Portrayals of blacks by authors and illustrators of children's literature and how their literature affects children's attitudes

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Abstract
Children associate with each other every day. They work, play, and have fun together in school church, organizations, recreation, etc. For many children much of this association is limited to others of their own race. How, then, do they learn to accept others of different races? How do they learn to work, play, and have fun with these children? Integration has forced the association of white children with black children, but this does not always bring acceptance, and acceptance is the beginning of a total relationship.

It is the intent of this paper to show how children's literature can promote a better understanding between races. Through the citing of several pieces of literature and through an extensive literature search, it will be shown how literature depicting the black race can emulate, neutralize, or degrade this race.

The paper has been set up beginning with a brief history of the black's presentation in children's literature and proceeded by a presentation of basic assumptions which explain how the black image is projected in literature. The major areas of the study are concerned with the presentation of the black's life styles and the presentation of the illustrations of the black in children's literature.
PORTRAYALS OF BLACKS BY AUTHORS AND ILLUSTRATORS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
AND HOW THEIR LITERATURE AFFECTS CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES

A Research Paper
Presented to the
Faculty of the Library Science Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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April 1975

Read and approved by

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Accepted by Department
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Date 4-14-75
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INTRODUCTION

Children associate with each other every day. They work, play, and have fun together in school, church, organizations, recreation, etc. For many children much of this association is limited to others of their own race. How, then, do they learn to accept others of different races? How do they learn to work, play, and have fun with these children? Integration has forced the association of white children with black children, but this does not always bring acceptance, and acceptance is the beginning of a total relationship.

It is the intent of this paper to show how children's literature can promote a better understanding between races. Through the citing of several pieces of literature and through an extensive literature search, it will be shown how literature depicting the black race can emulate, neutralize, or degrade this race.

The paper has been set up beginning with a brief history of the black's presentation in children's literature and proceeded by a presentation of basic assumptions which explain how the black image is projected in literature. The major areas of the study are concerned with the presentation of the black's life styles and the presentation of the illustrations of the black in children's literature.

Purpose of the Study

No child is born prejudiced. He has to be carefully taught,
before he is six or seven or even eight years old. Research findings have supported this rather realistic proposition that children are born free of prejudice, that they learn it before they are eight years old, and that society performs this instructional task in a fairly methodically, if not completely outwardly manner.¹

If society so systematically teaches children to be prejudiced, then it is also necessary for society to provide children with a way in which to diminish these negative attitudes. Certainly an excellent way that society can perform this function is through good literature. What kind of books are given to the child who lives in today's multi-ethnic society? It is necessary to give him books in which he can see himself and know his value. Books that help him to understand that others are different and that differences are good.

For many years literature has been valued for introducing children to each other. Books describe the physical appearance of other people, explain customs, ways of living, and illustrate graphically how others are supposed to look, live, and seem to be.²

There is an old Chinese proverb that states "That which enters the eye will never leave the heart."³ Assuming this proverb is valid,

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can literature provide for children an understanding of others which can produce a lasting affect on a child's attitudes?
HISTORY OF BLACKS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The presence of blacks in children's literature is not a recent occurrence. However, until recently the portrayal of the blacks were often nothing more than a caricature of the race they depicted. In an edition of Kipling's Just So Stories, which is a favorite read-aloud book on the elementary level, one of the stories is racially offensive. Kipling was a masterful storyteller, but one of his stories, "How the Leopard Got His Spots", is an example of what must be done to improve the black image in children's literature. It is the tale of a leopard being given black spots by an Ethiopian. The animal, feeling proud of his spotted beauty, as the African, "Why don't you go spotty, too?" The Ethiopian then replies, "Oh, plain black is best for a nigger." Since the language is offensive some publishing companies, for instance, Grosset and Dunlap in 1957, changed the last line to read, "Oh, plain black is best. Now come along." A.A. Shockley cites another example of well-known children's literature that has affected the image of the black. He states:

Undoubtedly, a dark and backward step in publishing history with regard to Negro children was taken in 1900 when Helen Bannerman's Little Black Sambo was first published. The ridiculous illustrations of thick red lips, and clashing colors of red coat, blue pants, purple shoes with 'crimson soles and crimson linings' overtopped with a green umbrella, and complete with the name of Sambo, produced the model stereotyped caricature of

Negroes to white children for generations. 5

From 1890 to 1910, a flood of children's literature was published. The stories commonly called "plantation stories" were about black twin children living on southern plantations before or after the Civil War. Up until 1930 when some quality books for black children were published, most of the literature produced told of the poor but happy black people in the South before and after the Civil War. 6 During a thirty-eight year period, from 1930 to 1944, only forty-nine books containing black characters were recommended. 7

Alice McGuire comments on the next time period in the history of the black in children's literature:

Following World War II, in the forties some authors awoke to a realization that the area of minorities would have better treatment in children's literature. More sensitive interpretations, new images, and situations showing mutual respect were needed, predicated on a belief that books enjoyed by children help to shape their values, attitudes, and understanding.

There had been a growing consciousness that the blacks should be integrated into American life. Of course, the surest way to this integration was to understand him and to accept him as a


fellow human being with all the privileges and the responsibilities that his acceptance entails. One of the most useful methods of helping children to understand this change in American society was to make available to them suitable books dealing with the black in this new light.9

Another major influence on children's literature took place in 1954 with the Supreme Court decision that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. However, integration may have been the exception of the land, but it certainly was not a common feature of children's books.

Many members of minority groups have fought to improve the literature for and about the black child. P. Cornelius cites two such people:

Two black librarians who were especially active in the interracial children's book field in the 1950's, as well as in the two previous decades, were Augusta Baker, now coordinator, Office of Children's Services, the New York Public Library, and Charlemae Rollins, now retired children's librarian, the Chicago Public Library. The bibliographies of interracial children's books they published in the 1950's and earlier drew attention to the best such books already published, but they also showed a need for many more books.10

In the early 1960's, themes, types of stories, and illustrations continued to improve as children's literature's black authors and illustrators began to receive considerable attention. However, even in 1965, many writers, editors, and publishers became more aware

10 Cornelius, op. cit., p. 110.
that the black minority group was still very inadequately represented in children's literature. In fact, research disclosed that, over a three-year period, only forty-four children's books from sixty-three publishers told a story about blacks in the United States. Twelve of these forty-four books were simple picture books showing blacks in the illustrations, but omitting them from the text. In many books showing the black people only tanned faces appeared, often in a crowd. The shadings of many of the tanned faces made it difficult to tell whether they were black or suntanned whites. 11

Today the market for literature for and about black children may still be small, but it has grown considerably in recent years. A comment was made in Publishers Weekly which explains what must be done in the future:

It is now necessary to use the highest standards of artistic and literary quality, get some guidance on questions of content from members of minority groups themselves and then go ahead and publish. 12

A Presentation of Basic Assumptions

The attitudes we adopt when we are young remain with us throughout our entire life and often affect how we feel and react toward others. Jean Wong states:

Because we are adults so long and childhood is so brief and fleeting, it is assumed that the experience of a childhood is relatively so much the less important. Yet childhood is the impressionable and formative period . . . . The impressions of

11 Ibid., p. 107.
childhood are lasting, and the sum of its impressions is the pattern taken on by maturity. 13

All children need their world extended beyond their neighborhood limitations of color, religion, or social class. Because research has found that white children's attitudes toward blacks as worthy and acceptable members of American society may be affected by the presence or absence of minorities in illustrated materials, literature is assuming an important role in breaking down these barriers of misunderstanding and in reinforcing an acceptable identity for black children. 14 We have to be taught to hate and unfortunately children have been so taught. It is now time to give them the literature that moves them to love and to hold out a helping hand.

Young children just take in what they read without a great deal of analysis. Therefore, the responsive and responsible publication of children's literature has a great potential for dispelling prejudice and for promoting understanding in our society. 15 It has become evident that literature can increase the social sensitivity of a child and enable him to extend his world to gain new insights, appreciations, and understanding of himself and others. 16 This literature can also give children a respect and appreciation of others as human beings.

13 Wong, op. cit., p. 5.
14 Bingham, op. cit., p. 881.
16 Rollins, op. cit., p. xii.
The literature should help the reader to realize that every minority group has something of worth inborn in it. The reader should be helped to realize that the diverse yet worthwhile values and characteristics of a minority group should be coveted and retained.17

White children are not the only ones who need the black experience in their literature. The black children as well as other minority children need their presence to achieve a better self-image and to adopt positive role-models. The literature will also enable the black children to gain greater confidence in their own worth and ability, and will help them to appreciate the literature through identification with the characters and situations in a story.18

The black has met with as great an injustice in American literature as he has in American life. When the blacks were finally represented in children's literature, they were presented through conceptions white society had of them rather than perceptions of them as individuals.

One of the problems in literature concerning blacks relates to the author's preconceived ideas of what black people are like. Few of the authors allowed their characters to develop. Early in each book the black was assigned to play a role, and the author did not allow

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17 P. J. Cianciolo, "Recommended Reading Diet for Children and Youth of Different Cultures", Elementary English, XLVIII (November, 1971), 783.
18 Ibid., p. 787.
the black to change the role assigned to him. This role assigning is often a reflection of social attitudes. Because in past history, blacks were happy or unhappy slaves and later became family servants with no distinguishing characteristics. B.L. Tate comments on this presentation:

Valid books for children must capture truth and the sense of a definite culture through authentic settings and character portrayals. White authors have often used stilted stereotypic duplication of supposed 'colored folks talk' while recreating the black image in unreal illustrations, thus failing to develop a black human who comes across to the reader in terms of his blackness.

Often well meaning writers fail to capture and relate the truth of the black's experience. Bettye Latimer states:

The writer of children's books about black Americans has a special responsibility to move beyond the stereotypes, myths, and half-truths perpetrated about Black people to develop characters—whether real or imagined—whose unique heritage and personal experiences have an authentic ring about them.

Another comment was made by J.M. Birtha concerning this same question:

Does the author know black people well enough to write about them? Is he, himself, unbiased enough to interpret the content of his books with clarity and meaning? Many white authors fail in this matter without realizing why. An old Indian saying is 'Never attempt to judge another man until you have walked in his moccasins.' Some of the least successful books about Negroes

written by white people have been due to an attempt to write the story from the black point of view. 22

The characterization in the literature should never represent the black as a person in a derogatory way that may insult him or give the child who has never known a black person a mistaken impression of the race. 23 If this portrayal of the minority in children's literature is offensive, biased, or inaccurate then the story does not provide an over-all purpose and appeal. Therefore, it is not acceptable as a piece of children's literature. 24

Thompson and Woodard have an explanation as to why blacks are portrayed inaccurately in children's literature:

It is because we have failed to examine our own racial attitudes fully enough that the sociologically determined stereotype continues to predominate in books about black children. Such characters are created when the traits assigned to a character do not derive from the story but from assumptions about all members of the community or ethnic group. 25

There is too much literature about blacks which is not written with accurate facts but with implication or omission of facts. The differences within the black minority group should show realistically the various life-styles and goals without stereotyped concepts of race, religion, or socioeconomic status. 26

23 Ibid., p. 192.
26 Taylor, op. cit., p. 39.
A Presentation of the Black's Life Styles

It is important that books for children and young people should not reinforce the stereotypes about blacks that are still in existence in our society. In fact, books should help dispel such thinking, particularly where everyday contacts with members of the black race are infrequent or entirely lacking. Then, books may serve as the only means some children have of knowing what blacks are really like.

In the majority of children's literature in which blacks are found, the white children are dominant characters. Thompson and Woodard respond to the question of white predominance:

We must ask to what extent and by what means have narrow ethnic attitudes pervaded books about black Americans, even those books specifically written to further interracial harmony? We must ask whether these books are providing meaningful identification for black children, as well as real insight for white children into the historical, ethnic, and cultural characteristics of black Americans. Finally, we must frankly ask whether the image of the white American has been made to seem more desirable than that of the black American in these books.27

Much literature is available that tends to reinforce the very attitudes that is is trying to change. In too much of the literature the white child dominates the story. He is the controlling factor, the active character. The focus of the story is on his character development and the black child is often placed in a subservient role. He is the passive character.28 Therefore, it is necessary to eliminate this situation of having literature portray the white people

27 Thompson and Woodard, op. cit., p. 416.
28 Ibid.
almost exclusively. We must bring the black child into the white child's world.

It is true that most children's literature does present a world in which all the characters, at least the significant ones are white. In most instances, they reflect the segregated world in which we live and are a constant reminder of the value placed on whiteness in our society. The message that such literature carries for black children is that they do not really matter or count. On the other hand, white children are again given an example of their superiority. 29

In the past blacks have almost always remained as servants and slaves. In addition to being given inferior social and occupational status, they are also given character and personality traits that develop their inferiority further. The black person is never allowed to develop as a real character or a real person. 30

The major characteristic of the happy slaves was that they were more or less resigned to their position in life. They accepted it without complaint, with good grace and with enthusiasm. What kind of persons were these happy slaves? They were dumb but loyal, grateful to their masters for providing for them, and proud to belong to a man of quality. Dorothy Broderick comments on this life style of the black slave:


We know that the long hours of field work and the harsh treatment by overseers were the slaves only complaint. However, children's authors avoided the field hand's complaints by not having major characters be field hands. . . . Nowhere do you find in children's books a portrait of a slave who is forced to live day in and day out with the misery of enslavement. About the only method used to show a slave's unhappiness is to have the slave run away. Of course it stands to reason that not every unhappy slave was fortunate enough to be able to run away. 31

It is evident, then, that the representation of the black in literature for children has been for the most part only a superficial presentation of reality which distorts black life through stereotypes. Through the study of the black in American literature there seems to be an indication that he has been depicted almost more as a "stereotype than as a human being". 32

Bettye Latimer has commented about this misrepresentation:

With the exception of an occasional biography of a great man like George Washington Carver or Ralph Bunche, the array of Black characters in children's books have seldom been presented as real people doing meaningful things. 33

If children's literature is to concern itself with all kinds of people then it is questionable why so many authors do not present the black in positive life styles. Often through literature children assume that the black children do not experience whatever storybooks deal with. They do not go shopping with their mothers or take a trip to the zoo; they do not jump rope or learn their ABC's; they do

31 Broderick, op. cit., p. 36.
33 Latimer, op. cit., p. 30.
not dream about monsters; they do not have birthdays. In addition, it can be found that although some of these black children are major characters in a book, they do not have a real life. Most books do not offer a portrait of black family life. There have been many comments made concerning the question of life styles of blacks in children's literature. In her book *Children and Books*, Mary Hill Arbuthnot responds in the following manner:

Certainly, any story about Negro children should take them seriously and present pictures either of average families or of families solving their problems intelligently and successfully.

Another area of black life styles not often presented in children's literature is expressed by A.A. Shockley:

It is true that children share the same feelings of happiness, sorrow, and love, but there are vast differences in the sets of circumstances which provide happiness for a white boy or a black boy. A black boy finally being able to use the public library or sit down at a hamburger stand finds in these a unique happiness coming out of the black experience. Books depicting this unique black experience in American society can help to open avenues of understanding between the white and black child.

There is not only a need to show positive life styles for white children, but also for the black children. R.J. Hurley states:

The Negro child is still socially insecure and books should foster a sense of dignity, self-respect and security. Books should not be concerned exclusively with the race question but

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36 Ibid., p. 33.
show a zest for living and joy in the midst of sorrow. 37

Obviously, there is a need for literature pertaining to the black child. However, an overview will reveal that the black child has never had enough books about himself except for the bad, and there definitely is no better way to reach this child than through his books.

Teaching children to be "color blind" may seem to be a good idea, but as long as being black is the most important fact of a black child's life, then the real harm comes when we pretend that we are all alike. 38 Ethel Richard comments on this question of blackness:

When the black child picks up a book, several factors other than his color keep him aware of blackness. He is black and blackness should stay with him, but not in ways that cut his spirit, undermine his intellect, and disturb him emotionally. Traditionally, he has been aware of this blackness when he looks at books because of the absence of black children in the pictures. Even in photographically illustrated books blacks have been omitted. In other instances, blacks have been artificially included. Other stories have harped upon the blackness of characters just to be sure the black reader is aware of this inclusion. 39

Recently publishers, authors, librarians, etc. have desperately to improve the content of literature for and about blacks. They have found that the black child of the inner city who is often reluctant to read may be hooked by books that are relevant to his environment and his experiences. Thus, they have tried to inspire

38 Broderick, op. cit., p. 4.
him with his black history, to assure him that black is beautiful in many bright picture books, to improve his self-image with black family stories, and to explore the problems and controversies of his life. 40

Books cannot take the place of first hand contacts with other people. However, they can prepare children to meet people, to overlook differences, and to appreciate cultural traditions and values different from their own. The black child is given pride in his heritage and the white child gains knowledge of another culture and history. Through his books the black child must find his identity as a black, and he must develop in relation to others in the society in which he lives. 41

Often in the past children's literature has portrayed the minority child's life styles quite dissimilar from the life styles of a white child. Most literature today, depicts black children as individuals whose identity includes a name, home life, family, friends, toys, hobbies, etc. Also, the children are Americans and first-class citizens. This literature then leads the children naturally to the conclusion that differences in personality, abilities, and background are desirable among people. 42


42 Thompson and Woodard, op. cit., p. 422.
Jean Colby comments on the book *A New Boy in School* by May Justus in relation to a similarity between a black and a white child's feelings:

This is a story of a Negro boy in a new school where he is placed in a grade that has all white students. The book is not a literary epic, but it puts over a point that had not been made in children's books. It showed that a Negro boy is just like a white child in being afraid of new situations and making new friends. It showed that white children can cooperate and be friendly, but the Negro must accept this friendliness and help themselves. 43

Literature has now reached the point where most aspects in the black community can be portrayed in children's books without self-consciousness. The whole range of black life can be shown. Some of the characters are good, some are bad, some brave, and some fearful. Together they portray the complexities of life for black people.

A book that deals with complexities of a black family's life is *Roosevelt Grady* by Louisa Shotwell. It looks at a black family's goals for life and not just how to earn a living. The author shows a need to belong and the need to have a place of one's own even if it is a humble one. However, Mrs. Grady's ambitions for her children go beyond just providing them with a home. As for being black, it is irrelevant to the book. Being a migrant worker is the only identification the author gives. If not for the illustrations, the reader would not know the family was black.44


44 Broderick, op. cit., p. 91.
In 1965, the Caldecott Medal was awarded to Ezra Jack Keats for *The Snowy Day* which not only presented an appealing black child in his first experience with snow, but it avoided all the stereotypes to which there had been objection in earlier picture books. Another book by Keats, *Whistle for Willie* shows a small boy struggling to acquire the skill that all small boys long to attain. No mention is made that he is black.

Since books can convey the delight of a child experiencing snow for the first time, they can also convey to the readers what it is like to be a black sharecropper from the Deep South on the day he arrives in New York City and moves into a Harlem tenement. The difficulties of biracial friendship, housing, discrimination, white hostility, black militance, and the problems of segregation can all be explored and dramatized on the printed page.45

More and more books and collections of stories have appeared about black life and especially about famous blacks who participated in the American past or who are contributing to the present. In addition, histories of the black people including the ancient past in Africa have been published.

At one time, we had few if any children's books dealing with black people in roles other than menial. Today, there are books about black professionals, judges, soldiers, sailors, etc. Also, there are books about the black conservatives as well as books about black

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militants. In fact, as they are found in every walk of life. These books help the black child to discover his own identity and enable the white child to see how blacks live.

A Presentation of the Illustrations of the Black

Each illustration in a piece of children's literature should emphasize the richness and diversity of the human experience, since it is established that art leads the reader to a better understanding of himself and others. These illustrations should also extend the reader's perception to worlds beyond his own. A picture is a window and through this window the reader may learn about individuals who live in an environment which differs from his own.46 The illustrations in children's books should be childlike, but not coy, naive, or condescending. The illustrations must radiate sincere human emotions, warmth, and hope.

J.M. Birtha comments on children's reactions to the illustrations in their literature:

In books for children, illustrations supplement the text in a way that is not necessary in most adult books. Many children judge a book by its illustrations. If these portray abnormally proportioned, repulsive characters following the old stereotypes of books of past decades, children are certain to reject the book.47

How a black person is depicted is exceptionally important in books for children. An illustrator can portray a black child with


47 Birtha, op. cit., p. 192.
black skin, natural hair, and flat features, and make him attractive or create a stereotype and a caricature. The black child who sees pictures ridiculing his race may be hurt, feel defeated, or even become resentful and rebellious. The white child who sees this caricature of the black child may feel superior and accept this distorted picture. Because this distorted picture of the caricatured black may be construed as typical, the illustrator must portray the black in such a way as to make him respected and liked.

We want the illustrations to be attractive. It is not desirable to have these black children look like white children with brown wash or black wash spread over them. They must have the features, have distinction, and have an attraction that is found among black children. Definitely, the characters should be natural.

Annette Phinazee reacts to the black illustrations when she states:

In elaborating this point, we said that we want the Negro children in the books to be attractive, but realistic. They should be obviously Negro children. The illustrator should be consistent in his characterization and his portrayal. There are artists who have a kind of caricature style of illustrations which is carried on throughout the entire book. There is a reason for this: it is the style of the author's work. But we would be disturbed if the Negro child in that book were a caricature and the others were not.

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48 Baker, loc. cit.


Because of the large amount of literature that depends on picture content for its appeal, the illustrator should try to avoid the stereotypes. Grotesque characters, overdrawn figures, and exaggerated features are common examples of the stereotypes used. Often the resulting stereotypes might even be unintentional on the part of the illustrator. Therefore, to help prevent the use of these stereotypes, the artist must bring a sense of appreciation and feeling for the face of the black he portrays.\(^5\)

In this trend toward the non-stereotyped illustration, there are not only excellent realistic pictures and photographs, but also imaginative and delightful illustrations. This trend is now extended so that black children are also included in most types of readers, picture books, textbooks, beginning-to-read stories, and historical material just as they are represented in the many areas of our society. These illustrations in all forms of literature for young children do influence their values, attitudes, and concepts; and contribute to the children's understanding and acceptance of racial differences.

Tom Feelings, Ezra Jack Keats, Symeon Shimin, and Ann Grifalconi are a few artists who have been particularly sensitive in their illustrations. Today, we find that these illustrators are conscious of the need to portray black children as pleasant and attractive without caricatures of the past.

\(^5\)Latimer, op. cit., p. 10.
For instance, in 1946, the Caldecott Medal went to The Rooster Crows: A Book of American Rhymes and Jingles which was illustrated by Maud and Miska Petersham. Obviously, the selection committee was not disturbed by four pages in the book showing black children with great "buniony feet", black skin and "bulging eyes". In the distance is shown a dilapidated cabin with a black gun-toting, barefoot adult. On the other hand, the white children are nothing less than cherubic, with little barefoot or well-made shoes. After eighteen years the publisher was finally convinced that the book would improve if the illustrations of the black children were omitted. In the new edition of this book published in 1964, only white children appear in the illustrations.\textsuperscript{52}

Fortunately, children's literature today rarely contains illustrations of black people as they were often depicted several years ago with oversized feet and lips, dozens of tiny pigtails and an ever-present grin. However, now there is a tendency on the part of many illustrators to "whitewash" black people and to portray them as suntanned whites.\textsuperscript{53}

It is not always the illustration which is harmful to the black's image. Often the description of a character in the text of the book can be just as demeaning. In Natalie Carlson's The Empty

\textsuperscript{52}Nancy Larrick, "The All-White World of Children's Books," Saturday Review, XL (September 11, 1965) 63.

Schoolhouse, Emma, the narrator, describes her sister as having "skin like coffee and cream mixed together", and wavy hair to her shoulders while she, Emma, is dark as her father with hair as short as his. Emma also emphasizes the fact that she is not as intelligent as her sister. From this description, therefore, the reader might infer that intelligence can be equated with lightness of skin color since Emma says she is dumb and Lullah is bright.54

From what has been expressed, it is rather obvious that the visual message transmitted by a book's illustrations may strongly determine the concept of oneself and of others that the reader constructs. Illustrated books may be used to help the reader view people of his race and of other races. They may, also, help him to consciously accept those people in the society in which he lives.55

54 Broderick, op. cit., p. 108.

CONCLUSION

The black people have been for so long imperfectly presented in children's literature. It is obvious that an honest and varied depiction of this race can do much toward gaining a better understanding between whites and blacks.

Every publishing season brings more intercultural and interracial literature for all age levels. There is some fine new literature about blacks being introduced. This literature which realistically portrays the diversity and complexity of our world has been considerably increased. However, the number of good books involving blacks still represents a very small proportion of children's literature. Obviously, quantity should not be confused with quality. We must select carefully so that the impressionable children can be assured of excellent quality.

We are discovering, in most instances, that the variety and quality of black literature today is healthy and offers us hope that young children will develop a better understanding between races. There is much physical contact today, but the races are still miles apart. At the present, the illustrations in children's literature for the most part, are good; the customs, modes and ways of living are being described more or less normally; and the stereotypes are

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gradually disappearing. All these changes and the continued changes produce literature that will enable all children to better understand themselves and others. 57

A comment by J.M. Birtha summarizes what has been said:

So let us have books ..., books which can help the black child to realize his identity, his individuality, his proud heritage, and his great potential, books which can help the white child to recognize, understand, and appreciate the tremendous cultural and historical contributions of his fellow Americans. These books should be read by black and white children - not as special books but because they are good books, meeting the basic criteria of children's literature, and the rigid demands of children themselves. 58

57 Millender, op. cit., p. 4576.
58 Birtha, op. cit., p. 195.


