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Interracial Books

FOR CHILDREN

Vol. 5 Number 5, 1974



Shown above are examples of Spanish books which have recently been imported for distribution to bilingual programs. A future issue of the Bulletin will question the relevance and examine the racism and sexism of these books.

Critiques of this year's Newbery Award winner—**The Slave Dancer**—appear on pages 4-5.

500 Librarians Attend Council Presentation at ALA

The Council's presentation, "How to Identify Racism and Sexism in Your Library," drew an audience of nearly 500 librarians in New York, July 8. The presentation was given at the American Library Association's 1974 National Convention and was held in the Empire Room of the Waldorf-Astoria.

The presentation (1) featured a slide survey of stereotypes in "classic" children's books and modern award-winning books; (2) linked the issues of racism and sexism and urged that both issues be battled simultaneously; (3) provided a forum for critiques of *The Slave Dancer* and *Duffy and the Devil*, this year's Newbery and Caldecott award winners; and (4) led to the creation of a Task Force of Librarians to work with the Council to prepare action strategies to counteract racist and sexist stereotypes.

The slide show, narrated by Al Schwartz, assistant professor of children's literature at Richmond College (SUNY), began the presentation. Using past and present Newbery and Caldecott winners as examples, Professor Schwartz argued that racism and sexism are widespread in the books available for children. His remarks focused on ways to detect stereotypes in both fiction and non-fiction books.

A RACIST AWARD-WINNER

A critique of *The Slave Dancer* was presented by Sharon Bell Mathis, author of several children's books including *Sidewalk Story* and *Teacup Full of Roses*. Ms. Mathis, herself a student of library science in Washington, D. C., attacked *The Slave Dancer* as essentially a racist book, citing de-

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Misgivings About "The Giving Tree"

BOOK REACHING CULT STATUS GLORIFIES SEXIST VALUES

By Barbara A. Schram

For the past three years Whitney Darrow Jr.'s *I'm Glad I'm A Girl* (Simon and Schuster) has been my favorite "horrible" example of the kind of overt sex-role stereotyping that lurks within the pages of seemingly innocent children's books. I take it along with me when I lead discussion groups and usually simply read it aloud. A few times I've been able to get hold of a projector so that I can flash on a screen—larger than life—its humorous line drawings and simple declarative statements.

My audiences greet the first few pages with nervous giggles. As the cruelty of the text escalates the giggles give way to surprised gasps and occasional angry jeers:

Boys are doctors, Girls are nurses.
Boys are football players, Girls are cheerleaders.
Boys invent things, Girls use the things that boys invent.
Boys fix things, Girls need things fixed.
Boys are Presidents, Girls are First Ladies.

After these statements, it is easy to get a group actively discussing the way children's books stereotype and distort the image of women and other oppressed peoples to reinforce an unjust status quo.

I'd used this book so often I'd begun to weary of it. I'd also begun to think that it was unfair to use a book pub-

All the tree's branches are taken for a house, but "the tree was happy."



lished in 1970 as an object lesson in would be immoral enough to print this kind of propaganda.

A HORRIBLE EXAMPLE

How wrong I was! I've just discovered a new and equally horrible example in Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* (Harper & Row). Although this was written ten years ago it has recently been reissued in a spanking new edition, and according to its publisher, it has sold over a quarter of a million copies. (It is interesting to note that sales of this book began slowly but suddenly accelerated in 1968, and since then sales have doubled each year. It seems *The Giving Tree* has achieved almost a cult status—like *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*—among college students and young adults.)

The Giving Tree has a broad appeal to readers. With its engaging drawings, seemingly sophisticated theme, and witty expression, it becomes a much more dangerous book than Whitney Darrow Jr.'s pedantic pre-school picture book. The jacket of *The Giving Tree* describes it as "a moving parable for readers of all ages that offers an affecting interpretation of the gift of giving and a serene acceptance of another's capacity to love in return," and the book has been hailed by the *Catholic Library World* magazine and recommended as "just right for Christmas giving."

The book tells the story of a young boy's life-long relationship with a tree. In his youth he gathers her leaves, swings in her branches and eats her apples. As a teenager he carves his valentines in her trunk and lies in her shade with his sweetheart. As he grows older he shuns childish games although the tree implores him to return. He stays away for longer and longer periods, and returns only when he needs money to buy things, wood for

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THE REAL ROBINSON CRUSOE: A CLASSIC REVISITED

By Kik Reeder

Like many adults I have had to face my own distorted memory of books I read and adored as a child. It is a bit of a shock to find that those literary treasures that made their distinct mark on our young and tender selves and—more importantly—largely shaped our view of the outside world, aren't what we thought they were. They are either duller, more racist, less complex or more badly written than we knew. Even the content often differs very much from what we remember.

This shock of "non-recognition" is especially obvious when it comes to the classics, for not only do we have to contend with our own private vision of them, but with everybody else's as well, since even if people have not actually read a classic they know it well enough by osmosis to speak of it with a vague authority.

Take *Robinson Crusoe*, or as the complete title reads: *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner: who lived eight and twenty years all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of Great River of Oroonoke; having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, whereon all the men perished but himself. With an account how he was at last strangely deliver'd by Pyrates. Written by himself.*

The first part of *Robinson Crusoe*, published in England in 1719, was Daniel Defoe's first fictional work, and it was written when he was sixty years old. It was an instant success, and the second part was published later in the same year.

In brief, the story is as follows: In 1651 young Robinson Crusoe, bent on adventure and exploration, leaves England for Guinea, where he buys gold dust for £40, which yields him £300 on his return to London. He then makes a second trip to Guinea, but the ship is pirated and he is taken to Sallee, an Arab (Moorish) port, where he is made a slave for two years. With a young Moorish boy, Xury, he manages to escape in a small fishing boat, hoping to be picked up by some European ship.

While sailing along the African coast

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TASK FORCE FIGHTS SEXISM IN EDUCATION

Emma Hart Willard was a pioneer in the field of education for women. In 1814 she began the Middlebury (Vermont) Female Seminary which offered classical and scientific studies on a college level. She advocated state government support of women's education, and in 1819 she moved her seminary to New York so that she could enlist the state legislature's interest in a program of state-aided schools for girls. She later established "a female academy" in Troy, where women were offered science courses more advanced than those available at many men's colleges of that time.

The goals of this nineteenth century feminist educator are being carried forward today in Minnesota by the Emma Willard Task Force on Education. Founded in 1970 by a group of women whose original members include Kathy Olson, Mary Sornsin and Gerri Perreault, the Task Force is dedicated to eliminating discriminatory practices based on sex in elementary and secondary schools. The group seeks to educate not only students and teachers but government officials as well about the nature of sexism.

Like Ms. Willard, the Task Force has worked diligently with state government officials. Task Force members have close ties with the Minnesota State Department of Education's own Task Force on Sex Bias (Kathy Olsen is chairperson of this Task Force), and they have conducted workshops on curriculum evaluation for the Equal Educational Opportunity regional office.

When the Task Force learned that the 1971 Minnesota State Board of Education rule requiring all prospective teachers to take a course in sexism, members met with Department of Education officials. As a result, the study of sexism is now an integral part of the human relations training required of all Minnesota teachers. The Emma Willard Task Force estimates that its workshops on sexism have reached well over 3,500 teachers throughout Minnesota. Nor is the group's contact with teachers limited to this training course. Another 12-week course, taught by three Task Force members and entitled "Women and Society," was so successful that the course has been repeated and expanded.

The Task Force considers its work with teachers to be of paramount importance. "Our greatest frustration," says Gerri Perreault, "is that many people, teachers among them, do not see sexism as a serious problem. For that reason even the most basic and obvious kinds of sexist behavior must be pointed out, so that gradually teachers become aware of what their words and deeds really mean to others. At the same time they are shown how sexist attitudes are built right into edu-

cational materials and institutions."

Workshops are geared to making teachers aware of their own sexist behavior and attitudes, as well as to the sexist content of classroom texts. Teachers are involved in small discussion groups, role playing, and in games such as one the Task Force calls "Values Voting," in which teachers respond with one of five gestures indicating degrees of agreement or disagreement to statements such as: "Boys should operate the audio-visual material," or, "People stay married for economic reasons." The object of such exercises, Task Force member Mary Sornsin observes, is to let teachers reveal their feelings and opinions and eventually to discover how they themselves may be perpetuating a sexist society. Teachers are also given criteria for evaluating curriculum materials, and as they examine their textbooks they discover how sexist these are. As Kathy Olsen observes, "It's amazing in the books the frequency with which little boys rescue their moms—grown women!"

Teachers are encouraged to develop consciousness-raising ideas for their own classes. A project developed by an art teacher, for instance, used styles of clothing to illustrate the roles in which women have been traditionally locked.

The Task Force has also published a highly acclaimed series of articles on sexism in elementary and secondary education. Published in book form as *Sexism in Education*, the articles cover criteria for examining materials, recommendations on curriculum change, a mini-course on women's liberation, and a very exciting, *Bleeding Heart* in its fourth issue, available from the Task Force at \$4 for individuals and \$6 for institutions and organizations.

Among the group's other activities has been a collaboration with the Minnesota Resource Center for Social Work. This led to a four-part television series on sexism in education, which was shown on Minnesota's Channel 17.

FUTURE PLANS

The Task Force would like to establish a Sexism Awareness Center and increase its work with parents and students. Parents, Task Force members believe, are frequently more aware of sexist practices than are school administrators. They can be influential advocates, for example, of the admission of girls to shop courses and of their increased participation in sports, etc. The Force feels that students have potentially far-reaching contributions to make in the creation of curriculum and educational materials.

The group also wants to develop methods for dealing directly with sexist materials since non-sexist materials are slow in coming and even when they are available, many schools do not have the money for new materials.

The Emma Willard Task Force on Education invites interested individuals and groups to share ideas with them. Their address and several phone numbers are, Box 14229, Minneapolis, Minn. 55414; (612) 333-9076, 823-7516, 333-6870, 332-3958.

This is the first in a series of profiles designed to share with our readers the strategies for change that are being effectively used by groups or individuals combatting racism and sexism. We would like to hear from our readers about other individuals or groups that should be profiled in future issues.

ROBINSON CRUSOE

Continued from page 1

he fears going ashore, "... for to have fallen into the hands of any of the savages, had been as bad as to have fallen into the hands of lions and tigers." But when he finally encounters some inhabitants of the area, "... quite black and stark naked," he finds them completely decent and kind; they share their food with Crusoe and the Moorish boy and bring them water. A Portuguese ship finally saves Crusoe and sets sail for Brazil, but we are not told anything about the cargo, even though most traffic in these latitudes at that time dealt in slaves.

CRUSOE AS SLAVE-OWNER

Although Crusoe has escaped slavery with the help of Xury, he is not beyond selling this faithful boy to the Portuguese captain who promises "to set him free in ten years if he turned Christian." With the money he gets for the boy and the sailboat, Crusoe buys land in Brazil and settles down as a sugar planter, and as soon as he can afford it he buys himself a Black slave. But after four years of prosperity he gets greedy for more. He makes friends among his fellow-planters and gives "them an account of my two voyages to the coast of Guinea, the manner of trading with negroes there and how easy it was to purchase upon the coast for trifles—such as beads, toys, knives, scissors, hatchets, bits of glass, and the like—not only gold dust, Guinea grams, elephant's teeth, etc., but negroes, for the service of the Brazil, in great numbers."

Robinson Crusoe says he'll be happy to go there himself to secure enough slaves for the other planters and for himself. In September, 1659, he sets sail with 16 men. But the ship doesn't escape a fierce storm off one of the remotest Caribbean islands. Crusoe alone survives, and he swims ashore to the island. At this point the story which most of us think of as the adventures of Robinson Crusoe begins.

Defoe makes us feel exactly what it means to be left alone on a deserted island—the grief, despair and small triumphs that are part of the simplest undertaking. But Defoe and Fate are on Robinson Crusoe's side, for in the wrecked ship he finds tools, food and weapons, carpenter's materials, a dog and two cats, some bedding and sails to serve as a tent. He is in fact so well equipped that a boy scout would blush with envy.

THE SHOCKING SURPRISE

He toils and plants, makes a canoe, harvests his corn, raises goats and fights occasional bouts of depression. His loneliness is immense, and his only hope is that God will save him. After 15 years he is in for a shocking surprise—the sight of a naked footprint in the sand—a discovery that temporarily robs him of his newly found religious faith. Two years later he again sees the traces of "savages" and their grisly meals of human bodies. The island is periodically visited by "savages" and in spite of his fear and horror of the cannibalistic rituals Crusoe thinks: "How do I know what God Himself judges in this particular case?"

Crusoe realizes he can leave the island only with the help of one of the "savages." He has already dreamed about saving one of them, not—as one might think after more than 25 years of loneliness—in order to have a friend, but to make him his servant!

The meeting with Friday occurs almost exactly as Crusoe had dreamed: he saves Friday from pursuing captors and so impresses Friday with his gun

that "the poor creature" prostrates himself in front of Crusoe and puts the white man's foot on his own head. Friday is a Native American, not a runaway Black slave as has been hinted in some adaptations: "His hair was long and black, not curled like wool... his face was found and plump; his nose small, not flat like the negroes; a very good mouth, thin lips, and fine teeth well set and white as ivory."

Friday is taught that he must address Crusoe as Master, and there is never any question in Crusoe's mind that their relationship must be that of master and slave. Says Crusoe: "I was greatly delighted with him and made it my business to teach him everything that was proper to make him useful, handy and helpful." At no time is Friday referred to as a man or a boy or an individual, but always as "the poor savage" or simply "the creature." "His simple, unfeigned honesty appeared to me more and more every day, and I began to love the creature; and on his side, I believe he loved me more than it was possible for him ever to love anything before."

THE FIRST NOBLE SAVAGE?

At one point Crusoe falls into a lyrical description of his faithful servant, which might be the first ode to the Noble Savage known to literature, although since then we have certainly read it often enough. "... for never man had a more faithful, loving, sincere servant than Friday was to me; without passions, sullenness, or designs, perfectly obliged and engaged; his very affections were tied to me, like those of a child to a father; and I dare say he would have sacrificed his life for the saving of mine, upon any occasion whatever."

And just like so many other literary "savages" since, Friday would rather people when there is finally a chance for escape. A mutiny on board a passing English ship is the indirect reason why Crusoe with his parrot and Friday can start on the long voyage to England, where they arrive in 1687, 35 years after he first left home, according to Defoe's way of counting (actually 36 years).

Here most modern editions of *Robinson Crusoe* end, but Defoe had more to say about his hero. In the original version, Crusoe returns to London to learn that during his long absence his plantation in Brazil has been well taken care of and he can now sell it at a considerable profit. He marries and fathers two sons and one daughter, but when his wife dies his restless soul forces him out on a long voyage to East India. He also visits his old island, where a colony had been founded by the mutineers left behind by the ship that had rescued him. Thus ends the first part of the original *Robinson Crusoe*.

The second part is mainly concerned with the later fate of the colony and Crusoe's voyages to other places, including China and Japan.

The story of Robinson Crusoe exists on several levels. First and foremost, it is an adventure story about man's survival against great odds. But more importantly it is a story about man's utter loneliness and fear when he is isolated from other human contacts. It is also very much the story about a man who has sinned against God. (Robinson disobeyed his father, a severe sin in those days, and when he is shipwrecked on his first voyage, the ship's captain seems to feel that disaster struck because he had taken on board a disobedient son.) During those many years of loneliness Crusoe becomes deeply religious and repents; eventually he longs as much for God's forgiveness as for release from his captivity on the island. Robinson's religious development from a

Interracial Books

FOR CHILDREN

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Crusoe instructing Friday in an early edition of Robinson Crusoe.

callous young man (he never even writes his parents to say goodbye) to a mature Christian is an important theme in the book.

Next to the Bible there is hardly another book that has been translated into as many languages as *Robinson Crusoe*. This story of a shipwrecked man has been a world-wide best seller for more than 250 years because of its universal theme: it deals with that which, next to death, we fear most of all in life—loneliness.

NO LOVE INTEREST, NO WOMEN

This is a best seller without a love motif and, what's more, one that totally lacks the presence of women! One is loath to draw any conclusions from that curious fact and the book's tremendous success! The only woman Defoe mentions is Crusoe's mother and he does so in an early scene: "However, I did not act so hastily neither as my first heat of resolution prompted, but I took my mother, at a time when I thought her a little pleasanter than ordinary, and told her, that my thoughts were entirely bent upon seeing the world. . . ." (Italics mine)

Since this is the only description of his mother—as opposed to a lengthy one of his father—one is apt to conclude that Defoe didn't think much of women. And *Robinson Crusoe* is indeed a man's book, dealing only with men. One of the few things we know about Defoe is that he himself left his family when he was seventy! A man who leaves his family at the age of seventy is either senile or in dire need of escape. Perhaps the comments on Crusoe's mother is a sixty-year-old author's feelings about the woman he had been married to most of his life. But whatever the reason, Defoe obviously was not a happy man, knowing infinitely more about loneliness than about love and happiness.

BOOK QUICKLY TRANSLATED

In 1720, a year after *Robinson Crusoe's* first publication, abridged versions and adaptations began to appear; the same year saw the first translations into French, German and Dutch. In my own country, Sweden, 40 different translations and adaptations have already appeared and many more will undoubtedly come. The first Swedish translation was published in 1738, but the first complete version only appeared in 1842, and was given the necessary sub-title: "The real, original *Robinson Crusoe*."

And that brings me back to what I first said about our distorted memory of childhood favorites. This is of course true of everything we re-read; the book remains the same, but we don't. For *Robinson Crusoe*, the shock is almost unavoidable since as chil-

dred we seldom read the original. In most adaptations in both France and Germany we can trace Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion that since Crusoe started with nothing the whole story is a metaphor for man's evolution. (In fact, in *Emile*, Rousseau recommended *Robinson Crusoe* as sole reading for his young hero.) Since most Swedish translations have relied heavily on German ones it is now quite clear that as a child I didn't read *Robinson Crusoe* at all! The *Robinson Crusoe* I remember was a story (in the third person) about a rich and idle young man from Hamburg who disobeyed his parents and who as a just and well-earned punishment was shipwrecked on a deserted island without much more than the shirt on his back. He wasn't very lonely during the 12 years he stayed on the island for there was a happy boy scout air about the whole expedition. Friday came as a welcome helpmate rather than a feared "savage" (though he was still very much the servant), and together the two walked off into the sunset—more or less. During all this Robinson remained a fairly young man, for when he returned to England he was received by a forgiving father. I certainly can't recall any religious crisis. My surprises while reading the "original" version (Scribner's Illustrated Classics, 1957, illustrated by N.C. Wyeth), can only be understood by someone else who has been through the same experience.

But it isn't only in Europe that such "misinterpretations" have been allowed to linger. Whether influenced by Rousseau or not, there are a great variety of distorted versions available right here—abridged versions, adaptations and children's versions where the essence of *Robinson Crusoe* is changed so that seven-, eight-, and nine-year-olds can understand. (It should be noted here that at least in New York City the Public Library refuses to carry anything but the authorized, "original" editions that are available. However, it is not truly the original since it ends a bit sooner than Defoe had intended.)

IMPERIALISTIC AND RACIST

Over the years, *Robinson Crusoe* has been severely criticized for its imperialistic thinking, its *Übermensch* mentality and of course for its racism. In several of the Swedish editions of the late 18th century and early 19th century, all references to Crusoe's slave-trade were deleted. As a hero of an important book he could not possibly indulge in a practice that was under violent attack in most of Europe at the time. Racism and imperialism are often part of any book written in 1719—but it would be immensely helpful in the education of young people (and older ones too for that matter!) if this were explained in its historical context either in a foreword or in some other manner so as not to allow that kind of thinking to influence young and impressionable minds.

The sexism is of a much more serious variety—the hidden kind. It is so well hidden in fact that most readers won't even notice it. It simply has no women, except for the slur I mentioned earlier. And there is little we can do about that.

Robinson Crusoe will no doubt be read for a long time to come. And in spite of—or perhaps because of—its racism and imperialism it stands as a document about a period in our history which more often than not is recorded from the viewpoint of kings and philosophers and politicians—but seldom from that of an ordinary man.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
KIK REEDER, who is visiting the U.S., is a Swedish journalist-writer who has been working for the Scandinavian press as a fiction editor.

INFORMATION CLEARINGHOUSE

Education & Racism: An Action Manual provides information, program ideas and ways to deal with institutional racism. A bibliography of literature and audio-visual materials is also included. The booklet is especially useful for group leaders dealing with racism awareness. Order from the Foundation for Change, 1841 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023; or from the National Education Association, Washington, D. C. 20036 (order number 381-12056). \$2.

A consciousness-raising leaflet, *How Fair Are Your Children's Textbooks?* suggests ways to analyze texts and actions to be taken to insure unbiased material and provides a bibliography. Price for 30 copies is \$1.50. Make checks payable to the National Education Foundation; order from American Education Week, P.O. Box 327, Hyattsville, Md. 20781.

Early Childhood Newsletters: A Selected Guide lists periodicals of interest to educators, librarians, researchers, parents and others concerned with children. Single copies, 75¢; order from Publications Office, ERIC, College of Education, University of Illinois, 805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., Urbana, Ill. 61801.

The magazine *Integrated Education: Race and Schools* carries articles emphasizing research and theory on race and education. A one-year subscription (six issues) is \$8. Send to Northwestern University, Sheriden Rd., Evanston, Ill. 20201.

Booklegger magazine carries articles, listings and reviews of alternative resources (people and organizations) and publications of alternative and independent presses. \$1.50 per issue; \$8 annually (bi-monthly). Booklegger Press, 72 Ord St., San Francisco, Cal. 94114.

The Martin Luther King Foundation has prepared "King . . . Legacy of a Dream," a 29-minute film narrated by James Earl Jones, which shows not only Dr. King's work in civil rights but also what effects his work has had on today's society. The film rents for \$50 for 2 days or sells for \$350. Also available is "King: Speeches and Sermons," a 45-minute tape with an introduction by Coretta Scott King, which sells for \$7. A filmstrip on the life of Dr. King with a reading script and study guide for elementary schools will be ready in October. Contact the Martin Luther King Foundation at 309 East 90th St., New York, N.Y. 10028.

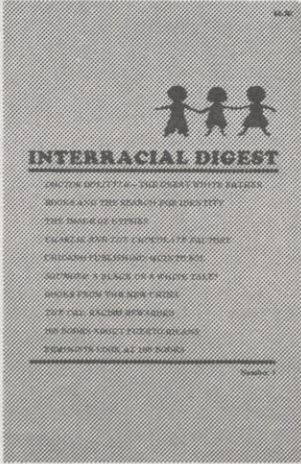
The Fourth Street is a bilingual journal published by New York City teenagers, is a magazine primarily "for, by, and about" the Puerto Rican community. Formerly an annual, it will be published monthly beginning this fall. Single issues are \$1 plus 50¢ postage. Write *The Fourth Street*, Box 13, 56 Avenue B, New York, N.Y. 10019.

An up-dated edition of "Fact Sheet on Institutional Racism," a 24-page compilation of statistics on minority oppression and white control of the American economy, government, education, etc., is available from the Foundation for Change, 1841 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023. Suitable for classroom use; 25¢ each.

Leake and Watts, a non-sectarian and interracial social service agency for children, is establishing a cultural center with material on all ethnic groups, but with emphasis on Black culture and history. Posters, records and record players, books, subscriptions to relevant newspapers or periodicals, etc., would be most welcome. Please send material to Ms. Joan Berner, Leake and Watts, 463 Hawthorne Ave., Yonkers, N.Y. 10705.

A demonstration to show support of the independence of Puerto Rico is being organized by The Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee. It will take place October 27th at Madison Square Garden, New York City. Persons interested in attending the demonstration, contributing to it or working on it should contact the Committee at P. O. Box 319, Cooper Station, New York, N.Y. 10023.

A new community center in Edwards, Mississippi, is starting a community library and requests relevant children's books. Please send to James Smith, The Rural Coalition of Mississippi, P. O. Box 3634, 520 N. President St., Jackson, Miss. 39201.



Order Your Copy of This New Book Now!

The *Interracial Digest*—containing 10 of the best articles from previous Bulletins—is now available. In a handy 5 1/2" X 8 1/2" format, the 48-page *Digest* includes reviews of such children's classics as "Doctor Dolittle," "The Cay," "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" and "Sounder," as well as general articles on the portrayal of minorities in children's books. The *Digest* is available free to new institutional or contributing subscribers (see coupon on page 8) or it can be obtained from the Council, 1841 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023, for \$2.50.

THE SLAVE DANCER: Critiques of T

We are giving special attention to *The Slave Dancer* on these pages not because its literary racism is any more pronounced than what appears in a great many children's books today, but because it has been cited by librarians as the "most distinguished" work of the year. We believe that the librarians who select next year's most "distinguished" book will want to be aware of these criticisms. We present, on this page, the views of two black authors; on the following page, two white authors look at *The Slave Dancer*.

Racism and Distortions Pervade "The Slave Dancer"

By Binnie Tate

Having a good deal of respect for some of the author's earlier writings, I approached *The Slave Dancer* by Paula Fox with positive expectations. After reading the book, I pushed my nagging negative feelings into the background. Later, during conversations and discussions about the book, my apprehensions kept surfacing. Much that was said about the book in these discussions had very racist implications, and these implications were supported by the book. I then reread *The Slave Dancer* to determine the reason for this.

At the American Library Association presentation by the Council in July, Sharon Bell Mathis vividly pointed out many of the negative aspects of the story. I support her findings and would like to suggest that no matter what the author's intent, this book presents grave problems for those of us concerned with eliminating children's materials which help perpetuate racism.

Told in the first person, *The Slave Dancer* is the story of Jessie Bollier, a thirteen-year-old boy who is shanghaied and compelled to work on a slave ship. The title derives from the boy's shipboard assignment to play his fife and "dance" the slaves, which was in essence an exercise to keep the slaves alive.

Most of the story takes place aboard ship. The crew is described, and several scenes revolve around their interaction with the boy and each other. Later, the slaves are brought aboard and Jessie and the crew are seen in relation to the slaves.

The tainted ship meets with disaster. Jessie and Ras, a slave boy, are the only survivors. They swim to shore where they meet an escaped slave who takes care of them. Ras is taken to safety and Jessie returns home.

In the early passages of the story, the captain of the ship speaks of Jessie as "creole." This identification could be thoroughly confusing to readers. Depending upon a person's background, "creole" may have a variety of meanings. For some, it means anyone in the colonies with a European background; for others, it is a French-Spanish, French-English or French-American mixture. In the Black community, "creole" generally implies some basis in blackness—for example, a Black person from a certain area of Louisiana with creole parentage and who speaks creole or any white-skinned Black.

In any case, some readers identify the main character as creole Black and others identify him as creole white. Certainly, the interpretation of the story will differ accordingly.

As the story develops the author attempts to portray the slave ship's captain and crew as villains, but through the characters' words, she excuses the captors and places the blame for the slaves' captivity on Africans themselves. The author slowly and systematically excuses almost all the whites in the story for their partici-

pation in the slave venture and by innuendo places the blame elsewhere. A few examples follow:

The native chiefs are so greedy for our trade goods, they sell their own people cheaper than they ever did to tempt us to run the British blockade. (page 34)

I thought of the African kings setting upon each other's tribes to capture the men and women—and children for all I knew—who would be bartered for spirits and tobacco and arms. . . . (page 70)

The chiefs kidnap the children. . . . The slavers give good trade goods for them because they fetch such high prices in the West Indies. (page 84)

The following quotes were probably an attempt to balance this perspective, but they are too feeble and have an almost equally negative impact:

Purvis had said the native kings sold their own people willingly, yet he'd also told me there were chiefs who would sink the ship and kill us if they had the chance. (page 62)

The African was tempted and then became depraved by a desire for the material things offered him by debased traders. (page 84)

America is held generally blameless in the slave trade. Says Jessie, "I learned then that there were American laws, too, against the importing of slaves" (page 44). Later in the book, the Americans are compared with the Spanish. When the slaves are forced to dress up, a crew member says, "[The slaves] ought to have a bit of pleasure before the Cubans get them. The Spanish are very cruel you know" (page 136). The British are also at least partly exonerated: "They've entirely stopped the slave trade in their country" (page 34).

On page 70 the author attempts to equate the African slave trade with other historical incidents. Says one of the crew:

Do you think it was easier for my own people who sailed to Boston sixty years ago from Ireland, locked up in a hold for the whole voyage where they might have died of sickness and suffocation? . . . and you dare speak of my parents in the same breath with these niggers!

The plight of the crew is described as worse than that of the slaves:

[The captain was] terrible, terrible with his crews and only a little less so with the blacks. But he wants *them* in good health to make his profit. But God help the sick nigger for he'll drop him overboard between the brandy and the lighting of his pipe! (page 31)

In scenes aboard ship, the crew are generally portrayed as vile, coarse and vicious but the author even manages to cancel these qualities in most of the crew.

But except for Stout and Spark and the Captain, the men were *not especially cruel* save in their shared and unshakable conviction that the least of them was better than any black alive. Gardere and Purvis and Cooley even played with the small black children. . . . (italics added, page 95)

The slaves in the story are completely dehumanized. They are often

spoken of as "creatures." Many of the statements and incidents regarding them are prejudicial and totally unnecessary to the development of the story. Some of the statements and incidents which are seemingly included only to "color" the Blacks follow:

I won't have Ibos. They're *soft as melons* and kill themselves if they're not watched twenty-four hours a day. I will not put up with such *creatures!* (italics added, page 27)

The slaves are *never* gone! . . . All of Africa is nothing but a bottomless sack of blacks. (page 63)

. . . the *poor, poor* black fellows. Poor indeed! Living in savagery and ignorance. Think on this—their own chiefs can't wait to throw them in our holds! (page 65)

They [the slaves] ain't like us, and that's the truth. (page 75)

. . . since none of [the slaves] were Christian he would not *corrupt his tongue* by learning a single word from any of them. (italics added, page 84)

Most striking are comments from the boy Jessie:

I hated the slaves! I hated their shuffling, their howling, their very suffering. I hated the way they spat out their food upon the deck, the overflowing buckets, the emptying of which tried all my strength. I hated the foul stench that came from the holds no matter which way the wind blew, as though the ship itself were soaked with human excrement. I would have snatched the rope from Spark's hand and beaten them myself! Oh God! I wished them all dead! Not to hear them! Not to smell them, not to know of their existence. (page 91)

Aside from the constantly repeated

racist implications and negative illusions, there is a question of *The Slave Dancer's* historical accuracy. There is, for instance, some question about the slaves being "Ashantis captured in tribal wars with the Yoruba." I can find no evidence of these being warring peoples.

Certainly there is not enough evidence that African chiefs were a *primary* force in the slave trade to allow for the consistent projection of this theme.

One may also argue the credibility of the relationship that is portrayed between Jessie and the slave boy Ras. There was no basis for the trust which exists between them in the final passages of the story.

The author has assumed the task of dealing in this story with a serious and critical issue in U.S. history. Slavery touches at the very "gut" of the Black Experience in America, and young children deserve a *fair and accurate* picture of it, even in a work of fiction. Instead, as presented, this story has clearly racist leanings.

The Newbery-Caldecott Committee of the ALA has given this book a label of excellence. It therefore becomes the responsibility of adults who care about the eradication of racism to reject the purchase and use of *The Slave Dancer*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BINNIE TATE is former children's specialist for the Los Angeles Public Library and has taught specialized courses in Black materials at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and California State College, Fullerton.

An Insult to Black Children

By Sharon Bell Mathis

The following article is excerpted from the speech given by Ms. Mathis at the Council's ALA presentation (see pg. 1).

I had hoped that Rosa Guy's *The Friends* would win the Newbery Prize this year since it had been nominated. I thought, "Well, maybe this will be the year in the 53-year-history of the prize that a Black book will win." *The Friends* did not win.

So this year *again* the ALA has chosen as "a distinguished book" one that insults my children and, yes, all Black people. A book that perpetuates stereotypes about Africa and about Blacks in general—stereotypes that in my writing I do my best to demolish.

Of course, I am talking as one Black writer, but I am sure this is what all Black writers who are writing for children today are about. Those of us who are writing for children are trying to celebrate and to document Black truth.

Just in case there are some of you who haven't yet read *The Slave Dancer*, there are some excerpts that I would like to read to you from this year's "most distinguished book" for children.

I wonder where [the slaves] think they are [says Jessie]. They don't think much [answers one of the crew]. (page 123)

I saw the others regarded the slaves as less than animals, although having a greater value in gold . . . [and the crew shared an] unshakable conviction that the least of them was better than any black alive. (page 95)

And if a white child never thought that before, it's in his head now.

They're all mad, the blacks! (page 64)

[The buckets are] latrines for the blacks. . . . Put them where your fancy suits you. It won't matter to them. (page 71)

Man? . . . you mean the nigger! (page 75)

Cawthorne [the captain] knew the black would recover—they can survive floggings that would kill a white man a hundred times over. . . . (page 101)

And there's one thing I noticed in *The Slave Dancer*, nobody says anything about the white sailors taking a bath. One bucket of water per day is allotted to the *whole* crew for washing (page 36) but there's no attention given to that. Only to the fact that the smell that was on the ship came from Black people.

And again, when the slaves are brought on board, "I heard a sound as though a thousand rats were scrambling up the hull of *The Moonlight*" (page 72). OK, now I know what it's like to sit at a typewriter half the night and look for the images that will say most what you want to say. And I just think that the word "rats" there was uncalled for. The feet of people don't sound like the feet of rats. Rats have a delicate sound. I know.

And then on page 136, you have, "Give what he calls a ball. . . . [The captain] says the niggers like to dress up." And I want you to know, for those of you who haven't read the book, that in this particular scene there is a trunk full of "clothes. . . the very best! Silks, laces. . ." and I want you also to know that they had mentioned that the slaves of course couldn't wash. They were stinking terribly. They even had feces

This Year's Newbery Award Winner

sticking to their bodies. So if you have a trunk full of clothes that you have used again and again for these slaves that you dress up, and they all have human feces on them, that's a tremendous expense, isn't it? To put these fine silks on people, and take them off, and clean them, or what have you, and put them back in the trunk. Well, I don't believe it. About this scene I thought, "How could somebody sit at a typewriter and write this, and then the ALA calls it 'distinguished'?" It isn't even believable.

And then you have a ship wreck, and the only two people to survive are the white boy and the Black boy. And no sooner are they on land than the white child becomes the superior, the leader.

When a Newbery winner is cited, it is one of the first books that school officials make *sure* the children read. I have three children, one almost fifteen, one eleven and one nine, and they'll have to read "niggers like to dress up," they stink, they shuffle, they sound like rats coming on ships, and the reason why they're on the ship is because somebody Black sold them out.

The ALA has a responsibility to all of us since libraries belong to all of us. And if libraries reflect what we are about, then there must be something wrong with us when librarians cite books like *Sounder* and *The Slave Dancer* as "distinguished."

Children's books have always reflected the society they flourished in. There was a time when people thought that books had to be very tiny because children were very small. We laugh about that now, but that was very serious at one time. "Little books for little people." There was another time when children had to read the most terrible, the most frightening literature, to make them good, to make them courteous, to make them understand that God was important. Now we all recognize the mistakes. I wonder, years from now, what people will recognize as *our* mistakes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SHARON BELL MATHIS is a student of library science in Washington, D.C. She is the author of several children's books, including *Teacup Full of Roses*, *Sidewalk Story* and *Listen for the Fig Tree*.

The Black Experience as Backdrop For White Adventure Story

By Albert V. Schwartz

Should a white author use the Black Experience as mere background for a white-oriented adventure story?

This is one of several disturbing questions that have been posed by the selection of Paula Fox's *The Slave Dancer* for the 1974 Newbery Award.

For an analysis of *The Slave Dancer*, I would like to borrow some perspectives and criteria from Paul Hazard—the noted historian and author of *Books, Children and Men* (Horn Books, 1970).

To the question "What are good books for children?" Hazard answered,

... books that awaken in them not maudlin sentimentality, but sensibility; that enable them to share in great human emotions; that give them respect for universal life ... that contain a profound morality. Not the kind of morality which consists in believing oneself a hero because one has given two cents to a poor man ... here snivelling pity, there a pietism that knows nothing of charity; somewhere else a middle-class hypocrisy. Not the kind of morality that asks for no deeply felt consent, for no personal effort ... books that set in action truths worthy of lasting forever, and of inspiring one's whole inner life ...

With Hazard's concepts in mind—"not maudlin sentimentality, but sensibility ... inspiring one's whole inner life"—let us discuss *The Slave Dancer*.

The book revolves essentially around the familiar theme of a white adolescent boy's initiation into manhood. The location of young Jessie's ritual is the slave ship *The Moonlight*. The evil white officers and crew are the masters of the ritual. The baptism occurs when Jessie emerges from the shipwrecked vessel as "the man," mastering the crisis and automatically assuming the leadership role in his relation with the one surviving Black.

As Ruth Hill Viguers pointed out in *A Critical History of Children's Literature* (Macmillan, 1953):

Over and over again, in sea adventure stories, is to be found the plot involving the young apprentice who must make his way among seasoned, often cruel seamen. ...

AN OLD THEME WITH A NEW TWIST

What is new in this particular sea adventure is the introduction of the Black Experience. The trade in African slaves becomes the backdrop for a white child's ritual. There are sea adventure stories in which galley "slaves" (English, Spanish, French) actively take over the ship and become the heroes, sometimes knighted by a European king. There are no such heroes in *The Slave Dancer*. In this sea story, chained Black people passively submit to the whims of white men. By story's end, all the Blacks are destroyed, with the exception of

one lone young boy. And he submits to the young white hero.

Millions of Black people were killed during the "middle passage." The fierce struggle of those who survived is worthy of a writer's attention, but Paula Fox describes only a hopeless acceptance of chains, beatings and humiliations.

For a white author to overcome the limitations of ethnocentric bias in an attempt to describe and interpret the Black Experience would be a challenging task. It would require a new creative approach to the polarizations of Black and white views of historical reality. Such a white author would have to dig into the prevalent myths and stereotypes on a personal level—confront her or his own racism as a white person socialized in a racist society. An awesome task; but one that authors intent on portraying with truth an experience outside their own must strive for. (Here I want to say that previously, in *Blowfish Live in the Sea*, Paula Fox used reality with brilliance. In that story the one "real" fact illuminates and defines the characters and the plot, and a moment of life is revealed.)

In *The Slave Dancer*, the Black victims are a nameless mass, differentiated only by their sex. In other sea stories white galley "slaves" would have names and personalities. Here, no human characteristic is delineated for the slaves; no individuality is shown. The whites in the story—despite their evilness—possess names, possess personalities, possess individualities. Their depravity is counteracted



(Detail) Jessie plays the fife on board the slave ship.

by their "human" aspects. The Black people are *only* pathetic sufferers. No "fight back" qualities whatever are found in these characterless, chained objects on the ship *The Moonlight*. For them the author presents no balance.

White writers frequently resort to the device of portraying Blacks as a passive, faceless mass to show their oppression. The device is effective sometimes in creating pity and sentimentality, but it is still dehumanizing, and that is a major flaw.

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Evaluating Books by New Criteria

By Lyla Hoffman

I'm white. The Council invited me to read *The Slave Dancer* and join a discussion of the book. So I read—I cried—and I went to the meeting.

I said to the Council discussion group (Asian, Black and white women and men): "Paula Fox writes well. She wanted to do an exposé of the 'middle passage' aspect of slavery. Young readers will learn from her book about the horrors of the slave trade. They will see the vileness of the whites who earned their livelihood from this 'human cargo.' I would be delighted to have children read this book."

The ensuing discussion did something more important than change my outlook on this particular well-intentioned book. The discussion forced me to formulate my own criteria for judging the worth of any children's book. In reaching my personal formulation, I had to abandon as irrelevant any consideration of the *intent* of the author (or the *intent* of the librarians who gave it the Newbery award). I had to focus on the impact of the book on readers of *all* colors in today's racist society.

So when a Black librarian, who is also a parent and a grandparent, spoke at that Council discussion, she set me thinking when she said, "Any Black child reading *The Slave Dancer* would cringe at the endless, ugly remarks white characters spew out about the captured Africans. Black children must no longer be forced to hear such insults."

I suddenly realized that setting age-old racist remarks into fresh print today cannot be justified, especially when nothing else in the book counteracts the insulting "niggerisms." Even when the characters responsible for the insults are clearly described as evil and unsympathetic, their re-

marks still have the ability to deeply wound young Black readers. And if an author intends to show that human oppression dehumanizes the white oppressors as well as the oppressed Blacks, then it is necessary to delineate the humanity of the Blacks. This never was done in *The Slave Dancer*.

In thinking about the book's impact on Black youngsters, I began to realize how white youngsters of today have also been socialized in a racist society. They too have been taught to believe vile things about Blacks. They have been taught to feel virtuous when they feel compassion for the suffering of the oppressed. And they are taught to feel compassion without feeling the need to *do* anything about oppression. Jessie, the young hero of *The Slave Dancer*, feels horror and pity, but he does nothing as a boy; and he does nothing, later in life, as a man. He is, therefore, just part of the problem.

My new test of a book is: "Will this book advance human liberation or will it reinforce oppression?" Or, as a wise man previously put it, "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem." Though I had long applied this yardstick to matters of personal behavior, of school policy, of legal matters, of life in general—I had not had the sense to apply it to book criticism.

Although I have heard many compelling reasons for condemning the choice of *The Slave Dancer* as a prize winner in the year 1974, the arguments were not necessary for me. I had switched. Today, my first test for evaluating a book is, "Will this book be part of the solution?"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LYLA HOFFMAN is the director of the Foundation for Change, New York City.

We believe that literary and artistic merit cannot be separated from the larger cultural and political context of society. We therefore ask that new criteria be established for library awards and children's recommended book lists and that these criteria include recognition of the human values fostered by the content of books under consideration for special merit. Since those most sensitive to injustice are those harmed most by it, we further ask that a Third World review board be set up to critique and assess all books being considered for special recognition before awards are granted. We also ask that machinery be set up to determine the disposition of books under consideration if they are found to be offensive to the Third World review board.—The Council on Interracial Books for Children

THE SLAVE DANCER

Continued from page 5

Paula Fox infers that whites and Blacks participated equally in the slave trade. This is another of the modern manifestations of racism—to mitigate white responsibility for slavery by blaming the victim. This white perspective ignores the difference between chattel slavery in the U.S.—which developed out of a desire for a massive supply of cheap labor—and the slavery which existed in Africa. In Africa, slaves were not considered biologically or culturally inferior; they lived with the family they served; often their freedom was assured after a certain number of years or they could buy their way out of slavery; they could marry a non-slave and not risk the loss of their children. Contemporary prejudices are so often confused with historical truths!

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

One example of the put-down of Blacks is the author's unconscious bias in her use of proper nouns—capitalizing a noun and hence giving it dignity when the reference is to a white person but lower-casing the noun and depriving it of dignity when the reference is to a Black. Read the following paragraph from *The Slave Dancer* (page 70), and see if the white captain and the African king, who are equated in cruelty by the author, are given equal dignity in the writing:

... the [African] king and the Captain had got so drunk that when dawn rose, the Captain had clambered over the side, ready to make off and rule the tribe and leave the black king in command of the ship.

Jessie, the hero of this tale, never achieves Paul Hazard's concept of a "higher morality" which might "inspire inner life." Jessie's experience with oppression on the slaver simply inactivates him. He shows that he is aware of oppression but makes no meaningful protest; he takes no stand against it. He is no model for today's young readers. At the end of the ritual of baptism, Jessie cannot play his fife, thus easing the uncomfortable memories.

Despite endless incidents of white cruelty to Blacks and of white cruelty to other whites, it is only when Jessie hears that African kings sell slaves that he is moved to think, "The world, I told myself, was as wicked as our parson had said . . ." (page 70). This line serves as the "moral" of the tale and it is the stepping stone for Jessie's defeatism as an adult. Jessie uses his privilege as a white to erase the ugly memories of his experience on the slaver. (In the anticlimactic ending of the book, Jessie states almost parenthetically that he was prepared for the horrors of the Civil War by his experience on *The Moonlight*.)

In the midst of his onerous jobs aboard ship—he is after all a kidnapped victim himself—he does not turn against the evil captain or the despicable crew but against the enslaved Blacks: "I hated the slaves! I hated their shuffling, their howling, their very suffering" (page 91).

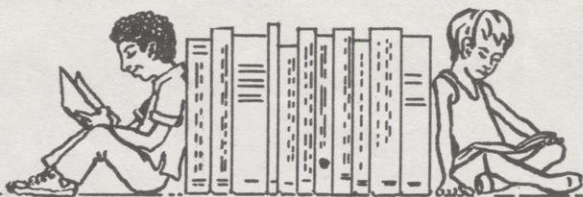
Later when Jessie is punished with five strokes of the whip he thinks:

But one thing was clear, I was a thirteen-year-old male, not as tall though somewhat heavier than a boy close to my own age, now doubled up in the dark below, not a dozen yards from where I was being beaten.

So Jessie's lot is not so bad—as long as others have it worse! White misery is not bad if Black slavery is worse. It is an interesting psychological mechanism.

White readers who empathize with the misery of the Black Experience can feel virtuous. To feel virtuous is to feel superior. To put it into the terms of an R. D. Laing "Knot" or

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THE BOOKSHELF

On Our Way: Poems of Pride and Love selected by Lee Bennett Hopkins, photographs by David Parks. Alfred A. Knopf, 1974, \$4.95, 63 pages

On Our Way: Poems of Pride and Love is an anthology of Black poetry which presents the reader with an optimistic outlook. Strength and fortitude, love and brotherhood, and pride are its major concerns and they reflect the poets, the editor, and the photographer's hope and belief in a new era.

The titles of the five sections into which the anthology is divided (Blackness, Soullove, Four, Feelings, and Remembering) alert the reader to the volume's subject matter: affirmations of Blackness, consideration of the love experience, praise of Black personalities, responses or reactions, and nostalgia. The anthology contains works by such well-known poets as Langston Hughes and Nikki Giovanni as well as poems by less familiar authors. Accompanying each poem is a photograph by David Parks.

Poems such as "As a Basic," "A Love Song," and "Knoxville, Tenn." can be read and understood by young readers. More difficult poems can be explained by teacher or parent. Poems inspired by Black personalities, poems that refer to the harsher realities of the Black experience, and poems that reflect "the good times" are fine vehicles for exposing readers to the Black historical perspective. [Tanya Joy Cobbs]

* * *

City ABC's by Michael Deasy, photographs by Robert Perron. Walker and Company, 1974, trade edition \$5.50, library edition \$5.39, 32 pages

City ABC's presents the alphabet with each letter next to a large photograph of an urban scene. "A" is illustrated by a shot of an alley; "G," by a gate. Each letter is also accompanied by a short ditty about the photograph. "G is for gate, locked gates block your way, open gates let you play."

Photographs were taken in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, New Orleans and San Francisco; many photos or explanations are humorous. For instance, "H is for hard hat. Why must the hard hat wear a hard hat? 'Because I don't have a hard head.'" "M" for manhole shows a scene of a supervisor pointing down a hole for two apparently reluctant workers. The photo for "Q" shows a girl under a Quiet Hospital Zone sign. She's listening to a radio.

The book is refreshing because the scenes are real, and the people are interracial. *City ABC's* is especially good for urban children. [Roberto Gautier]

* * *

Hey, Look at Me! A City A.B.C. by Sandy Grant, photographs by Larry Mulvehill. Bradbury Press, 1973, \$4.95, 32 pages

This book is another welcome and exciting change from the usual A.B.C. book. Instead of the stuffed animal or apple for "A," there are interesting photos of children performing an action for each letter.

A group of children—racially integrated—are shown in an urban setting. The young urban reader can eas-

ily identify with the children in the book and see himself performing the same actions. In fact, the book can be used to encourage children to act out the different verbs introduced by the book. The excellent photos will make children aware of their own activities. [Elaine Bloom]

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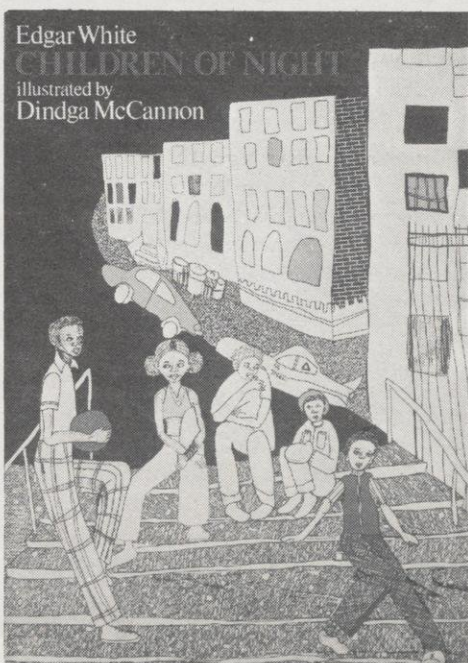
Children of Night by Edgar White, illustrated by Dindga McCannon. Lothrop, Lee and Shephard, 1974, \$4.95, 48 pages

Children of Night is Edgar White's third book for children. Like the author, Chaka was born in the British West Indies, but he is growing up in the "South Bronx of the Dark City." Chaka sleeps three in a bed, a pyramid of brothers, and goes to school where the windows have wire for faces. The only thing enjoyable in school is the free lunch. When Chaka has to write about freedom he writes: "Only birds are free because they never can run out of sky."

Chaka is not free because he and his family run out of everything. Chaka dreams a lot—sometimes he dreams of having enough to eat—but even his dreams are not free; they are invaded by armies of roaches and by crowds of people trying to break into his apartment. The author's use of dreams shows the way in which fantasy can be used to comment on reality. The tension between Chaka's life and his dreams provides the young reader with an insight into the ugly and at times frightening reality that too many children are forced to live with.

When summer comes to the dark city, the city blows up, and in the riot (a scene which will remind many adult readers of Ellison's *Invisible Man*) Chaka makes his way to a supermarket and collects a bag of food. His mother's ambivalent reaction to the food is at first confusing to Chaka, but in his dreams that night there is freedom; the bird-like dream carries him out of the tenement, out of city and country, beyond the world and universe. Chaka is at peace.

This imaginative story is told in simple and powerful sentences. Equally important in this book are the folk/primitive illustrations which suggest that Ms. McCannon, who is now working on her own book, is a children's



Children of Night was illustrated by Black artist Dindga McCannon.

artist to watch. [Ray Anthony Shepard]

* * *

Viva La Raza! by Elizabeth S. Martínez and Enriqueta L. Vázquez. Doubleday, 1974, \$4.95, 353 pages

Two Chicanas, long active in many efforts to advance the Chicano cause, have written a forceful and fervent account of some of the most significant events and personalities in recent years of the Chicano movement.

Viva La Raza is an accurate rendering of the feelings among many of the people of *los barrios* about the injustice and neglect which Chicanos have suffered for generations. The authors pull no punches about what they consider the real causes of the Chicano predicament: "The *gringo* took over our land, our technology, and our natural resources. It is these losses that made the *mestizo* (Mexican-Indian) and the Indian into colonized people, people who became not only strangers in their own land but voiceless shadows of the West."

In a very sincere and direct manner, Martínez and Vázquez get their basic message across quite clearly: *Viva La Raza!* should not be just an empty clamor of pride but a call to vindicate through effective action the countless injustices committed against the Chicano in the name of "Manifest Destiny," "law and order," and "free enterprise."

The book recounts many of the key events which have occurred within the mainstreams of *el movimiento*: La Raza Unida Party, the United Farmworkers' strikes and boycotts, the Crusade for Justice, the land grants struggle in New Mexico, and the student walkouts. An important aspect of many of these events which no writers have yet captured is the role of Chicanas, *las mujeres*. The authors' special contribution in this regard, I believe, is that they place the focus of Chicano nationalism on the *Familia de La Raza*.

Because of its format (large type, short chapters plus an index), *Viva La Raza!* is an ideal text for junior and senior high school students. [Armando B. Rendon]

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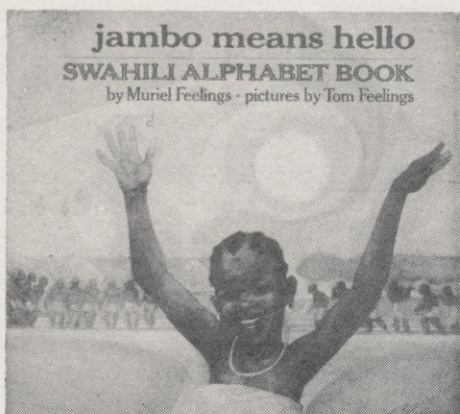
Puerto Rico En Me Corazon/Puerto Rico In My Heart by Federico Ribes Tovar, illustrated by Izzy Sanabria. Plus Ultra Educational Publishers, 1972, \$2.45, 32 pages.

This book is a notch above the usual genre of children's books on Puerto Rico. Each of its 32 pages describes an aspect of Puerto Rican life, and the accounts appear—on two parallel columns—first in Spanish and then in English. That Spanish is given first position is a welcome change for bilingual books.

Some Puerto Rican heroes that are usually ignored are given prominence in this book—the Black sea adventurer Miguel Enriquez and the pirate hero Robert Cofresi, for example. Moreover, the origin of the word *Jibaro* is not in this book attributed to the Spanish for "primitive," as it often is.

However, teachers or parents will do well to point out the author's white male European point of view and his pro-Spain orientation (the author is Moroccan). In the illustrations, non-whites are shown in positions that are subservient to whites, and the few females shown are also passive and in positions subservient to males. The absurdity of the book's opening sentence, that Columbus "discovered" Puerto Rico, should also be pointed out to young readers.

The book shares a number of other faults in common with children's books on Puerto Rico. Cock-fighting is a popular sport in Puerto Rico, but it is not—as this book claims—the favorite amusement of Puerto Ricans. As for the word "hammock,"



Jambo Means Hello introduces Swahili and a way of life.

though it is in fact derived from a Carib Indian term, it is not "typical of Puerto Rico's carefree way of life." Conditions in Puerto Rico under U.S. domination have become altogether too depressing to justify the term "carefree" for any part of Puerto Rican life. [Carmen Puigdollers]

* * *

Jambo Means Hello by Muriel Feelings, illustrated by Tom Feelings. Dial Press, 1974, \$5.95, 44 pages

Jambo Means Hello is an excellent book. It will introduce small children (and adults) to the African language of Swahili. It is a picture dictionary of the language with a word, its pronunciation and its meaning for each of the 24 letters of the Swahili alphabet.

The definitions are an important element in the excellence of this book. They are not *just* definitions; rather they tell how the word relates to the people and they describe a way of life. For example: "C—chakula is food. In villages the people grow most of their food. Together, many families raise crops like corn, green vegetables, fruits and nuts, and divide the harvest." Accompanying this definition is a two-page soft pencil drawing that shows neat fields of crops and men, women and children working together. The entire book evokes a feeling of community—Black community—and I recommend it highly. [Ed Celina Marcus]

* * *

The Life and Legend of George McJunkin—Black Cowboy by Frank Folsome. Thomas Nelson, 1974 \$5.95 162 pages

In 1865 George McJunkin was fourteen years old. That year Union soldiers, passing the Texas ranch where he worked as a slave, told him that the Emancipation Proclamation had given him his freedom. The following year, against the wishes of his father who was a free Black and operated a blacksmith shop, George left home. According to the author, he wanted to "be a cowboy and ride off to faraway places and learn about all kinds of wonders."

This biography gives a credible picture of a Black cowboy struggling to do the job that he does best in an often hostile white world. While presenting McJunkin as a skilled cowboy (the best ranch foreman) and an heroic man (saving a 14-man trail crew from freezing to death during a blizzard), the author uses every opportunity to alert the reader to the harsh realities of McJunkin's world. For example, he lived a solitary and lonely life because whites in the area where he worked were hostile to Black settlers. The author also shows that McJunkin as a Black man could not escape personal humiliation. For instance, he was given a seat in the kitchen at a dinner given in his honor because the hotel did not serve Blacks in the dining room.

Readers with a serious interest in the West or in Black history will find a great deal of information in this book. [Barbara Walker]

Ray Charles by Sharon Bell Mathis, illustrated by George Ford. T.Y. Crowell, 1973, \$3.75, 33 pages

This book is about as good as a short biography of Ray Charles could possibly be. The musician, blinded as a child from an eye disease, emerges from Ms. Mathis' skillfully crafted book as a gentle, strong, competent man, husband, father, Black man. The black and white illustrations by George Ford are sensitive and excellently complement the text.

The point that Ray Charles is blind but not helpless is well-made. Did you know that he owns an airplane and could fly it—if a blind man were allowed to have a pilot's license? Did you know that he can take a television set apart and then put it back together again? Did you know that he rides a motorcycle by following another cycle and listening to its sound to stay on course? Did you know that he selects his own clothes and decides what colors that he wants?

Even as a little boy Ray Charles knew that he had the ability to accomplish anything. His mother gave him this confidence. As she told him, "You're blind, not stupid. You lost your sight, not your mind." Ray's mother expected him to perform tasks that a sighted child could perform. She even had him use an axe to chop wood.

Young readers should be intrigued by this glimpse into the life of one of America's most talented musicians. [Barbara Walker]

* * *

Riverlisp by Frederick Ward. Tundra Books, 1974, \$5.95, 154 pages

Frederick Ward's objective in writing *Riverlisp* was to provide the reader with a glimpse of those lost Black communities known as riverlisps. He does so by allowing those who lived the experience of the riverlisp to speak to the reader directly. Thus, *Riverlisp* is both a part of Black history and a manifestation of the Black (African) oral tradition.

Frederick Ward allows his characters not only to relate their recollections, but also to express themselves in Black language. In the context of *Riverlisp* this is necessary, non-offensive, and illustrative of the author's pride in his heritage. Readers not familiar with the written form will have no difficulty if *Riverlisp* is read in the manner recommended by the author: "aloud [and] with feeling."

Since *Riverlisp* is the story of a community, it describes situations and events and focuses on personalities. In each instance, it deals with the good and the bad, the happy and the sad.

Given its explicit language and some of its subject matter, *Riverlisp* may be best appreciated by adults. However, used selectively, *Riverlisp* will be informative and enjoyable to the young. [Tanya Joy Cobbs]

* * *

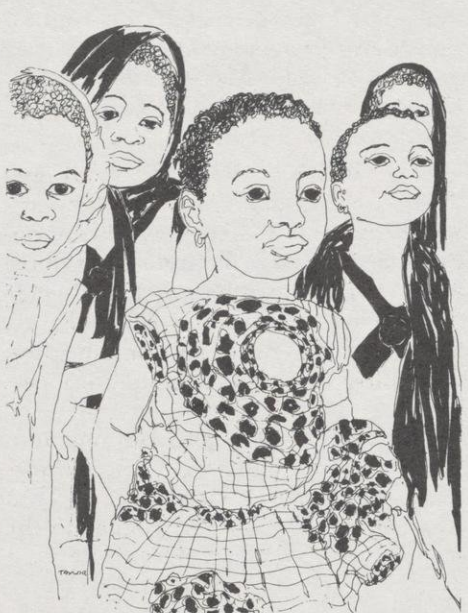
Shawn Goes to School by Petronella Breinburg, illustrated by Errol Lloyd. Thomas Y. Crowell, 1973, \$4.50, unpagged

Published a year ago in England by Bodley Head under the title *My Brother Sean*, this book was the first of a series to be written and illustrated by Black authors and artists. (The book was described in the Bulletin's "Report from England" that appeared in Vol. 5, No. 1 & 2.)

The book is now available in the U.S. and it is interesting how few changes were made to adapt the book for the U.S. market: "Sean" became "Shawn" and "Mum" is now "Mom."

The story deals with the experiences of a young boy who longs to go to school like his older brother but who, when the day finally comes, finds nursery school a bit frightening. The happy ending should reassure children starting school. [Ruth Charnes]

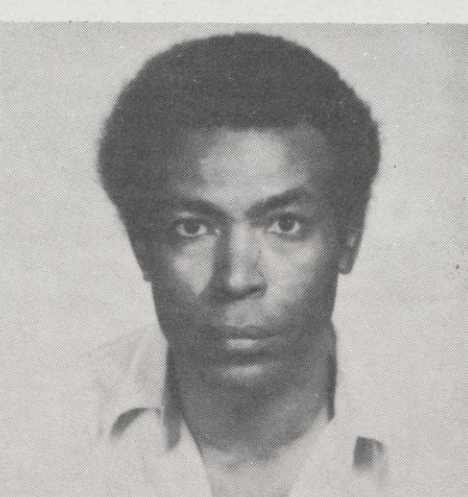
ART DIRECTORS, TAKE NOTE



Jean Taylor, a graduate of Pratt, has had work in many exhibits, including a recent show at the Studio Museum in Harlem. In addition to doing the poster for the First Festival of Third World Artists, she has done illustrations for the U.S. Department of Labor, National Business League Magazine, etc. Ms. Taylor can be reached at 95 W. 95th St., New York, N.Y. 10025; tel. (212) 866-7253.



Betty Dillard, an art major at York College, has participated in the Council's Art-and-Storytelling-in-the-Streets Program. Ms. Dillard can be reached at 209 Clinton Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11205; tel., UL 2-8380.



Charles Bible has produced the Afro-American Hero Series of posters and illustrated Black Means . . . , Brooklyn Story, and Spin a Soft Black Song (all Hill & Wang). Mr. Bible can be reached at 94-11 34th Rd., Jackson Heights, N.Y. 11378; tel. (212) 898-0790. (Mr. Bible appeared in a previous Bulletin, at which time his address was inadvertently omitted.)

THE SLAVE DANCER

Continued from page 6
paradox: "I feel bad that this is happening to them. I feel good that I feel bad." But by thus feeling compassion, whites are relieved of the need to change society. Like Jessie, they end up feeling no real obligation to take a positive role. They merely take the passive role of not playing the fife—of not reacting to injustice in any meaningful way.

The *Slave Dancer* is an excellent example of the subtle forms literary racism has taken recently. (*Literary racism* may be defined as the aspect of cultural racism which deals with language, metaphors and mythology and which prevents a Black-white unity capable of destroying institutional racism.)

A TOOL FOR LIBERATION

If literature—just like every human institution and art form—can be a tool for oppression or a tool for liberation, then let us ask:

1. If a story emphasizes the Black Experience, should it ever be written by anyone other than a Black author?
2. Should the Black Experience ever be treated solely as a backdrop to a white historical panorama?
3. When a story includes the Black Experience, shouldn't authors and critics reject placing Black survival and destiny in white hands? (For instance, should Ras, the young Black boy, have immediately followed Jessie's leadership after the shipwreck?)
4. Should Third World people in any story written today be nameless and without individuality?
5. Should stories about the Black Experience produce in young people the kind of pity and guilt that results in paternalistic attitudes? Shouldn't an inspired desire for human improvement, based upon truth and justice, be the product of good, anti-racist literature?

In conclusion I should like to offer another statement from Paul Hazard, who made the point so well:

But to misshape young souls, to profit by a certain facility that one may possess to add to the number of indigestible and sham books . . . that is what I call oppressing children.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
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ALA PRESENTATION

Continued from page 1
scription, metaphor, and dialogue in the Newbery winner. (Excerpts from Ms. Mathis' presentation and critiques of *The Slave Dancer* appear on pages 4 and 5.)
Jane Galvin Lewis, an active Black feminist and consultant for Social Change Advocates, spoke about the importance of freeing children's literature from racism and sexism simultaneously. She discussed the connections between the movements for racial and sexual equality, mentioning, for example, the connection between the Abolitionists and the early feminists. Ms. Lewis discussed Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking series and *The Matchlock Gun* by Walter D. Edmonds, both of which have been hailed recently as feminist books because they feature female protagonists. Ms. Lewis pointed out, however, that while heroic and interesting girls are needed in children's fiction they should not exist in the context of racist values. The Pippi books frequently have racist distortions and stereotypes about Third World people, and Pippi's exploits are often at the expense of Third World people. *The Matchlock Gun* presents the usual picture of "savage" and gratuitously violent American Indians. Ms. Lewis also spoke of the sexist values in the 1974 Caldecott Award, *Duffy and the Devil*, by Harve and Margot Zemach.

TASK FORCE ORGANIZED

At the presentation's end, Brad Chambers, director of the Council, called for volunteers from the audience to organize a Task Force to draw up proposals for specific actions that librarians may take to counteract racism and sexism in books in their libraries.
Twelve librarians from seven states volunteered to set up the Task Force. Open to all librarians, the Task Force will prepare (1) strategies for combating stereotypes in books and (2) new criteria for selecting Newbery and Caldecott winners to prevent future awards going to books perpetuating racist and sexist values.
Librarians who wish to join the Task Force are asked to get in touch with Chairperson Bertha Parker Phillips, Children's Librarian, Atlanta Public Library, 126 Carnegie Way, N. W., Atlanta, Georgia 30327.

THE GIVING TREE

Continued from page 1
a house, and a boat to sail away from it all. In the end, a gnarled old man, he returns looking for a place to rest. Each time the boy asks the tree for something she responds by giving him a part of herself—her apples to sell for money, her branches for a home, and finally her weathered stump for a place to sit and rest. Each time she gives of herself the author tells us "the tree was happy."

Instead of being a "parable on the jobs of giving," the book impressed me as a dressed-up version of the "happy slave" myth where the "good slave," "loyal dog" or "old family retainer" finds satisfaction by serving his or her master. Their service is doubly ennobling—so goes the myth—since it requires them to sacrifice their own lives for their masters' well-being.

By choosing the female pronoun for the all-giving tree and the male pronoun for the all-taking boy, it is clear that the author did indeed have a prototypical master/slave relationship in mind. In this male supremacist's fantasy, we see the "idealized" relationship of mother/son, wife/husband, mistress/lover. It did not surprise me that the author was a cartoonist for *Playboy* magazine. It can be argued, of course, that the choice of "she" in describing the tree is simply coincidental. In fact, the six reviews of the book I read neglected this. The *New York Times* reviewer mentioned, as an aside, that his wife was upset about the book's implied sexism. But, the reviewer commented, this was probably an example of her oversensitivity.

I should add that I would find this book objectionable even if the author were to use a neutral "it" in referring to the tree. This is a tale of man's selfish plundering of the environment. The boy uses up every part of the tree; he feels no obligation to share what he has with others nor to plant




In the end, the tree has nothing (left, below) but she gives the old man a place to rest (above) and is happy.

another tree for future generations.
I found myself thinking about this book as I listened to a talk by Phyllis Chessler, author of *Women and Madness* (Doubleday, hardback; Avon, paperback). Chessler maintains that the most severe psychological strain women live with (or crack-up under) is a pervasive sense of guilt, a feeling that they never measure up to the societal image of the nurturing, self-less "earth mother"—the all-giving tree. Displays of self-assertiveness or aggressiveness and demands for time, space, and money of their own are defined as unhealthy, against the order of nature. Women who work outside the home, leaving their children with babysitters or in day-care centers, women who decide not to have children, or not to marry at all, women who put their own jobs above those of their husbands or lovers, confront harsh internal as well as external judgements on their femininity. Each bit of success in the world outside the home can be accompanied by an added psychic burden of guilt and doubt. How frightening that little boys and girls who read *The Giving Tree* will encounter this glorification of female selflessness and male selfishness! Hopefully a liberated adult will be nearby to help them discover ways of giving and loving that enrich both partners.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
BARBARA A. SCHRAM is a professor at Northeastern University, Boston, and a consultant to Bank Street College of Education's Day Care Unit. She has worked as a community organizer for welfare rights and community participation in schools and is active in several feminist groups.

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