let's find and encourage and develop them. First by educating the teachers.

Reviews in Brief: Interracial Scenes for Young Readers

One way in which publishers are providing more interracial experiences in books for young people is through the use of illustrations showing non-white children. This is especially true of books published for preschoolers and young school-children. Some examples of such books are given below. As they grow in number, the Council hopes to develop a list of recommended titles in this area.

Baker, Betty; il by Arnold Lobel
LITTLE RUNNER OF THE LONG HOUSE
Harper & Row, 1962. \$1.95

This is an "I Can Read" book describing the life and customs of the Iroquois Indians as seen through the eyes of a small boy. Illustrations are excellent.

Beim, Lorraine and Jerrold; il by Ernest Crichlow
TWO IS A TEAM
Harcourt, Brace and World, 1945. \$2.75

One of the first to use interracial illustration, this book is still read widely today. It is a simple story of friendship and cooperation between two boys that can be read independently by younger children. Only the illustrations convey the fact that one of the boys is Negro.

Bonsall, Crosby
THE CASE OF THE CAT'S MEOW
THE CASE OF THE HUNGRY STRANGER
Harper & Row, 1965 & 1963.
\$1.95 each.

Two beginner mysteries written with humor and suspense. A very young group of private eyes, including Skinny, a Negro boy, solve two major cases: the disappearance of a pet cat, Mildred, and the sudden vanishing of Mrs. Meech's blueberry pie.

A Book To Be Remembered

By EVE MERRIAM

It is exactly a decade since Harper published "Bronzeville Boys and Girls," a book of poems for and about children by the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks. The pictures by Ronni Solbert, simple black-and-white line drawings, managed to convey a quality of Negritude without being cartoonish or sentimentalized. Whenever I lecture on poetry for young people, I mention this book as an outstanding example of what American publishing can offer. Here is a sampling of some of the characters in the collection. There are thirty-four portraits in all, and I wish we had room to present each and every one. All youngsters, teachers, and parents could be richer for reading--and rereading--this lovely lyric book.

RUDOLPH IS TIRED OF THE CITY

These buildings are too close
to me.

I'd like to PUSH away.
I'd like to live in the country,
And spread my arms all day.

I'd like to spread my breath
out, too--
As farmers' sons and daughters
do.

I'd tend the cows and chickens.
I'd do the other chores.
Then, all the hours left I'd go
A-SPREADING out-of-doors.

Udry, Janice May; il. by Eleanor Mill
WHAT MARY JO SHARED
Whitman, 1966. \$2.95

Written and illustrated with great sensitivity. Mary Jo, a little Negro girl, wanted to bring something to school for sharing time. But somehow whatever she planned was something someone else had chosen. Then she had a wonderful idea--and the happy response of her classmates is warming both to Mary Jo and the young reader.

NARCISSA

Some of the girls are playing
jacks.
Some are playing ball.
But small Narcissa is not playing
Anything at all.

Small Narcissa sits upon
A brick in her back yard
And looks at tiger-lilies,
And shakes her pigtails hard.

First she is an ancient queen
In pomp and purple veil.
Soon she is a singing wind
And, next, a nightingale.

How fine to be Narcissa,
A-changing like all that!
While sitting still, as still, as
still
As anyone ever sat!

Keats, Ezra Jack
SNOWY DAY
WHISTLE FOR WILLIE
Viking, 1962, 1964
\$3.00; 3.50

Pre-school and kindergarten children will enjoy the adventures of a little Negro boy as he plays in the snow and tries to whistle. Distinguished, colorful illustrations add to the beauty of these simple stories.

An Editor's Point of View: Enough for All

(Continued from page 1)

and knowledgeable people, were not competent writers. Books fulfill their purpose only when they are good books, well-written and honestly reflecting an author's understanding and deep convictions.

Although editors have been willing for some time to publish good books representing all backgrounds, they are now eagerly seeking them. But they are looking for literature, not teaching devices or sociological tracts. When they find what they consider good manuscripts, they publish. But both authors and editors are caught in something of a dilemma so far as audience is concerned. A speaker discussing the problem at a recent meeting said: "There are so few books now available about Negro children that every one receives a kind of scrutiny no book could withstand unscathed. Perhaps only when numbers of such books are available, and such careful scrutiny is no longer possible, will the really unself-conscious books in this area be written."

There is a great deal of truth in this observation. Some books that portray real situations run the risk of perpetuating what is considered a stereotype. Others that present equally real situations may be accused of being too

pleasant or too flattering. If either approach is deliberate, the book deserves to be condemned. But if an author presents an honest description of life as he has seen it, then what he writes deserves to be accepted as such--even if it does not meet the image some readers would like to see.

Although over-careful scrutiny is a problem--and only one of many--in creating books that will give every segment of our population a place in children's literature, the fact is that these books are on the way. Good books come from good authors, old and new. And good authors are sensitive, responsive people. They are aware of the world around them, and they reach out to meet and understand change, often using their writing to broaden and deepen their own grasp of new ideas. These people

are writing the books that everyone knows should exist--and their books will be published. But like all good things, it takes a little time.

The responsibility for all of us who are interested in seeing culturally diverse books reach the children who need and want them is now two-fold. First, we must learn to recognize what is good and what is bad in this area of children's literature. Second, we must encourage all children to read about the things they know and slowly to blend this knowledge with what they do not know. As a result, each child will appreciate his own culture not only for what it is, but for what it can give to others who are different; and those who are different will no longer seem strange or unreal to him, but a source of pleasure and personal growth.

CLIP AND MAIL

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I wish to contribute \$ to help the Council carry out its program. (Contributions are tax-deductible.)

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