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**Black, Black, Beautiful Black: The Educational Use of  
African American Children's Literature in New York City,  
1965-1979**

by  
Nick Batho

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Black pride, Black history and Black memory in a renaissance of Black-authored US children's books from 1965 to 1979. African American children's books had a long history of furthering a Black educational philosophy and this project demonstrates how this was reshaped in the era of Black Power. African American authored children's books became vital weapons in the arsenal of Black liberation during the African American community control movement in New York as parents, educators and activists called for more local control over children's education and the literature available in schools. African American authors and illustrators visited centres of Black Power educational activism to provide Black children with culturally relevant literary works as they sought to engage children in the wider political issues of being Black in America. Through literary examination of children's books combined with archival work into the groups, schools and individuals involved, this project uncovers the voices of children by working across historical, literary, social and political methodologies. The intersection between Black children's books and activism within New York – Black Power and African American community activists – is investigated to reveal the untold story of Black children during this period of educational upheaval and Black Power and centre them within the wider story. It was not just the content of African American children's books but how they were used in education. A case study of New York City helps to underscore how African American children's literature helped bring different groups together in the name of a Black educational philosophy. From storytelling sessions on the streets of New York City to teacher training sessions at Columbia University, African American children's books became a crucial vehicle in promoting a Black educational philosophy and brought authors, educators, children, and parents together. Through children's literature, children and authors brought topics such as 'Black is Beautiful', the power of communities and Black Power into mainstream education.



## LAY SUMMARY

This thesis examines the role of African American children's books in furthering Black educational philosophy in New York City education during the era of Black Power, 1965 to 1979. Black educational philosophy is a community-orientated education that focuses on providing Black children with a culturally relevant and relatable education. African American children's literature provided children with books on Black history, Black folktales, Black Power, and books set in familiar settings. Educators, activists, parents and students pushed for the use of such literature in New York City schools to challenge an education that was white-centric and often racist. Since the nineteenth century activists and educators had used Black children's literature to challenge and defy stereotypes. From 1965 to 1979, however, there was an unprecedented rise in African American children's literature as well as new efforts to use these books in education.

After the introduction, the first chapter explores how African American children's literature has been used in education since the mid-nineteenth century. This demonstrates that the work in New York City in the late 1960s and 1970s was built on decades of work and activism. The second chapter examines the literature used in 1965-1979 New York City, analysing how these books were used within education. The third and fourth chapters focus upon educational events in New York City and how children's literature was used in educational changes in the city. This ranges from storytelling sessions on the streets to teacher training courses that focused on how to provide a culturally relevant education. The final chapter looks at writing by African American children and how their poetry, interviews, and other writing also addressed Black educational philosophy and politics. This chapter places the voice of children into the overall story, emphasising their importance to educational changes, African American children's literature and Black Power.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AATA: African American Teachers Association  
AAVE: African American Vernacular English  
CIBC: Council of Interracial Books for Children  
CORE: Congress of Racial Equality  
ESEA: Elementary and Secondary Education Act  
NAACP: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People  
NYPL: New York Public Library  
PAT: Parents and Taxpayers  
RIF: Reading is Fundamental  
SAT: Scholastic Aptitude Test  
SE: Standard English  
SNCC: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee  
TBB: *The Brownies Book*  
UFT: United Federation of Teachers

## INTRODUCTION

### **“SPEAK OUR STORIES”: HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE OFFERS A WINDOW INTO BLACK EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY**

In a statement on public education in New York City in 1967, William King, the Black principal of James Fenimore Cooper Junior High School, argued that New York City’s public school system was locked in the thinking of the 1890s. The educational philosophy that underpinned the public school system viewed African Americans as “inferior to whites” and its real purpose was the “domination of the black...clothed in education”.<sup>1</sup> The notion that the New York City public school system was racist was commonly asserted by a range of activists from Black Power advocates including Stokely Carmichael to school librarians such as Harriet Brown, district librarian of Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Crucial to combatting this institutional racism was Black educational philosophy; a philosophy that is malleable and multi-faceted with educators, parents and activists having applied it in myriad contexts in different ways. However, central to Black educational philosophy was a grounding in African American history and cultures as these had continually faced erasure within white-dominant public educational institutions. African American children’s literature in the late 1960s and 1970s occupied a crucial

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<sup>1</sup> William D. King, ‘A Statement of Posture Toward Public Education in New York City’, The Federation of Negro Civil Service Organisations, Inc. October 21, 1967, Box 140, Folder ‘Board of Education, 1963-1969 2’, John Doar Papers Princeton University Library, Department of Special Collections, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Public Policy Papers, Princeton, New Jersey (hereafter cited as John Doar Papers).

role in Black educational philosophies that sought to change New York City schooling and make it an education in which Black children would thrive.

Despite accusations of institutional racism and failing African American children, New York City was the envy of many educators across the United States of America (U.S.) and traditionally led the nation in educational innovation. A case study of New York City between 1965 and 1979 is included because many educators regarded the city as “the nation’s educational pacemaker” and because educators everywhere had their “eye cocked on New York”.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the city was important because of the proximity of African American authors (many of whom lived in the city) and publishers, as well as the strong presence of Black Power activists in the period from 1965 to 1979. During this time the money that flowed from liberal institutions such as the Ford Foundation; the unprecedented spending on books for schools; the cultural power of Black Power and the Black Arts movement; as well as the educational upheavals of desegregation and Community Control in New York City all combined to create an unparalleled rise in African American children’s literature that educators used in new ways in New York City education.

Children’s literature from 1965 to 1979 is examined because books featuring Black characters more than doubled in U.S. children’s books in the decade after 1965.<sup>3</sup> African American children’s literature did not end in 1979

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<sup>2</sup> Mario Fantini, Marilyn Gittell, and Richard Magat, *Community Control and the Urban School* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 101.

<sup>3</sup> Jeanne Chall, Eugene Radwin, Valarie W. French, Cynthia R. Hall, “Blacks in the World of Children’s Books” in *The Black American in Books for Children: Readings in Racism*, eds. Donnaræ MacCann and Gloria Woodard (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1985), 215.

but the educational drive had lost its momentum. The period signalled a high point in African American children's literature. The educational activism that promoted African American children's books waned as Black Power, as activist Amiri Baraka noted, had reached "a valley" after its "1960s peaks".<sup>4</sup> Conservative backlash to education initiatives, a drop in federal funding, and declining interest from publishers meant that the impact of African American children's books had diminished as fewer were published and fewer children had access to these books.<sup>5</sup> However, this dissertation seeks to understand how within the period from 1965 to 1979, African American children's books had a significant impact on education and on the lives of the children who read these books and represents an important cultural impact of Black Power.

The Black educational philosophy at the heart of educational upheavals in New York City, often chimed with the rhetoric and ideology of Black Power. Black Power emerged as a radical alternative to integrationist approaches of the Civil Rights Movement as it emphasised Black pride and self-determination. The Black Arts Movement was the cultural wing of Black Power and Black Arts contributor Larry Neal in 1968 described it as the "aesthetic and spiritual sister" of Black Power.<sup>6</sup> Black Power activists engaged in a broad array of activities, seeking to assert Black control by encouraging community activism, Black consciousness and Black pride, and

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<sup>4</sup> William Van Deburg *New day in Babylon: The Black power movement and American culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 303.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Dean Myers, "'I Actually Thought We Would Revolutionize the Industry'," *New York Times*, 9 November, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement" *The Drama Review: TDR* 12, no. 4 (1968): 29.

Black Arts advocates focused on producing African American art and creating Black cultural institutions. Black Power was part of a longer Black radical tradition that sought to challenge and disrupt oppressive social, cultural, and political norms. In this thesis the term 'Black Power Movement' is not used, instead Black Power era is employed because children's authors and educators all interacted with Black Power in varying ways. Some, such as author Julius Lester, became deeply aligned with ideas of Black Power, whilst other authors, such as Lucille Clifton, felt her work merely touched upon similar ideas. The term 'era' is also important because it conveys the cultural and political context in which authors and illustrators created their works and does not necessitate any political affiliations of any individuals.

During the Black Power era, which encompasses the Black Arts Movement, educators, authors, parents and children recognised the power of African American children's literature to provoke and reflect social change. This thesis defines African American children's literature as trade books written by African American authors for children in which the text and imagery are "focused on African American people and their life experiences".<sup>7</sup> African American children's literature encompasses a diversity of genres including history, biography, fantasy and folktales.

African American children's author Lucille Clifton reflected that, though not intimately tied to the Black Arts movement, her children's writing reflected

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<sup>7</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, *Free within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2007), xi.

many of the same ideas as “it is better to speak our stories than to keep silence. It is better to try and define ourselves than to remain defined by others.”<sup>8</sup> African American children’s literature was a central part of self-definition for Black children as it helped them learn Black history, African American cultures and read books that reflected their lives, not just other children’s. How educators and parents employed African American children’s books to service a Black educational philosophy in the Black Power era has not been explored and understood in wider scholarship of African American children’s literature, New York City education and Black Power historiography. It is important to consider the uses and power of African American children’s literature in education. African American children’s books, unlike textbooks and other trade books, were an integral part of an educational philosophy that stressed the importance of Black history and the power of Black communities. Educators and activists used African American children’s literature as tools for survival in a racist society.

Rudine Sims Bishop, an African American children’s literature specialist, argues that the seeds of African American children’s literature were sown “in the soil of Black people’s struggles for liberation, literacy and survival”.<sup>9</sup> Since the late nineteenth century African American children’s literature has occupied an important role in a Black educational philosophy as a vehicle for social, political and cultural change and the source for a more racially inclusive education. Black authors and illustrators created

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Rowell, "An Interview with Lucille Clifton," *Callaloo* 22, no. 1 (1999): 67.

<sup>9</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, *Free within Ourselves*, 1.

children's literature that featured connections to earlier iterations of a Black educational philosophy but also represented a significant change in the application of this philosophy as it connected with contemporary political movements and contexts.

In 1966, John Vliet Lindsay, a white Republican with New York Liberal party support, became Mayor of New York City at a time when desegregation only illuminated the inequalities inherent in New York Schools; Black Power became a "national ideology"; and for the first time Black and Puerto Rican enrolment passed the fifty percent mark of all students in the city's public schools.<sup>10</sup> Black communities, in Brooklyn and Harlem in particular, demanded control and oversight of their local schools, which quickly gathered pace and became the Community Control movement. This movement in New York City brought together parents, educators, Black Power activists, authors, illustrators, and students in the struggle for a better education for children in which local communities had greater oversight. In schools, libraries, bookmobiles and on the streets, figures called for a Black educational philosophy in which African American children's literature became an important tool in the fight for education, racial justice and, for some of these figures, a fight for Black Power.

No scholar has focused on the complex interrelations of African American children's books, Black Power, educational upheaval and community activism. This thesis uses New York City as a case study in order

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<sup>10</sup> Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: A History of the New York Public Schools* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 257.

to bridge the gaps of other research and demonstrate how important African American children's books were to Black education and how entwined both African American children's books and education was with Black Power in the city. New York City is significant because it set many precedents that were copied and reflected across the nation. Organisations, educators, and authors in New York City inspired others and provided help and information on how best to use African American children's literature.

This interdisciplinary dissertation intervenes in educational history, African American children's literature and Black Power scholarship in order to demonstrate the significance of African American children's literature in supporting Black educational philosophy and communicating Black Power ideas. Firstly, building upon scholarship on Black educational philosophy this thesis examines how it was reshaped and reborn in 1960s and 1970s New York City. Secondly, it also contributes to understanding on desegregation and Community Control in New York City by focusing on how activists campaigned for more relevant literature. This dissertation contributes to educational history by focusing on the books that children read, and the educational programmes initiated in New York City that used African American children's literature. Finally, Black Power historiography has made great strides in recent years and addressed new topics and ideas, but the role of children's books and their importance both culturally and in terms of educational activism is not covered within this historiography. This dissertation connects the rise of African American children's literature to the educational upheavals in New York City from 1965 to 1979 as activists,

authors, parents and children helped implement a Black educational philosophy, often imbued with Black Power ideas and rhetoric, both inside and outside public schools.

### **Black Educational Philosophy: Reshaped and Reborn in 1960s New York City**

The initiatives established by New York City based educators, librarians and many campaigners who participated in the pioneering work of the Council on Interracial Children's Books (CIBC) in particular, were part of a living tradition of Black educational philosophy. This philosophy is defined as an education that is community-, rather than government-, based and one that celebrates any Black cultures and histories from the African diaspora in order to facilitate building a strong self-identity and to help battle against white supremacy and internalised racism. It attends to struggle for survival by focusing on the strength of Black communities and focusing on the power of Black cultural heritage. Deeply entwined with political activism and Black liberation movements, the Black educational philosophy of the 1960s and 1970s was influenced by ideas of racial pride and the focus on Black cultural heritage present in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century works and writings of Anna Julia Cooper, Sarah Mapps Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Jessie Fauset, Booker T. Washington, Mary Church Terrell, Silas X. Floyd, Amelia Johnson, Carter G. Woodson, Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps.

Cooper, in her essay 'On Education', argued that a unique pedagogy was required for African Americans who would need "peculiar equipment for

the intense, the unrelenting struggle for survival”.<sup>11</sup>. African American children’s literature, since the late nineteenth century, has been part of this ‘peculiar equipment’ of Black educational philosophy. This literature included images, topics and themes that were absent in a public education that denigrated and dehumanised Black lives.

Educational theorists in the 1960s and 1970s such as Edgar Epps, Louis N. Williams, Mohamed El-Khawas and Barbara Sizemore similarly theorized about education and connected education with contemporary Black Power ideologies by focusing on revolutionary potential and Black nationalism.<sup>12</sup> However, the main driving forces of educational philosophy in New York City from 1965 to 1979 were educators, Les Campbell and Albert Vann, librarians Augusta Baker and Harriet Brown and many parents and organisers involved in the Community Control project in the city. These names are not widely known but these figures, among many others, helped pioneer the use of African American children’s literature in education during the 1960s and 1970s. This dissertation contributes to the scholarship on Black educational philosophy by uncovering the work undertaken by many of these relatively unknown figures and their efforts in promoting a Black educational philosophy and positioning their work in classrooms and in storytelling sessions as part of a longer history of Black educational activism.

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<sup>11</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, ‘On Education’ in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper: Including A Voice from the South and other important essays, papers, and letters*. Edited by Charles C. Lemert and Esme Bhan (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998): 251.

<sup>12</sup> Sizemore, Williams and El-Khawas all stress the power of education in supporting revolution and Black Power. See Barbara Sizemore “Education for Liberation.” *The School Review* 81, no. 3 (1973): 389–404; Williams, Louis N, and Mohamed El-Khawas. “A Philosophy of Black Education.” *The Journal of Negro Education* 47, no. 2 (1978).

Furthermore, an examination of their Black educational philosophy, as made manifest in their radical pedagogical initiatives, provides a new way of theorising and understanding the educational upheavals surrounding desegregation and Community Control in New York City. The Black educational philosophy of educators is traced from Cooper in the nineteenth century to Campbell in the 1960s. In doing so it demonstrates how Black educational philosophies used African American children's books in New York City classrooms, libraries and homes.

An understanding and methodology for examining Black educational philosophy is needed to fully explore how these children's books represented a change in approach during the Black Power Era from earlier African American children's literature. In his work on Black radical organisations, Muhammad Ahmad (Maxwell Stanford, Jr.) emphasises the need for a dialectical and historically materialist approach, that is an emphasis on real-life context, as one cannot fully understand Black activism outside of its historical context.<sup>13</sup> Ahmad's approach is followed because full engagement with the children's books and their use in schools requires an understanding of wider Black educational traditions and philosophy. Educational philosophy informed Black activism and, in turn, Black Power ideas and activism informed how educators interpreted traditional Black educational philosophy in the 1960s and 1970s. This dissertation builds upon scholarship on African American children's literature by examining the content of the books as well

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<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Ahmad, *We Will Return in the Worldwind: Black Radical Organizations 1960-1975* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing, 2007), 308.

as the events, schools and programmes educators used them in. Children's literature supported a Black educational philosophy not just because of their content, but also how educators and children used them.

Dianne Johnson describes the pedagogical impulse in African American children's literature as the desire "to teach Black history, to reinforce self-esteem, to interpret realities of the present while offering promise for the future".<sup>14</sup> This impulse is a constant throughout the creation of African American children's literature but different authors, educators and activists interpreted it in their own way and this dissertation expands upon Johnson's work by examining the similarities and differences in books written in the late 1960s and 1970s. Whilst it is probable that the most influential Black educational philosophy of the time period in question was adapted by a range of individuals who selected and emphasised different aspects, it is important to understand the background to the educational ideas that arose in this period and provided an environment for Black-centred children's books to flourish. From the nineteenth century to the 1970s ran a history of Black educational philosophy and its use of Black children's books. Especially important was the pioneering work and educational philosophies of Black women.

Anna Julia Cooper, a nineteenth century educator and philosopher of Black education, attacked racist books and the miseducation of Black children. Mary Helen Washington's work on Anna Julia Cooper incisively

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<sup>14</sup> Dianne Johnson, *Telling Tales: The Pedagogy and Promise of African American Literature for Youth* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990), 129.

details Cooper's educational philosophy and provides an historical backdrop that is vital to this thesis. Washington's scholarship focuses on Cooper's writings as well as her actions in schools.<sup>15</sup> This investigation enables the reader to witness her educational philosophy in action. It is the focus on Cooper's philosophy in action that is at the heart of this research. Cooper declared her life's vocation as "[t]he education of neglected people" and her experiences as a public school teacher in the District of Columbia from 1887 to 1930 informed her educational philosophy. She even touched on the importance of positive literature in *A Voice from the South* in which Cooper states that "what I hope to see before I die is a black man honestly and appreciatively portraying the Negro as he is", indicating the importance of literature that challenges caricatures and provides authentic images of African American lives.

Rather than focusing on educational theorists of the time, this thesis will use educational philosophy to understand not just educator's beliefs but how this impacted on their work with children. It understands Black educational philosophy not as an academic discipline but an active educational process, supported by wider theory. The focus is on the classroom and the library and how, within these spaces, educators used children's books in their adherence to a Black educational philosophy. This will build upon current understanding of Black educational philosophy and its

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<sup>15</sup> Mary Helen Washington, "Anna Julia Cooper: A Voice from the South" in *Black Women's Intellectual Traditions: Speaking Their Minds*, ed. Kristin Waters and Carol B. Conaway (Burlington: University Press of New England, 2007): 251.

usage during this period by expanding beyond the famous theorists and emphasising the enduring impact of Black women on educational philosophy.

The literature on Black educational philosophy and its connections to Black liberation movements includes many informative works. Historian Frederick Dunn's article on the educational philosophies of Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois and Charles Hamilton Houston contends that, whilst differing in approach, these three stalwarts of Black educational philosophy had broadly similar political aims: all sought Black liberation but foresaw different paths.<sup>16</sup> Dunn's work on these figures is valuable because it demonstrates how interconnected education has been to Black politics for years and precisely how Black educational philosophy has worked towards the goal of liberation. Dunn's work, however, ignores the impact of women in Black educational thought and reiterates a traditional focus on men as educational theorists.

This thesis focuses on the practical implementation of a Black educational philosophy, rather than educational theory in the period from 1965 to 1979. As such, whilst the influence of Du Bois and Washington cannot be ignored, the legacy and history of lesser known figures' work in classrooms and with children underpins how librarians, educators and parents of the 1960s and 1970s operated in a similar way. The crux of their work was the real, rather than imagined, education and the history is of the

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<sup>16</sup> Frederick Dunn. "The Educational Philosophies of Washington, Du Bois, and Houston: Laying the Foundations for Afrocentrism and Multiculturalism", *Journal of Negro Education* 62, no. 1 (1993): 27.

efforts of individuals working with children rather than the theorists and icons of the era.

There is little mention of children's books and their place within educational philosophy. Many scholars focus upon the essays and writings of Du Bois to examine his Black educational philosophy but, crucially, his work with Jessie Redmond Fauset in creating *The Brownies Book* is not examined. Indeed, in an essay in *The Crisis* Du Bois made it clear that children's learning of history, culture and the achievements of those of African descent was vital as he proclaimed that "we are and must be interested in our children above all else, if we love our race and humanity".<sup>17</sup> Du Bois' recognition of the importance of literature for children, despite his elitist and sexist views on education, is a vital precursor to efforts in various New York city schools in the late 1960s and 1970s to provide better reading materials for Black children.

W.E.B. Du Bois' proclamations and editorials for *The Brownies Book* signal an idea about his view of children's education but Jessie Fauset's role in the creation of the magazine is often overlooked. An educator and novelist, Fauset contributed far more writing to *The Brownies Book* than Du Bois and had a more active role in its monthly production. The predominantly female-led Black educational philosophy that was focused on children's learning was replicated in the era of 1965 to 1979. Whilst Black Power activists and educators in the 1960s and 1970s were more concerned with

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<sup>17</sup>W.E.B. Du Bois, 'True Brownies', *The Crisis*, vol.18 (October, 1919): 286.

children from disadvantaged backgrounds, the legacy of Fauset and Du Bois' magazine is important to understand because they pioneered the provision of Black-centred materials for children. This dissertation emphasises how integral African American children's literature has been to Black educational philosophy. Furthermore, this thesis underscores the continuing role of Black women in African American children's literature and contributes to existing scholarship by connecting the work of female educational innovators Fauset and Cooper to later figures involved in schools and programmes in late 1960s and 1970s New York City.

During the late 1960s and 1970s, several Black educators outlined their own philosophy of Black education that was deeply indebted to the work of Cooper, Du Bois and Fauset. However, they differed in several important ways from earlier proponents of Black educational philosophy. Librarians Augusta Baker and Harriet Brown were leading figures in championing African American children's literature and its educational benefits. Teachers including Les Campbell in Ocean-Hill Brownsville argued for the importance of culturally relevant materials for children. Examination of library events, lesson plans, and parents' magazines help to uncover a Black educational philosophy in New York City in which African American children's books played a key role. Baker, Campbell, Brown and others used children's books in pursuit of their own Black educational philosophy, an educational philosophy that was reborn and reshaped from earlier pedagogical efforts involving Black children's literature.

The theoretical Black educational philosophy promoted by activists and scholars Louis N. Williams and Mohammed El-Khawas in the 1970s overlooked children's books and focused on general trends such as the widening of cultural norms in education and a focus on Black identity.<sup>18</sup> Williams and El-Khawas argued that a Black education was not just about teaching the past and Black contributions but was about “the development of Black Pride, self-determination, dignity, the concept of self, and the liberation of the mind from racism”, their aims for a Black education are clearly laid out but their theory does not extend to the specifics of *how* these concepts should be transmitted. Similarly, Edgar Epps was one of the most prominent advocates for Black educational philosophy in the 1960s and 1970s. In an article in 1978 he contended that “there is a need for programs that use the cultural context of the Black experience to determine values, goals, and content of education”.<sup>19</sup> While not specifically mentioning what type of materials this would involve, this does emphasise the renewed focus in this period on books that better represented the cultural background of Black Americans.

Barbara Sizemore's body of work on African American education moved beyond Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson to employ an approach that was far more class conscious than other Black educational philosophies, particularly important for working class neighbourhoods in New York City.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Louis N. Williams and Mohamed El-Khawas. “A Philosophy of Black Education”, 177–91.

<sup>19</sup> Edgar Epps, “Education for Black Americans: Outlook for the Future.” *School Review* 81, no. 3 (1973): 328.

<sup>20</sup> Barbara Sizemore “Education for Liberation”, 389–404.

Sizemore's work is indicative of other material that appeared in the 1970s and beyond, which approaches African American education with an understanding of how class impacted on education. Sizemore contended that a key to Black educational philosophy was a "liberation curriculum" that focused on the learner's "language, cultural life style and modes, role models, organizing theories, histories, literatures" as well as "social class".<sup>21</sup> Sizemore's evaluation of a Black educational philosophy is built upon within this dissertation by examining how children's literature was key to a "liberation curriculum".<sup>22</sup> The notion of class is extended to African American children's books in this thesis as it explores how African American children's books in the 1960s and 1970s often approached class. Authors such as Kristen Hunter and Sharon Bell Mathis specifically focused on working class concerns through the language used, the characters portrayed, and the setting employed. The significance of changes to trade books in public schools is not just that they featured Black empowerment but that the books used a diverse range of Black characters to emphasise that this empowerment was for all African Americans irrespective of social class. This thesis focuses on the changes to Black educational philosophy in the 1960s and 1970s and through African American children's literature demonstrates the practical changes in New York City education from storytelling sessions to teacher training.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 398.

It is important to connect these philosophies to the work being done in libraries, schools and clubs across New York City. These scholars often allude to, but do not feature, a specific focus on these books as examples of a Black Power-influenced educational philosophy. Nevertheless, many contemporary studies and writings on Black educational philosophy provide a useful gateway into the range of different interpretation and visions for education that were being espoused during this era. This dissertation bridges the gap between educational theory and practical education by examining archival material of authors, teachers and librarians who discussed similar issues.

The approach of examination of children's books developed in this thesis will contribute to works on educational philosophy as they provide an insight into how children's literature addressed issues of Black consciousness and class oppression. Stephen Schneider's work on Stokely Carmichael and his lessons in Freedom Schools illuminate how Carmichael used classroom materials to encourage self-definition and raise consciousness of racial and class oppression.<sup>23</sup> Schneider's focus on Carmichael's lesson on African American Vernacular English (AAVE) demonstrates an understanding of the intersections of race and class in education and oppression. The examination of Freedom Schools as an historical site of critical pedagogy is a perceptive way of examining Black education because it centres upon initiatives beyond the control of central

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Schneider, "Freedom Schooling: Stokely Carmichael and Critical Rhetorical Education", *College Composition and Communication* 58, no. 1 (2006).

educational bodies. For the purposes of this thesis Schneider's focus on educational initiatives outside of public school education is focused upon as it demonstrates how Black educational philosophy is community-, rather than government-based and often operated outside of schools.

This dissertation analyses how children's books helped educate children beyond the control of the Board of education's remit as educators and organisations focused on the different forms of oppression Black children faced. The focus on children's books in New York schools provides a way in which it is possible to examine how educators and activists employed Black educational philosophy within schools, and outside of them, at a tumultuous time. Examining how educators used the materials in question provides a greater understanding of Black educational philosophy, Black Power and children's literature. A focus on African American children's literature in this thesis ensures that the practical application of Black educational philosophy is examined as authors and illustrators sought to create books for children that educators and parents could use to teach Black history, encourage Black pride, and help children fight against white oppression.

### **'A Concord of sensibilities': The importance of African American Children's Literature**

During the Black Power era, educational upheaval, desegregation and Community Control in New York City made the city a crucible for African American children's literature to be used for the ends of a Black educational

philosophy. Scholars have examined African American children's literature and its pedagogical uses, but there is a dearth in the scholarship on the history of how books have been used in education. This thesis contributes to the scholarship by addressing the literary power of these books but also combining this with archival research into how they became important tools in New York City education.

Rudine Sims Bishop is a pioneer in the study of African American children's literature and her work underpins most scholarship on it. Bishop argues that while there is huge variety within African American children's literature all creators "share the experience of being members of a society in which race matters a great deal more than it should".<sup>24</sup> Authors in the late 1960s and 1970s inserted "Black people, Black history, and Black cultural traditions" into American children's literature through a variety of genres and formats.<sup>25</sup> The interdisciplinary approach in this thesis demonstrates how books that focused on Black cultural traditions, topics and history came to be crucial tools in education as they encapsulated crucial elements of Black educational philosophy.

The term 'cultural authenticity' is applied throughout the thesis to encompass books that Rudine Sims Bishop describes as texts "communicating distinctive cultural meanings" through aspects including speech, imagery, proverbial statements and "references to African American

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<sup>24</sup> Bishop, *Free Within Ourselves*, xii.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

cultural values, customs, beliefs, attitudes and manners".<sup>26</sup> Combining books which feature distinctive cultural meanings with archival research into what books were used underpins the criteria for book selection in order to best address books that supported a Black educational philosophy. Bishop's categorisation encapsulates the term 'cultural authenticity' that was often used by authors and educational activists and therefore is used throughout this dissertation. The concept of cultural authenticity is important because a Black educational philosophy challenged white racist depictions of African American cultures and so to support a Black educational philosophy, African American children's literature needed to be culturally authentic.

In 1965, children's literature specialist Nancy Larrick declared children's books an 'all-white world' as children's books only featured references or illustrations of black children in 4.2% of all books published by the largest publishing houses.<sup>27</sup> African American authors and illustrators tried to challenge this all-white world as Black Power became a popular ideology in the late 1960s and communities in New York City attacked the institutional racism in public education. Terri Burger, Edythe Haskett, Muriel Feelings, and Margaret Musgrove wrote books on African cultural traditions and stories. Rose Blue, Sharon Bell Mathis, Walter Dean Myers, Kristen Hunter, and John Steptoe set their works in Black cultural environments, familiar to many children in New York City. Julius Lester, Janet Harris, Judith

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<sup>26</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, "Reflections on the Development of African American Children's Literature," *Journal of Children's Literature* 38, no. 2 (2012): 12.

<sup>27</sup> Nancy Larrick 'The All-White World of Children's Books' *The Saturday Review*, (September 11, 1965), 63.

Griffin, Eloise Greenfield, and Lucille Clifton focused on Black history in many of their works. Nikki Giovanni, Arnold Adoff, Dora Pantell, and Edwin Greenidge often focused on contemporary Black political figures to help educate children on the history of Black liberation. These authors often crossed genres and adopted different approaches for each book. They wrote many books that became crucial in a push by educators for a Black educational philosophy as the books focused on African American cultural heritage, Black history and the power of Black communities.

They often worked in collaboration with Black illustrators who provided a range of images to help children see the beauty in being Black and working against centuries long white racist iconography that led to dehumanizing stereotypes and caricatures that they radically contested with revisionist empowered imagery. Tom Feelings, Leo Carty, George Ford, Jerry Pinkney, and Charles Bible provided paintings and drawings for these books as well as using their talents in schools and on the streets to talk to children directly. This dissertation focuses on books used in New York City schools and educational events from 1965 to 1979 as outlined in the appendix so that both the content of the books and their application in education can be examined. The books analysed are just a selection of just some of the many books that children read and had access to, but they are representative of the wider selection in terms of genre, topics and authors.

The rise in African American children's books accompanied increased calls for an education that was culturally authentic and relevant for all children. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

included provisions in Title II that enabled public schools and libraries to purchase books for children in low-income areas. Many educational bodies such as the Columbia Teachers College and the New York Black Librarians Caucus focused on trade books, literature that is for general readership by a commercial publisher rather than textbooks, which are focused on the study of a particular subject, as many school libraries were deemed inadequate. Therefore, children's books became important purchases for public schools in New York City unlike in any previous era. There followed a boom for children's books and works that focused on African American history and cultures.

Scholars from literature and educational studies have lauded the late 1960s and 1970s as a key time for African American children's books. Frances Fitzgerald's work on school textbooks emphasises great changes by the 1970s in terms of the treatment of race as textbooks' treatment of African American history shifted to a more visible and positive representation though with many racist elements still present.<sup>28</sup> Fitzgerald's work asserts that educators had become more engaged with representations of race in schoolbooks. In his work on U.S. publishing, John Tebbel has argued that after 1966 there was an explosion of more diverse literature in both textbooks and trade books.<sup>29</sup> The works by Tebbel and Fitzgerald illuminate the changes in children's books, however both scholars' periodisation

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<sup>28</sup> Frances Fitzgerald, *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979).

<sup>29</sup> John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States, vol.4, the Great Change, 1940-1980* (New York: R. R. Bowker Co, 1981), 378.

suggests the late 1960s and 1970s were an epilogue in the long struggle for more inclusive and appropriate books for children. However, this dissertation asserts that the period 1965 to 1979 was a period of significant change in African American children's literature. The period was not an epilogue, but the Black Power era was a crucial turning point in African American children's literature and an important precursor for later multicultural education movements efforts in which educators modified their approach to facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural and social-class groups.<sup>30</sup>

Rudine Sims Bishop identifies the 1960s and 1970s as the period when "contemporary African American children's literature came into its own" because of its large increase and support, though still steeped in a long history of Black children's writing.<sup>31</sup> Bishop examines African American children's literature through different genres and formats from poetry through song to picture books. Bishop's focus is not on how educators and parents used books in education, but each chapter acknowledges the educational importance of this literature and how authors sought their work to be used. Bishop's work on African American children's books has been integral to the field and other scholars, such as Dianne Johnson, have analysed African American children's books through textual examination as well as focusing on the pedagogical importance. This thesis seeks to contribute further to the pioneering work of Bishop by examining how these books became important

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<sup>30</sup> James Banks, "Multicultural Education and Curriculum Transformation", *Journal of Negro Education* 64, no. 4 (1995): 390-394.

<sup>31</sup> Bishop, *Free Within Ourselves*, xi.

tools for New York City teachers, librarians, authors and children who believed in the power of a Black educational philosophy in combatting white supremacy and also providing a better education for children. An interdisciplinary approach enables analysis of the pedagogical aspects of the books as well as a study of events and programmes in which the books were used.

Scholars such as Michelle Martin, Katherine Capshaw-Smith, Gloria Woodard, and Donnaræ McCann, among others, have examined a range of African American children's literature across its history, particularly focusing on children's books as cultural artefacts.<sup>32</sup> Recent research by Jonda McNair and Wanda Brooks has built on the works of these scholars by examining texts and analysing how African American children's books were important resources for "acculturation for children by shaping their values, beliefs, and worldviews", moving beyond their content and examining their impact.<sup>33</sup> In Michelle Martin's *Brown Gold: Milestones of African American Children's Picture Books, 1845-2002*, she offers a long history of African American children's books that insightfully examines shifting traditions and beliefs in picture books. In particular, Martin demonstrates the influence of the Black

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<sup>32</sup> Katharine Capshaw-Smith, "A Cross-Written Harlem Renaissance: Langston Hughes" in *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature*, ed. Julia Mickenberg Lynne Vallone (Oxford University Press, 2011); MacCann and Woodard, eds., *The Black American in Books for Children*; Elizabeth Marshall, "'The Random Brushing of Birds': Representations of African American Women in Biographies," in *Embracing, Evaluating, and Examining African American Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. Wanda M. Brooks and Jonda C. McNair (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Wanda Brooks and Jonda McNair, "'Combing' through Representations of Black Girls' Hair in African American Children's Literature," *Children's Literature in Education* 46, no. 3 (2015): 299.

Arts movement on picture books and explores how difficult themes such as racism and violence were adapted for the pages of children's books.

These scholars have provided invaluable work on themes and ideas within texts which are crucial in understanding their importance. Other scholars have connected literature with wider experiences of the readers. Jonda McNair and Wanda Brooks' scholarship on Black girls' hair in children's literature is an example of how textual analysis provides a greater understanding of how African American children's literature "speaks to the realities and cultural experiences of young readers".<sup>34</sup> This dissertation makes the connection clearer as it examines how authors and illustrators sought to address issues familiar and relevant to their readers from the beauty of Black hair to adventures children embarked upon in New York City. Connecting the content of books with the lives of children is important to a Black educational philosophy because educators, activists and parents strove to provide education that was relevant to children's lives.

Scholarship that focuses solely on textual analysis cannot fully explain how African American children's literature of the 1960s and 1970s became part of an educational philosophy that elevated culturally relevant pedagogy, however. Educational scholars such as Gloria Ladson-Billings have highlighted the important connections between culture and education and the potential impact on children's learning. Ladson-Billings contends that the dominant groups' culture and epistemology is asserted as the "authentic

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 305.

voice of the official curriculum” which ensures that children are exposed to an “incoherent and disjointed picture of those who are not white”.<sup>35</sup> Her work addresses contemporary issues in social studies and history curricula and attempts to “address the disconnect between the artificial life of the classroom and the real lives of the students”.<sup>36</sup> This dissertation builds upon Ladson-Billings’ argument by examining the history of events in New York City in the late 1960s and 1970s and demonstrating how children’s books became an important tool in challenging the dominant culture in education by making learning more relevant to children’s lives.<sup>37</sup> The case study of New York City provides historical evidence that supports Ladson-Billings’ argument and can provide further information on the development of antiracist educational strategies and the provision of more culturally relevant material.

One of the earliest scholarly works addressing this topic was an article by Peter Messmore in 1972 in which he suggested that children needed books that they could relate to in order to improve their reading.<sup>38</sup> The intersection of curriculum studies, educational studies and literary studies has developed significantly over the last two decades. Violet Harris has produced numerous studies on the role of African American children’s

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<sup>35</sup>Gloria Ladson-Billings, ‘Lies my teacher still tells: Developing a critical perspective toward social studies’ in Ladson-Billings, G., ed., *Critical Race Theory Perspectives on Social Studies: The Profession, Policies, and Curriculum* (Greenwich: Information Age, 2003), 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>37</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, “But That’s Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy”, *Theory Into Practice* 34, no. 3 (1995).

<sup>38</sup> Peter B. Messmore, “Multi-Ethnic Reading Texts: The Role of Inferred Story-Character Identification and Reading Comprehension”, *Journal of Reading Behavior* 5, no. 2 (1972): 126.

literature in contemporary classroom settings.<sup>39</sup> In the 2008 edited volume *Embracing, Evaluating, and Examining African American Children's and Young Adult Literature* an entire section is devoted to the pedagogical importance of African American children's literature, emphasising how interlinked the concepts are.

Much of this material, however, lacks analysis and examination of the history of the educational impact of African American children's books on children and this dissertation contributes to this gap. Dianne Johnson's body of work has addressed the historical pedagogical elements of African American children's literature. In her 1990 book *Telling Tales: The Pedagogy and Promise of African American Literature for Youth*, Johnson examines African American literature from the late nineteenth century and powerfully articulates how this literature has been an important resource in African American quests for literacy and education. An invaluable insight into the long history of the intersection of African American children's literature and education. Johnson's work uses case studies to explore the changing relationship between education and children's literature, but her work does not cover the myriad ways in which books became powerful educational tools in the 1960s and 1970s.

This thesis intervenes into this scholarship and expands upon Johnson's analysis of the pedagogical nature of children's books by

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<sup>39</sup> Violet Harris, 'Using African American literature in the classroom', in *Literacy among African American Youth: Issues in Learning, Teaching, and Schooling*, 229-259, eds. V. L. Gadsden & D. A. Wagner (Cresskill: Hampton, 1995); Violet Harris *Using Multiethnic Literature in the K-8 Classroom* (Norwood: Christopher-Gordon, 1997).

examining ways educators and activists used African American children's books in educational settings. Johnson focuses on how Lucille Clifton's children's books involved "the passing down of histories and cultures" and her study of Clifton is simply "one step toward a collective appreciation" of the wider educational power of African American children's books.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, her work focuses on the pedagogical underpinnings of the books rather than exploring how individuals and organisations used this literature to promote a Black educational philosophy. In assessing a wide variety of books in a shorter period, this thesis explores how educators, the CIBC, and children used a range of genres for educational purposes. This range of books provides an insight into the nuances of Black educational philosophy and its many strands. In assessing different books used in educational initiatives and classrooms this dissertation demonstrates how African American fairy tales, biographies, and histories among others became important parts of Black educational philosophy in the Black Power era.

To fully gain an idea of Black educational philosophy it is important to recognise the influence of Black Power ideology and contemporary politics. A few scholars have addressed the intersection of political movements and children's literature. Julia Mickenberg and Philip Nel examine the radical educational and political roles of children's books by focusing upon key themes such as internationalism, challenging authority and bigotry within a wide range of texts. Mickenberg and Nel's work focuses on authors who

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<sup>40</sup> Dianne Johnson, *Telling Tales*, 129.

“recognize the cognitive and emotional capacities of children” and therefore provide children with difficult topics that promote social justice.<sup>41</sup> Their focus is on broad trends such as unionism and antiracism rather than close analysis of particular books but they do emphasise the interrelations of children’s literature and wider political and cultural movements. Their recognition of children’s engagement with political ideas through the medium of children’s books is built upon within this thesis as it is argued that not only did many authors and illustrators imbue their work with Black Power ideas and imagery, but children responded to this.

Children’s literature specialist Sara Austin directly links author Virginia Hamilton to Black Arts politics in her article “Two Separate Hearts”. She asserts that Hamilton incorporated elements of the Black Arts Movement such as folklore and a focus on identity.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Austin has contributed to a greater understanding of African American children’s literature and demonstrated the impact of the Black Arts movement on children’s literature. Austin’s scholarship, like much on African American children’s literature, focuses on the material rather than how children and educators used and experienced the books. The case study of New York City demonstrates how Black Power and contemporary educational politics became part of the literature but was also crucial in children’s experiences as these books supported a reshaped and transformed Black educational philosophy.

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<sup>41</sup> Julia L. Mickenberg and Philip Nel, "Radical Children's Literature Now!," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2011): 445.

<sup>42</sup> Sara Austin, "Two Separate Hearts: Virginia Hamilton and the Black Arts Movement," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 40, no. 3 (2016).

This thesis does not argue that every African American children's book focuses on "Blackness", nor that they are all explorations of African American culture. As Dianne Johnson contends, these books are "grounded in African American points of reference".<sup>43</sup> These books are examined because of their diversity in approach and topics and how authors sought to represent the varied lives of African American children. Some explicitly deal with Black Power themes; others deal with schooling whilst still others offer imagined realities for children to engage with. It is this diversity of approach that is crucial because it reveals how children's literature was used in the service of many strands of Black educational philosophy. From bolstering Black pride to emphasising the importance of community, to focusing on Black Power figures and their efforts to battle white supremacy, African American children's books became important tools in the pursuit of change, not just of education but society at large. These children's books defy any ideas of a monolithic African American culture and history. The books examined in this study reiterate that educators used African American children's literature that was diverse in approach and topic in furthering a Black educational philosophy.

### **How Desegregation Led to a Push for African American Children's Literature**

School desegregation was an attempt to end the practice of separating children of different races into different public schools and desegregation efforts in New York City prompted a backlash from parents, educators and

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<sup>43</sup> Johnson, *Telling Tales*, 3.

students for the inadequacy of materials reflecting African American lives and history. Much of the literature on desegregation acknowledges poorly executed aspects of the process but praises the effect on minority schooling. This dissertation intervenes in the historiography of desegregation as parents, students and educators pushed for a Black educational philosophy as the limitations of desegregation were laid bare. Jomill Braddock's empirical research into latter stages of pupils' lives demonstrates that many who attended desegregated schools achieved greater success than their counterparts and lived more integrated lives.<sup>44</sup> Scholarly emphasis on some long-term benefits of desegregation overlook the immediate impact on children's lives such as the paucity of culturally relevant literature. These studies tend to focus on small increases in test scores rather than the, admittedly harder to quantify, feelings of parents and students. For the purposes of this thesis children's connection to cultural heritage and Black consciousness are more important aspects of a Black educational philosophy than test scores.

Whilst the works of scholars that focus upon the benefits of desegregation include some interesting insights into the potential benefits it has had, they do tend to ignore how damaging it often was for Black children when first implemented. A Black educational philosophy is child-centred and focused on psychologically strengthening children and so the immediate

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<sup>44</sup> J. H. Braddock, "School desegregation and Black assimilation" *Journal of Social Issues*, 41,3 (1985):9-22; See also Willis Hawley, 'Increasing the Effectiveness of School Desegregation: Lessons from the Research' in *Race and Schooling in the City* edited by Adam Yarmolinsky, Lance Liebman, and Corinne S. Schelling, 145-162, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

impact on children's feelings is an important consideration. Historian Siddle Walker has argued that many African Americans valued aspects of segregated school environments because they often focused on racial uplift. Education lost focuses on racial uplift during desegregation efforts and this thesis examines how some educators and activists viewed books for children as a form of remedy to this issue.<sup>45</sup> Mary Braxton and Charles Bullock's study into pupil attitudes before and after desegregation is an invaluable resource that through interviews with Black and white students from Georgia before and after desegregation, demonstrates how the students viewed the process.<sup>46</sup> The study in Georgia in 1970 skilfully presents how desegregation did not live up to the expectations of Black students as many surveyed felt disappointed and cynical about the process. The study reveals that Black students had high hopes for desegregation efforts, but the reality was much more limited. Unlike many other studies, Braxton and Bullock delve into how students felt about desegregation and this child-centric approach informs this thesis' approach to educational changes.

In April of 1969, Jeff Nilson, a white teacher in New York City, wrote to the New York Board of Education to advise it on ways to improve the education of children in the city. Nilsson argued that Black children in New York City did not view the education provided in public schools as relevant to

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<sup>45</sup> Vanessa Siddle Walker, "Valued Segregated Schools for African American Children in the South, 1935-1969: A Review of Common Themes and Characteristics", *Review of Educational Research* 70, no. 3 (2000): 253–85.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Bullock and Mary Victoria Braxton, "The Coming of School Desegregation: A Before and After Study of Black and White Student Perceptions" *Social Science Quarterly* (1973), 132–38.

their lives. He claimed that “what curriculum experts have deemed interesting to ‘inner city children’ has been judged corny and boring by these same children”.<sup>47</sup> These children’s lack of engagement with the materials provided in schools was indicative of a wider white education system that did not address the wants and needs of African American students.

The curriculum and books available often became a contentious issue as African American children were subjected to books that ignored the history and culture of African Americans, and often caricatured it. Books that portrayed Black characters in a negative light could be found in most schools and libraries in New York City, leaving children exposed to racist imagery. Desegregation revealed the extent of racist books in schools and the lack of Black-authored material.<sup>48</sup> *Little Black Sambo* written by white Scottish author Helen Bannerman in 1899 was commonly found in schools. As desegregation slowly occurred, parents, students and activists signalled that its presence was evidence of white racist education. A NAACP member in Washington D.C. decried that *Little Black Sambo* “violates one of the first rules of intercultural education: mutual respect for the cultures involved”.<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Zimmerman’s study of textbooks after the *Brown Vs. Board* decision includes a focus on *Little Black Sambo* because of how the

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<sup>47</sup> Jeff Nilson to John Doar, Memorandum, April 14, 1969, Box 140, Folder Board of Education General 2, John Doar Papers.

<sup>48</sup> Further discussion on the white-dominated libraries and curriculum highlighted by desegregation can be found in U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Education and Labor, *Books for Schools and the Treatment of Minorities: Hearings before the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on De Facto School Segregation*. 89th Cong., 2nd sess., August 24, 30, 31; and September 1, 1966.

<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Zimmerman "Brown-Ing the American Textbook: History, Psychology, and the Origins of Modern Multiculturalism", *History of Education Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2004): 54.

presence of dehumanising books became a frontline for debates about education during desegregation. This thesis intervenes in desegregation historiography by demonstrating how racist literature became an important target to be challenged by authors and educators who sought to counteract the presence of this literature with African American children's literature that celebrated rather than denigrated Blackness. *The Washington Post* supported the use of *Little Black Sambo* and argued that Black activists were pushing equality in schools to "a point of absurdity" while many Black educators and parents vociferously argued that the book contributed to internalised racism and "self-hatred".<sup>50</sup> The issues raised during desegregation continued to prove important as a handwritten survey by CIBC revealed how *Little Black Sambo* was still carried by many libraries across the United States. Zimmerman's research supports the idea that desegregation brought the issue of books to the forefront and this dissertation uncovers how desegregation led to calls for the implementation of a Black educational philosophy and African American children's books in schools.

Desegregation highlighted just how lacking materials for Black children were in most schools. Black schools were comprehensively underfunded across the United States but, as Black children moved into white schools, many realised that not only were the schools unevenly supplied with materials, but materials were disproportionately directed at white children. Inequality within schooling had been a core issue for a

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<sup>50</sup> "Little Black Sambo", *The Washington Post*, 30 September, 1947.

century and as desegregation laid bare further issues Black communities in New York City sought new solutions.

### **Community Control: How Activists Sought to Further a Black Educational Philosophy**

Desegregation and Community Control in New York City were irrevocably linked. Community Control was a redefinition of the roles of parents and the local community in a system that had marginalized the education of children of colour. Community Control meant powers over curricula, distribution of funds and a range of other powers transferred from the local Board of Education into the hands of the local community. Black parents and activists rallied against the dominance of white education within schools and as such local community control in predominantly African American areas became a key issue. By late 1966, many community leaders who had earlier supported desegregation called for greater community control to improve the education of New York's Black and Puerto Rican residents. Activists campaigned for authorities to allow communities to control local education so that local needs could be met, and a child-centric approach could be enforced. This meant the implementation of a Black educational philosophy in predominantly African American schools. Community Control activists wanted to provide an education that centred on the children in the classroom, freeing them from schooling that had been designed with white children in mind. Integral to the push for Community Control was control over what books children had access to and this thesis contributed to scholarship on Community Control by

examining the cultural side of Community Control and how it was closely tied to a Black educational philosophy.

The historiography of the Community Control Movement is still in nascent stages as it has often been reduced to a short section in histories of wider race relations. Several contemporary works by educational scholars, activists and social theorists provide nuanced accounts of the movement - primarily the motivations and the practicalities of the project.<sup>51</sup> The proliferation of works that examined the potential benefits of community control in the 1960s was later accompanied by a number of works in the 1970s, such as Joseph Cronin's *The Control of Urban Schools*, that delineated the pitfalls and fallouts of the movement.<sup>52</sup> Diane Ravitch's work, *The Great School Wars, New York City 1805-1973*, is impressive in its scope and analysis of immigration patterns but, like Cronin's work, it lacks an astute analysis of the educational issues at the heart of the movement, instead focusing on political manoeuvrings rather than underlying Black educational philosophy.<sup>53</sup> Many of the works from the 1970s are limited in their proximity to events; the historical background and immediate political effects are impressively drawn out but the broader impact of the movement had not yet been felt.

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<sup>51</sup> For contemporary accounts and analysis of Community Control see: Altshuler, *Community Control: The Black Demand for Participation in Large American Cities* (New York: Pegasus, 1970); Fantini, Gittell, and Magat, *Community Control and the Urban School*.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph Cronin, *The Control on Urban Schools: Perspective on the Power of Educational Reformers* (New York: The Free Press, 1973).

<sup>53</sup> Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*.

More recent histories have examined the Community Control Movement in a wider historical context. Derek Edgell's work examines the class dynamics of the movement in particular, weaving together the competing ideologies and hyperbole inherent in the controversy to demonstrate how this fits with the wider politics of the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>54</sup> Jerald Podair's work *The Strike that Changed New York* illuminates the racial divide key to the Community Control Movement and details the complex grassroots, federal and corporate politics involved. Podair's work keenly examines the racial conflict involved in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strikes and the 'culture war' sparked by this brief conflict. This thesis builds upon studies of Community Control by examining how the movement allowed for a Black Educational philosophy to flourish and demonstrating that it led to increased use of African American children's books in education.

In Puerto Rican communities, bilingualism became a key issue, whereas in predominantly African American neighbourhoods groups such as the Harlem Parents Committee called for materials that focused on Black history and cultures while also demanding images, language and settings that were more recognisable to their children.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the issues of materials and curricula appear in literature on Community Control time and time again. In his book on the strike in the Ocean Brownsville School district,

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<sup>54</sup> Derek Edgell, *The Movement for Community Control of New York City's Schools, 1966-1970: Class Wars* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellin Press, 1998).

<sup>55</sup> Harlem Parents Committee, *Views*, June 1966, Box 15, Folder 'Views', Annie Stein papers, University Archives, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries, New York, New York (hereafter cited as Annie Stein papers)

Jerald Podair highlights how the community activist group, the District Advisory Committee, demanded a “curriculum based on the glory and greatness of the African American culture, history and experience”.<sup>56</sup> However, details of the books and materials used are not made clear and so this thesis provides insight into the cultural impact of Community Control. Beyond the Community Control movement in New York City, scholars have addressed grassroots Black educational movements.

Historian Russell Rickford’s book on Black Power and independent education is a revealing history that contributes to the historiography of U.S. education as well as Black Power by focusing on the cultural as well as political importance of the movement within schools.<sup>57</sup> His book challenges traditional assumptions about the efficacy of Black Power political action and uses education to establish that it was not a story of apathy and frustrations. Instead, he argues that education represented a formidable movement that arose substantively during that decade, that proved remarkably resilient, and that posited education as the final battlefield of “the colonized”.<sup>58</sup> Rickford’s work is one of the most extensive books to deal with education during the late 1960s and he argues that, whilst having roots in the past, the movement within education represented something fundamentally new: it honoured, rather than denigrated, being Black and did not push children towards mainstream white education. This dissertation follows Rickford’s assertion

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<sup>56</sup> Ocean Hill-Brownsville District Advisory Committee qtd. in Jerald Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (London: Yale University Press, 2002) 67.

<sup>57</sup> Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (London: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

that community education was a powerful movement and emphasises the cultural impact of Community Control, providing detailed analysis into this shift in education and examining a specific change to New York City education - the use of African American children's literature.

Rickford and other scholars have indicated that the materials children used in schools is an important signifier of educational change. For example, Dionne Danna's study of the Chicago school system and Black activism in the late 1960s is a detailed study that elucidates many of the issues raised by teachers and students.<sup>59</sup> The study adroitly argues that though the results were limited, the activists utilised organisational tactics citywide and forced changes within local education, including updates to curricula. Danna demonstrates that Black history courses and more culturally relevant material were crucial to student demands. The detail of what this material was is not clear and an understanding of the changes in the books that were used would augment this argument. Even studies that downplay the importance of community schooling do not delve into the materials used, even though they are frequently cited as evidence.<sup>60</sup>

This thesis, however, connects most closely with the work of Melissa Wiener, and her book *Power, Protest, and the Public Schools: Jewish and African American Struggles in New York City*, because of the focus on the

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<sup>59</sup> Dionne Danna. 'Black student empowerment and Chicago school reform efforts in 1968' *Urban Education*, 37, no. 5 (2002): 631-55.

<sup>60</sup> See Joan Davis Ratteray. "Independent Neighborhood Schools: A Framework for the Education of African Americans." *The Journal of Negro Education* 61, no. 2 (1992). Ratteray asserts that independent Black schools borrowed from Eurocentric curricula but she does not provide evidence of the materials or books used.

cultural battles at the heart of New York educational struggles.<sup>61</sup> Her emphasis on crucial curriculum changes and the fight to include more culturally relevant materials are built upon in this dissertation, moving beyond her examination of African American history courses. Weiner rightly contends that African American post-war efforts of curriculum change was “to challenge the hegemonic whiteness of the curricular canon”, but it was more than just challenging whiteness; the African American children’s books used in education after 1965 celebrated Blackness and sought to strengthen the bonds of Black communities. The huge rise in children’s books that focused on African American history as well as other themes became important for schools in this movement as they sought to use the opportunity to inculcate Black pride and engage Black children with reading that they could relate to.

This dissertation moves beyond challenges to the curriculum as education moved to bookmobiles, stoops, sidewalks and homes. Black educational philosophy challenged white racist curricula but also provided a community-oriented education outside traditional public school parameters. Community Control rose amid the Black Power era as activists called for Black-led and Black-controlled institutions. The collective action calling for African American children’s literature after desegregation and during Community Control connected these efforts with Black Power ideas and activists.

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<sup>61</sup> Melissa Weiner, *Power, Protest, and the Public Schools: Jewish and African American Struggles in New York City* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

## **“New Protest Strategies”: Black Power and its Relationship with African American Children’s Literature**

Educators involved in Community Control projects often became closely aligned with Black Power politics; for example, Les Campbell taught African American history and culture from a Black nationalist perspective in the Ocean-Hill Brownsville district in Brooklyn. A focus on identity, self-determination and the power of African American cultures connected Black Power and Black Arts activists with the educational changes in New York City. Sonny Carson of Brooklyn Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Stokely Carmichael, Nikki Giovanni, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Amiri Baraka all campaigned for educational changes and worked with local activists in order to make changes in education, especially making changes to the books that children had access to. The concerns of parents, teachers and creators overlapped with Black Power activists as they shared in the belief in the power of Black cultures to improve education and help children survive and defy in a white supremacist society. Black Power featured in many children’s books but even in those that it did not, the political power of expressing Black cultures was a crucial part of the Black Arts Movement. The role of children’s literature as an extension of the Black Arts Movement has rarely been explored but this thesis examines how authors, illustrators and readers engaged with Black Power through children’s literature. Whether it was explicit references to famous activists or a focus on themes like ‘Black is Beautiful’, African American children’s literature became an important educational tool that was often inflected with Black Power ideology, imagery and rhetoric.

Historian Tracy K'Meyer asserts that the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power shared many similarities, but the key differences were that Black Power activists often rejected integration for its own sake and called for separate Black organisations and institutions. They also questioned the philosophy of non-violence and supported armed self-defence and some, such as the Black Liberation Army and the Black Panther Party, advocated for armed struggle.<sup>62</sup> Armed self-defence had been a crucial aspect of civil rights protest, as Timothy Dyson demonstrates in his history of Robert F. Williams as he argues Black Power and the Civil Rights Movement “emerged from the same soil”.<sup>63</sup> This thesis asserts that while Black Power and the Civil Rights Movement shared many tactics, personnel and aims for freedom they were differentiated by “new protest strategies” and a reinterpretation of how armed struggle could underpin Black liberation.<sup>64</sup> The examination of African American children’s books within this context furthers this idea of ‘new protest strategies’ as children’s literature became an important part of Black Power cultural expressions of Black pride, solidarity and resistance. African American children’s literature was an important challenge to white supremacy and represented an important battleground: the shaping of young minds. African American children’s literature had a long historical connection with Black activism. However, during the Black Power era children’s books

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<sup>62</sup> Tracy E. K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South: Louisville, Kentucky 1945-1980* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 180.

<sup>63</sup> Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 308.

<sup>64</sup> Simon Wendt, “The Roots of Black Power? Armed Resistance and the Radicalization of the Civil Rights Movement” in *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, edited by Peniel E. Joseph (London: Routledge, 2006), 146.

took on new importance in facilitating the transmission of Black educational philosophy.

The Black Power era included many groups and individuals with a variety of aims, philosophies and tactics. However, whilst disagreements were rife and the meaning of 'Black Power' was not consistent, the issues of Black pride, self-determination and the need to forge Black-led groups and institutions were crucial among Black Power proponents. Ever since, scholars have re-evaluated the chronology, content and impact of Black Power and its intersections with the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>65</sup> Several scholars have characterised the movement as a fleeting, fractious and often violent epilogue to the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>66</sup> However, in recent years a number of academics have argued that, whilst broad, Black Power linked together people with common ideas about identity and the need for Black solidarity and self-development. Numerous scholars such as Jeffrey Ogbar and Yohuru Williams have argued that the Black Power era made positive contributions to communities and left an indelible mark on American

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<sup>65</sup> Peniel Joseph "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field." *The Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (2009); Tyson *Radio Free Dixie*; K'Meyer *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South*; Robert O'Self, 'The Black Panther Party and the Long Civil Rights Era' in *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement*, edited by Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams, (London: Duke University Press, 2006): 15-57.

<sup>66</sup> Clayborne Carson. *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Matthew Countryman. *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia. Politics and Culture in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

society.<sup>67</sup> This thesis supports this assertion as it illustrates the cultural impact of Black Power on African American children's literature and how this literature reinforced Black educational philosophy.

Black Power is difficult fully to define and no singular meaning can cover its diversity. Some Black Power adherents, such as N.Y Democrat congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, focused on organising grassroots support in Black communities to "unite and fight together for their own advancement".<sup>68</sup> By contrast, groups such as the Black Panthers disavowed the entire capitalist system that, in their view, propagated oppression and relied on exploitation. Furthermore, Black separatists such as the Nation of Islam and Maulana Karenga's US organisation (as opposed to 'them') sought to create a distinct Black community with Black institutions and Black culture. The strategies and tactics of the Black Panther Party, US, The Nation of Islam and the Congress of Racial Equality, among others, differed wildly. How Black Power activists organised and defined themselves led to many bitter disputes and violent confrontations such as the fatal shootout between Black Panther members and US members in January 1969. David Hillard, Black Panther Party Chief of Staff, commented that it was not just violence from white people but that there were "a lot of enemies within the assemblies of black people themselves".<sup>69</sup> The frictions and tensions between organisations and individuals ranged from fatal incidents to philosophical

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<sup>67</sup> Jeffrey Ogbonna Green Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) ; Yohuru Williams, *Rethinking the Black Freedom Movement*, (New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>68</sup> John T. McCartney, *Black Power Ideologies: An Essay in African-American Political Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 111.

<sup>69</sup> 'Brothers hunted in UCLA deaths', *The New York Times*, 20 January 1969.

debates. This division was reflected in children's literature, from Muriel Feelings' emphasis on the power of understanding African heritage to Nikki Giovanni celebrating the Black Panthers, allowing children's authors and illustrators to showcase different aspects of the Black Power era.

Although divided on many issues, policies and worldviews, Black Power activists and Black children's authors shared many important beliefs that stretched across many of the factions and divides. Key concepts connected a variety of authors and activists (though this did not mean they did not disagree on the details of these concepts). Black consciousness, an understanding of what it meant to be Black and the history and culture attached to this proved to be an important basis for many Black Power activists.<sup>70</sup> Black Power groups differed greatly in their understanding of what Black consciousness meant and how it should be applied but the underlying importance of Black consciousness was shared among Black Power activists. Whether it was replacing white society or simply gaining a greater share of power, Black Power meant the Black communities taking control of their destinies, politics and culture.

African American children's literature similarly was connected by beliefs in the importance of Black consciousness and Black self-definition as well as the fact that the Black community must come together and lead efforts to improve the lot of Black people in the United States. In his work *Achieving Blackness*, Algernon Austin correctly asserts that Black Power is

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<sup>70</sup> Ogbar, *Black Power*, 110.

too often conflated with Black popular culture of the time.<sup>71</sup> Activists from myriad Black Power groups concerned themselves with political, economic and cultural issues of Black lives because Black Power meant asserting Black control in all areas of Black life and combating white supremacy. The African American children's literature produced during this era was not just an important part of Black popular culture but was a tool to help children engage in community activism. The divides between African American children's authors were not as fractious or fatal as those between Black Power groups. However, the range of children's books produced, while differing in approach, did all contribute to the furtherance of Black educational philosophy.

Historian Komozi Woodard characterises Black Power as a simultaneous cultural and political movement in which culture played a central role in a grassroots movement.<sup>72</sup> Black cultural identity helped with psychological liberation from the "mind of the white nation" that allowed for the Black community to organise and take greater control of Black lives in a hostile white society.<sup>73</sup> This confluence of culture with liberation is built upon in this thesis as the reading events, bookmobiles and other activities encouraged community organisation and a focus on shaping children's cultural identities. Rafael Torrubiá, a Black Power historian, hails Black

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<sup>71</sup> Algernon Austin, *Achieving Blackness: Race, Black Nationalism, and Afrocentrism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 80.

<sup>72</sup> Komozi Woodard, *The Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black power politics* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999)

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

cultural expression as key to the new Black identity that acted as “a much-needed social adhesive and steering force for the developing political Black power”.<sup>74</sup> This ‘new’ identity was the “soul of a new radicalism” because crucial to Black Power was a strong, positive Black identity that would enable further action.<sup>75</sup> Black cultural heritage and expressions helped facilitate stronger Black identity and are therefore a crucial part of Black Power. Historian Waldo Martin argues that culture and cultural struggle are “principal ways of imagining and realizing our world and are crucial to being and acting in the world”.<sup>76</sup> This thesis builds upon these positions because it examines African American children’s literature and how it became an important conduit for ideas of Black identity. Analysis of educational events and children’s books reveals a complex picture in which some individuals involved believed that these events were part of this steering force for Black Power whilst others, like many in the Harlem Parents Committee, felt that their interests briefly aligned with Black Power activists in terms of local Black control and books that celebrated Black identities.

Black Power influenced children’s writing just as children’s writing contributed to the cultural legacy of the Black Power era, both arguments overlooked within historiography. The children’s author and former Black Power adherent, Julius Lester, considered the importance of Black

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<sup>74</sup> Rafael Torrubia, *Black Power and the American People: Culture and Identity in the Twentieth Century* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 44.

<sup>75</sup> Peniel Joseph, ‘Introduction’, in *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, edited by Peniel E. Joseph (London: Routledge, 2006), 1.

<sup>76</sup> Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *No Coward Soldiers: Black Cultural Politics and Postwar America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 5.

consciousness to his work, later claiming that one of the reasons he became a children's writer was "because of the questions of identity that are central to childhood".<sup>77</sup> For Lester, ideas linked Black Power, Black Arts and writing for children. For Walter Dean Myers, however, Black Power brought attention to issues Black children faced and the popularity of Black Power helped with the increase of African American children's literature. He later claimed that the "Angry black faces... commanded the front pages of our tabloids. We were news, and what is news is marketable" and aided by the ESEA money by "the end of the 60s the publishing industry was talking seriously about the need for books for blacks".<sup>78</sup> Therefore, the Black Power era is important because it influenced authors in different ways. For some it was an opportunity to educate children in radical politics, for others it provided an avenue in which to address concepts of Black consciousness and identity, others it was an opportunity to teach children Black history – all facets of Black educational philosophy.

The role and importance of children in Black Power has been addressed by few scholars. Katherine Capshaw's *Civil Rights Childhood* devotes a section to understanding how the Black Arts Movement used photography to emphasise childhood as a "liberatory process".<sup>79</sup> Capshaw's contribution is important because her history gives the children involved an agency and engagement with Black liberation politics, centring children in

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<sup>77</sup> Julius Lester, *On Writing for Children and Other People* (New York: Dial Books, 2004), 104.

<sup>78</sup> Myers, "'I Actually Thought We Would Revolutionize the Industry'".

<sup>79</sup> Katherine Capshaw, "Civil Rights Childhood," (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 154.

cultural contributions. Similarly, Russell John Rickford addresses how Black Power affected children and others on a more local level, exploring the complex nuances of Black education, although his focus is primarily on the political organisation of education rather than the content.<sup>80</sup> The cultural impact of Black Power has become an important strand of scholarship after the pioneering work of William Van Deburg's *New Day in Babylon* in 1992.<sup>81</sup> The cultural impact of work for children, and by children, however is absent from historiography. Addressing this absence, this dissertation examines how African American authors transmitted Black Power ideas and images in children's books.

'Black Power' invokes images of armed self-defence as the sensationalised images of Black Power adorned newspapers and news reports. Integral to Black power was self-defence, not just defending Black bodies from racist violence, but Black Power activists sought to defend against the whitewashing of Black history and culture. They sought to defend against the omission of Black voices from books. They defended Black children in the classroom against a white society that marginalised and limited them. A key weapon was African American children's literature as it represented a distilled version of Black Power that avoided much of the factionalism of Black Power groups and simply sought to provide self-affirmation, Black pride, and a chance for Black children to learn the importance, and power, in being Black. African American children's literature

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<sup>80</sup> Rickford, *We Are an African People*.

<sup>81</sup> Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon*.

brought Black Power into education and messages of self-determination, the power of the Black community and Black pride all helped in New York City's battle for education that was culturally relevant, community based, and engaging for African American children.

### **Continuity, Change, and Children's Books**

In order to fully uncover the role and impact of African American children's literature this thesis is organised to address the interconnections between African American children's literature, Black Power, and education. The thesis is split into three sections.

The first section 'Changing Same: Black Educational Philosophy and African American Children's Literature In Theory and Tradition' features two chapters. The title is borrowed from Black Studies scholar George Lipsitz who contends that the fight against the racial order of white supremacy is "always changing but forever the same struggle" one that "contains both continuity and rupture" with the past.<sup>82</sup> Chapter One explores this idea of continuity and change, examining the Black educational philosophy of writing for children from the late nineteenth century up until 1965. Ranging from the educational philosophy of Anna Julia Cooper to that of teachers in the Freedom Schools in the summer of 1964, this chapter demonstrates how children's literature's role in a Black educational philosophy changed, and in some facets remained the same, up to the Black Power era. The second chapter is a literary analysis of African American children's books from 1965

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<sup>82</sup> George Lipsitz, "The Changing Same", *Social Identities* 24, no. 1 (2018): 20.

to 1979. The books were all used for educational purposes in New York City during this period. A Black Studies methodology and interdisciplinary literary, historical and cultural analysis are used to examine the major themes, topics and trends in the children's literature and how this was tied to a Black educational philosophy. These books focused on community, Black history and Black pride and sought to provide readers with positive African American imagery. The 1960s and 1970s African American children's literature is examined for the continuities and changes from previous Black children's writing.

The second section 'Black Educational Philosophy in Practice' presents a case study of how activists and educators used the African American children's literature from Chapter Two for educative purposes in New York City. This case study provides insight into the role and impact of African American children's literature in education because of leading educators, Black Power activists, authors and illustrators in the city. Their presence is recorded across several archival collections that reveals a complex web of activism in which educators, parents, children and authors often worked together.

Chapter Three examines how African American children's books gained an unprecedented importance in public education during a tumultuous period in New York City education. Through an examination of the desegregation process and the subsequent experiment in Community Control, the chapter furthers existing history of New York City education and Black Power by uncovering how African American children's books became

vehicles for change. Chapter Four expands on this importance of African American children's literature by focusing on a range of educational initiatives and events such as Book Weeks, reading programmes and teacher training seminars that demonstrate how educators used African American children's literature to further Black educational philosophy.

The final section 'Toward a Child-Centred Black Educational Philosophy' focuses on uncovering the voices of children by working across disciplines of history, literary studies, Black studies, and educational studies. Through a combination of archival research and published materials written by children, this section focuses on understanding the contributions of children to literature, educational activism, and Black Power. Due to the new nature of this approach there is no existing methodology to draw upon, but this section seeks to re-centre children's experiences. This section incorporates sources from children in order to establish the importance of children to Black educational philosophy. Their poetry, drawings, and letters reveal how children viewed literature as important and, furthermore, how they believed in the power of literature in enacting change. The final chapter uses a variety of child-created sources in order to centre children's experiences in this story, a demographic often overlooked in historical records and scholarship.

With its focus on African American children's books and their uses in education this thesis takes as its key sources the children's books used in New York City educational initiatives and archival material related to educational events in New York City. By combining children's literature with

archival research this thesis explores not just the contents of the books but how they were used, who used them, and how they supported a Black educational philosophy. As no study has been done on how African American children's literature was used as an educational tool from 1965 to 1979, a combination of literary analysis of the books combined with original archival research is required to fully comprehend the role of children's literature in New York City during this period. This builds upon scholarship on African American children's literature, educational history and Black Power history and connects these disciplines.

The children's books have all been selected based on their use in New York City schools or educational events.<sup>83</sup> Public school curriculum lists from municipal and New York City Board of Education collections have been used in conjunction with collections of funding bodies including the Ford Foundation and independent organisations such as the CIBC and Reading is Fundamental (RIF). Archival research has provided lists of books that educators used in public schools as well as the books children read outside of school in educational initiatives and programmes. A broad archival approach has expanded the knowledge of what books were used in schools by addressing events outside the Board of Education's control - from Community Control districts to afterschool events. The focus of this thesis on education beyond the public school classroom required an archival methodology that addressed official educational documents as well as the plans, notes, letters, and documents of a range of individuals outside the

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<sup>83</sup> See appendix.

educational establishments. Archives of individual authors such as John Steptoe as well as educational campaigners including Babette Edwards of the Harlem Parents Association were examined. A broad archival approach has helped corroborate events as well as providing a more nuanced account of events rather than organisations' narrow view of their work. Furthermore, the purpose of this broad approach is to emphasise that the use of African American children's literature in schools is a story of collaborations and alliances to overcome an educational system that was systemically racist.

This thesis does not include every book that educators and activists used from 1965 to 1979, but the books used are ones that appeared in several collections, such as the CIBC Director's Files, the educational activist Annie Stein Papers, the member of the New York City Board of Education John Doar Papers, and New York City Board of Education Curriculum Reports demonstrating their wide usage. Books mentioned in several archives were examined because of their widespread use and because they provide insight into the connections between public schooling and outside efforts in using African American children's literature. However, books that were mentioned by children or the CIBC as being particularly popular were always examined, even if they were not found on official curriculum lists. A combination of books, both those that had the support of the New York City Board of Education as well as books that educators used outside of classrooms in external reading programmes, is important to uncover the key differences in approach to Black educational philosophy between outside organisers and those within the public school establishment.

All books used are the editions that were in print at the time, many of which are housed in the Cotsen Children's library at Princeton University. Some books were not available in the Cotsen Children's library nor could they be found elsewhere.<sup>84</sup> While this does limit the study in some capacity it does reveal how little these books have been studied and how their importance has not been acknowledged. Through the Cotsen Children's Library, the New York Public Library, as well as bookshops in the U.S. it has been possible to examine a wide range of children's books that were used by children in New York City and analyse how they contributed to Black educational philosophy.

There are, however, problems in using archival materials as a selection method. This indicates which books adults used in educational initiatives but does not fully cover what books children picked off library shelves. The bias has been somewhat mitigated by comments by librarians and bookmobile volunteers who made some records of the materials children borrowed and which titles were popular. Archival reports from storytellers and librarians indicate the books requested by children which helps alleviate some of the bias in adults' selection and aids in moving towards a child-centric approach.

A specific age range of books is not adopted for several reasons. The varied literacy rates of children in New York City public schools meant that children read across several age ranges. Moreover, the New York

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<sup>84</sup> Including Margo Humphrey, *The River That Gave Gifts*; June Jordan, *Fannie Lou Hamer*; Florence Heide, *Sound of Sunshine*, *Sound of Rain*.

Curriculum Project's use of 'interest level' as well as reading level suggest that these books were read by a wide range of ages and that the appeal of books went beyond age ranges. 'Interest level' is an important consideration given that many African American children's books addressed topics, settings and themes uncommon in public school libraries. In one report of a bookmobile programme it was noted that they did not organise the books by age so that everyone could feel comfortable browsing every shelf.<sup>85</sup> Many books addressed topics not commonly found on school library shelves and so it is important to take into account the draw of new and interesting topics irrespective of age range. Furthermore, in their recording of educational events participants noted the interest of parents and other members of the community, especially in storytelling events. Whilst authors aimed their works at children, they were widely popular beyond this demographic, further emphasising their role in fostering a community based education, a crucial aspect of Black educational philosophy.

For this study, a child is defined as a person aged sixteen and under. This is because African American children's literature was aimed at children into their teens and children who participated in educational events ranged from four to sixteen. It is important to recognize that many people beyond these ages engaged with these books because they provided stories and topics that interested a variety of people.

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<sup>85</sup> 'Report on First Two Months of the Bookmobile' September, 1967, Box 151, Folder 2, John Doar Papers.

This dissertation uses archival materials from municipal and New York City government alongside the papers of individuals and organisations not directly attached to public schooling. This combination has been used to examine education beyond the confines of schools and to compare the approaches of community education and public school education. The municipal archives and papers from figures involved in the Board of Education, including the John Doar papers, are a vital way to examine purchases and curricula projects in New York City in order to uncover the impact of outside pressure for better children's books in public schools. Furthermore, the Annie Stein Papers, Babette Edwards Papers, and The NYC Black Librarians' Caucus Papers, among others, offer insight into community educational activism that often focused on the issue of children's literature providing insight into how the books children read were a crucial concern to educational activists.

The only collection that is specifically about children's books is the Council for Interracial Books for Children: Director's Files. This collection is undigitized and is not included in the most prominent study on New York City education by Diane Ravitch, recent work on Black Power in New York City by Tom Adam Davies nor in Rudine Sims Bishop's work on African American children's literature. The CIBC included members from publishing houses, educators, authors, and parents and so they are central in understanding the connections between African American children's literature and education. The uses of children's books are found among letters, lesson plans, community declarations and many other different documents, emphasising

the importance of children's books to a range of individuals and organisations. This combination of archival research and literary analysis helps to reveal the extent to which African American children's books became important tools for social justice by promoting a Black educational philosophy.

**“Black is children fighting to get an education”**

The above title is one child's definition of the meaning of the word 'Black' in the collaborative book *Black Means...* between pupils of P.S. 150 in the Bronx and Black illustrator Charles Bible.<sup>86</sup> Education and African American children's books have a long, intertwined history that has never been fully explored. In 1979, Director of the CIBC Bradford Chambers wrote that “children's books play a far more important role than is commonly recognized”.<sup>87</sup> This thesis reiterates Chambers' statement and argues that African American children's books played a crucial role in fostering a Black educational philosophy in New York City from 1965 to 1979. The literature impacted schools and children who produced their own literature during this period in response to the flood of books that dealt with Black pride, Black history and the power of Black communities. Black authors and illustrators of the 1960s and 1970s created artwork which was imbued with decades of Black children's writing and a Black educational philosophy. However, this period is also the story of how these Black creators tackled new topics with new perspectives. In the Black Power era these authors and illustrators

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<sup>86</sup> Barney Grossman, Gladys Groom, and Pupils of P.S. 150, "Black Means..." (New York: Hill & Wang, 1970), np.

<sup>87</sup> Bradford Chambers, untitled, 1979, Box 15, Folder 'NAEYC', CIBC Director's Files.

forged strong connections with New York City children as they collaborated with them, read to them and drew them. There is a lot of continuity with earlier African American children's literature but there was also great change. Black Power, educational upheavals in the city and the support of organisations such as the CIBC and individuals including librarian Harriet Brown ensured that from 1965 to 1979 African American children's literature became a key part of a burgeoning Black educational philosophy in New York City.

Rose Blue, a teacher in the Bedford-Stuyvesant district of New York City, began writing children's books in an effort to improve education for local children of colour who were experiencing marginalisation, racism and inequality in the white-dominated school system of New York City. Her first book *Black, Black Beautiful Black* (1969) is indicative of how African American children's literature and educational initiatives combined to help children understand the power and beauty of being Black.<sup>88</sup> Rose Blue is not widely known but she, and many other Black authors and illustrators, created children's books that furthered Black educational philosophy. This thesis examines how African American children's books became a key part of a radical and consciousness-raising Black educational philosophy in New York City from 1965 to 1979 as they were used in educational initiatives across the city. This thesis examines how Black Power, educational activism and federal initiatives coalesced to usher in the "birth of contemporary African

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<sup>88</sup> Rose Blue, *Black, Black, Beautiful Black*, (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1969).

American children's literature".<sup>89</sup> This literature came from a long Black literary and educational continuum, but the books in the late 1960s and 1970s represented a significant shift from previous African American children's literature, a shift that reflected ideologies and imagery of the era. An interdisciplinary approach provides an original way of approaching the fields of Black Power, educational philosophy and African American children's literature by addressing the content of books as well as how educators and parents used them and how children responded to them.

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<sup>89</sup> Bishop, *Free Within Ourselves*, xi.



# CHANGING SAME: BLACK EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

## CHAPTER 1:

### "CHILDREN OF THE SUN": CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN EDUCATION

The interrelation between Black educational endeavours and children's books dates to the nineteenth century. Standing before the National Press Convention in Louisville in 1887, Mary V. Cook delivered a paper entitled "Is Juvenile Literature Demanded on the Part of Colored Children?".<sup>1</sup> Cook's paper was responded to over the next few years in Sunday schools and by a few authors. Her question elicited responses from contemporaries and marks an early point in a long history of calls for literature for Black children by Black women. Just under a century later in 1971, children's author Virginia Hamilton ruminated on the Black experience, the essence of her work, and its long history in the United States. Writing amidst the Black Power era, Hamilton wrote of the Black experience: "At times through our history it became submerged only to emerge again and again. Each time it emerges, it seems strong, more explicit and insistent."<sup>2</sup> African American children's literature, that is literature that is written by Black authors for, but not exclusively for, Black children had a renaissance in the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>3</sup> Much of this children's literature was indeed more explicit and insistent than previous literature for Black children but addressed many similar themes and ideas. An

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<sup>1</sup> James Fraser, "Black Publishing for Black Children: The Experiences of the Sixties and the Seventies", *School Library Journal* 20, no. 9 (1973): 22.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia Hamilton, "Portrait of the Author as a Working Writer", *Elementary English* (1971): 239.

<sup>3</sup> Dianne Johnson, *Telling Tales: The Pedagogy and Promise of African American Literature for Youth* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990), 2.

examination of historical precedents of African American children's literature reveals the continuity evident in the period 1965 to 1979, but also emphasises the significance of this period. Authors including John Steptoe, Virginia Hamilton and Julius Lester reflected ideas common to the Black Power Era such as Black pride, self-determination, and the potential for the Black community to enact change. These themes had historical grounding in works by figures like Anna Julia Cooper, Jessie Faucet and W.E.B. Du Bois and responded to many of the same ongoing problems African Americans faced, yet the period 1965-1979 also represented a change from previous children's literature.

In New York City in the late 1960s and 1970s, authors and illustrators created a range of African American children's books that educationalists, activists, and often the creators themselves, sought to promote in predominantly Black public schools. In 1978, political scholars Louis Williams and Mohamed El-Khawas outlined their philosophy for Black education by arguing that the key to Black education was "the development of Black Pride, self-determination, dignity, the concept of self, and the liberation of the mind from racism".<sup>4</sup> These concepts were reflected frequently within African American children's literature as many Black authors viewed their books as an important social force as well as entertainment. Walter D. Myers hoped that because of the new wave of Black children's books children "would not only escape the demeaning images [he] had experienced but would have strong,

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<sup>4</sup> Louis N. Williams and Mohamed El-Khawas, "A Philosophy of Black Education", *Journal of Negro Education* 47, no. 2 (1978): 181.

positive images as well".<sup>5</sup> Myers' focus on positive representation echoes the sentiments of creators and educators involved in producing Black children's literature from the late nineteenth century. The growth in African American children's literature from 1965 was steeped in a long history but inflected with attitudes, imagery, and topics of the Black Power era.

Rudine Sims Bishop, an African American children's literature specialist, argues that contemporary African American children's literature arose in the 1960s and 1970s. She contends that after 1965 there was a rise in "culturally conscious books" and this term referred to books that featured Black cultural settings, had Black major characters, and gave a realistic and valued depiction of what it means to be Black.<sup>6</sup> Teachers, parents, librarians and activists all tried to encourage the use of more culturally relevant books for children during the 1960s and 1970s. Getting more culturally appropriate children's books in schools became a priority. The interracial group the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC), a leading group in promoting culturally conscious children's literature, brought together public school officials and white publishers to witness how African American children were responding positively to Black children's books and that there was a real need for this material.<sup>7</sup> For over a century, figures argued for the educational potential of Black children's literature and the necessity of such material in providing a good education for African American children. This educational

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Dean Myers, "I Actually Thought We Would Revolutionize the Industry", *New York Times*, November 9, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, "Reflections on the Development of African American Children's Literature", *Journal of Children's Literature* 38, no. 2 (2012): 7.

<sup>7</sup> Brad Chambers to Thomas Cooney, May 20, 1969, Letter, Box 4, Folder 1, Council on Interracial Books for Children: Director's Files, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, New York, New York (hereafter cited as CIBC Director's Files)

philosophy changed over time, but key elements remained the same: the Black educational philosophy espoused by educators and activists in New York City from 1965 to 1979 echoed previous figures but differed in numerous ways.

### **Black Educational Philosophy: Education as a vehicle for Liberation**

The historical importance of education to the African American community cannot be overstated. Frederick Douglass proclaimed that “education means emancipation” as he viewed education as freedom.<sup>8</sup> Ever since Africans were forcibly brought to British colonial America, Black communities employed education as a powerful intellectual tool that could help nurture Africans and African Americans psychologically and provide skills to help defy and resist a white supremacist nation. In his assessment of pre-revolution education, Antonio Bly contends that education and books written by Black figures “earned the laurel of humanity” and helped improve the status of Black communities.<sup>9</sup> Education served an intellectual function together with social and political ones. In 1829, David Walker passionately called “for colored people to acquire learning in this country, [as this acquisition of learning] makes tyrants quake and tremble on their sandy foundation...The bare name of educating the coloured people, scares our cruel oppressors almost to death.”<sup>10</sup> Walker’s fervent appeal for education emphasised that education meant freedom for Africans and African Americans. Ever since, prominent

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<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Buccola, *The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass: In Pursuit of American Liberty*, First paperback edition: 2013. ed. (New York ; London: New York University Press, 2012), 163.

<sup>9</sup> Antonio T. Bly, "In Pursuit of Letters: A History of the Bray Schools for Enslaved Children in Colonial Virginia", *History of Education Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2011): 429.

<sup>10</sup> David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1830 ; repr., Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1993.), 52.

African Americans such as Anna Julia Cooper and W.E.B. Du Bois, as well as myriad educators across the United States, have argued that education for African Americans was not just about excelling academically but ensuring Black dignity and self-determination.<sup>11</sup>

Integral to Black educational philosophy is a history of politics of resistance within education. Key figures, predominantly female educators, countered racist representations of Blackness in the classroom. Teachers like Sarah Mapps Douglass, Anna Julia Cooper and Fanny Jackson Coppin used their real experiences of education to inform their educational philosophy and their teaching practices. Historian Karen Johnson contends that for Anna Julia Cooper and Nannie Helen Burroughs, the classroom was where education as a “vehicle for liberation” was first enacted and they took their experiences of the classroom into wider political activism.<sup>12</sup> The notion of education as an entryway into political activism is a crucial aspect of the focus of this thesis. While different in many regards, the activist use of African American children’s books in the 1960s and 1970s was grounded in a longer history of schooling as a site of antiracist protest.

Black educational philosophy was concerned with providing an education for African Americans that strengthens learners in their fight against internalised racism as well as the tools with which to combat the oppressive elements of white society. African American educators contributed to a

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<sup>11</sup> Walter Recharde Allen et al., "Introduction" in *African American Education: Race, Community, Inequality and Achievement ; a Tribute to Edgar G. Epps*, ed. Walter Recharde Allen, et al. (Amsterdam: JAI, 2002), xx.

<sup>12</sup> Karen Johnson, *Uplifting the Women and the Race: The Educational Philosophies and Social Activism of Anna Julia Cooper and Nannie Helen Burroughs* (London: Routledge, 2000), 131.

philosophy that addressed various challenging facets of life that Black people faced. However, much of the scholarly work on Black education has focused on the figures of W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington.<sup>13</sup> Whilst both were hugely influential figures, the focus on their arguments does a disservice to the educators who contributed to Black educational philosophy, an aspect a range of scholars have been challenging in recent years.<sup>14</sup> Much scholarship also overlooks aspects of Black education, such as children's literature, that have been an important part of debates on education running through African American history to the Black Power Movement and beyond. African American Children's literature has played an important role in education as it has addressed topics like Black history and concepts like Black pride.

### **Racial Pride and Racial Uplift**

The concept of Racial Uplift connotes an elitist movement that sought to demonstrate respectability and civility amongst the African American population in the hope of challenging white racist notions of Black inferiority. The movement had origins from the late-eighteenth century and developed throughout the nineteenth century. This movement was led by Black elites, who felt that it was their mission and their duty to further the conditions of the race.<sup>15</sup> The inherent elitism of racial uplift's attempts to enter white society seems an anathema to later Black Power ideas, yet there were efforts to

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<sup>13</sup> David Alridge, "African American Educators and the Black Intellectual Tradition" in *The Sage Handbook of African American Education*, ed. Linda Tillman (London: SAGE, 2009), 52; Thomas Aiello, *The Battle for the Souls of Black Folk: W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and the Debate That Shaped the Course of Civil Rights* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Hilary J. Moss, *Schooling Citizens: The Struggle for African American Education in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Andrea D. Lewis and Nicole A. Taylor, *Unsung Legacies of Educators and Events in African American Education* (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "Aristocrats of Color: South and North; the Black Elite, 1880-1920", *Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 1 (1988): 112.

foment racial pride and provide a positive history for Black children. Historian Willard Gatewood significantly alters Booker T. Washington's 'separate but one' hand and fingers analogy to move the focus from segregation to the classist relationships between the Black elite and the wider Black communities. Gatewood uses the analogy to argue that whilst the Black elite, upper middle class and upper class African Americans, were as separate from the wider Black population as fingers in terms of their social circles, ambitions and other aspects, that they were "one as the hand" when it came to trying to enact changes to society. Therefore, whilst the concept of racial uplift often focuses on a small proportion of African Americans it is vital to examine how widely some of the concepts were employed and to look beyond the elitist and classist rhetoric and examine the work done for Black communities in terms of education

Within the Black elite, female figures focused on children's issues more than male contemporaries primarily because they had experiences in schools and worked extensively with children. From 1895 to 1901 Mary Church Terrell helped in the formation of educational policy for the District of Columbia public schools board, where she focused on issues facing Black children and helped establish programmes for youths in the community.<sup>16</sup> Terrell's views of the "deserving poor" outlined in her essay 'The Poor in Our Cities' is reflective of middle-class reformist thinking in the nineteenth century and distant from the class-conscious educational initiatives in 1960s New York City. However, her ideas of fostering racial pride in children and trying to

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<sup>16</sup> Wilma Peebles-Wilkins and E. Aracelis Francis, "Two Outstanding Black Women in Social Welfare History: Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells-Barnett", *Affilia* 5, no. 4 (1990): 89-91.

make them feel part of a wider, Black community is a torch that is carried through to the Black Power era. Common to the late nineteenth century and the Black Power era was the use of pride to encourage community action, not just an elite.

In 1890, Wesley Gaines of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church wrote of his “pride in the literary work of the race” as he extolled the important educational work that was being conducted by the church.<sup>17</sup> Sunday Schools began providing literature specifically for African American children. In 1896, Richard Henry Boyd established the Black National Baptist Publishing Board and, within the first year, it had disseminated over 700,000 reading materials to Sunday Schools.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, the A.M.E. employed 60 people in writing and publishing materials for Black children in Sunday Schools across the United States.<sup>19</sup> Although much of this material was within the confines of Christian culture and stories, that there were so many people involved and so many materials produced specifically for Black children demonstrates that literature for Black children was seen as a vital endeavour for the Black community. Similarly, Amelia Johnson wrote two evangelical, moralistic novels for children published by the American Baptist Publication Society. Although both are seemingly ‘raceless’, they do emphasise the idea of social uplift. Literary scholar Ann DuCille, contends that the evangelical content of Johnson’s work and her messages of social uplift are intimately tied to her writing to both white and Black religious readerships and therefore

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<sup>17</sup> Wesley J. Gaines, *African Methodism in the South, or, Twenty-five years of Freedom* (Atlanta: Franklin Publishing House, 1890), 137.

<sup>18</sup> Fraser, "Black Publishing", 23.

<sup>19</sup> Richard R. Wright, Jr., *Centennial Encyclopaedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: Book Concern of the AME Church, 1916), 6.

suggests that her writing was viewed as an important way to help with the education of African American children.

Other children's writers in this turn of the century era focused specifically on racial uplift. They did so by imbuing their writing with racial pride and the importance of knowing Black history. Integration and ideas of Black pride were not mutually exclusive. There was recognition that the Black community had a history to be proud of and that being Black was not something to be ashamed of. In his 1905 book *Floyd's Flowers: Or, Duty and Beauty for Colored Children*, former educator and Black author Silas X. Floyd emphasised that children should try not to think about the "troubles of the race" and instead focus on hard and honest work because that will bring improvement to their lives.<sup>20</sup> Floyd's writing, unlike that of many authors in the 1960s and 1970s, did not see the power in the community to change society for fear of violent retribution. Indeed, Floyd emphasised that, during the period he was writing in, the Black community could not afford to "use fire and torch and sword and shotgun ourselves", so he would have been shocked to see the Black Panthers standing, armed, on the courthouse steps in Alabama in 1969.<sup>21</sup> However, whilst Floyd's position would not align him politically with later Black Power adherents, throughout his book his emphasis on racial pride connects with other cultural expressions of racial pride that are evident right through the twentieth century.

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<sup>20</sup> Silas Xavier Floyd, *Floyd's Flowers: Or, Duty and Beauty for Colored Children: Being One Hundred Short Stories Gleaned from the Storehouse of Human Knowledge and Experience: Simple, Amusing, Elevating*, ed. John Henry Adams (1905), 327.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Floyd contends that “no true history of the American continent can be written without giving due credit” to the Black heroes who “have played on the field of battle in the defense of liberty”.<sup>22</sup> The book features several prominent African Americans to help children understand the wealth of Black history. This is developed in an entire chapter on “Negro Heroes”, which included sections on Frederick Douglass, as well as on the history of Black soldiers. A focus on Black heroes reappeared in many books including Julius Lester’s *Black Folktales* in 1969 which also has a section dedicated to Black heroes. Floyd lists the achievements of Black individuals and he implores the “little colored boys and girls of America” to be proud of figures like Benjamin Banneker, a Black man who was responsible for making the first clock entirely in America.<sup>23</sup> The role of children’s books as pedagogical tools is important as from an early stage they were used not simply to entertain but to educate Black children about race and history. Furthermore, unlike textbooks, families could use children’s books at home as entertainment rather than homework. They were an important part of local community education and this emphasises the role families had to play in education. Black history and the topic of Black heroes remains a constant from the nineteenth century into the Black Power era. However, the key difference is in the heroes they focus upon. Floyd’s work focuses on battle heroes and innovators, all exceptional individuals. While authors in the 1960s and 1970s focused on more overtly political figures like Arnold Adoff’s *Malcolm X* or Eloise Greenfield’s *Paul Robeson*.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 313.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 263.

From the era of racial uplift through to the 1970s, Black educators became key figures in providing their classes with materials that sought to elicit pride and gave them a sense of Black history and culture. One of the most prominent educators of late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Anna Julia Cooper, embodied this anti-racist educational philosophy. Cooper's approach to educating African American children included a focus on the worth of Black humanity to promote self-actualization and provide children with a sense of agency and control over their lives within a hostile society.<sup>24</sup> Her essay 'What Are We Worth?' demands the recognition of Black humanity because education was not about a "scramble for standing and marks" but cultivating worthy men and women.<sup>25</sup>

Cooper's day to day interaction with children influenced her educational philosophy as she realised the damaging effects of negative literature on Black children. In one of her essays, Cooper focuses on white authors who wrote about Black life, in particular, on Joel Chandler Harris, author of the *Uncle Remus* children's stories. Cooper castigated the "astounding egotism" of white authors writing about Black life and she commented sarcastically that authors such as Harris hope to "enlighten the world...on the racial traits of the Negro" through a series of crass generalisations.<sup>26</sup> Cooper's emphasis on the

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<sup>24</sup> Lemah Bonnick, "In the Service of Neglected People: Anna Julia Cooper, Ontology, and Education", *Philosophical Studies in Education* 38 (2007): 184.

<sup>25</sup> Anna J. Cooper, 'What Are We Worth?' in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper: Including A Voice from the South and other important essays, papers, and letters*. Edited by Charles C. Lemert and Esme Bhan (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 148.

<sup>26</sup> Anna J. Cooper, 'The Negro as Presented in American Literature' in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper: Including A Voice from the South and other important essays, papers, and letters*. Edited by Charles C. Lemert and Esme Bhan (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 140.

damaging effects of literature indicates how she hoped to combat racist assumptions that children were exposed to through literature.

An often-neglected voice in Black educational philosophy, Cooper taught in schools and tried to combat the inherent racism. Cooper's focus on the power of literature was sustained by educators throughout the twentieth century. Educators have since been the foundations for engaging in an educational philosophy that exalts the use of children's literature. The positive imagery in literature and a strong pedagogical approach to race could be a process of uplift and collective racial progress.<sup>27</sup> Cooper's pedagogy was Black-centred as she hoped to use education to further the opportunities for the entire Black community.<sup>28</sup> She struggled to get many of her works published as she worked within a highly racialized, as well as gendered and classist society. Cooper's radical vision for publishing positive materials for African Americans was overlooked by Black editors such as W.E.B. Du Bois. The role of Black women in calling for and producing Black children's books is a crucial thread that runs through the centuries. Figures like Cooper were often side-lined by editorial decisions of men and the direction of Black children's literature often lay in their hands.<sup>29</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, though sexism was still endemic, there were many female children's books writers, and more women involved in publishing that allowed books that focused on

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<sup>27</sup> Mary Helen Washington, "Anna Julia Cooper: A Voice from the South" in *Black Women's Intellectual Traditions: Speaking Their Minds*, ed. Kristin Waters and Carol B. Conaway (Burlington: University Press of New England, 2007): 251.

<sup>28</sup> Larese C. Hubbard, "When and Where I Enter: Anna Julia Cooper, Afrocentric Theory, and Africana Studies", *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 2 (2009): 283-87.

<sup>29</sup> Shirley Moody-Turner, "'Dear Doctor Du Bois': Anna Julia Cooper, W. E. B. Du Bois, and the Gender Politics of Black Publishing", *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 40, no. 3 (2015): 48.

racial, as well as issues of gender and class too. Former educators like Lucille Clifton moved into children's book writing and built upon a long tradition that was promoted decades earlier by Cooper. Like Cooper, Clifton believed that African American children needed to see themselves in literature.<sup>30</sup> However, historiography has not recognised female authors, librarians and educators as the Black educational philosophers of the 1960s and 1970s. Common throughout the Black educational philosophy continuum was an erasure of the contributions of those working with children and working in schools.

### ***The Brownies' Book: A magazine for "children of the sun"***

In their correspondence, Anna Julia Cooper implored W.E.B. Du Bois to expand his editorial scope to focus on women, the Black working classes and children as she believed her approach would "not only interest but help the thousands of teachers of colored youth".<sup>31</sup> Du Bois' early educational philosophy, particularly in essays such as "The Talented Tenth", emphasised the importance of African American male elites in helping the advancement of the race. However, whilst he did not address many of Cooper's concerns, and plagiarised others, Du Bois proved adaptable in his philosophy. The education and materials available for African American children became one of his chief concerns. Du Bois' belief in the power of educating people in the history and

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<sup>30</sup> Lucille Clifton, "Lucille Clifton Interview", interview by Jacqueline Jones Lamon, *Mosaic* (January 2007) <https://mosaicmagazine.org/lucille-clifton-interview> (Accessed: 18<sup>th</sup> October 2018).

<sup>31</sup> Anna Julia Cooper to W. E. B. Du Bois, Letter, May 18, 1925, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b169-i465> (Accessed: 23 May, 2017).

culture of Africa and the African diaspora proved an influential belief that was central in creating the children's magazine, *The Brownies Book (TBB)*.<sup>32</sup>

In 1919, W.E.B Du Bois stated the importance of making children "familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race" with *The Brownies Book*.<sup>33</sup> Between January 1920 and December 1921, *TBB* ran as a monthly magazine published by W.E.B. Du Bois and Augustus Granville Dill, co-edited by former educator Jessie Redmon Fauset. Children's literature specialist Dianne Johnson contends that the magazine advanced African American children's literature "in all of its subsequent manifestations and meanings".<sup>34</sup> The magazine proved to be influential in terms of Black educational philosophy as Jessie Fauset, a former educator proved to be a vital influence in writing and editing a magazine designed to help with the education of African American children. However, the magazine's narrow readership and focus on the Black middle class separates it from the children's literature in the 1960s and 1970s.

The magazine built upon Africana centred pedagogy of Black educators, such as Anna Julia Cooper, and was predicated on a history of newspaper sections and Sunday school literature designed for African American children. Though it was short-lived, the magazine proved to be influential in providing positive images for Black children and establishing the uniqueness of the African American community. When Du Bois stated that "the education of the Negro child has been too much in terms of white people"

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<sup>32</sup> Reiland Rabaka, "Web Du Bois' Evolving Africana Philosophy of Education." *Journal of Black Studies* 33, no. 4 (2003):400

<sup>33</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, "True Brownies", *Crisis*, vol.18 (October, 1919): 285.

<sup>34</sup> Johnson, *Telling Tales*, 19.

it was later echoed by countless activists in the 1960s and 1970s, such as those in the Harlem Parents Committee, who argued that materials were being chosen by white officials with no knowledge of the Black community.<sup>35</sup> The problems of Black education have been reiterated over several generations but the solutions of more accessible literature for children has also been a key feature in Black educational thought for over a century.

Du Bois reflected on his time in school and found that, as a Black child, he was not being provided for, and therefore he “watched outside my textbooks and without reference to my teachers, the race developments throughout the world”.<sup>36</sup> In creating *TBB*, Du Bois, Dill and Fauset engaged in a pedagogical project through children’s literature. The magazine sought to promote racial pride, a connection to Africa and to make children feel part of the wider Black community in the U.S. It is these aspects that mark out the magazine as an important precursor to later children’s literature. Historian Patricia Young correctly argues that Du Bois’ central concern for education was providing a holistic, rather than decontextualized education because learning comes from many places and therefore it was important to provide children different sources to be educated.<sup>37</sup> Children’s literature for Fauset and Du Bois served a similar function to later Black activists as it contributed to Black children’s education about the world, community, social relations and race and provided what was lacking in mainstream education. The *TBB*

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<sup>35</sup> *The Brownies Book*. No.2 (1921): 63; “Harlem Parents Committee”, Box 3, Folder 2, Babette Edwards Education Reform in Harlem collection, Sc MG 809, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library, New York, New York (hereafter cited as Babette Edwards Collection).

<sup>36</sup> Patricia A. Young, “The Brownies’ Book (1920-1921): Exploring the Past to Elucidate the Future of Instructional Design”, *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education* 8, no. 1 (2009): 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

feature 'As The Crow Flies' updated children on world events. Black history was addressed in stories about famous Black figures like Sojourner Truth and the magazine also featured many photographs of Black people around the country as it sought to promote knowledge of the wider African American community. *TBB*'s many features addressed race within stories and articles to help Black children learn and feel part of a wider community. One reader wrote in to the magazine and professed that she used to hate history until *TBB*'s features showed her that there were other "brown people like [her]" and that history is not just about dates, but a lot more than that.<sup>38</sup> *TBB* contained various features that enabled children to learn about history and the wider world through literature. Stories in the magazine served to entertain but were also part of a Black educational philosophy that sought to bolster pride and foster community.

*The Brownies Book* demonstrates early pedagogical purpose to African American children's literature, particularly educating children on African and African American history. Rabaka Reiland's work on Du Bois' Africana philosophy of education provides an in-depth depiction of Du Bois' philosophy. It is:

defined by and demands historical and cultural grounding because it understands that African history and culture have been and remain under attack and threatened by both omission and erasure within the educational circles.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> "The Jury" *The Brownies Book* (May, 1920), 140.

<sup>39</sup> Rabaka, "Du Bois' Evolving Africana Philosophy", 411.

Du Bois' philosophy of education had great influence on educators and activists in the 1960s and 1970s as Africana-centred education and culturally sensitive learning was later a key emphasis. In a 1972 essay Virginia Hamilton quotes Du Bois on the importance of "the race conscious black man" in furthering emancipation as she reflects that her writing is also about characters "reaching for their black American history or their African heritage".<sup>40</sup> Reiland's analysis of Du Bois' philosophy also contends that Du Bois' "educational thought was constantly open, responsive to the ever-changing historical and cultural needs and conditions" of African Americans, emphasising the ever changing nature of Black educational philosophy.<sup>41</sup> Reiland argues that Du Bois' thoughts were not static and adapted to changing circumstances for African Americans, particularly how Du Bois broadened his scope of education beyond the 'talented tenth' to the 'guiding hundredth' in a later speech. Nevertheless, while adaptable Du Bois' educational philosophy had little practical focus and is representative of a theoretical educational philosophy rather than one that was implemented in classrooms.

Whilst Du Bois' work for children is reflected in the Black Power era - with a focus on history and materials relevant to African Americans - Du Bois' classist view of education was not shared by Black Power activists. Courtney Vaughn-Roberson and Brenda Hill's work on *The Brownies' Book*, contends that the magazine was highly influential but limited by Du Bois'

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<sup>40</sup> Virginia Hamilton, "Thoughts on Children's Books, Reading, and Ethnic America" in *Speeches, Essays and Conversations*, ed. Arnold Adoff and Kacy Cook (New York: Blue Sky Press, 2010), 24-25.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

elitist leanings and focus on the Black middle class.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Du Bois' work provides crucial background to later periods but it is important that his elitist approach within educational thought was not only rejected by later activists but it also received ire from contemporaries such as socialist A. Philip Randolph who critiqued his moderate and gradual reform and his "anti-revolution" stance.<sup>43</sup>

Scholars, such as Dianne Johnson, assert that as a children's counterpart to *The Crisis*, a publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), *The Brownies Book* was probably read by predominantly middle-class children.<sup>44</sup> A thorough analysis of subscribers is not available but in one issue of *TBB* librarian Marion Hadley praised the magazine as it provided "Negro stories" for the local children who had been looking for these.<sup>45</sup> This suggests a wider array of children had access to the magazine perhaps through teachers or members of the local community so this middle-class focus may be overstated. However, whilst the class of the readership cannot be assumed, the magazine's approach emphasised Black middle-class sensibilities. The children featured, the issues illuminated, and other features are very different from the more class sensitive and radical elements inherent in the children's literature of the 1960s and 1970s.

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<sup>42</sup> Courtney Vaughn-Roberson and Brenda Hill, "The Brownies' Book and Ebony Jr.!: Literature as a Mirror of the Afro- American Experience", *The Journal of Negro Education* Vol. 58, No. 4 (Autumn, 1989): 495.

<sup>43</sup> Reiland Rabaka, *W.E.B. Du Bois and the Problems of the Twenty-First Century: An Essay on Africana Critical Theory* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), 118.

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, *Telling Tales*, 17.

<sup>45</sup> "The Grown-Up's Corner" *The Brownies Book* (April 1920), 109.

The Black educational philosophy that underpins *The Brownies Book* is based partly on the work of Du Bois, but the work of Jessie Fauset was vital, and often overlooked in scholarship. Together, they created a magazine that was relevant to many children's lives and explored Black pride and Black history in innovative ways. This children's magazine is an important precedent for the books under consideration for this study because it featured letters from children and tried to connect literature with the lives of its readers.

One of the primary aims of *TBB* was to help strengthen racial pride in its readers. Mrs Johnson from Massachusetts wrote into the magazine about her child and asked what advice the writers had to help "to instil into him race love and race pride?"<sup>46</sup> The answer lay in the pages of the magazine: in the stories, the drawings, the photographs all for Mrs Johnson's child to see. This aim was set out in an issue of the *Crisis* and Du Bois resolved that the magazine should "make colored children realize that being 'colored' is a normal, beautiful thing".<sup>47</sup> This language was later reflected in many children's books of the Black Power era as books such as Virginia Hamilton's *Zeeley* celebrated the idea that 'Black is beautiful'. Dianne Johnson pinpoints Camille Yarbrough's *Corrows* (1979) as an example of children's literature that connects ideas of Black American beauty with African history and culture.<sup>48</sup> The focus on the beauty and achievements associated with Blackness is crucial to the magazine and literature of much later periods. In

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<sup>46</sup> "The Grown-Up's Corner" *The Brownies Book* (January, 1920), 25.

<sup>47</sup> Du Bois, "True Brownies", 285.

<sup>48</sup> Dianne Johnson, "African American Women Writers of Children's and Young Adult Literature" in *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature*, eds., Angelyn Mitchell and Danille K. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 210–23.

her poem 'Dedication' from 1920 Jessie Fauset encapsulates this drive to make children proud:

For History or Song or Story  
That told of colored people's glory-  
We dedicate *The Brownies Book*.<sup>49</sup>

Jessie Fauset, as a former educator, was well-informed about the lack of materials available to children and the impact on children's perception of race. The literature that Fauset edited was a mixture of history, songs, folktales and other forms that all provided a positive image of the Black life and history. Throughout the magazine many of the stories reflected this idea of having racial pride. Writers tried to imbibe children with a sense of pride that ranged from African tales to focuses on historical Black figures.<sup>50</sup>

*TBB's* stories and columns promoted themes of racial pride amongst others that do not relate to the educational goals and ideologies of writers in the 1960s and 1970s such as moderation and duty.<sup>51</sup> *TBB's* readership was predominantly middle- and upper-class Black children. The magazine's focus on civility and refinement seem distant to the radical politics, and class-conscious works of writers who identified with aspects of the Black Power Movement. While still guided by similar educational principles, the Black educational philosophy of the Black Power era was significantly different. John Steptoe, a children's author from the late 1960s, felt pride in his work

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<sup>49</sup> Jessie Fauset, "Dedication" *The Brownies Book* (January, 1920), 32.

<sup>50</sup> Violet J. Harris, "Race Consciousness, Refinement, Radicalism: Socialization in the Brownies' Book", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1989): 192.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

that strongly identified with the working-class Black community and used African American slang throughout his writing.<sup>52</sup> This broader approach to class is rarely found in *TBB*, perhaps reflective of how their readership predominantly comprised of NAACP members' children as it was advertised in the NAACP's *The Crisis*. Many activists in the Black power era combined a racial consciousness with analyses of the oppression of class.

However, whilst class attitudes were remarkably different, *TBB* and children's books of the Black Power Era shared the same educational thrust of trying to make Black children aware of the wider Black community that they were a part of. In their seminal work on Black Power, Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton argued that one of the central tenets of Black Power is to "build a sense of community".<sup>53</sup> Indeed, one of the most important aspects of *TBB* was its use of reader contributions that children's literature specialist Dianne Johnson has labelled a "community through art".<sup>54</sup> Sections such as 'The Jury', 'Grown Up's Corner' and 'Little People of the Month' included readers' letters, contributions and photographs that would reveal to children looking through the magazine parts of wider Black communities, though still probably predominantly upper middle classes, that they belonged to. Readers were encouraged to celebrate in other children's achievements, from Ida Clarke singing in front of over 100 people to H. Willis Mosely Jr. receiving \$5.00 for reciting an essay by Frederick Douglas.<sup>55</sup> Whilst the membership of this community was limited, the drive to make children feel part of a

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<sup>52</sup> Roni Natov and Geraldine Deluca, "An Interview with John Steptoe", *The Lion and the Unicorn* 11, no. 1 (1987): 125.

<sup>53</sup> Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, ed. Charles V. Hamilton (London: J. Cape, 1968), 44.

<sup>54</sup> Johnson, *Telling Tales*, 20.

<sup>55</sup> "Little People of the Month" *The Brownies Book* (March 1920), 35.

community is important even though the number of children reached was restricted. Black educational philosophy seeks to help children survive an oppressive white society and though the communities of *TBB* and the Black communities that books of the Black Power Era addressed were constituted differently, they both were driven by a similar educational impulse: to give reading children a community to associate with and to view this community as a source of strength.

### **Carter G. Woodson: Education and the Transformative Power of Children's Literature**

In his influential 1933 work, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Carter G. Woodson sarcastically refers to “educated” African Americans who know nothing of Black history and culture.<sup>56</sup> Woodson rejected the elitist idea of racial uplift, and instead argued for mass education of African and African American history as he believed knowledge helped form a strong Black identity and could lead to significant social and political change. Katherine Capshaw-Smith, children's literary scholar, argues that Woodson was an influential figure for children's literature because he believed that children's literature had the power to “reconceptualise the relationship to ethnic and national identities”.<sup>57</sup> Woodson was not necessarily important because of the materials he wrote for children nor because of the books produced by his Associated Publishers. He was a crucial precursor to Black Power educational philosophy because of his focus on a united Black community and his belief in the inherent social and political power in Black children's books.

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<sup>56</sup> Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 2nd ed. (Washington D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1969), 21.

<sup>57</sup> Katharine Capshaw Smith, "Introduction: The Landscape of Ethnic American Children's Literature," *MELUS* 27, no. 2 (2002): 3.

In October 1937, Carter G. Woodson established the *Negro History Bulletin*, a magazine released nine times across the school year, which served to provide teachers, parents and children with Black illustrated history in an easy-to-read format. It also served as a platform for the Black community to engage in and discuss Black history. Woodson ran the magazine at a loss, such was his desire to provide an education that could be transformative for the Black community.<sup>58</sup> The stories in the *Negro History Bulletin* are predominantly serious histories written in a style accessible for children. Woodson's real history for children influenced Julius Lester's *To Be a Slave* (1968) in which the focus was on providing an accurate account of Black history to help children form a strong Black identity. The racist, brutal and exploitative nature of slavery is a key theme in articles on slavery in the *Negro History Bulletin* and within Lester's work. Carter G. Woodson did focus on accomplishments of significant Black figures as in *TBB* and Silas X. Floyd's work, but his writings also told the stories of millions of African Americans across different periods of history that are similar to efforts in the Black Power Era. In his 1968 book *Chronicles of Protest* Bradford Chambers the director of the CIBC emphasises the "past history and current directions of the racial struggle in the United States" rather than focusing on famous figures.<sup>59</sup> Woodson's work connects with the educational approach of authors and educators in the Black Power era because they all challenged the dominant narrative in school history education, seeking to provide information to children about Black history. Proponents of a radical Black educational

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<sup>58</sup> Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 55.

<sup>59</sup> Bradford Chambers, *Chronicles of Negro Protest: A Background Book for Young People Documenting* (New York: Parents' Magazine Press, 1968), 1.

philosophy in the 1970s, Williams and El-Khawas reiterated the importance of emphasising past atrocity as they argued that Black history “must be utilized as a vehicle for social change...must document social, race, and class analysis and the plight of Black people as victims of an oppressor system.”<sup>60</sup> While Woodson’s historical literature for children did not contain an immediate connection with much of the fictional literature produced in the 1970s, his influence on approaches to history and his desire to help nurture Black identity in children marks his work as a significant precedent in Black children’s literature. Woodson’s academic style is different to the majority of African American children’s books in the 1960s and 1970s, however, many books including Lucille Clifton’s *The Black BC’s* and Julius Lester’s *To Be A Slave* echoed the approach of Woodson as they sought to provide a real Black history for children to learn that was absent in many public schools.

Perhaps more influential than his writing for children was Woodson’s approach to educational philosophy. Woodson’s influence on later Black educational philosophy was evidenced in the *Negro History Bulletin* and his desire to reach out to teachers and encourage grassroots engagement with Black history. Carter G. Woodson’s intellectual approach was to democratize the process and encourage librarians, teachers and parents to contribute. His call for community leadership in Black education was met with fervour as his creation of Negro History Week inspired educators to write stories, put on plays and create books about the Black experience.<sup>61</sup> Woodson’s outreach to the community produced innovative and creative ways to approach the Black

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<sup>60</sup> Williams and El-Khawas, "A Philosophy", 178.

<sup>61</sup> Katharine Smith, "'for the Children of the Sun': African American Children’s Literature, 1914–1954," PhD diss. (University of Connecticut, 2000), 163.

experience. Many of these reveal an overarching attachment to American identity rather than a specific Black identity reflecting wider hopes for integration that was not as present in the Black Power Era. For example, Helen Whiting's book *Negro Art, Music, and Rhyme* (1938) provides a fascinating look at African art but it is treated as a foreign curiosity and Africa as a distant 'other', aligning African American children with the American experience instead.<sup>62</sup> Whiting provided children with a litany of information on the Black cultural experience but throughout the book there is a clear separation of 'The American Negro' and 'the African'.<sup>63</sup> This delineation between Black Americans and Africans is different to many works produced in the 1960s and 1970s connected the lives of Black Americans to Africa such as Muriel Feelings' *Moja Means One* that emphasized the value of children connecting to their African heritage. Works produced by Associated Publishers and pieces inspired by Negro History Week, however, demonstrate an important step in encouraging a wider array of individuals to approach the topic of the Black experience - a crucial precedent in later community efforts in Black education.<sup>64</sup>

### **Homesick Blues: How Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps brought Black life into mainstream children's literature**

Many Black children's writers of the 1930s and 1940s exhibited a shift in tone and emphasis as they became more assimilationist in their output than prior Black children's literature. Writers like Jane Dabney Shackelford, Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes produced children's books that were more

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Helen Adele Whiting, *Negro Art, Music and Rhyme: For Young Folks: Book I* (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, inc, 1938).

<sup>64</sup> See: Smith, "for the Children of the Sun", for a discussion on writers for Woodson's Associated Press, and their approach to writing about Africa and the Black experience.

in-line with mainstream children's works and with mainstream publishers like Macmillan and Houghton Mifflin. Furthermore, their work was produced during an increased push for integration and as such these writers often included more white characters and fewer explicit references to race.<sup>65</sup> This shift from an overt racial standpoint was partially due to pressure from white publishers but also many of the authors sought to provide all children with their social messages. Katherine Capshaw Smith argues in her book *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* that *The Brownies Book* and the works of Associated Publishers was "cross-written" for Black children and Black adults, whereas the work of Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps was cross-written for Black children and white children.<sup>66</sup> While writing for white and Black audiences signals a significant change from *The Brownies Book* and books written in the Black Power era, the children's fiction by Bontemps and Hughes are significant because they were mainstream trade books that subverted and challenged racist assumptions and had strong messages of social justice.

Rather than publishing their children's work themselves, Bontemps and Hughes sought widespread publication through mainstream publishing houses. Bontemps' pride in being included in a MacMillan publishing house children's literature anthology was evident in a letter to his long-time friend and collaborator Langston Hughes. Bontemps exclaimed: "We are in the best of company... It will perhaps become a standard for libraries, colleges, etc., being designed also for use in classes for librarians and others studying the

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<sup>65</sup> Katherine Capshaw Smith, *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 204.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

whole range of children's literature".<sup>67</sup> Bontemps' optimism for the acceptance of African American children's literature within schools and libraries was not so widely shared by the 1960s and 1970s. However, the publishing of African American children's literature by a large publishing house became more widespread during the 1960s and 1970s. Some children's books of the Black Power period were produced by more radical and Black publishers like Third World Press at a time of waning enthusiasm for integrationist efforts but Macmillan, Dial Press, and Houghton Mifflin all became involved in the publishing African American children's books during the Black Power era.

Though in the 1930s there was an increased focus on integration and American identity in much of the children's literature there were also emphases on the everyday lives of Black people and a wider view of the different classes within the Black community. Furthermore, the focus on the pedagogical potential for Black children's literature reveals that Black experiences were not submerged during this period. Authors still hoped to focus on Black identity and racial pride but also make books for children that were accessible rather than didactic. In the 1930s there was a push for children's books for Black children that sought to normalize Blackness and provide a culturally relevant canon, focusing on everyday Black characters. The influence on books of the Black Power and Black Arts movement may not be as obvious but the proclivity for Black folklore as well as stories that included race in less explicit ways paved the way for authors such as Virginia Hamilton and Walter Dean Myers who wrote many stories that did not

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<sup>67</sup> Smith, "for the Children of the Sun": 355.

specifically address racial issues but provided children with a book that was culturally relevant and set in Black cultural environments.

In her assessment of Black children's literature of the 1960s and 1970s, Rudine Sims Bishop categorized a subsection of Black children's literature as 'culturally conscious' books, ones that are set in "Black cultural environments, have Black major characters, are told from the perspective of those characters".<sup>68</sup> Many aspects of Bishop's 'culturally conscious' books find part of their roots in the era of the 1930s and 1940s when authors attempted to provide depictions of Black characters that countered the plethora of negative images in other children's books and provided realistic portrayals of various Black lives.

In doing so Bontemps and Hughes used their books as a way of, as Katherine Capshaw Smith describes, "deflating stereotypes", challenging pejorative portrayals of Blackness within other mainstream children's literature. In their first collaboration as children's writers, Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes created *Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti* (1932), a story focusing on characters from the African diaspora that includes likeable and engaging characters that are Black. The story follows the family across Haiti and the focus is on the journey rather than any explicit reference to race. After receiving editorial notes from Macmillan to make the book more "colorful", Hughes drolly remarked that he would include "a rum shop owned by a voodoo priestess".<sup>69</sup> Langston Hughes' remark is revealing of how there was

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<sup>68</sup> Bishop, "Reflections", 7.

<sup>69</sup> Langston Hughes qtd. in Violet J. Harris, "From Little Black Sambo to Popo and Fifina: Arna Bontemps and the Creation of African-American Children's Literature", *The Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children's Literature* 14, no. 1 (1990): 119.

pressure to caricature Black characters during this period. His resolve to focus on authentic Black characters continued through into the 1960s and 1970s. The book avoids caricature and stereotyping as Haiti is not presented as an exotic and uncivilized place, but Bontemps and Hughes focus on the daily lives such as flying kites, or the daily chores. In Bontemps' solo-authored children's books he often engaged with stereotypes of Black lives in the South and subverted readers' assumptions. In his 1934 book *You Can't Pet a Possum*, a 'possum meal' is not used to 'other' African American cultural practices but to demonstrate to readers the complexities of life in the rural South.<sup>70</sup> Bontemps engages with the stereotype of Black poverty in the South but uses it as an opportunity to provide an insight into the nuanced and multifaceted lives of the characters. These African American children's books defy the common representations of caricatured and othered Black lives to present to their readers characters whom they could identify with.

In their appraisal of John Steptoe's *Stevie* (1968), Judith Thompson and Gloria Woodard, both attached to the CIBC, contended that the value in the book is providing a character that a Black child can relate to and that they are "important enough to be reflected in the literature" has a great effect on a reading child.<sup>71</sup> Children's authors that produced works in Harlem Renaissance often did not write stories about race but stories with which African American children could relate to, in a way they could not relate to children's books that did not feature Black characters or simply caricatured

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<sup>70</sup> Smith, *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance*, 255.

<sup>71</sup> Judith Thompson and Gloria Woodard, 'Black Perspective in Books for Children' in *The Black American in Books for Children: Readings in Racism* eds., Donnarae MacCann and Gloria Woodard, second edition (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1985), 48.

them. Arna Bontemps felt compelled to begin writing children's books because "Black children had nothing with which they could identify".<sup>72</sup>

The importance and influence of this period on the writing of Black children's literature from the late 1960s is based on the use of authentic Black characters, but also their belief in the power of literature to encourage social change. The stories are products of the cultural environment that focused on integrationist efforts and many of the stories seem far less radical and Black-centric than books of the 1960s and 1970s. However, the stories of this period often expanded their Black audience beyond the elites and focused on the power of children's literature to teach children about different Black lives, Black history and provide a positive and authentic Black identity, an important precursor to social change. In 1955 Langston Hughes wrote *The First Book of Jazz* an introduction to Jazz for children that tells the history of jazz and how it "grew out of the beating of African drums".<sup>73</sup> Hughes uses the book to tell the history of African American music, focusing on the Blues and spirituals as crucial antecedents to Jazz. The focus on music as a way of discussing African American history became a prominent theme in the 1960s and 1970s with Kristen Hunter using *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou* to explore the cultural importance of African American music.

The children's books of Bontemps and Hughes signaled a shift towards mainstream children's literature, indeed Bontemps *You Can't Pet a Possum*, *Golden Slippers* and Hughes' *The Dream Keeper* and *The First Book of Jazz*

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<sup>72</sup> Arna Bontemps, *Interviews with Black Writers*, ed. John Brien (New York: Liveright, 1973), 13.

<sup>73</sup> Langston Hughes, *The First Book of Jazz* (New York: Franklin Watts Inc., 1955), 5.

among others continued to be included on school lists into the 1960s and 1970s. Their books focused on the everyday lives of Black children, a theme that remained an important part of African American children's literature as books like *Sidewalk Story* (1971) by Sharon Bell Mathis and *Uptown* (1970) by John Steptoe focused on providing identifiable stories to African American children in the cities. Both authors' books often used white and Black characters and did not often address racial issues directly which seems far from the Black educational philosophy of fostering Black pride and Black community bonds. However, their books challenged pervasive stereotypes and provided identifiable characters in children's books. Violet Harris questions whether these authors were simply born in the wrong period for African American children's literature and that their work for children would have been more recognized in the 1970s.<sup>74</sup> Their integrationist books were imbued with a radical social vision that sought to reflect African American culture, history and lives in children's mainstream literature.

### **Freedom Schools: Education as Politics**

During the 1950s and early 1960s much of children's literature fell into an integrationist category if it addressed race at all. In this period of increased Civil Rights activism many white publishers avoided the issue of race. Publishers changed Black characters to white ones or simply removed them. In a 1964 edition of the 1946 Caldecott winning *The Rooster Crows: A Book of American Rhymes and Jingles* the publishers Macmillan replaced the racist caricatures of Black characters with illustrations of white children rather than changing the depiction of the Black characters. Publishers justified these

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<sup>74</sup> Harris, 'From Little Black Sambo to Popo and Fifina', 125.

moves by citing that sales dropped, or books were returned if they addressed race at all.<sup>75</sup> During this period there was an increase in 'social conscience' literature, which was often written by white authors and targeted at a white audience, and these books tended to try and encourage a sense of social justice and prompt action.

Books such as Dorothy Sterling's *Mary Jane* (1959) focused on the strife of integration and while sympathetic to the Black freedom struggles, it is markedly different from books that were designed for a Black audience. It would be classed as a 'social conscience' book in Rudine Sims Bishop's categorizations, as it is designed primarily for a white audience in order to encourage an awareness of social injustice.<sup>76</sup> Many children's books in the 1960s fit into the 'social conscience' category and they do not fit into a Black educational philosophy because they are concerned with convincing white audiences of the legitimacy of the struggle, rather than empowering Black children. This difference between 'culturally conscious' African American children's literature and 'social conscience' books is reflective of wider aims within the Civil Rights Movement, divergent aims revealed in the Freedom Summer of 1964. For James Forman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) the function of the summer was twofold, "to break the pattern of white racism and helping to build viable institutions of, by, and for black people".<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Nancy Larrick, "The All-White World of Children's Books", *The Saturday Review* (September 11, 1965), 63.

<sup>76</sup> Bishop, 'Reflections', 7.

<sup>77</sup> James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 374.

In 1964, as part of the Civil Rights Movement, the Freedom Summer restated many of the same ideas that had been important to children's literature and the Black educational philosophy that underpinned their usage. Though a lot of children's literature continued to focus on integration, educational efforts to address the Black experience re-emerged during the mid-1960s. Children's books often reflected the cultural milieu of their time and the focus on integration in books echoed the political action of the Civil Rights Movement. The potential for children's literature to help develop social change reiterated the philosophy of Du Bois and Cooper and again found a voice through teachers and volunteers in the 1960s. The Black educational philosophy of the Freedom Schools had much in common with Black Power era educational movements as both focused on heritage, community, and political action. Literature for children, however, differed considerably between the eras as hope for integration still remained strong.

In the summer of 1964, forty-one Freedom Schools were established across Mississippi and attended by all ages as the political possibilities of education were lauded in schoolhouses, people's porches, and in churches.<sup>78</sup> In an address to students, Freedom Schools organizer Robert Beech asserted that the curriculum enabled students to "for the first time read about and hear about things that the regular schools do not touch", such as political participation, voting rights, and significantly the reading of a wide array of

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<sup>78</sup> "Freedom School Curriculum, Mississippi Freedom Summer, 1964", *Education and Democracy*, <http://www.educationanddemocracy.org/FSCpdf/CurrTextOnlyAll.pdf> (Accessed: 15<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

literature.<sup>79</sup> Even though publishers produced fewer Black children's books during this era, the importance and power of these books was not forgotten. The Freedom Schools fore-fronted Black education and its importance to the Black community as Cleveland Sellers of SNCC later recalled "all the lessons in the schools were tied to the need for blacks to stand up and demand the freedom that was rightfully theirs".<sup>80</sup> A range of lessons took place but crucial for many of the children involved was the libraries and materials brought and designed for the children.

The Freedom Schools' educational philosophy was premised on social justice and participatory democracy, the idea that individuals directly determined the decisions that affected their lives. The primary influence on the Freedom School educational philosophy was the Highlander Folk School of the 1930s.<sup>81</sup> This educational philosophy ensured that lessons were often student-led, non-didactic and encouraged questioning of materials and methods. However, there was also the influence of Black educational philosophy that focused on education for liberation: this included culturally relevant materials, a focus on Black history and African American literature. The Freedom Schools curriculum, drawn up by a range of both white and Black educators and activists in New York in 1964, stated that the Schools were intended to "train people to be active agents in bringing about social

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<sup>79</sup> 'Special to the Students and Young People of Ruleville, Indianola, And Drew' Robert Beech Papers, 1963-1972, Mss 945, Box 6, Folder 3, <http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15932coll2/id/46258> (Accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

<sup>80</sup> Cleveland Sellers, *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC* (New York: Morrow, 1973), 99.

<sup>81</sup> William Sturkey and Jon N. Hale, *To Write in the Light of Freedom: The Newspapers of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 12.

change”.<sup>82</sup> The focus on forming students into political activists was overt in the Freedom Schools. The aim in classes on voting registration and political action are clear, but they also had classes on history and literature that were intended to empower the students and help them engage in racial pride and self-definition. The Freedom Schools’ more radical approach to politics and history was closely aligned with the later aims of many educators influenced by the Black Power ideas. The history units, for example, focused on the “deep-rooted radical traditions in the Black freedom struggle”, rather than the accomplishments of famous Black figures.<sup>83</sup> The focus on radicalism and aspects of community Black activism were important precursor to much of the educational thrust of the later Black Power era. Moreover, rather than focusing on the achievements of famous individuals, lessons included histories and lives of a broad array of African Americans. This approach to history was indebted to the works of Jessie Fauset, Langston Hughes, and Carter G. Woodson among others and underscores how Black educational philosophy was a constantly evolving philosophy. This grassroots approach to Black history was carried on after during the Black Power Era in children’s literature as figures like Bradford Chambers focused on radical histories in his book *Chronicles of Negro Protest* and Julius Lester used *To Be A Slave* to explore the lives and histories of enslaved people instead of exploring the lives of famous figures.

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<sup>82</sup> "Freedom School Curriculum: Citizenship Curriculum, Mississippi Freedom Summer, 1964", *Education and Democracy*, <http://www.educationanddemocracy.org/FSCpdf/CurrTextOnlyAll.pdf> (Accessed: 15<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

<sup>83</sup> Sturkey and Hale, *To Write in the Light*, 23.

The political nature of the Freedom Schools was accompanied by reading groups and lessons for younger children. The importance of children's literature was evident in how many young students responded to its inclusion in the Freedom Summer project. The Hattiesburg Freedom Library, created for Freedom Summer, repeatedly made calls for children's literature that would benefit Black children and the focus was on integrated literature with Black characters as protagonists.<sup>84</sup> Whilst the shift in children's literature from this period to the Black Power era is stark as there was a move from integrationist literature to Black-centric works, the very nature of inclusion of more relatable children's books was important. Reports from several counties in Mississippi indicate that children's story hours became so popular that the Freedom Libraries began holding story hours every day and children were routinely borrowing books.<sup>85</sup> However, books that fit into a more radical and race conscious education were fairly absent. Eleven-year old Rita Mae complained that they "need better books".<sup>86</sup> What 'better' meant for Rita Mae is unknown, but her attitude is reflective of educators who felt that children's books did not cater to the Black population. The existence of these story hours indicates an acknowledgement of the importance of children's literature and its role in engaging children with education. Furthermore, reading events became a crucial way to provide access to African American children's literature in New York City in the late 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, at the advent of the Black Power Era books that focused more specifically, and more

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<sup>84</sup> Mike Selby, *Freedom Libraries: The Untold Story of Libraries for African Americans in the South* (New York: Roman and Littlefield, 2019), 32.

<sup>85</sup> County Reports, 1964, Box 6, Folder 3, Robert Beech Papers, <http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15932coll2/id/46258> (Accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

<sup>86</sup> Sturkey and Hale, *To Write in the Light*, 35.

radically, on Black life and Black culture started to be written and shared with children.

After 1964, concepts of Black consciousness became increasingly important for some Civil Rights groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). As Black Power gained prominence, the confluence of children's literature and political education became more pronounced. The Freedom Schools had demonstrated that there was a demand from children for better books for Black children. In response, Julius Lester and Mary Varela compiled a book of Black folk tales distributed for free to poor children in Mississippi and Alabama in 1966. These stories were intended to demonstrate that Black culture had value and was something worthy of being built upon.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, the lack of materials available in the Freedom Schools prompted authors and other concerned individuals to remedy the state of children's books.

A white volunteer from the Freedom Schools returned to New York and raged against the invisibility of Black children in children's books. In 1965 this young volunteer's mother, the children's author Lilian Moore, gathered fellow writers and others to discuss the issue and at the next meeting the CIBC was created. The writer Franklin Folsom became the first chairman and civil rights lawyer Stanley Faulkner was chosen as the treasurer.<sup>88</sup> The CIBC grew out of the Freedom Schools Movement imbued with an educational philosophy that emphasised the importance of children's literature. Authors, librarians,

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<sup>87</sup> Personal correspondence with the author.

<sup>88</sup> 'A Brief History of the Council on Interracial Books for Children', nd., Box 7, F 'Council 1969-1970', CIBC Director's Files.

teachers and illustrators joined the Council to promote the significance of Black authored children's books in education and also for the self-esteem of upcoming generations.

Between 1965 and 1975, the proportion children's books published that included Black characters more than doubled from 6.7 percent to 14.4 percent.<sup>89</sup> Many activists and educators recognised the power and importance of Black children's books and the authors of these books gained unprecedented support. In 1968, the CIBC began a competition for Black writers who did not have the money or connections to get published. The purpose was to promote the writing of new writers of colour and bring it to the attention of publishers. In this respect the council was very successful as of the first twenty-one winners, eleven had their work published and seven of those published several children's books.<sup>90</sup> Winners such as Krysten Hunter and Walter Dean Myers joined the ranks of more established authors like Virginia Hamilton, Eloise Greenfield, Julius Lester, and created stories and histories for children that focused on racial pride, Black histories and cultures, and authentic depictions of various Black lives.

These themes had been important for decades and writers such as these reshaped and established a new era of children's books that had built upon efforts for children dating back to the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, the educational potential of children's books was also refashioned as teachers and librarians called for these children's books to be

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<sup>89</sup> Jeanne Chall, Eugene Radwin, Valarie W. French, Cynthia R. Hall, "Blacks in the World of Children's Books" in *The Black American in Books for Children: Readings in Racism*, eds. Donnarae MacCann and Gloria Woodard (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1985), 215.

<sup>90</sup> 'Writer's Contest' Box 9, Folder 'Contest', CIBC Director's Files.

used in schools, not just in the libraries but as part of lessons. Authors and illustrators were invited to centres of Black Power educational activism, like the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school in New York, to provide Black children with books that were relevant to them.<sup>91</sup> The themes and educational impulses are distinctive re-renderings of decades of efforts for Black children. Jennifer, a young girl from Brooklyn wrote to John Steptoe in 1973 saying that she “liked reading about Black children like me”.<sup>92</sup> Whilst the Black Power era produced books that were more radical, the words of Jennifer indicate how Black children’s literature has always been about empowering as well as about providing books children wanted to read. Though throughout the eras the treatment of the Black experience and Black politics has differed, underpinning this all is a desire for children’s books to provide pride, happiness and a desire for better education for Black children.

Black educational philosophy in the Black Power era was “ever changing but forever the same”.<sup>93</sup> The power of community, the liberating power of education and the importance of racial underpinned African American children’s literature from the nineteenth century into the Black Power era. However, the African American children’s literature from 1967 to 1979 also represented a significant shift in terms of focus and topics. The Black cultural environment remained crucial but from the late 1960s authors like John Steptoe and Kristen Hunter focused on urban Black communities.

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<sup>91</sup> *William F. Koch to Brad Chambers*, December 2, 1969, Letter, Box 4, Folder ‘1968 Correspondence’, CIBC Director’s Files.

<sup>92</sup> Jennifer McMeans to John Steptoe, December 14, 1973, Letter, Box 2, Folder ‘Youth fanmail’, John Steptoe Papers, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, New York, New York.

<sup>93</sup> George Lipsitz, “The Changing Same.” *Social Identities* 24, no. 1 (2018): 16.

Racial pride remained a constant theme, but it took on a new radicalism with the rise of Black Power and Black nationalism. African American children's literature has a long history of being used to further a Black educational philosophy and this continued in the Black Power era. Books like Julius Lester's *Black Folktales* mention 'Black Power', Nikki Giovanni names H. Rap Brown in poems, and Kristin Hunter reflected the daily life of Black communities in New York City. The African American children's literature of the 1960s and 1970s represented a significant change in tone, topics, and politics but they were also part of a longer continuum of Black children's stories that facilitated a Black educational philosophy

## CHAPTER 2:

### **“THEY DON’T TEACH THE TRUTH IN SCHOOL”: BLACK EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE FROM 1967-1979**

This chapter uses literary analysis of African American children’s books used in New York City schools and educational initiatives in order to investigate how African American children’s literature became a crucial part of a Black educational philosophy. The concept of ‘changing same’ continues in this chapter as the literature is analysed within the broader context of a changing Black educational philosophy. Between 1965 and 1979, many ideas, topics and themes shared commonalities with older iterations in Black educational philosophy, but they also marked a noticeable shift. There was a distinct move towards a focus on different family structures, community education, and Black Power. The children’s books analysed are outlined in the appendix detailing where and how they were used in education. The books selected are a representative sample of the African American children’s literature used and include works by Arnold Adoff, Rose Blue, Sharon Bell-Mathis, Lucille Clifton, Muriel Feelings, Nikki Giovanni, Eloise Greenfield, Judith Griffin, Julius Hobson, Kristen Hunter, Julius Lester, Margaret Musgrove, Walter Dean Myers and John Steptoe.

The African American children’s literature read by children, read aloud to groups and used in schools across New York City in the late 1960s and 1970s came from a long continuum of Black literary culture. Walter Dean Myers eloquently described this literary culture as “more than simply having

one's characters brown-skinned or having them live in what publishers insist on describing on the book jackets as a 'ghetto.'" He argued that the core of the Black writer was in "capturing the subtle rhythms of language and movement and weaving it all... into the recognizable fabric of black life".<sup>1</sup> Myers' emphasis is on the relatability of books and how small cultural signifiers can make a book more relatable for children. His statement captures Black educational philosophy's emphasis on the significance of cultural relevance. Examining these books is crucial in understanding the "instructive and pedagogical" aspect of African American children's literature and understanding how it was a crucial part of a wider Black educational philosophy.<sup>2</sup> This chapter examines African American children's books used in schools or educational events in New York City from 1967-1979 to demonstrate the array of material produced by Black writers. These books cut across genres, topics, and style from historical stories like Judith Griffin's *Nat Turner* to stories accompanied by musical notation like Rose *Bed-stuy Beat*. While the books used were diverse, they share noticeable similarities, including settings, themes of family and approaches to contemporary politics.<sup>3</sup>

Rudine Sims Bishop borrows the term 'concord of sensibilities' to argue that while writers and artists employed vastly different approaches,

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<sup>1</sup> R. D. Lane, "'Keepin It Real': Walter Dean Myers and the Promise of African-American Children's Literature", *African American Review*. 32, no. 1 (1998): 130.

<sup>2</sup> Dianne Johnson, *Telling Tales: The Pedagogy and Promise of African American Literature for Youth* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990), 2.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix.

topics and ideas, there are crucial features like use of setting and focus on orality that united African American children's literature.<sup>4</sup> This chapter adds to this by demonstrating not only how they shared many features but how different African American children's literature was used for pedagogical purposes in pursuit of furthering a Black educational philosophy. In her book *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks primarily examines Higher Education, however, she addressed her own childhood and reflects that white educational institutions had no interest in the political commitment of a liberatory pedagogy and instead reinforced racist stereotypes.<sup>5</sup> She reflects that integration changed schooling as no longer was school about transforming young minds but about "information only", as it had "no relation to how one loved, behaved. It was no longer connected to antiracist struggle".<sup>6</sup> bell hooks' memories' of education speak to a critical issue many parents, students, authors, and educators were responding to by using African American children's books in education. African American trade books challenged stereotypes and dehumanising depictions in children's education. In their illustrations and stories, Black creators sought to participate in a Black educational philosophy that stressed Black pride, Black memory, and psychologically prepared children to battle white supremacy.

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<sup>4</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, *Free within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2007), xii.

<sup>5</sup> Bell Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

This chapter examines children's books because they are part of a larger "tradition of story as a way of teaching and a way of knowing" within African American communities.<sup>7</sup> In the late 1960s, New York City educational initiatives expanded on this tradition as educators and activist organisations used books in a wider educational philosophy that emphasised a 'knowing' of cultural heritage and sought to teach children histories and ideas that white mainstream education denied. Furthermore, what is powerful about African American children's literature is that it "bears witness to Black people's determined struggle for freedom, equality, and dignity" and "nurtures the souls of Black children" through both textual and pictorial means.<sup>8</sup>

During the Black Power Era, writers and illustrators in this study created books steeped in a Black educational philosophy that addressed concepts of identity, beauty, and liberation. As children's literature scholar R.D. Lane argues, Black children's literature was revolutionary because it "battled to defy, resist, and complicate public representations".<sup>9</sup> What tied African American children's literature together was this common aim throughout. Whether it was through folktales, history, political poems, or a variety of other stories, the books used in educational events in the 1960s and 1970s came from a longer literary tradition. However, they were imbued with many of the contemporary ideologies and trends of the Black Power Era, referencing figures such as H. Rap Brown and evoking powerful symbols like the raised fist. Examination of the books used in education

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<sup>7</sup> Bishop, *Free Within Ourselves*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>9</sup> Lane, "Keepin It Real", 127.

helps to elucidate on the Black educational movements in New York City. It also complicates the picture of the Black Power and Black Arts Era as their influence expanded to bookmobiles and school libraries. Julius Lester and Nikki Giovanni's works are overtly in support of Black Power while Kristen Hunter embraces Black pride and self-determination but is cynical of 'the movement' and its misogyny.

An analysis of the books situates the literature produced within a longer African American literary tradition by focusing on the concept of 'changing same', that is exploring the differences and similarities with African American children's literature and its connections with Black educational philosophy before the Black Power era. The children's literature produced in the late 1960s and 1970s shared some commonalities with earlier African children's literature. A focus on African heritage was present in *The Brownies Book* and works by Associated Press and this was replicated by Margaret Musgrove in *Ashanti to Zulu* and Muriel Feelings in *Moja Means One*; however, these later books do not 'other' Africa in the same way and embrace African heritage as an important part of contemporary African American identity. Similarly, Black history was a crucial focus prior to the Black Power era but books like Lester's *To Be A Slave* shifted focus from famous Black figures, like Silas X Floyd's emphasis on Benjamin Banneker, to a broader history of African Americans and the struggle for liberation.

African American children's literature of the 1960s and 1970s contained elements that had historical roots as well as new, radical ideas that reflected the contemporary Black liberation movement in its focus on

Black Power and social class. Children's literature specialist Nancy Tolson contends that a purely aesthetic approach is inappropriate for African American children's literature because books are a "literary vehicle in understanding the historical, political, spiritual, and sociological experiences of being Black in the United States for children".<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to engage in a literary analysis that is conscious of the contemporary politics, symbolisms and historical context. In choosing books that were used in New York City educational initiatives this thesis emphasises how closely African American children's books were tied to Black educational philosophy. The rise in African American children's books was not just about representation within the books, but also because authors used books to reflect the lives of Black children in the United States and teach them lessons not being provided in mainstream, white-dominated education. Therefore, a textual analysis of the books needs to be accompanied with a broader cultural methodology that focuses on tenets of African American children's literature and closely analyses the books in their historical context.

### **Methodological approach**

This chapter examines African American children's books used by the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC), the storytelling teams, the Bookmobiles, and within schools in New York City. The methodology underpinning the analysis of these books is how they were used as part of a Black educational philosophy. To achieve this the conception of childhood,

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<sup>10</sup> Nancy Tolson, *Black Children's Literature Got De Blues; the Creativity of Black Writers & Illustrators* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 7.

the pedagogical aims of the writer and the use of oral traditions needs to be the grounding for the analysis and will help elucidate some of the common themes of the books used in educational projects in New York City.

Furthermore, the foregrounding of these foundational aspects of African American children's literature helps to illustrate what was new and significant in the Black children's books produced in the late 1960s and the 1970s.

Issues of Black pride and Black Beauty were promulgated in new ways and reflected much of the rhetoric and ideology of the Black Power Era. In addition, biographies and Black history was used within many books to provide children with a radical education. However, the orality of books and the recurring themes of family reveal that these children's books, whilst radical and new in many ways, are part of a longer Black literary tradition.

Literary analysis of the books' imagery, language and themes can help unravel how African American children's authors' work fit within a Black educational philosophy. African American children's literature scholars Wanda Brooks and Jonda McNair contend that stories matter and reveal much about African American political, cultural and educational aims and need to be read as such.<sup>11</sup> This study furthers this idea of interdisciplinary importance as the literary analysis is combined with analysis of authors' wider words and actions as well as where, and how, the books were used. As literary expert Theresa Rogers argues, literary practices cannot be

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<sup>11</sup> Wanda Brooks and Jonda C. McNair, "'but This Story of Mine Is Not Unique': A Review of Research on African American Children's Literature", *Review of Educational Research* 79, no. 1 (2009): 127.

separated from the “cultural and social issues beyond the classroom”.<sup>12</sup> Classrooms in New York City became important sites of political activism and the books used in these schools evidently reflected the educational upheaval and activism within the city.<sup>13</sup> Therefore analysis of the books in this chapter is premised on the educational uses of these books and what aspects authors, educators and librarians focused upon. Brooks and McNair argue that “African Americans gain a vehicle through which they can participate more fully in their textual and, thus, public representation” so children’s books were an important form of protest and social change because there was so little representation of Blackness in public school libraries.<sup>14</sup> Analysis of books including Rose Blue’s *A Quiet Place* and Kristen Hunter’s *Guests in the Promised Land* expand on existing scholarship to demonstrate how African American children’s books represented Blackness and, moreover, how this was used in pursuit of better education for Black children.

Rudine Sims Bishop’s book *Free Within Ourselves*, is a foundational work in examining and understanding African American children’s literature as it delves into every genre and spans generations in order to weave together an array of texts into a much larger tradition of African American children’s writing. In analysing a smaller proportion of books within their historical context, this project builds upon Bishop’s work to emphasise the power and impact of African American children’s literature. Much of the

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<sup>12</sup> Theresa Rogers, "Literary Theory and Children's Literature: Interpreting Ourselves and Our Worlds", *Theory into Practice* 38, no. 3 (1999): 142.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>14</sup> Brooks and McNair, "but This Story of Mine Is Not Unique", 127.

scholarly work on children's literature is Euro-centric, the *Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* for example, features chapters on Scotland, Greece and Switzerland accompanied by chapters on Africa and the 'Far-East'.<sup>15</sup> Whilst scholars such as Peter Hunt, Theresa Rogers and, Aidan Chambers have produced important insights into children's literature and ways of understanding it, often the work specifically refers to western and white children's literature.<sup>16</sup> This approach neglects the importance of African American children's books to literature as well as to education. The content of African American children's literature from 1967-1979 reveals more than themes and ideas but ways in which Black history, Black pride, and Black self-determination could be a critical part of education.

Understanding the importance of pedagogy, childhood, and language in African American children's literature enables greater insight into the use of the children's books used in Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools, Bedford-Stuyvesant streets, and Columbia classrooms. To comprehend the 'changing-same' of Black children's books from the late 1960s into the 1970s it is vital to be conscious of the culture of orality, the long pedagogical history of Black children's literature, and the concept of childhood. A literature analysis that is grounded in these themes helps demonstrate the Black

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Hunt ed., *Understanding Children's Literature Key Essays from the Second Edition of 'the International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature'*, Second edition (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> See Peter Hunt, *Children's Literature: The Development of Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990); Chambers, Aidan. *The Reading Environment*. Stroud: Thimble, 1991.

educational philosophy that was crucial to these works and enabled their use in educational initiatives.

To fully appreciate the nuances and complexity of Black children's literature, authors and scholars emphasise the need to understand how childhood is understood differently by African American authors and that this is inevitably reflected in their work. The author and activist Julius Lester believed that given the history of the U.S., childhood was a luxury many African Americans could not afford because of the "attendant psychic violence" of racism. He argues that children "do not have the language and concepts to make sense of what we see and hear" so it is the responsibility of adults to help Black children understand racism, therefore African American children are denied the innocence afforded to others.<sup>17</sup>

Leslie Kroup, an African American teenager interviewed by author Rosa Guy in the book *Children of Longing*, exemplified this difference between Black and white childhoods when she responded to a question about her age. The sixteen-year-old responded to Guy: "My age? I usually say I'm sixteen...the truth is I never even seen sixteen. I went from eight to being twenty-eight".<sup>18</sup> Kroup's response is indicative of how many African American children felt about childhood as Kroup explains that he skipped much of childhood after witnessing violence and having to work at such a young age. How African American childhoods were perceived by authors and

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<sup>17</sup> Julius Lester, *On Writing for Children and Other People* (New York: Dial Books, 2004), 25.

<sup>18</sup> Leslie Kroup, 'A Negro Ain't Shit' in *Children of Longing* ed. Rosa Guy (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 7.

illustrators is helpful in understanding how they crafted their works and how they appealed to their audiences.

Combining literary analysis with archival sources, interviews and other secondary sources help uncover Black creator's hopes and intentions. Children's literature specialist Perry Nodelman contends that adults tend to assume childhood is a time of innocence and thus authors, illustrators and other adult mediators tend to project this into children's literature, which stifles children's representations by providing only a snippet "of what is possible for children to be".<sup>19</sup> However, children's literature scholar Katherine Capshaw-Smith accentuates how Black children's literature became "an intense site of ideological and political contest", compared to other children's literature because there was not an assumed innocence.<sup>20</sup> Black writers understood the difficulties a Black child faced because of their lived experiences and therefore in reading their works it is important to be conscious of writers' views: that childhood was a time of survival, not innocence, and that children's literature was a weapon in the social justice struggle. In her poem 'Nikki-Rosa', Nikki Giovanni claimed that "childhood remembrances are always a drag if you're Black" emphasising just how differently Black children's writing framed childhood.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Rogers, "Literary Theory and Children's Literature", 143.

<sup>20</sup> Katharine Capshaw Smith, "Introduction: The Landscape of Ethnic American Children's Literature", *MELUS* 27, no. 2 (2002): 3.

<sup>21</sup> Nikki Giovanni, *Ego-Tripping and Other Poems for Young People* (New York: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1973), 19.

However, African American childhood is not solely defined by hardship caused by white racist depredations and white supremacist injustices; Giovanni reiterates that while her childhood was difficult, it was also happy and full of love.<sup>22</sup> In African American children's literature these two aspects of childhood are reflected in competing themes of love and struggle. The power of familial and community love is addressed in the chapter but often this is accompanied in the face of adversity as parents, siblings and grandparents help guide young African American children through difficulties and pain.

Reflecting on her own writing, children's author Virginia Hamilton reasoned that African American life had been "made eccentric by slavery, escape, fear of capture; by discrimination, and constant despair".<sup>23</sup> The attendant violence and discrimination of being Black in America shaped how authors in the late 1960s and 1970s wrote for children. Black authors and illustrators did not assume an age of innocence. Their children's books became part of efforts to psychologically address the impact of racism on children's lives. In her debut novel *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*, Kristin Hunter compares the reaction of a white teacher to the Black teenagers in the novel after an altercation with the police. Because of his naïve reaction to an officer arresting a young boy for doing nothing wrong, Hunter writes that the teacher "must be close to thirty, yet he seemed, somehow, younger than

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Virginia Hamilton, "Changing Woman, Working" in *Celebrating Children's Books*, ed. Betsy Hearne and Marilyn Kaye (New York: Lorthop, Lee and Shepard, 1981), 57.

any of the group”.<sup>24</sup> Hunter’s description underscores how Black children’s writers often had a tacit understanding that African American childhoods were marred by discrimination and police brutality. Understanding this conception of childhood is key in reading books by African American children’s creators because authors such as Hunter emphasise the differences in growing up Black in the United States as this was absent from education and damaging for African American children.

A white teacher in New York City, Mrs. Palmer became acutely aware of these differences in approaches to childhood when she worked on the Bookmobile in Bedford-Stuyvesant. She introduced a class-favourite *The Day Joe Went to the Supermarket* an intended comedic book of a boy knocking over food and causing chaos in a supermarket but found that “in Brooklyn it’s a great big flop” as she discovered that the children felt that if they knocked over things in a supermarket like that they would have to leave quickly. Instead of being a light-hearted tale the book was a “terrifying tragedy”.<sup>25</sup> Palmer’s experiences on the Bookmobile obviously enlightened her to an aspect of children’s literature that Black creators had long focused on – that an understanding of African American childhood was missing from white mainstream children’s literature in public schools.

The need to help children foster a positive self-image is a predominant theme in African American children’s literature. During the Black Power Era,

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<sup>24</sup> Kristin Hunter, *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou* (London: London Macdonald & Co., 1971), 99.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Background Memo on Chase Manhattan’s Bookmobile’, Papers 151, Folder ‘Bookmobile’, John Doar Papers Princeton University Library, Department of Special Collections, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Public Policy Papers, Princeton, New Jersey.

this need was a direct response to the difficulties Black children faced due to the racist stranglehold exerted through systemic racism. The illustrator Tom Feelings regarded books as powerful instruments for children as they could “strengthen his or her spirit, prepare the child to face reality”.<sup>26</sup> Feelings’ perception of books not as escapism but as a crucial part of an education emphasises how Black creators viewed their work as a weapon in the fight for social justice. Whilst entertainment was also a concern for the writers examined, a consciousness of other artists’ intentions is crucial, especially given how often Black creators interacted with their readership. In order to examine the books selected for this chapter it is necessary to reject the traditional notion of childhood innocence and analyse the works in the context of the difficulties African American adults perceived for children such as racism, police brutality and lack of services. As Sims Bishop writes: “The seeds of an African American literature were sown in the soil of Black people’s struggles” not only for survival but for literacy too.<sup>27</sup> Children’s books became tools of Black educational philosophy because these books addressed problems particular to the lives of African American children and helped children understand concepts like racial discrimination, police brutality, and an education that marginalised them.

Acknowledging the centrality of learning to African American children’s literature leads to a different reading of the books and enables a clearer

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<sup>26</sup>Tom Feelings, “A Strange Balance Between Joy and Pain” in *Innocence & Experience: Essays & Conversations on Children’s Literature*, ed. Barbara Harrison and Gregory Maguire (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1987), 343.

<sup>27</sup>Bishop, *Free within Ourselves*, xvii.

understanding of Black Educational philosophy. Children's literature is a transmission of ideology as well as history and this is not unique to African American children's literature.<sup>28</sup> However, Dianne Johnson argues that African American children's literature has specifically responded to stereotyping and misrepresentation so there is a very explicit pedagogical purpose inherent in African American children's literature to defy and challenge this.<sup>29</sup>

Detailed focus on learning from children's literature – history, cultures, racial identity – is vital in understanding the literature and how they were used in schools. Many of the authors featured also worked as teachers. For example, Terry Berger and Rose Blue both worked in the New York public education system as teachers. The dual roles of teacher and author exemplify how intertwined African American children's books were with education. The books discussed here reveal a pedagogical purpose of the text and imagery. All the children's books used in educational events and in schools respond to stereotypes and misrepresentations in wider children's literature. The books are not didactic children's books of the nineteenth century but teaching children was still a key feature in African American children's books in the 1960s and 1970s and should be read as such. Black educational philosophy is not simply about teaching children information but about communicating antiracist strategies, and messages of empowerment.

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<sup>28</sup> See: Johnson, *Telling Tales*; J. Taxel, "Children's Literature: Ideology and Response" *Curriculum Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (1988); John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (London: Longman, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, *Telling Tales*, 2.

The illustrator Tom Feelings argued that the “oral tradition was a vital educational tool for Black children” and works produced in the 1960s and 70s helped “fill in the place of folk memory”.<sup>30</sup> Orality is a crucial part of Black educational philosophy, in transmitting the strength of community and connecting generations. The emergence of African American children’s literature in print came from a longer oral tradition that dates back centuries. So, understanding this is key to reading the books. Rudine Sims Bishop views language as a crucial element in African American children’s literature emphasizing the importance of common devices like the inclusion of “African American discourse patterns in the characters' dialogue, the narrator's voice, or both.” Furthermore, discourse patterns also include other oral features such as “call-and- response, or stylistic elements such as inventive metaphors, creative imagery, proverbial statements, and naming”.<sup>31</sup> That African American children’s literature was situated in a longer African American oral-tradition informed how the books were used in schools and in events like storytelling on the streets. The emphasis on orality underscores how a Black educational philosophy differed from Eurocentric schooling provided in New York City. Orality in literature requires a reading of the text and imagery and also means acknowledging the uses of rhythm and understanding how the books could be ‘performed’ to audiences.

### **Black Women:**

The pioneering work of Black women, such as Jessie Fauset, in writing

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<sup>30</sup> Feelings, “A Strange Balance of Joy and Pain”, 345.

<sup>31</sup> Bishop, *Free within Ourselves*, 149.

children's literature and creating a wider Black educational philosophy continued into the 1960s and 1970s. Authors such as Lucille Clifton, Eloise Greenfield, Krysten Hunter, and Rosa Guy were part of a long trajectory of Black women producing children's literature. Their works challenged perceptions of women within the Black liberation movement and the Black Power Era. In her ground-breaking work, *Remaking Black Power*, Ashley D. Farmer argues that many Black women "challenged popular, masculinist perceptions of Black Power" and in redefining Black womanhood and manhood helped build the framework for Black Power politics.<sup>32</sup> In accord with this idea, Black women writers used children's literature as a vehicle for redefining Black womanhood by challenging and defying the stereotypes children were confronted with. Kristen Hunter challenged ideas of Black female roles in her short stories and Lucille Clifton emphasised the powerful impact Black women had made in history. These authors were part of the wider educational drive to challenge white cultural hegemony and in their children's books they focused on the powerful role of women in liberation struggles. As scholar Dianne Johnson argues "without women's work and women's vision, there would be no African American children's literature".<sup>33</sup>

The Black educational philosophy of the 1960s and 1970s had a focus on issues of race but also included the accompanying difficulties that Black girls faced. The focus on helping Black girls in education had a long history

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<sup>32</sup> Ashley D. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>33</sup> Dianne Johnson, 'African American women writers of children's and young adult literature' in *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature* edited by A. Mitchell & D. Taylor, 210-223 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 216.

and represented a continued trend in children's education. Anna Julia Cooper proclaimed "let our girls feel that we expect something more of them than that they merely look pretty and appear well in society", revealing the importance of Black women and girls in Black liberation struggles and that challenging misogyny was part of the struggle against racism.<sup>34</sup> Historian Vivian May contends that Cooper faced and battled against Black male sexism and indeed, authors like Hunter and Blue also fought against sexism within the wider Black Power era.<sup>35</sup>

The legacy of Black female creators including Amelia Johnson and Anna Julia Cooper was continued during the 1960s and 1970s, supported by groups like the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC), as issues of sexism in children's literature also came to the fore. Kristen Hunter and Eloise Greenfield, amongst others, provided realistic and powerful Black female characters and these writers explored the multiplicity and myriad dimensions of being Black in the United States.

Black women writers foregrounded the important work of female heroes in Black history and folklore. Children's books often celebrated heroes, both historical and from folklore, but the majority were male heroes. Authors fixated on male heroes and often they defined them by their manhood. In Julius Lester's *Black Folktales*, the 'Heroes' section only features male characters. High John the Conqueror is introduced as "what

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<sup>34</sup> Anna J. Cooper, 'The Negro as Presented in American Literature' in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper: Including A Voice from the South and other important essays, papers, and letters*, ed. Charles C. Lemert and Esme Bhan (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 49.

<sup>35</sup> Vivian M. May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist* (London: Routledge, 2012), 157.

you call a *man*”, the embodiment of masculinity. In another story, Stagolee’s behaviour is traditionally ‘masculine’, he is violent, a womaniser and strikes fear in others. Characters such as these reflected the gendered language of “reclaiming manhood” that was common in the Black Power era.<sup>36</sup> However, while Lester’s work was situated within this wider Black Power era framework, the number of Black female authors who included female characters reveals a more complex picture of the era, one in which Black womanhood was a theme amongst African American children’s books, counteracting the predominantly white and predominantly male view in books suggested by educational authorities in curricula lists.<sup>37</sup>

Lucille Clifton’s work *The Black BC’s*, primer of Black history, featured women prominently. Female figures, famous and everyday women, are pictured and mentioned throughout the book. Clifton included a two-page spread for two famous women: “T is for Truth Sojourner the Brave and Harriet Tubman the Moses of slaves”.<sup>38</sup> The short biographies of each woman attest to their radical history and contributions to the Civil War. Placed together, they emphasise the vital role of Black women in military history, an aspect overlooked in the majority of textbooks for children. Tubman and Truth are both mentioned under the letter ‘T’, whereas male figures like Frederick Douglass is the only historical figure assigned to the letter ‘D’, limiting the space afforded to Black women in the book. However, because Clifton and illustrator Don Miller both feature women prominently

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<sup>36</sup> Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*, 58.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Lucille Clifton, *The Black BC’s* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1970), 36.

throughout the book, this combination of Tubman and Truth could also be read as instructing children in the depth of Black female history by providing two examples from the Civil War. Clifton reveals to child readers that it was not just one exceptional woman, but many who fought for freedom. *The Black BC's* raises questions for children, issues to be considered and stories to be shared. In using the traditional ABC book format, Clifton engages in “cultural definition” and uses the book to provide an history missing from public education, a history which celebrates Blackness and Black figures.<sup>39</sup>

When Clifton uses ‘Books’ for the letter ‘B’, Phyllis Wheatley features in the description and an illustration of her occupies the prominent space above the text. Clifton uses the opportunity to highlight contemporary writers to her readers, citing Gwendolyn Brooks and Lorraine Hansbury within that list. By including Black female figures alongside famous Black male figures, Clifton forces the reader to consider Black history and Black cultural life not as the inherently masculinist culture propagated by many figures, like Eldridge Cleaver, but as being formed by both Black manhood and womanhood.

While historical female figures occupied a crucial space in Black history books for children, many African American children’s books featured strong, complicated and independent female protagonists in contemporary settings. In Kristin Hunter’s debut children’s book, *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*, the protagonist Louretta Hawkins is a strong female character

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<sup>39</sup> Katherine Capshaw, *Civil Rights Childhood* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 194.

who openly challenges the daily misogyny she faces. Early in the book Louretta's mother tells her daughter that "women are *born* grown. Men are always little boys".<sup>40</sup> This adage is felt throughout the book as Louretta is portrayed as an intelligent and commanding figure, but she is patronized, side-lined and, assaulted by her male peers as well as the Black Power group she visits. Hunter's depiction of Louretta, her mother and her teacher Miss Hodges provides a view of the strength of Black womanhood in the face of institutional racism together with everyday sexism and misogyny.

The intersectionality of oppression created by race and gender is particularly highlighted at an event for what her peer Fess refers to as 'the movement', a Black nationalist meeting Louretta attends. She leaves the meeting unhappy with the group, after having previously been supportive of a radical Black Power rhetoric espoused by others. Fess, angry at her leaving, displays his misogynistic view of Black womanhood and their role in politics as he says "the women in this movement respect us. And they *belong* to us". Fess' view of women as property and as submissive characters, serves to highlight what Louretta is rebelling against. Compared to Hunter's portrayal of female characters in the book Fess' words appear hollow and vindictive. For example, Hunter repeatedly portrays Rosetta Hawkins, Louretta's mother, as a proud and capable woman in the face of innumerable hardships. Rosetta decries to her daughter that it would kill her if anything happened to Louretta, who reminds herself of the impossibility of her mother

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<sup>40</sup> Hunter, *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*, 64.

being killed because she is “too big, and too strong, and too wise for that”.<sup>41</sup> Hunter adroitly uses a range of characters to assert a view of Black womanhood that is steeped in independence and power. Rosetta’s words are echoed throughout the book as the male figures in the book react violently and petulantly whilst the most sensible, and thoughtful characters within the book are predominantly Black women.

Other authors, especially authors who aimed books at younger children, did not explicitly address issues of misogyny. Instead, they used female protagonists in order convey the importance and visibility of Black women. In Rose Blue’s *Black, Black, Beautiful Black* the final beautiful black thing included is the reflection of the narrator, a young Black girl (Figure 1). Furthermore, both Terry Berger’s *Black Fairy Tales* and Edythe Rance Haskett’s *Grains of Pepper* feature many female protagonists in their short stories based on African folklore. Haskett’s tale ‘Baboon Skins’ is a story of an African princess who uses men’s obsession with physical beauty to her advantage. By presenting female characters as autonomous actors and protagonists in stories, authors such as these countered the anti-intellectual “docile and apolitical” characterizations of Black women that Ashley D. Farmer identifies was prevalent in the 1960s.<sup>42</sup>

Female children’s authors challenged stereotypical representations of Black women such as the Mammy, Sapphire or Jezebel figures, cultural

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>42</sup> Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*, 89.

imagery that, as scholar K. Sue Jewell argues was designed as a form of “social control” .<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Marshall’s work on the pedagogical significance of Black female biography emphasises the role of these books in providing “race- and gender specific lessons” for readers.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, it was not solely biographies of Black women that challenged stereotypes of Black women but all kinds of genres. The folk tales by Haskett and the picture book by Blue, in very different ways, used children’s books to address misrepresentations of Black girls and women. It is vital to recognise that children’s authors and illustrators like Emmett Wigglesworth for *Black, Black, Beautiful Black* used their art in similar ways to Black Power female artists like Gayle Dickson, an artist for the *Black Panther* newspaper who emphasised the political agency of Black women in her art. Authors and illustrators’ Black educational philosophy often did engage with the intersectionality of discrimination, identifying the unique difficulties Black women and girls faced and portraying strong female characters to defy racist and misogynistic stereotypes.

From beauty standards to expectations of female roles, African American women writers used children’s books to give voice and visibility to Black girls and Black women. Literature scholar Elizabeth Marshall asserts the importance of representation of girls and women of colour in literature as it is part of an “educative agenda that reinserts African American girls and women as historical and political actors” .<sup>45</sup> The inclusion of a range of Black

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<sup>43</sup> K. Sue Jewell, *From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US Social Policy* (London: Routledge, 1993), 8.

<sup>44</sup> Marshall, "The Random Brushing of Birds", 34.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

female characters demonstrates that a Black educational philosophy was also used to challenge the unique discrimination Black females faced. Indeed, whether they were defiant like Loretta Hawkins, brave like Harriet Tubman or beautiful like Rose Blue's anonymous narrator, children's books dealt with the intersectionality of race and gender by challenging a host of stereotypes imposed on women of colour. In her short story 'Debut', Kristin Hunter uses the relationship between Judy and her mother to emphasise the difficulties African American women faced. Her mother is desperate to make Judy look perfect for a dance because, due to her gender and skin colour, "They'll be watching you every minute, hoping to see something wrong. You've got to be the *best*".<sup>46</sup> This emphasis on the word 'best' reiterates the insurmountable pressure on Black females and the extreme lengths needed to overcome long-held cultural stereotypes. Hunter's work repeatedly emphasises the difficulties Black girls faced when growing up, using her stories to demonstrate characters like Judy and Loretta who overcome discrimination. Other books acknowledge the experiences and contributions of African American women and at times bolstered pride in being Black and female. As these books were celebrated and used by groups like the CIBC in their award and support given to Kristen Hunter's work or teachers taking these books from curricula lists in New York City, these books promoted a Black educational philosophy that viewed Black womanhood as a necessary part of the wider Black liberation movement.

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<sup>46</sup> Kristin Hunter, *Guests in the Promised Land* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968; Reprint, 1973), 49.

### **Orality and language:**

African American children's literature in the 1960s and 1970s incorporated African American oral traditions into children's literature in a variety of ways: through song, dialects, call and response and other modes.<sup>47</sup> This focus on orality became an important part of Black educational philosophy during the 1960s and 1970s, representing a significant shift from earlier African American children's literature that rarely included African American dialects or other oral forms. In 1964, the Mississippi Freedom School Curriculum cited continuation of the oral tradition as an important medium for maintaining African American culture and traditions.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, in 1971 educator William Smith created a curriculum for Black studies that included a concentration on African American oral traditions as well as dialects and African American Vernacular English (AAVE).<sup>49</sup> Evidently, the continuation of oral culture within Black-focused education became a common thread in the 1960s and 1970s. Children's works did not replace oral culture but adopted it and used it for educational purposes.

Katherine Capshaw-Smith argues that children's literature is often situated between children's oral culture and the written language. Books often play with language and rhythm and within African American children's

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<sup>47</sup> Bishop, *Free within Ourselves*, 4.

<sup>48</sup> "Freedom School Curriculum, Mississippi Freedom Summer, 1964." edited by. Kathy Emery, Sylvia Braselmann, and Linda Gold, *Education and Democracy*, <http://www.educationanddemocracy.org/FSCpdf/CurrTextOnlyAll.pdf>. [accessed October 14, 2017]

<sup>49</sup> William D. Smith, "Black Studies a Survey of Models and Curricula," *Journal of Black Studies* 1, no. 3 (1971): 269.

literature this had a political and historical significance.<sup>50</sup> Rose Blue used song and music in her book *Bed-stuy Beat*, Judith Griffin focused on the power of song in *Nat Turner*. These authors and others focused on orality and African American language patterns within children's books affirming the importance of these forms in education.<sup>51</sup> The use of song, testimony and the focus on storytelling in various African American children's books acted in the same way as oral traditions in transmitting stories, history, and folklore to a new generation. Children's literature scholar Sara Austin contends that characters and narrators use stories and songs to connect to the past, to African roots, and play a part in constructing positive Black identities.<sup>52</sup>

The incorporation of African American oral tradition into literature was expressed, in Langston Hughes' words, "without fear or shame" from the Harlem Renaissance and into the late Black Power era and orality became a crucial part of African American literature. In *Liberating Voices: Oral Tradition and African American Literature*, Gayl Jones asserts that the inclusion of oral traditions was the basis for African American writers later in the twentieth century as they used orality for their own social, political, intellectual and pedagogical functions.<sup>53</sup> However, Jones does not address the many uses of orality in children's literature; African American children's authors used orality

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<sup>50</sup> Capshaw Smith, "Introduction: The Landscape of Ethnic American Children's Literature", 6.

<sup>51</sup> KaaVonnia Hinton, "Following Tradition: Young Adult Literature as Neo-Slave Narrative" in *Embracing, Evaluating, and Examining African American Children's and Young Adult Literature*, ed. Wanda M. Brooks and Jonda C. McNair (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), 53.

<sup>52</sup> Sara Austin, "Two Separate Hearts: Virginia Hamilton and the Black Arts Movement", *The Lion and the Unicorn* 40, no. 3 (2016): 269.

<sup>53</sup> Gayl Jones, *Liberating Voices: Oral Tradition in African American Literature* (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1991), 9.

to bolster pride in Blackness and educate children on history, politics and a variety of African American cultures. Crucially orality in children's literature replicated oral culture's historical importance in educating children.

Julius Lester's *To Be a Slave*, which won the Newbery Honor prize in 1969, was the first book for children written as, what KaaVonia Hinto describes as, a "Neo-slave narrative".<sup>54</sup> Lester's work is compiled of narratives of the Federal Writers Project and the book includes the "earthy directness of communication" as a way of preserving the actual testimonies of enslaved people.<sup>55</sup> Orality and song are a crucial element of Lester's work as he argues that song was a constant tool "used to resist the spiritual brutality of slavery".<sup>56</sup> In selecting the songs, Lester emphasises the role of culture in forms of resistance and is educating children on the important oral traditions that began as part of Black liberation. The songs Lester selected are not just spirituals but include songs that made fun of enslavers and also speak to the realities of slavery. By including these oral forms as well as other testimony, it engages the reader with the cultural heritage that was born out of slavery and how some of this could be traced back to Africa. In terms of Black educational philosophy, the inclusion of songs serves to pass African American cultural heritage onto children and also provides readers with the cultural language of resistance.

The common use of song in African American children's books during the 1960s and 1970s illustrates the radical political uses of song as well as

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<sup>54</sup> Hinton, "Following Tradition", 53.

<sup>55</sup> Julius Lester, *To Be a Slave* (New York: Puffin Books, 1968; Reprinted, 1998), 15.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

emphasising the proud heritage of Black music. The power of spirituals and subversive religious songs is highlighted in two biographies: Judith Griffin's *Nat Turner* (1970) and Eloise Greenfield's *Paul Robeson* (1975). Griffin's Nat Turner loses himself in the "spell of the singing and the rhythm of the clapping hands" as free preacher, John Charleston, leads the enslaved community in 'Go down Moses, way down to Egypt land' a subversive song about slavery and freedom.<sup>57</sup> The power of music in moving people to resist underpins both biographies. After hearing the music of other enslaved people singing, Griffin's Nat Turner believes that God must hear that music and "help them be free", Turner directly connects song to resistance and freedom, key aspects of Black educational philosophy.<sup>58</sup>

Greenfield's biography of Paul Robeson focuses on the power of songs, and particularly spirituals, especially how Robeson used song as a form of protest. Greenfield asserts this perception of song when she details how Robeson changed a line of 'Old Man River' from being 'tired of living and scared of dying' to the more radically infused "I must keep fighting until I'm dying".<sup>59</sup> Music as a form of subversion appeared in different guises in children's literature. In *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*, Fess' lyrics for his song 'Hungry Cat Blues' echo his radical politics with demands for respect and an underlying threat of violence as the lyrics tell of a Black cat that jumps out of the darkness and claims: "You better treat me right, Or you'll find out

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<sup>57</sup> Judith Berry Griffin, *Nat Turner* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1970), 24.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Eloise Greenfield, *Paul Robeson* (New York: Lee & Low Books Inc., 1975; Reprint, 2009), np.

what I mean”.<sup>60</sup> The connection between music and resistance is evident and by writing out the lyrics in full, Hunter encourages the reader to engage with the song in its entirety. The inclusion of the lyrics combined with a description of its power engages the reader directly. This direct relationship to the music furthers Black educational philosophy because it is not just passing on information but demonstrating the power of cultural heritage.

In *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou* music, especially the blues, is portrayed as a bonding force between generations and, despite their differences, brings many of the characters together. An old famous blues musician, Blind Eddie Bell, visits the children in their clubhouse and when he tells Louretta that the blues was created by African Americans she “felt a warm thrill of pride”.<sup>61</sup> The character Blind Eddie educates the reader on the blues and also Louretta’s interactions with Blind Eddie reiterate the importance of the blues in American culture and how that is a source of Black pride. The white music teacher Mr. Lucitanno shows reverence to the blues as his character serves to support the message about the power of African American song. The emphasis on pride for African American musical heritage and its ability to connect people furthers a Black educational philosophy because it highlights Black contributions and also fosters an idea of community, bringing people together. Furthermore, in the book Hunter includes lyrics to the songs the characters write as well as providing the blues chord progression alongside the lyrics, making the song something to

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<sup>60</sup> Hunter, *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*, 63.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

be read in the book in addition to something to be sung out loud. The inclusion of music and lyrics ensures that the importance of orality is fully felt as readers are encouraged to engage with the oral culture of song.

Rose Blue, a teacher in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, in the late 1960s, wrote *Bed-Stuy Beat: Sonny's Song* (1970) a book that celebrated her local community but was also designed to be sung along to. It even included musical notation in the back for a teacher, storyteller, or parent to accompany the reading of the book. By including songs within the text, it places emphasis on an immediate, community experience as a song to be sung with others. This idea of using books to foster community was part of an educational philosophy that celebrated family and community as a cultural institution and source of strength.<sup>62</sup> By including music and lyrics the books encourage the readers to share the material with others and sing the songs together.

As well as songs, the oral and aural nature of these books lent themselves to storytelling and were used precisely as such in educational initiatives on the streets as well as in classrooms in furtherance of a Black educational philosophy. The purpose of books designed to be read out loud was to strengthen community bonds as well as educate children in Black history and African American cultural heritage. In Muriel Feelings Swahili counting book *Moja Means One* the cultural traditions of storytelling in Black communities is illustrated by a picture of children gathered around together

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<sup>62</sup> Bishop, *Free within Ourselves*, 273.

as “in villages old people tell stories to children around the fireside”.<sup>63</sup> The accompanying painting by Tom Feelings connects children to an African cultural heritage and makes immediate connections between children’s books and African traditions. In *Grains of Pepper: Folktales from Liberia* (1967) Edythe Haskett underlines the pedagogical purposes of the stories, whether it was teaching history or moral lessons, and also, how interactive the stories could be as the audience could finish the story and respond to the dramatic elements.<sup>64</sup>

Like Haskett, Julius Lester emphasised the importance of storytelling in his *Black Folktales* (1969). In the introduction, he informs the reader that “a folktale assumes the shape of its teller, and through the teller’s voice colorations, vocal timbre and rhythms, gestures...the tale is recreated and made new”.<sup>65</sup> This was important in the context of education because crucial to Black educational philosophy during this period was the fostering of community and preparing children to survive in an oppressive white society. By emphasising orality and elements of storytelling, authors like Lester, used their books to teach history and make reading relevant, as well as to make it a community experience. Furthermore, the specific stories to be read out are folklore including enslaved people outwitting their enslavers like in the story ‘High John the Conqueror’ or reminding children in the beauty of African

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<sup>63</sup> Muriel Feelings, *Moja Means One: Swahili Counting Book* (New York: The Dial Press), np.

<sup>64</sup> Edythe Rance Haskett, *Grains of Pepper: Folk Tales from Liberia* (New York: John Day Company, 1967), 14.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, ix.

American English by stating that “we” changed the “white folks” word flutterbys into butterfly as it was “easy on the tongue and easy on the ear”.<sup>66</sup> The use of ‘we’ suggests that this is a story to be read by an African American for younger children, reiterating the idea of a community education being shared from generation to generation.

Most children’s books are designed to be read out loud, but it is the focus on specific verbal traditions that are unique to African American children’s books. The verbal art of ‘the dozens’ occurs in several children’s works used in education. The inclusion of this street tradition in children’s literature is indicative of the cultural relevance argued by Rudine Sims Bishop, as well as many educators in the 1960s and 1970s. In Kristen Hunter’s short story ‘The Pool Table Caper’ the narrator suggests half the fun of pool is the “sounding on the players” as Sunshine heckles his friend String to get help from his “Grandmama to make a tough shot”.<sup>67</sup> Much of Hunter’s work is peppered with back and forth insults between the characters reflecting the verbal combat used by young people at the time. Furthermore, in Julius Lester’s story ‘How the Snake got his Rattles’, Mrs. Snake plays the dozens with her husband telling him that “his mama was a lizard and his daddy was a fishing worm”.<sup>68</sup> By including familiar verbal patterns for humour, these authors kept the absurdity and humour of children’s literature whilst simultaneously ensuring their books held relevance for African American children.

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<sup>66</sup> Julius Lester, *Black Folktales* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1969), 19.

<sup>67</sup> Hunter, *Guests in the Promised Land*, 32.

<sup>68</sup> Lester, *Black Folktales*, 23.

## Language

Just as verbal art forms were crucial to African American children's literature so was language. Whether it was the use of vernacular, dialect, slang or Swahili, language played an important role in fostering a knowledge of Black heritage in children as well as making the books relatable. In her book *Moja Means One Muriel Feelings* explained the importance of the book as "part of our heritage is language".<sup>69</sup> Feelings emphasises language as well as history and culture as an important part of identity. Different uses of language engage with a Black educational philosophy by fostering wider community connections and asserting the power of African American cultural heritage.

The African American children's books used in educational settings like storytelling sessions, classroom readings or in bookmobiles in New York City employed language children were familiar with. Author John Steptoe deliberately used African American dialect and slang because he "wrote it this way because [black children] are never spoken to".<sup>70</sup> Whether it was cultural relevance or connecting Black children to a broader history and heritage, language played an important role in African American children's books. African American Vernacular English scholar Geneva Smitherman argues that language is an important focus because it is "inextricable from the complex social structure and political history of people of African

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<sup>69</sup> Feelings, *Moja Means One*, np.

<sup>70</sup> "Stevie", *New York Times Book Review*, Oct. 5 1969.

descent” and so its use furthers a Black educational philosophy because AAVE helps children engage in a sense of community identity.<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, studies of African American children’s responses to literature illustrate how Black children respond differently to texts written in AAVE or Standard English (SE). Teresa Miller’s study reveals the physical responses children had to varying types of dialogue – they sat rigidly when a character speaks SE but engaged rhythmically when AAVE was used, mimicking the characters more.<sup>72</sup> The power of AAVE, therefore, perhaps impacted on readings and storytelling sessions engaging children in ways other books simply did not. Miller’s educational research indicates how language changed the impact of a book, in particular, engaging children in ways that otherwise they would not have been.<sup>73</sup> Not only does language further a Black educational philosophy through connecting children to wider African American cultural heritage but it demonstrates that language can also spark interest and engagement with education. Nina Nilsson’s examination of the impact of AAVE reveals that African American children often detect the complex subtleties of character relationships when AAVE is used among characters.<sup>74</sup> Educational scholarship asserts increased engagement and learning when books are culturally relevant, and this includes the use of

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<sup>71</sup> Geneva Smitheran, “Foreword” in John R. Rickford, *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*, ed. Russell John Rickford (New York: Wiley, 2000), i.

<sup>72</sup> Teresa Miller, “Literature Discussion Groups Respond to Culturally Relevant Children’s Literature in the Kindergarten Classroom”, PhD Diss, (University of Pennsylvania, 2003), 71.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>74</sup> Nina L. Nilsson, “Reader Response to African American Children’s Literature: A Sociolinguistic Perspective” in *Embracing, Evaluating, and Examining African American Children’s and Young Adult Literature*, ed. Wanda M. Brooks and Jonda C. McNair (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), 142-144.

AAVE. This link between cultural relevance and learning was crucial to the Black educational philosophy of the Black Power era and the children's books of this era provide a historical background of the culturally relevant learning focused on by educational scholars.

African American authors understood the importance of providing familiar language for children. In *Black Folktales*, Julius Lester's story 'How Butterflies Came to Be' is a fun creation story for children that also explores the differences between white and Black approaches to language. The narrator says that white people "put their tongues through all kinds of contortions trying to talk" whilst "we always got to have *our* way of saying something. The brother in black is going to say the thing his way or die trying".<sup>75</sup> Lester's story reiterates the importance of language to African American cultures by focusing on its fundamental role in shaping identity. In pursuit of cultural authenticity, authors such as John Steptoe, Nikki Giovanni and Kristin Hunter used a variety African American language patterns in their work for children. Like John Steptoe suggested, African American children's books spoke to children with familiar rhythms and language in a way children's literature traditionally had not for Black children in the USA. African American Vernacular English, or "Spoken Soul" as John Rickford describes it, is a dialect of English with vocabulary, syntactic structures and pronunciations associated with African American people. It was an expressive tool that enabled writers to create authentic characters with whom

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<sup>75</sup> Lester, "Black Folktales", 6.

children could identify by seeing their own speech patterns and language affirmed in books.<sup>76</sup>

John Steptoe, Julius Lester, Kristen Hunter and Nikki Giovanni all made use of AAVE in their children's literature. The inclusion of AAVE was significant in these books in terms of Black Educational Philosophy encouraged Black community and African American heritage. Linguistic scholars have identified the use of AAVE increases between African Americans and in group settings. For example, John Rickford has highlighted one interview with the Cobras gang in New York City and found that their use of AAVE dropped when interviewed individually but they used it more amongst their peers.<sup>77</sup> The use of African American vernacular in children's books fostered an idea of community and put into print speech that was familiar and inclusive for Black children in New York City.

One of the most common features of AAVE is the use of the double negative and this is frequently used in the African American children's literature of the period. In John Steptoe's debut work *Stevie*, the narrator is irritated about another young boy coming to stay with him and complains that even though he puts footprints on the bed "my momma never said nothin' to him".<sup>78</sup> Teresa Miller and Wanda Brooks' studies have demonstrated that familiarity of language has been shown to increase engagement with material. *Stevie* was a story directly relevant to the lives of children as it was

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<sup>76</sup> John R. Rickford, *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*, ed. Russell John Rickford (New York: Wiley, 2000), 10.

<sup>77</sup> John R. Rickford, *African American Vernacular English: Features, Evolution, Educational Implications* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 10.

<sup>78</sup> John Steptoe, *Stevie* (New York: Harper Trophy, 1986; Reprinted, 1969), np.

a contemporary story with which many children could relate to but also the relevance to children is reflected in the language as the children spoke in ways familiar to many readers. In Lester's story 'Jack and the Devil's Daughter', a folkloric story of a man outsmarting the Devil, Lester uses similar language, making the folktale an authentic rendering of a story passed down for generations. When Jack rides an eagle across the ocean it "hollers 'One quarter cross the ocean! Don't see nothing but blue water!'"<sup>79</sup> The use of the double negative and the word 'hollers' captures realistic speech and also defies the editing and white washing of language common in other children's books. To have this speech throughout many African American children's books legitimises the language as a significant cultural force, especially given the history of the stereotyping of Black speech in children's books.<sup>80</sup>

Another feature of AAVE authors frequently used in African American children's literature was the "reduction of word-final consonant clusters" and ending gerunds in n' occurs frequently.<sup>81</sup> For example, in Kristin Hunter's story 'Debut', the confident Lucy Mae Watkins' speech is filled with this feature as she responds to the comments of some local boys that what she is "puttin' down is too strong for boys like you".<sup>82</sup> The use of familiar slang combined with the gerund ending further emphasises that the speech is

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<sup>79</sup> Lester, *Black Folktales*, 78.

<sup>80</sup> See for example the caricatured language of Black characters in Edward Stratemeyer's *The Rover Boys* series.

<sup>81</sup> Rickford, *African American Vernacular English*, 105.

<sup>82</sup> Hunter, *Guests in the Promised Land*, 52.

supposed to reflect that of its readership. The use of *they* as third plural possessive was another grammatical feature used, for example, by Nikki Giovanni in her poem “Beautiful Black Men” as she describes the “outsight black men with they afros”.<sup>83</sup> Whilst many authors like Walter Dean Myers and Sharon Bell Mathis did not use AAVE, its usage in a wide array of African American children’s books is important.

Stephen Schneider’s article on Stokely Carmichael’s lesson on the two forms of English in Freedom schools in the South underscores how the usage of AAVE “turned on issues of oppression, power, and the role of language in defining the individual and the world”.<sup>84</sup> Schneider’s analysis of Carmichael’s lesson demonstrates how the use of AAVE in an educational setting challenged traditional modes of education as oppressive and centred education in the Black liberation struggle. Evidently the use of AAVE had become a part of Black educational philosophy in the mid-1960s and the use within children’s literature adds to Schneider’s argument that these authors also used language to challenge the institutionally racist education system that denigrated AAVE. So, within these children’s books the nuances of language is an important political tool, providing children with a linguistic education that affirms and empowers. The common use of AAVE engaged children in stories, but also challenged oppressive elements of public school education that tried to enforce Standard English. The use of AAVE in African American children’s books was part of the Black educational philosophy that

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<sup>83</sup> Giovanni, *Ego-Tripping*, 25.

<sup>84</sup> Stephen Schneider, "Freedom Schooling: Stokely Carmichael and Critical Rhetorical Education," *College Composition and Communication* (2006), 49.

strove to foster an education based in the community rather than having schools impose language onto children.

Many schools within Community Control districts in new York City challenged traditional curricula by teaching children Swahili. Indeed, in IS 201 in Harlem, Robert Campbell, a white teacher came to visit and was surprised to find the school's own magazine *Kweli* (Swahili for truth) had sections in the language. The use of Swahili was replicated in some African American children's literature. The adoption of Swahili rather than any other African languages was for two reasons. The first is that Swahili cut across tribal affiliations and was adopted by Africans across the continent because of the absence of tones found within many other African languages and so was easier for English speakers.<sup>85</sup> Secondly, many proponents of Swahili like Maulana Karenga were inspired by Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the first president of the United Republic of Tanzania. In the 1960s, Nyerere initiated policies that developed "a pedagogy in Swahili" and an education that was "dedicated to pride in being African".<sup>86</sup> The introduction of Swahili into children's literature operated as a pedagogical tool as well as way to introduce children to an African cultural heritage and help foster pride in this heritage much like Nyerere did.

In *If not now, when? The Many Meanings of Black Power* (1969), a book recommended by educational group Reading is Fundamental (RIF) in 1970 for young readers interested in politics, Dora Pantell and Edwin

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<sup>85</sup> John Mugane, *The Story of Swahili*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015), 253.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

Greenidge discuss the addition of Swahili in New York City public school curricula as part of a Black nationalist education. The notion of a Black nationalist education suggests one in which Black Power groups had control over New York City education. This was not the case, but it does reveal how aligned educators, authors and Black Power activists were on some issues. Swahili became important to many Black Power and Black nationalist figures and groups. Words like 'dada' in Swahili meaning older sister were borrowed to mean "sisterhood of black women" and people like LeRoi Jones changed his name to the Swahili influenced Amiri Baraka.<sup>87</sup> In education the use of Swahili was not simply a Black nationalist phenomenon but it provided a meaningful "cultural identification" that also promoted the study of foreign languages.<sup>88</sup> Even though most African Americans had West African ancestors, Swahili became a prominent symbol of Black consciousness and Black nationalism as well as a key educational tool that could help children engage with aspects of a Black educational philosophy.<sup>89</sup>

Muriel Feelings' work *Moja Means One* used the learning of Swahili numbers as a guide to African cultures, for example, sita – number six- introduces six African figures dressed in African clothing (Figure 2) and gives examples such as dashiki, lapa and kanzu.<sup>90</sup> Feelings' dedication is to "all Black children living in the Western Hemisphere," hoping that her readers

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>88</sup> Dora Pantell and Edwin Greenidge, *If Not Now, When? The Many Meanings of Black Power* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969), 31.

<sup>89</sup> Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination*. (London: Oxford University Press, 2016), 122.

<sup>90</sup> Feelings, *Moja Means One*, 12.

“will one day speak the language in Africa”.<sup>91</sup> This dedication makes clear that the inclusion of Swahili for Feelings was not just about teaching a language but engaging African American children with one version of African life and culture.

Other authors similarly used Swahili or African languages in their work to help children connect to an African heritage. Terry Berger’s *Black Fairy Tales*, a book read out to children in CIBC storytelling in the streets sessions, is a series of South African tales in English but with many words in their original language from Swazi and ’Msuto people, as well as other communities. The book includes a glossary of Swahili words that introduce children to terms relating to everyday words such as ‘kraal’ for village or African mythological creatures such as Imbulas and Inzimus. The addition of the glossary is a vital component of the book as it encourages its readers to look up any words they are not familiar with and begin learning about African cultures and concepts. By including a glossary to help children learn the Swahili terms the book is indicative of the wider pedagogical role of African American children’s books, the stories simultaneously entertain and educate. Similarly, Elizabeth Murphy Oliver’s *Black Mother Goose* (1969) features Swahili translations at the bottom of each page of Western nursery rhymes. Combined with Aaron Sopher’s paintings of the nursery rhymes that exclusively feature Black characters, Oliver’s use of Swahili encourages an act of translation and seeks to make the stories more directly relevant to African American children. In using a foreign language, the children’s

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

literature simultaneously educates children and captures a distinct part of African American cultural experiences as highlighted by Rudine Sims Bishop.<sup>92</sup>

Furthermore, the use of Swahili in books does emphasise the connection between children's literature with contemporary Black liberation movements and groups such as *US*. The leader of *US*, Maulana Karenga described Swahili as a "language of self-determination".<sup>93</sup> The teaching of Swahili and the inclusion in African American children's books was not necessarily directly inspired by Karenga's messages of cultural liberation, however, it did connect to efforts to use Swahili to help children gain a better understanding of what African heritage meant.<sup>94</sup> Educators and authors like Les Campbell or Nikki Giovanni subscribed to Black Power and Black nationalist ideology, however, many did not. Nevertheless, Swahili was not simply a result of Black nationalist influence on schools, rather its adoption demonstrates how useful Swahili and language was to Black educational philosophy. It could help activists as a "language of self-determination" but simultaneously it could also help children engage more with education and learn more about Black history and African American cultures.

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<sup>92</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, "Reflections on the Development of African American Children's Literature," *Journal of Children's Literature* 38, no. 2 (2012): 6.

<sup>93</sup> William Van Deburg *New day in Babylon: The Black power movement and American culture, 1965-1975*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 171.

<sup>94</sup> Scot Brown, *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (London: New York University Press, 2003), 13.

## Setting

Mirroring the use of language in books, authors also used setting as part of a Black educational philosophy by providing culturally relevant settings and focusing on cultural heritage. Authors often focused on Africa or predominantly Black New York City neighbourhoods like Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant as settings for their stories. In Sims Bishop's analysis of African American children's literature, one of the key components of culturally conscious books is that they are set in Black cultural environments.<sup>95</sup> Authors such as Margaret Musgrove, Nikki Giovanni and Terry Berger used Africa as a setting for stories and poems as a way to educate children about the continent. Other authors, such as Rose Blue, Walter Dean Myers and Kristin Hunter, focused on providing their primary readership with familiar settings and celebrating city life. Both settings of Africa and city-life served a pedagogical purpose and African American children's books in the late 1960s and 1970s featured settings that countered white representations of Africa and different neighbourhoods in New York City. A host of authors used city settings to challenge racist depictions of 'ghetto' life and convey a realistic depiction of many children's lives, whilst others used African settings to challenge common misrepresentations of the continent such as how people lived.

Nancy Schmidt, a scholar and member of the CIBC, argued that an educational focus on Africa was vital given that public school curricula either

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

ignored or misrepresented the continent.<sup>96</sup> Just as Swahili became a prominent feature of some children's literature, a focus on Africa as a setting was used to challenge monolithic white representations of the continent and "unfavourable stereotypes of African people" and provide children with knowledge of African heritage.<sup>97</sup> The emphasis on Africa was part of an effort by some authors to try and bolster pride in being Black. In the preface to *Moja Means One*, Muriel Feelings explicitly speaks to Black children saying that in learning more of "our African heritage, we become increasingly proud".<sup>98</sup> Feelings' invocation of pride was a statement of how she hopes her book would be used. Her preface indicates that education of Africa and its cultures would encourage pride in being Black and knowledge of African heritage would occur as she hopes that "boys and girls of African origin will enjoy learning to count in Swahili...gaining more knowledge of their African heritage".<sup>99</sup> Similarly, Edythe Rance Haskett introduces her Liberian folktales by claiming that her book is "for the boys and girls of America who will find pride in the folklore of their ancestors", establishing a connection between the setting of Africa and African American children. This reiterates that within a Black educational philosophy Black pride was a crucial part of an education, not a by-product.

In many books, illustrators used their art to portray the folklore and traditions of many African countries. Whilst Margaret Musgrove and Edythe

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<sup>96</sup> Nancy J. Schmidt, "Children's Literature About Africa", *African Studies Bulletin* vol. 8 no.3 (1965), 61-70.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>98</sup> Feelings, *Moja Means One*, np.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, np.

Haskett emphasise the modernity of African countries, the artwork focuses on African tribal imagery. However, the range of colours and variety shown do challenge traditional Western portrayals of Africa, emphasising an Africa of multiple cultures and traditions. The illustrations in *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions* by Diane and Leo Dillon were well-researched and aimed to provide a realistic, whilst still visually stunning, depiction of traditions from tribes across Africa (Figure 3). Each picture is framed with Kano knots, an old design from Kano in Nigeria. These knots feature on every page and in their golden colour provide a striking frame for each section. Each colourful, and meticulously researched artwork contains a dwelling, a woman, a man, a child, a landscape and an animal specific to the region providing the reader with a rich array of images relating to Africa. This level of detail and emphasis on the rich cultural heritage of Africa was an important part of a Black educational philosophy that tried to provide children with a culturally relevant education in order to engage children in education and raise their Black consciousness.

Zoe Burkholder's work *Color in the Classroom* reveals how during the twentieth century white teachers avoided talking about African American children's heritage despite the trend of incorporating other ethnic groups' history and culture grew considerably. Children presented to their classes on national holidays based on their heritage but white teachers avoided discussing African heritage.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, the illustrations of African heritage

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<sup>100</sup> Zoe Burkholder, *Color in the Classroom: How American Schools Taught Race 1900-1954* (Oxford, Oxford UP, 2011), 36.

are an important contribution to a growing trend in twentieth century education. The focus on Africa through the artwork provided children with an emphasis on African cultural heritages. The artwork and accompanying text in *Ashanti to Zulu* provides its readers with a rich and varied depiction of African cultures and traditions. Leo Dillon's work in children's books had always focused on providing positive imagery for Black children, starting with his son for whom he found "there were never any Black or other ethnic children in picture books. We ended up "coloring" them before we gave him a book".<sup>101</sup> This personal touch for his child was repeated for other children as he sketched on pavements in the CIBC storytelling on the streets programme. For Dillon the imagery was just as vital as the text in helping, not just his child, but all Black children in seeing themselves within literature; the art was crucial in an educative and political sense.

Another artist who sketched children's stories on the streets of New York City in the CIBC storytelling on the streets programme was George Ford. He also illustrated Nikki Giovanni's *Ego- Tripping and Other Poems for Young People* (1973). Ford's artwork is not the meticulously researched work of the Dillons but immediately he tries to connect Black children with Africa.

The frontispiece by George Ford (Figure 4) reflects the more dramatic work of Nikki Giovanni. In representing the boy's shadow as Africa, Ford emphasises how intrinsic Africa, its history and cultures, is in the lives of Black children. As if reaching out in celebration the boy is welcoming his

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<sup>101</sup> Michael Patrick Hearn, "Talking with the Dillons: An Interview", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1981).

African heritage, symbolised by the silhouette of the continent as well as the imposing African mask that dominates the silhouette. The inclusion of the traditional mask design emphasises the rich artistic heritage of African countries showing readers a visual connection between themselves and African cultures. Writing about Black Power, Dora Pantell and Edwin Greenidge emphasised the importance of Africa in revolutionary Black thought as it was “a reaching out for roots in a time when they were once free and, in a land, where the white culture has not yet debased the black man”, a time before European colonisation.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, in Ford’s image the boy is reaching out and, unlike the images in Haskett’s and Musgrove’s work, the picture establishes Africa within a contemporary U.S. context, reiterating the importance of the continent on the lives of African American children rather than ‘othering’ Africa in the same way writers like Jane Dabney Shackleford did in the 1930s and 1940s.

In *The Black BC’s*, A stood for Africa “land of the sun”, but Lucille Clifton also included another important setting: the Ghetto for the letter G “a place where we can be at home loved and free”.<sup>103</sup> The urban North had become a crucial setting for many African American children’s writers. Just as the artists in the Storytelling on the Streets programme engaged children by drawing local New York City landmarks, the inclusion of recognisable cultural environments was in part to engage children and help them see their lives reflected in a book. Rose Blue, who published many books based

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<sup>102</sup> Pantell and Greenidge, *If Not Now, When?*, 27.

<sup>103</sup> Clifton, *The Black BC’s*, 14.

around New York City, was a teacher in Bedford-Stuyvesant which perhaps made her conscious of a lack of culturally relevant materials that children connected to. Her concern for the lack of cultural relevance is addressed in *A Quiet Place*, about a local boy Matthew, who was obsessed with reading. After his local library closes for the summer, Matthew borrows a book from the local Bookmobile. Upon returning home he opens up the book to find “pictures of some houses on a street that looked like his street. Matthew had never seen a picture like that before, not on the cover of any book he had read,”.<sup>104</sup> The power of the recognisable setting is evident in how it captures Matthew’s attention. He is so absorbed in the familiarity of the setting he does not notice when his sister is banging on the bathroom door. Walter Dean Myers argued that it was crucial to include “recognizable fabric of Black life” in the African American children’s literature of the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>105</sup> Representation was not only about the inclusion of Black characters but also settings children could identify with.

The strength of community was integral to both the Community Control movement and the Black Power era therefore the inclusion of local communities in African American children’s literature was an important affirmation of the areas that the educational initiatives took place in. In *A Quiet Place*, Matthew’s sister Claudia tells him that the places in most of the books he reads “may as well be on the moon”. Claudia is referring to the tree-lined, clean streets depicted in white-written books and her point is

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<sup>104</sup> Rose Blue, *A Quiet Place* (New York: Frank Watts, Inc., 1969), 54.

<sup>105</sup> Walter Dean Myers, “I Actually Thought We Would Revolutionize the Industry” *New York Times*, November 9, 1986.

important when it comes to setting; what was in books could be so alien to many Black children in New York City that it would not engage many in reading. The inclusion of these settings ties into larger themes of self-determination and pride in community and authors used city settings as a source of these. Other authors however, used the setting to highlight the difficulties African American children faced in terms of lack of services and police brutality.

Frightening and damaging elements of city-life are emphasised in many of the children's books conscious of how different African American childhood, and inner-city childhood, was and how this was never reflected in children's books before. For example, Walter Dean Myers's 1975 work *Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff* focuses on a group of young friends in Harlem. The friends encounter routine violence, drug overdose, police brutality in their day-to-day lives. Literary scholar Mary Ellen Snodgrass pinpoints the book as devoted to "consciousness raising", and while for many readers it may bring light to issues, for many readers Myers' setting is not about consciousness raising but providing a realistic setting for the book.<sup>106</sup> Myers portrayed a realistic Harlem that he had experienced as a child, which meant that it came from a genuinely lived experience of the place rather than any "romantic notion" but this included darker elements, such as drug use and violence. Myers claimed that he knew that life and if he did not write it, "then who?", demonstrating a desire for his childhood setting not to be

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<sup>106</sup> Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Walter Dean Myers: A Literary Companion* (London: Macfarland & Company, Inc., 2006), 103.

misrepresented.<sup>107</sup> African American authors, like Myers, understood that the lives of African American children in the city were not reflected in books so stories like *Fast Sam* were in settings familiar to children. For children reading this in New York City, it is about acknowledging the difficulties as well as the joys of city life and Myers was writing for children who grew up without their lives represented on the page.

The everyday racism children faced, in particular from the police, is emphasised in books such as Myers' *Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff* and Kristin Hunter's *Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*. Stories like these were part of a wider part of the Black educational philosophy that sought to psychologically prepare children for the realities of white supremacy. Stuff's father in *Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff* is representative of the idea of preparing Black children for the harsh realities of racism. After Stuff is mistakenly arrested for theft, Stuff's father told him that he was "learning what the world was all about", revealing a realistic outlook on arrest that Stuff does not yet share.<sup>108</sup>

In *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*, Kristen Hunter acknowledges the implicit understanding many African American children had of the ubiquity of police violence. The white teacher tells the class that policemen are their friends to which "Louretta and all the other Southside pupils smiled wisely whenever a teacher said this, because they knew better".<sup>109</sup> Hunter is able to

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<sup>107</sup> Roger Sutton, "Threads in Our Cultural Fabric: A Conversation with Walter Dean Myers", *School Library Journal* 40, no. 6 (1994).

<sup>108</sup> Walter Dean Myers, *Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1975), 93.

<sup>109</sup> Hunter, *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*, 6.

showcase the realities of being an African American child through setting. She underscores how environment impacts children's lives as the classroom scene continues when the narrator proclaims that all the Black children "knew that all policemen were not *their* friends, even if they might be the friends of children on the other side of town".<sup>110</sup> The clear racial and class division in how children view police is directly affected by the setting as throughout the book it is made clear that the police, particularly Officer Lafferty, target Black children and use unwarranted force against them.

The casual use of violence by the police in the book reaches a climax when a white rookie cop shoots Jethro at the clubhouse. The shocking scene features the community gathered in the clubhouse to shout 'murderer' at the police as they make an exit. Throughout, the book is much darker in tone than most of the other books for children. Nevertheless, the CIBC lauded Hunter who won its writing prize, demonstrating how valuable this worldview was in the sphere of African American children's books. The award was given to unpublished writers and Hunter's work was unlike the majority of literature printed by the mainstream presses. The realistic setting was crucial in an educational philosophy that sought to tell the truth to Black children about the world. Louretta's mother tells her daughter that "they don't teach the truth in school", and that is why the book's setting is crucial because the CIBC promoted and used the book in educational events and provided what

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

schools had traditionally failed to do – provide an authentic view of many Black children’s lives in the city.

Whilst the attendant violence and racism of city-life is part of the African American children’s books of the time, the city as a force for good is also emphasised in some of the books used, bolstering pride in children’s community. At the end of *Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff*, the narrator, Stuff, thinks back to his youth which involved jail, police brutality, and poverty but the one aspect he “won’t forget” is how much he and his friends all “cared for each other”.<sup>111</sup> In Sharon Bell Mathis’ *Sidewalk Story* (1971), Lilly Etta refuses to accept her friend’s eviction and does everything she can to get her to stay in the neighbourhood. Mathis’ story addresses the complex lives of African American children as seeing them represented was key to spiritual survival. Books like *Sidewalk Story* emphasise Black children as a source of strength within the community as Lily Etta is able to rally the community to support her friends’ family. Leo Carty’s black-and-white paintings make the setting immediately recognisable as Lilly Etta stands upon a Brownstone stoop looking at the truck that has arrived to take her neighbour’s possessions away (Figure 5). The paintings evoke the architecture of the city as well as capturing the local community spirit as Carty depicts concerned neighbours gathered to watch as white men in suits evict a local family. Mathis’ accompanying text features a man yelling at the white evictors telling them to “Go back to where [they] came from”.<sup>112</sup> The illustration and

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<sup>111</sup> Myers, *Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff*, 190.

<sup>112</sup> Sharon Bell-Mathis, *Sidewalk Story* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 9.

text combine to emphasise the community spirit of this district as people come to the aid of their neighbour. Lilly Etta is symbolic of the power of community and the importance of it; she thwarts the eviction, protecting her community and keeping her friend.

Rose Blue emphasises community pride in a very different way in *Bed-Stuy Beat*. Illustrated by Tom Feelings, this book similarly celebrates a Black urban community, but it is much more celebratory in tone compared to Mathis' work. Tom Feelings' drawings of a young boy dancing along the street in Bedford-Stuyvesant accompany the lyrics to a song celebrating the community. The boy moves "proud and strong to the Bed-Stuy beat" as he encounters "all the action" in his vibrant neighbourhood.<sup>113</sup> Feelings' artwork emphasises the joy in the community as the child is pictured smiling in every image and, in one particular image, Feelings captures the movement of the boy dancing. The child's interactions with the setting emphasise the vitality of the area as he skips by a music shop, a library, and men playing cards in the street. The drawings are detailed renderings of the area, just like some of the work done during the storytelling on the streets programme in which writers sketched out local buildings and scenes for children, but they are more than that. There are visual cues in the setting that emphasise how special the community is. In one shop window, a sign reads "we do our own thing" and, in another image, a car is emblazoned with the phrase "I'm a soul man" (Figure 6).<sup>114</sup> Along with the written lyric "standing tall on your own two feet",

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<sup>113</sup> Rose Blue, "Bed-Stuy Beat: Sonny's Song," (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1970).

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

Blue and Feelings' depiction portrays a community that is proud of its Blackness and is imbued with a self-determination. Feelings' illustrations simultaneously provide recognisable settings and reinforces aspects of Black educational philosophy such as Black pride and the strong bonds of community in these neighbourhoods.

These messages of defiance and distinctiveness contest traditional depictions of Black neighbourhoods in New York City. From the police brutality and lack of services portrayed by Kristin Hunter to familiar sights drawn out by John Steptoe and Tom Feelings, the city took on an important role as a setting that both showcased the effects of white supremacy and also the strength of Black communities in the face of everyday violence and discrimination. Through setting, authors challenged and defied stereotypes of Black cultural environments. Their books acted as an antidote to racist depictions widespread in education. From Bedford-Stuyvesant to South Africa, the environment of the children's books used in educational initiatives were not simply locations where stories took place but an affirmation of a broader cultural heritage that had been ignored or denigrated in children's books before. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, as Assistant Secretary of Labor under President Lyndon B. Johnson, described in his report on Black families the influence of the "city of destruction" on people. Authors, on the other hand, used urban settings in ways to humanize and celebrate as well as focus on the hardships they faced.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Daniel Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report and Its Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 60.

## Family

In 1970, poet and children's writer June Jordan wrote 'Memo to Daniel Pretty Moynihan', a poem refuting the claims of Moynihan's report about the destructive nature of Black families and instead emphasising their strength. A Black feminist critique of the report, the poem begins "You done what you done, I do what I can", emphasising the hypocrisy of such criticisms given how Black families lives are dominated by institutional white supremacy.<sup>116</sup> The focus on a variety of family dynamics appears to be a direct challenge to the ideas within the Moynihan Report that posited that Black families contributed to antisocial behaviour and poor education. The report essentialised Black family life focusing on absent fathers and matriarchal dominance.<sup>117</sup> African American children's authors comprised part of a wider criticism of the assumptions and assertions of the Moynihan Report.

How African American children's literature addressed Black families changed in the 1960s. Whether it was challenging the concept of the nuclear family or how family impacts personal and cultural identity, children's literature written in the late 1960s and 1970s focused on a variety of family units and their strength. A variety of family dynamics are explored in African American children's literature, in particular, the role of elders, non-nuclear families and how African American families shape identity.

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<sup>116</sup> Valerie Kinloch, *June Jordan: Her Life and Letters* (London: Praeger, 2006), 51.

<sup>117</sup> Christopher M. Tinson, *Radical Intellect: Liberator Magazine and Black Activism in the 1960s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 109.

Family is a term used broadly here to include non-biologically related figures who are involved in the nurture of others and who help in forming children's identity. This is especially important as concepts like othermothering is an important element of African American family-living.<sup>118</sup> That family was an integral theme to African American children's books in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrates how authors adapted to contemporary sociological concerns and sought to use their literature to continually challenge stereotypes and racist assertions. Rudine Sims Bishop identifies family as a central theme in the children's books of the late 1960s and 1970s and her assertion is supported by authors such as Lucille Clifton who claimed all her work presented familial love, and Eloise Greenfield who sought to continually reflect the "strength of the Black family".<sup>119</sup> In terms of a Black educational philosophy, the focus on family after the publication of the Moynihan Report was an important way to challenge generalisations and oversimplifications of Black family life with positive portrayals of a range of family dynamics. Black educational philosophy was changing and adapting to circumstances and African American children's books in the wake of the Moynihan report had a renewed focus on the strength and love of Black families. The strength of family in the face of white supremacy is continually featured in African American children's literature from Malcom X's mother to a grandmother helping her grandson bury his dog.

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<sup>118</sup> Othermothering is defined as help offered to the children of blood mothers within the African American community.

<sup>119</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, "Profiles and Perspectives: Surveying the Hopescape," *Language Arts* 86, no. 3 (2009), 213.

Many African American children's authors focused on including different family dynamics to challenge the dominance of the traditional nuclear family in literature. Family is a source of strength for many of the protagonists in African American children's literature irrespective of the family dynamic- emphasising the complexity of African American families and the strength that emanates from them. For example, Kristin Hunter's story 'Beegee's Ghost' features a young boy Freddy who lives with his grandmother. His parents are never mentioned. The focal point of the story is the death of Freddy's dog, rather than his living situation which serves to normalise the family dynamic. After BeeGee the dog is killed by a passing car, Freddy's grandmother consoles him and instructs him to hold a funeral for his dog. The relationship between the grandmother and Freddy is very close as she acts as a protector, acting so tough after the incident that "the white man drove off in a hurry".<sup>120</sup> This representation of a strong but caring elder reiterates Sims Bishop's argument that African American children's books often celebrated the role of Black elders.<sup>121</sup>

In *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*, Louretta's father is absent. However, Louretta's mother poignantly explains to her the reason for his absence: he left because his education meant he could not get a job and the family would receive more welfare in his absence. In telling Louretta the story of her father, Hunter is able to address institutional racism and its pervasive effects on Black families. Black families were disproportionately affected by

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<sup>120</sup> Hunter, *Guests in the Promised Land*, 16.

<sup>121</sup> Bishop, *Free Within Ourselves*, 25.

Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) rules that “oddly encouraged, in a marginalized way, single-parent Black families” in a system that disempowered Black men through job discrimination.<sup>122</sup> Hunter later spoke of hoping to provide children with realism through her work including the “terrifying restrictions of society” and how Black people responded to these.<sup>123</sup> Hunter’s depiction of family does not challenge ideas like the Moynihan Report but complicate them revealing the difficult circumstances that government initiatives forced upon many Black families.

Other authors introduced wider family dynamics too. These were not always used to highlight injustice but to provide examples of family structures absent from the majority of children’s books but which many children would have been familiar with. In *A Quiet Place*, Rose Blue reveals that Matthew “had lived in a children’s shelter, where he shared a cottage with eleven other boys” before being adopted.<sup>124</sup> After this is mentioned it is not brought up again and he refers to his adoptive mother as ‘Mama’ . Matthew’s familial situation is not treated as a peculiarity but a normal part of life. In a report on behalf of the CIBC, the anonymous author emphasised the importance of presenting positive images of various family dynamics to children who did not experience ‘traditional’ family dynamics.<sup>125</sup> In *Stevie*, John Steptoe features a

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<sup>122</sup> Nancy E. Dowd, *In Defense of Single-Parent Families*, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 45-48.

<sup>123</sup> Claudia Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 84.

<sup>124</sup> Blue, *A Quiet Place*, 10.

<sup>125</sup> Anonymous Author, “Representations of Black Family Life in Picture Books Portraying Black Children”, undated, Box 10, Council on Interracial Books for Children: Director’s Files, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, New York, New York (hereafter cited as CIBC Director’s Files).

different family dynamic and uses it to reinforce the strength of these familial bonds. The narrator's mother in the story, in order to allow her friend to go to work, looks after her friend's child. Throughout the book, the narrator resents and then deeply misses his new brother revealing the important bonds forged. The othermothering of Stevie by the narrator's mother is a crucial element to the story as she nurtures the child, much to the annoyance of the narrator. Though Stevie is a source of frustration at first, the othermothering of him emphasises the community spirit in nurturing children and the fluid and changing care commitments often necessary in many African American households.<sup>126</sup>

The increased focus on different families in African American children's literature during the 1960s and 1970s often deeply linked to the enduring importance of the African American family in history. In many African American biographies and histories for children, the authors focused on the importance of family and the strength families exhibited. Judith Berry Griffin's biography of Nat Turner, prominently features his early family life as a child, emphasising the impact his family had made on Nat in his strike for freedom. His father is absent having run for freedom and in Griffin's story Nat "remembered that word – free" after hearing about his father. The focus on Turner's family life serves to make the life of Nat Turner recognisable to children, emphasising that he was not a mythic historical figure, but a child like them, with a family similar to theirs. Leo Carty's drawings further

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<sup>126</sup> Susan Chase and Mary Rogers, *Mothers and Children: Feminist Analyses and Personal Narratives* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 236.

emphasise the strength of family in slavery and features Nat's elderly grandmother as a primary source of nurture. The inclusion of such a tender image (Figure 9) in the story of this famous figure serves to humanise Turner and indicate how his family had been a crucial part of his life which emphasises to the reader the power of their families and communities.

Similarly, Eloise Greenfield's biography of Paul Robeson begins with the importance of his family. Greenfield attributes Paul Robeson's development to different members of his family. Robeson's fight against racial injustice begins by watching his older brother fight white students "for making insulting remarks about black people", while his singing developed as his father had him join his church's choir.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, Greenfield also emphasises the impact of his extended family on him when, after the death of his mother, the children were looked after by relatives: "these families didn't have much money, but they were glad to share their homes. They were full of love for the children".<sup>128</sup> The focus on familial love and care as a theme became especially prominent in the biographies of African American figures in the 1960s and 1970s, representing a significant shift from previous eras. Julia Mickenberg demonstrates that Black biographies in prior decades often focused on a civic education for children, connecting the subject to U.S. founding fathers' ideals. Shirley Graham's 1946 biography of Paul Robeson, for example, does not focus on his upbringing but features his childhood

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<sup>127</sup> Greenfield, *Paul Robeson*, np.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

speech about Patrick Henry.<sup>129</sup> Instead, stories like Griffin's *Nat Turner* and Greenfield's *Paul Robeson* emphasise the power of familial love in the face of struggle against white supremacy and other hardships.

This change in approach was representative of a more radical Black educational philosophy that focused on Black self-determination rather than earlier authors' emphasis on civic education. The role of families is often to signal the importance of love in the face of struggle against white violence and discrimination. Arnold Adoff's 1970 biography of Malcolm X encapsulates the focus on the strength of Black family in the face of white supremacy. The book begins before Malcolm X is born, with his mother Louisa and her three children huddling for protection under her as the Ku Klux Klan rides by. The illustration by John Wilson is on the first page and Louisa's face is illuminated by the Klan's torches as she protects her children (Figure 7). All the children appear to be gripping on to Louisa as she looks in trepidation out to the Klan members, creating a human shield between them and her children. By beginning the biography in such a dramatic way, Adoff emphasises the role of family as a source of protection and strength in the face of white supremacy.

The topic of family operates in many different ways in the African American children's literature of the 1960s and 1970s. Children who sought consciously or unconsciously for affirmation in reading could find a wide array of family dynamics in books presented as positive forces. From single

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<sup>129</sup> Julia Mickenberg, "Civil Rights, History, and the Left: Inventing the Juvenile Black Biography," *Melus* 27, no. 2 (2002): 71.

parents to being raised by grandparents or foster parents, many African American authors portrayed positive family models in their texts and illustrations to provide an alternative to the nuclear family common within children's literature. Moreover, within the wider context of the Moynihan Report in 1965, the topic within children's books should be viewed as a part of the wider backlash to the report as authors challenged its racialised assumptions. Furthermore, authors who wrote historical biographies emphasised the role of the African American family in helping the lives of famous and exceptional individuals. Rudine Sims Bishop's metaphor of mirrors and windows in her work *Shadow and Substance: Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children's Fiction* claims that African American children's literature reflects the lives of many Black children and offers a window for others to gain greater understanding. A range of children's books reflected African American children's lives and also opened-up windows to ideas and topics Black children had been denied. Children could view Robeson or Turner as a child and relate to historical figures in ways they had not before. African American children's literature gave children a clearer reflection of their lives and also gave them an opportunity to examine topics and themes not available in children's trade or textbooks.

## **History**

In his 1968 book *Chronicles of Negro Protest: Documenting the History of Black Power*, Bradford Chambers the director of CIBC, included an introduction to the documents that entreated to the reader: "as parents and

teachers, we have not been honest with our youth. We have sought to avoid the implications of our history by avoiding the facts of our history”.<sup>130</sup> Authors, like Chambers, sought to use children’s literature to educate children on Black history. Political philosopher Charles Mills asserts that there is a long tradition of black opposition to the ‘whitewashing’ of history and this dissertation asserts that African American children’s literature should also be considered a part of this “intellectual political struggle against the system of global white supremacy”.<sup>131</sup> While Black history had been important to African American children’s literature since its inception, the Black radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s permeated these books. Authors like Chambers used books to show children that “the explosive cry of ‘Black Power’ was not a new phenomenon”.<sup>132</sup> Lucille Clifton and Deloris Holt wrote books that emphasized Black history and achievements and some of the figures chosen signalled a more radical view of Black history. Others, however, like Julius Lester and Judith Griffin, explored other elements of Black history, focusing on the courage and humanity in the fight for Black liberation. African American children’s authors changed the way that Black history was written about, but they also emphasised the continuity of the struggle against racist power structures in U.S. history.

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<sup>130</sup> Bradford Chambers, *Chronicles of Negro Protest: A Background Book for Young People Documenting* (New York: Parents' Magazine Press, 1968), 9.

<sup>131</sup> Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 114.

<sup>132</sup> Chambers, *Chronicles of Negro Protest*, book inlay.

In writing about Black history, Julius Lester reflected that writing “about the past is my way of telling stories about the present because the past is not something completed and forever pinioned to memory”.<sup>133</sup> Lester’s point is important in understanding how Black history was written about in the 1960s and 1970s; African American children’s literature had always included Black history but the tone and approach differed in each era.

Authors invoked and connected Black history to contemporary radical politics. Arnold Adoff edited *Black on Black*, a history book of important documents in Black history from Frederick Douglass to Amiri Baraka and Stokely Carmichael that was recommended to New York public schools.<sup>134</sup> Janet Harris and Julius Hobson co-wrote *Black Pride: A People’s Struggle* (1969) and were subsequently invited to present their work and answer children’s questions in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district, talking with children about Black history. In their book Harris and Hobson spoke of the late 1960s and 1970s as “the most militant generation of American black people...calling for an account of their achievements in the past”.<sup>135</sup> Hobson and Harris connected contemporary Black radicalism with Black history and underscored the pedagogical need for examining the past. In describing, the “most militant generation”, Hobson and Harris signalled that their readers were the latest iteration of a much longer history of Black history. *Black Pride* is a more advanced book for older children.

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<sup>133</sup> Julius Lester, *On Writing for Children*, 44.

<sup>134</sup> Arnold Adoff ed., *Black on Black* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

<sup>135</sup> Janet Harris and Julius Hobson, *Black Pride: A People’s Struggle* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969), 150.

Other authors created works for younger children similarly focused on the connections between more contemporary radical politics and a more distant Black history. For example, Deloris Holt adapted her lessons on Black history as a schoolteacher into *The ABC's of Black History*, an alphabet book of Black achievements and the struggle for freedom that featured figures from Benjamin Banneker up to Malcolm X.<sup>136</sup> For children reading these works, or being spoken to in school, the connections between the contemporary Black freedom struggle was linked to the longer struggle for freedom, emphasising the current importance of Black self-determination.

Historical children's books not connected to contemporary politics served a different purpose. Rudine Sims Bishop argues that many historical works for children focused on "humanizing enslaved Blacks and destigmatizing slave ancestry", an important part of a Black educational philosophy.<sup>137</sup> Concerned with the self-esteem of Black children and the effects of racist books for children, books like Lester's *To Be a Slave* provided Black children an insight into the lives, feelings and cultures of enslaved people in an effort to correct the tropes often found within other works on slavery that depicted slaves as passive and happy. Tom Feelings, the book's illustrator, felt that exposing the atrocities of slavery to children was an important step in creating "well-rounded, compassionate human beings" empathetic to the suffering of others. Lester and Feelings intended

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<sup>136</sup> Deloris Holt, *The ABC's of Black History* (Los Angeles: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1972), np.

<sup>137</sup> Bishop, *Free within Ourselves*, 251.

for the material to strengthen children's spirits and prepare them for the cruelty of racism and its damaging effects - an aim that was part of a wider Black educational philosophy.<sup>138</sup> Paula Connolly, describes the Black Power Era as a "renaissance" of literature about slavery that focused on Black characters rather than white abolitionists or 'Uncle Toms'".<sup>139</sup> In this "renaissance", Julius Lester was a pioneering figure as his book preceded many others and gave children the opportunity to read about how slavery really occurred. His work combatted the historical material available in school that misrepresented slavery as an institution that was often benign and even beneficial to enslaved people.<sup>140</sup> Lester and Feelings' use of enslaved peoples' testimony is a continued effort within Black educational philosophy from earlier figures like Carter G. Woodson who sought to provide a Black-centric history that was not mediated through a white lens.

Don Miller's illustration of the Middle Passage in Clifton's *The Black BC's* (Figure 8) is another example of authors portrayed the horrors of slavery to children. The understanding of African American childhood as not a time of innocence is crucial in understanding how African American authors and illustrators portrayed slavery – they did not attempt to preserve some idea of childhood innocence but understood the inherent political and social responsibilities of depicting slavery in children's books. Black educational philosophy of the 1960s and 1970s continued to emphasise the importance

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<sup>138</sup> Tom Feelings 'Introduction' in Julius Lester, *To Be a Slave* (New York: Puffin Books, 1968; Reprinted, 1998), 10.

<sup>139</sup> Lester, *To Be a Slave*, 174.

<sup>140</sup> LaGarrett King, "A Narrative to the Colored Children in America: Lelia Amos Pendleton, African American History Textbooks, and Challenging Personhood" *The Journal of Negro Education* 84, no. 4 (2015): 525-527.

of Black history but the difference from earlier children's literature was the increased focus on the human suffering.

Miller's black and white painting of the Middle Passage immediately situates the viewer onto the slave ship with the enslaved people though on the top deck. The proximity of the enslaved people to the viewer emphasises the emotional toll on their faces as well as the crowded conditions. One enslaved man sits with his hands covering his face emphasising the despair of being on such a ship. Having such detailed images of faces reinforces the personhood of Africans and African Americans, determined to visualise the humanity of every individual incarcerated. However, the detailed imagery of the middle passage was something new to African American children's literature as authors challenged the sanitised portrayals of slavery in public schools. Furthermore, violence and death are also integral to the image. One enslaved man is jumping to his death over the side reiterating Clifton's words "what peace they knew the waters gave". This visual accompaniment to Clifton's words enables the reader to grasp the full meaning of the situation even if their reading is not at a high level. Central to the image is the violence of the white crew whipping one of the captives, making the brutality of white supremacy clear to any child looking at the image.

Violence was also highlighted as a necessary force in the fight for freedom. Griffin's biography of Nat Turner portrays violence as a necessity and Griffin does not overlook the violence. Instead, she creates dramatic tension for the child reader with a series of short sentences such as "The

men trembled there on the edge of freedom- or death”.<sup>141</sup> Griffin builds up anticipation for the rebellion, accompanied by Leo Carty’s illustration which depicts armed enslaved people deep in conversation. Written in 1970 when images of armed Black Panthers were emblazoned across newspapers and TV, this connection to contemporary politics will not have bypassed child readers. These comparisons helped children compare their struggles against white supremacy to historical struggles, helping children relate more directly to their history.

Black history provided children with examples of Black achievement and helped bolster Black pride by challenging racist narratives and emphasising the multifaceted history of African Americans. Virginia Hamilton used African heritage and African American history because she discovered “what power there can be in black pride”.<sup>142</sup> Certain African American children’s authors emphasised the strong Black radical tradition and continual opposition to white dominance through the use of writing Black history in children’s books. Lester, Griffin, and Clifton’s are among authors whose work forged connections between their present and the past in an effort to demonstrate to children the ongoing need to resist white supremacy.

### **Black is Beautiful**

In 1972, George Nesbitt argued that “the teaching of black pride is of

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<sup>141</sup> Griffin, *Nat Turner*, 44.

<sup>142</sup> Virginia Hamilton, “ Nonwhite Literature as American Literature: A Proposal for Cullture Democracy” in *Speeches, Essays, and Conversations*, ed. Arnold Adoff and Kay Cook (New York: The Blue Sky Press, 2010), 38.

greatest importance to the very young” and families, the church and schools had a responsibility to prepare children to be “black and proud in a white-dominated society”.<sup>143</sup> Nesbitt acknowledged in his writing that focusing on Black beauty in education was not a new phenomenon. Jessie Faucet and W.E.B. Du Bois emphasised Black beauty in *The Brownies Book* as the magazine sought to help children “realize that being ‘colored’ is a normal, beautiful thing”.<sup>144</sup> The phrase ‘Black is beautiful’ became a mantra after 1966 when Robin Gregory was the first Howard University homecoming queen with a natural hairdo.<sup>145</sup> Physical appearance became a crucial mode of expression of a cultural identity for many Black Power advocates and African Americans who adopted certain trends to “express affiliation with positions of black militancy”.<sup>146</sup> Many children’s book authors and illustrators used their works to encourage “children to love themselves” and included focus on Black beauty.<sup>147</sup> The aims of ‘Black is Beautiful’ had a long history in African American education and children’s literature, but the emphasis in the 1960s and 1970s was on challenging contemporary beauty standards. The Black Power era of African American children’s books focused more on natural hair and dress as aspects of beauty than previous eras. There is a shift from Black being a “normal, beautiful” thing to Blackness being

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<sup>143</sup> George B. Nesbitt, "Time and Place for Teaching Black Pride." *The Journal of Negro Education* 41, no. 4 (1972), 308.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>145</sup> Paul C. Taylor, *Black Is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (Hoboken: Hoboken: Wiley, 2016), 113.

<sup>146</sup> Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain't I A Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 106.

<sup>147</sup> Bishop, "Profiles and Perspectives", 214.

exceptionally beautiful and encouraging children to embrace natural looks as a way to encourage pride in Blackness.

In *The Black BC's*, Clifton uses N for natural as she writes “people today are wearing their hair in natural styles, conscious and proud of the beauty of themselves”.<sup>148</sup> Pride in being Black, and pride in the beauty of Blackness became a recurrent theme across different genres of African American children’s books. Dianne Johnson asserts that the term ‘Black is Beautiful’ was integral to the “very foundation” of African American children’s literature and certainly, authors and illustrators focused on this idea to help children learn the “many meanings and implications of ‘blackness’”.<sup>149</sup>

In the ‘all white world of children’s books’, the inclusion of Black characters was a psychologically vital part of children’s books. Bradford Chambers’ *Chronicles of Negro Protest* features Robert Browne’s essay ‘The Case for Black Separatism’ which argues for the inclusion of positive images in books and other media because of “the untold agony of raising black, kinky-haired children in a society where the standard of beauty is a milk-white skin and long, straight hair”.<sup>150</sup> A positive self-image was integral to Black educational philosophy and also a key feature of many Black Power arguments. Simple visual representations of Black beauty challenged the litany of misrepresentations and absences in children’s books of Black characters. As Browne argues in his essay, the inclusion of positive Black

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<sup>148</sup> Clifton, *The Black BC's*, 26-27.

<sup>149</sup> Dianne Johnson, “I See Me in the Book!: Visual Literacy and African- American Children's Literature.” *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1990): 13.

<sup>150</sup> Robert Browne, “The Case for Black Separatism’ in Chambers, *Chronicles of Negro Protest: A Background Book for Young People Documenting*, 291.

imagery in children's literature emphasises the beauty of Blackness through increased visibility. This prominence of Black imagery challenged the standard imagery available to children.

The power of Black characters being visible in children's literature is an important source of fostering a positive self-esteem. In *A Quiet Place*, Rose Blue encapsulates the importance of children seeing characters that looked like them. When the young Matthew visits the Bookmobile, he examines the shelves and is immediately drawn to one book because the front cover featured a Black character. On the cover "the boy had brown skin just like Matthew's and he looked about the same age. Matthew thought it would be nice to read a book about a boy who looked so much like himself".<sup>151</sup> Blue's understated language reflects Matthew's shyness, but the illustrations emphasise the power of this moment on Matthew. Tom Feelings' depicts Matthew staring down at the book with a smile on his face (Figure 10). The boy on the cover stands out as the only book with any detail on it, meaning that the reader is similarly drawn to the image as Matthew. Throughout *A Quiet Place*, Blue subtly comments on the power of imagery in books as Matthew is absorbed in a book's cover, emphasising the need for better representation. Her emphasis on visual representation had a lot in common with the aims and efforts of earlier children's literature that also emphasised fostering a positive self-image by including well-illustrated Black characters.

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<sup>151</sup> Blue, *A Quiet Place*, 54.

Rather than focus on the importance of visuals in books other authors' works more clearly emphasised the beauty of Blackness. Throughout *Black Fairy Tales*, Terry Berger's descriptions of characters emphasise their beauty and the magnificence of their clothes. In 'The Serpent's Bride', a "more lovely sight" cannot be imagined than Timba in her wedding outfit of brightly coloured cloth and her jewellery of copper and beads.<sup>152</sup> When the serpent king reveals his human form, "his handsome appearance left Timba speechless" as leopard skins hang off his "broad black shoulders".<sup>153</sup> Berger's descriptions emphasise beauty and the magnificence of African clothing and jewellery constituting another form of generating pride in African heritage. The underpinning ideology associated with 'Black is Beautiful' fostered an understanding of Blackness that rejected dehumanising and oppressive imagery and authors, such as Terry Berger, used a range of stories to accentuate the beauty in Blackness.<sup>154</sup> The African American children's books of this period echoed the rhetoric and imagery of this movement as "dark skin, tightly curled hair, and African facial features" became an expression of self-love as well as a visual political tool of non-conformity to white-imposed standards.<sup>155</sup> The 'Black is Beautiful' idea sought to "embrace and elevate" all things Black. Beauty one aspect in which

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<sup>152</sup> Terry Berger, "Black Fairy Tales", (Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc., 1969, .24.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>154</sup> Lisa R. Merriweather, "Black is Beautiful" in *Black Power Encyclopedia: From 'Black Is Beautiful' to Urban Uprising* eds., Akinyele Umoja, Karin Stanford, and Jasmin Young (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2018), 121.

<sup>155</sup> Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?*, 23.

authors could embrace African cultural traditions such as dress and jewellery.<sup>156</sup>

“Black is Beautiful” was an assertion of Black pride and, in terms of an educational philosophy, it was about fostering Black self-esteem in children and counteracting negative depictions of Blackness. Rose Blue’s book *Black, Black, Beautiful Black* was aimed at a younger reader than Berger’s, but the book also directed its readers or audience to connect beauty with Blackness. Blue dedicates the book to all her prekindergarten students in P.S. 44, implying that the book came about in reaction to the wants and needs of her class. On each page the narrator identifies something black and beautiful in her day which culminates in the narrator’s image being reflected in water as she realizes that “she was beautiful” too.<sup>157</sup> Emmett Wigglesworth, the illustrator for the book, taught art to education groups and the Harlem Parents association underscoring how involved authors and illustrators were with educational issues. Black educational philosophy was not just about educators using books but parents, authors, illustrators and others working as a community to improve education. The final image in *Black, Black, Beautiful Black* ensures the child reader or audience sees the beauty in Blackness. The book builds up to this reveal of the character’s face and her recognition of her own beauty (Figure 1). Part of a wider rhetoric of Black empowerment, this focus on beauty for children emphasised the psychological value of children’s books and the educational value images of

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<sup>156</sup> Merriweather, “Black is Beautiful”, 110.

<sup>157</sup> Rose Blue, “Black, Black, Beautiful Black,” (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1969), 42.

Black beauty had within a wider white supremacist education. It challenged white beauty standards and also attended to the child readers' self-worth and self-perception.

Other works for children emphasised the beauty of Blackness but also, as scholar Lisa Merriweather argues, deconstructed institutionalised discrimination and challenged internalized racism.<sup>158</sup> Children's books appropriated the rhetoric of 'Black is Beautiful' and engaged with contemporary Black Power politics. Authors, such as Nikki Giovanni, sought to entertain children and also boost their self-esteem by celebrating the power of Blackness. In the poem 'beautiful black men' written in 1968, Giovanni emphasises the beauty of Afros, dashikis and many other elements of appearance popular at the time. Giovanni evokes cultural pride in "beautiful black men with outasight afros" which was important because the Afro had become an important symbol of Black consciousness.<sup>159</sup> The inclusion of natural hairstyles in children's literature reflected a wider Black Power ideology that challenged dominant white values being forced upon children. The CIBC recommended Eloise Greenfield's *Honey I Love You and Other Love Poems* to demonstrate to children "the beauty of Black hair", which suggests that the ideology reflected in such children's literature became a springboard for discussions with children. The educational potential within African American children's literature was not limited to the content of the books but could spark discussion and activities. Images of

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<sup>158</sup> Lisa Merriweather, "Black is Beautiful", 111.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

natural hairstyles drawn by Diane and Leo Dillon fill Greenfield's book and dominate many of the pages. Similarly, Camille Yarborough's 1979 book *Cornrows* focused on traditional and natural hairstyles as a way of fostering positive self-images in African American children. The use of beauty and hair in African American children's books ranged from encouraging self-esteem and positive images to challenging racist beauty standards to encouraging Black consciousness.

Many African American children's authors reflected and propagated the 'Black is Beautiful' within their books. A self-published children's author, Brother Diggs, used his small pamphlet 'Black children: Black and Beautiful' to attempt "to inspire all Black children to learn a complete knowledge of themselves".<sup>160</sup> Diggs' work reflects a more radical cadre of work for children that sought to focus on Beauty as a form of liberation. However, more well-known authors like Greenfield, Giovanni and Clifton similarly used beauty as a source of promoting positive self-esteem and a way to teach Black children to love themselves. They all contributed to a Black educational philosophy that sought to help Black children survive and become liberated from white oppression. Counteracting negative imagery was an integral of Black educational philosophy and by focusing on the beauty of Black children and Black aesthetics, authors could help expose children to an array of ideas about beauty.

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<sup>160</sup> Alfred Diggs, "Black Children Black and Beautiful," (Cotsen Children's Library, Princeton University, 1969), np.

## **Black Power**

Many African American children's writers reflected their contemporary political climate in their works. Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing into the 1970s contemporary Black politics became explicitly referenced within children's literature. Rudine Sims Bishop categorised these politically mindful books as 'culturally conscious' and the references and allusions to Black Power should be understood as part of radical Black education many Black Power proponents supported. Dora Pantell and Edwin Greenidge in their book for children argued for Black Power as part of an "historic march" for racial justice, but what was new in children's books was an emphasis on radical politics.<sup>161</sup> The crossover of authors and illustrators with Black Power politics meant that Black Power became a common theme in African American children's literature and demonstrated how entwined politics, children's literature, and education had become. There was a more direct correlation between African American children's books and politics than in previous eras. In part, this is because a Black educational philosophy appealed to writers, illustrators as well as political activists. This idea drew together the world of children's writers and activists in new ways.

Julius Lester became a children's writer after his editor for *Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama* (1969), an early history and interpretation of Black Power, suggested his simple writing style would work well for children's literature. His subsequent work for children directly addressed Black Power by weaving his politics into his renderings of

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<sup>161</sup> Pantell and Greenidge, *If Not Now, When?*, 2.

folktales and fables such as his version of the Stagolee story. Lester claimed that a crucial tactic of Black Power was “one of subversion” and his *Black Folktales* subverted old folktales to reflect the radical Black politics he was involved in.<sup>162</sup> In his foreword to *Black Folktales*, Lester informs his reader that the stories are not told “as they were a hundred years ago, but as I tell them now”.<sup>163</sup> Lester was not just reflecting the political climate but African American children’s literature was an important vehicle because he claimed that he only told them “now because they have meaning now”, underscoring how closely tied Black Power and children’s literature was for him.<sup>164</sup>

Illustrators Tom Feelings and Leo Carty contributed to *Liberator* magazine, a New York-based publication that was a hub of Black activism in the 1960s and 1970s that focused on “economic justice and political empowerment”.<sup>165</sup> Carty’s illustrations in particular satirised anyone who did not share “*Liberator’s* brand of radicalism” which included politicians and civil rights leaders.<sup>166</sup> As well as being part of this radical periodical and illustrating children’s books both Feelings and Carty also engaged with children’s education. For example, Leo Carty as well as illustrating for *Liberator* and various children’s books like *Nat Turner* spoke to children in New York City public schools about his work, demonstrating how interconnected these worlds were. Katherine Capshaw, a specialist in African

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<sup>162</sup> Julius Lester, *Look Out Whitey! Black Power’s Gon’ Get Your Mama!* (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 141.

<sup>163</sup> Lester, *Black Folktales*, ix.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Tinson, *Radical Intellect*, 2.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

American childhood history, states that during the Black Arts Movement, for many “black childhood embodied both a nationalist ideal and its incomplete fruition” so the connections between children’s literature and radical politics was a natural union.<sup>167</sup>

In her collection of poems for young readers, Nikki Giovanni included the poem ‘black power (for all the beautiful black panthers east)’ that features the “tremendous growl from out of nowhere” of the Black panther, a reference to the Black Panthers sudden rise that would have been obvious to child readers.<sup>168</sup> Giovanni’s poem portrays Black Power as a new radical phenomenon in contrast to the long view of Black Power suggested by Bradford Chambers and Edwin Greenidge, reflecting wider divisions over Black Power in history. The accompanying image by George Ford (Figure 11) features young children in the foreground, one wearing a beret like the Black Panther Party, emphasising children’s position in Black Power groups as crucial allies rather than passive beings. With a menacing white policeman standing behind the children, Ford’s illustration raises the spectre of police brutality that children faced. Featured behind this scene is a giant panther, teeth-bared overlooking the policeman alluding to the policing of the police and protecting Black communities and Black children from white racist violence. In her poem ‘2<sup>nd</sup> rapp’ Nikki Giovanni praises H. Rap Brown, the chairman of SNCC and a Black Power activist, for enlightening people with his political philosophy as Giovanni claims “look how well we see since he

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<sup>167</sup> Capshaw, "Civil Rights Childhood", 155.

<sup>168</sup> Giovanni, *Ego-Tripping*, 27.

came".<sup>169</sup> The poem continues emphasising the impact of Brown as he inspired Black women to "turn little him onto the world", reiterating how mothers played a role in educating African American children in Black Power as a vanguard for the future.<sup>170</sup>

Julius Lester featured H. Rap Brown in his dedication in *Black Folktales*, underlining the connection between Black Power politics and African American children's literature. Furthermore, in the retelling of the story of Stagolee in *Black Folktales*, Lester explicitly invokes Black Power and associates it with the bold, unremitting character of Stagolee. After Stagolee travels to Hell, because Heaven is too white, he is welcomed by a "big BLACK POWER sign on the gate" and he quickly usurps the position of the Devil. Lester subverts negative white stereotypes as Stagolee leads the barbecue-cooking, music playing Hell populated by all black people not deemed "nice, respectable people" and "the hip" white population, an overt criticism of black efforts to integrate and try to appeal to whites.<sup>171</sup> Lester plays upon how white critics perceived and reported on Black Power and aligns it with the anti-hero Stagolee.

Similarly, in *Black Folktales* Lester co-opts the Uncle Tom stereotype in a Black Power context as he emphasises racial divisions and fractures among the African American population. He wrote: "If the people are talking about black power, it's the house nigger who runs down to the white folks". Lester's inflammatory rhetoric was in keeping with his earlier Black Power

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Lester, *Black Folktales*, 133-134.

writings and also reflects how Malcolm X used this same analogy. Like the Black Power era, not all children's literature was unified in its political aims. Lester's work was more closely aligned with the radical rhetoric of the Black Arts Movement as it was not just racist whites who were vilified but any person who did not share the same radical and revolutionary vision. Lester's invocation of Black Power suggests to the reader that those who embrace the ideology of Black Power are those free from the oppression of whites. Stagolee has self-determination and power in Hell, whereas those in Heaven have to adhere to white standards of respectability and society.

By contrast, Kristin Hunter embraces elements of Black Power such as Black pride, the importance of cultural heritage and self-determination in her work but rejects other aspects of it. Her work critiques discrimination within Black Power circles. In *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*, Louretta becomes angry with having to sit separately from the men at 'the movement' meeting. Furthermore, the character of Fess, who buys into 'the movement', is a subtle criticism of Black Power activism and how it operates because he tells Louretta that while women have a place in the movement "they can't be the leaders".<sup>172</sup> After the murder of their friend Jethro by the police, Fess' cynical politicism becomes apparent as he tried to explain to Louretta that "Jethro alive ain't no use to us. But Jethro *dead* can help us wake up this whole town".<sup>173</sup> Kristen Hunter's work emphasises Black pride and the

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<sup>172</sup> Hunter, *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*, 160.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

strength of the community but throughout she also portrays ‘the movement’ as a political movement lacking in humanity.

Hunter’s work, unlike Lester’s writing, examines the multiplicities of the Black experience and emphasises the array of lives and cultural experiences that are lost in more binary Black/White perceptions of life. For example, in ‘Two’s Enough of a Crowd’, Maurice meets Amy, who like him, feels alienated in the Black community because of their love of classical music and Chaucer, and their mutual hatred of dancing. Maurice comments that after meeting this girl he felt “free. Like it was 1865, and I’d just kicked off my chains. The ones put on me by my own people”, revealing how restricted Maurice feels by the social pressure to enjoy certain things and act a certain way.<sup>174</sup> Hunter uses the meeting of Maurice and Amy to illustrate the multiplicity of Black lives even amidst the Black Power era that stresses the power of shared African American culture and heritage. Hunter’s work is rare in its challenges to contemporary Black politics. However, her work does exemplify how, during the Black Power Era, children’s literature reflected the divisions and fissure within wider society. In *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou* and *Guests in the Promised Land*, Hunter portrays positive aspects of Black Power such as pride and self-determination but also criticises its confining and limiting nature. The children have agency to engage with politics and are given scope to form their own political, social, and cultural views.

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<sup>174</sup> Hunter, *Guests in the Promised Land*, 67.

Black Power was explicitly referenced by some authors and echoed by others, but also in some case directly critiqued too. Children's literature was not a propaganda tool of Black Power activists, but authors shared some sensibilities and rejected others. As the media prominently featured the Black Panther Party and Black Power dominated political discourse, children could not avoid it. African American children's authors understood the importance of addressing Black Power for African American children and provide an education that offered an alternative to what was being provided to children in schools and in the media. Children were not shielded from wider politics but given a voice whether it was Lou rejecting the misogyny of the movement or Nikki Giovanni emphasising the necessity of children to Black Power.

### **Conclusion**

During the Black Power Era, childhood was an important focus for African American children's authors in trying to establish positive Black identities. From challenging depictions of Black cultural environments to Black family structures, children's books provided African American children with an alternative to the normalised racism within New York City public schools. Children's literature had a long history of use within a Black educational philosophy. African American children's literature served to help children's self-esteem, challenge stereotypes and foster Black pride.

Underpinning African American children's literature was a Black educational philosophy. Authors used their works to promote community, reinforce Black pride and help children counter white supremacy. Whether it was through Black cultural environments, Black history or folktales, the

books used in educational initiatives sought to help African American children. Children's writer Sharon Bell Mathis claimed that "I write to salute the strength in Black children and to say to them, 'Stay strong, stay Black and stay alive'".<sup>175</sup> Mathis, and many authors, believed that Black children of the late 1960s and 1970s could challenge and defy white supremacy. The African American children's literature used in educational initiatives was not didactic and moralising on how to live, but a collaboration with the children involved. Through language, orality, and topics like Black history African American children's authors and illustrators engaged with children and celebrated their worlds.

These themes had been important for decades and writers such as Lester, Steptoe, Greenfield, and Mathis reshaped and established a new era of children's books that had built upon efforts for children dating back to the late nineteenth century. The educational potential of children's books was also refashioned as teachers and librarians called for these children's books to be used in schools, not just in the libraries but as part of lessons. Authors and illustrators were invited to centres of Black Power educational activism, like the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school in New York, to provide Black children with books that were relevant to them.<sup>176</sup> The themes and educational impulses of Black Power era African American children's literature were distinctive re-renderings of decades of efforts for Black children. Jennifer, a

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<sup>175</sup> James Roginski, "Sharon Bell Mathis" in *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, ed. D.L. Kirkpatrick, (London: The Macmillan Press, 1978), 844.

<sup>176</sup> William F. Koch to Brad Chambers, December 2, 1969, Letter, Box 4, Folder '1968 Correspondence', CIBC Director's Files.

young girl from Brooklyn wrote to John Steptoe in 1973 saying that she “liked reading about Black children like me”.<sup>177</sup> Whilst the Black Power era produced books that were more radical, the words of Jennifer indicate how Black children’s literature has always been about empowering as well as about providing books children wanted to read. Though throughout the eras the treatment of the Black experience and Black politics has differed, underpinning this all is a desire for children’s books to provide pride, happiness and a desire for better education for Black children.

How these books were used to promote a Black educational philosophy is best seen in New York City. The CIBC based in New York City became a central body in the use of African American children’s books in schools. New York City underwent significant changes to public education in the 1960s and 1970s and the proximity of the CIBC and many prominent authors meant that children’s literature and education intertwined in the city. Rose Blue was a teacher in Bedford-Stuyvesant, John Steptoe lived in Harlem, Walter Dean Myers and Tom Feelings both had children who attended public schools in Brooklyn. When crises began unfolding in New York City schools over desegregation and Community Control, authors worked with the CIBC, educators, and parents to promote a Black educational philosophy in which children’s literature played a significant role. Building upon a long history of Black educational philosophy and the power of African American children’s literature, events in New York city unfolded in

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<sup>177</sup> Jennifer McMeans to John Steptoe, December 14, 1973, Letter, Box 2, Folder ‘Youth fanmail’, John Steptoe Papers, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, New York, New York.

the Black Power Era. African American children's literature had again become a vital tool in providing an education to Black children. The educational impact of African American children's books extended beyond the contents of the books. Authors, illustrators, teachers, parents and children directed these children's books for pedagogical purposes. From reading groups, lessons, to storytelling on the streets, African American children's books from 1967 to 1979 furthered a Black educational philosophy.

# BLACK EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY IN PRACTICE, 1965-1979

## CHAPTER 3:

### ‘IT’S THE SCHOOLS THAT FAIL THE CHILDREN!’ CHILDREN’S BOOKS IN THE EDUCATIONAL UPHEAVAL OF NEW YORK CITY

For decades, New York City had been the shining city on the hill for education. It had been a pioneering force in schooling within the U.S. in terms of programmes and staff; educators across the country viewed New York teachers with “reverential awe”.<sup>1</sup> In her report on behalf of the National Commission on Urban Problems, Mary Herrick contended that New York schooling, contrary to widespread belief, had never actually given equal opportunity to all children.<sup>2</sup> During the 1960s, desegregation laid bare many issues within New York City public schooling including a curriculum that marginalised and dehumanised Black people. Parents, educators, and political activists sought greater oversight of local schools to provide an opportunity to put into practice a Black educational philosophy. Babette Edwards, head of the Harlem Parents Union, argued that the public schooling authority’s record in “teaching Black children” was “nothing short of

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<sup>1</sup> Mario Fantini, Marilyn Gittell, and Richard Magat, *Community Control and the Urban School* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 100.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Herrick, ‘The Rise of Community Schools in Urban Public Education’ in *Local Community Structure and Civic Participation*, National Commission on Urban Problems, 1969. Retrieved from [https://archive.org/stream/ERIC\\_ED040220#page/n1](https://archive.org/stream/ERIC_ED040220#page/n1). (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> July 2018).

disgraceful” and that “an informed parent body” should implement changes.<sup>3</sup>

Edwards’ organisation found allies and like-minded thinkers across New York City as teachers, librarians, Black Power activists and many others sought to introduce an education for Black children instilled with a Black education philosophy. This vision for education was community orientated with a curriculum that was culturally relevant to the children.<sup>4</sup>

As individuals and organisations fought for better education, children’s books and their use in schools became a key issue in debates about desegregation, decentralisation, and Community Control. Historian Robert Self notes that Black liberation struggles “nurtured multiple strategies and ideologies of resistance, accommodation, and liberation”.<sup>5</sup> Self argues to expand geographical scope in order to uncover a fuller picture of African American political organizing. This chapter, however, seeks to expand the scope of forms of resistance and to view the role of children’s literature as one of these forms of liberation and defiance against a white supremacist education. Within the wider political debates over these educational upheavals children’s books occupied an important place as they became symbolic of the wider ideological struggles in education that, among many, sought to focus on Black pride, Black history and give children a visible, and

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<sup>3</sup> Babette Edwards, “A Harlem Parents Union”, Box 15, Folder ‘drafts and memorandums’, Babette Edwards Education Reform in Harlem collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library, New York, New York.

(hereafter cited as Babette Edwards Papers).

<sup>4</sup> ‘An agenda for the curriculum committee’ Box 3, Folder ‘community control management’, Babette Edwards papers.

<sup>5</sup> Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race, Power, and the Struggle for the Postwar City in California* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 11.

positive, Black presence in school materials. The changing landscape of education for Black children in New York City is an important focus for this dissertation as it provides insights into a developing Black educational philosophy and eventually how children's books occupied a significant space within this framework. In New York City parents, Black Power activists, educators and authors overlapped and worked together. As educational crises mounted in the city these groups connected and collaborated for a better education for their children.

The educational upheavals, desegregation and community control, in New York City have been well documented in a rich historiography.<sup>6</sup> Much of this has focused on the personnel changes and political manoeuvrings rather than the educational philosophy that drove a lot of these changes. Children's literature expert Dianne Johnson rightly asserts that children's books are not simply "innocent yarns" but are important educational tools that are capable of transmitting histories, cultures, and ideologies.<sup>7</sup> The increased accessibility of children's books due to funding from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA); the huge increase in creation of Black-authored and illustrated children's books; and the versatility between genres meant that children's books became an increasingly important source within education. African American children's books covered a wide range of topics

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<sup>6</sup> See: Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: A History of the New York Public Schools* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Dianne Johnson, *Telling Tales: The Pedagogy and Promise of African American Literature for Youth* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990), 11.

like family, Black Power, Black History in various formats and activists sought to use this broad array of books to improve education.

Robert Campbell, a white teacher in New York City in the late 1960s, claimed that a shift in perception occurred within schools. Members of the community no longer asked “why can’t the children *learn*” but instead of blaming the children, people started to question “why can’t the teachers *teach*?”<sup>8</sup>

Educators, Black Power activists, parents and students criticised how New York public schools educated African American children. Desegregation and Community Control in New York City education illuminated issues within public schools and one common criticism was the lack of appropriate reading materials children could access.

### **The Great Society: A Windfall for Children’s Literature**

In 1965, the advent of the ESEA was an unprecedented involvement of the federal government in public education as \$1 billion was earmarked for the act. Title I became a crucial part of the act as it was designed to improve the education for children in low-income areas.<sup>9</sup> As libraries in these areas had been long-underfunded many projects under Title I focused on the purchase of children’s books and they became an important resource in schools during this period. Rather than focus on textbooks, educational campaigners saw potential in trade books in providing a more suitable education. Black Power activists and Black nationalists lauded these books’ educational value, but

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Campbell, *The Life and Death of a Great Experiment in Ghetto Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), 16.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Health, Education & Welfare, “History of Title I ESEA”, Office of Education (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 7.

an increasing number of people not directly associated with this activism also praised these books for their potential to help local communities' children. Children's books had long associations with Black educational drives to provide an education that engaged young Black children. This featured material that was relevant and also infused with a strong ideology of Black pride, whether this was via Black history, folklore or other genres.

The ESEA gave a great degree of control to local communities over the educational materials that librarians, and teachers, could purchase. Grant applications stated that under Title I children should be given access to "innovative programs" and "interesting content matter".<sup>10</sup> The grants sought to engage children in new ways and with new materials. While some money was spent on audio-visual materials and other media, a crucial medium for reaching Black children became the new wave of Black-authored children's books. In 1966 only 3.4 percent of materials purchased under Title I were textbooks, demonstrating that other instructional materials, such as trade books, had become popular educational tools.<sup>11</sup> The provisions under ESEA transformed children's book publishing. An extra \$400 million a year was made available specifically for the purchase of books for schools.<sup>12</sup> Unlike previous efforts at reforming books in schools, this act focused on disadvantaged children rather than "gifted" children ( a coded term that

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Health, Education & Welfare, 'School Libraries in the United States' *Office of Education* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 1967), 4.

<sup>11</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *America's Public School Libraries, 1953-2000*. U.S. Department of Education, May 2005. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005324.pdf> (Accessed: 12<sup>th</sup> January 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Sara L. Schwebel, *Child-Sized History: Fictions of the Past in U.S. Classrooms* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2011), 17.

meant predominantly middle-class and white children).<sup>13</sup> As such there was unparalleled change in the children's publishing industry as the funding challenged the industry to cater to a demographic previously ignored. Even though President Richard Nixon reversed or limited many of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programmes like the ESEA, the publishing industry had already undergone substantial changes in the approach to Black children's books. More Black writers had their work published and many had more creative control over their projects such as Julius Lester being able to pick the illustrators for his books.<sup>14</sup>

Children's trade books became a focus for librarians in low-income and educationally disadvantaged areas because children of colour made up a significant proportion in these areas of New York City. Children's books held significance because they offered a more creative and positive approach to race than textbooks because they did not have to be approved by state committees. Moreover, they made more use of imagination to challenge racist ideas. Chairman of the Harlem Parents Committee, Isaiah Robinson argued before the Congressional Subcommittee on De Facto Segregation that textbooks were part of an educational "brain-washing of children" that "perpetuated a racist philosophy".<sup>15</sup> Publishers commissioned textbooks nationally and so the influence of large, conservative states

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Personal correspondence with the author.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Education and Labor. *Books for Schools and the Treatment of Minorities: Hearings before the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on De Facto School Segregation*. 89th Cong., 2nd sess., August 24,30,31; September 1, 1966, 69.

ensured biased and explicitly racist depictions of Black histories and cultures.<sup>16</sup> In his comprehensive analysis in 1961, Marcus Lloyd concluded that textbooks tended to portray the United States as a white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon society and largely ignored the contributions of any African Americans.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, authors of children's books addressed a range of racial issues and areas of Black History, and provided children with imagery and content that were culturally relevant. Not beholden to national markets or controlled by a state-purchasing committee, many public schools in New York City used ESEA money to refurbish and update their libraries. As children's books became more important to the education of children of colour, public schools went through drastic changes in New York City

Throughout the country, Black independent schools proliferated, which provided Black children with a curriculum that was formulated with the children in mind.<sup>18</sup> Examples such as Amiri Baraka's African Free School in New Jersey that provided young children with an African colouring book and Afrocentric schools, such as the Nairobi Day School established in Palo Alto in 1966, demonstrate that activist educators worked across the country to establish schools that focused on African American children's backgrounds and heritage. Although what constituted heritage was debated across the nation, key to these institutions was institutional independence so they could

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<sup>16</sup> Frances FitzGerald, *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979); Alvin Wolf, "Minorities in Us History Textbooks, 1945--1985", *The Clearing House* 65, no. 5 (1992).

<sup>17</sup> Marcus Lloyd, *The Treatment of Minorities in Secondary School Textbooks* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1961), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 5.

enact a 'liberatory pedagogy', a form of education that was about fostering resistance and focused on education as a tool to battle white supremacy. In the Black Panthers' Ten Point Program the fifth point stressed: "We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in present-day society. We believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of self".<sup>19</sup> The provision of appropriate materials in support of a strong ideological philosophy was integral to independent Black institutions. Independence from white-dominated Boards of Education allowed these schools to enact an educational philosophy that placed the Black child at the centre.

However, within public schools, efforts to provide children with an education that reflected a broad range of African and African American history and cultures came up against resistance from white educational authorities. Moreover, a variety of other white-dominated groups such as the 300, 000 strong Queens-based Parents and Taxpayers (PAT) organisation proved a formidable obstacle to integration including the creation of an integrated curriculum.<sup>20</sup> Organizers of Milwaukee's Clifford McKissick Community School, an independent black institution, argued in 1970 that efforts in public schools at creating such a curriculum was simply "a black patchwork on a snow-white blanket of white nationalist education", indicative

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<sup>19</sup> "The Black Panther Ten-Point Program", *The North American Review* 253, no. 4 (1968): 16.

<sup>20</sup> Jerald Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (London: Yale University Press, 2002), 23-24.

of how their plans faced racist backlash from white parents, educators and school officials.<sup>21</sup>

However, the centrality of the curriculum to the educational upheaval in New York City public schools is often overlooked in scholarship. The use of African American children's literature in schools was not simply an addition to the school system but increasingly parent groups and educators saw their potential in furthering a more wholesale Black educational philosophy. Independent Black schools had innovative materials, lessons and a strong pedagogical ideology, however, this does not mean that this was not replicated to some extent within public schools, particularly after the funding of the ESEA.

As hopes faded among New York City Black communities for school integration that benefitted all children, members of these communities increasingly sought alternative ways to provide a good education for their children. Abstract ideas of Black educational philosophy became common arguments in community meetings, protests and curriculum designs in New York City as parents, educators and activists joined together. In 1965 New York CORE and the Harlem Parents Committee joined together in 'Operation Shut-Down' that intended to boycott public schools for the miseducation of the community's children, they also held workshops on Black history, African culture and other classes that were absent from the

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<sup>21</sup> Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 7.

schools.<sup>22</sup> It was not just parents but students, activists and educators who called for the use of children's literature that was relevant to Black children. Many participants still aimed for integration but the New York Board of Education's intransigence meant many figures began to look for alternative solutions.

**“Why Integrate Hell?”: The disillusionment with integration.**

In 1958, five sets of local Black parents refused to send their children to JHS 136 and JHS 139 in Harlem because it was segregated, and lacked funds for adequate education. In a legal challenge the Board of Education accused the parents of neglect and denying their children education. Judge Justine Wise Polier dismissed the charges and supported the parents in their argument that their children suffered an inferior education with limited resources because of racial discrimination.<sup>23</sup> The problems with integration efforts did not disappear. In 1964, over 460,000 students and 3,500 teachers adhered to a boycott of public schools due to the Board of Education's seemingly blasé attitude towards integration.<sup>24</sup> This campaign, run by the Parents' Workshop led by Reverend Milton Galamison and the Citywide Committee for Integrated Schools, aimed to force the Board of Education to draw up extensive plans for integration. Public schools in New York City became

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<sup>22</sup> Jewel Curvin and Ruth Singer 'Operation Shut-Down', 21 January 1965, Box 15, Folder 'Boycott', Annie Stein Papers, University Archives, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries, New York, New York (hereafter cited as the Annie Stein Papers).

<sup>23</sup> Gerald E. Markowitz and David Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power: Kenneth and Mamie Clarks Northside Center* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 103.

<sup>24</sup> Jonna Perrillo, *Uncivil Rights Teachers, Unions, and Race in the Battle for School Equity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 116.

more segregated by 1966 compared to their 1954 levels.<sup>25</sup> The inflexibility of the NYC Board of Education in the early 1960s encouraged activists and parents to look at other ways of improving their children's education. In 1968, Galamison claimed that many Black parents felt it was not beneficial for their children to be "educated beside the children whose parents sanctioned bigotry and hatred".<sup>26</sup> The shift in attitude towards integration for Galamison was representative of a wider trend of Black communities' attitudes towards integration. The end goal was not necessarily integration but better schooling for the communities' children, so if integration did not improve the education of their children then parents, activists and educators would look to other solutions. The issues of violence, discrimination, and police brutality all contributed to the increasing cynicism towards the Board of Education's commitment to integration efforts.

With integration came fears from Black parents and students of racial violence and increased police brutality. A report by Kenneth Clark highlighted that within New York City many Black students were "systematically harassed" by white students and the police and that in schools such as Franklin Lane on the Queens-Brooklyn border Black and Puerto Rican students faced widespread hostility and violence.<sup>27</sup> The physical threat posed to children by their classmates and the police was a considerable factor in the disenchantment with desegregation efforts but it also combined with an

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<sup>25</sup> Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York*, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Milton A. Galamison, "Educational Values and Community Power", *Freedomways*, (Winter 1968), 313.

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Clark, "A Statement" Metropolitan Applied Research Center, March 19 1969, Box 16 Folder 1, Marvin D. Markowitz Papers, 1962-1973, University Archives, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries.

education that invalidated many student's cultural backgrounds and experiences. In December 1969, the African American Students Association in New York City submitted a list of fifteen demands to the New York Board of Education. Alongside demands about community safety the list of demands declared that there should be an examination of "all books and educational supplies and materials...to their adequacy and relevancy".<sup>28</sup> The students' demands emphasise that it was not just their safety at risk but the process of integration in New York City threatened their access to an education that included the history and contributions of people of colour. Geneva Gay, a multicultural educational specialist, contends that U.S. schools have historically provided a distorted version of history and culture that overlooked the experiences and lives of people of colour.<sup>29</sup> The New York Board of Education disregarded the safety of African American children in efforts to desegregate public schools in New York City and the education provided was designed to reflect the dominant white culture.

Writing in 1970, Professor of African American literature Keneth Kinnamon's rhetorical question: "Why integrate Hell?" emphasised that public schools culturally alienated Black children in addition to being physically threatening spaces.<sup>30</sup> For Kinnamon, integrated schools were 'Hell' because:

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<sup>28</sup> Kristen Buras, "From Carter G. Woodson to Critical Race Curriculum Studies: Fieldnotes in Confronting the History of White Supremacy in Educational Knowledge and Practice" in *Researching Race in Education: Policy, Practice, and Qualitative Research*, ed. Adrienne D. Dixon (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2014): 46.

<sup>29</sup> Geneva Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, And Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010), 207.

<sup>30</sup> Keneth Kinnamon, "Afro-American Literature, the Black Revolution, and Ghetto High Schools" *The English Journal* 59, no. 2 (1970), 191.

the traditional function of American public education has been to socialize the child, to preach patriotism, to minimize group differences, to serve as a melting pot. But blacks now want the schools to inculcate black group awareness and pride, to expose the shams of a racist society, to prepare for black self-determination.<sup>31</sup>

Kinnamon had a Black nationalist view of education and its potential, but his words reflected a broader disillusionment with integration. It was one-sided, the responsibility was laid upon Black students to adapt to schools and assimilate rather than schools adapting to benefit African American children. Efforts at ending de facto segregation were inadequate. David Spencer, a parent of a child at I.S. 201, argued: "I don't want segregation, but if I have it, I want it on my terms".<sup>32</sup> Spencer's view encapsulates that of many parents who did not believe in Black separatism but began to feel that it might offer an improved education. Although historian Siddle-Walker's work focuses on the South, her argument that aspects of segregated schooling were valued by many students, parents, and educators held true for many communities in New York City.<sup>33</sup> Many integrated schools did not provide Black children with safe environments and classes overlooked the existence and contributions of African Americans. In 1964, for example, public schools across the city used the textbook *New York: Past and Present* which only had a fleeting mention of the Black historical presence in New York City.<sup>34</sup> Roger Collins, an education expert, correctly contends that those who control the curriculum utilize it to "reflect their social and cultural reality" and in the case of New

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 42.

<sup>33</sup> Vanessa Siddle Walker, "Valued Segregated Schools for African American Children in the South, 1935-1969: A Review of Common Themes and Characteristics" *Review of Educational Research* 70, no. 3 (2000).

<sup>34</sup> Fitzgerald, *America Revised*, 39.

York City the “reality” that was portrayed marginalized Black voices and images.<sup>35</sup>

Parent and activist groups had spent years campaigning to achieve an integrated school system that benefitted all children. However, integration did not necessarily mean an integrated curriculum. Parents repeatedly demanded curricula and material changes but with little result. In a report to the New York educational commission, Professor LaMar P. Miller of New York University argued that schools broadly ignored racial or ethnic distinctions and topics by “submerging them in an undifferentiated curriculum”.<sup>36</sup> Miller’s report is indicative of how curricula, including the books read by children, did not reflect the experiences, cultures and histories of all those attending schools. In a 1974 edition of *Viewpoint* magazine, a feature on “minority education” argued that during the 1960s schools failed when they looked at the curriculum and the books through “white eyes”.<sup>37</sup> As the shortcomings of desegregation became clear and the paucity of culturally relevant materials was laid bare it was not just Black nationalist figures looking to create a more Black-oriented curriculum. Many parents, students and educators argued for an education that catered to the needs of local African American communities.

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<sup>35</sup> Roger Collins, "Responding to Cultural Diversity in Our Schools" in *Understanding Curriculum as Racial Text: Representations of Identity and Difference in Education*, ed. Louis A. Castanell and William F. Pinar (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 201.

<sup>36</sup> “Chronicle of Race and Schools”, *Integrated Education*, Vol.10 No.1, 1972 in Box 12, Folder 4, Annie Stein Papers.

<sup>37</sup> “Schools Flunk Equal Opportunity Exam”, *Viewpoint* vol. 6, May 1974, Box 16, Folder 6, Markowitz Papers.

## The Turn to a more radical Black Educational Philosophy

During the 1960s and 1970s, the 'Cultural Deficit Paradigm' dominated educational discourse. This paradigm asserted that African American culture was deficient as it did not adequately prepare children for society and thus contributed to a lack of success.<sup>38</sup> As the white teacher Robert Campbell noted, the blame was placed on the children for being inadequate learners rather than interrogating the quality of teaching and materials available. In their work on multicultural education, James Banks and Cherry McGee-Banks argue that a focus on the 'Cultural Deficit Paradigm' meant that educators often focused on the limitations of students rather than examining the school system as one that did not allow Black students to prosper.<sup>39</sup> In Harlem during the early 1960s, children performed on average between two and four years behind their white peers in national and citywide academic standards.<sup>40</sup> *Viewpoint* magazine lambasted this approach as "blaming the victim" and contested that educators were not taking responsibility, demonstrating that there was a continual backlash against this paradigm.<sup>41</sup> The proliferation of works by scholars such as Daniel Moynihan and E. Franklin Frazier on the culture of poverty laid blame on poor communities for their troubles rather than fully examining structural deficiencies, and even the cultural deficiencies, of the dominant group.<sup>42</sup> It was not only social

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<sup>38</sup> Serie McDougal, *Research methods in Africana studies* (New York: Peter Lang, 2017), 33.

<sup>39</sup> James Banks and Cherry McGee-Banks, *Multicultural Education: Characteristics and Goals in Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Son's, 2010), 32.

<sup>40</sup> Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 24.

<sup>41</sup> "Schools Flunk Equal Opportunity Exam", *Viewpoint* vol. 6, May 1974, Box 16, Folder 6, Makowitz Papers.

<sup>42</sup> Fantini et al., *Community Control*, 76.

theorists that held Black communities responsible for their situation. In 1968, 56 percent of white respondents to the Kerner Commission, a national advisory on civil disorders, felt that the struggles of Black communities were not due to discrimination but the responsibility of the communities themselves.<sup>43</sup>

The racist 'Cultural Deficit' argument ignored that education and society had always been political and had disrespected and annihilated the contributions, history and cultures of different ethnic groups in school curricula. Charles Valentine's 1968 work *Culture and Poverty* critiqued the patronizing and racist works of theorists that laid blame on Black communities.<sup>44</sup> Valentine argued that powerful cultural forms lay under the statistics but were being denied by a "form of social class and racial snobbery and ignorance".<sup>45</sup> Educators and activists reiterated his point as many championed the potential impact of children's books and relevant materials, if only they were used more extensively in schools. Hortense Jones, an early childhood specialist in New York City, claimed that poor reading scores were not through the fault of children. Rather, because the children could not identify with the books put before them, as they simply were not interesting to Black children.<sup>46</sup> With the support of a broad coalition of Black Power activists, parents, students and many educators there was a shift in potential solutions in the late 1960s- one common solution was the

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<sup>43</sup> Alan Altshuler, *Community Control: The Black Demand for Participation in Large American Cities* (New York: Pegasus, 1970), 17.

<sup>44</sup> Charles A. Valentine, *Culture and Poverty: Critique and Counter-Proposals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>46</sup> "Integrating the Texts" *Newsweek*, Mar 7, 1966, 93.

provision of more positive reading materials for Black children in New York City. An advocate for local control of schools, educational specialist S. Alan Cohen described the cultural deficit theory as “hogwash” because the actions of concerned citizens was going to make more of a difference to the cultural reliance of education than the opinions of “absentee landlords” who worked and lived miles away.<sup>47</sup>

In the late sixties, many educators made attempts at dealing with this crisis of low literacy rates in predominantly Black schools. They did this by not by blaming the children but by improving what they were teaching them. In 1964, in a report to the Superintendent of New York schools, educational specialists argued that aggressive action needed to be undertaken in order to provide new materials that met the needs of the students.<sup>48</sup> The top of the list for materials was an “Urban Packet” which included children’s books as well as other media directed at urban children and reflected “the life and contributions of all minority groups”.<sup>49</sup> Whilst this report yielded little reaction from the Superintendent of New York schools, it was important in representing the changes in attitude towards the educational potential of children’s books. African American educators had long lauded the benefits of reading that was relevant and instilled pride in their race and cultural heritage.

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<sup>47</sup> S. Alan Cohen in Helen Parr, “Coalitions, Negotiations and the ComField Model, Appendix E. Vol. II, A Plan for Managing the Development, Implementation and Operation of a Model Elementary Teacher Education Program.” *Office of Education (DHEW)*, Feb. 1970.

<sup>48</sup> “Report of Joint Planning Committee for More Effective Schools to Superintendent of Schools” New York City Public Schools, May 15 1964, Box 14, Folder ‘Fruitless Negot.’, Annie Stein Papers.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

However, these efforts in the late 1960s demonstrated how educators and activists raised these issues for a new generation. After two years of federal funding of the Afro-American History and Culture Center in Queens, the *Amsterdam News* claimed that the centre demonstrated that “there’s a lot in African and Afro-American history and culture to enrich the minds of all children”.<sup>50</sup> The work of the centre was part of a long legacy of educational advocacy for African American history and literature. Pioneering white educational theorist John Dewey had argued for connecting children with their cultural background to improve learning and figures including Jessie Fauset, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Langston Hughes had long emphasised the importance of Black-authored children’s literature as an important source of education for children. The use of African American children’s books was championed by members of the local community as parents, educators and Black Power activists articulated their own versions of a Black educational philosophy, one in which children’s literature would play an important role.

### **Black educational philosophy in the community**

Under the shadow of the Penn Central Railroad that carried commuters from affluent suburbs into New York City, a \$5 million-dollar, architectural award-winning school, I.S. 201, opened in 1966. The school stood on large white pillars on the block between 127<sup>th</sup> and 128<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem, situated beside run-down bars on Park Avenue and facing dilapidated housing on the other three sides. Though a modern and impressive building the announcement of

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<sup>50</sup> “Afro-American History, Culture Project a Hit”, *New York Amsterdam News*, August 24 1968, 20.

this school in 1958 caused an outcry from the local community during an era of hope for integration as this school would only cater to children of colour – de facto segregated. It is fitting that it was in this concrete building with no outward facing windows that the local community, disillusioned with the New York Board of Education's handling of desegregation, began looking inwards to find solutions for their children's education. The Harlem Parents Committee and local community activists began to call for more community control of schools in 1966 as they felt the solution to educational problems was to ensure oversight from the local Black community. That year, for the first time, Black and Puerto Rican students comprised over fifty percent of the New York City public school population, yet the curriculum, the libraries and the resources did not reflect this because control of these was in white hands.

In September 1966, outside I.S. 201, Stokely Carmichael came to support the parents. Only a few months on from his first public cries of 'Black Power!', Carmichael's presence was symbolic of a coalescence of interests between Black radicalism and local community education movements. Black Power activists, Black parent groups and many local educators called for a more Black-centred educational philosophy that included African American children's literature. Throughout the city, the New York Board of Education erected expensive structures like I.S. 201 and I.S. 55 in Brooklyn, large imposing structures that would have little to do with the community that surrounded them. A concerned citizen wrote to the Board of Education referring to these buildings as an "alien intruder in the local scene",

structures that did not solve the educational crises in the city but propagated a white-centric education.<sup>51</sup> The themes of Black pride, self-determination and an increased focus on Black history and cultural relevance within many Black-authored children's books reflected many of the ideas of Black Power, but they also represented the Black-centred education that many in local communities cried out for. Throughout educational upheavals in New York City, the use of children's books as a learning tool for Black children remained a constant. Each struggle for better education for Black communities in New York City comprised many bitter complaints and hopes for public schools. Though not central in desegregation debates and calls for Community Control, the desire for reading materials that positively focused on Blackness or were culturally relevant to Black children, was always present.

Children's books became an important battleground in the fight for better education in New York City. The content and messages of books such as John Steptoe's *Uptown* or Rose Blue's *Black, Black, Beautiful Black* crystallized many issues parents, educators and children had with the education provided: it reflected a white, middle class outlook that was alien to many children. The movement to provide children with more culturally relevant and representative literature was an important aspect of the grassroots Black activism of the late 1960s and 1970s. Often portrayed as a

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<sup>51</sup> Jeff Nilson to John Doar, Memorandum, April 14, 1969, Box 140, Folder 2, John Doar Papers Princeton University Library, Department of Special Collections, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Public Policy Papers. Princeton, New Jersey.

tragic denouement of the Civil Rights Movement, this period, as historian Stephen Tuck argues, instead represented a significant moment in Black liberation history.<sup>52</sup> Desegregation and Community Control in New York City brought together a variety of groups who looked to provide children with an education that was culturally conscious and combatted the racist assumptions within schools.

Children's books became an important issue for educators and parent groups and reflected many of the demands placed on education by these various groups. A racist curriculum and a lack of representation in books contributed to a growing distrust of integration efforts in New York City as the inclusion of racist archetypes in children's books, if characters of colour were included at all, indicated that the education system had little interest in real integration. The rise of Black-written and illustrated material became an integral part of a complex struggle of combatting an educational system that had been entrenched in a white supremacy and showed no signs of abating.

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<sup>52</sup> Stephen G. N. Tuck, *We Ain't What We Ought to Be: The Black Freedom Struggle, from Emancipation to Obama* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010). 333. The idea of denouement in the late 1960s and 1970s can be found in Clayborne Carson. *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia. Politics and Culture in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

## **“To Be Black and Successful”:** Different groups Embrace a Black Educational Philosophy

Edgar Epps' 1973 study *Education for Black Americans* articulated Black parental fears of desegregation as he argued that the process had “raised the spectre of the elimination of minority group culture”.<sup>53</sup> For decades, parents in New York City had petitioned and fought for an increase in Black history and culture within the curriculum only to be met with limited success. During the 1950s, the Committee for the Improvement of Textbooks worked tirelessly in New York City to rid schools of racist texts but their battle against textbooks proved to be a constant struggle.<sup>54</sup>

In 1966, concerned parents and community leaders in East Harlem formed the Ad Hoc Parent Council, a group that petitioned the New York Board of Education to keep I.S. 201 closed until the community was satisfied that the school met “the critical needs of our children”.<sup>55</sup> Led by Preston Wilcox, Professor of Social Work at Columbia and director of the East Harlem Project, the Ad Hoc Parent Council developed an educational philosophy that included community oversight and an education that focused on Black cultures. Wilcox, in particular, emphasised the need for education to be relevant to children’s lives in order to help them form positive Black identities. Wilcox’s educational philosophy asserted that a community-based

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<sup>53</sup> Edgar G. Epps, “Education for Black Americans: Outlook for the Future,” *School Review* 81, no. 3 (1973): 321.

<sup>54</sup> “Textbooks Purging – To Exclude Insults- Backed by Parents”, *New York Amsterdam News* (March 14, 1953), 15.

<sup>55</sup> Ad Hoc Parent Council, “Sequence of Events Surrounding Community Involvement with Public School 201” in Dianne Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: A History of the New York Public Schools*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 296.

and culturally relevant education would “help the youth believe that they can be black *and* successful”.<sup>56</sup> The Ad Hoc Parent Council used the basis of Wilcox’s philosophy for their demands, focusing on children’s self-image, community involvement and culturally relevant materials.

This educational philosophy had great support from members of the New York Public Library (NYPL) and myriad school librarians. One of the pioneers in the NYPL was Augusta Baker who had dedicated decades to improving literature for African American children. Her work for the New York Public Library Children’s Services focused on trying to speak to Black children through children’s literature. Children’s Services Book Discussion Meetings regularly featured the topic of ‘the Black experience’ as Baker and other librarians discussed how to improve the selections for African American children. Throughout these meetings Baker outlined the desire to give Black children pride in their heritage as well as teach white children about another history and culture.<sup>57</sup> The tireless work of Baker, who had been campaigning since the 1930s, became a renewed focus for educators and activists in New York City. Book discussion meetings held by the Children’s Services division of the New York Public Library illustrates how librarians viewed Black-authored children’s books, such as Lester’s *To Be a Slave* and Kristen Hunter’s *Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*, as “vital” to their learning.<sup>58</sup> From

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<sup>56</sup> Preston Wilcox qtd. in Karen Ferguson, *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 123.

<sup>57</sup> “Book Discussion Meetings, 1967-1973”, Box 32, Office of Children’s Services, New York Public Library Archives, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, New York, New York.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

1937 until 1974 librarian Augusta Baker, removed books that fostered “prejudice by planting false images in the minds of children”.<sup>59</sup> Baker spent decades trying to foster positive images of African Americans in the Children’s libraries of New York publishing a bibliography of appropriate works and heading the New York Library Children’s Service in 1961 entitled *The Black Experience in Children’s Books*.

Later figures built upon the pioneering educational work of Augusta Bakers. Arnold Adoff, author of children’s biography *Malcolm X* and editor of Black poetry anthology *I am the Darker Brother*, exalted the role of librarians in African American children’s literature. He claimed that “it was librarians who took us into their hearts and who opened the rest of America up - first, to our work, and, secondly, to who we were”.<sup>60</sup> The stimulus of the ESEA program facilitated a growing educational role of the library and throughout the 1960s the school library collections became more deeply entwined with the educational mission of schools.<sup>61</sup> In 1970, Louise Sutherland a school library programme specialist argued that with the help of ESEA funding the school library “would at last have its day in the sun”.<sup>62</sup> The role of the children’s book became more entwined in education in others’ minds, not just librarians.

On the opening day of Albert Schomberg Complex I.S. 201 in 1966, there were numerous protestors on the steps of the school. The Harlem

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<sup>59</sup> Augusta Baker, "The Changing Image of the Black in Children's Literature", *Horn Book* 51 (Feb. 1975): 79.

<sup>60</sup> Arnold Adoff, "Newsmaker: Arnold Adoff", *American Libraries* 41, no. 4 (2010): 22.

<sup>61</sup> *School Libraries in the United States*, 6.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

Parents Committee gathered with members of Civil Rights organisations Brooklyn CORE, SNCC as well as the African American Teachers Association (AATA). Created in 1964, the AATA focused on increasing opportunities for Black educators and on improving schooling for New York City's African American children.<sup>63</sup> Black teachers in the city became a crucial driving force in expounding a Black educational philosophy that embraced the local community and focused on culturally conscious materials. This struggle disrupted the school year with a series of protests occurring throughout the year.

In early 1968, a group of teachers in I.S. 201 worked together to create a teaching pack. Their Black educational philosophy was demonstrated in the pack immediately stating a set of objectives, one of which was to provide a learning environment in which "students' own needs and interests can be more fully met".<sup>64</sup> The specifics of lessons were elucidated as the pack featured a potential English lesson. For example, a teacher could "develop materials on African letters, poetry and arts" and the teacher could highlight the "relevance of the literary culture of Africa to our American Society".<sup>65</sup> The emphasis on relevance was crucial as Black educational philosophy had a long history of promoting materials that had cultural relevance. This particular lesson evocative of one of the objectives of *The Brownies Book*: to make children "familiar with the history and

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<sup>63</sup> Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York*, 41.

<sup>64</sup> 'A Unit Plan For Team Teaching', 1968, Box 36, Folder 'Teacher Training', Babette Edwards Papers.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

achievements of the Negro race”.<sup>66</sup> These teachers espoused a philosophy entrenched in the history of other Black educators, but crucially their educational philosophy was rooted in the educational context of New York City in the 1960s. In one lesson it is suggested that the history of “America is taught from the viewpoint of a resident of the I.S. 201 community”.<sup>67</sup> The focus on community was an integral part of their educational philosophy but also this lesson plan reveals how teachers felt they could engage local children in subject matters by making it directly relatable to their lives and environment.

A considerable number of white teachers supported this endeavour including Robert Campbell and Charles Isaacs of Ocean-Hill Brownsville. In New York University’s *Educational Quarterly*, a writer urged colleagues to understand the changing climate, claiming that the “melting pot ideology...is an anathema to the new population”.<sup>68</sup> The anonymous writer indicates that the pursuit of integrated materials was misguided in the Black Power era. Many books that focused on integration, or ‘social conscience’ books as Bishop identifies, were not written for Black children but often targeted to elicit a moral response from white readers, whereas much of the African American children’s literature was written to be relatable for Black children.

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<sup>66</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, ‘True Brownies’, *Crisis*, vol.18 (October, 1919): 286.

<sup>67</sup> ‘A Unit Plan For Team Teaching’, 1968, Box 36, Folder ‘Teacher Training’, Babette Edwards Papers.

<sup>68</sup> Daniel Griffiths, ‘The Past, Present, and Future of Schooling’, *Educational Quarterly*, Fall 1969, Box 1, Folder ‘1969-1970’, School of Education, Richard Lonsdale Papers, New York University Special Collections, Special Collections Centre, New York, New York.

However, while many white teachers supported an educational philosophy focused on Black cultural heritage others resisted. Historian Diana D'Amico argues that in the late 1960s many white teachers became adrift in the shifting racial politics of New York City education. Many white teachers had emerged as strong supporters of the Civil Rights Movement in the early 1960s, supporting efforts for integration. However, calls for structural change from Black activists and community groups and a rise in more separatist rhetoric meant many of these teachers became averse to focusing on themes of Black pride over integration.<sup>69</sup> Marie Syrkin, a white, former teacher in New York City became a prominent critic of the New York education system. Syrkin claimed that the “demagogic slogan” of ‘cultural genocide’ had become normalised and the school system was in danger of being reduced to separatist, racist enclaves.<sup>70</sup> The connection between better reading materials and Black militants’ larger goals were featured in her argument. She contended that while some folklore was appreciated, it should not come at the expense of aspirations to a “white-collar or middle class job” as one must be “literate in the accepted sense” for such jobs.<sup>71</sup> Syrkin’s conception of ‘acceptance’ emphasises her focus on maintaining the status quo and not engaging with materials, like African American children’s literature, that challenged this. The racist focus of Syrkin on the purpose of education emphasises the gulf between educational philosophies; education

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<sup>69</sup> Diana D'Amico, "Teachers' Rights Versus Students' Rights: Race and Professional Authority in the New York City Public Schools, 1960-1986", *American Educational Research Journal* 53, no. 3 (2016): 555.

<sup>70</sup> Marie Syrkin “Don’t Flunk the Middle Class Teacher”, *New York Times Magazine*, December 15 1968, Box 1 Folder 6, Annie Stein Papers.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

as a mode for liberation is not countenanced whilst she emphasises education's purpose is to pursue a career. Syrkin was one of many white critics who feared the influence of African American children's literature. In Zena Sutherland's review of Julius Lester's *Black Folktales*, Sutherland characterised the book as a "vehicle for hostility" because she claimed that it attacked whites.<sup>72</sup> The reactions against such books and calls for a more culturally relevant curriculum reveal just how linked these children's books and the Black Power Movement had become in many white critics' minds.

For Black Power, Black Nationalist and educational activists, children's books had the potential to be part of what Black educational philosopher Barbara Sizemore described as a "liberation curriculum".<sup>73</sup> Sizemore's study was indicative of how Black educational philosophy had developed in the Black Power era. It helped African American children in the face of white oppression by creating a curriculum free from oppressive white influence. Adapting learning to the learner's cultural background, Sizemore argued, helped the collective fight against oppression.<sup>74</sup> African American children's books challenged oppression by providing children with culturally conscious materials. Other contemporary educational theorists like Edgar Epps, Louis Williams, and Mohamed El-Khawas contended that such an approach also helped the individual child psychologically and contributed to

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<sup>72</sup> Zena Sutherland, 'Review of Black Folktales' *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, (Feb. 1970), 101.

<sup>73</sup> Barbara A. Sizemore, "Education for Liberation," *School Review* 81, no. 3 (1973): 395.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 389.

increased Black pride and self-determination.<sup>75</sup> Epps argued that attention must be on the “psychological rewards associated with being identified” with a group that’s contributions to the nation have been “important and respected”.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, Epps argued, a curriculum that focused on Black cultural heritages and Black history were crucial in forming a “positive self-image, and a sense of group pride”.<sup>77</sup> African American children’s books could contribute to different aspects of Black educational philosophy and this broadened the appeal because children’s books could address the individual and the collective.

Black Power and Black nationalist groups’ involvement in New York City education was a result of several factors. Brooklyn CORE protested the violence that Black students faced in strikes in 1968. Later in the year Stokely Carmichael and Floyd McKissick protested with parents at I.S. 201 in Harlem against the hiring of a white principal. Education became a crucial concern for many Black Nationalists and Black Power activists. Muhammad Ahmad in a tract on revolutionary Black Nationalism argued that the “education of children is our number one concern” as for some Black Power activists children were the vanguards of a revolutionary future, whereas others simply wanted Black control of predominantly Black schools.<sup>78</sup> Protests and direct action from Black Power activists inspired students too.

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<sup>75</sup> Epps, "Education for Black Americans"; Louis N. Williams and Mohamed El-Khawas, "A Philosophy of Black Education," *The Journal of Negro Education* 47, no. 2 (1978), 180.

<sup>76</sup> Epps, "Education for Black Americans", 321

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Muhammad Ahmad. Basic tenets of Revolutionary Black Nationalism Institute of Black Political Studies. Philadelphia. Dec, 1977. Frame 663, Reel 1, The Black Power Movement

In Franklin Lane High School students replaced the United States' flag in a classroom with the black, red and green "flag of Black liberation".<sup>79</sup> The connection between these radical movements and education was the result of the various forms of oppression faced by children in public schools from violence to the 'cultural genocide'. Dorothy Jones, a member of the Harlem Parents Committee, highlighted the crucial role of Black Power activists and groups in the educational drives in Harlem. At I.S. 201, she mentioned that Harlem CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), headed by Roy Innes, had been on the negotiating committee from the very beginning.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, the New York Black Panthers and SNCC, whilst not on the negotiating team, acted as crucial members of the community in their support. Jones emphasised that whilst outsiders of the community maligned these groups those active within the community recognised them "not as devils to be feared, but as human individuals whom we know, sometimes agree with, sometimes disagree with, but whose existence and function in the community we recognize".<sup>81</sup> Black Power groups were an integral part of the struggle in education and the struggle for better children's books but not the only driving force. Like other members of the community they shared their ideas and disagreed with others, but these groups belonged to the communities they lived and worked in. Members of many of these groups

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Part 1: Amiri Baraka from Black Arts to Black radicalism. University Publications of America Bethesda, Maryland Roosevelt Study Center Collection, Middelberg, Netherlands (hereafter cited as BPM: RSC Collection).

<sup>79</sup> Iver Peterson, 'Racial Disputes Erupt in Two City High Schools' *The New York Times*, 24 October, 1969.

<sup>80</sup> Dorothy S. Jones, 'The Issues as I.S. 201: A View From The Parent's Committee, *Integrated Education*, 4:5): 18.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

were not proselytising from afar, and many had children in schools or had grown up within the New York City educational system.

The issue of what children read was a significant issue for Black Power and nationalist groups. Sociologist Alphonso Pinkney identifies student demands in Universities for Afro-American studies as a “necessary component of the black liberation struggle”.<sup>82</sup> Pinkney’s connection between radical politics and education is compelling but is not focused on works for children within this struggle. In Autumn 1966, twelve members of the Harlem Black Panther Party tried to prevent students from entering J.H.S. 139 as the Panthers demanded the creation of a Black curriculum.<sup>83</sup> Calls for a Black curriculum often included references to children’s books or better reading for children and so for groups such as the Harlem Black Panthers, children’s books formed a key part of the Black liberation movement. Amiri Baraka, a leader in the Black Arts Movement, the cultural wing of the Black Power, argued that strong Black culture was “as necessary as bread or TV sets” but questioned “who is your Sholem Aleichem, the recorder of your African folk tales? You do not know, nor your children?”.<sup>84</sup> Baraka crystallized the argument for a stronger focus on Black culture within education. His call to the power of folk tales was answered by myriad Black children’s authors,

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<sup>82</sup> Alphonso Pinkney, *Red, Black, and Green: Black Nationalism in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 177.

<sup>83</sup> “Schomburg Center hosts 50th anniversary of Harlem’s original Black Panthers”, *New York Amsterdam News*, 4 August, 2016, <http://amsterdamnews.com/news/2016/aug/04/schomburg-center-hosts-50th-anniversary-harlems-or/> (Accessed: 22 June, 2017).

<sup>84</sup> Sally Eisenberg. “The Press of Freedom: The Black Man’s Burden”, *The Village Voice*, 19 May 1966. Reel 1, Box 1, BPM: RSC Collection.

including Julius Lester and Virginia Hamilton who both published their own retellings of African American folktales.

The Black-authored children's literature boom of the 1960s and 1970s had much in common with the Black Arts movement. This included direct connections between children's literature and the Black Power, such as Julius Lester's dedication to H. Rap Brown in *Black Folktales*. Other books had more nuanced connections to groups like the US organization with books focusing on African heritage. These connections with Black Power groups coincided with what Rudine Sims Bishop termed a shift from "melting pot" books to "culturally conscious books".<sup>85</sup> The 'Melting Pot' books, Bishop argues, focused on integration and ignored the cultural differences and experiences of Black children. Mainly written by white authors, these books often provided an optimistic outlook on race relations. The 'culturally conscious' books however, reflected universal aspects of life and the particularities of African American life. Children's books by authors such as John Steptoe, Rosa Guy, and Eloise Greenfield moved to provide an insight into lived experiences as well as the struggles African American children faced. Many authors' determination to reflect the lives of Black children was matched by myriad figures such as teachers and librarians.

The use of Black-authored and illustrated children's books as an educational tool was not simply a feature of Black Power activists; students, parents, and educators called for the use of African American children's

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<sup>85</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, "Reflections on the Development of African American Children's Literature," *Journal of Children's Literature* 38, no. 2 (2012), 8-11.

books due to their potential in helping alleviate issues in New York's schools. A Black educational philosophy had potential to be revolutionary as Kinnamon, in his framework for Black literature, emphasised that more militant books would have the power to interest Black students and prompt them to action.<sup>86</sup> Kinnamon's position illustrated how the burgeoning canon of Black children's literature could be used by militants as he contends that to "control the curriculum" was a way to achieve "black desires and demands" and overcome the paternalistic white racism which kept Black nationalism away from children.

However, the role of children's books, community education and other facets of a Black educational philosophy were embraced, even on a Federal level. George Nesbitt, Deputy Assistant to the Secretary for Intergroup Relations, argued that it was crucial for public schools to inculcate Black pride and that "it ought to begin with...coloring books."<sup>87</sup> Nesbitt's focus on early childhood education suggests that at least some federal figures viewed the lack of Black-centric materials being pervasive throughout children's education and that it needed to be addressed from kindergarten to high school. In a 1966 congressional hearing on books in schools Helen Lloyd, Assistant Superintendent of schools in New York, claimed that the Board of Education understood the importance of the issue and stated that "minority groups require books which will tell them something about their past, books

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<sup>86</sup> Kinnamon, "Afro-American Literature", 193.

<sup>87</sup> George B. Nesbitt, "Time and Place for Teaching Black Pride," *Journal of Negro Education* 41, no. 4 (1972): 303.

in which they can recognize themselves, books which are not reluctant to discuss the controversial contemporary problems of their group and their community”.<sup>88</sup> However, backing up this rhetoric with action in public schools was doubted by many within the communities in question. An administrator at the Harlem Freedom School, Isaiah Robinson, claimed that whilst the statements made seemed to demonstrate progress, the Board of Education was, in practice, the “same as 1866”.<sup>89</sup> His statement reveals a distrust in the authorities who often spoke of freedom but still treated African American children as “less than”.<sup>90</sup> Books that included Black characters as well as focused on various histories, cultures and settings that were relevant to children became educationally important to a large range of figures seeking to deal with the educational issues in New York City.

In 1968 at a conference on education at Harvard, a Black caucus produced a paper that declared that a Black educational philosophy was needed to redefine “education in urban communities as it relates to black children”.<sup>91</sup> From federal figures like Nesbitt to librarians, such as Baker, in New York City there was a broad concern about the education of Black children and many argued for the educational potential of children’s literature. The paper delivered at Harvard called for community control as a solution to inferior public education Black children received and this idea

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<sup>88</sup> U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Education and Labor. *Books for Schools and the Treatment of Minorities: Hearings before the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on De Facto School Segregation*. 89th Cong., 2nd sess., August 24,30,31; and September 1, 1966, 279-285.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Heather Lewis, *New York City Public Schools from Brownsville to Bloomberg: Community Control and its Legacy* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2012), 54.

chimed well with a large number of individuals and groups in New York City. The general positive assessment from different groups on community control took public schooling in New York City in a radical direction. Revolution in education was impossible within the confines of the traditional set-up of public schools in New York City. However, a more decentralized system appealed to many different people and one issue that people raised time after time, was how materials and curriculum could be changed to better suit Black children.

Carl McCall of the Taconic Foundation, a small organisation that sought to combat social inequities, wrote a letter to Kay Kelly, a parent in New York who had been battling for greater community oversight. McCall praised her ideas for education and observed that “when reading your material I was struck by the notion that your ideas and some others would have seemed quite radical 2 or 3 years ago”, demonstrating how far Black educational philosophy had developed in the mid-1960s. Kelly’s research into community-run education impacted McCall as he went on to claim that her educational changes “appear as imperatives if public education is going to serve more than a custodial function”.<sup>92</sup> McCall’s admiration for Kelly revealed how far the educational philosophies of parents and educators had shifted. Furthermore, how many people and organisations had been persuaded to try a new approach to education, one which was community-based and foregrounded a Black educational philosophy.

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<sup>92</sup> Carl McCall to Kay Kelly, August 23, 1966, Box 3, Folder ‘Correspondence In’, Babette Edwards Papers.

## **The People's Board of Education: A Sit in for a Black Educational Philosophy**

Parent groups, Black Power activists, community activists and educators developed their own Black educational philosophies during the 1960s as disillusionment with integration prompted such groups to find their own solutions. In December 1966, these groups combined in defence of Lillian Wagner, a parent from Brooklyn, whom the City Board of Education silenced at a meeting at 110 Livingston Street, the headquarters of the New York Board of Education. The Board rejected Wagner's concerns as she was not on the official list of speakers, but she defied their orders and proclaimed that "the voice of the people is with me!"<sup>93</sup>

As the City Board of Education members took a break, members of the community immediately occupied their "red, soft-cushioned swivel chairs" and formed the People's Board of Education and nominated Lillian Wagner as their Superintendent.<sup>94</sup> Over the next three days, activists occupied 110 Livingston Street and made demands of New York City education. Parents and activists from across New York City gathered in the chambers with figures such as Babette Edwards of the East Harlem Union, John Powis of the Ocean-Hill Brownsville Independent School Board, and members of the United Bronx Parents as well as SNCC and CORE members. One *New York Times* reporter commented that whilst "to some observers, the charade was just a publicity stunt", it became clear over the three days of the sit-in that "it

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<sup>93</sup> M.A. Farber, "Parents Disrupt School Hearing, Then Start Sit-In" *New York Times*, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1966.

<sup>94</sup> Leonard Buder, "Ghetto Residents Seeking New Role", *New York Times*, January 11, 1967.

was something more”.<sup>95</sup> It was a dramatic demonstration of how the community had come together to “exercise a voice in the conduct of local school affairs”.<sup>96</sup>

The activists involved came up with a list of demands that articulated their Black educational philosophy. Audley Moore, popularly referred to as ‘Queen Mother Moore’ by the Harlem parents spoke up and argued that efforts to help their children had failed and that “creative innovation” was required.<sup>97</sup> Moore had a long history of activism from Garveyism to Black Power and as Komozi Woodard rightly asserts she was one of the most significant “strategic bridges between the UNIA generation of the 1920s and the Black Power generation”.<sup>98</sup> Moore’s role in the occupation of 110 Livingston Street underscores how the calls for a Black educational philosophy had roots in decades of Black activism. She suggested using members of the community who can “contribute their own special knowledge and experience to children’s education”.<sup>99</sup> Historian Heather Lewis argues that the People’s Board of Education drew on the language and arguments of Black Power but were firmly “grounded in the day-to-day experiences of children and families” in the communities.<sup>100</sup> Lewis’ assertion rightly identifies that whilst Black Power proponents attended the sit-in, they did not lead it. Parents and educators came to the sit-in after years of battling for

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> M.A. Farber, ‘Brooklyn Sit-In Bars 2D Hearing By School Board’, *New York Times*, December 21, 1966.

<sup>98</sup> Komozi Woodard, “Queen Mother Moore and the Black Power Generation”, *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 7, no. 2 (2018): 181.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Lewis, *New York City Public Schools*, 42.

better education and they argued for an education that was instilled with Black educational philosophy but specifically targeted for the schools in New York City. Black Power activists played an important supporting role as Black Power coalesced with the educational arguments of concerned citizens. SNCC and Brooklyn CORE members sat on the red cushioned seats to keep the chairs occupied whilst community organisers rested. The Board of Education tried to “freeze out” the People’s Board with their air-conditioning system to no avail.<sup>101</sup>

On the 21<sup>st</sup> December twelve members of the People’s Board were arrested and led out of the building in full view of supporters for community-based education. Mayor John Lindsay, the Ford Foundation and the City Board of Education responded with a plan for a decentralization experiment with community input through community boards. The People’s Board of Education argued for the need of a better education for children, an education that had oversight and input from members of the local community.

### **“The Community Entered the Room”: Children’s Books and Community Control**

After a twelve year struggle in New York City to improve education through integration many parents and activists embarked on a “new strategy in the war to save the children” from a racist and inadequate education.<sup>102</sup> The new

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<sup>101</sup> Nancy Naples, *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research* (London: Routledge, 2003), 98.

<sup>102</sup> Annie Stein, ‘Community Control of the Schools’ 17<sup>th</sup> March 1968, Box 1, Folder 6, Annie Stein Papers.

call was for 'Community Control' in New York City. This meant the transfer of power over educational matters from the New York Board of Education to a democratically elected neighbourhood associations.<sup>103</sup> Most proponents of Community Control argued for greater community oversight of education, particularly from parents. Supporters of Community Control often raised similar areas in need of oversight: who was administering the school; who was teaching the children; and what the children were being taught. It was a tumultuous time for education in New York City as it resulted in an educational experiment, a series of strikes, and bitter disputes. "The Community Entered the Room" was typed up in the minutes of a Community Board meeting in Brooklyn as twenty local activists burst into the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Governing Board meeting to ensure that the community's interests were heard.<sup>104</sup> The activists' intervention in the board meeting was demonstrative of their mistrust in education management. What they demanded was real change in the schools rather than tokenistic efforts.

The advent of Community Control created a ripple effect throughout the nation as educators across the country paid close attention.<sup>105</sup> In 1967, responding to the increasing clamour from parents and activists for Community Control, the New York State legislature established a committee to produce a report on the issue. Heading the committee was McGeorge Bundy, president of the Ford Foundation, who produced a controversial

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<sup>103</sup> Altshuler, *Community Control*, 64.

<sup>104</sup> Martin Mayer, "The Full and Sometimes Very Surprising Story of Ocean Hill, the Teachers' Union And the Teacher Strikes of 1968: The story of Ocean Hill", *New York Times*, February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1969.

<sup>105</sup> Herrick, "The Rise of Community Schools in Urban Public Education".

report on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1967 that called for increased community participation in the educational process. Whilst the Bundy Report's recommendations were not fully implemented, Mayor Lindsay sought a compromise and eventually three experimental districts were formed, comprised of 18 schools in total (out of over a thousand).<sup>106</sup>

The three communities that achieved recognition from the Board of Education as demonstration districts had long histories of parental activism: I.S. 201 and four elementary schools in East Harlem; six elementary schools, a junior high and an intermediate school in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district of Brooklyn; and junior high and another four elementary schools in Two Bridges (the Lower East Side of Manhattan). The educational flashpoint of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strikes became the most recognisable feature of this short-lived experiment. The firing of white teachers by the newly created local school board in Ocean-Hill Brownsville exacerbated relations between the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the community in which they served and often Community Control was reduced to a racial dispute by the media.<sup>107</sup> However, the Community Control movement in New York City was far more complex than a racial divide. It brought together allies with different agendas: Ford Foundation figures, radical educators, concerned parents, government officials, and students themselves. This complex intersection of Black Power politics, grassroots educational activism, and liberal institutions has slowly been uncovered in scholarship including Jerald Podair's work on

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<sup>106</sup> Fantini et al, *Community Control*, 147.

<sup>107</sup> "Impasse in the Schools", *New York Times*, 13 September, 1968.

school strikes and Karen Ferguson's book *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism*.<sup>108</sup>

From the calls for Community Control to the establishment of the three experimental school districts Black-authored children's books again occupied an important place. Historian Jerald Podair has characterised this period in New York City history as the opening of the "perceptual gulf" between white and Black New York.<sup>109</sup> The two communities, as Podair argues, were talking in different languages and they had a significantly different understanding of what children needed to learn. A national Harris poll in 1969 asking about the quality of education children received demonstrated the gap between white and Black communities' attitudes: 72 percent of African Americans felt that they were discriminated against in receiving quality education, but only 23 percent of white respondents agreed.<sup>110</sup> This suggests why community control seemed the only viable option for Black communities: there was a significant difference in how race informed attitudes towards education. In *Scope Bulletin*, a local Brooklyn paper in support of Community Control, an anonymous author encapsulated the predominant view in Black communities: Community Control already existed in white, suburban America and the new movement was a natural progression in the search for racial equality.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> See: Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York*; Ferguson, *Top Down*.

<sup>109</sup> Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York*, 5.

<sup>110</sup> Altshuler, *Community Control*, 17.

<sup>111</sup> "Are Uneducated People Going to Tell Me What to Teach?" *Scope Bulletin*, March 1969, Box 1, Folder 6, Annie Stein Papers.

The quest to decentralize New York City public schools and give local communities greater control in education stemmed from years of neglect by the New York Board of Education in low-income areas. Advocates for Community Control had different visions of what it could provide. Albert Vann, later administrator to Ocean Hill-Brownsville district, argued that Black teachers had been conned by the educational system. He claimed: "We understand now that the schools have been preparing us to live in a white society as white people".<sup>112</sup> Many Black teachers and administrators argued how Black teachers lived in the communities they taught in, exemplifying that many white teachers were "strangers" in the school as they often did not.<sup>113</sup> Jim Haskins' diary of his time as a Harlem schoolteacher gives great insight into the antipathy many Black parents had for white teachers who they felt did not understand the children they were supposed to teach.<sup>114</sup> Haskins' diary demonstrates the breadth of opinion on the issues within the teaching staff, the parents and the student body. His diary uncovers the frustration many parents had with the education system and how communication between the schools and parents in places like Harlem had become hostile and infrequent. One continuing flashpoint was the parents' "long fight to get the acting principal appointed principal" as the Board of Education dragged its heels and refused to listen to the demands of local parents who supported the hiring of the Black acting principal on a permanent basis.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 42.

<sup>113</sup> D'Amico, "Teachers' Rights Versus Students' Rights", 552.

<sup>114</sup> James Haskins, *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher* (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 22.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

Parents and community activists repeatedly voiced their concern on the racial inequality of materials provided for children. Children's books had long been part of Black educational philosophies and in the 1960s and 1970s they encapsulated the "Black drive for self-determination".<sup>116</sup> The focus on Black pride and Black memory coalesced in calls for Black Power and gave hope to parents and educators who felt that Black children suffered due to a lack of culturally conscious teaching. A planning document for I.S. 201 proclaimed that the "Euro-American programmatic planlessness" in schools needed to be replaced with a new model to suit community schools.<sup>117</sup>

The Community Control Movement offered an educational space in which the needs of Black schoolchildren could be met. Demands for change in personnel and community oversight became common. Calls to improve the reading materials available to the children also became a frequent rallying call. In the planning stages of Community Control the Harlem Parents Association and some teachers formed the Curriculum Committee to discuss how to make schooling more "relevant to students" and where to find the best materials.<sup>118</sup> Greater community oversight provided promise that these issues could be addressed.

### **The Draw of Community Control**

The extensive nature of the emerging canon of books that focused on topics

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<sup>116</sup> Esther Cooper Jackson and Constance Pohl eds., *Freedomways Reader: Prophets in Their Own Country* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 223.

<sup>117</sup> Merle Stewart, 'The Community Controlled-School and Modern Management', Box 3, Folder 'Community Control Management', Babette Edwards Papers.

<sup>118</sup> 'Agenda of the Curriculum Committee', Box 3, Folder 'Community Control Management', Babette Edwards Papers.

such as Black pride and Black history ensured that there were books that appealed to a wide variety of those supporting Community Control. From political biographies like Arnold Adoff's *Malcolm X* to African folktales like Edythe Haskett's *Grains of Pepper*, African American children's books covered an array of topics that groups like the Curriculum Committee of I.S. 201 wanted to address.<sup>119</sup> The decentralisation experiment of Community Control is important for the study of children's literature because it gave greater educational freedom to parents and educators who had become concerned with how schools taught Black children. Jim Haskins' diary reveals that the experiment split people based on their educational philosophy as many white teachers felt the "present system [was] adequate" whereas many parents and Black teachers believed the current system was "crippling black children".<sup>120</sup> This division reveals that many members of the local community believed that Community Control would provide a greater opportunity to provide a better, more relevant education to the children.

Writing for *Freedomways* in 1968, psychiatrist Dr. Alvin Poussaint, argued that Community Control could bring a change in the materials in schools as the curricula of American public schools had taught white racism knowingly and unknowingly since their inception.<sup>121</sup> Greater community oversight in the materials available targeted materials that contributed to internalised racism with dehumanising racist imagery. Historian Russell

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Haskins, *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher*, 25.

<sup>121</sup> Jackson and Pohl, *Freedomways Reader*, 223.

Rickford asserts that Community Control was a “formidable movement...that posited education as the final battlefield of ‘the colonized,’”<sup>122</sup> Rickford’s work connects the Black Power and Community Control movements on a cultural, as well as a political level. Indeed, in terms of children’s books there was a strong connection between the ideology within the pages of children’s literature and that which could be found in Black Power and Black Nationalist groups. However, Black-authored children’s books were not just a voice for Black Power rhetoric.

African American children’s books that began to be published en masse during the late 1960s and 1970s became powerful tools in educating Black children for parents, educators, and even those working for the Ford Foundation. An examination of the appeal of Community Control to a variety of groups helps to uncover their complex political as well as cultural motivations. The educational freedom allowed by Community Control provided the context in which Black children’s literature could flourish. Parents, educators, Black Power activists, and individuals attached to the Ford Foundation illustrated the potential in Community Control to encourage their version of cultural education of children. The appeal of the Community Control movement and the draw of the demonstration districts to concerned parents reveals how Black authored children’s books increasingly became an important educational tool. A broad range of groups became interested in

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<sup>122</sup> Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 5.

how public schooling could be a space in which Black children might have access to more culturally relevant materials.

On a local level parents and educators worked together to provide a more relevant curriculum for Black children in the city. In one pamphlet promoting Community Control, an article highlighted that the focus on “black awareness” mainly came from teachers, however parents requested “books, pictures, and other teaching materials that depicted black people”.<sup>123</sup> Evidently, parents had an interest in what books their children were reading. Educational scholar Jomills Braddock has argued that desegregation improved test scores and led to higher achievement for Black children.<sup>124</sup> However, a Black educational philosophy was not premised on better test scores, but a better, more holistic education.

The calls from parents for Community Control to provide more culturally conscious books, however, attests to the notion that parents did not simply want their children to improve on test scores, but to receive an education that celebrated, rather than denigrated the histories and cultural contributions of Black Americans. One of the key demands put forward by the Harlem Parents Committee for Community Control was the power of the community governing boards to directly buy books and supplies from suppliers directly.<sup>125</sup> The system of Community Control allowed for a greater

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<sup>123</sup> *Scope Bulletin*, March 1969, Box 1, Folder 6, Annie Stein Papers.

<sup>124</sup> Jomills Henry Braddock, "School Desegregation and Black Assimilation," *Journal of Social Issues* 41, no. 3 (1985), 18.

<sup>125</sup> George Todds, "Demand More Power for Schools" *New York Amsterdam News*, Feb 24, 1968, 23.

degree of influence for parents in choosing what their children read. Parents made up ten of the twenty-one members of the community governing board for I.S. 201 which included one supervisor, five teachers and five other members of the community.<sup>126</sup> Parents in the East Harlem demonstration district established a curriculum committee in order to establish how best they could make changes to the materials children had access to. The curriculum committee drew up a list of authors, educational specialists and others who they could consult in the process – underscoring just how important some parent groups felt their role was in book selection.<sup>127</sup> Crucial within this committee was the role of educators. Parents committees did not outrightly reject the knowledge of teachers but figures like Babette Edwards of the Harlem Parents Committee demonstrated a distrust in the ability of white educators to teach local children. The demonstration districts gave an opportunity for Black parents to have a say in what their children learnt and what teachers could teach their children.

Between 1964 and 1968, the professional goals of many teachers and the goals of Black activists and Civil Rights groups had grown apart.<sup>128</sup> Historian Daniel Perlstein skilfully argues that the battle for Community Control exposed the strains between Black calls for equal education and the liberalism of white teachers.<sup>129</sup> Many community activists and parents blamed white teachers for inhibiting the learning of Black children. The

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<sup>126</sup> 'Struggle for a Showcase', *Newsweek*, Feb 19, 1968, 87.

<sup>127</sup> "Curriculum Committee" Box 3, Folder 'Curriculum', Babette Edwards papers.

<sup>128</sup> Perrillo, *Uncivil Rights Teachers*, 118.

<sup>129</sup> Daniel H. Perlstein, *Justice, Justice: School Politics and the Eclipse of Liberalism* (New York; Oxford: P. Lang, 2004), 2.

Moynihan and Coleman Reports had “pathologized blackness”, teachers instead on focusing on academic achievement emphasised discipline and attendance because teaching colleges, like the School of Education at New York University, focused upon preparing children for misbehaviour and confrontation “escalating the very cleavage they sought to repair”.<sup>130</sup> Community Control threatened the professional control of the teacher and schoolteacher Jim Haskins noted in his diary that many white teachers opposed Community Control because they feared losing their jobs.<sup>131</sup> Newspaper reports in the *New York Times* consistently portrayed the issue of Community Control as a dichotomy of parents vs. teachers. Whilst Perlstein’s assertion of a separation between the two groups rings true for a great many white teachers, the reality was more complex.<sup>132</sup>

Many teachers, the majority were Black but including many white teachers, saw the benefits of Community Control and the advantages it had for the education of Black children. Charles Isaacs, a white Jewish teacher at J.H.S. 271 in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, wrote extensively about the new dynamics for teachers during Community Control and their ability to innovate. Isaacs argued that the new system meant that rather than focusing on suspensions, teachers could now motivate the children with an “appeal...to pride in Blackness” and he cited his colleague Les Campbell for being an innovator in teaching African American History.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> D’Amico, “Teachers’ Rights Versus Students’ Rights”, 552.

<sup>131</sup> Haskins, *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher*, 28.

<sup>132</sup> Perlstein, *Justice*, 8.

<sup>133</sup> Charles S. Isaacs, “Teacher Tells it Like He Sees It”, *New York Times Magazine*, Nov 24 1968.

Indeed, for Campbell, Community Control gave greater power to the Black community and allowed him to raise Black consciousness through a much larger variety of materials such as children's books, records, and photographs in his lessons. This use of a wide array of cultural materials is indicative of how the Community Control movement allowed an educational philosophy that worked with a range of media to focus on African American histories and cultures.<sup>134</sup> One of the founding members of the African American Teachers Association (AATA), Les Campbell recalled that establishing the group with other Black teachers was vital because the AATA was "more centered around the question of providing a better educational opportunity for Black youth, rather than issues around pay and benefits".<sup>135</sup> One of the principal concerns of the AATA was a curriculum designed with Black children in mind.

Educator and theoretician of community control, Preston Wilcox's *The Black Curriculum* became a key text that encapsulated much of the Black educational philosophy that was popular amongst Community Control advocates. Wilcox argued that at the heart of this book was "education for Black liberation".<sup>136</sup> Educators involved in Community Control took the opportunity to design a curriculum that is "based on the glory and greatness of the African American culture, history, and experience".<sup>137</sup> Keith Baird,

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<sup>134</sup> Interview with Les Campbell", *Eyes on the Prize II Interviews*, November 2, 1988. [http://digital.wustl.edu/e/eii/eiiweb/cam5427.0642.028marc\\_record\\_interviewee\\_process.htm](http://digital.wustl.edu/e/eii/eiiweb/cam5427.0642.028marc_record_interviewee_process.htm) | (Accessed: 4th February 2017).

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Preston Wilcox "The Black Curriculum: Developing a Program in Afro-American Studies (Book Review)." *The Black Scholar* 1, no. 1 (1969): 86.

<sup>137</sup> Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York*, 67.

director of African American education in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, claimed that Black teachers had the opportunity to counteract white supremacist education and it was a chance to supply “the missing pages of Black culture”.<sup>138</sup> Evidently, whilst many teachers in New York (predominantly white teachers) felt that Community Control was a threat to their professional freedom, many others viewed it as an opportunity to make real changes to what they taught children. Les Campbell felt that the term ‘decentralisation’ meant a “shift in the balance of power...power in every sphere” and this included governance of school districts as well as control of the materials, the libraries, the purchases made by the schools.<sup>139</sup> Campbell’s language of self-determination and “power” demonstrates how Black Power ideology was not just part of activist groups but became the language of teachers, administration staff and many others in the struggle for schooling. The demand for Community Control involved a shift in power from the white Board of Education to the Black community. It is important to note that while many took on the language of power and control many teachers and parents regarded Campbell as “too radical” as he described how some parents warned their children to stay away from him as “he’ll get you in trouble” and another teacher removed his pictures of Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown from the bulletin board.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Buras, "From Carter G. Woodson to Critical Race Curriculum Studies", 44.

<sup>139</sup> Helen Parr, "Coalitions, Negotiations and the Comfield Model: Appendix E A Plan for Managing the Development, Implementation and Operation of a Model Elementary Teacher Education Program" *Office of Education* (Washington D.C.: Bureau of Research, 1970), 17.

<sup>140</sup> Campbell, *Eyes on the Prize II Interviews*.

For Black Power activists, the Community Control movement became an important conduit for their ideology because the movement was rooted in self-determination.<sup>141</sup> Sonny Carson, head of Brooklyn independent CORE, taught classes during the strikes and this included leading the children through the subway with “cupped fists” as he led the children in a chant of “Black Power!”.<sup>142</sup> In October 1968, a march from city hall to 110 Livingston Street (New York City Board of Education headquarters) took place in which several prominent Black Power and Black nationalist leaders joined together and marched with the children and other educational activists. H. Rap Brown, Sonny Carson and also the leaders of the New Republic of Afrika walked arm-in-arm.<sup>143</sup> While the appeal for Community Control for Black Power and Nationalist groups stemmed from the idea that it was change by and for the Black communities, the opportunity to engage with children through educational materials also became a significant factor.

Jaqueline Mithun, in her 1977 assessment of the impact of Black Power, argued that education was an important focus for Black Power, especially in terms of curriculum as it created a new form of power, the power of self-image.<sup>144</sup> Russell Rickford argues that the Community Control movement was a “rebirth of Black Nationalism” because the endeavour of assimilating culture was over in favour of teaching children Black heritage

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<sup>141</sup> Tom Adam Davies, *Mainstreaming Black Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 137.

<sup>142</sup> Ernest Johnson Jr., “A Day in the Life of the Locked...’ in Box 12, Folder “Clippings” Annie Stein Papers.

<sup>143</sup> “Interview with Les Campbell”.

<sup>144</sup> Jacqueline S. Mithun, “Black Power and Community Change: An Assessment”, *Journal of Black Studies* 7, no. 3 (1977): 270.

and history.<sup>145</sup> While Community Control did feature some prominent Black nationalists Rickford's assertion assumes too much of the motivations of various parents and teachers, many who supported greater community control but were not necessarily Black nationalists. However, for Black Power and Black nationalist advocates, the Community Control movement offered an opportunity to inculcate children with Black radical politics as well as various African American histories and cultures, depending on the activist's beliefs. Black Power supporters and Black nationalists had demonstrated an interest in education and a focus on Black history and cultures in a range of independent Black schools. In New York City, Sonny Carson, along with H. Rap Brown, Amiri Baraka and Mualana Karenga all became involved in the "School for Common Sense" that taught over 30 Black children African and Black American Art, Music and History.<sup>146</sup> The involvement in small projects like these schools demonstrates how Black radicals embraced an educational philosophy that promoted liberation through African and African American culture. As the Community Control movement developed, figures like Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown attended community meetings and protests, demonstrating their interest in developing public school education along the lines of a more radical Black educational philosophy.

McGeorge Bundy, President of the Ford Foundation from 1965 to 1979, shocked many when the institution engaged with, rather than side-

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<sup>145</sup> Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 28.

<sup>146</sup> "New School For Blacks Opens Fall Registration" *New York Amsterdam News*, September 28, 1968.

lined, radical Black activists.<sup>147</sup> After the Board of Education intimated that it might experiment with decentralization, the Ford Foundation provided an initial \$139, 000 in planning grants for the experimental districts.<sup>148</sup> In her analysis of the Community Control movement, Noliwe Rooks illustrates the power of white institutional support of the Community Control movement. She contends that the Ford Foundation and Bundy believed that “a little Black Power in the classroom” could influence achievement and reading levels.<sup>149</sup> Rooks is right in her assertion of co-optation of radical Black politics, however, the nuances of liberal institutions’ interactions is not fully explored as Black Power activists still had scope to implement their own ideas. A program officer for Ford Foundation, Marjorie Martus stressed that the Foundation’s role was in supporting Community Control and aspects such as curriculum development should stay in communities’ hands.<sup>150</sup> Historian Karen Ferguson’s *Top Down: The Ford Foundation, Black Power, and the Reinvention of Racial Liberalism* is a significant work that demonstrates the intricate relationship between Black Power and the Ford Foundation and how both influenced each other.<sup>151</sup>

Rather than simply using soft power to negate the influence of Black Power groups, those involved in the Community Control movement on behalf

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<sup>147</sup> Ferguson, *Top Down*, 1.

<sup>148</sup> Carolyn Eisenberg, “The Parents Movement at I.S. 201: From Integration to Black Power, 1958-1966” PhD Diss., (Columbia University, 1971), 329.

<sup>149</sup> Noliwe M. Rooks, *White Money/ Black Power: The Surprising History of African American Studies and the Crisis of Race in Higher Education* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006), 90.

<sup>150</sup> Marjorie Martus to Joseph F. Phelan, Jr., 23 April, 1969, letter, Box 24, Folder ‘Negro Education’, Ford Foundation Records, Education and Public Policy Program, Rockefeller Archive Center.

<sup>151</sup> Ferguson, *Top Down*.

of the Ford Foundation had their own ideologies and hopes for curriculum change in schools and this often aligned closely with Black Power advocates. A programme officer for the Ford Foundation, Mario Fantini a former teacher, administrator and teacher-trainer, employed his experiences in schools for his work with the Foundation in the demonstration districts. The Ford Foundation signalled curriculum development as part of the Ford Foundation's goals in this experiment, but it was essential for Fantini. Believing that Community Control needed to be political, as well as educational, Fantini and Richard Magat of the Ford Foundation argued for a culturally relevant curriculum that could be taught alongside a more traditional one that prepared children for the social realities beyond school. He claimed that more children could be engaged in the educational process if a curriculum dealt with a child's "quest for identity, their feelings of power or powerlessness".<sup>152</sup> The experimental district programme directors of the Foundation, saw in their project an opportunity to develop their research and theories of curricula as well as fostering a "melting-pot cultural pluralism" and mutual understanding between communities.<sup>153</sup> This was far removed from the aims of many Black Community Control advocates like Preston Wilcox who believed that a cultural focus entirely separate from whiteness would be "self-liberating" and important for Black communities.<sup>154</sup> However, it is crucial that amongst the most active on the project were figures that believed in the

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<sup>152</sup> Fantini et al., *Community Control*, 197.

<sup>153</sup> Ferguson, *Top Down*, 126.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

educational potential of culturally relevant materials that could help with self-discovery and engagement with learning.<sup>155</sup>

Community Control was attractive to for many reasons but consistently activists, parents and teachers highlighted the opportunity to improve the curriculum and reading materials of children. A New York teacher, Robert Campbell, in a conversation with Charles Wilson, the head of the East Harlem demonstration district, questioned why in the incessant discussions of Community Control one never heard the word 'children'.<sup>156</sup> Wilson replied that it was simply because "children have no power base".<sup>157</sup> This response encapsulates the early period of the Community Control movement. On all sides when children were invoked it was about drawing battle lines. Figures across the spectrum of educational activism claimed to be acting in the best interest of children but they were not given a voice in the press or in community meetings.<sup>158</sup> Student Ellen Shephard led a demonstration of students against racist education and declared in 1968 that it was "student power and not any other kind of power".<sup>159</sup> The initial stages of Community Control, however, featured a distinct lack of children's voices. It was not until the realities of Community Control had found their way into

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Campbell, *The Life and Death of a Great Experiment*, 79.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>158</sup> Caroline Loomis, "'As far as I'm concerned, they're on strike because they're against me': Children's Voices in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Community Control Struggle, 1968-69" *Theory, Research, and Action in Urban Education*, nd, <https://traue.commons.gc.cuny.edu/far-im-concerned-theyre-strike-theyre-childrens-voices-ocean-hill-brownsville-community-control-struggle-1968-69/> (accessed 27 June 2017).

<sup>159</sup> James P. Sterba, "School Protest Leader Defines Action" *New York Times*, December 3, 1968.

classrooms that children's voices were heard more often through lessons, programmes, and events that sought children's input.

Community Control gave the local communities more power, but it also provided greater pedagogical freedom in what the children could be taught. For some on the New Left, liberals and many involved in the Ford Foundation it provided an opportunity to expand an education based on cultural identity that facilitated communication between communities that was pioneered by John Dewey decades earlier and by progressive educators such as Jonathan Kozol and Herbert Kohl.<sup>160</sup> For Black Power activists and Black Nationalists, changing what children read was an opportunity to provide children with a new sense of power, self-determination and pride Blackness. However, for many parents it was a way to get their children interested in reading and gain a foothold in an educational system that was stacked against them. One of the greatest appeals of Community Control for each group was the ability to create a more inclusive curriculum that included, or focused on, Black history, Black pride and a broad range of different African and African American cultures. This coalition of parents, students, educators and Black Power activists helped to form an educational environment that encouraged progressive teaching methods and an emphasis on the variety and depth of African American cultural experiences. After the establishment of the demonstration districts, Black-authored and illustrated books and storytelling became crucial features in New York City

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<sup>160</sup> Jim Garrison, Stefan Neubert and Kersten Reich, *John Dewey's Philosophy of Education: An Introduction and Recontextualization For Our Times*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), xxi.

education and the impact outlasted the experiment in Community Control that ended in 1969.

## **Conclusion**

The Demonstration Districts in New York lasted only until 1969. The final decision on school decentralisation was due by May of that year. After the strikes in Ocean Hill Brownsville, Albert Shanker, the head of the UFT, had gained significant political support from Republicans and many Democrats in the suburbs. The State legislature passed the act on 30<sup>th</sup> April and it had “Shanker’s fingerprints all over it”; the new decentralisation law limited the power of community boards and re-established a more centralised control over many aspects of public schooling.<sup>161</sup> Community Control always had competing ideas amongst its supporters and a vociferous campaign undertaken by its opponents. The rise of Community Control coincided with the rise of Black Power and shared many of the same goals, such as self-determination and the fostering of Black pride. Indeed, Dora Pantell and Edwin Greenidge in their 1969 work on Black Power, specifically focused on the issue of schooling as a key issue for Black Power advocates – Floyd McKissick of CORE, spoke at the graduation at I.S. 201 whilst Herman Ferguson was a community advisory member of one of the decentralised districts before being convicted of attempted assassination and seeking exile in Guyana.<sup>162</sup> This association fostered fear in many areas as the idea of

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<sup>161</sup> Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York*, 146.

<sup>162</sup> Dora Pantell and Edwin Greenidge, *If Not Now, When? The Many Meanings of Black Power* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969), 102-104.

'black militants' running the schools created a conservative backlash and was latched onto by the UFT.

The significance of the experimental districts, however, did not end with their dismantling. The districts had a greater voter turnout and involvement in school affairs than New York City's other districts.<sup>163</sup> In each of the demonstration districts there had been more direct-participation with school boards and educational issues.<sup>164</sup> Importantly, this featured a more direct relationship with local schools for working class communities and a greater number of women were elected to school boards.<sup>165</sup> Moreover, the local community and activists had become more engaged with educational issues and potential solutions. In terms of children's literature, the problems of desegregation and the highlights of Community Control had exposed many to a more radical Black educational philosophy that sought to centre a child's cultural background and identity and provide them with a more relevant education. In *Black Literate Lives*, Maisha Fisher contends that the strive for Community Control had the "underpinnings that framed the Black struggle for literacy throughout enslavement, Reconstruction, and the thrust for Black Power".<sup>166</sup> This chapter builds upon the exemplary work of Fisher and furthers this argument. Black educational philosophy was integral throughout the educational upheavals in New York City, a philosophy that

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<sup>163</sup> Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York*, 86.

<sup>164</sup> Maurice R. Berube and Ross Gittell. 'Educational Reform and Citizen Participation' in *Activist Scholar: Selected Works of Marilyn Gittell* edited by Ross Gittell and Kathe Newman, (London: Sage, 2012), 10.

<sup>165</sup> Fantini et al, *Community Control*, 173-180.

<sup>166</sup> Maisha T. Fisher, *Black Literate Lives: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2009), np.

called for community building and Black pride. African American children's books were cited by educators, Black Power activists, and parents as a way to further this Black educational philosophy for the community's children.

Educational upheavals in New York City exposed many individuals and groups to an area of children's literature that was both popular and educational. The demonstration districts opened up avenues of exploration for a number of different groups and individuals that encouraged the use of Black-authored children's books. Community Control underscored how children's literature could further a Black educational philosophy. It also provided physical space for publishers, authors, and groups like the CIBC to run events and programmes with African American children's literature as a central feature in education

**CHAPTER 4:**  
**FROM THE STREETS TO THE CLASSROOM: CHILDREN’S BOOK PROGRAMMES IN  
NEW YORK CITY**

Dramatic educational changes in New York City in the 1960s, culminating in experimental districts for Community Control, opened up education beyond the confines of the classroom. A 1964 pamphlet created for teachers by the state Office of Education Information recognised that many children, particularly Black and Puerto Rican children, potentially felt like “strangers” in the school system. The pamphlet encouraged white teachers to “move out of your world and into theirs”.<sup>1</sup> Historian Diane D’Amico rightly asserts that the pamphlets were representative of racialised assumptions of power that pathologized Blackness and Puerto Rican identity and focused on social deprivation.<sup>2</sup> However, many projects undertaken in the late 1960s and early 1970s that arose out of Community Control reiterated the importance of moving into the Black child’s world but focused specifically on issues in white-controlled education, rather than issues with the communities. Education among Black communities and in the streets provided a radical and beneficial education not just for African American children, but for all children in the surrounding communities. Educational events that used Black children’s books such as the Ocean Hill-Brownsville “Be-In”, Storytelling on

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<sup>1</sup> “They’re strangers in school”, December 1964, Series 565, Box 4, Folder 3, Office of Education Information Services and Public Relations, Board of Education of the City of New York, Municipal Archives, New York City Department of Records.

<sup>2</sup> Diana D’Amico, “Teachers’ Rights Versus Students’ Rights: Race and Professional Authority in the New York City Public Schools, 1960-1986,” *American Educational Research Journal* 53, no. 3 (2016), 553.

the Streets, and Bookmobiles in Brooklyn and Harlem reveal how children's literature and its educational engaged the community. During these programmes, authors, educators and activists developed a clearer Black educational philosophy, as ways in which Black children's books could be used to educate on topics like history and be part of what historian Rafael Torrúbia calls a "revolution of the mind", changing about how children thought about Blackness.<sup>3</sup> Books could be tools with which children could help shape their own identity and understanding of the world.

The Community Control Movement opened avenues for various groups such as the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) and school librarians to become more involved in the education of children, whereas opportunities were more limited in other school districts. Shortly after his book *Where Does the Day Go?* was published in 1969, Walter Dean Myers was invited by a school librarian to talk about it to his daughter's class in Brooklyn. The white headteacher of the school thumbed through the story which featured several Black children, a Japanese girl and a Puerto Rican boy and told Myers that the school simply could not have such a book in the library because it excluded white children.<sup>4</sup> That Myers' work was rejected indicates the difficulty in promoting Black children's books in schools beyond the experimental districts of East Harlem, Ocean-Hill Brownsville and Two Bridges in the late 1960s. The Demonstration Districts brought together more

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<sup>3</sup> Rafael Torrúbia, *Black Power and the American People: Culture and Identity in the Twentieth Century* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Dean Myers, "The Black Experience in Children's Books: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back" in *The Black American in Books for Children: Readings in Racism*, eds. Donnarae MacCann and Gloria Woodard (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1985), 222.

like-minded individuals who believed in multi-racial children's books. With the support of many teachers and local activists, groups such as the CIBC, became more involved in education. The co-operation between CIBC and educators helped a radical Black educational philosophy flourish both inside and outside of public schools. Away from the oversight of the New York Board of Education, on the streets, in libraries and in the experimental school districts children's books became an important way to teach Black history and Black memory and to bolster Black pride.

The educational initiatives between 1968 and 1974 are ignored in much of the historiography on the Community Control Movement and education. In his analysis of the aftermath of the school strikes, historian Jerald Podair focuses on the fallout of Community Control and its co-option by white neighbourhoods in New York. Podair argues that in places like Canarsie and Forest Hills, white middle-class activists harnessed the impulses of the Community Control movement to abandon integration aims and helped divide New York City along racial fault lines.<sup>5</sup> After the Decentralization law of 1969 took effect in 1970, redistricting led to renewed racial tensions as the predominantly Black demonstration districts were split and folded into new, larger districts. In the Brooklyn district of Canarsie, just south of Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the predominantly white local school board resisted the inclusion of Black children from the Tilden Houses into JHS 211. The multicultural educational programmes initiated during Community

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<sup>5</sup> Jerald Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis*, (London: Yale University Press, 2002), 192.

Control had been eclipsed by racial division promoted under the banner of Community Control after 1970. Most historiography on the Community Control Movement views it as a short-lived movement that recoiled in the face of a large conservative backlash in the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> However, even though districts were redrawn and the experiments ended, this chapter demonstrates that Community Control had a wider cultural impact in children's books and multicultural education. This impact goes beyond the traditional periodisation of Community Control into the 1970s. By focusing on African American children's books, this study challenges the historiography that asserts Community Control as a failure, though it was discontinued the impact of using African children's literature was felt from Brooklyn Streets to the Columbia teacher training college years afterwards. This chapter examines how, during Community Control and after it was dismantled, activists and educators used African American children's books to further Black educational philosophy.

In Fred Siegel's research on U.S. cities, rather than focusing on the racist white backlash, he contends that Community Control was a Black nationalist political movement that failed in its mission "to support a miniaturized version of black nation building" as it tried to hijack liberalism in the city.<sup>7</sup> His work attributes the movement to Black nationalists, but he

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel H. Perlstein, *Justice, Justice: School Politics and the Eclipse of Liberalism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004); Jane Anna Gordon, *Why They Couldn't Wait: A Critique of the Black-Jewish Conflict over Community Control in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, 1967-71* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2001); Diane Ravitch, *The Great School War: A History of the New York City Public School*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Fred Siegel, *The Future Once Happened Here: New York, D.C., L.A., and the Fate of America's Big Cities* (New York: The Free Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Siegel, *The Future Once Happened Here*, 74-76.

never analyses the educational or cultural elements of the movement and reduces it to a bitter conflict between conservatism and Black Power militants. Siegel's research does not countenance a Community Control beyond the divisive headlines in newspapers so the work of teachers, librarians and the voices of children are entirely absent. In a more positive response to the movement, Diane Ravitch's work *The Great School Wars* asserts that the movement was not the disaster many feared whilst arguing that neither was it the "panacea its proponents anticipated", concluding that it was a complex episode in "discovering how to teach children of all backgrounds".<sup>8</sup> Her more nuanced approach exposes the complexity of education in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but she focuses on the political engagements rather than other impacts Community Control had. Whilst there is disagreement within the historiography over who is to blame for the failure of the Community Control project, the majority of works agree that the movement was a political disaster. The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) succeeded in its pressure on Mayor John Lindsay and the State legislature as the districts were divided. Community Control failed to overcome opposition from the UFT and did not succeed in establishing community schooling across the city.

What happened afterwards in education, such as book events on the streets and even in people's homes, however, is completely overlooked in scholarship. An examination of these educational events demonstrates the cultural and educational impact of Black authored children's books and how

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<sup>8</sup> Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 398.

they became important educational tools despite Mayor Lindsay's ending of the experiment. Whilst scholars like Ravitch and Podair are correct to argue that the New York Board of Education implemented very little change after the events of the late 1960s, this does not mean education outside the Board control did not change. More recent work by Heather Lewis has challenged the orthodox view of educational success. Lewis emphasises that innovative and important educational work continued in some districts and in certain schools after the Decentralisation Bill in 1969.<sup>9</sup> Lewis asserts that New York City District four and thirteen "became exemplars of educational progress" after Community Control had ended, counteracting many historians who Lewis rightly argues "superficially cast as an era of decline and backlash".<sup>10</sup> Lewis' work examines education at the local level and her work reveals a complex picture of schools after Community Control in which the impact of a Black educational philosophy continued. However, education was broader and was not limited to select schools, but key educational initiatives sprung up outside of schools across the city.

Educational upheavals in New York City had forged relationships and connections that were used during and after the official end of the experimental districts. The success of the movement has so often been examined solely through the prism of schools, whereas throughout New York City there were storytellers on the streets helping children to read and

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<sup>9</sup> Heather Lewis, "Protest, Place and Pedagogy: New York City's Community Control Movement and Its Aftermath, 1966–1996" PhD Diss., (New York University, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

teachers began establishing “classrooms without walls” on the avenues of Harlem.<sup>11</sup> This opening-up of education featured myriad events that used Black children’s books outside traditional educational settings in order to help children read and engage positively with education. When the CIBC created a teacher training course in 1974, the organization had almost a decade of experience using children’s books in a variety of settings from the experimental districts to the streets of New York City. Community Control had seen the developments of a Black educational philosophy that harnessed the power of African American children’s literature, but this philosophy was continued and lived through on in the streets, in classrooms, in libraries and in people’s homes.

Figures involved in the experimental districts displayed a nuanced understanding of what these districts meant for education in the long term. In their book on Community Control, Mario Fantini, Marylyn Gittell and Richard Magat claimed that whilst it was not wholly successful the experiment had developed “a *framework* for change”.<sup>12</sup> Their predictions were right. After they published their work in 1970, events focused on children’s literature started in the experimental districts and continued on the streets, in museums, and in homes before a focus on children’s literature returned back to public schools.

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<sup>11</sup> Sara Slack, “Harlem Self-Help Teams Teach Pupils on Sidewalks” *New York Amsterdam News*, Sep 3, 1966.

<sup>12</sup> Mario Fantini, Marilyn Gittell, and Richard Magat, *Community Control and the Urban School* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 232.

Bradford Chambers and the CIBC led the changes, cognisant of the symbolic importance and legacy of these schools and their use of children's books. In a letter to the Ford Foundation, Chambers recognised that experimental school districts, such as Ocean Hill-Brownsville, may not last long as a "functioning district" but that "it will remain a national symbol and one of the most valuable community laboratories for testing interracial materials".<sup>13</sup> The reading programmes and events that began in the three experimental districts had a broader impact across New York City and across the U.S. more widely. It was in these schools that publishers, librarians, Ford Foundation members, authors, parents, and many others worked together and advocated the educational importance of culturally relevant children's literature. Individuals and organisations that promoted the use of Black children's literature used an array of events outside of the dominant educational system to forge connections with teachers, librarians, children and parents. Working outside the white-dominated 'traditional' parameters of schooling gave groups and activists new experiences before their focus returned to the classrooms in the mid-1970s. This movement, outside the traditional confines of schooling, helped to build communities that would later develop teacher training programmes at Columbia University and provide teachers with detailed lesson plans, having a longer lasting impact than is assumed in wider scholarship.

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<sup>13</sup> Bradford Chambers to Thomas E. Cooney, May 20 1969, Letter, Reel 1112, Ford Foundation records, Grants C-D, 1936-2006. Microfilm. Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (hereafter referred to as Ford Foundation Grants, RAC).

### **Connections Made: The networks created around Black children's literature**

The importance of Black children's literature had been highlighted by educators, parents, and librarians within New York City public schools for decades but had little success. However, it was the formation of the experimental districts that allowed many individuals and groups to form connections and begin working together more closely. The social, political, and cultural climate of late 1960s New York City allowed for a variety of groups to work together to encourage the use of African American children's books. This mix of activists, educators and dedicated groups reasserted and refashioned a longer history of Black children's literature as part of a radical educational philosophy that featured concepts including Black Power and armed resistance. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district provides an insight into how coalitions built around African American children's literature and their educational potential as authors, publishers and activists were invited into the schools. People made connections outside the control of educational institutions in order to formulate the best ways in which children's books could be used. Then, after this experience, the use of Black children's books returned to schools as educators and teacher trainers sought out the expertise of groups such as the CIBC as well as authors, illustrators and prominent educators.

Rhody McCoy, the district administrator for Ocean Hill-Brownsville, claimed that it was important to "open up education so people can see it and

try it".<sup>14</sup> McCoy's actions matched his rhetoric as he welcomed publishers, authors, the CIBC, and a range of other professionals and paraprofessionals into the districts' schools to promote better children's books within education. Crucially, McCoy appointed Harriet Brown as his library coordinator, a school librarian with a decade's experience in Harlem and a former supervisor of libraries for the Board of Education. The "good vibrations" of McCoy worked well with the "quiet dynamism" of Harriet Brown as they formed a large group of paraprofessionals who helped children read. These paraprofessionals included authors, storytellers and parents who all worked on helping Black children access culturally relevant materials.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, Brown and McCoy formed a close relationship with the CIBC in 1968, establishing the Ocean-Hill Be-in, a book event which included publishers, teachers, authors, illustrators, librarians and students. All participants were sent a form to fill out prior to arrival and the form included a section for the invitee to suggest the names of artists, editors or writers that they wished to be included, furthering the network of contacts involved in promoting Black children's literature.<sup>16</sup>

Many of the sources for these educational events originate from campaign groups, keen to secure their educational initiatives. Thus, a lot of

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<sup>14</sup> Rhody McCoy qtd. in Lilian S. Calhoun, "New York: Schools and Power-Whose?", *Equity & Excellence in Education* 7, no. 1 (1969): 35.

<sup>15</sup> Parents' Magazine Press to Bradford Chambers, April 17<sup>th</sup> 1969, Letter. Reel 1112, Ford Foundation Grants, RAC.

<sup>16</sup> Book Week Forms, October, 1968, Box 14, Folder "Ocean-Hill Brownsville Book-Week", Council on Interracial Books for Children: Director's Files, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, New York, New York (hereafter cited as CIBC Director's Files).

the material in the CIBC Director's Files were part of collections used to positively promote their efforts in order to gain further funding and support. However, Ford Foundation correspondence and New York Board of Education materials reveal an expansive movement that the CIBC aided but did not fully control. The Ocean-Hill Brownsville district acted as a locus for parties interested in developing the canon of Black children's books and significantly it was a place where children could meet and interact with these authors, illustrators, and publishers. The CIBC archival sources are not just carefully selected materials, but a vast array of materials written by hundreds of individuals that reveal a movement for multicultural children's literature that had many disagreements and a range of competing ideas, yet a unified desire to improve education for children. It is not just official documentation of the organisation but notes, drawings, plans and other materials from various members of the CIBC that give an insight into the loose association of individuals drawn together by a common purpose.

District librarian Harriet Brown was crucial to the formation of this association of interested parties. The letters she received from a variety of children's publishers reveal the extent to which she had introduced publishers to librarians and teachers and, moreover, the students.<sup>17</sup> Caroline Greenberg, editor at Golden Books, wrote of the "contagiously exciting experience" of meeting so many people in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, from the students to the teachers. Her endorsement of the children's book events in

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<sup>17</sup> Edna Barth to Harriet Brown, November 25, 1969, Letter, Box 14, Folder "Ocean-Hill Brownsville Book-Week", CIBC Director's Files.

the district reveal how Community Control facilitated the meeting of publishers with Black authors, children and librarians to discuss the importance of children's books and to exchange ideas about their use in education. A veteran of the New York public school system, Jim Haskins a former teacher and a writer, argued that reading events in schools such as the 'Be-In' were a "needed breath of fresh air".<sup>18</sup> Community Control gave rise to a more open approach to education that included the community in education but also brought powerful groups to meet with the community and serve its educational needs.

The experimental school districts became national focus points in the media; the coverage predominantly focused on strikes, antisemitism, and Black militancy.<sup>19</sup> Newspapers covered the story in a binary fashion focusing on the disputes between Black militants and the UFT, always couched in militaristic language as Ocean-Hill Brownsville was described as the "Flanders fields of the New York school dispute" and this overshadowed the real educational work being undertaken in the schools.<sup>20</sup> However, Harriet Brown, amidst the flurry of attention that the school district received, brought together different people to provide a project that would establish the importance of African American children's literature in schools. Even though the media did not focus on the Black educational philosophy that drove

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<sup>18</sup> Jim Haskins to Thomas Cooney, December 16, 1969, Letter, Reel 1112, Ford Foundation Grants, RAC.

<sup>19</sup> "More power for Shanker and Union", *New York Times*, 16 June 1968.

<sup>20</sup> Ward Just, "Community Control and the N.Y. School Experiment", *The Washington Post*, 2 December 1968.

Community Control, projects such as those initiated by Brown did not go unnoticed. After the book events at Ocean-Hill, the Ford Foundation provided \$40,000 in funding to the CIBC to continue and expand its projects.<sup>21</sup> A raft of authors, illustrators, publishers, and teachers wrote letters of endorsement to the Ford Foundation on behalf of the CIBC, revealing the extensive network of people who rallied around the educational benefits of Black children's literature.<sup>22</sup>

By using the district schools to host book events centred around African American children's literature, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district reveals how Community Control provided the physical space as well as the educational philosophy through which children's books could be used in education. Harriet Brown argued for the importance of African American children's books and how crucial it was for them to "tell it like it is" to Black children as "they must be able to see their lives portrayed in books, with utter realism".<sup>23</sup> Brown encapsulated a Black educational philosophy that promoted cultural relevance and encouraged Black pride. It was through the connections made through Community Control that Brown could meet with authors, illustrators and publishers who all shared her vision. The networks made in the experimental districts would provide the impetus for a range of events that used Black-authored children's books to help African American children to learn to read and engage more positively with education. The

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<sup>21</sup> Grant Precis, Grant No. 710-0086, Reel 1112, Ford Foundation Grants, RAC.

<sup>22</sup> Jim Haskins to Thomas Cooney, December 16 1969, Letter, Reel 1112, Ford Foundation Grants, RAC.

<sup>23</sup> "Children's Book Editors Study Children Book Needs", *New York Amsterdam News*, August 9, 1969.

Ocean Hill-Brownsville experimental district was the most notable in the press, so key events such as the Be-In and Storytelling on the Streets benefitted from this popularity.

However, the other experimental districts also became crucial sites for children's literature, and this helped form connections citywide. One anonymous publisher claimed that the districts were of "tremendous ongoing importance as a line of communication to everyone in the book world", revealing how these networks impacted education in the classroom as well as the actual publishing of such books.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, after events that lauded the value of Black children's books began in the experimental districts, similar events occurred citywide as increasingly teachers, activists, librarians and publishers formed connections. From storytelling in the streets to Columbia University teacher training courses in Black children's literature, there was a "reaching out for relevant education" from across New York City.<sup>25</sup> Groups and individuals responded to this 'Reaching out': the CIBC, community activists, and teachers as well as authors and illustrators. They collaborated to create events that focused on Black authored and illustrated children's books and the planners involved understood that these events "could lead to the opening of new modes of education".<sup>26</sup> The CIBC's consciousness of the educational possibilities reveals how intimately tied African American children's books and a Black educational philosophy were. The children's

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<sup>24</sup> George Todd, "Book Publishing Group Supports Ocean Hill", *New York Amsterdam News*, November 29, 1969.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Storytelling Planning Notes, Box 12, Folder "Arts and Storytelling program", CIBC Director's Files.

books the CIBC used were not simply about finding a better balance on library shelves but could be a driving force of a Black educational philosophy.

### **“To the Dream of Ocean Hill-Brownsville”: Book Week and the Ocean-Hill Be-In**

The CIBC approached Rhody McCoy and Harriet Brown in 1968 about hosting an event for children’s publishers to meet librarians and curriculum task force members in the experimental districts. They set a date for May 1969, unaware it would coincide with the signing of the Decentralization Act that would later dismantle the experimental school districts. The original aim was to provide publishers with an insight into “the kind of books that children at the experimental district have been responding to positively, and to learn at first hand the kind of books still in need at such an inner-city school district”.<sup>27</sup> Bradford Chambers, chairman of CIBC was worried about the organisation’s first major event so he decided to keep it relatively small, sending information out to twenty of the biggest publishers of children’s literature but not advertising the event beyond that. However, Chambers’ concern for the event was misplaced. The first major conference hosted by the CIBC was a rousing success. It garnered praise from all the publishers involved and Dr. Charles Hurst, President of Malcolm X College in Chicago, described the events as being a “model for consciousness raising”.<sup>28</sup> Hurst had demonstrated an adherence to Community Control and relevant

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<sup>27</sup> Jim Haskins to Thomas Cooney, Dec 16 1969. Letter. Reel 1112, Ford Foundation Grants, RAC.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Hurst, *Passport to Freedom; Education, Humanism and Malcolm X* (Hamden: Linnet Books, 1972), 4.

education for a number of years. His recognition and praise for the events in Brooklyn school libraries was significant in examining educational struggles in the city as he perceived the focus on Black heritage and history as crucial to Community Control. The Book Week was a crucial event for school librarians and publishers, many of whom viewed it as an important part of a 'liberatory pedagogy'. Many of the children's books promoted at the event demonstrated the educational philosophy being pursued by radical Black Power and Black nationalist figures such as Dr. Hurst. The event brought people together for roundtable discussions and meetings as well demonstrating the crucial work done and needed within children's publishing.

Overall, eighteen editors of children's books took part in the Book Week and the organisers split them into two groups. Harriet Brown took one group on a tour of school classrooms and the school libraries, whilst Rhody McCoy engaged the other group in a meeting about Community Control and how he foresaw children's trade books becoming an integral part of that education. Robert Wyatt, a senior editor at Avon books reported that he could not help but get caught up in a sense of adventure as he walked around classrooms and saw children huddled reading together, expressing what he termed the "true spirit of education".<sup>29</sup> Every editor commented on how, within these classrooms, children's books had the ability to fully engage the children. A consulting editor at McGraw Hill, Lillian McLintock, observed

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Wyatt, Report on Ocean-Hill Be-In, Reel 1112, Ford Foundation Grants, RAC.

how the slogan “Black is Beautiful” was brought to life within the classrooms and libraries that she visited.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, another editor noted how many children pridefully wore buttons emblazoned with the slogan “Be all you can be – READ”, an indication of the underpinning educational philosophy within the schools. This was a philosophy that saw the psychological and educational power in books for children.<sup>31</sup> The slogan encompassed ideas of self-determination and self- knowledge that were part of a longer Black radical literary continuum for children from publications such as *The Brownies Book* and works by Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen. Children’s literature expert Rudine Sims Bishop argues that reading books which visually and textually portray Black characters is vital in helping children understand that they are valued in society and the event embraced this notion.<sup>32</sup> Publishers encountered children not only engaged in education but actively empowered by it. The focus in the district on getting children to read trade books reiterates the mistrust many educators had of textbooks’ treatment of race as textbooks often either denigrated the contributions and lives of Black people. Whereas African American children’s trade books developed an educational philosophy that sought to use the words and images of Black creators to engage children in education and empower them through literature.

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<sup>30</sup> Lillian McLintock, Report on Ocean-Hill Be-In, Reel 1112, Ford Foundation Grants, RAC.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, "Reflections on the Development of African American Children’s Literature," *Journal of Children’s Literature* 38, no. 2 (2012): 9.

Harriet Brown understood this critical concept of helping children feel positively about education, and she passionately believed in the importance of good children's books within schools. Brown met with colleagues, authors and illustrators and explained that misrepresentation in literature was crucial in the "sowing of seeds of despair" in children that led to a disengagement with literature by high school.<sup>33</sup> She was very careful in her purchase of materials not to include any books that denigrated or tokenised Black people as she was acutely aware of how this could lead to bitterness, resentment and a disengagement from education.<sup>34</sup> The sessions with Brown and McCoy evidently had an effect on the editors because their time in the school forced many of them to recognise how crucial these books were to education. Many of the reports by editors reveal disappointment that the changes in children's book publishing were not being seen in the schools.<sup>35</sup>

This surprise of the editors that the "progress they had worked hard to promote" was not yet visible in schools suggests that there was actually little engagement from educational authorities within New York City on a large scale in implementing publishers' efforts. As an educational consultant for Doubleday and Co., Miriam Cohen understood the amount of red-tape and bureaucracy involved in the purchase of books more than her colleagues at the Book Week. She knew the difficulty in getting books that the Board of

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<sup>33</sup> Harriet Brown, Roundtable Minutes, Box 14, Folder "Ocean-Hill Brownsville Book-Week", CIBC Director's Files.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. The 'Roundtable' Minutes are incomplete, so a full understanding of the meeting is impossible to ascertain. However, there is enough discussion recorded by hand that words spoken by Harriet Brown seem to be complete.

<sup>35</sup> Reports on Ocean-Hill Be-In, Reel 1112, Ford Foundation Grants, RAC.

Education did not include on its approved list of trade books in schools led to a “long and laborious” process in an undernourished school district.<sup>36</sup>

The CIBC and the staff in the Ocean-Hill Brownsville schools used the Book Week to highlight to editors and publishers that the education system did not act urgently in providing relevant materials to children. Bradford Chambers accused the educational authorities of not keeping pace with the publishers, authors and, children as the Board of Education relied on ‘timeless’ children’s books rather than “the books of today”.<sup>37</sup> Chambers’ sarcastic reference to ‘timeless’ books reiterated that children’s literature was imbued in old white supremacist thought and providing children with better books was a matter of urgency. By showing publishers the classrooms filled with children reading Black-authored books, the organisers of the event succeeded in demonstrating how Community Control would benefit both the communities and the publishing industry. The event encouraged publishers to produce “better books”, but it also demonstrated how important Black-authored children’s books were to the educational vision that had been popularized in parts of New York City. A better education for African American children had the library as the locus, a place to educate and inspire children.

The Ocean Hill-Brownsville district’s location for the event was significant because it illustrated how Community Control facilitated a Black educational philosophy. By having events in school libraries and in

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<sup>36</sup> Miriam Cohen, Reports on Ocean-Hill Be-In, Reel 1112, Ford Foundation Grants, RAC.

<sup>37</sup> Bradford Chambers to Thomas E. Cooney, May 20, 1969. Letter, Reel 1112, Ford Foundation Grants, RAC.

classrooms filled with children, the educational value of Black authored children's books was evident as every guest noticed the intense interest with which the children engaged with the books. For the CIBC and those involved in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville District, Black children's books did not just provide better representation in literature, but they demonstrated what was lacking within wider education, relevance and a positive attachment to Blackness. The single day event sparked greater interest in educational drives for Black children's books. Just seven months later, a week-long event with many of the same publishers occurred in the same district, this time with authors and illustrators as well as greater inclusion of school staff present.

The second event, the November Book-Week Be-In ran from Monday the seventeenth of November 1969 until Friday the twenty-first. As well as being longer, the event included over two-hundred participants during the week, not including the myriad children and teaching staff involved. The CIBC advertised the event as an "outgrowth of the provocative meeting" the previous April with children's book editors that would closely examine the "book needs of ethnic minority children", as well as the growth of trade book use in schools.<sup>38</sup> The centrality of children's trade books to education was made clear in the invitation to participants. Being the second event within the year emphasised that many advocates of, and participants in, Community Control reimagined a Black educational philosophy that included a focus on the power of positive Black children's literature.

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<sup>38</sup> Be-In Invitation, 1968. CIBC Director's Files, Box 14, Folder "Ocean-Hill Brownsville Book-Week", CIBC Director's Files.

Historians Daniel Perlstein and Jerald Podair have provided an insight into the intensity of the Community Control project as figures like Rhody McCoy and David Spencer X of I.S. 201 faced an uphill battle against constant criticism from the media, educational authorities, and the UFT.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, police often lined up outside the schools when tensions between the UFT and Community Control advocates flared up. That, within this contested climate, the CIBC were able to sponsor two large-scale events on children's books, attests to their importance. While confrontations outside schools garnered headlines, educators continued to provide an innovative and empowering education to children within the schools. The educational significance of Black children's literature that Jessie Fauset, W.E.B. Du Bois and many others had put forward earlier in the twentieth century via the medium of Black magazines, was resurgent in the experimental districts in New York City. Like the feature "The Grown Ups Corner" in *The Brownies Book*, the districts provided a context and space for interested parties to exchange ideas about how Black-authored children's literature could be educationally useful. Furthermore, similar to *The Brownies Book* and *The Joy*, the November Be-In garnered widespread attention within the city as well as across the nation.

The white children's author Ann McGovern commented on the positive atmosphere of the school she visited in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. She described the halls she moved through as "a collage of color and black

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<sup>39</sup> Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York*, 123.

pride”.<sup>40</sup> McGovern’s observation touches on how central a Black cultural identity was to the school’s educational philosophy, an aspect repeatedly explicated by figures such as Rhody McCoy, Keith Baird and Harriet Brown. The second Book Week Be-In expanded on the first by including a number of authors of colour rather than just focusing on the books in the libraries. The illustrator Tom Feelings wrote to the CIBC on the Be-In and said that his “first concern in visiting any black school to be: How would this visit best benefit the children of the schools?”, and he was anxious about how many number white authors and illustrators would be present.<sup>41</sup> Feelings reflected on his childhood and how as a student in Bedford-Stuyvesant in New York City he had never identified with anyone visiting the classroom. He welcomed the inclusion of Black artists and writers at the Be-In.<sup>42</sup> His focus on the presence of Black authors and illustrators is significant because children’s book events were not solely about the literature but their pedagogical potential. Because public schools had to choose from a list of approved books, many Black authors became more deeply involved in schools and educational events to promote their usage and ensure that their work reached the children.

The Be-In involved visits to classrooms and Tom Feelings wrote about how artists and writers could provide better books and become “living

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<sup>40</sup> Ann McGovern, “untitled”, Box 14, Folder “Ocean-Hill Brownsville Book Week”, CIBC Director’s Files.

<sup>41</sup> Tom Feelings to Interracial Book Council, undated, Letter, Box 14, Folder “Ocean-Hill Brownsville Book Week”, CIBC Director’s Files.

<sup>42</sup> The inclusion of Feelings’ concerns and hesitations about the CIBC’s event help to balance the positive comments throughout the CIBC Director’s Files on the Be-In. A lot of the material seems to have been gathered for promotional purposes. However, the addition of some negative views does highlight that positive press was not the only regard in collecting material for the CIBC Director’s Files.

examples” to the children.<sup>43</sup> The vital role played by the presence of Black creators and their influence on the children is evidenced in the reports children wrote on the classroom visits. Leo Carty illustrator for Walter Dean Myers’ *Where Does the Day Go?* visited several classes at I.S. 271 to talk to the children about being a Black illustrator. One child praised the “young, gifted and black” illustrator for his artwork.<sup>44</sup> The impact of meeting Black creators in school is reflected in many more reports from children. Donna Richards from class 08-230 approvingly described the visit of Janet Harris, Robert Barrett and Leo Carty as in her report she described that she wished “they will all come back to tell us how books are written” demonstrating that the presence of these creators proved thought-provoking. Furthermore, Donna Richards was also inspired by Carty’s Mother’s Day cards for Black mothers and learning this compelled her to declare that that this was “a good idea” because usually she has to buy “white mother’s day cards”.<sup>45</sup> Black children’s books in school were not simply sitting on the shelves of libraries but artists and writers brought them to life for the children and caused children to think about African American children’s literature. Events like the Be-In proved to be a demonstration of the power and popularity of Black children’s literature and the potential it had in education. After the Be-In, the CIBC estimated that 8,000 children had interactions with authors and

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<sup>43</sup> Tom Feelings to Interracial Book Council, undated, Letter, Box 14, Folder “Ocean-Hill Brownsville Book Week”, CIBC Director’s Files.

<sup>44</sup> Nate, “Leo Carty”, November 8, 1970. Box 14, Folder “Ocean-Hill Brownsville Book Week”, CIBC Director’s Files.

<sup>45</sup> Donna Richards, “Class Report: Visitors in the School” November 8, 1970. Box 14, Folder “Ocean-Hill Brownsville Book Week”, CIBC Director’s Files.

illustrators during the week from classroom visits, library readings, and having lunch with them too.<sup>46</sup>

The Be-In was a success with publishers, authors and children. The event was also indicative of how closely linked Black-authored children's books were to the burgeoning Black educational philosophy and Black Power ideology especially popular within the experimental districts. For Keith Baird, director of African American Studies in Ocean-Hill Brownsville, the task of an educator was "fundamentally cultural in its implications" as culture is intimately linked with "how a person comes into, and maintains itself in, being", this focus on identity was an important precondition for further political change.<sup>47</sup> Historian Daniel Perlstein argues that Black Power deeply impacted the curricula within public schools and certainly with children's books these events demonstrate how interconnected children's literature and Black Power were.<sup>48</sup> Many of the teachers involved perceived Black Power as an important aspect of education. Les Campbell of the Ocean-Hill Brownsville district described the Community Control experiment in terms of racial power. Campbell claimed that Black people had "never been put in charge of their own destinies, and now they're demanding it" with Community Control.<sup>49</sup> Campbell's asserted the need for full Black control and power over education including any events, curriculum and allocation of funds. A Black

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<sup>46</sup>Bradford Chambers, Press Release, Nov. 16 1969, Box 14, Folder "Ocean-Hill Brownsville Meetings", CIBC Director's Files.

<sup>47</sup>Perlstein, *Justice, Justice*, 139.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Helen Parr, "Coalitions, Negotiations and the ComField Model, Appendix E. Vol. II, A Plan for Managing the Development, Implementation and Operation of a Model Elementary Teacher Education Program." *Office of Education (DHEW)*, Feb. 1970, 95.

educational philosophy was integral to many teachers' visions and events, such as the Be-In, worked for these educators as many African American children's books echoed their views on Black Power, Black pride and the importance of radical Black history.

Included in the events were children's authors whose work explicitly addressed Black identity and radical Black politics. Janet Harris whose book *Black Pride: A People's Struggle* spoke to several classes and the chairman of the CIBC, Bradford Chambers, discussed his book *Chronicles of Negro Protest* with attendees of the Be-In. Russell Rickford argues that many parents involved in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district were not politically radical and rejected any revolutionary politics but simply desired a better education for their children.<sup>50</sup> However, whilst they may not have adhered to Marxist interpretations and Black Power ideology as commonly as Rickford draws attention to, the very nature of these books radically challenged what was taught in schools and represent an important refashioning of a Black educational philosophy. Still central were ideas of Black pride and Black history but authors focused on aspects of history and African American cultures not present in public schools. Historian Joy Ann Williamson asserts that the use of Black-centred materials was integral to Black Power and Black nationalist educational programmes. The use of children's backgrounds was a "springboard for learning" and helped promote cultural

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<sup>50</sup> Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 43.

pride and a sense of belonging.<sup>51</sup> The books used in reading sessions and the authors who partook in the Be-In, demonstrate how, though the CIBC emerged out of the Civil Rights Movement, the issue of children's books in education was just as powerful for many Black Power advocates. Events such as the Be-In have not been critically studied, but they were vital because they appealed to a wide array of community activists, including those who wanted a more relevant education, and those like Keith Baird who viewed this type of education as a crucial precursor to greater political change. The events are significant because they demonstrate the broad appeal of Black educational philosophy and how it brought together a wide array of interested parties.

However, a *Newsweek* article criticised the East Harlem district for yielding few results. The broad appeal of the events was overlooked in favour of portraying Community Control as a hotbed of anti-white Black activism.<sup>52</sup> The article claimed that H. Rap Brown, LeRoi Jones and Floyd McKissick conducted a "Hate Whitey" assembly in the school and signalled that Community Control, a Black militant project, was destined for failure. Acting chairman of the governing board, David Spencer, came under significant pressure from the press and the Board of Education. Spencer bitterly complained of white critics' hypocrisy as he queried that "They want to know what improvements we've made in the last few months. What

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<sup>51</sup> Joy Ann Williamson, "Community Control with a Black Nationalist Twist" in *Black Protest Thought and Education*, ed. William H. Watkins (New York: P. Lang, 2005), 139.

<sup>52</sup> "Struggle for a Showcase", *Newsweek* 71, no. 8 (1968).

improvements have *they* made in 40 years?”<sup>53</sup> The scrutiny the schools in these districts came under focused on their political affiliations and perceived failures in attempts to discredit the experiment. *Newsweek’s* attack on the district focused on connections the district had with popular Black Power figures. In reality, the Black Power messages in schools were often through grassroots activists and educators like Les Campbell and Keith Baird. Though short-lived, the experimental districts held two largescale events for publishers, educators, authors and illustrators. The bringing together of these groups was a significant achievement that was not limited to New York City. The Book–Week and the Be-In received national attention in the media as newspapers such as the *New York Times* reported on these children’s literature events as well as media such as the *Library Journal*, a publication that had far-reaching impact across school libraries in the nation.

The majority of attendees at the Be-In recognised the educational importance of the school districts and their connections with the book world. The event saw the establishment of the Committee for More Relevant Education, a group formed to support the continuance of the experimental school districts. The committee was formed of authors, publishers and educators who believed that the demonstration districts were of “tremendous ongoing importance as a line of communication to everyone in the book world”.<sup>54</sup> Their plea to Mayor Lindsay to maintain the Community Control

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>54</sup> Committee for More Relevant Education to Mayor John Lindsay, November 21 1969, Telegram Files, Box 14, Folder “Ocean- Hill Brownsville Meetings”, CIBC Director’s Files.

project stated that the “stress on books in the educational experience at Ocean-Hill” was key in their support for Community Control.<sup>55</sup> The Book-Week and the Be-in were not just about getting relevant books into schools but about creating a better education for a community that the committee argued was “reaching out for relevant education”.<sup>56</sup> These events prompted further initiatives that tried to use children’s books as educational tools, some more successful than others, but the connections made during these events helped open-up education and children’s books within New York City. The utility of African American children’s books in furthering a Black educational philosophy spread across the city through these connections as educators, activists, and parents saw the value in Black children’s literature.

### **Reading is Fundamental: How their Bookmobile brought children’s literature to the streets**

In the late 1960s, it was not just the CIBC and concerned citizens that banded together to promote children’s books. Margaret McNamara, who was married to Robert McNamara the former Defense Secretary, chaired the Reading is Fundamental (RIF) organisation, a non-profit dedicated to encouraging children to read. She quickly started up the Bookmobile project in New York City at the behest of Mayor Lindsay and their funders, the Chase Manhattan Bank Foundation. Beginning in 1967, a project operated by the Bookmobile Service Trust in conjunction with the Brooklyn Public library, periodically sent its “canary-yellow, two-ton truck” Bookmobile around

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

the streets of Bushwick and Bedford-Stuyvesant. The Bookmobile ran for 250 days over a nineteen-month run from July 1967, during which 51,000 books were distributed to 21,000 children and adults across New York City.<sup>57</sup> Like the events in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district, the Bookmobile aimed to bring together children, parents and schools through children's books and was successful in its mission in encouraging children to read. Furthermore, one of the trustees of the Bookmobile Service Trust was Louise Bolling, Chairman of the District 16 School Board in Brooklyn, directly linking educational efforts with the Bookmobile. Like the Be-In and the Book Week, this programme sought to expand education into the community and use children's books as a resource for encouraging reading and education.

However, a crucial difference between RIF's Bookmobile project and those run by the CIBC was the approach to Black-children's literature. Most of the books in the Bookmobile were either donated or discounted by large publishers of children's books such as Scholastic which had few books by African American authors. This meant that the books donated were often the cheapest and most widely published titles of these publishers. Furthermore, the reliance on large publishers ensured that African American children's literature published by smaller presses, like Grove Press or Dial, did not feature in the Bookmobile. The book lists provided by RIF focused on the "universal quality" of books such as the Curious George, Clifford, and other

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<sup>57</sup> "The Book Wagon" in *Steps in Learning: Bedford-Stuyvesant Bushwick*, Feb. 1969, Box 151, Folder 1, John Doar Papers Princeton University Library, Department of Special Collections, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Public Policy Papers. Princeton, New Jersey (hereafter cited as John Doar papers).

popular series written by white authors.<sup>58</sup> In the Be-In, Harriet Brown and Leo Carty discussed how ‘universal’ appealing books were misleading as a criteria for selection because children told librarians which books which “they have already read” when asked and many did not know of African American children’s literature. Whilst local districts had a degree of control over which books they placed in their libraries, there was a significant lack of Black-authored material for children. Works by H. Rap Brown, Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver were popular amongst the adults of Brooklyn, but the choice for children was far more limited.<sup>59</sup>

This section examines how RIF’s Bookmobile service shared in the educational philosophy of providing better materials for children. As a more national-orientated organisation than the CIBC with ties to elites, RIF’s educational philosophy did not have the same radicalism and drive as projects led by CIBC or Black creators. However, the existence of the Bookmobile in Brooklyn demonstrates how the role of Black-children’s books in education was a wider consideration beyond smaller, more community activist-orientated organisations.

Organizers of the Bookmobile in Bushwick and Bedford-Stuyvesant believed that their service closely aligned with the work of the experimental districts. They viewed their project as a way of implementing the changes to curricula and materials being instigated in the schools in Harlem and Brooklyn districts on a wider scale. Louise Bolling, chairman of School Board

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<sup>58</sup> “Report on the First Two Months Operations of the Bookmobile” September 1967, Box 151, Folder 2, John Doar Papers.

<sup>59</sup> “Bookmobiles Aid New Borrowers”, *The New York Times*, March 21 1971, 89.

16 in New York City, reached out to the Bookmobile trust claiming that “with more autonomy” being given to school boards the Bookmobile service could work more closely with the schools and “link the schools, the parents and the libraries more closely together”.<sup>60</sup> The connection drawn between increased community autonomy over schooling and the possibilities of educational projects demonstrates how crucial the demonstration districts were in fostering educational projects across the city. Also, it reveals how the educational value of children’s trade books had become a more widespread idea.

The organisers chose the stop locations after discussing them with local members of the Bushwick school district such as the district librarian Mrs. Hein and the Parent co-ordinator Mrs. John.<sup>61</sup> Though affiliated with powerful figures within New York City such as Mayor Lindsay, consultation with local community members suggests that the Bookmobile service shared similarities with the Be-In project as it sought to work with the local community to provide a better education. In total, the organisation arranged eleven stops throughout the Bushwick and Bedford-Stuyvesant areas. Children flocked to the Bookmobile at each location as they were strategically planned near schools and housing projects. Estimates from those working on the Bookmobile suggest together patrons borrowed over a thousand books per week. The vast majority of these borrowers were

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<sup>60</sup> Louise Bollings to Bookmobile Service Trust, Jan. 16, 1969, Letter, Box 151, Folder 1, John Doar Papers.

<sup>61</sup> “Report on the First Two Months Operations of the Bookmobile” Sept, 1967, Box 151, Folder 2, John Doar Papers.

children. The creator of the Bushwick and Bedford-Stuyvesant project, Julia Palmer, quickly realised that a huge part of the project was engaging with the children, not simply just providing them with books. The children who visited did not just take books home, they also stayed to be read to and talk with the librarians and volunteers on board. As volunteer Julia Palmer recounted the children did not leave “they stay, they stay, they stay” and “they’ve got to be talked to”.<sup>62</sup> Palmer’s account hints that the Bookmobile went further than acting as a library on wheels by connecting with the community. Like the Be-In and Book Week, RIF’s Bookmobile was not just about better books but how children’s literature could be used to connect with children and educate them.

The educational philosophy that underpinned the Bookmobile service in Brooklyn intended to provide children’s books to local children of colour to help engage them in reading and education. Margie McNamara believed in the power of children’s books to make a difference in children’s lives. The Bookmobile gave power to the children as the organisers tried to be guided by children’s interests. RIF had list of recommended books compiled by volunteer librarians and mainstream publishers, however, the staff and volunteers tried to adapt to local wants and needs. McNamara claimed that the most popular books related “very directly to these children’s experiences”, but the issue for staff and volunteers was in obtaining books

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<sup>62</sup> Julia Palmer qtd. “In ‘Background Memo on Chase Manhattan’s Bookmobile”, Box 151, Folder 2, John Doar Papers.

that children could relate to.<sup>63</sup> The organisers evidently attempted to address Black history and representation but most of the books they stocked were written by white authors such as John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me* and historian Earl Schenk Miers' *The Story of the American Negro*. The concept of 'relevance' within the Bookmobile programme was limited to books about African Americans and some books by prominent Black political activists such as Amiri Baraka and Malcolm X.<sup>64</sup>

The idea of cultural relevance was an integral part of Black educational philosophy, however, McNamara's understanding of what constituted 'relevant' literature was substantially different from others concerned with the issue. McNamara perceived relevance in terms of urban and rural children because she observed that many of the children in Brooklyn were not interested in farm stories. McNamara's idea of 'relevance' was not the same as that of Black educational philosophy as it is limited to setting rather than taking into account history, language, and cultural practices among others. While still important, this narrow perception of what 'relevance' meant for children's books was widespread in RIF. For example, Julia Palmer described the importance of making books "meaningful and important" to people in the inner-city as she claimed many of the books set in white, middle-class environments did not interest the clientele.<sup>65</sup> McNamara and Palmer recognized the issue of cultural relevance but their

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<sup>63</sup> Bernadette Carey, "Children Swarm to Free Bookmobile" *The Washington Post*, Dec. 12 1968.

<sup>64</sup> "The RIF Book List", 1968, Box 151, Folder 'Programs: Reading is Fundamental, 1965-1969' in John Doar Papers.

<sup>65</sup> Julia Palmer, Bookmobile Service Trust, Box 151, Folder 1, John Doar Papers

understanding of what a relevant book looked like differed greatly from figures involved in the Book Week and Be-In. Their comments on the issue of relevance suggest that, for them, environmental setting was what children related to and their comments stop short of addressing wider concerns of Black history, heritage and language that Black authors including Nikki Giovanni and Edythe Haskett addressed.

Despite this difference in understanding, the notion of providing books African American children could connect to is significant. Underpinning the educational philosophy of RIF was engaging children in reading but what separates it from the Black educational philosophy in New York City during this period is the lack of focus on the cultural signifiers and experiences of African American creators. Rudine Sims Bishop asserts that Black illustrators and writers' lives and experiences have coalesced and shaped their work "into a canon of African American children's literature" that is more than just the inclusion of Black characters and certain settings.<sup>66</sup>

A desire to engage children in reading and providing better books for children connected very different projects. The RIF programme had a much less specific focus on celebrating works by Black illustrators and authors than events sponsored and organised by CIBC. Around the corner from the Brooklyn Children's Museum on Park Place, an employee of the Bookmobile encountered "resentment and suspicion" from a group of adults who came up to the Bookmobile to examine the materials it was carrying.<sup>67</sup> This group

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<sup>66</sup> Bishop, *Free Within Ourselves*, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Anonymous, Report, Box 151, Folder 1, John Doar Papers.

criticised the endeavour for its lack of materials by Black authors for children and provided a “list of such books and where they could be obtained and strongly suggested we do something about getting them”.<sup>68</sup> While the level of scrutiny was certainly not expected by the author of this report, the interaction reveals how embedded the idea of the importance of African American children’s literature had become within communities in New York City. Not just organized activist groups believed in the importance of children reading Black-authored and illustrated materials but concerned citizens from the surrounding communities. Unlike other programmes in New York City that focused on children’s literature, RIF lacked engagement with authors and illustrators who had grown up in these areas and wrote stories about these communities. Authors including John Steptoe, Rosa Guy, Rose Blue and Kristen Hunter all wrote about the communities that they lived and had grown up within. The inclusion of material that featured African Americans was important to the Bookmobile, but evidently, unlike the second Be-In, there was not a considered effort to celebrate the works of Black creators.

The CIBC and RIF had very similar objectives but very different methods. They sourced their books differently, CIBC focused on unpublished authors and smaller presses while RIF relied heavily on Scholastic and large donors. After having lunch with RIF’s Director, Jerrold Sandler, Bradford Chambers evidently found out about RIF’s funding from the Ford Foundation-funding which the CIBC did not receive after submitting a very similar plan. In a subsequent letter to the Foundation, Chambers claimed that it was “scary

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

that the wife of a Secretary of Defense was the one person able to obtain funds” for the Bookmobile programme.<sup>69</sup> Chambers’ insinuation that the funding was received due to her status and whiteness is obvious and he was concerned that children’s reading programmes were not grassroots but rather patronized by wealthy white elites and foundations.

Certainly, within RIF there was a distinct lack of awareness of the requirement and desire for Black-written and illustrated materials. However, as Chambers acknowledged, the programme shared objectives with the works of more radical activist groups and individuals as they all sought to provide children with better access to a more diverse range of books. The RIF Bookmobile programme, whilst lacking in its development and encouragement of Black children’s books, had the same drive as the CIBC for using children’s books to help with the education of African American children. They also shared the same desire to bring education out of the traditional confines of schools in order to bring a new form of learning to children. In a report on the RIF Bookmobile, it was noted that one of the key aims was to “link together the parents, the schools, and the libraries”, fostering a more community-based education.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the RIF programme centred children’s interests. A document on the RIF booklist stated that “meeting the interests of children is of prime importance”.<sup>71</sup> RIF’s

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<sup>69</sup> Bradford Chambers to Thomas E. Cooney, May 20 1969, Letter, Reel 1112, Ford Foundation Grants, RAC.

<sup>70</sup> “Interim Report”, October 1967, Box 151, Folder “Bookmobile, 1967-1969” [Folder 2], John Doar Papers.

<sup>71</sup> “A Discussion of the RIF Booklist” undated, Box 151, Folder “Reading is Fundamental, 1965-1969”, John Doar Papers.

educational mission was directed by the fundamental belief that reading should be fun and it was to give children agency over what they read.

In their 1969 book *If Not Now, When? The Many Meanings of Black Power*, Dora Pantell and Edwin Greenidge recall a group of New York City teenagers who, one summer, organised and ran their own bookmobile in their neighbourhood, purchasing Black-written books and distributing them to the community.<sup>72</sup> Pantell and Greenidge do not provide any further information on this event nor did they provide any specific details. However, though it is hard to gain more understanding of this event, it does underscore that the stories available in the archives are perhaps those of larger groups like CIBC or RIF who were more deeply tied to large institutions. The RIF Bookmobile was just one example of work being done in New York City but, this does not necessarily mean that smaller projects that used African American children's books did not operate on more local levels and operated more unofficial forms of book-shares. Though not instilled with the same radical Black educational philosophy as many members of CIBC, the Bookmobile project did bring children's literature to the communities and demonstrated how popular, and educationally vital, this was. The RIF Bookmobile programme shared similar educational ideals of promoting reading in children but crucially differed in the books that should be used, focusing less on African American authored and illustrated work rather focusing on popular children's series that were published by large printing

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<sup>72</sup> Dora Pantell and Edwin Greenidge, *If Not Now, When? The Many Meanings of Black Power* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969), 75.

houses. Bradford Chambers argued that RIF hoped to get children reading by simply “giving them books”, whereas the CIBC believed that to motivate children then “effecting basic changes in the books” was necessary.<sup>73</sup>

### **Storytelling on the Streets**

In the summer of 1970, the CIBC launched a new art and storytelling on the streets campaign that rivalled the work of RIF as it brought its mission to children. This project grew out of the increased contact with a host of writers who teamed up with an illustrator and read to children on the streets as the artist sketched out the stories on the sidewalks. Teams included Leo and Joyce Carty, Charles Bible and Sonia Sanchez and Jeanine Gosey and Betty Dillard as well as a range of other illustrators and writers who joined the project on a less permanent basis. The idea was simple: “children playing in the neighbourhood gather as a storyteller opens a book and reads, while nearby an illustrator starts to draw scenes from the story”.<sup>74</sup> This project was underpinned by a radical educational philosophy that concentrated on engaging African American children with education by providing innovative and relevant projects for them.

In the draft proposals for the project, the organizers within the CIBC described its key purpose as being to meet with children in parks, on street corners or on stoops and to introduce them to “relevant reading material and

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<sup>73</sup> Bradford Chambers to Thomas E. Cooney, September 1970, Letter, Reel 1112, Ford Foundation Grants, RAC.

<sup>74</sup> Jean Carey Bond, “Council on Interracial Books Issue Manifesto to Editors” *New York Amsterdam News*, November 6, 1971.

positive role models”.<sup>75</sup> Literary theorist Aidan Chambers rightly contends that “storytelling is indispensable in enabling people to become literary readers” and so the reading of children’s books was just as vital to education as children reading themselves.<sup>76</sup> They did this by providing stories and imagery that celebrated Black history and focused on Black pride in the hope that children would value education, unstifled by the surroundings of school.

Harriet Brown, a consultant on the project, helped bring together a team of artists and storytellers who shared her belief in the importance of literature in teaching children. Black illustrators chalked out figures of Black history, like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, as storytellers recounted Lucille Clifton’s *The Black BC’s*. They etched High John, Stagger Lee and other figures from Black folklore in front of the stoops as the children heard Julius Lester’s *Black Folktales*. They saw young Black children carefully drawn out as John Steptoe’s work *Stevie* was read to them. Often the children had their own portrait drawn by children’s book illustrators like George Ford, Charles Bible and Leo Carty. The handwritten plans and notes on the project reveal a more spontaneous and ad hoc operation than the Bookmobile run by RIF. Schedules, routes and teams are written on margins revealing how the project was ever evolving and adapting. The Black educational philosophy of the project is laid out underneath the heading “educational benefits” in a bullet-pointed, handwritten list in felt tip pen rather

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<sup>75</sup> Draft proposal, Box 7, Folder “CIBC: Yesterday, today and Tomorrow”, CIBC Director’s Files.

<sup>76</sup> Aidan Chambers, *The Reading Environment* (Stroud: Thimble, 1991), 46.

than a typed-out memo.<sup>77</sup> The CIBC estimated that thousands of children were reached by the programme which officially ran for three years, followed by more unofficial events. Whilst the storytelling teams thrived on the “storytelling with noise” and providing an experience unlike school, sustaining the programme was a strong belief amongst its participants in the impact of Black-authored and illustrated children’s books on local children by establishing Black educational philosophy on the streets.

Central to the storytelling on the streets was Black authored and illustrated children’s literature. Every participant had been involved in creating Black or Puerto Rican children’s books and were part of a community of artists and illustrators who believed in the educational power of these books. The storytelling teams began in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district and expanded across New York City with storytelling events in the Lower East Side, Staten Island, Harlem, Brooklyn and the Bronx. One book used was Barney Grossman and Charles Bible’s work *Black Means...* which was collaborated on with the pupils of P.S. 150 in the Bronx. The use of this book emphasising to children their voice in literature and showcasing African American children’s creativity. The storytelling teams also used books such as Nikki Giovanni’s *Spin a Soft Black Song*, Muriel and Tom Feelings’ *Moja Means One* and Rose Blue’s *Bed-Stuy Beat*.<sup>78</sup> This range of books addressed Black cultural settings, African cultural heritage as well as poetry

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<sup>77</sup> Storytelling Planning Notes, 1970, Box 12, Folder “Arts and Storytelling program”, CIBC Director’s Files.

<sup>78</sup> Storytelling Planning Notes, 1970, Box 12, Folder “Arts and Storytelling program”, CIBC Director’s Files.

for Black children; storytelling on the streets was not just adapting picture books but complex ideas and themes on the sidewalks of New York City. The citywide project was imbued with a radical Black educational philosophy that sought to use children's books to engage Black children in a relevant education and also promote a positive self-image for children as they were encouraged to contribute to stories and illustrations. The storytelling on the streets project focused on Black-authored and illustrated children's books and sought to use the project for "new modes of education".<sup>79</sup> Focusing on reading relevant and engaging materials could help children become literate in a way the public schools were failing to achieve.

Augusta Baker, the Coordinator of Children's Services for the New York Public Library, praised the project as a "wonderful way to motivate children's interest in books" and a model for community education projects.<sup>80</sup> Baker, a veteran of New York children's libraries, understood how Black children's books acted as a motivator for many children otherwise disengaged from education. In plans for the first project in 1970, the CIBC identified the three educational benefits of the art-and-storytelling on the streets programme. Firstly, it would lead children to understand the "necessity to be able to read" and help encourage children to be interested in education. Secondly, children's books could enable children to form bonds and learn from one another. Thirdly, it claimed that since "illiteracy keeps people in the ghettos" these books could help children who were otherwise

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<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Additional Material for Art-and-Storytelling Article, 1970, Box 12, Folder "Council-Art and Storytelling", CIBC Director's Files.

forgotten by the education system. The extent of the plans reveal how the CIBC believed that the use of African American children's literature went beyond improving reading skills but was integral to grassroots educational efforts. For the CIBC, children's books not only helped children educationally but could help in the fight against systemic racism. The educational plans of the CIBC argue that any educational initiative "must be built from the bottom up" to reflect the needs of local communities.<sup>81</sup> Crucial to the Black educational philosophy that had become popular within many areas of New York was self-determination and control of education beyond the clutches of the white power structures.

The art and storytelling project's basis on the streets allowed for a Black educational philosophy to flourish among children. Teachers from Brooklyn wrote to the CIBC and praised the project as "the most innovative educational experience of the school year".<sup>82</sup> The approval of local teachers demonstrates that many felt limited within schools in a way that the storytelling project was not. Donnarae McCann of the CIBC claimed that the project provided children with an informal education which revealed the "potential of mobile, loosely-structured activities, in contrast to confining all service within pseudo-Grecian, Carnegie buildings".<sup>83</sup> McCann's words underline the distrust many in the city had of the New York City public schooling system as communities across the city hoped for an education

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<sup>81</sup> Planning Notes, Box 12, Folder "Art and Storytelling Program- CIBC". CIBC Director's Files.

<sup>82</sup> Bradford Chambers to Don Robertson, June 9, 1971, Letter, Box 12, Folder "Council-Art and Storytelling". CIBC Director's Files.

<sup>83</sup> Donnarae McCann, "Notes on Librarians and the Bulletin", Box 8, CIBC Director's Files.

that would not ignore African American children but celebrate them. Crucial to the project was the idea of education outside schools and libraries in the city. Like the Ocean-Hill Be-In and the Bookmobile, the project moved educational initiatives into local communities away from the oversight of the New York Board of Education.

A variety of new locations from playgrounds and stoops to museums became testing sites for an education that sought to use Black-authored children's books to empower children educationally and psychologically. Rather than a rival to local education, the project was a welcome addition for myriad parents, educators and children. In February 1971, the project's second year 'the Mews' in Marcus Garvey Village in Brownsville, Brooklyn, a pedestrianised community-space was the scene for storytelling sessions and an art show of all the previous summer's artworks by illustrators and children. Ten different schools transported children "by the busload" to the project for field trips.<sup>84</sup> In transporting children to 'the Mews' the schools clearly saw in educational value in the programme. Many parents shared this belief as they brought their children to 'the Mews' and chaperoned them to sessions across New York City and made sure they behaved during the "learning experience".<sup>85</sup> Parents and educators evidently perceived the project as a form of education outside of school rather than simply an activity to entertain children.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Jeannene Gosey, storytelling report, July 9, 1971, Box 12, Folder "Council-Art and Storytelling", CIBC Director's Files.

Teachers commented with surprise on the large amounts of Black-authored children's books the storytelling teams possessed, demonstrating how these books were often not available in schools.<sup>86</sup> The storytelling teams took these books to streets and parks and some of them made connections with educational aides, educators hired by the Board of Education to engage with children who had not been able to properly attend school. After children received visits from educational aides, Don and Dorothy Robertson visited several homes in Red Hook, south Brooklyn where they read to smaller groups of children who did not attend school at all and provided them with illustration demonstrations. By going into homes, the storytelling teams supplemented public education that reached out to children who, for many reasons, were not able to attend school. An educational aide warned the Robertsons that one child never spoke when in the District office but to the Robertsons surprise in their own home the child became "very warm and talkative" during the storytelling session.<sup>87</sup> The project challenged white-centred schooling in terms of materials and also expanded education into local Black communities. By bringing education outside the school and into new avenues, streets, and homes, the project focused on crucial elements of Black educational philosophy such as cultural relevance, Black pride, and Black history. Not bound by the New York Board of Education, teams like the Robertsons, used an array of books that could not be found on the

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<sup>86</sup> Dorothy Robertson, storytelling report, Feb 21, 1971, Box 12, Folder "Council-Art and Storytelling", CIBC Director's Files.

<sup>87</sup> Dorothy Robertson, Report: Red Hook District, south Brooklyn, 12<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1971, Reel 1112, Ford Foundation Grants, RAC.

bookshelves of schools and these books helped facilitate a Black-centred education.

A crucial element for the majority of proponents of a Black educational philosophy was cultural relevance- that is, connecting education to the experiences and understanding of the students. For many at the New York Board of Education this idea of relevance was about teaching African American history and little more. African Americans featured in specialised lessons but were not reflected in wider lessons in history or literature. Gloria Ladson-Billings, a pedagogical theorist, argues that the dominant groups' ideology and vision permeates the curriculum leaving "an incoherent and disjointed picture of those who are not White".<sup>88</sup> The CIBC sought to rectify the fragmentary inclusion of African American stories, histories and images within schools. The storytelling on the streets exemplified a more radical understanding than the New York Board of Education of what relevance meant. Storytelling teams centred the experience around the children in their local environments with books that spoke to them directly. Charles Bible, illustrator for the book *Black Means...* claimed the "best part" of the project was "when [the children] see themselves" in drawings. Indeed, he fascinated a young Millie Moldanado in Tompkins Square Park in the Lower East Side by sketching out local landmarks. As soon as she recognised them, she leapt up and pointed out where they were.<sup>89</sup> Bible made children's literature

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<sup>88</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Lies my Teacher Still Tells: Developing a Critical Perspective Toward Social Studies" in *Critical Race Theory Perspectives on Social Studies: The Profession, Policies, and Curriculum* ed. Gloria Ladson Billings, 1-11 (Greenwich: Information Age, 2003), 4.

<sup>89</sup> Josh Friedman, "Telling It To Kids Like it Is" in *New York Post*, Aug 22 1972, Reel 1112, Ford Foundation Grants, RAC.

relatable to local children by connecting illustration and storytelling to the world that the children knew and experienced everyday. Bible's approach shows how the events were centred on the children, the sessions were not made of fragments of materials that included African American figures but the sessions engaged with children's lives very directly. Bible's work reveals how one of the project's educational aims was to spark interest in reading in children as a way to encourage children to connect with education more positively.<sup>90</sup>

Evidently, the educational philosophy underpinning this programme focused on providing children with books as RIF had done, but also giving children access to books that would interest them and connect more directly to their lives. Central to the project, from the drafts to the actions of the storytelling teams, was 'relevance' and the ability of African American authors and illustrators to portray realistic Black lives in children's stories. Dianne Johnson argues that African American children's literature interprets and invokes aspects of African American life and culture which helps young readers understand the "many meanings and implications of 'Blackness'".<sup>91</sup> The storytelling programme featured a variety of books, some of which explored meanings of Blackness whereas others focused on settings familiar to the children. The premise of the storytelling project had, at its core, an educational philosophy that centred on helping children form a positive racial

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<sup>90</sup> Program Planning Notes, Box 12, Folder "Art and Storytelling Program," CIBC Director's Files.

<sup>91</sup> Dianne Johnson, "I See Me in the Book': Visual Literacy and African- American Children's Literature", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1990): 13.

identity and personhood through Black written, Black illustrated, and Black disseminated work.

Relevance was not just about subject matter but also about visual representation and authentic voices. Imagery was also a crucial part of enhancing Black pride in *The Brownies Book* and other early African American children's literature. The Storytelling project sought to include children in this visual representation and build on the long history of Black imagery in new and imaginative ways. The chalked-out imagery on sidewalks during this project and the portraits drawn of the children were a crucial component of African American children's literature as they demonstrated visibility of Black children's images in literature. Each storytelling team reported the children's fascination with the images sketched out on the sidewalks and the pictures within the books, this deep interest emphasising how important, and unusual, this visual representation was for many of the children. One boy took one of the books after and "looked at each picture carefully...flipping the pages with a caressing motion" and this child's considered reaction to the book gives a real insight into how this educational drive engaged children in the world of children's books.<sup>92</sup> Tom Feelings felt that, because positive illustrations of Black people were rare, it was his duty as an illustrator to provide recognisable images and for children to "see the

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<sup>92</sup> George Wilson, storytelling report, Aug. 12, 1970, Box 12, Folder "Council-Art and Storytelling", CIBC Director's Files.

beauty” in themselves. Feelings claimed that “to fill the gap” in Black illustrations in libraries he would need to “draw for the rest of my life”.<sup>93</sup>

The value later ascribed to Black illustrators’ work by scholars such as Dianne Johnson is clearly was evident in children’s responses recorded in the reports. Children followed the storytelling teams and lined up to talk to the artists. At the grassroots level, illustrators engaged children in reading and children’s books by showing them art in progress and by including them within the context of children’s literature. Johnson’s assertion of the importance of visual literacy was played out on stoops and sidewalks as illustrators brought the words of African American stories to life in front of them. By also sketching each child, they cemented a place for the children within children’s literature. The storytelling teams helped children realise that there were Black creators like Leo Carty, Tom Feelings, and Dorothy Robertson who were making books for them with characters like them.

The visual spectacle of Black imagery chalked out on the streets interlinked with many Black Power ideas that emphasised self-image and identity. Black Power scholar, Jeffrey Ogbar, argues that self-identity was a crucial element that characterised Black Power.<sup>94</sup> Ogbar asserts that Black Power, influenced by the Nation of Islam and other Black nationalist organisations, celebrated and popularised “black historical accomplishment, reclamation of Africa, and...self-determination” and the images drawn out on

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<sup>93</sup> Sandra Roberts, “Books for Black Children by Black Writers: A Passing Fancy?”, *Publishers Weekly*, January 19, 1982.

<sup>94</sup> Jeffrey Ogbonna Green Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 191-192.

the streets of New York City similarly honoured Black achievements and cultures.<sup>95</sup> CORE's official definition of Black Power at its annual convention in 1967, included: "an improved self-image for the Black man".<sup>96</sup> The storytelling project brought education to the streets and it demonstrates Black Power at a very grassroots level with children engaged in ideas of self-determination and Black pride. Tom Feelings drew images of Africa; artists sketched Black historical figures on sidewalks; and illustrators addressed self-image by drawing children's portraits.

The storytelling teams reiterated Black Power rhetoric in their reports back to the CIBC as they highlighted the psychologically important work of drawing children and sketching out Black children's books. In her report, Dorothy Robertson claimed that her husband endeavoured to draw each and every child, numbering into the hundreds each day as "he felt that within this age group, self-image and identity were of paramount importance".<sup>97</sup> Dorothy Robertson's words did not merely echo Black Power rhetoric but demonstrated that Black Power political ideologies were not limited to organisations but driven by individuals and groups working in Black communities. Jim Haskins, a former teacher in the New York Public school system, interviewed Black Power advocates in the early 1970s and argued that what tied all facets Black Power together was a "new pride in being black".<sup>98</sup> The focus of illustrators in providing children with positive images of

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>96</sup> James Haskins, *Profiles in Black Power* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), 86.

<sup>97</sup> Dorothy Robertson, storytelling report, July 13, 1970, Box 12, Folder "Council-Art and Storytelling", CIBC Director's Files.

<sup>98</sup> Haskins, *Profiles in Black Power*, 12.

Blackness broadens the list of those who contributed to Black Power. This supports historian Tom Adam Davies' assertion that grassroots educational activism was vital to Black Power as it sought to secure greater self-determination for Black communities.<sup>99</sup> The storytelling on the streets encouraged children's education through literature but the project also sought to help children overcome the damaging psychological effects of white supremacy using art by Black creators.

The CIBC's Art and Storytelling on the Streets Project ran for several years from 1970 reaching thousands of children in New York City. The project reveals how Black Power ideas could operate at a grassroots level that did not display the same factionalism of Black Power organisations.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the enduring importance of the project was in using African American children's books as part of an educational philosophy that sought to centre the Black child's experiences in learning materials and provide material such as Black history that was ignored in public education. The CIBC and storytelling teams used a range of Black-authored children's books from poetry to Swahili counting books in conjunction with Black art to encourage children to become interested in literacy and education, and also to overcome the white supremacy that dominated education. Community Control scholars, such as Diana D'Amico, view the movement as a battle

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<sup>99</sup> Tom Adam Davies, *Mainstreaming Black Power*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 166.

<sup>100</sup> See: Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

against the “racist power structure” of education and programmes such as the storytelling on the streets are an under-explored extension of this movement.<sup>101</sup> Projects operated outside the restrictions of the New York public school system which allowed radical Black politics and a Black educational philosophy to thrive. During these projects, networks were formed, and ideas were strengthened. As education in New York City faced further threats from a conservative backlash, organisations like the CIBC prepared to re-engage with public education and give educators the tools to help their students.

### **Back to School: Teacher Training Courses and Classroom Resources**

In a prescient draft for the ‘New Directions’ of New York University’s School of Education in 1966, Chairman of the Department of Administration and Supervision Richard Lonsdale predicted that if the School of Education did not respond to the great changes of the 1960s with “leadership, imagination and vigor” then they would find their functions being performed “by other agencies”.<sup>102</sup> The imagination and creativity of children’s book projects in schools and on the streets caught the attention of individuals involved in the educational establishment. Individuals as well as the CIBC began to influence educational initiatives that involved children’s literature in New York City as they provided bibliographies for courses, seminars for teachers and,

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<sup>101</sup> D’Amico, “Teachers’ Rights Versus Students’ Rights”, 555.

<sup>102</sup> Richard Lonsdale, “New Directions for the School of Education: draft”, Box 1, Folder “School of Education, 1965-66”, Richard C. Lonsdale Papers 1964-1989, New York University Special Collections, Special Collections Centre, New York, New York.

teacher training courses. The focus on Black children's books in education moved from the streets of Harlem and Brooklyn, West into the classrooms of Columbia University. Social activists such as actor Ossie Davis and educator Beryle Banfield brought a radical Black educational philosophy into the educational establishment as the Board of Education and teaching training programmes failed to address the rapidly changing educational demands of New York City in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

There was a lack of projects that showcased African American children's literature provided by educational authorities in New York City. However, several individuals who worked for the New York Board of Education endeavoured to provide teachers with materials and guidance on such literature even though this was not part of any specific policy or campaign. Long-time member of the CIBC, Beryle Banfield also worked as a curriculum specialist for the Board of Education. Her position in the Board of Education illustrates how several figures within the educational establishment did engage in promoting a better and more inclusive children's literature. In her reflective account on her days as an educator and activist in Brooklyn, Sonia Nieto, details the impression individuals like Banfield made in New York City education as the Board of Education made no mandates on diversity in the literature.<sup>103</sup> Nieto describes the impact on her as a young teacher of Banfield's book *Africa in the Curriculum* as a "breath of fresh air" from a Board of Education that did not help its teachers engage with African

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<sup>103</sup> Sonia Nieto, *Brooklyn Dreams: My Life in Public Education* (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2015), np.

American children's literature.<sup>104</sup> Nieto's experiences indicate how crucial individuals, especially ones with connections to the CIBC, could be for teachers in New York City. Teachers did not receive much information on the education of African American children from their Board of Education.

Materials published by the New York Board of Education reveal that African American children's literature was featured in some curricula lists but limited to small specialist sections for the most part. A resource bulletin created for teachers by the Bureau of Curriculum Development in 1967 reveals a limited approach that was behind the contemporary trends. Written in the same year that Lerone Bennett Jr., editor of *Ebony*, decried that "'Negro' is an inaccurate epithet which perpetuates the master-slave mentality", the Board of Education's bulletin repeatedly used such language.<sup>105</sup> The bulletin provides information on how to teach about "the Negro people", accompanied by a bibliography in which much of the material was written by white authors years prior. The bulletin explained the responsibilities of teachers to address African American topics and it emphasised to teachers that just because a child "lives in the ghetto" it did not mean that the child was "culturally deprived".<sup>106</sup> The bulletin was emblematic of much of the materials produced because it attempted to address the issues but it is not inflected with the "tone and urgency" Bennett

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Lerone Bennett Jr., "What's in a Name? Negro vs. Afro-American vs. Black", *Ebony* vol. 23., November (1967): 46.

<sup>106</sup> "Teaching About Minorities in Classroom Situations", *Curriculum Bulletin 1967-1968* Series, no. 23., Bureau of Curriculum Development, Board of Education of the City of New York, Municipal Archives, New York City Department of Records.

Jr. urged was necessary for change.<sup>107</sup> The disconnect with the concerns of Bennett Jr., and the use of 'Negro' emphasised that the New York City Board of Education was not, as an institution, engaged with the concerns of Black educational activists. Some bibliographies recommended many Black children's books such as Margaret Musgrove's *Ashanti to Zulu* and Arnold Adoff's *Black Out Loud* but further guidance on the literature was not usually provided. Indeed, while figures like Banfield prepared specific bibliographies for Black-authored materials, the majority of recommendations relied on important but older material by authors such as Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps rather than recommending more recent African American authored books to teachers.

Given the shortcomings, much of the information provided to teachers came from their peers. In 1968, Leon Weisman the chairman of the English Department at I.S. 218 in Brooklyn created a booklet of "outstanding poetry by Black Americans" for his colleagues in New York City. In its preface, Weisman acknowledged that public schools in New York City lacked Black-authored materials. By including poetry by Arnold Adoff, Melvil Tolson and Arna Bontemps the booklet provided a service that could "provide a mirror to culture, a portrayal of heritage, and an echo of voices from the past".<sup>108</sup> Weisman's focus on Black history, heritage and cultural relevance emphasise how Black educational philosophy was espoused by teachers

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<sup>107</sup> Bennett Jr., "Whats in a Name?", 46.

<sup>108</sup> Leon Weisman, "'Dreams': A Booklet of outstanding poetry of Black Americans" Dec. 1968, Box 163, John Doar Papers.

within the New York City public school system. Others like Seymour Gang, a principal in Harlem, implored other teachers to “choose relevant materials”, indicating that the responsibility was on the teachers.<sup>109</sup> Even though this advice and guidance existed, teachers found themselves limited by the restrictions in the libraries as many newer materials had not reached school library shelves. Weisman acknowledged that the booklet scratched the surface, but his and other’s work in creating guidance underscores the lack of detailed bibliographies and lesson plans that highlighted African American literature, especially materials that could be read by children.

Several school districts in New York City responded to the lack of available support from the Board of Education by initiating their own bibliographies and programmes. In District 29, Keith Baird and Annette Sobin co-directed the Afro-American Studies Project. A similar project was initiated in District 2, whilst in District 5 a “special heritage corps” of seventeen artists were hired to provide “enrichment experiences in schools”.<sup>110</sup> As Banfield noted, materials that dealt with African American history, folklore and other types of literature proliferated, but the “burden” rested on one or two teachers who went above and beyond in preparing materials. This burden laid on teachers was inventively supplemented by external groups like the CIBC, that sought to bring education outside and use children’s books in a variety of events. Many teachers struggled to conduct their jobs at the same time as extensively researching appropriate materials for children. Individuals’ s

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<sup>109</sup> Seymour Gang, “Revolution”, *Reading Newsreport*, vol.3, no. 2, (November, 1968): 39.

<sup>110</sup> Beryle Banfield, “African and Afro-American Studies”, *New York City Education*, Spring 1969, no. 4.

exhaustive efforts nevertheless led to innovative programmes and lessons throughout the city but, without the necessary support, these efforts could only reach a limited number of classes. Intransigence from the New York Board of Education and a rising conservative backlash to innovative teaching methods ensured that by the early 1970s, the CIBC's focus reverted from the streets to the schools. The CIBC could help teachers develop the skills needed to teach Black children's literature and reduce the burden on a handful of educators.

From January to May 1974, members of CIBC, co-sponsored by the Teachers College of Columbia University, ran a course on "Identifying Racism and Sexism in Classroom Literature".<sup>111</sup> The stated purpose of the course was to provide teachers with the tools with which to "identify racist and sexist stereotypes, omissions and distortions in books for children".<sup>112</sup> A fifteen week course, it focused specifically on the importance of literature for children. The course featured classes such as "The Black American in Classroom Literature", "African Realities: Omissions and Distortions" as well as other topics on sexism and the denial of Puerto Rican history. The CIBC moved from a bottom-up approach on the streets to working at the elite institution of Columbia University. This change in approach reveals that the organisation sought to continue to improve the use of children's books in schools but realized the necessity of working within the educational

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<sup>111</sup> "Preliminary Report on the CIBC Course at Teachers College, Columbia University" June 1974, Box 7, Folder CIBC 1. CIBC Director's Files.

<sup>112</sup> Herbert Kurz, "Racism and Sexism to be Explored in New Course at Teachers College", Box 12, folder "Teacher Training Program", CIBC Director's Files.

establishment. However, the CIBC took their guidance from the experiences of the Community Control district schools and the streets. The course demonstrated a more nuanced and holistic approach to children's literature in schools than was offered by other teacher training programmes and Board of Education materials. Overall, thirty people participated including elementary and secondary school teachers, school librarians, a curriculum co-ordinator of a New York City district and four editors of school textbooks. The course was indicative of how the idea of Black children's books in schools had expanded beyond events in the streets and in local communities to one of the leading teacher training universities.

Beryle Banfield, a curriculum specialist at the Board of Education, and Albert Schwarz, assistant professor of Education at Richmond College of the City University of New York conducted the course. They were also resource specialists for the CIBC. The organisation always had colleagues and supporters within the New York educational establishment, but the course exhibited how deeply entwined the CIBC had become with education in New York City. The lesson plans and guides for teachers created by the Council revealed how seriously many teachers regarded Black children's literature and its educational potential. More than just a crossover of personnel advocating a Black educational philosophy, the course was a more official connection between the CIBC and the educational establishment than their events in Ocean Hill-Brownsville and on the streets of New York City.

For years, individual educators and specialists in the Board of Education had produced bibliographies and guides for teachers but were

constrained by time, money and, professional support. The CIBC, however, had grown to a large organisation with many contacts within educational institutions and nationwide support. Efforts in New York City from 1965 had provided experiential training for CIBC members on the many educational values of Black children's books and made connections between schools and outside experts.

For years the CIBC sent out a list of "authors and artists available for programmes" to local school boards and teacher events, fostering connections between schools and African American children's book creators.<sup>113</sup> As a result, the lesson plans and educational materials produced by CIBC members reveal a more detailed use of children's books due to a history of educational events and programmes. In the first week of the Teachers College course, Beryle Banfield conducted a lesson on children's literature and its "syndromes and subtleties".<sup>114</sup> Lessons such as this challenged educators' views of what African American children's literature was and how to use it in education. In the course feedback, several participants claimed how it had raised their consciousness of issues including racism in books and provided them with new insights into literature in the classroom.<sup>115</sup> Albertha Toppins, a curriculum coordinator in Manhattan claimed that the insights she gained from the course prompted her to

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<sup>113</sup> CIBC, "New York City Memo", June 1971, Box 7, Folder "Children's Book Council", CIBC Director's Files.

<sup>114</sup> "Teacher College Course Kit", February, 1974, Box 12, Folder "Teachers Training course", CIBC Director's Files.

<sup>115</sup> "The CIBC Course at Teachers College", "Columbia University Preliminary Report", June, 1974, Box 7, Folder un-named, CIBC Director's Files.

implement workshops run by the CIBC on book selection.<sup>116</sup> The teacher training course at Columbia University reveals that educational experts began to take the inclusion of Black children's literature within education seriously and, more importantly, that it could serve as a vital tool in the education of children. The experiences of those involved with the CIBC provided lesson plans and curriculum ideas that sought to use children's books in an antiracist curriculum.

Children's book projects in New York City opened up education from the confines of the classroom. By the early 1970s, groups like the CIBC and an affiliated organisation the Multicultural Project for Communication and Education, as well as many individuals returned to schools to provide help to educators on how to use Black children's books and open up possibilities within the classroom. The teacher training course represented a shift in the CIBC's focus back into how to change classroom practices, rather than promoting a Black educational philosophy outside the schools.

Resources created for schools in the 1970s by the CIBC were filled with suggestions about how to use Black children's books educationally within the classroom. Greenfield's *Paul Robeson* biography was suggested to be used in combination with recordings of his songs to introduce children to African American music. One plan used Muriel Feelings' *Moja Means One* book to teach children how to count in Swahili, connecting many children to an African heritage but the lesson also emphasised encouraging

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

children from other backgrounds to share how to count other languages, developing a respect for language difference.<sup>117</sup> Lesson materials also feature books such as Eloise Greenfield's *Honey I Love* that could help strengthen Black pride by focusing on skin colour and "the beauty of Black hair".<sup>118</sup> The CIBC resources suggest how children's literature can be combined with other activities, for example the book *Honey, I Love* is recommended to help prompt children to "make a photocollage of different hair colors, textures, styles".<sup>119</sup> The list of activities and resources emphasises how African American children's books could be used in education, not just to engage children in reading but prompt children to think about hair, beauty, music, heritage among other topics.

In establishing a Resource Centre in 1974, the CIBC provided educators with workshops, materials and information on fighting racism and sexism in classroom materials. Lesson plans provided help to teachers amidst a challenge from "right-wing and "Back-To-Basics" groups" that the CIBC viewed as cutting programmes in an attempt to "deny Third World peoples equal access to educational opportunities".<sup>120</sup> The programmes of the council in the mid and late 1970s signalled a shift from a position of distrust in schools' abilities to teach Black children adequately.

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<sup>117</sup> CIBC and Multicultural Project for Communication and Education, Inc., *Childcare Shapes the Future: Anti-Racist Strategies*, New York: Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1974, Box 7, CIBC Director's Files.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> "Statement From the Council On Interracial Books for Children", Box 7, Folder CIBC 70s-80s, CIBC Director's Files.

The Teacher Training Course, the Resource Center and the CIBC's renewed focus on public schools suggest that there was support amongst educators for information about Black children's books and even limited support from the Board of Education. However, by the mid-1970s broad calls for a "back to basics" schooling put curriculum innovations at risk as a 'traditionalist' approach reacted to changes in public education. A 'back-to-basics' education meant moving the focus away from cultural studies and notions of cultural relevance to more traditional methods of reading, writing and arithmetic.

In 1982 Burton Yale Pines, a sociologist, wrote a study and history of the grassroots traditionalist movement as he argued the "chic theories of the 1960s" and the experimental classrooms made "casualties of the 3 R's".<sup>121</sup> Pines' work illustrates how a focus on 'back to basics' arguments by conservatives rejected creative approaches and viewed education through a nostalgic lens which, although Pines does not highlight this, predominantly meant a white lens. Phyllis Schafly, a conservative Republican activist, similarly attacked educational innovation in her 1984 book *Child Abuse in the Classroom* that attacked the 1960s and 1970s classroom focuses on equal rights and racial justice.<sup>122</sup>

Innovative programmes such as the storytelling on the streets and the bookmobiles come under Schafly's ire and Pines' label of "chic theories".

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<sup>121</sup> Burton Yale Pines, *Back to Basics: The Traditionalist Movement That Is Sweeping Grass-Roots America* (New York: Morrow, 1982), 103.

<sup>122</sup> Robert Singh, *Contemporary American Politics and Society Issues and Controversies* (London: SAGE, 2003), 5.

Calls for “a traditional curriculum, taught in a traditional classroom by a traditional teacher” inadvertently challenged teachers’ ability to be creative in their approaches to teaching Black children’s literature.<sup>123</sup> The innovative work undertaken by librarians and teachers in using African American children’s books fell under the umbrella criticisms levelled at public education in the 1970s. Educational critic Paul Copperfield attacked the “pedagogical folly” of non-traditional reading programmes and student-centred approaches in the classroom.<sup>124</sup>

This resistance to providing an antiracist and multicultural education partially explains why CIBC focused its energies back on teacher training. Evidently, one of the reasons groups such as the CIBC transitioned back to the classrooms was because of the pressure on educators to return ‘back to basics’. By returning to the classroom the CIBC could support teachers in delivering an antiracist curriculum and provide resources for a creative approach to teaching. The Resource Center materials reveal an effort to encourage the use of a wide array of materials to tackle many subjects important for African American children such as beauty standards and Black history. That it was not just teachers who attended the Columbia University course but librarians and publishers reveal that the course intended to build wide support for a Black educational philosophy and an antiracist approach to teaching within a wider conservative backlash in education.

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<sup>123</sup> Pines, *Back to Basics*, 103-104.

<sup>124</sup> Paul Copperman, "The Decline of Literacy", *Journal of Communication* 30, no. 1 (1980): 116.

Historian Ira Shor labels the 1970s a “conservative restoration” in education because the push for ‘back to basics’ education succeeded as traditional programmes and “regimes of standard testing” swept across the nation.<sup>125</sup> Government figures and conservative groups highlighted declining SAT scores and the benefits of career-focused education as reasons to move away from innovation in reading programmes. Conservative views on education became nationwide reading in 1975 when *Newsweek* created an alarmist spread entitled “Why Jonny Can’t Write”, claiming that children were leaving school as “semi-literates”.<sup>126</sup> Concerned parents and educators raised the article at PTA meetings, English Departments. Linguist Suzette Elgin claimed at the time that everywhere she saw “teachers and administrators and officials and parents waving it”.<sup>127</sup> Elgin argued against the *Newsweek* article because it represented wider misunderstandings of what ‘literate’ meant and how conservative figures misused ‘literate’ to simply mean speaking the English of a “homogeneous white upperclass” with a “prep school background”.<sup>128</sup> In the 1970s, the CIBC and linguists like Elgin renewed their efforts within educational institutions to counteract this focus on a white, conservative education.

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<sup>125</sup> Ira Shor, *Culture Wars: School and Society in the Conservative Restoration 1969-1984* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1992), 78.

<sup>126</sup> Suzette Haden Elgin, “Why ‘Newsweek’ Can’t Tell Us Why Johnny Can’t Write”, *The English Journal* 65, no. 8 (1976): 29.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

## **Conclusion: The enduring importance of African American children's literature in combatting white supremacy**

Programmes that sought to use African American children's literature continued to proliferate both in and out of New York City public schools to counteract the "conservative restoration" that ignored the voices and images of all children. Events across the city addressed the crucial needs that public schools often ignored. Groups like RIF and the CIBC hosted programmes outside of schools shortly after the State legislature dismantled the Community Control project. The CIBC returned to schools in order to help educators who had come under threat from the proliferation of 'Back to Basics' programmes. Children's book programmes took on an importance at a time when education that addressed the needs of African American students was under threat. Whether inside schools or within the communities, activists and educators used children's books to provide a better education for children and to combat the pervasive racism children faced. What these events demonstrate is that Black children's books became a vital tool in a Black educational philosophy both inside and outside of schools as they tried to provide children with "authentic identities and interests".<sup>129</sup> Programmes used books to provide children with stories that resonated with them. Sharon Bell Mathis' *Sidewalk Story* was set in a recognisable urban setting for many children; Julius Lester adapted old folktales that children had probably heard from elder relatives in books like

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<sup>129</sup> Daniel Perlstein, "Live the Truth: Politics and Pedagogy in the African American Movement for Freedom and Liberation" in *Education as Freedom: African American Educational Thought and Activism* ed. Noel S. Anderson and Haroon Kharem (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009), 157.

*The Knee-High Man*; and Arnold Adoff wrote about famous black figures like Malcolm X.

These, and many other African American children's books, became tools against an oppressive white-centric education. They not only populated library shelves but these books became important educational tools in a variety of programmes both in and outside of schools. As children's author Walter Dean Myers explained:

“Children need books, in and out of school, that depict people who look like them because they are being told on a daily basis that these books are indicators of importance.”<sup>130</sup>

Myers' recognition of the power of children's books both within and outside school, reiterates that education for Black children was not confined to the classroom. Myers' argument attests to how a Black educational philosophy encompassed identity, history and heritage as well as helping children become engaged with education. From sessions with authors in classrooms to images being sketched out on sidewalks, African American children's books were a powerful medium of education.

Because of their breadth of subject matter and bold approaches to important topics, Black children's books became inextricably linked with education as well as important channels for wider politics. In 1972, Ernest

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<sup>130</sup> Walter Dean Myers in Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Walter Dean Myers: A Literary Companion* (London: Macfarland & Company, Inc., 2006), 198.

Gregg had a children's book rejected by the Board of Education because it was viewed as a "slick way of promoting Black nationalism and Pan Africanism".<sup>131</sup> The reaction to Gregg's work highlights the existence of a radical canon of Black children's literature. Also, the Board of Education's response indicates why children's book events operated both in and outside of schools as Board deemed many books as too radical.

Black children's literature had a long association with education; in the late 1960s and 1970s there was a renaissance of children's literature that reflected the period in its radicalism and sought to address the educational concerns of Black communities of the period. From the underground railroad to Steptoe's *Uptown* train, from Julius Lester's menacing Stagolee to Rose Blue's boy reading in *A Quiet Place*, African American children's literature covered a vast array of ideas, but these books all had a commonality. Culturally conscious Black children's literature was widely used by educators and activists to help children, whether that was to help combat racism; help improve literacy; or help establish a strong connection to Black Power ideology, children's books were a valuable tool in the Black liberation movement.

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<sup>131</sup> James Murray, "Publishers Have Few Good Words...", *New York Amsterdam News*, March 1 (1975).

# TOWARD A CHILD-CENTRED BLACK EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

## CHAPTER 5:

### THE VOICE OF THE CHILDREN: CHILDREN'S CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESPONSES TO AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE.

In 1968, Michael Gill, a thirteen-year-old New York City resident, wrote “I wish I could just go out and live a clean life and go to a good school. I wish I would, but, we’re Black and Black is hard to recognize by some people”.<sup>1</sup> Gill’s moving words from his poem ‘The Days of My People’ were published in a collection of children’s writing collected by June Jordan and Terri Bush during a writing workshop they ran on Saturdays in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. Gill and his peers touch on Blackness, poverty, education, police brutality and myriad other topics in their poems. Gill’s insights into the interconnections between race, education and poverty offer a glimpse into the involvement of children in writing and children’s understanding of Black educational philosophy. Poet and social activist June Jordan claims in her afterword for the book, “if we will hear them, they will teach us”, her words underlining the importance of children’s voices within the wider educational and political movements.<sup>2</sup> This chapter examines children’s writings in *Children of Longing*, *The Voice of the Children*, *Black means...*, and *The Voice of 175*, as well as children’s letters and reports about African American children’s literature. The works amplify a range of children’s voices and

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Gill, “The Days of My People” in *The Voice of the Children*, eds., June Jordan and Terri Bush (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970), 54.

<sup>2</sup> June Jordan, “Afterword” in *The Voice of the Children*, 94.

reveal how children contributed and responded to the works of adult authors by focusing on similar themes and ideas such as the importance of education, Black history, and the power of positive representation. This chapter demonstrates how, through their writing, children voiced their ideas and concerns on education, Black Power among other things. Though children's agency was limited as they could not vote or make many decisions in adult-dominated institutions, children did have a voice. Their voice was an important part of Black educational philosophy as authors, illustrators, and educators collaborated with children to publish their thoughts, feelings, and demands.

Sources from children are rare because, as Kristine Moruzi, Nell Musgrove, and Carla Pascoe Leahy explain children are "less likely to be empowered to freely create the kinds of sources that historians might later access in their research".<sup>3</sup> However, Black children's authors such as June Jordan and Rosa Guy and a range of New York City educators empowered children to create their own sources. Children wrote their own poems, voiced their own thoughts to interviewers, and wrote letters to authors. These sources do not cover every child's engagement with books nor their involvement in New York City events but help illustrate how children approached race, contemporary politics, and education. They also reveal

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<sup>3</sup> Kristine Moruzi, Nell Musgrove, and Carla Pascoe Leahy, "Hearing Children's Voices: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges" in *Children's Voices from the Past New Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Kristine Moruzi, Nell Musgrove, and Carla Pascoe Leahy, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 11.

their thoughts and feelings on a range of other subjects. Spyros Spyrou, a sociologist, rightly argues against any attempt to exotify children's voices and urges to be reflexive about sources to avoid this issue.<sup>4</sup> However, the books examined in this chapter offer a crucial insight into how children dealt with complex themes in their own writing. By reading African American children's writing, it is possible to understand their myriad concerns, thoughts and feelings in New York City. Literary, as well as historical, analysis of these texts provides a deeper understanding of how children understood and felt about ideas and topics that were common throughout African American children's literature. Children's involvement in fights for racial justice have been examined by historians but children's role as cultural critics engaged in producing works that defied, challenged and complicated representations has been overlooked.<sup>5</sup>

### **Children's Black Educational Philosophy**

These sources provide insights into themes and ideas that interested children and how they articulated their own particular Black educational philosophy. Their perspective as students within the public school system offers a different insight than adult perspectives into how a Black educational philosophy was adapted. For many children, cultural relevance and the

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<sup>4</sup> Spyros Spyrou, *Disclosing Childhoods: Research and Knowledge Production for a Critical Childhood Studies*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 86.

<sup>5</sup> Many historians have examined Black youth activism, especially in the Civil Rights and Black Power Eras. See: Gael Graham, *Young Activists: American High School in the Age of Protest* (DeKalb:

Northern Illinois University Press, 2006); Rebecca de Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World: Young People and America's Long Struggle for Racial Equality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

liberatory power of education were integral. However, unlike many adult activists, children also focused on their treatment by teachers. Many of the children emphasised that teachers, especially white teachers, should respect their students and the onus was on the teachers to understand cultural and class differences in their classroom. Education was repeatedly examined by children in each source and their writings offer an insight into how children perceived their own roles in education and what education should provide them. Children's writings in *Children of Longing*, *The Voice of the Children*, *Black means...*, and *The Voice of 175* demand an education that provides cultural relevance, respect for children, and a focus on Black history.

Jennifer McMeans, a young girl from Brooklyn wrote to author John Steptoe in 1973 in praise of his work *Uptown*, because she “liked reading about black children like me”.<sup>6</sup> McMean's statement poignantly captures the crux of the intersection of African American children's literature and education. Literature that children connected to encouraged further reading and, perhaps, greater involvement in education. Children's responses to and use of literature illuminate how African American children engaged with Black educational philosophy. Grace E. Funk, a school librarian from New York City, explained to John Steptoe the “mystical rapport” African American

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<sup>6</sup> Jennifer McMeans to John Steptoe, December 14, 1973, Letter, Box 2, Folder 'Youth fanmail', John Steptoe Papers, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, New York, New York.

children had with his books in praise of his work.<sup>7</sup> Funk's letter acclaims the "immediate identification" children had with his work, and she explained that one boy responded to *Stevie* by saying "that boy feels like me".<sup>8</sup> Though provided in a second-hand account, this anonymous boy's response to Steptoe's work demonstrates that the child emotionally engaged with the work, as well as connecting the book to his lived experience. Cultural relevancy was an integral part of Black educational philosophy. This boy's instinctive reaction to the book demonstrates the impact of cultural relevancy and its positive effect on African American children. 'Cultural relevance' and representation was not simply a slogan used by groups like Reading is Fundamental (RIF) but a powerful part of education that children noticed and wrote about. The writings of children reveal how children explored themes and ideas in African American children's literature, and how they viewed literature as a way to articulate their views about education.

### **Theorizing Children's Voices**

A new scholarly apparatus is required in theorizing these children's voices because books like *Black means...* and *The Voice of the Children* are not addressed within historiography on childhood or children's literature theory. For example, *Children's Voices from the Past* is a vital volume in which a range of scholars examine the methodological challenges of finding

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<sup>7</sup> Grace E. Funk to John Steptoe, letter, March 21 1970, Box 2, Folder 'Adult fanmail', John Steptoe Papers, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library (hereafter cited as the John Steptoe Papers).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

children's voices in historical sources and how to theorize them. Historian Susan Eckelmann Berghel's powerful chapter "'Str[a]ight from My Heart': Black Lives, Affective Citizenship, and 1960s American Politics' examines children's writing, but she focuses on children's correspondence rather than fiction. The books examined in this chapter, however, are not the "muffled voices" of children to be found in archival documents but children's writing published for public consumption.<sup>9</sup> The texts were written by children or featured unedited interviews with children. They were directed at a readership of both adults and children. Therefore, children's literary criticism cannot adequately address these sources as children's literature is often defined as imagining the child as the reader.<sup>10</sup> A new approach is needed to understand how these children's voices reflected and responded to wider African American children's literature. This chapter uses children's published voices to examine the ways in which children used these books as vehicles for their ideas, protests and feelings which often aligned, interrogated and intervened with adult authors' concerns.

How children interacted with and understood African American children's literature can reveal their impact on Black educational philosophy and how central they were to this. Black educational philosophy was not

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<sup>9</sup> G. T. Smith, "Muffled Voices: Recovering Children's Voices From England's Social Margins" in *Children's Voices from the Past New Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Kristine Moruzi, Nell Musgrove, and Carla Pascoe Leahy, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 263.

<sup>10</sup> Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, "Defining Children's Literature and Childhood" in *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 1996), 18.

transmitted from authors to children but was a collaboration in which authors and illustrators responded to children's voices. The importance of children in children's literature has been widely explored by reader-response theorists, such as Louise Rosenblatt, who argue that meaning of a text is only achieved when the reader meets the text.<sup>11</sup> Reader-Response theory accommodates the role of the child within children's literature and emphasises the active role played by children. However, this approach does not consider children as authors. Moreover, Wanda Brooks and Susan Browne argue that many reader response scholars do not examine "the myriad cultural influences (values, practices, experiences, etc.) affecting both readers and authors, and the ways in which these influence meaning making".<sup>12</sup> Brooks and Browne rightly highlight the importance of "a culturally situated reader response" because African American children responded to the cultural markers of Black creators. Literature scholar Ebony Wilkins built upon the cultural situated reader response and formulated five tenets of African American reader response: "connecting, constructing, engaging, evaluating, and imaging".<sup>13</sup> Wilkins' framework is adapted in this chapter to expand it beyond a reader response to conduct a "culturally situated" analysis of African American children's writings and explore how these young

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<sup>11</sup> Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, Fifth edition. (New York: New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1995), 91-129.

<sup>12</sup> Wanda Brooks and Susan Browne, "Towards a Culturally Situated Reader Response Theory" *An International Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2012), 77.

<sup>13</sup> Ebony Wilkins, "Members of the Jury Please Rise: Children Interact with African American Children's Literature", PhD Diss., (University of Illinois, 2015), 22.

writers used writing to engage with the growing canon of African American children's literature and its associated topics, themes and language.

African American children in New York City could use interviews and writing to emphasise their place in the world as "valid, valuable, and voiced".<sup>14</sup> Children's literature scholar, Martha Collier argues that Black authored children's literature "provides a powerful means to greatly enhance the educational experience of African American children by (a) immersing them in the stories of their people and (b) developing a cultural mirror image".<sup>15</sup> However, this is not limited to children reading literature, it is vital to understand how children used their own writing to engage with issues of representation in literature and the liberating power of education, both topics written about by children in these sources. In her work on children in the American Revolution, historian Susan Miller contends that "children willingly conform to adult agendas, not necessarily because youth acquiesce to power, but because their interests often align with those promoted by adults".<sup>16</sup> Miller's statement is significant because it is important to analyse the words and images of these children's not as reflections of wider African American children's literature but as a response to the same stimuli. In their poems, interviews and letters, children addressed Black Power, Black pride and identities, as well as local struggles such as the Community Control project. To examine children's voices a culturally situated approach that

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<sup>14</sup> Marta Collier, "Through the Looking Glass: Harnessing the Power of African American Children's Literature", *Journal of Negro Education* 69, no. 3 (2000), 235.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Susan A. Miller, "Assent as Agency in the Early Years of the Children of the American Revolution", *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 9, no. 1 (2016), 26.

values the voices of children is needed. Moving beyond “binaries of adult versus child” enables an approach in which the voices of African American children can be understood as part of wider debates on education, Black Power and literature.<sup>17</sup> Though children had limited agency to make their own choices in adult-imposed institutions, their voice was listened to and an important part of Black educational philosophy.<sup>18</sup>

Engaging with children’s voices enables a broader analysis of the educational upheavals in New York City, as well as deeper insights into and what children hoped to gain from children’s literature. It is possible to see which aspects of wider African American children’s writing, the authors of these sources connected to and engaged with. The children’s voices reveal how the social activism of African American children’s writers was embraced by children and used in their own, complex ways. From addressing topics like a Black God to the importance of memorialising Black history, children were a crucial part of this story. In poems and letters children reiterate elements of Black educational philosophy and understood the power of language. This chapter addresses each of the four texts in turn to demonstrate the topics and themes African American children from New York City focused upon.

### **Children of Longing**

Rosa Guy, a Trinidadian American children’s author, interviewed Black youth across the United States to create the 1970 book *Children of Longing*. She

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<sup>17</sup> Moruzi et al., “Hearing Children’s Voices”, 12.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

states in the introduction that the book began as a “desire to know what Black youth of today were thinking and feeling”.<sup>19</sup> Guy’s focus on these hidden aspects of children’s lives reveals how she sought to capture the realities of children’s experiences. The book comprises of interviews with children and young adults talking about their childhood including responses from the “Inner Cities” and “The Southland”. As such *Children of Longing* contains a wide sample of children’s words from New York City. Guy does not make her methodology clear as she states that she “travelled throughout the United States...going into Black high schools and colleges in urban and rural areas, into writer’s workshops, the cotton fields and the ghettos, seeing answers from young Black people”.<sup>20</sup> While her selection process seems opaque, the varied responses and stories from the interviewees suggest that the interviews were led by the interviewee. Each interview is unedited, different in length, in approach and focus which suggests that Guy allowed the children to tell their own story rather than being directed by certain questions.

The concerns of each child and young adult is made clear. Some have obvious political thoughts whilst some have provided deeply personal stories about growing up Black. As a collaboration between children and a Black children’s writer, *Children of Longing* is important because it offers children’s views about education, politics and culture. The topics raised by the interviewees help to demonstrate that issues such as Black educational

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<sup>19</sup> Rosa Guy, *Children of Longing*, ed. Rosa Guy (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), xiii.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

philosophy and Black Power did not escape the attention of children as many explicitly discussed their views on these topics. *Children of Longing* demonstrates that while limited in their agency to enact change, children had a voice in wider political dialogue. The interviews with children in New York City prove that African American children had opinions about Community Control and political movements in the city as well as having their own personal concerns about issues that affected their daily lives.

In the introduction to Rosa Guy's *Children of Longing*, Julius Lester begins by addressing education. Lester opens the introduction by proclaiming: "In America, we are educated to be oblivious of each other and to each other. We are taught literature, mathematics, history, science, and society considers us educated".<sup>21</sup> Lester's passive construction indicates his aversion to U.S. education, emphasising the didactic nature of public education in the country that did not listen to the voice of children. Lester attacks school's focus on 'great man history' which ignores the contributions of millions in favour of a few individuals. However, he saw a generational change in attitude as "the history of the 1960s was not made in the White House, but in the minds and lives of millions of people".<sup>22</sup> Lester's optimism was, in part, inspired by the words of Black youth printed in the rest of the book. As an African American children's author and activist in the Black freedom struggles, Lester uses his introduction to praise the next generation for their humanity and their role in seeking a better world. Lester foregrounds

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<sup>21</sup> Lester, "Introduction" in *Children of Longing* ed. Rosa Guy (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), v.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

education in the introduction, signalling how education inflects the stories of every life recorded in *Children of Longing*. Lester echoes the words of the children within the book as they focus on education and the realities of Black childhood in the U.S. Guy's interviews underscore how children's voices added to the cacophony that called for a Black educational philosophy and an antiracist education.

Kim West, aged thirteen, from Brooklyn uses her interview, 'I Stand for Good Education', to address the institutionalised racism that pervaded the New York City public school system. West refers to an anonymous 'they' throughout her interview, an unidentified group of people who impeded African American children's education. Though she does not explicitly state so, the 'they' she refers to is powerful and white. Firstly, West claims that children struggle in education so "they don't ruin our lives by not giving us equal opportunities", suggesting that 'they' have the power over children's futures, and 'they' have signalled that education is a vital component in establishing a positive future. Secondly, West introduces the 'they' as she claims that "they send all the" African American children to poorer schools in which "they teach you things that they should have taught you in elementary school", signalling that the 'they' are not African American.<sup>23</sup> West's criticisms of this unidentified group, are comparable to the Black educational philosophy criticisms of education as white-dominated, serving the needs of white children to the disadvantage of all others. West conceptualizes

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<sup>23</sup> Kim West, "I Stand for Good Education" in *Children of Longing* ed. Rosa Guy (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 22-23.

education as a battle between African American children striving for an education that is not being delivered and a white society that was limiting these opportunities.

She demonstrates a consciousness of educational upheavals in New York City, such as Community Control and desegregation. The interview touches upon the crisis in Ocean Hill-Brownsville as West demonstrates an understanding of Community Control and firmly aligns herself with the local community. She states: “the community got together and solved the problem. The community is now understanding as a whole the importance of education”.<sup>24</sup> It is evident that West perceives success in Community Control not as lasting political success, but as the impact such control had on local people. West’s phrase “now understanding” suggests that issues of desegregation and Community Control made local people conscious of the problems in education. For West, success in the school crisis was how it catalysed community support. She directly addresses the interviewer and reader with her last sentence as she questions: “Why don’t you do as the community did and *CARE?*”. The ending of the interview with this direct question emphasises how, for West, the crisis was not about the politics of who ran the school but having people care about education and support for the children. Her stress on ‘care’ at the end is indicative of her emotional plea to the reader and interviewer as her experiences in school have convinced her of the need for change and that it was everyone’s responsibility.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

It is teachers who do not care who come under the ire of thirteen-year-old Sandra Ancum in her interview. Ancum's experiences of schooling and Community Control led her to posit a future for herself as a teacher " 'cause the children need their education".<sup>25</sup> In contrast to West, Ancum perceives the Community Control movement as an impediment to learning and part of a general lack of care from the position of teachers. Unlike Kim West, Ancum views her teachers as unconcerned with her education as she claims that "they never thought of us children who came to learn".<sup>26</sup> Ancum perceives herself as part of a collection of children who had been forgotten about and ignored in schools.

The idea of abandonment is a crucial insight into one child's perspective of the crises in New York City schools because often when students are focused upon, it is the activist students that are examined. The voices of children on Community Control are primarily from an activist perspective which is reflected in historiography. In his history of the school strikes, when Jerald Podair discusses students, he emphasises the topic of "student vandalism" and how the UFT and white teachers capitalised on this.<sup>27</sup> Podair's work shows obvious empathy for students involved but seldom incorporates student's voices. Furthermore, children's voices in archival reports from the Bureau of Education and independent educational groups in New York City are filtered through adult perceptions of student

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<sup>25</sup> Sandra Ancum, "Children Need Teachers Who Care" in *Children of Longing* ed. Rosa Guy (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 11.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Jerald Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 160

activism. For example, in a report by the Metropolitan Applied Research Center, a non-profit organisation that examined urban problems in the U.S., educational researchers described Black student activism as a “provocative program” supported by Sonny Carson of the Brooklyn Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), an organisation that had embraced Black Power.<sup>28</sup> Though the report is ostensibly supportive, the word ‘provocative’ eliminates many subtleties in children’s thoughts and actions during Community Control. The focus on provocation suggests the author’s perceived student activism as a way to incite change rather than focusing on the ideas and changes put forward by children. The perspective of Sandra Ancum is an invaluable resource because her experiences in school of being overlooked prompted her desire to become a teacher who would teach children without prejudice and never abandon children who sought an education.

After visits by authors to their school in Ocean Hill-Brownsville during Book Week, students responses further accentuated the power of a Black educational philosophy. For example, after Janet Harris visited to speak about her book *Black Pride*, Peaches McCray wrote to Harris praising her “because she didn’t seem to be prejudice” and she “gave everyone an equal chance.”<sup>29</sup> McCray compared Harris’ positive impact to many white teachers’ mistreatment of African American students. McCray’s

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<sup>28</sup> Metropolitan Applied Research Center, untitled report, 1969, Box 16, Folder 1, Marvin D. Markowitz Papers, 1962-1973, University Archives, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries.

<sup>29</sup> Peaches McCray (slang name), School Report, Box 14 Folder “Book Week”, Council on Interracial Books for Children: Director’s Files, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, New York, New York.

characterisation of white teachers is a common theme throughout Black children's writing.

In sixteen-year-old Leslie Kroup's interview in *Children of Longing*, 'A Negro Ain't Shit', Kroup situates white teachers' mistreatment of African American children as a wider issue of growing up Black in the United States. Kroup states that: "just because we're black and young, don't mean we're not human beings, remember", a reminder to white teachers they have had to treat them with respect.<sup>30</sup> In Kroup's interview he connects his lived experiences in school of being mistreated as an African American youth and also imagines a future where he is principal. In this imagined future, Kroup as a principal, rewards teachers "who try to understand their students and respect them" and the students would be talked to like human beings if they caused problems. In his idea of how to teach, Kroup imagines a school in which respect and dignity are crucial in all relationships between students and teachers. Kroup's tone is far more pessimistic than other interviewees, perhaps as he was older and had extensive experience of poor teaching. After positing a future as a school principal, he states that he "would have been a groovy principal", implying that this dream is unachievable. Instead, he will "hang out on the streets and see what's shaking".<sup>31</sup> Kroups' interview reiterates many of the concerns of adult activists, teachers, parents and authors. Black educational philosophy was a way of fighting concerns that

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<sup>30</sup> Leslie Kroup, "A Negro Ain't Shit", *Children of Longing* ed. Rosa Guy (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 9.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

schools and teachers discriminated against African American students and did not seek to understand Black youth.

At only sixteen, Leslie Kroup demonstrates an understanding of how white people perceive him as a young African American. In school, white teachers and students often “acted scared” of Kroup which only encouraged him to “make them scareder”.<sup>32</sup> Throughout the interview, Kroup details how his race impacted upon his school experience and led to his disengagement from education. He makes a clear delineation between the white students’ experiences and his own, not just in school but he speaks of widely different experiences of childhood. When discussing his age, Kroup mentions that he passes for nineteen outside of school because his face is too young to “fool anybody but white-folks”.<sup>33</sup> His comment is in parentheses, perhaps suggesting Kroup said it as an aside during the interview, but the comment speaks to wider issues of how white teachers and white children’s authors misunderstood African American childhood. Many African American authors including John Steptoe and Rose Blue addressed the complexities and distinctiveness of growing up Black in the United States in their books for children in response to how white teachers and authors failed to do so. Kroup’s focus on the hardships of Black childhood connects to wider concerns of childhood innocence in African American children’s literature. Authors and illustrators did not want to deny children a childhood, but they also did not project innocence into children’s literature. African American

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

children's books in the 1960s and 1970s frequently addressed issues such as violence, religion and politics in their works as authors, including Eloise Greenfield and Kristen Hunter, understood the experiences Black children often had in the United States.

John Nelson, aged thirteen, covers many topics in short succession in his interview as he reveals a life marred by racist violence before advocating a solution of African Americans uniting "as one then people will learn of BLACK POWER!!!!!!".<sup>34</sup> For Nelson, the interview offers an opportunity to voice his political worldview and demonstrate his understanding of the rhetorical strength of 'Black Power' as he builds up to it as his conclusion. Scholars, such as Katherine Capshaw Smith, have emphasised African American children's literature written by adults as sites of political and ideological contest. John Nelson's interview reveals a consciousness of politics as he recognizes the impact of 'Black Power' as a slogan. He also comprehends the underlying reasons for the need to come together for Black Power as a source of strength. Nelson states that he wishes to be a "racism criticizer" and the issue that triggered this belief was because he "hardly heard a thing about black heritage and black people".<sup>35</sup> Nelson's experiences in school prompted him to theorise a world in which he is able to tackle racism. He connects not hearing about Black history and heritage in school with further issues of institutional racism as he contends that "They do not

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<sup>34</sup> John Nelson, "Give Me the Blade", *Children of Longing* ed. Rosa Guy (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 34.

<sup>35</sup> Nelson, "Give Me The Blade", *Children of Longing*, 32.

hardly give blacks jobs, or a good education, and we also have economical problems".<sup>36</sup> Nelson, like other interviewees, perceives education as a part of wide institutional racism that directly affects children's lives. This connection was also an important part of a Black educational philosophy, with proponents such as Tom Feelings, viewing education as an important battleground against white supremacy. Nelson and Feelings' criticisms are very similar, which underscores how interrelated adult's and children's views on education and Black educational philosophy were.

Rosa Guy's collection of interviews in *Children of Longing* reveals that children connected educational issues with wider issues of institutional racism and Black Power politics. Furthermore, the interviews allowed children to discuss topics important to them. It is significant that they focused on education in every interview, even though they had the freedom to discuss whatever concerned them. These children espoused different variations of a Black educational philosophy, but they all attacked an educational system that was institutionally racist and limiting for African American children. Furthermore, many of the concerns of the children were echoed in wider African American children's literature. Interviews touched on Black history, childhood innocence, and racist schooling and all of these topics featured prominently in books by authors including Judith Griffin who examined Black history, Julius Lester who explored childhood innocence, and Kristen Hunter who wrote about racism in schools. They are an important insight into how African American children's literature responded to

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

the needs and concerns of African American children. Authors, such as Kristen Hunter and Walter Dean Myers, used literature to discuss topics not taught in schools and address issues specific to growing up Black, topics which the interviewees in *Children of Longing* continually raised as important to them.

### **Black means...**

The book *Black means...* was similarly child-led as children from elementary school P.S. 150 provided their own definitions of the word 'Black'. Created by Barney Grossman, the principal of P.S. 150 in the Bronx, and Gladys Groom, a teacher at the school, the book was published in 1970. It is a large book with each double-page spread featuring an illustration by Charles Bible, a Black artist who had worked on children's books as well as posters for children that featured famous Black heroes. Opposite each illustration is a definition of Black submitted by a child of the school which stands out as the only text within the book in large font at the bottom of one page on each double-page spread. Twenty-seven definitions and images are featured in the book, each selected for inclusion by Barney and Gladys Grossman. The definitions range from "Black is as precious as a kitten" to overtly politically inspired definitions such as "Black is a people striving for freedom".<sup>37</sup> The book comprises the words of a small number of children edited into a children's book, but it is a rare example of a work of Black children's literature that was written by children. The book offers an insight into

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<sup>37</sup> Barney Grossman, Gladys Groom, and Pupils of P.S. 150, "Black Means..." (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), np.

children's understanding of Blackness and their interpretation of their world. Furthermore, the book's very existence is evidence of a Black educational philosophy in an elementary school in which teachers, parents and children worked together to create "a thesaurus of positive images of black" that was intended to bolster Black pride and self-respect.<sup>38</sup>

The book opens with "Black is as beautiful as my face" (Figure 12), accompanied by an illustration of three faces: a woman, a man, and a child. The definition immediately connects Blackness with family and beauty and, evoking the 'Black is Beautiful' slogan popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, the child author has not used the slogan but adapted it and made it more personal to them. The author is connecting their own appearance to the phrase 'Black is Beautiful'. The topic of Black beauty had a long history in children's literature from Silas Floyd to *The Brownies Book* and was an important part of a Black educational philosophy that sought to help children's self-esteem. That this author has included "my face" in their definition demonstrates how they engaged with this element of Black educational philosophy through visualising themselves within this broader context of Black beauty. Charles Bible, the illustrator, drew children's portraits in the Storytelling on the Streets project as part of an educational drive to get children to visualise themselves within children's literature and foster a more positive self-image. Therefore emphasising the important role of Black illustrators in a Black educational philosophy. Black illustrators

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<sup>38</sup> Barney Grossman, "Introduction" in *Black means...*, np.

helped children visualise concepts like 'Black is Beautiful' and helped to convey complex ideas in a medium accessible to children.

The illustration in *Black means...* was directed by the children as Bible responded to the prompts of children. This underlines how, rather than being exclusively adult-led, the imaging of Black childhood was also an important aspect for African American children, who, like this author, viewed books as an important site of physical representation in literature. African American children's literature scholar Dianne Johnson asserts that because "representation, and misrepresentation, of Black people" in children's literature has always been problematic, as they have stereotyped and dehumanised Black bodies, the illustrations of African Americans in children's books was an important site of defying white supremacy.<sup>39</sup> That a child used their definition of Blackness to highlight physical beauty and has directed the illustrator to include the drawing of a Black child underscores how children, similar to adult authors, sought to use literature as a place to promote positive visualisations of Blackness. Furthermore, the depiction of three generations of figures in Bible's illustration focuses on the beauty of tall ages emphasising that the definition applies to all Black people. The illustration is inclusive of all generations and is reflective of the focus on the strength of family within African American children's literature. The illustration accentuates the importance of Black elders and the importance of

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<sup>39</sup> Dianne Johnson, "I See Me in the Book!: Visual Literacy and African- American Children's Literature", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1990), 11.

intergenerational connections as the image includes three individuals of different ages, connected by their beauty as well as their familial ties.

Throughout *Black means...* there is also a reoccurring theme of Black culture as an important expression of identity. The book has two different definitions of Blackness that identify music genres as central components of the meaning of 'Black': the first is "Black is as elevating as a spiritual" and the second is "Black is as soulful as the blues".<sup>40</sup> These children's definitions frame African American cultural expression as an essence of what it means to be Black. Many Black Power scholars emphasise the role of African American culture as a form of empowerment and Black pride.<sup>41</sup> For example, William Van Deburg argues that a crucial element of Black Power was a "distinctive group culture", such as these children's use of African American musical traditions, "to promote resistance to oppression and to facilitate the development of positive self-worth among those who have "grown up black" within white America".<sup>42</sup> Music provided a shared sense of identity as soul and spirituals came from a long African musical continuum that was forged in the struggle for freedom. Topics of liberation and freedom continued in songs such as "(For God's Sake) Give More Power to the People" by the Chi-Lites (1971) and Eugene McDaniel's "Freedom Death Dance" (1970).

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<sup>40</sup> *Black means...*, np.

<sup>41</sup> Rafael Torrubia, *Black Power and the American People: Culture and Identity in the Twentieth Century* (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016); Jeffrey Ogbonna Green Ogbarr, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore ; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Amy Abugo Ongiri, *Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> William Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), x.

Music has a long history as a form of Black resistance and the author's choice of music celebrates a Black cultural heritage that defied white supremacy. African American music, as asserted by music historian Gayle Wald, often engaged in combatting the "silencing power of racism" and these children's definitions emphasise the power of African American musical culture by featuring them in *Black means...*<sup>43</sup> Both spirituals and the blues have long associations, as Black theologian James Cone described in 1970, of being "essential for identity and survival", two key aspects of a Black educational philosophy.<sup>44</sup> The selection of both the blues and spirituals suggests the children's consciousness of the enduring importance of these forms of music to Black communities and also how they were a "rejection of white cultural values".<sup>45</sup> The child authors' selection of Black music as a defining element of being Black mirrors the focus on the power of Black music and its empowering effects in African American children's literature such as Kristen Hunter's *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou* and Rose Blue's *Bed-Stuy Beat*. As with adult-written children's literature, the prominence of music was emblematic of how African American children's literature frequently tied issues of identity to cultural heritage.<sup>46</sup>

Rudine Sims Bishop correctly asserts that African American children's literature also "celebrates the strength of the Black family" in the

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<sup>43</sup> Gayle Wald, "Soul Vibrations: Black Music and Black Freedom in Sound and Space," *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2011), 675.

<sup>44</sup> James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972), 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 7.

<sup>46</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, *Free within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2007), 243.

struggle for freedom and serves as a “vehicle for survival”.<sup>47</sup> One child’s definition of Black simultaneously engages the reader with an intimate picture of family life and connects to broader themes of representing the power of the Black family. The definition reads: “Black is as good as having your mother tuck you into bed”.<sup>48</sup> The love suggested in this definition and the accompanying image of a mother and her child at bedtime provide an insight into the life of the author and the importance they place upon familial love. The definition challenges racist assumptions of Black family life as dysfunctional, as suggested in the Moynihan Report. Furthermore, by connecting the meaning of Black to family life, it accentuates the importance of the Black family as a source of comfort and strength to African American children. The accompanying illustration further emphasises the power of familial love because it stresses intimacy as the mother and child’s eyes are locked together as the focal point of the illustration. The illustration, unlike many of the others in the book is contained within a box, creating a sense of intimacy as the viewer looks into a tender scene. The picture is a detailed image of a child’s bedtime as the child and mother look at each other after having read a bedtime story. The image engages the reader in an emotional scene that portrays the importance of the Black family.

The range of responses from the children of P.S. 150 underscore varied lived experiences of growing up Black as the topics range from the personal to more generally political statements. The format of the book

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>48</sup> *Black means...*, np.

reveals how widely Black was interpreted by children. At the end readers are encouraged to create their own “good and beautiful meanings of black” so as an audience Black children are encouraged to use their voice and contribute to literature.<sup>49</sup> *Black means...* is a book of children’s ideas and images, but it also encourages further engagement from other children. The book seeks to help children visualise Blackness through “pictures that you can see in your mind or put on paper”.<sup>50</sup> It was part of a pedagogical effort to help children engage directly with African American children’s literature by voicing and visualising themselves through literature. This encouragement of children to continue the work of the book includes the reader as an integral part of the literature, one who can continue the efforts beyond the original text.

### **The Voice of 175**

Children were also integral in the creation of *The Voice of 175*, an annual publication “by and for the children of public school 175” in Brooklyn.<sup>51</sup>

Children wrote, illustrated and edited the publication. *The Voice of 175* comprises the contributions of over twenty children from drawings to poems to reviews. Unlike other sources, this publication was solely for the consumption of the children and their families. The intended readership resulted in a magazine in which children specifically deal with their local area of Brownsville. Given the educational and political tumult of the period in this

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<sup>49</sup> *Black means...*, “A note”, np.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> *The Voice of 175*, June, 1968, Box 163, John Doar Papers Princeton University Library, Department of Special Collections, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Public Policy Papers, Princeton, New Jersey (hereafter cited as John Doar Papers).

district, the source provides an invaluable insight into children's thoughts about their district and education. As it was a school publication, the children perhaps had less freedom to write critically about their own school. However, through the visual images, the poems, editorial, and other sections of the magazine it is possible to unearth how children viewed their own community, and their district, as well as wider political issues, such as the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The editorial team of *The Voice of 175* indicated who they thought was responsible for Ocean Hill-Brownsville district education. In their editorial "How we can Improve Brownsville", the student team stated that it was the community that was responsible for education and that schools could be improved "by the children, parents and teachers".<sup>52</sup> By mentioning children first the editorial emphasises the importance of children to Community Control, they are responsible for the school and an integral part in change. In other literature, such as *The Chasm* by former teacher Robert Campbell, children need to be protected and nurtured and rarely feature as active agents in the history of Community Control.<sup>53</sup> Within *The Voice of 175* the children's understanding of educational changes in New York City reveal a consciousness of a Black educational philosophy that focused on community, relevance and liberation. Furthermore, children acted as a

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<sup>52</sup> Tzylai Chong, Michelle Howell, Evelyn Rodriguez and Timothy Spencer, "How we can Improve Brownsville" in *The Voice of 175*, June, 1968, Box 163, John Doar Papers.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Campbell, *The Life and Death of a Great Experiment in Ghetto Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974).

crucial group who strove for better education and the children view it as their responsibility.

Throughout *The Voice of 175*, children emphasised the power of their local community and the importance of this network of support. The section 'We Work Together for a Better Community' emphasises the role of children in as they demonstrate their relationship to the local community in short pieces of writing, ranging from ways to improve the community to what they liked about it.

Prominent throughout African American children's literature is an emphasis on the power and value of community. Furthermore, throughout the Community Control project, activists emphasised the role of the community in education as a crucial part of Black educational philosophy. Black teachers and advocates for Community Control Albert Vann and Les Campbell argued that the Black community had the resources and power to support African American children's successes in education.<sup>54</sup> Though children are not specifically included in scholars depictions of 'the community', the children writing in *The Voice of 175* establish their position within the their local community.

Dexter Parker, a student at PS 175 in his contribution to *The Voice of 175*, emphasises the strength of the community as he claims that if he "works with other children then they will work with me".<sup>55</sup> Parker asserts that

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<sup>54</sup> Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York*, 96.

<sup>55</sup> Dexter Parker, "Working Together", *The Voice of 175*, June, 1968, Box 163, John Doar Papers.

the strength in community lies in its reciprocal nature. For Parker, community means that people can “work together” and his emphasis on this reciprocal arrangement in the section on Brownsville suggests that Parker viewed his wider community as one in which people can, and do, work together. Mildred M. of grade five states that she likes Brownsville because “there are some people who are good and some people who help us and I know many people”.<sup>56</sup> Mildred identifies the people of the district as an important source of support and signifies that it is the people who make the district. Both children emphasise the value of community, an emphasis that Community Control proponents also shared. The children focus on community engagement and support as a key merit that they thought educators should have if they were to teach in the district, demonstrating how children shared similar thoughts on teachers as Community Control exponents.<sup>57</sup> The children positioned themselves within the wider community and assumed a responsibility within it, demonstrating that although they had little agency for educational change, they were an important part of the community’s voice.<sup>58</sup>

Mildred M. also identifies the community’s responsibility to keep the streets clean as she declares that: “If all the people of Brownsville would keep it cleaner, I would like it more”.<sup>59</sup> Many children paid attention to the cleanliness of the streets within *The Voice of 175* and this was replicated

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<sup>56</sup> Mildred M., “Brownsville”, *The Voice of 175*, June, 1968, Box 163, John Doar Papers.

<sup>57</sup> Alan Altshuler, *Community Control: The Black Demand for Participation in Large American Cities* (New York: Pegasus, 1970), 168.

<sup>58</sup> See: Ibid.; Derek Edgell, *The Movement for Community Control of New York City’s Schools, 1966-1970: Class Wars* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellin Press, 1998); Mario Fantini, Marilyn Gittell, and Richard Magat, *Community Control and the Urban School* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970).

<sup>59</sup> Mildred M., “Brownsville”, *The Voice of 175*, June, 1968, Box 163, John Doar Papers.

amongst other African American children writers across the United States, such as children in the *Young Black Writers* book from North Carolina . For example, Tommy Hill's 'How I Would Change the World' in *Young Black Writers* proclaims that the only action he can do "for the world is keep America clean".<sup>60</sup> Hill's perception of how he can effect change is limited to "picking up trash" because, he argues, he is a Black child so many avenues are closed off to him. Similar sentiments are alluded to in *The Voice of 175*. Several of its writers focus on the importance of street cleaning and this helps to uncover a child's worldview and how they viewed their place in the world. In focusing on cleaning, the children demonstrated consciousness of the limitations of their ability to enact change. In the editorial "How we can Improve Brownsville", the writers proclaim that it is their responsibility to "use trash cans, sweep the sidewalk". The children argued that they "should take care of their schoolbooks and try their best to learn".<sup>61</sup> The delineation of duties by the writers reveal how these children viewed their responsibility to the community as well as their role in education. Their realistic perception of what they could achieve as children demonstrates an awareness of the limitations of childhood.

In the section "When I Grow Up", the child writers imagine futures where they are able to enact change. Of the six entries in this section, four explicitly mention how their future will enable them to help future generations

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<sup>60</sup> Tommy Hill, How I Would Change the World, *Young Black Writers* (unknown location; Chango Press, 1978), 9 in Cotsen Children's Library, Princeton University, 1969.

<sup>61</sup> Chong, et al., "How we can Improve Brownsville" Box 163, John Doar Papers.

of children through nursing and education. Yvette Vega in grade two declares that she will be a teacher because she wants “to help children learn how to be good citizens”.<sup>62</sup> The emphasis on helping future children combines children’s imagination of a future with their own experiences as a child and what they want. The six imagined futures include one child who aims to become a soldier to “fight for [his] country”, another hopes to become a nurse “to help those with no ability” and another three who specifically mention becoming teachers so they can improve the lives of children. The child writers focus on the importance, and power of education. Yvette Vega focuses on the outcome of education as good citizenship. By contrast, Vanessa Parker’s vision of her future is a good education because that will help her “get a good job”.<sup>63</sup> These different visions of education affirm its prominence in different children’s lives. It also indicates how differently children viewed education. It could serve an activist function but also provide better opportunities for children.

In the editorial, the children end with a statement of intent. They declare that “We can build a better Brownsville if everyone joins together and does his share of work”, firmly establishing themselves as part of the community and part of its future. The children’s voice throughout the publication focussed on their immediate environment, whether it was books they had read in school or what they could do for the local community. Brownsville was the world these children inhabited. Many of the children

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<sup>62</sup> Yvette Vega, “When I Grow Up” in *The Voice of 175*, June, 1968, Box 163, John Doar Papers.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

envisioned a future in which they would be help another generation of children in Brownsville as teachers and nurses. For the writers of *The Voice of 175* their immediate surroundings were important sites of community and places where they could enact change. African American children's literature helped children imagine fantasy worlds, such as Julius Lester's *Black Folktales*. Yet many authors including Kristen Hunter and John Steptoe also recognised how important it was for children to explore their own worlds through literature. The authors in *The Voice of 175* focus on their immediate surroundings and community was integral to their Black educational philosophy. Education could provide a pathway for these children to continue to help their community in more effective ways.

### **The Voice of the Children**

June Jordan, a prolific poet, combined her teaching career with creative writing and activism in works for children that sought to address the social realities and difficulties Black children faced in the United States. *The Voice of the Children*, one of Jordan's first works for children, was a collaboration with children with whom she had interacted with at a writing workshop. June Jordan and Terri Bush, another teacher and activist, compiled the works of young writers from workshops that they ran in Fort Greene in Brooklyn, New York. In her biography of June Jordan, Valerie Kinloch establishes Jordan's work with children as a formative period in her writing. Kinloch argues that Jordan's workshops with children "demonstrates her ability to combine social activism and responsibility with teaching the tools of empowerment".<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Valerie Kinloch, *June Jordan: Her Life and Letters* (London: Praeger, 2006), 96.

Kinloch's term "tools of empowerment" fits in Black educational philosophy because it suggests that in the workshops the reading and writing performed by children helped them address issues such as identity, race and education in their own way. Literature could help educate and also be psychologically beneficial for children.

In the workshops and the subsequent creation of the book Jordan and Bush acted as facilitators rather than leading the children in any one direction. The workshop met on Saturday mornings in a community centre close to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. One of the children explained that in the workshop, children used "to rap, dance, snack, browse among the books lying around, and write their stories, poems, editorials and jokes".<sup>65</sup> As an informal writing group, the workshop differed from public school and let children work at their own pace. Much of *The Voice of the Children* is unedited and written in African American Vernacular English, suggesting a creative freedom many of the children may not have found in school. Jordan stressed that she and Bush wanted the workshop to differ, "as much as possible, from school".<sup>66</sup> Kinloch convincingly asserts that the work "embraced the realities of [the children's] varied lives" because the topics ranged from school to imagined worlds and demonstrated that "language...is a currency of power".<sup>67</sup> The poems allowed children to intervene in topics with their voices. The children's poetry tackled a variety of ideas. Their work reflected the political nature of other African American children's literature as

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<sup>65</sup> Martin Gansberg, "Voice of Children is Stilled," in *New York Times*, November 7, 1971, 18.

<sup>66</sup> Jordan, "Afterword" in *The Voice of the Children*, np.

<sup>67</sup> Kinloch, *June Jordan*, 126.

children could, in their creative writing, connect literature to their lives, create imagined futures and insert their voice into a variety of issues.

The children addressed Black Power, poverty, history and education amongst other topics in a way not available in other sources because the children had the freedom to write on topics of their choosing. Many of those who attended *The Voice of The Children* programmes already had an interest in political and cultural issues and this may have prompted them to seek out such a programme. As such, the writing produced reflected concerns on Blackness, nature, love and politics in a way a wider sample of children's writing from schools may not have. However, *The Voice of The Children* is an invaluable source as it shows children addressing topics including Black history, memory, and community. It is a rare sample of African American children writing for other children and adopting many of the ideas and themes found in wider African American children's literature. In 1969, Charles Reasoner, associate professor of children's literature at New York University, wrote that the book "is but an echo of a single heartbeat of one child; yet his name is *all children*".<sup>68</sup> Reasoner posits that though the children were from a small sample of New York City children, provided insight into Black children's feelings and opinions. The poems illustrate wider beliefs and ideas of children, but the poems were written by individual boys and girls, addressing the unique lives of growing up Black in the United

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<sup>68</sup> Charles Reasoner in *The Voice of the Children*, back cover.

States. They addressed a range of topics like beauty, history, politics and the issues that Black children faced in New York City education.

### **The Voice of the Children: Education and representation**

In *The Voice of the Children*, Margaret Cowan illustrates problems of education from a child's perspective in her poem 'If I Was President'. The poem begins by declaring "I would change schools and the food in the school".<sup>69</sup> Cowan's bold opening line targets education and the daily realities of school life in the form of food. Her focus emphasises how differently children approached education from adult activists as she focuses on aspects of school that children had to live with every day. At the end of the poem, she addresses the reader directly: "If you were in my place you would want the same".<sup>70</sup> Cowan's powerful ending stresses her lived experiences of school life and how that should inform people on educational changes.

Cowan's writing also constructs an alternate reality. Imagining herself as President, she posits that she would make school improvements her primary concern. Cowan may not have represented all children. Her attendance at a weekend writing workshop suggests perhaps an interest in education not shared by all her peers. However, Cowan's poem was reflective of some other children's writings as her form of Black educational philosophy was one in which the daily difficulties and problems of school life were also addressed. Cowan's poem provides insight into children's thoughts on the school crises of New York City and reveals ways in which African

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<sup>69</sup> Margaret Cowan, "If I Was President" in *The Voice of the Children*, 7.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

American children felt education could be improved. Some of children's concerns corresponded with the Black educational philosophy espoused by teachers, Black Power activists and authors. The words and images of children also contributed to the history of New York City education as they demonstrated an array of concerns children had regarding education that was not reflected in adult educational activism. These child writers used their school experiences in their writing which included many issues adults did not immediately relate to. This is crucial because it underscores why the children's voices are so important in understanding children's books and education in New York City in the 1960s and 1970s because, whilst they often coincided with adult demands, children had a distinct perception of New York City education.

Black children, like many African American authors and educators, demanded better representation in the literature that they read. Robert Fortuna, from P.S. 95 in New York, told Steptoe that he thought the book *Uptown* was good but that he "didn't like it too much because only too [sic] black people were in it".<sup>71</sup> Fortuna's criticism indicates how he had expected better representation even though Steptoe's main characters, two "little dudes", are Black.<sup>72</sup> Children connected with books that included African American characters but they also demanded the presence of more Black characters. In an untitled poem in *The Voice of the Children*, Phillip Solomon, aged fourteen, addresses Black visibility as his poem begins:

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<sup>71</sup> Robert Fortuna to John Steptoe. December 14, 1973, Letter, Box 2, Folder "Youth fanmail", John Steptoe Papers.

<sup>72</sup> John Steptoe, *Uptown* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

“black child,  
Step in the back  
And just don’t be noticed”<sup>73</sup>

Solomon’s poem does not explicitly deal with representation in literature but it speaks to wider issues of institutional racism within society that denied opportunities to Black children. Solomon reiterates the danger of being visible as “you will be bottled...to never be seen again”. The threat of violence and censure in the poem emphasises the extent to the dominant white culture ‘invisibilised’ Blackness and the risks involved for Black children using their voice. Written at a young age, Solomon’s poem reflects the difficulties Black children faced in being recognized by white society, a threat that Solomon’s poem directly challenges. Solomon displays a consciousness of the importance of Black representation and visibility, an issue addressed by advocates of a Black educational philosophy and by Black creators of children’s books.

### **The Voice of the Children: Children’s Poems Interrogating Black Identity**

Julius Lester argued that when writing for children it is crucial to help them with “questions of identity that are central to childhood”.<sup>74</sup> Lester’s comment reflected the words of young writers who grappled with representation and identity, and in particular, what Black identity meant to them. In the poem ‘Ghetto’ in *The Voice of the Children*, Vanessa Howard proclaims “I think they put all Black people in a box marked ‘ghetto’ which leaves them having

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<sup>73</sup> Philip Solomon, Untitled in *The Voice of the Children*, 51.

<sup>74</sup> Julius Lester, *On Writing for Children and Other People* (New York: Dial Books, 2004), 104.

no identity". The unidentified 'they' hold power to isolate Black people physically and strip away their identity. Howard's poem evokes the idea of an external 'they', stifling Black communities by trading in generalisations and stereotypes. Howard's poem suggests that wider, white society had a singular view of Black communities and compartmentalized these communities into their idea of a ghetto, a word that has "become a definition meaning Black, garbage, slum areas".<sup>75</sup> She continues that "They should let Black people be seen for themselves, not as one reflection on all". Howard attacks the idea of a monolithic Black identity that 'they' force upon Black communities. Much like Krysten Hunter's story 'Two's Enough of a Crowd' in which the characters struggle with their identities, Howard resists the idea of a monolithic Black identity. Howard's poem was a response to the stereotyping of African Americans, especially within literature and the media, that much of African American children's literature strove to defy. The poem is situated in its own section as the book's Foreword, suggesting that the poems which followed were all about children expressing themselves and their own identities rather than as "one reflection on all".<sup>76</sup>

In the section 'Blackness', child writers explored Black identity in myriad forms. In the poem 'Will I Make It?', twelve-year-old Jerome Holland alludes to a difficult journey with a "danger that might exist" but his Blackness is a source for strength.<sup>77</sup> His determination to reach his destination is innately tied to his race as he claims he will make it because "I'm black and

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<sup>75</sup> Vanessa Howard, "Ghetto" in *The Voice of the Children*, np.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Jerome Holland, "Will I Make It?" in *The Voice of the Children*, 53.

wanna make it". Holland's connection between overcoming the struggle of his journey with being Black suggests a belief in the strength of the Black community and its resilience to dangers and oppression. Though not stated explicitly, Holland's poem reveals a pride in his Blackness. Although not couched in the common terms used by activists and Black Power adherents, the concept of pride is an important undercurrent to his poem. The anonymous narrator of Holland's poem holds their "shoulder up high" on their journey, dismissing all the "people looking" at them as they pass. The narrator defies the implied judgement of the white onlookers in the poem as the narrator quickly emphasises that although they are being looked upon, they "don't care, 'cause I'm gonna get there". This dismissal of other's attitudes emphasises an inner strength in the narrator. Holland ends the poem by connecting this strength to the narrator's Blackness demonstrating that, for Holland, part of Black identity is a resolve and determination not to internalise the judgement and racism of white people.

One of the more striking examples of the theme of identity appears as a double set of poems, titled 'I' and 'II', by Linda Curry that address Black beauty. In both poems, Curry focuses on the beauty of Black hair, a common topic in African American children's literature, as she describes a woman's Afro as "so high almost to reach the sky" in 'I' and comments in 'II' that the man's Afro "looked like he spent a week fixing it".<sup>78</sup> The importance of natural hair is evident in both poems. The Afros are integral to the beauty the narrator sees in these strangers. In the poem 'I', each stanza reflects on a

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<sup>78</sup>Linda Curry, "I" in *The Voice of the Children*, 64.

different aspect of the woman who walks past the narrator's front door and ends with her trying to call the woman's attention so the narrator can tell her "black woman you are beautiful".<sup>79</sup> Curry's poems call attention to the beauty of two different strangers she sees in the street. The anonymous narrator in both poems call out to the strangers 'Hey you' as if they feel it imperative to let the strangers know of their beauty. Counteracting negative imagery was an integral part of Black educational philosophy. These poems reveal that some children engaged with the issue in a similar way to adult writers such as Eloise Greenfield focused on the beauty of natural hairstyles in *Honey, I Love*.

In 'White Man and Black Man Are Talking', Michael Goode, aged twelve, begins the poem with the words "Black is beautiful some people say", and then immediately addresses the point that this phrase is in direct defiance of other's views:

"Some of the white people don't think this way.  
Some think we are creatures monsters  
Dirt on the ground"<sup>80</sup>

The elongated spaces place emphasis on the negative images and words some white people targeted at Black people. The reader is forced to engage with each description this way because Goode ensures that these words stand out on the page. At the end of the poem, the reader is directly addressed as "my white friend", signifying that Goode's placement of these words is to force his white readers into acknowledging and recognising racist

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Goode, "White Man and Black Man Are Talking" in *The Voice of the Children*, 48.

language. Goode's poem is distinct because it was targeted at a white audience, using the poem to force white readers to engage with the everyday racist language used by some white people. Goode accentuates what the phrase 'Black is Beautiful' is fighting against by emphasising the dehumanising language used against Black people. Furthermore, his use of 'we' reiterates the personal effects of these derogatory phrases and underscores the importance of focusing on Black beauty in challenging racist depictions.

In framing the poem between the Black 'we' and the white reader, Goode is trying to force the reader to confront their conceptions of what Black means. The second stanza begins: "We are Black and militant" and the next line: "sometimes this is so true" can be interpreted in different ways by the reader.<sup>81</sup> The "white friend" reader's view of Black militancy is immediately challenged as the narrator complicates this idea of "Black and militant" and argues the reality is more nuanced by qualifying it with "sometimes". However, the phrase 'so true' can also be read as emphasis on militancy rather than as a qualifier. Rather than militancy being an occasional reaction, this equivocal phrasing suggests that, in the face of racism, militancy is a powerful reaction. The ambiguity of this phrase, however, does not diminish how both these readings speak to the complexity of Black politics and responses to racism. Goode's poem asserts that in the face of racism there were different responses, militancy and kindness, but these

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

were not mutually exclusive. However, one form that was not acceptable to Goode was begging as this “is just as cruel”.<sup>82</sup> Goode’s poem strives to defy white racist language. Moreover, Goode’s ambiguous writing challenges white perceptions of Black politics and forces the reader to consider how they view Black militancy.

### **The Voice of the Children: Children voicing their beliefs on Black Power and Black Nationalism**

“What is Black Power?” Loudel Baez, aged twelve, questions his reader in *The Voice of the Children*. He continues “Is Black power winning a fight? Is Black power killing White? Is Black Power having a gang?”.<sup>83</sup> Baez’s use of repeated rhetorical questions challenges common stereotypes and oversimplifications of Black Power as a violent, racist movement. The narrator settles on a final definition: “Or is Black power being proud, standing out in the crowd, standing with your fist held high?”.<sup>84</sup> This final view of Black Power demonstrates an understanding of Black Power as a revolution of the mind. A profound change in how one perceived their own identity and a “reframing of the African American experience”.<sup>85</sup> By ending on the concept of Black pride, Baez depicts Black Power as a force for good that fosters a positive self-identity. Baez’s poem evokes the powerful peaceful protest of Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics because he ends with the image of the “fist held high”.<sup>86</sup> Baez implicitly rejects the white racist imaginary idea of Black Power as being a violent, gang-related phenomenon

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Loudel Baez, “What is Black Power?” in *The Voice of the Children*, 47.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Torrubia, *Black Power and the American People*, 263.

<sup>86</sup> Baez, “What is Black Power?”, 47.

with his series of questions. The alternative he posits embraces the symbolism of Black Power and the idea that it was about self-esteem and self-determination. The questions suggest a variety of possible interpretations of Black Power, a topic investigated by scholars Joel Aberbach and Jack Walker from a 1967 survey in Detroit. Aberbach and Walker discovered that the slogan 'Black Power' meant many things to different demographics and individuals ranging from support of armed resistance to Black controlled institutions and businesses.<sup>87</sup>

In contrast to Baez, David Clarke, Jr., aged fourteen, raises the spectre of Black Power violence in his poem 'We Can't Always Follow The White Man's Way'. He warns that "white people must be careful because there is not any more Martin Luther King" and Black children will "begin to like groups like the Black Panthers".<sup>88</sup> There is a distinction between the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Black Panthers within the poem as Clarke suggests caution after the death of King. Clarke's poem evokes Black nationalism as he implores Black people to "build our own foundation" in opposition to the "fascist...white European country that we live in".<sup>89</sup> The suggestion of Black nationalism and separatism is clear as the narrator cannot countenance integration.

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<sup>87</sup> Joel D. Aberbach and Jack L. Walker, "The Meanings of Black Power: A Comparison of White and Black Interpretations of a Political Slogan," *The American Political Science Review* 64, no. 2 (1970).

<sup>88</sup> David Clarke, Jr., "We Can't Always Follow The White Man's Way", in *The Voice of the Children*, 16.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

Clarke's understanding of Black nationalism is further made clear in another poem, 'Who Are You – Who Are You?'. The poem powerfully addresses Black Christian nationalism in the form of a dialogue between God and the author. God addressed David by saying "I am god. a true god a/ BLACK GOD BLACK BOY/ and heaven ain't all white, David".<sup>90</sup> The focus on a Black God demonstrates an understanding of Black religious nationalism and the importance of representing a Black deity from Marcus Garvey to figures like Albert B. Cleage Jr. and James H. Cone. Historian Jeffrey Ogbonna Green contends that a key facet of Black religious nationalism is that God speaks to Black people as the chosen ones and when "God or Heavenly deities are imagined in anthropomorphic terms, they are invariably black, reflecting the phenotype of God's chosen ones".<sup>91</sup> Clark features direct dialogue as if the Black God is speaking to the chosen people. Throughout both of his poems, Clarke engages with ideas of Black nationalism suggesting that he subscribed to a Black nationalist belief, or at the very least was familiar with intellectual frameworks of Black nationalism.

The young writers Clarke and Baez offered very different perceptions of Black Power that reflected wide divisions among Black Power activists from a focus on Black pride to the necessity of armed revolution. Both writers attended the same writing workshop in Brooklyn each week, but they produced vastly different works on contemporary politics. In 1972, Jim Haskins, a former schoolteacher and Black Power scholar, argued that Black

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<sup>90</sup> David Clarke, Jr., "Who Are You- Who Are You?" in *The Voice of the Children*, 79.

<sup>91</sup> Jeffrey Ogbonna Green Ogbar, "Prophet Nat and God's Children of Darkness: Black Religious Nationalism", *The Journal of Religious Thought* 53, no. 2 (1997).

Power meant anything from an equal share of power to armed revolution, but the common thread between adherents was “a pride in blackness and a sense of black unity”.<sup>92</sup> That children’s interpretations differed so much and addressed many themes and ideas common to Black Power supporters suggests an intellectual impact of Black Power on children not often addressed in historiography. In 1970, Charles Billings conducted a study of Black activism amongst school-age children and concluded that although not in the majority, Black activist students were “articulate exponents of the “black power” school of thought.”<sup>93</sup> Their responses to open-end questions revealed their familiarity with the issues and the rhetoric of the Black Power era. The poems written in *The Voice of the Children* workshop support Billings’ conclusion: African American youths understood Black Power in all its manifestations and engaged with it.<sup>94</sup>

### **The Voice of the Children: The importance of Black history to children’s education**

In *The Voice of the Children*, the child writers demonstrate understanding of Black politics and also an appreciation of the enduring importance of Black history. A long history of using African American history as a vehicle for social change continued from *The Brownies Book* and Carter G. Woodson’s work in *The Voice of the Children*. Vanessa Howard’s poem ‘Monument in Black’ is reminiscent of other writers’ works, such as Lester’s *To Be a Slave*, that sought to recognise the importance of Black history. ‘Monument

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<sup>92</sup> James Haskins, *Profiles in Black Power* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), 12.

<sup>93</sup> Charles E. Billings, “Black Activists and the Schools,” *High School Journal* 54, no. 2 (1970): 106.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

in Black' demands recognition of Black history, including all the sacrifices and achievements, as Howard's anonymous narrator calls for the acknowledgement of her family's suffering. The narrator begins with the petition, "Put my black father on the penny," and continues to connect the importance of Black historical recognition to a personal level with the words "put his smile at me on the silver dime".<sup>95</sup> The imploring tone signals the symbolic importance of this request as Howard invokes reparations for slavery, claiming that "all the money couldn't repay" but nevertheless memorialising Black historical figures is still vital.<sup>96</sup>

The narrator's familial attachments reinforce the personhood of Africans and African Americans in history. The closeness to the narrator's family emphasises the pain of denying history as her relatives are left "standing idle in the dark" as she seeks to construct an alternate world in which African American suffering is recognised in society. Howard's poem reflects a common approach to Black history evident in African American children's literature during the 1960s and 1970s that did not shy away from brutality and suffering. Instead Howard, like other children's writers at the time, defied and challenged benign depictions of slavery by focusing on the inherent violence of slavery.

Christopher Meyer's untitled poem in *The Voice of Children* is particularly moving as the nine-year-old writes from the perspective of an

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<sup>95</sup> Vanessa Howard, "Monument in Black" in *The Voice of the Children*, 43.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

enslaved person, making the suffering immediate as the whip is “flickering about”.<sup>97</sup> The first-person perspective is an important insight into a child’s perspective of history. Black educational scholars emphasised on the importance of Black history in African American self-development and racial pride.<sup>98</sup> Children’s literature scholar Marta Collier argues that historical children’s fiction allows children “a place to find themselves in history” and “makes them active participants in their personal battle to uncover who they are”, suggesting that history is crucial not only in an educative sense but a psychological one too. Using an enslaved person’s perspective, Meyer connects the reader with the everyday violence of slavery and immediately situates the reader in “hellish misery”.<sup>99</sup> Meyer’s use of the word ‘hellish’ emphasises how he engaged with the topic emotionally, imagining the brutality enslaved people endured. Although a singular example, Meyer’s poem fits with a Black educational philosophy that sought to teach history and also to use it to benefit African American children. Les Campbell, a teacher in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district, argued that he designed his African American history course not as a conventional history course but one that would answer children’s questions such as “Who am I? Where have I been? Who and where am I today?”.<sup>100</sup> For Campbell the use of history lay not in learning about great events but in helping children understand the long history of Black suffering and the enduring importance of resistance.

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<sup>97</sup> Christopher Meyer, untitled in *The Voice of the Children*, 52.

<sup>98</sup> Marta Collier, “Through the Looking Glass”, 236.

<sup>99</sup> Meyer, in *The Voice of the Children*, 52.

<sup>100</sup> Les Campbell in Charles S. Isaacs, “Teacher Tells it Like He Sees It” *New York Times Magazine*, November 24, 1968.

Subversion of power and resistance to white supremacy are key themes in the poem 'Drums of Freedom' by Glen Thompson, aged thirteen. Based on the notion that drums could be used by enslaved people to communicate and encourage rebellion, Thompson's poem uses Black history to create a poem that connects to the Black activism of the late 1960s.<sup>101</sup> Thompson's poem is analogous to a call to arms as it ends "For we shall get what we want/and the drums will beat". Black history is implied with the use of drums, but Thompson's use of the future tense gives the poem an immediacy, connecting the historical with the present. Julius Lester proclaimed that "writing from and about the past is my way of telling stories about the present". Similarly, Thompson's use of future tense establishes Black history as a way of connecting with contemporary politics and demands.<sup>102</sup>

## **Conclusion**

These examples of children's writing demonstrate an engagement with the topics and themes common in African American children's literature from 1965 to 1979. In addressing topics like Black history, city life, and the importance of community these children's writings evidenced a Black educational philosophy of their own. Interviewed in *Children of Longing*, Helen Desane described how children fought against a white dominated and racist education through literature. She argued that "school has filled me with

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<sup>101</sup> Colin A. Palmer, "Africa in the Making of the Caribbean: The Formative Years," in *Slavery, Freedom and Gender: The Dynamics of Caribbean Society*, ed. Brian L. Moore, et al. (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2003), 47-48.

<sup>102</sup> Lester, *On Writing for Children*, 44.

disgust when learning a concept I know isn't true" yet books for a long time had "been my friends".<sup>103</sup> Desane argues against schooling that miseducates children and she views books as a way to find out the truth. These collaborations and children's writing emphasise the highly developed thoughts of children on education, institutional racism, and the importance of providing teaching that caters to African American children.

No scholarship has addressed these works, but these collaborations and children's writing provides an understanding of how children used literature for their own ends. These are not simply reader responses but a crucial part of African American children's literature. Wanda Brooks and Susan Browne correctly assert that the Black Arts Movement "ushered in dynamic polysemic representations and varied modes of representing blackness".<sup>104</sup> Moreover, they rightly query why children's reception of these ideas has not been fully explored. However, they do not acknowledge that children also contributed to representations of Blackness through literature of their own. The poems, stories, images and interviews with children during the late 1960s and 1970s illuminates how engaged children were with educational debates, Black Power and the importance of literature. Rather than passive receptors of these ideas, children contributed through literature as well as in storytelling sessions, in class reports and many other ways.

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<sup>103</sup> Helen Desane, "Soulville" in *Children of Longing*, 12.

<sup>104</sup> Brooks and Brown, "Towards a Culturally Situated Reader Response", 123.

## CONCLUSION

In 1965, children's literature specialist Nancy Larrick declared that it was an "all-white world of children's books" after her study had revealed that only 6.7 percent of children's books published in the U.S. between 1962 and 1964 featured a Black character either in the text or illustrations.<sup>1</sup> Books that featured Black characters doubled in the years after 1965, however.<sup>2</sup> Many were written *for* Black children not just about them. Rudine Sims Bishop contends that the late 1960s and 1970s was the birth of contemporary African American children's literature.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, the books produced between 1965 and 1979 demonstrate a shift in approach in African American children's books, an approach that was steeped in the history of writing for Black children but had distinct elements such as the inclusion of Black linguistic features, a focus on Black cultural environments, and references to Black Power. The African American children's literature that was published during this period addressed topics and themes absent in white public education. These books did not just entertain children, but they became an important means of transmission for Black educational philosophy.

The impact of African American children's literature was not only felt on the page, but in classrooms, libraries and community spaces across New York City as books became powerful tools in the struggle for a better

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Larrick 'The All-White World of Children's Books' *The Saturday Review*, September 11, 1965, 63.

<sup>2</sup> Jeanne Chall, Eugene Radwin, Valarie W. French, Cynthia R. Hall, "Blacks in the World of Children's Books" in *The Black American in Books for Children: Readings in Racism*, eds. Donnarae MacCann and Gloria Woodard (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1985) 218.

<sup>3</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, *Free within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2007), xi.

education. They became vehicles for a Black educational philosophy that focused on self-worth, the power of the community, and the importance of African American cultural heritage. This rise in African American children's literature was not simply about better representation in literature, but books such as Steptoe's *Stevie*, Hunter's *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*, Blue's *A Quiet Place*, and Berger's *Black Fairy Tales* among numerous others sought to empower children to engage with an education that celebrated Black identities.

African American children's literature became part of an antiracist curriculum that was relevant and interesting to many children in New York City. In 1979, Council on Interracial Books for Children members Barbara Stanford and Jean Procope-Martin ruminated on the rise of children's books and their role in education. They argued that from the mid-nineteen sixties books changed from responding to racism through stories of individual success and acquiescence. Instead, Black writers like Kristen Hunter, Rosa Guy and Sharon Bell Mathis began to "write genuine literature about the joys and anguish" of Black children.<sup>4</sup> The centring of African American children's experiences was part of a broader Black educational philosophy that celebrated the power of Black communities, focused on Black pride and provided children with an education relevant to their lives and their cultural heritages.

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Stanford and Jean Procope-Martin, 'Black literature- A "fad" of the sixties?' *Bulletin*, vol 10 no. 7 1979.Box 8, Council on Interracial Books for Children: Director's Files, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, New York, New York (hereafter cited as CIBC Director's Files).

Children's books examined a variety of topics and themes. Many focused on the daily realities of growing up Black in the U.S., in particular, life in the city by providing children with familiar settings, characters, and experiences. Writers like Eloise Greenfield and John Steptoe used their writing to explore themes not often found in other children's books such as othermothering and relationships between children and their elders. Moreover, African American historical and cultural traditions also became a common topic amongst authors like Julius Lester and Muriel Feelings through folktales and non-fiction books about Africa. African American oral culture strongly influenced these books and this lent itself to communal reading practices like the Storytelling in the Streets programme. The impact of oral culture as well as a range of themes and topics like family dynamics marked African American children's literature as a distinct canon from other contemporary children's literature. From teaching children Swahili to focusing on the history of the blues, African American children's books promoted community and celebrated different Black identities and cultural heritages. The power was not just in the content of the books, but how children and educators used them to promote a Black educational philosophy.

This thesis has demonstrated how this rise in culturally conscious African American children's literature was used in school and educational events across the city. Furthermore, the practise of using African American children's books in educational programmes and lessons was part of a wider movement which brought together children, parents, teachers, librarians and Black Power activists in a battle to get an education that was based on a

Black educational philosophy. From the Community Control districts to the CIBC teachers training programme at Columbia University, children's books helped connect individuals and organisations who sought an education that was not just relevant but celebrated Blackness.

The period 1965 to 1979 was part of a longer continuum of Black children's literature and education. However, this period in New York City history was significant because it was closely tied to Black Power politics and because of the central role children's trade books played in the Community Control Movement. The Black educational philosophy that was espoused in schools and Bookmobiles in New York City has gone unnoticed in scholarship on Black education and in educational studies. However, this period represents an important affirmation of Black educational philosophy employed in new and innovative ways. African American children's literature was a pedagogical tool and was also a powerful political tool in the struggle for greater Black control of education in New York City. Children's books "had not even arrived at 'separate but equal'" by 1965 according to Rudine Sims Bishop because a lack of funding and support from publishers but, in the next fifteen years children's books made an important contribution to the Black Arts Movement, Black Power and the education of thousands of New York City children.<sup>5</sup>

The period between 1965 and 1979 is crucial to examine because it demonstrates the power of community activism and a study of African

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<sup>5</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, "What Has Happened to the 'All-White' World of Children's Books?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 64, no. 9 (May, 1983): 650.

American children's books reveals the interconnections between different groups, organizations and individuals. Black Power activists supported educational activists in Community Control; librarians promoted books that celebrated Black Power; and children wrote their own literature that contributed to the contemporary political and cultural movements. Black children's literature connected people and became an important symbol of Black educational philosophy. A study of children's books is more than the words and the images that adorn the pages. It also necessitates examining how a range of people used children's literature to promote a better education and to defy white supremacy.

Scholars like Dianne Johnson and Rudine Sims Bishop have expertly examined African American children's books during this era.<sup>6</sup> Other scholars have examined the crises in education and political struggles for Community Control in New York City public schools.<sup>7</sup> Figures like Russell Rickford have detailed the intersection of school politics and Black Power politics.<sup>8</sup> This thesis, however, addresses significant gaps of how African American children's books were used to alleviate crises in education and used to further a Black educational philosophy. African American children's literature is connected to wider struggles for education and Black Power. The story of

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<sup>6</sup> Dianne Johnson, *Telling Tales: The Pedagogy and Promise of African American Literature for Youth* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990); Rudine Sims Bishop, *Free within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> See: Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: A History of the New York Public Schools* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Jerald Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (London: Yale University Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Russell Rickford. *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination*. (London: Oxford University Press, 2016).

children's books in New York City underscores the impact of Black Power on children's writing, the grassroots struggle for a Black education in New York City, and the voice of children within Black Power and educational upheavals. Literature was an avenue for children to voice their thoughts on Black Power, schooling, city management, race relations among many other topics.

The role of children within this history was vital. Analysis of African American children's literature seldom focuses on children, yet authors and illustrators made a concerted effort to collaborate with them. The educational events like the Be-In, Bookmobiles and Storytelling sessions as well as collaborations like *The Voice of the Children* and *Black Means...* gave voice to children's demands and concerns as many adults within the struggle for more African American children's books recognised the importance of children's opinions. This thesis includes analysis of children's collaborative works with authors because child readers were not passive recipients of literature but active agents who used literature to voice their opinions and concerns. A Black educational philosophy needed the voice and input of children because they were valued members of the community.

From 1965 to 1979 literature on the Black experience emerged again "strong, more explicit and insistent" than before but one which receded again and was submerged by racist school policies and pressure from conservative

groups.<sup>9</sup> Between 1974 and 1984, the number of books focused on Black experiences in print fell by half. <sup>10</sup>This dramatic drop in books raises many questions but for this study it emphasises that the preceding years provided the necessary conditions for African American children's books to be used so widely in education. Publishers printed more African American children's books because of the pressure exerted by parents, educators, political activists and children for these books to be used in education. From its creation in 1965 the CIBC brought together authors, children, parents, teachers and librarians who worked together to improve the books Black children had access to. This thesis is not just a story of better books but the activism that ensured the power of these books was felt across New York City, whether it was in a Columbia teacher training course or on the sidewalk in Bushwick.

Events that made use of African American children's literature have received no scholarly attention, but they demonstrate how children's literature was used and uncovers more on grassroots activism in New York City. The Art and Storytelling on the Streets programme emphasised how children responded positively to Black visibility and demanded more, and better, representation. Children's positive engagement with events inspired publishers and teachers and led to more Black educational philosophy in the classroom. The Ocean Hill Be-In demonstrated how publishers, authors and

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<sup>9</sup> Virginia Hamilton, "Portrait of the Author as a Working Writer," *Elementary English* (1971): 239.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Dean Myers, "'I Actually Thought We Would Revolutionize the Industry'," *New York Times*, November 9 1986.

educators viewed their books in action with one publisher exclaiming that it was at that event that she saw “the slogan ‘Black is Beautiful’ brought to life” by children in the libraries and schools of Ocean Hill Brownsville.<sup>11</sup> These educational events promoted a Black educational philosophy as they endorsed Black self-determination in education, strengthened community involvement, and gave children access to Black histories and cultures that often the school boards, teachers and Boards of education had denied in public schooling. The children’s books used in educational initiatives focused on African cultures, family and African American childhood among other subjects. Their use across several educational initiatives and events underscores how these books were more than entertainment but important pedagogical tools.

However, this is a study of only New York City and therefore limited in its scope. The proximity of authors (many of whom lived in the city) and publishers, as well as the strong presence of Black Power activists meant that together they pressured the City Board of Education. Similar efforts in introducing African American children’s literature to education occurred in cities across the United States like Chicago and Los Angeles but there is no scholarship on African American children’s books in rural schools across the nation. This thesis provides an insight into the impact of African American children’s literature on education by focusing on New York City as an important centre of education and children’s literature. Although, it cannot

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<sup>11</sup> Lillian McClintock, “Statement of Support” May, 1969, Letter, Reel 1112, Ford Foundation records, Grants C-D, 1936-2006. Microfilm. Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

fully capture the variety of ways educators across the nation used Black children's books.

Nevertheless, the activities in New York City inspired other educators, parents and activists as letters to the CIBC came from across the nation as well as internationally, demonstrating the impact of the CIBC and their work with African American children's books in the city.<sup>12</sup> The CIBC provided articles and supports for the burgeoning *World Studies Journal* in England in 1980 after receiving requests.<sup>13</sup> The Cross-Cultural Communication in Canada sought advice to help provide children with "stories which deal realistically and critically with ways in which our society" limits the lives of immigrants.<sup>14</sup> Educators from the Midwest, California, New Orleans, Canada, Ghana, and many others forged connections through the CIBC with other like-minded individuals. Further scholarship is needed to investigate the impact of African American children's books throughout public schools in the U.S. and to uncover more about the re-emergence of Black educational philosophies in the Black Power era. However, this thesis does demonstrate how African American children's books became an important part of pedagogical efforts to challenge white racist education with a Black and child centred approach. Though focused on New York City it reveals how children's books linked parents, authors, children and activists together in a

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<sup>12</sup> Box 8, Folder 'Correspondence'. CIBC Director's Files.

<sup>13</sup> Dave Hicks to Bradford Chambers, 14 October 1979, Letter, Box 6, Folder '1979 Correspondence', CIBC Director's Files.

<sup>14</sup> Naomi Wall to CIBC, 7 June 1979, Letter, Box 6, Folder '1979 Correspondence', CIBC Director's Files.

campaign to provide an education that taught Black history, celebrated Black communities, and helped children challenge and defy white racism.

This thesis has underscored the educational power of African American children's books. Moreover, it has demonstrated how educational events and campaigns for African American children's literature engaged many people in grassroots Black activism, and often, Black Power. A CIBC report claimed that "librarians and teachers extended their role to be active participants in combating institutional racism and sexism", and combined with the many letters and reports produced by educators this suggests that the events with children's books led individuals to engage more fully in political activism.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as James Murray from *New York Amsterdam News* put it: "Nothing makes adults fight like children's books".<sup>16</sup> Moreover, nothing like African American children's literature brought children, parents, educators and Black Power activists together in the same way.

In 1980, the CIBC issued a statement "on the emerging problems of the '80s". African American children's literature suffered due to educational cuts and clamour from conservatives for 'no frills' education and a return to the 'basics' philosophy. The CIBC argued that the increasingly conservative political climate of the 1980s saw the reversal of many advances in getting children access to better reading materials during the previous decades. Similarly, Walter Dean Myers lamented that "the time has not yet come to

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<sup>15</sup> Donnaræe McCann, "Notes on Librarians & The Bulletin", undated, Box 8, CIBC Director's Files.

<sup>16</sup> James Murray, "Publishers Have Few Good Words..." *New York Amsterdam News*, March 1 (1975).

say “enough” about racism in children’s books” as cuts to libraries and schools effected Black children’s literature first.<sup>17</sup> The use of African American children’s literature in schools was curtailed by cuts as well as by diminishing pressure from activists as Myers contended that the “days of rage ended” as Black issues were no longer the “hot topic”.<sup>18</sup>

The enduring importance of African American children’s literature from 1965 to 1979 is undiminished by the subsequent cuts to libraries and changes in education, however. The educational initiatives in which African American children’s books played a central role set an important precedent that has been followed up by activists who fought against the conservative tide that limited the use of Black children’s literature.

In 1987, Cheryl and Wade Hudson, disappointed in the availability in schools and libraries of children’s books that “reflected the diversity of Black history, heritage and experiences”. In response they published their own *AFRO-Bets A B C Book* which in three months sold over 5,000 copies.<sup>19</sup> Since then, their organization *Just Us Books* has become a leader in multicultural publishing. Illustrator George Ford worked with the organization extensively. Authors who wrote in the 1960s and 1970s, like Eloise Greenfield, have given talks for *Just Us Books* demonstrating a continuity from the late 1960s to the present-day. African American children’s literature

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<sup>17</sup> Myers, “I Actually Thought We Would Revolutionize the Industry”.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> “About Us”, *Just Us Books*, <https://justusbooks.com/pages/about-us.html> (accessed: 29<sup>th</sup> January 2020).

became an important part of the push for multicultural education in the 1990s. Rudine Sims Bishop was involved in creating *Kaleidoscope: A Multicultural Booklist for Grades K-8*, underscoring how linked education and African American children's literature had become.<sup>20</sup> Ever since authors such as Angela Johnson and Christopher Paul Curtis have created African American children's literature that has pushed new boundaries and broached new topics.

More scholarship is needed on this continuing legacy that has emerged strongly at different times since 1979. African American children's books published between 1965 and 1979 reshaped a Black educational philosophy and this legacy is still felt in wider children's literature. African American children's books explored the lives of different social classes, addressed issues of police brutality and murder and explored Black history previously disregarded in public schools. The CIBC, educators and children built on a longer continuum of African American children's literature but radically transformed the ways in which children's books were used in education. Children had their poetry on Black liberation published, Black history was etched on sidewalks in chalk and teaching aids about how to teach about Black hair were given to teachers. The books used in educational events are part of a longer tradition of Black children's literature that has often been maligned and ignored by educational authorities and a racist white society but has survived and helped create a more inclusive and

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<sup>20</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop, "Reflections on the Development of African American Children's Literature", *Journal of Children's Literature* 38, no. 2 (2012): 9.

relevant education for many children. In 1969, Paul Goggin, aged thirteen, wrote the poem 'Life'. His work encapsulates how African American children's literature strove to help children overcome hardships by demonstrating the power and beauty in being Black.

Life can be *dirty*,  
Life can even be painful;  
But life is what you make it,  
So try to make it beautiful.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Goggins, "Life" in *The Voice of the Children*, eds., June Jordan and Terri Bush, eds., (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970), 33.

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## APPENDIX

Author (Last name, first name)	Book Title	Reason for Selection
Adoff, Arnold	<i>Malcolm X</i>	Included in the Curriculum Project Reports of the New York Board of Education.
Adoff, Arnold	<i>Black on Black</i>	Included in the Curriculum Project Reports of the New York Board of Education.
Bell-Mathis, Sharon	<i>Sidewalk Story</i>	CIBC winner promoted in schools and Included in the Curriculum Project Reports of the New York Board of Education.
Berger, Terry	<i>Black Fairy Tales</i>	Storytelling on the Streets Programme
Blue, Rose	<i>Black, Black, Beautiful Black</i>	A teacher in Bedford-Stuyvesant and used in Storytelling on the Streets programme
Blue, Rose	<i>Bed-Stuy Beat: Sonny's Song</i>	A teacher in Bedford-Stuyvesant
Blue, Rose	<i>A Quiet Place</i>	A teacher in Bedford-Stuyvesant
Bond, Jean Carey	<i>Brown is a Beautiful Color</i>	CIBC member and included in Curriculum Project Reports of the New York Board of Education.
Chambers, Bradford	<i>Chronicles of Negro Protest: Documenting the History of Black Power</i>	CIBC director wrote it and included in Curriculum Project Reports of the New York Board of Education.
Clifton, Lucille	<i>The Black BC's</i>	Recommended in CIBC guidelines in the bulletin magazine

Feelings, Muriel	<i>Moja Means One</i>	Used in Storytelling on the Streets programme
Giovanni, Nikki	<i>Ego-Tripping and Other Poems for Young People</i>	Was the keynote speaker at a Board of Education conference on "Children and literature" in Brooklyn
Greenfield, Eloise	<i>Paul Robeson</i>	Used in Storytelling on the Streets programme
Greenfield, Eloise	<i>Honey I Love You and Other Love Poems</i>	CIBC Resource Center materials guide
Greenidge, Edwin and Dora Pantell	<i>If Not Now, When? The Many Meanings of Black Power</i>	Reading is Fundamental Bookmobile
Griffin, Judith	<i>Nat Turner</i>	Used in Storytelling on the Streets programme
Hamilton, Virginia	<i>Zeely</i>	New York Board of Education: Bureau of Supplies
Hamilton, Virginia	<i>The House of Dries Dear</i>	New York Board of Education: Bureau of Supplies
Harris, Janet and Julius Hobson	<i>Black Pride: A People's Struggle</i>	Authors spoke to classes about the book in the Ocean Hill Be-In and also recommended in Curriculum Project Reports of the New York Board of Education.
Haskett, Edythe Rance	<i>Grains of Pepper: Folktales from Liberia</i>	Included in the Curriculum Project Reports of the New York Board of Education.
Hunter, Kristin	<i>The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou</i>	Winner of CIBC programme and promoted to schools
Hunter, Kristen	<i>Guests in the Promised Land</i>	Winner of CIBC programme and promoted to schools
Lester, Julius	<i>Black Folktales</i>	Used in Storytelling on the Streets programme

Lester, Julius	<i>To Be a Slave</i>	Included Curriculum Project Reports of the New York Board of Education.
Musgrove, Margaret	<i>Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions</i>	Included Curriculum Project Reports of the New York Board of Education.
Myers, Walter Dean	<i>Where Does the Day Go?</i>	CIBC winner promoted in schools
Myers, Walter Dean	<i>Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff</i>	New York Board of Education: Bureau of Supplies
Oliver, Elizabeth Murphy	<i>Black Mother Goose</i>	Reading is Fundamental Bookmobile
Step toe, John	<i>Stevie</i>	Storytelling on the Streets Programme and ocean hill be in
Yarnborough, Camille	<i>Cornrows</i>	Included in CIBC lesson plans segment in the Bulletin

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- Figure 1 Emmett Wigglesworth in Rose Blue, *Black, Black, Beautiful Black*. New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1969), np.
- Figure 2 Tom Feelings in Muriel Feelings, *Moja Means One: Swahili Counting Book* New York: The Dial Press), np.
- Figure 3 Leo and Diane Dillon in Margaret Musgrove, *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions* (New York: Dial Books, 1976), np.
- Figure 4 George Ford in Nikki Giovanni, *Ego-Tripping and Other Poems for Young People* (New York: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1973), np.
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- Figure 12 Charles Bible in Barney Grossman, Gladys Groom, and Pupils of P.S. 150, *Black Means...* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1970), np.

## ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 2: Emmett Wigglesworth in *Rose Blue, Black, Black, Beautiful Black*. New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1969), np.

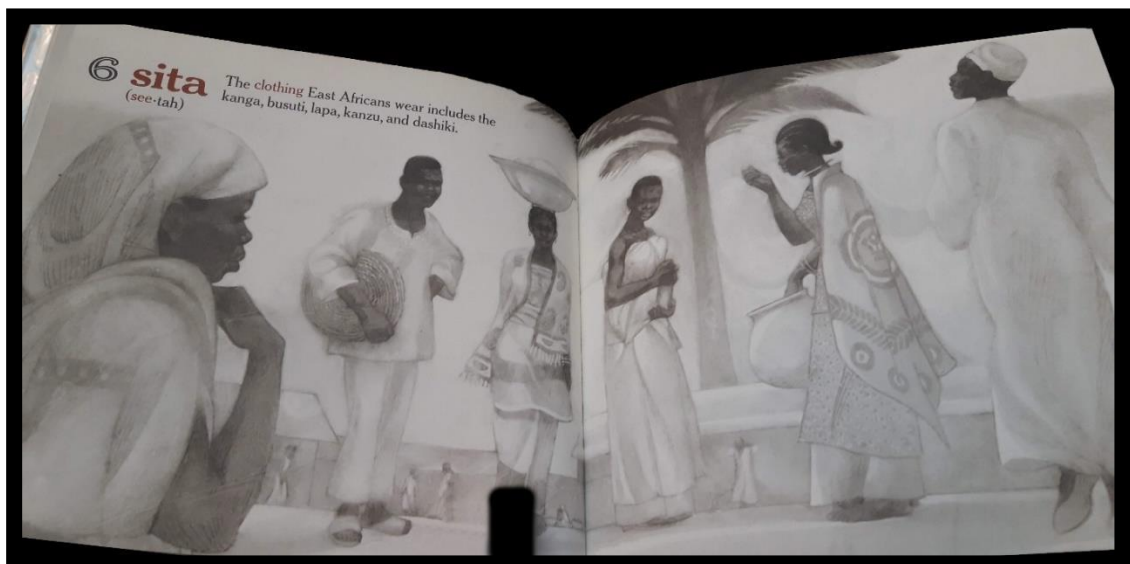
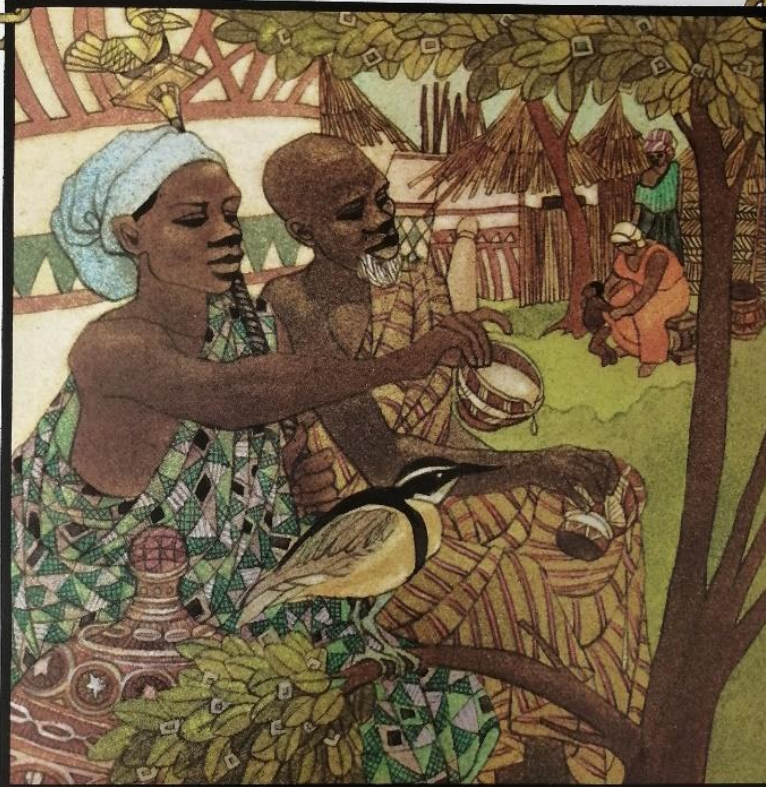


Figure 3: Tom Feelings in Muriel Feelings, *Moja Means One: Swahili Counting Book* (New York: The Dial Press), np.



**F**/ The Fanti (fahn'tee) offer their guests white bubbly palm wine that has a clean fresh smell. The wine comes from tree trunks, and the Fanti chop down or tap palm trees to get it. People sip it from gourds called calabashes. Before drinking, a person pours a little wine on the ground and says, "Come drink with us." This is called "pouring libation," and it is done to honor the ancestors.

Figure 4: Leo and Diane Dillon in Margaret Musgrove, *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions* (New York: Dial Books, 1976), np.

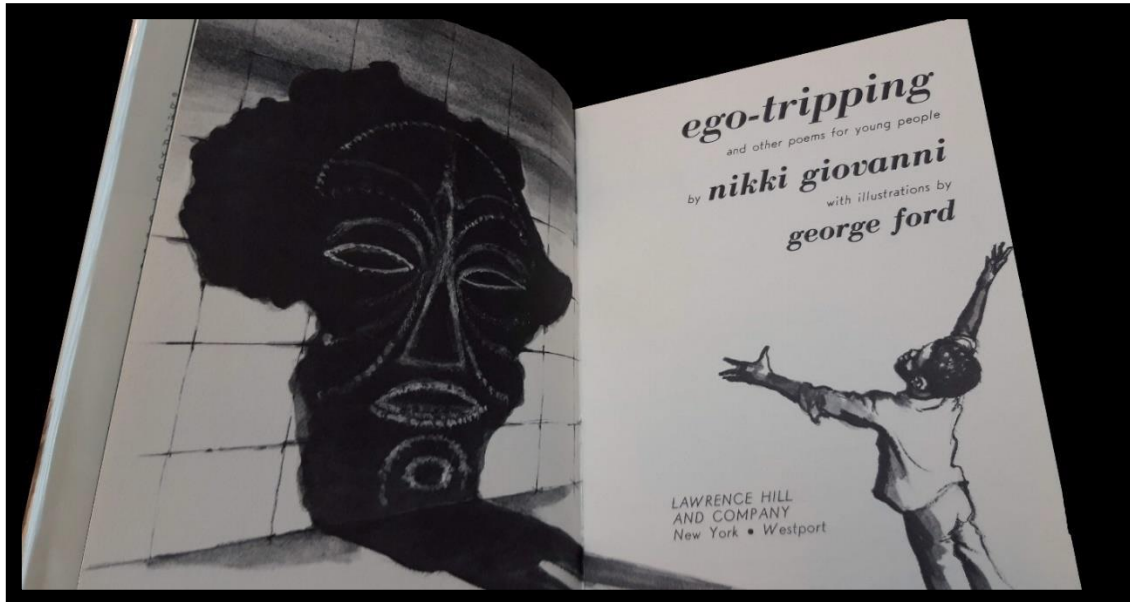


Figure 5: George Ford in Nikki Giovanni, *Ego-Tripping and Other Poems for Young People* (New York: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1973), np.

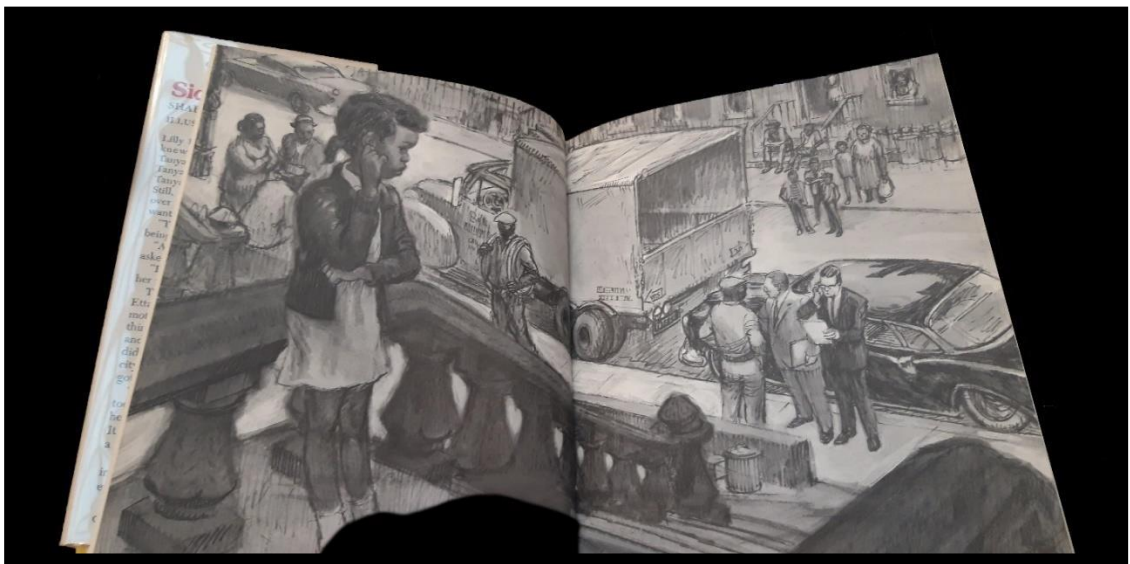


Figure 6: Leo Carty in Sharon Bell-Mathis, *Sidewalk Story* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), np.

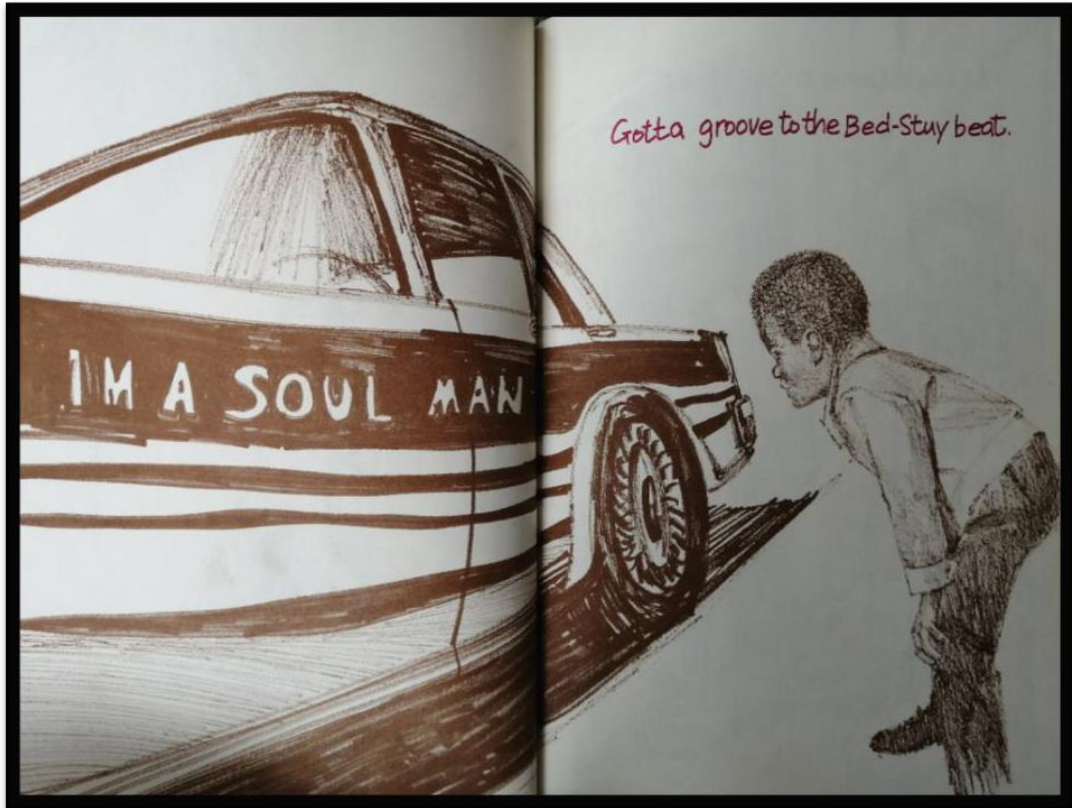


Figure 7: Harold James in Rose Blue, *Bed-Stuy Beat: Sonny's Song* (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1970), np.



Figure7: Leo Carty in Judith Berry Griffin, *Nat Turner* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1970), 11.



Figure 8: John Wilson in Arnold Adoff, *Malcolm X* (New York: HarperCollins, 1970), np.

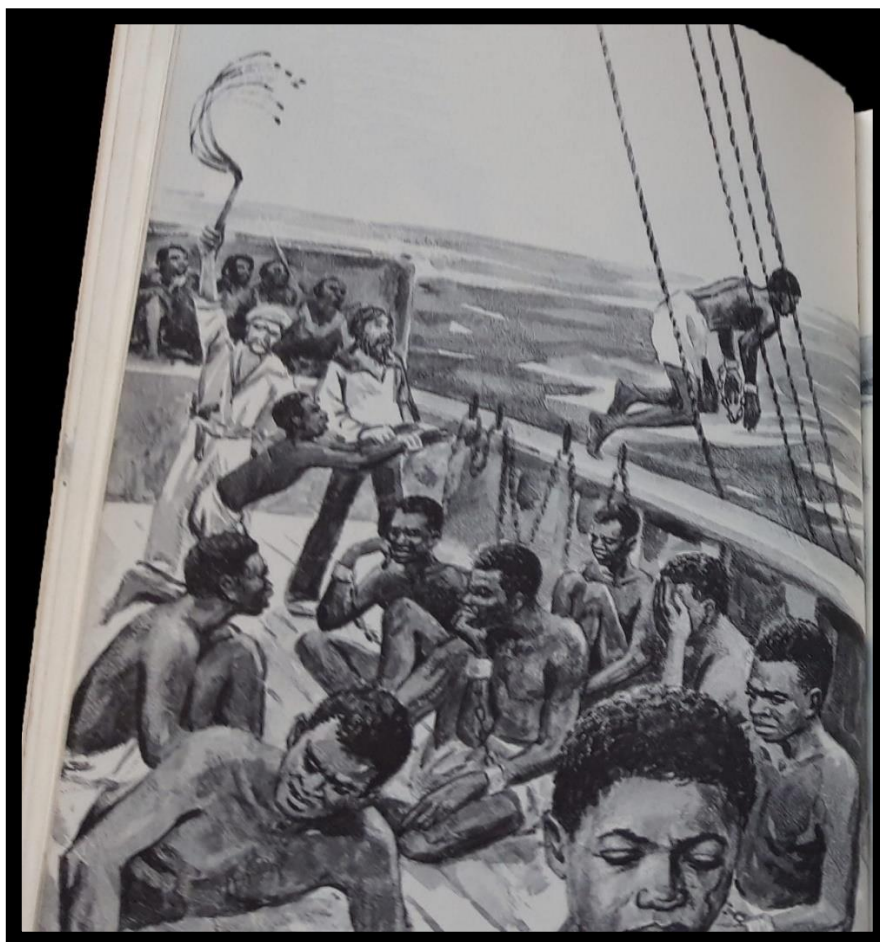


Figure 9: Don Miller in Lucille Clifton, *The Black BC's* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1970), np.

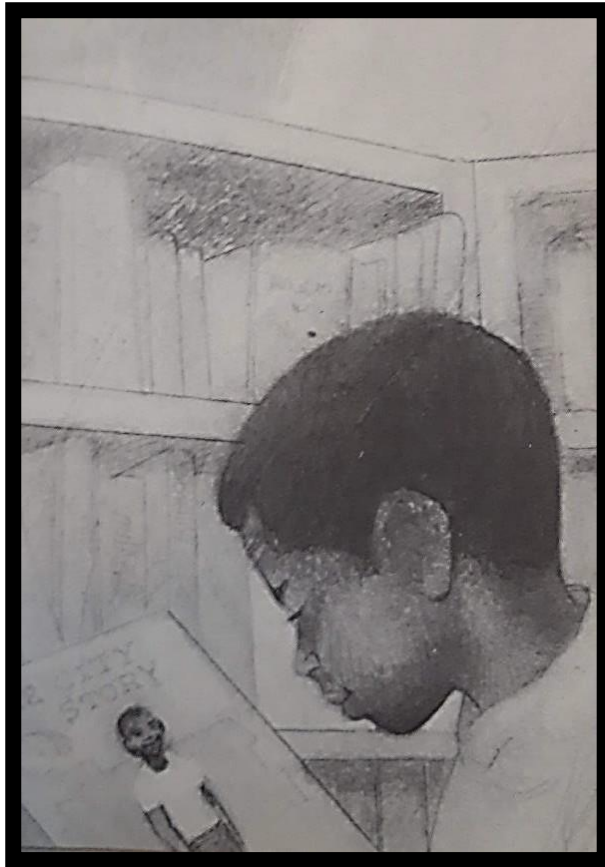


Figure 8: Tom Feelings in *Rose Blue, A Quiet Place* (New York: Frank Watts, Inc., 1969), 55.

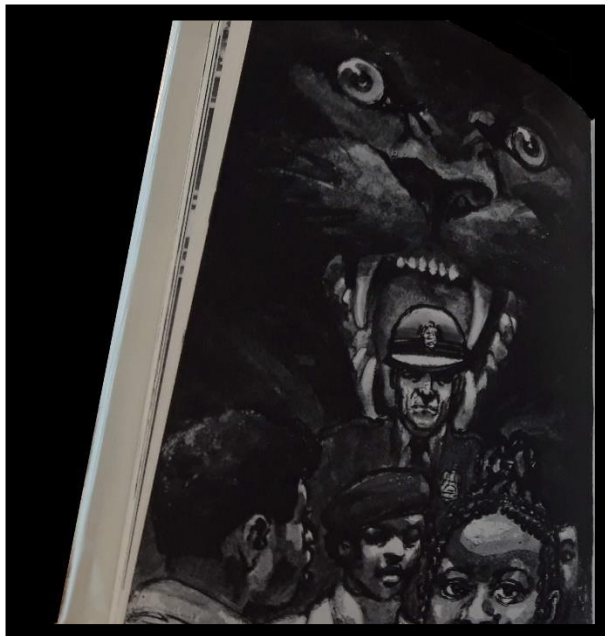
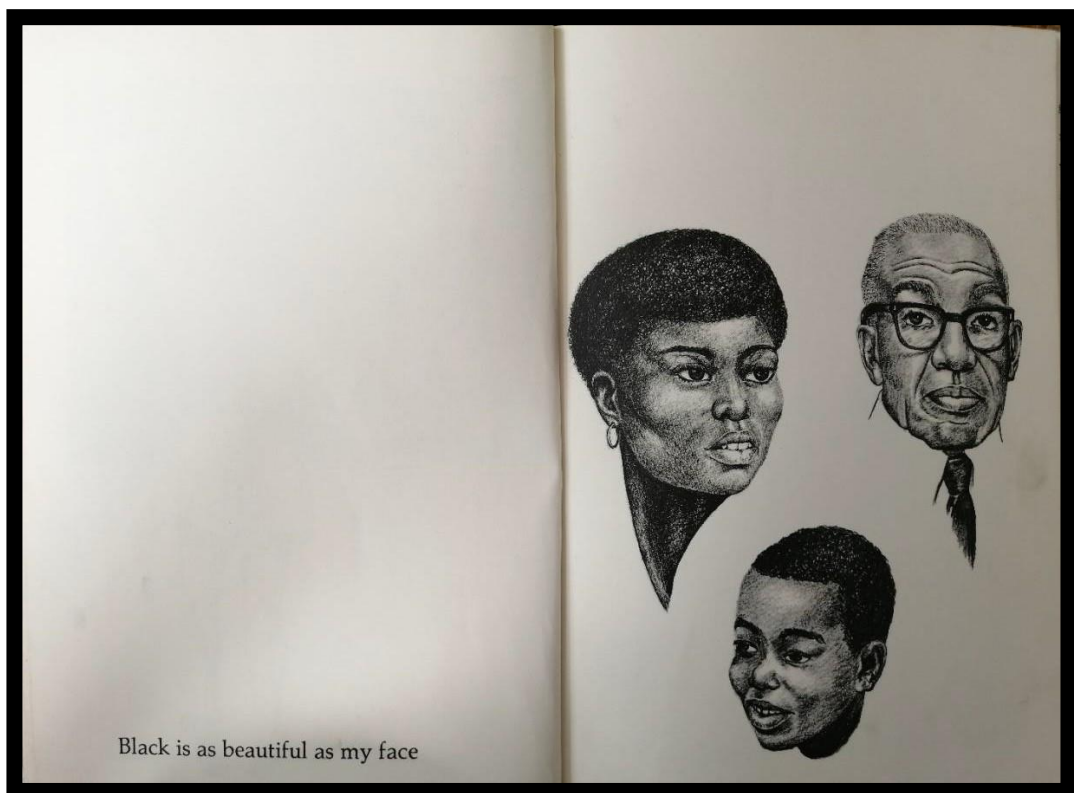


Figure 9: George Ford in Nikki Giovanni *Ego-Tripping and Other Poems for Young People* (New York: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1973), 26.



*Figure 10: Charles Bible in Barney Grossman, Gladys Groom, and Pupils of P.S. 150, *Black Means...* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1970), np.*

