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Searching for Ourselves: African Cultural Representation in Children's Books in the United States, and Implications for Educational Achievement

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**Title: Searching for Ourselves: African Cultural Representation in Children's Books in the
United States, and Implications for Educational Achievement**

by

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Final Research Paper Presented to the Faculty of Community Development and Planning

Clark University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master's Degree in Community Development and Planning

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The **Final Research Project** is a graduation requirement for Masters in Community Development and Planning at Clark University and is conducted within the academic year 2016-2017 to demonstrate basic facility in research and theory application. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by the research committee and implement the project and complete the research paper.

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Preface

The Alienated Alien

“Yesterday I looked inside myself
to fathom my connection to the world around me.
I came from a country of many tongues and colors
but here I have to lose all to speak one so that I
can become a part of the world around me.
Did I come to be docile and dumb?
An estranged person with no sense of being?

This linear society is forcing me to forget how to be.
How can I see you all around me when I am forgetting
to be a collective human
That my soul is mine but also belongs to a larger soul of humanity
How can I see with my eyes cast down and work
my body and soul to pieces
Living forcibly as an itinerant.

You have become an alienated alien
At least that is the label you are branded with.
Is this brandishing any different than yesterday’s hot iron?
What is so alien about you?
I thought you were human.”

- Written by Dr. Otrude Nontobeko Moyo (my mother).

My story will always begin with you, mom. You have been my example of fearless creativity, necessary disruption, unapologetic cultivation, home, and unconditional love. You navigated systems not built for us while baboola-ing (carrying) me on your back. You walked through this life, being made to feel as an alienated alien, but flawlessly and defiantly kept your humanity.

Thank you. Ngiyakuthanda.

Dad, thank you for singing “Buffalo Solider” to me whenever I was upset growing up, reminding me of the rich history of where I come from, and making sure that I know that I have an important purpose on this earth.

I love you.

To my Africa that lives ways away from home: This is for you. May you read this and find courage to love yourself purposefully and unapologetically. Let's heal from the scars of ancestral pain and break the bindings of colonial persistence. I see you. We are here. We matter.

Thank you to a select few Clark University Professors who inspired me to continue on this path of discovery and decolonizing academia. Thank you for challenging me and helping me get to where I have dreamed of being.

Abstract

Using documentary and discourse analysis of children's literature I explore the extent to which there is a multicultural gap in children's literature to reveal the prevailing challenges of the colonized and Eurocentric values embedded in the contemporary education system that supports the monocultural socialization of young children in their early formative years. I translate my research through examining four thematic ways on how the multicultural gap is manifested which are subject matter, the lack of African writers, degree of complexity of diasporic experiences, and confronting whiteness. By focusing more specifically on the gap in African diasporic children literature, I review children's books to determine 1) whether the demographic of African immigrant, refugee, asylum seeker learner populations are being well represented in children's literature, and 2) what kind of multicultural frames this literature represents. Ultimately, I acknowledge new movements to diversify children's literature, and make my own suggestions for improvement.

Introduction: My positionality/Journey to this Project

“Don’t you guys live in trees?”

“Do you even have houses?”

“Do you have lions and monkeys for pets?”

“Do you even brush your teeth?”

“Why are you so dark?”

“Do they speak African where you’re from?”

“Do you have roads in Africa?”

“Do they ride elephants to work?”

“People like you are ugly.”

“You’re an African booty scratcher.”

“When you wear black socks can you even see them?”

“Why would anyone ever want to go to school in Africa? Their schools aren’t as good as schools here [in the US].”

“Your parents left you in an oven to punish you and that’s why you’re so dark.”

“Go back to your own country.”

These are just a few of the statements and questions I faced growing up in mainly white spaces and educational settings in the United States. Sometimes even in spaces that included People of Color. I am hoping that through bringing my personal experiences to the surface, and connecting them with educational practice, they will resonate with others of the diaspora and might be representative of our collective experiences in the US. These words, alongside several different variations, were sentiments of ignorance; they left scars on my self-esteem and left me with a confused identity. These quotes do not all have malicious intent and purposeful harm. There are degrees of racial gradations that connote that anything African is perceived in the negative and they all have an indisputable degree of unknowing. I hope that through my research I will make a claim for the importance of having multicultural literature and how it disrupts such misguided comments.

Background:

I remember in elementary school, my mother translated her collection of Ndebele children's story books and would share them with my first grade classes at Unity Point, in Carbondale Illinois. Although the class demographics were majority students of color, there weren't any Africans in the class and so my African culture was completely foreign. The class loved these translated stories and made it easier for young people to ask questions about my culture. The work that my mother did by integrating multicultural representation and a more diverse representation of Africa in my classes and the receptivity of teachers helped to normalize difference, revealed the value of this work. The rest of my upbringing did not provide room for the same nurturing. After having reflected on my own education and my growth and personhood, I know that the education system that caters to the perceived "majority" in the US has hindered my success and my sense of self-worth in many different ways.

I moved from Illinois to Gorham, Maine, which is a predominantly white middle class suburb. The demographics in the classrooms were a stark contrast from where I was coming from. In elementary school I was one of the only persons of color. I was the only student of African origin, and one of few immigrants in my school for several years. Even when a few more students of color entered the school district, I remained the only person of color in all of my classes up until I switched school districts for high school. In this ultra-white school, the educational disparities were ever present. All the materials we used in the classroom reflected the white students. I began to hate my identity as an African immigrant in the United States because there was nothing that supported my identity. For example, in middle school we were assigned to do a report centered on Thanksgiving and the Mayflower voyage. My teacher asked the class to present on how our ancestors came to the country. The assignment was tailored to meet the needs

of white American students whose ancestors came via the Mayflower. I was not encouraged to speak on my story as a first generation immigrant. I was instead bound to telling the story of African slavery in the US, as that is the only topic of African diaspora that was being taught at the time. I had to speak on history that wasn't directly mine. But, the failure to recognize my story, makes it difficult to connect with other struggles. From a young age I wrote stories and did my own illustrations, but similarly to Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche's experiences that she refers to in "Danger of a Single Story", all my protagonists were White. The narratives and experiences that I began to fantasize about were tailored to white dominant narratives because these were the narratives that were normalized, made accessible for minds like mine to draw from. In this presentation, I was made to feel as though people of color couldn't exist; or if they do exist, it is only in diminished and singular ways. These are the impacts of colonialism and its residual embrace of white monoculture.

Situating this research

Africa is often inaccurately referred to as a country. But it is in fact an expansive continent that is significantly larger than North America as a whole. It houses 54 incredibly diverse countries. Within these countries, there are rich histories of kingdoms, clans, and cultures. Researchers have estimated that there are about 1500-2000 African languages spoken across the continent. There are also thousands of community and country specific dialects that are spoken in addition to these widely recognized languages. The regions have geographies as different as the peoples: The lands are inclusive of overabundant lush vegetation, deep forests, and thick jungles. There are also vast stretches of deserts and sandbanked ridges. With all this it is hard to understand how easily the continent is seen as a homogenous place.

Binyavanga Wainaina, author of “How to Write About Africa”, alludes to the apartheid of literature that I reference throughout this paper: Wainaina says that the mainstream makes the following areas “taboo” topics: “...ordinary domestic scenes, love between Africans (unless a death is involved), references to African writers or intellectuals, mention of school-going children who are not suffering from yaws or Ebola fever or female genital mutilation... The biggest taboo in writing about Africa is to describe or show dead or suffering white people.” His article gives readers a glimpse at the very real, reductionist Western representations of Africans: cuisine is only captured as the “bizarre” which are meals consisting of snakes, bugs; some of the stereotypical characters are The Loyal Servant who is childlike and overly-doting, The Ancient Wise Man who always comes from popularly talked about tribes and is close to nature, The Modern African Man is fat and sneaky and is against ex-pats and foreign development strategies; death, dying, and suffering are also reoccurring themes. My aim to acknowledge the presence of these limitations and I make a case for how these mono-framed narratives harm African people. These are the readily available narratives of the continent for all, including people from the continent. There has to be a harmful impact of being constantly feed this representation.

In doing this research I struggled with developing an approach that did not come off as reducing Africa to a monocultural existence like most western pedagogy does. As my research is centered on decolonizing and disrupting normed pedagogies on Africa, I really wanted my approach to comprehensively reflect this. Through evaluating my process I considered conducting a specific regional study. I initially wanted to focus on the region of Southern Africa as I am most familiar with this area. But through my research I found it very difficult to find not only Southern African picture books being published in the US, but country specific picture books as a whole. Many picture books capture a single note, homogenous experience. The

common books that most people read, that I also read when I was younger, are picture books based on West and East Africa. The East African books are usually books from Kenyan cultures like the Masi. West African picture books usually tell stories of folklore. But many of these books come from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s are not within the production benchmark of the last 15 years. It was a struggle finding a wide enough breadth of picture books from a specific region and so under circumstance I had to widen my lens. I also thought of only focusing on Sub-Saharan African. A lot of western framed literature and geographies make sure they clarify the differences between Northern Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa because of significant cultural and geopolitical differences. But this separatism needs to be problematized as people often forget or simply don't know that Northern African countries like Egypt and Morocco are a part of Africa. I don't think diversity is a proper excuse to create boundaries in recognition and knowledge of countries within the continent. I did not want to aid the othering of North Africa for the purpose of my research. It has made the most sense for me to honor the beautiful diversity of African countries by analyzing all the stories of all the countries and cultures are currently being represented. All people from African countries are impacted by the lack of representation/lack of accurate representation. Some more than others.

As a colonized being who continues to unlearn colonization, I see different levels of internalized racism that I allowed in my life due to this education. Using what I experienced in my own education and my intentional attempts in unlearning this monocultural socialization, I see this research project as part of decolonizing my own mind and continuing the advocacy to decolonize children's educational experiences, focusing specifically on educational literature. I desire to further socialization that is self-image affirming for African diasporic learners. I have chosen to focus on children's literature, which research has shown to have a significant impact

children learners at a distinctly impressionable stage of their development. Through this research, I explore the extent to which there is a multicultural gap in children's literature and this gap is manifested. I also make connections between cultural representation and educational performance, noting that cultural representation impact children's self-worth, which is linked to their educational outcomes. I also use my research to recommend children's books that provide diverse cultural representations of African experiences for the local Worcester school community.

Research Question

My research question is as follows: Is there still a gap in children's literature within the United States, and if there is, how have its manifestations impacted African Diasporic picture books?

The African diaspora that I am primarily referencing is comprised of recent African immigrants, which include refugees and asylum seekers; however, I am also including second and third generation immigrants given the importance of cultural representation to later generations of African immigrants. While it is impossible to exclude the African Americans whose lineage dates back many generations and directly connects to the legacy of the Atlantic slave trade, my study is not focused primarily on this group. But due to the experiential connections of being Black in the US, and the long standing efforts by African American scholars within children's literature, my own literature review pays homage to their achievements (and experiences) and is based off this extensive scholarship. I elaborate on this reasoning further along in the paper. The children's literature that is the focus of my research are picture books that aid learners from preschool age to second grade. I focus on children's picture

books from a 15 year period which is from 2002 to the present year. I am using a time span of 15 years for my research to create a more specific and narrow lens. Also, books that are older than 15 years because less useful in analyzing narratives that are relevant to today. Books published before 2002 will be briefly referenced in a way that historicizes the phenomenon of multicultural representation in children's book. I will also analyze a Worcester Public Library reading list from 2016 as it helps us understand a sample of currently prescribed reading for public schools in the local context.

Analytical Method

I am interested in the children's literature of Africans in the diaspora because, even though this population is not the largest in the US, its numbers continue to grow significantly. According to Migration Policy Institution, as of 2013 there are 1.7 million African immigrants and refugees living in the US, and the numbers continue to grow. This reveals a huge new African diaspora who will have children in the US schools and who will have multicultural identities.

I draw on documentary analysis and discourse analysis to examine children's books presented in the library setting, and the existing literature of children's books for multicultural representation. Documentary analysis is seen as "predestined for the interpretation of pictures" and as a method of "giving access to implicit, tacit or a-theoretical knowledge" (Bohnsack, 2014, p. 230). The usefulness of this method, which relies on careful and contextual observation and interpretation of pictures, lies in its capacity to generate meaning based on images. I skimmed through several children's picture books and utilized these interpretive tools to inform my research. I combine this approach with discourse analysis, and interpretative method of research

which is informed by critical theory and Foucauldian discourse analysis. This approach is particular keen on examining how language is a form of power and which shapes social reality (Van Dijk, 2015; Willig, 2014). Together, documentary analysis and discourse analysis serve to provide critical means of analyzing the visual images of children's books as well as the rich academic literature.

The categories I use to examine the children's literature for multicultural representation are as follows:

1. Book authorship: I survey who the books are written by
2. Feature subject: Who the books feature, and, if the books hold cultural accuracy and relevancy for new Africans in the diaspora.
3. Publishing statistics: I also compare publishing statistic and information overtime to examine key authorship and representation across different periods.

As indicated, the children's literature that I focused on are picture books. The demographic of Kindergarten through second grade roughly covers the age range of children who still read picture books. It is helpful for me to analyze who is represented in most books that are top ranking in publishing databases as libraries, schools, teachers, educators, and parents look to these resources. I then explore the amount of books featuring African characters and how they are represented. In addition to analyzing what books feature people of color, I also examine which ones are written by people of color. I am focusing on African narratives that are inclusive of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers as their stories and experiences are what connect them and all of us to past and contemporary Africa. I am focusing on first and second generation African immigrants as it is important for their self-development to see themselves and their

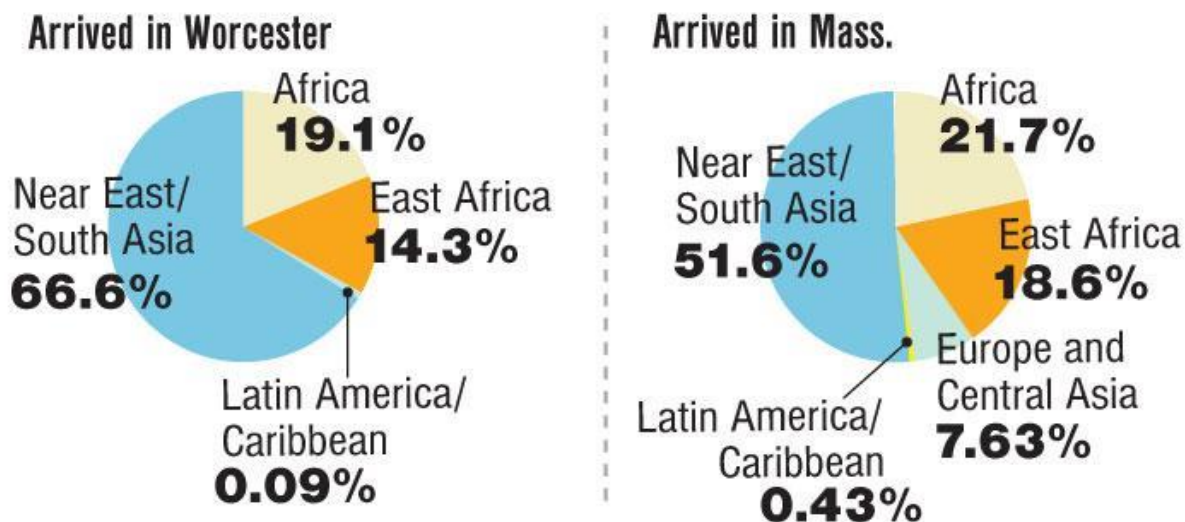
heritage in books. It is important so that the African diaspora does not feel as though they have to fragment their identity and have a dysphoric relationship with their heritage.

For the African immigrant children's literature scan, I analyzed documents such as literature databases and articles that address multicultural literature. One of those databases is the Cooperative Children's Book Center School of Education, which is located at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Another source I utilized was the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database, and the McGraw-Hill Higher Education database (McGraw-Hill is one of the top three publishers of educational literature in the US). Through my research, I found that these were the top databases that incorporated current information on multicultural literature. With this information, I developed a running list of children's books. I then, used this running list as my document analysis. I also analyzed various trends in multicultural literature campaigns that have begun to pop-up in the last few years. These trends were important to include as they inform us of the continued need of diverse books and the growing aware of the gap. The advances, particularly in the last two years are giving hope to closing the overall multicultural literature gap and giving hope to closing the literature gap of Africans in the diaspora.

For a more localized case study, I utilized Worcester, Massachusetts to examine children literature because of the city's cultural and racial diversity, and Worcester has a significant African diaspora population. Worcester has immigrant and refugee populations from countries such as Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Albania, Ghana, Liberia, and many more. Again, while the number of African immigrants in the city of Worcester are not the largest demographically, the representation of this population is still poignant. See the graph below highlighting the growth of Africa immigrants within the City of Worcester and the state of Massachusetts.

Where area refugees originate

By region of origin in Worcester and Massachusetts, 2007-2012



Source: State Department

T&G Staff

The 2016-2017 enrollment data for Worcester Public Schools shows that 15.4% of the students identified as being of the African diaspora. With this information it is fair to make a case for Worcester schools to have more multicultural literature. From Worcester, I analyzed public school summer reading lists to compose my data list. Ultimately, my study is designed to examine the case of children's literature to see if and where there is a gap in the representation of African culture, and how this gap is manifested. My second goal explores the links between cultural under-representation and educational performance. I connect these findings to show how the under-representation of African cultures in children's literature, while dominated by white cultural representations, convey certain norms and expectations through verbal and visual narrative patterns that ultimately diminish the sense of self with consequences for their performance in school. In other words, I argue that the representation, or lack thereof, of African

cultures has serious educational consequences for African diasporic communities in the United States.

The Complexity of African Diasporic Experiences

Now, I will provide a brief overview on the history of where the picture books and children's literature from Africa come from and their significance in African culture in Africa and in the US: A study of African experiences in literature reveals a combination of a rich and creative story telling of African experiences through oral tradition. Such experiences also emerge later in written text of African literature; however, as these diverse and complex African experiences emerge in Western literature, they seem diminished, and limited, as well as overly romantic and stereo-typed. I utilize the literature, *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature*, by Rudine Sims Bishop to frame the history of some of my research. Bishop notes how African and African American children's literature's beginnings are based on oral traditions. These oral traditions can be seen in several different communities all over the continent. Through globalization and modernization, oral traditions have transitioned into the written word so the stories can be passed on more easily. Much of the storytelling has been through folklore where the majority of the characters are animals. The stories could be mystical, mythical, or historical. Several also tell the story of the 'trickster' figure. This trickster figure is a highly intellectual character who uses their knowledge to deceive, disobey or subvert normative rule. Praise poems, narrative epics, riddles, and children's songs fall under oral traditions of storytelling. Written word has also been around for centuries. There is Ethiopian literature, for example, that dates as far back as 4th century AD.

African literature during colonial siege, like African American literature, was imperative for mobilizing and organizing people. For example, postcolonial African literature increased in the last century due to the increased literacy and publications that stemmed from liberated countries. As Ali Mazrui states, themes in literature of this period describe “the clash between Africa's past and present, between tradition and modernity, between indigenous and foreign, between individualism and community, between socialism and capitalism, between development and self-reliance and between Africanness and humanity”.¹ The above shows more diversity and complexity of the African experiences as presented in oral traditions in earlier eras, and later in the postcolonial era, in nuanced historical and socio-political incarnations.

However, with post-independence of African nations, representation of Africans in stereotypical ways seemed to have heightened. Black literary stereotypes degrade understandings of African Diasporic people: The frame of the animalistic darky African that has been feared throughout time, continues to still be feared. The caricatures in African American literature have appeared as Topsy, Little Black Sambo, pickaninnies. Although the blatancy of these caricatures have been removed from contemporary literature, post 1960s literature, misrepresentations continue in other forms.

African Diaspora members face the brunt of cultural misrepresentation and stereotypes as African cultures are more directly memed² by what is misunderstood or feared within the United States. In the US, many educational encounters with African cultures are through National Geographic. In these media representations, the presentation of African cultural are rarely depicted by Africans themselves. Popular culture continues to fetishize the African Diaspora in ways of comforting this fear. An example is the well-known Eddie Murphy movie, “Coming to

¹ Hill, Margari Aziza. "The African Novel." Margari Aziza. Wordpress, 29 June 2007. Web. 02 Apr. 2017.

² An image, video, text, etc. that is copied and spread rapidly. Often spread virally via the internet.

America,” where Murphy, an African American actor/comedian, plays a fictional king from a homogenized African “land”, Zamunda. There are themes in the movie that identify the African characters by their perceived ignorance and their backwards understandings of the western world. Pop cultural references such as this are often taken as accurate representations. Growing up, I was tirelessly asked to confirm the validity that the movie captured a turn “coming to America” story.

I also utilize the work of Christopher Myers in my research. Like Myer’s, my research acknowledges that there is an “apartheid of literature” for African new immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Through my research I found that most of the books that are either written by and/or about Black people are mostly about slavery and civil rights. As important as these subjects are, the gap in relevant contemporary African diasporic literature is of troubling concern. This gap can be seen in publication timeline. For example, most books that were published in the US about Africa were published in the 1980s and 1990s. This could be attributed to the surge of voluntary African immigrants coming to the US at this time. Also most of these books have been limited to content about rural, generalized, African landscapes, animals, and mysticism. I am not trying to negate the relevance and importance of these published books because many of them served the purpose to expose Americans to multicultural education. But because landscapes are ever changing, leaning on the untouched African wilderness example is less relevant and serves as a limiting narrative. It also binds people’s understanding to what I like to call, “The Lion King ideology” which keeps African in the box of pre-modern rurality, and as the diaspora continues to grow, the narratives and needs of diversities also grow.

The literary apartheid in the US limits the entire African experience to images of underdeveloped African wildlife, the “bush”, rural village life, and slavery. Through voyeuristic, exploitative, and overused images, we see emaciated black babies, skeletal frames, and child soldiers. Room has not been made to allow for a plethora of African diasporic narratives that bring Africans into contemporary times. Myers (2014) writing about his life growing up in Baltimore highlights how people of color are made to feel like problems if they are a part of the “dreamers” world that excludes the harsh realities of lives lived by children in our midst. In this regard, my literature review extends Christopher Myer’s idea and examines how this limits the African diaspora to learn about themselves and align their experiences with that of African Americans in the United States.

With this said, it is important to understand how the educational tools of stories have changed and manifested over the years and how this change impacts young people: Africans have this vibrant history of storytelling that has been used for different purposes such as being culturally informative, social justice focused, and for overall entertainment. It has been inclusive of young people but overtime post-colonial adult literature has been the focus of cultivation. But through globalization and changes in history, stories from Africa have more rapidly begun to be told by non-Africans in pejorative ways. The Diaspora has to battle between narratives that inaccurately portray their cultures, being bound to rural settings, and also not being represented at all.

Africans in the US have to navigate pressures of assimilation, being pushed to leave their home cultures, and face the pressures of holding on to their own individual Africinity. The United States is a country of immigrants: it was built on the backs of immigrants and thrives from the efforts of immigrants. It is often described as a melting pot. Bruce Thornton notes in his

article, “Melting Pots and Salad Bowls, that the melting pot theory was developed as a strategy that was first meant to bring people together through unifying beliefs and political ideals.

Traditionally, it was believed that this country should be a place where people from around the world and various backgrounds come together, carrying along their diversity, but grow into Americans by becoming more homogenous and being forced to assimilate. Racism and varying degrees of xenophobia from the majority white diverted this theory and have sculpted it to represent a pluralism that is understood through race, socio-economics, politics, and religion. In recent years, people have begun to problematize this and have appropriated the “salad bowl” metaphor as more accurately representative of the country. The salad bowl theory pushes against assimilation and acknowledges that people from other countries don’t always want to leave their home cultures behind and want to maintain a connectedness to those cultures. It embraces more principles of integration. As Thornton reveals, it is not perfect. It binds individuals to identities that don’t always permit them to live as they wish. I do not agree with Thornton’s criticisms of multiculturalism and how it is the undoing of American culture. He says, “Multiculturalism, not content to respect or celebrate diversity, seeks to indict American civilization for its imperial, colonial, xenophobic, and racist sins.” He uses this quote as a critique against Multiculturalism. I in fact think that it is necessary that Multiculturalism holds the US accountable for its historical degradation of diversity. The “salad bowl” theory is not seamless. But integrating and honoring different cultures instead of assimilating and putting pressure to reduce identity to what is perceived as truly American is a more inclusive cultural function. How can anyone be expected to have a foolproof self-awareness and not how insecurities about who they are if the world around them is sculpting this hollow narrative?

Analyzing the data on children's literature at national and local levels

As I mentioned previously, African cultures are homogenized and so the data I will reference does not separate the new generations of the diaspora from the old. I am utilizing this notion to give an understanding of what work has and hasn't been made in bringing African stories to the public, which make the case for questioning the representation of Africa diasporic children's literature.

The Cooperative Children's Book Center School of Education produced comprehensive data on publishing statistics from the last 15 years. Some of their recently published data charts the number of children's books that are by and about People of Color and First/Native Nations. The children's literature that encompasses the study includes not only picture books but novels and non-fiction as well. They were also analyzing trade books that were mostly published in the US. The focus of my study is also exclusive to US publishing statistics. The table below shows the breakdown of books received by *Cooperative Children's Book Center School of Education (CCBC)*, located at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Year	Number of Books Received at CCBC	African / African Americans		American Indians / First Nations		Asian Pacifics/ Asian Pacific Americans		Latinos	
		By	About	By	About	By	About	By	About
2016	3,400	92	278	22	55	212	237	101	166
2015	3,400	107	270	19	42	176	113	59	83
<u>2014</u>	3,500	85	181	20	38	129	112	59	66
2013	3,200	68	93	18	34	90	69	48	57
2012	3,600	68	119	6	22	83	76	59	54
2011	3,400	79	123	12	28	76	91	52	58
2010	3,400	102	156	9	22	60	64	55	66
2009	3,000	83	157	12	33	67	80	60	61
2008	3,000	83	172	9	40	77	98	48	79
2007	3,000	77	150	6	44	56	68	42	59
2006	3,000	87	153	14	41	72	74	42	63
2005	2,800	75	149	4	34	60	64	50	76
2004	2,800	99	143	7	33	61	65	37	61

2003	3,200	79	171	11	95	43	78	41	63
2002	3,150	69	166	6	64	46	91	48	94

The data shows that between 2,000 and 3,500 children's books of all types were published each year between year 2002 and their last updated publishing year, 2016. Out of 47,850 children's books that were published that the CCBC received over this 15 year span, only 1,253 books that were published by Africans/African Americans. Within that same 15 year span only 2,481 books about African/African Americans were produced. Children's books by American Indians/First Nation people over the 15 years totaled at a mere 175. Books about American Indians/First Nation people were 625. Children's books by Asian Pacifics/Asian Pacific Americans totaled at 1,308, and children's books by about the same population totaled at 1,380. Lastly, children's books written by Latino authors was 801 and children's books about Latinos was 1,106. After looking at the sums of each publishing category I added them up to find out the total amount of books published by People of Color that the CCBC analyzed. Out of the 47,850 children's books that the CCBC received for review, 9,129 books were either by or about People of Color. This does not mean that 38,721 children's books were solely written about white narratives. A large number of children's books are about animals, nature, and fantasy characters. The books that were reviewed by CCBC also included books that were not specifically picture books. But it does make clear that, even still, the publishing numbers for POC are disproportionate, and books by and about African/African Americans is a small fraction of this. The graph presentation above illustrates the CCBC data.

Looking at the data from CCBC, we see that there is a staggering amount of children's literature being written by people outside of the listed culture. African/African American literature has the highest rate for writers who do not come from this culture. An important point

drawn from the study of the data above and of those of the personnel within the publishing industry, is the lack of diversity in this sector. According to the Diversity Baseline Survey that was published in 2015, 79% of people working in publishing are White, and 4% are Black/African American. At the executive level, 86% are White and 2% are Black/American. In the Sales Department, 83% are White and 3% are Black/African American. In the Marketing and Publicity Department, 77% are white, while Black/African Americans only make up 3%. Lastly, 89% of book reviewers are white and a meager 1% are Black/African American. Why is this breakdown of who is who in publishing important? Underrepresentation of people of color in the publishing industry of children's book means this population is not likely to be represented as illustrated in the books received by CCBC discussion above.

Samples of representation historically

The CCBC data illustrate that African writers do not dominate African Diasporic children's literature – far from it; in fact, they are grossly under-represented. As I mentioned, authors, white authors in particular, are capitalizing on picture books that highlight animals or distant, rural lands. Further, after searching through major publishing sites and book sale websites, I found that African books that remain loved and highly regarded today are the books from the 80s and 90s: *Ananzi the Spider* series 1972, *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears*; *The Village of Round and Square Houses* 1986; *Ashanti to Zulu* 1976; *A Story A Story* 1970; *Juma and the Magic Jinn* 1986; *Galimoto* 1990; and *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain* 1992. In 1997, Boston University's African Studies Center published a picture book guide for teaching about Africa. They listed 38 books that they found to be quality and relevant. Some of the books listed are the aforementioned books I named. The majority of the books on the list tell tales of folklore,

fantasy, animals, and rural life. There are no complete guides on picture books published in the 2000's by and/or about Africa. Most of the publishing sites have grouped African literature with African American. Good Reads, which is one of the top online book list serves, published a reading list with 313 African American picture books. Out of all 313, only ten books were about African culture, animals, or were adapted western fairytales retold in an African setting. Some of those books were published before the 15 year cut-off. Here, we see a quantitative under-representation of African writers and themes.

Books Related to African Diaspora in 15 years

The following is a list of a few of the books I was able to find by and/or about Africans that were published between 2002 and 2016. These books were the most commonly found on Amazon, Good Reads, and Barnes and Noble:

- *There was a Tree* by Rachel Isadora 2012;
- *Mama Panya's Pancakes: A Village Tale From Kenya* by Mary Chamberlin, Rich Chamberlain, and Julia Cairns 2006
- *My Painted House, My Friendly Chicken, and Me* by Maya Angelou and Margaret Courtney-Clarke 2003;
- *My Father's Shop* by Satomi Ichikawa 2006;
- *Wangari's Trees of Peace: A True Story from Africa* by Jeanette Winter 2008;
- *Safari, So Good!: All About African Wildlife* by Bonnie Worth 2011;
- *Pinduli* by Janell Cannon.
- *The Matatu* by Eric Walters 2012

- *The Water Princess* 2016
- *Who is King?: And Other Tales from Africa* 2015
- *African Adventure* 2015
- *The Fire Children: A West African Folk Tale* 2015
- *The Princess and the Pea* by Rachel Isadora 2007
- *The Clever Monkey: A Folktale from West Africa* 2004
- *We All Went on a Safari*

Many of the authors I have mentioned have produced several similarly themed books. Isadora specializes in retelling western fairytales with African tropes. There are several books that are centered on wildlife. Again, as seen in the authors I have listed, many of the books I found were written by white authors and/or non-Africans. Some of the books display tropes outside of the stereo-typed norm, which is great. The *Matatu*, for example, tells a story of urban life experiences in an East Africa country. But this makes my earlier statements more clear: Diasporic stories are being represented by people who are removed from the culture and the books that they are producing are books on safaris and underdevelopment, and folklore. It is not unreasonable to claim that non-African authorship is aiding the literature apartheid.

From the national to the local: Worcester

The above databases represent children's literature nationwide in the US. To conduct the research for a local perspective, I analyzed the summer reading list for Worcester public schools that the Worcester Public Library composed. All public schools across the city and the students who attend them, received the reading list. Each year, the summer reading list is composed in hopes of continuing students' growth and learning development during the school break. It

provides options for the learners and their parents into furthering their education. All the books on the list are books that can easily be accessed from the library. Each reading list is organized by the corresponding grade level.

Preschool to grade level two:

Authors to consider: Mo Willems; Dr. Seuss; Victoria Kann; Eric Carle; Rosemary Wells; Ezra Jack Keats; Eric Carle; Eve Bunting

Series to consider: *Elephant and Piggy Duck and Goose* Madeline Olivia

Titles to consider:

Giraffes Can't Dance;

Dragons Love Tacos;

Chicka, Chicka, Boom, Boom;

Mix It Up!;

Once Upon an Alphabet: Short Stories for All the Letters;

A Perfectly Messed-Up Story; Maple;

Good Night Moon;

The Snowy Day;

Where the Wild Things Are;

Blueberries for Sal;

Where the Sidewalk Ends;

Make Way for Ducklings; Pajama Time;

Moo Baa La La La;

Click, Clack, Moo;

Trouble with Trolls;

I Like Myself!;

The Gardener;

Mama Played Baseball;

If You Give a Mouse a Cookie;

The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes;

We Are Girls Who Love to Run;

Book with No Pictures;

Paper Bag Princess;

Extra Yarn;

The Dot Harold and the Purple Crayon;

The Hello, Goodbye Window;

Owl Moon;

Fred Stays with Me!;

Raising Dragons

Grades 1&2:

The Serpent Came to Gloucester by Anderson;

Extra Yam by Barnett;

The Curious Garden by Brown;

The Great Kapok Tree by Cherry;

The Man who Walked Between the Towers by Gerstein

Dog Magic by Golembe;

Crow Call by Lowry;

My Rows and Piles of Coins by Mollé;

Zin! Zin! Zin! A Violin by Moss;

Grandfather's Journey by Say;

The Lorax by Seuss;

How I Learned Geography by Shulevitz;

Doctor De Soto by Steig;

Interrupting Chicken by Stein;

Owl Moon by Yolen

Out of the preschool-kindergarten reading list, only two suggested books were books with African American characters: *The Snowy Day*, and *I Like Myself!* Both are books that were written by non-African American writers. The rest of the books had no content related to narratives of color and were not written by people of color. There is a section on the public library reading list that suggests additional authors that learners and parents should look into. All of those authors were white. In the suggested series section, there was no African animal books that were written by a white author. There were no books about African narratives that had cultural significance.

Then out of all the picture books from the first and second grade list, only one book told the story of an African experience. The book, *My Rows and Piles of Coins* by Tololwa M. Mollé, is a book about a young Tanzanian boy's experiences in his village. The author is also Tanzanian and incorporates his personal experiences into the book. *Grandfather's Journey* by Allen Say, is another multicultural book. It details a Japanese diasporic story by Japanese American: Allen Say writes about his grandfather's experience living between the US and Japan.

The Great Kapok Tree by Lynne Cherry is a book about environmental conservation, and it features indigenous Amazonian people. Cherry is not an author of color. *Dog Magic* by Carla Golembe is a book with a person of color protagonist that works to get over her fear of dogs. The last book worth mentioning is, *How I Learned Geography* by Uri Shulevitz. It is not about or by POC but the book tells a story of forced migration and displacement. It also gives the reader a lens into various places and cultures as it teaches about multiple geographies. I went to the library and my analysis finds that all the aforementioned books were representative of their African picture books, with the exception of a few West African folk stories. By conducting book scans through database research and the Worcester case study I was able to see that the gap in African Diasporic books is significant. There is a huge lack of representation. There are hundreds of picture books in the library, and the majority we books with white characters by white authors. The books that were inclusive of African content were most still only inclusive of rural, folklore, blanketed narratives. In the following section I will discuss how this impact the level of achievement for the African Diaspora demographic.

Cultural Under-representation and the Achievement Gap

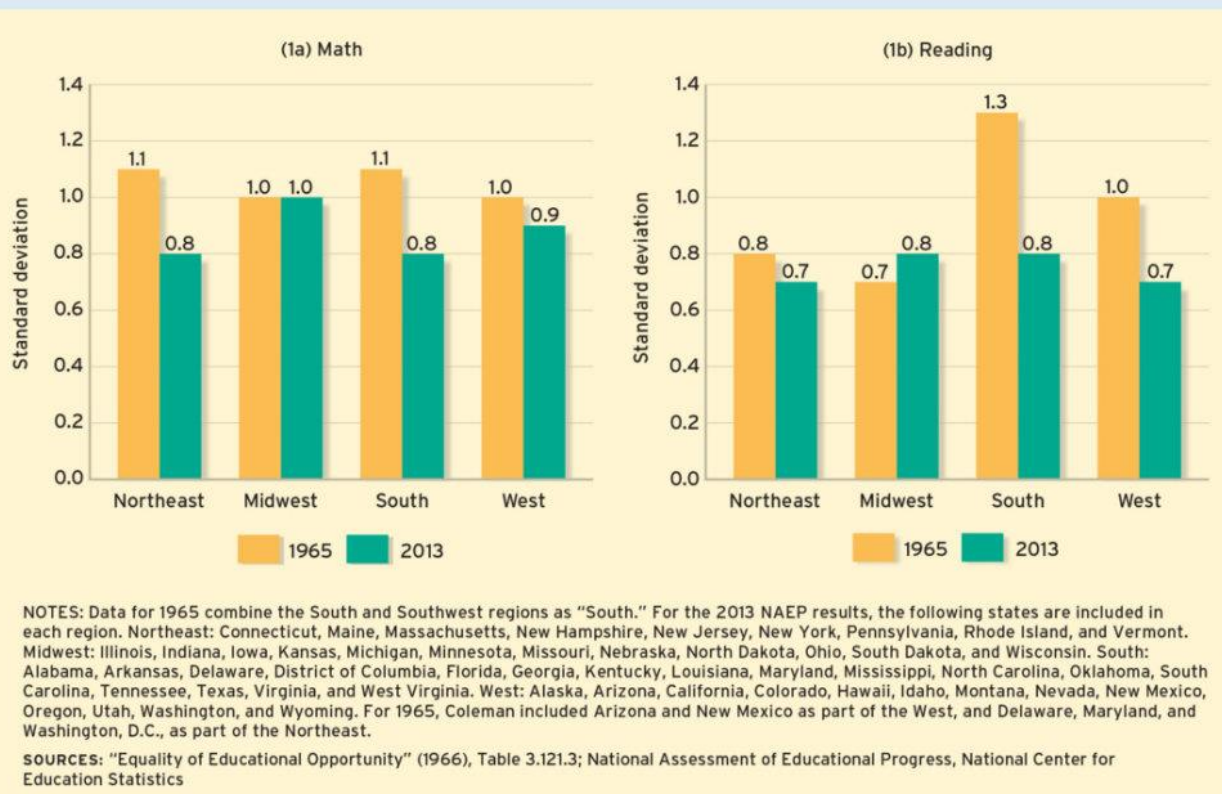
While this study is not primarily on the achievement gap, given my own personal educational experiences that have inspired this research, I believe that the lack of diverse and positive representation has serious implications on African diasporic children. My view also has support in broader educational literature on the achievement gap of Black learners in general (see *The Mis-Education of the Negro* by Carter G. Woodson, John Ogbu's study, "*Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities: A Cultural – Ecological Theory of School Performance with Some Implications for Education*", American Psychology Association's "Ethnic and Racial Disparities

in Education: Psychology's Contributions to Understanding and Reducing Disparities") It is therefore important to examine how this gap in children's literature may have relevance to addressing the current academic achievements gap for new African Immigrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Achievement gap refers to the disparities in academic performance measured in grades, standardized tests, course selection, high school drop-out rates, college completion, etc. Looking at national studies, Reardon, Robinson-Cimpian argue that achievement gaps persist, particularly between black and white students. Reardon, Robinson-Cimpian & Weathers (2014) looking at national data argue that racial, ethnic and socioeconomic disparities in the academic achievement remain a stubborn feature of schooling in the United States.³ This is made clear in Lauren Camera's article, "Achievement Gap Between White and Black Students Still Gaping". She exemplifies that White 12 graders scored 87% higher than Black in math and reading standardized testing. The graph below is from her article and provides important visual representation of the gap.

³ Reardon, Sean F., and Joseph P. Robinson. "Patterns and Trends in Racial/Ethnic and Socioeconomic Academic Achievement Gaps." *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy* (n.d.): n. pag. Web. 3 Apr. 2017.

The Black-White Achievement Gap Persists (Figure 1)

The black-white achievement gaps for 12th graders, based on the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress, remain unacceptably large, not much smaller than those identified by the Coleman Report for 1965. Progress in closing the gaps outside of the South has been largely disappointing.



Chien-hua Kuo in an article titled, "A Post Colonial Critique of the Representation of Taiwanese Culture in Children's Picture Books," identifies three studies that critically examine the visual representation of different cultures and ethnicities in children's picture-books. Kuo highlight Bradford (2003) who adopts a post-colonial viewpoint to critically analyze the problem of the aboriginal representation in Australian picture books. Bradford quoted by Kuo asserts that "books for children are inescapably ideological, Australian picture books offer the child reader versions of the postcolonial experience...oppositional ones...and privileging the imperial center (2003, p.110) quoted by Kuo p.1. Cross (1995) is another scholar quoted by Kuo: Cross adopts multiple voices to critically analyze how the cultural icon of Christopher Columbus was presented in different picture books. According to Kuo, Cross's study raises the issue of

whose view was presented in any given picture book and what was missing? The third author that Kuo identifies is Miranda (1994), and she conducted a cross cultural comparative study of how India and its culture were presented in the picture book published in the United States and India. According to Kuo, Miranda like the African American scholar, Rudine Sims Bishop, highlights the issues regarding stereotypes and authenticity through critically examining character, theme, and point of view of the picture book.

Overall, these studies indicate children's books as carrying both implicit and explicit ideologies of representation. Indeed picture books exist for fun but they also exist as socializing and educational medium. Kuo argues that today with information technology most learning experiences and information that children acquire heavily relies on visual representation in different formats, such as printing and digital imaging. Traditional stories, including folktales, myths, fables, fairy tales, everyday experiences and the like, which pass down certain ways of coping, ethnic traditions, heritages, and cultural values from one generation to the next relied on traditional oral story telling in the past. With technological changes, the visual images and formats for relaying the information about positive self -image has changed too. With these changes, forms of storytelling have changed too, but the functions remain to some degree the same (Chien-hua Kuo). Today, both traditional and contemporary stories are being produced in various formats. The crucial part is that the visual representations contribute to the process of identity formation and the construction of social reality for the viewer. In other words, they shape perception of who they are and how they see the world. As a result, studies are emerging examining the issues regarding visual representation and achievement gap. We can see this in: *The Positive Effects of Picture Books Providing Acceptance of Diversity in Social Studies and Increased Literacy in Early Childhood Education*, a paper written by Natalie A. Heinsbergen.

My argument is that by examining this gap further and acknowledging that this is a world and society where visual images dominate people's daily lives, it is important to understand the impact of these images and visual representations on children's identities and in turn success in education. The achievement gap between Black learners as a whole compared to White is stark and telling of the change we need to see. Using the study from Camera's article helps us see that even with a 52 year difference, the plight of Black learners in the US remains a struggle with very slow-moving changes. Critiques of why Black learners are not able to be as successful need to include critiques of majority White literature. These critiques need to also be conscious of how this White literature impacts self-awareness and how not loving yourself is a detriment to performance abilities. Black learners face the trials of trying to succeed in education systems that aren't built for them. But as a subset of this homogenous blackness are African learners who face their own challenges of lack of not being represented in the curriculum, African authors and academic are not highlighted, African learners battle with the multilateral challenges, and most schools don't actively look to incorporate African experiences outside of slavery. Africans are neither seen nor heard. How can students do better overall if they are not receiving education that makes them and their true histories visible? With Kuo's research we see the impact that stories have in self-development and how this sculpts achievement.

How might this gap be addressed? Picture Books with Diasporic Relevance

A few books that I came across that give stories of the African Diaspora with dualistic tropes of American and African immigration, and contemporary African existence are as follows:

- *Boundless Grace* by Mary Hoffman;
- *Emmanuel's Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah* by Laurie Ann Thompson;

- *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Picture Book Edition* by William Kamkwamba;
- *I Lost My Tooth In Africa* by Penda Diakité and Baba Wagué Diakité ;
- *Africa Dream* by Eloise Greenfield.
- *My Heart Will Not Sit Down* 2012

Not all of the books were produced in between 2002 and 2015 and not many had authors of African descent. But their narratives are important to the new diaspora. Picture books by and about African diaspora, produced within the last 15 years are far and few between. The few books that I have noted above are valuable because they depict narratives that paint an additional lens into contemporary African countries. For example, *Africa Dream*, although it paints a homogenous picture of a monocultural Africa, it provides a connectivity between the US experience and an African experience. The main character explores parts of the continent where her family originates from. The book takes readers through the main characters journey of experiencing Africa through a lens that has been influenced by a diasporic upbringing.

Emmanuel's Dream is a book I would also recommend as it indirectly problematizes the African dependency theory: It gives way to the knowledge that Africans are not defined by the mass produced images of poverty that are dependent on foreign aid. Emmanuel's story reveals to readers that there are people in Africa who are intelligent, capable, dedicated. There are young engineers who are self-taught and can persevere despite socio-economic challenges. *My Heart Will Not Sit Down* is the last book I would like to highlight. It is important literature because, like *Emmanuel's Dream*, it challenges the dominant narrative of African suffering. The book's main character who is from Cameroon learns about The Great Depression in the US and wants to help the Americans who are suffering. This book allows readers to see how Africans can and do

empathize with other people's conditions and that we do not have to represent a people who are always in need of saving.

Although the options available at the Worcester Public Library are currently slim for the African diaspora, I do want to note the strides that the library is making as a whole. After speaking with librarians, I found out that the books available for Hispanic and Latino youth have grown exponentially over the years and is the best represented ethnicity. The library is currently working on a "New America" section of the library where books from a variety of cultures and ethnicities are ready to be checked out. Many of the books are in languages outside of English and help to embrace integration instead of assimilation of people. It helps embrace the idea that people from other countries still might have a significant relationship to their homelands and that that chapter of their lives might not be closed. This change that has been seen in the example of the library is progressing but Worcester's African immigrant population has been here longer than these changes began being implemented and that has had an impact on the Diaspora. This slow moving growth and the lack of representative literature that public schools have will continue to have negative impacts on learners' self-awareness and development.

Multicultural Literature Campaigns: What can we do?

As mentioned throughout my paper, various levels of research and text on the general multicultural children's literature gap exists. It has been explored through a few different lenses and yet it is still apparent that the gap continues. What has shifted is the visibility of the concern for addressing the gap? A surge of campaigns have popped up in the past few years. "*We Need Diverse Books*", is a campaign that has been leading the way in vocalizing the issue of under-represented narratives. Their hashtag has taken social media by storm. They have mobilized

through photo voice projects that have been shared across social media as well and they raise funds to support authors who write children's books featuring diverse characters.

“Multicultural Children's Book Day” is another recent initiative that has been created to get more ethnically diverse children's literature onto the private book shelves in people's homes and the shelves of schools and public libraries. The campaign uses donations and funding money to get multicultural books out to people at no cost to them. Their nonprofit efforts provide classroom resources like teaching curricula. The organization also takes an important stance in helping support authors that write diverse literature. They help spread the word and provide advanced marketing strategies.

Author, Zetta Elliot, has worked hard to advocate for diversifying children's literature. In the, “Why I Write” section of her website, Elliot has shared these powerful sentiments of why she intentionally focuses on disrupting white majority narratives:

“To be a person of color is to be marked in a peculiar kind of way. You are at once highly visible—obvious, conspicuous, apparent. Yet at the same time you are virtually invisible—unseen, overlooked, transparent. Children, I think, share this strange experience—they are to be seen and not heard, they are spoken of, and spoken for, but not often spoken to. As a child of color, I experienced this silencing effect while also enduring racial slights and slurs from strangers and family members alike... I write predominantly about Black children because I grew up believing I was invisible in the real world, and it hurt just as much to discover that I was also invisible in the realm of the imaginary... Ultimately, I try to tell stories that give voice to the diverse realities of children. I write as much for parents as I do for their children because sometimes adults need the simple

instruction a picture book can provide. I write books my parents never had the chance to read to me. I write the books I wish I had had as a child.”

From Elliot, we see another personal testimony, although from a Caribbean lens, reveals the felt legacy of the white dominant narrative. Elliot does what she can as a writer to advocate against the “apartheid of literature” as well as the complete erasure of POC narratives for youth. She acknowledges the feeling of being made invisible in the real world, but also invisible in imagination.

Although not in the vein of specific advocacy for African narratives, there are noteworthy advances in multicultural children’s literature that have been popped up through social media. These books help disrupt the literary apartheid for all Black people: *Carefree, Like Me* by Rashad Malik Davis is the first book of a series of seven that keeps all its protagonists as people of color who go on incredible adventures, and *Large Fears* by Myles E. Johnson invites conversation about the queer experience of a Black boy and the challenges of acceptance. However, *The Indigenous Adventures of Princess Vanae* by Vanae James-Bey, is an important example of disrupting the dominant narrative and connecting various African Diasporas. This coloring book was created by a 6 year-old Black girl and her family who had the vision of teaching young people about Black indigenous cultures around the world. The book teaches young people of the different Black histories in Africa and America and disrupts binding Black the experience and Black education to slavery.

Resources such as, “10 Books I Wish My White Teachers Had Read”, are bringing attention to the continued lack of cultural competency in public schools. This blog post published on Bustle is a call for white educators to continue to expand their knowledge-base so they have a

larger “tool kit” for teaching all students. The author, Crystal Paul, notes that white teachers in both “urban” school and private, predominantly white schools need this education:

“... fancy private schools aren’t off the hook, either. As one of few black students at the private schools I attended, I had white teachers show photos of apes and compare them to African women. I had a history teacher touch my braids and ask, in front of the entire class, “Is this horse hair? I hear that’s how they do that.” But I was lucky. The experiences of many other students of color in schools often includes dropouts, pushouts, arrests, and even violence at the hands of their educators.”

People in power in the education system can unlearn racial biases and spare people of color from microaggressions and outward racism by expanding, not only their student’s knowledge, but their own as well. All the books on this list are comprehensive books about the Black experience in the US. All the authors are people of color.

“We Read Too”, is an important advocacy initiative that has taken the shape of a literature application that highlights books that tackle diversity. Kaya Thomas is the iOS app developer. Thomas created the app during her undergraduate degree at Dartmouth College. Through her experiences as a Black woman, as well as her research, Thomas saw the continued need for and access to literature that breaks free from the dominant white narrative. Although the books are for young adults and adult readers, the impressive mobile directory mostly highlights important literature written by POC. Her work contributes to lessening the multicultural literature gap by creating hypervisibility and access to books that have narratives outside of the White lens. This helps in the promotion of self-awareness of POC.

Conclusion: Confronting Whiteness Through Multiculturalism

“Clicking Tongues”

By Lulu (Moyo) Hawkes

It's a sort of *backwards*,

Back and forth,

Chitchat— small talk, talk.

A lost in translation,

Better yet a revelation,

But not quite yet a revolution, talk.

A woman at the corner store,

Speaking in the comfortable rhythm of her language.

The broken beat, smooth and raspy vibe--

A bilingual interlude

Interrupted by the cocky confusion of a Caucasian

"If you don't speak English,

You better go back to whatever jungle you crawled out of, sister."

It's a kind of chatter that does not leave your ear,

That crawls up your spine and gnaws at your limbs—

A paralyzing, immobilizing noise that leaves

A brandished mark on your soul.

Leaves you tearing at your frayed flesh, unable to remove its staple:

"I'm not your sister."

Pale-skinned ignorance

With veins black as the hate

That spews from your pursed mouths.

If only you knew what

I know.

Where I've been,

What worlds I've seen,

Lives lived.

What is misunderstood,

Mocked and mimicked

By crisscross stares are those words;

Their cleverly placed syllable

A bilingual's paradise

A sort of lost in translation

Type of clarity and serenity

That leaves the tongue and escapes through the lips,

Talk.

A sort of talk you fail to think I understand.

Me, with my polished and primmed syllables

Of choreographed phrases and ample bodied statements.

In those hollow socketed eyes of yours
 You see me as some
 Skinny, well read, well spoken, worldly, worded, *white* girl
 Trapped inside the frame of the full figured, big hipped, nappy-headed,

Thick skinned

NEGRO

That stands in front of you never missing a beat,
 The brutal beat that comes thump-thumping
 Out of you, passed you lips
 Staining the air.
 Those are the beats that knock against my skull
 Till they find their way in.

You sink your venomous fangs into me
 Letting your poison disable me
 Like a lion that has just thrashed and wounded its unsuspecting prey.
 But you see, I am not so naïve as some wild game to be preyed upon

Because I am the

Well read, well spoken, worldly, worded,

Me,

Laced with pronounced hips and African mahogany skin.

You do not understand this chitchat—

The busy speak that parallels where I am from,
Because I do not back my words with a beautifully arrayed tonality,
You assume I must not know where I come from
My history and culture lost in the blurs of America.
That all I should ever be mindful of is your cotton picking,
Slave ship asylumed African ancestors
That is the white noise you hear when my mouth opens
And dribbles out words
You pompously ponder me
When I state my true nationality
One reminiscent of my profound Ndebele skies,
That pulls at my choked heartstrings
It's not a game of clicking tongues
Where you scoff and ebb from us
Our humanity and humility
Where you, simple-minded simpletons
Use every fiber of your racially closeted beings
To be unaccepting, unrelenting, unjustifiably skewed
You side sayer, do not see
That it's simply the simple talk
That gets us through.

Above is an original spoken word poem I wrote in high school in response to those quotes I recalled in the beginning of my paper. For me, writing my own experiences and learning from others from the diaspora helps me reclaim power that has been removed from me through experiencing postcolonial reverberations. It is my unlearning of oppressive socialization, re-educating myself and my healing. Writing down my narrative to share my experiences is how I confront whiteness and its detrimental impacts of my multicultural existence.

Despite the current political climate in the United States where exclusionary policies continue to threaten immigration and resettlement initiatives, the country is still home to millions of new immigrants and their children. Currently, in the US, recent immigrants represent 26% of the population, which is about 81 million people. It is estimated that the US population will grow from 317 million to 417 million by 2060 due to immigration. The country is becoming more and more ethnically/racially diverse every day. With continued immigration trends and the growing numbers of “minority” communities, the US is projected to become a majority-“minority” nation by 2043. With this hard evidence of the country’s demographic reflecting multiculturalism, more advocacy for multicultural literature is on the rise as well.

Through my analysis I was able to determine that there is in fact a multicultural literature gap, and there is a gap in culturally accurate picture books for the African Diaspora. White majority monoculture continue to be the standard. The continued stark contrast of books being published that highlight white characters and are written by white authors, over books that highlight African characters/themes and are written by Africans is telling. Also, the themes that are covered by these books are limited in their diversity and serve to stereotype Africa and African experiences. If there are such large numbers of immigrant populations and African immigrant populations, why are their narratives still not in abundance? And why are their diverse

story being diminished? The US imperialist “melting-pot” values are rooted in assimilation. Immigrants are expected to come with diversity but to leave that difference behind and adopt white “majority” culture. Multicultural literature advocates for integration over assimilation. Publishing organizations, schools, teachers, and other entities of education should want to divest from setting a monocultural standard. Instead, diversity needs to be integrated evenly, and encouraged. African American children’s author, Julius Lester said, “... literature is the royal road that enables us to enter the realm of the imaginative. Literature enables us to experience what it is like to be someone else. Through literature, we experience other modes of being. Through literature, we recognize who we are and what we might become.” Authors, child psychologists, and academics alike acknowledge the powerful use children’s literature serves in education. It helps young people learn about themselves and others who aren’t like them. For me, closing the gap means looking at that cultural space of visual representation in children’s literature to build positive images, therefore identities.

“Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I’m Jamaican or I’m Ghanaian. America doesn’t care.” This quote comes from Chimamanda Ngozi’s highly acclaimed book, *Americanah*. This quote has continued to resonate with me as to captures the erasure of individual identity and pride that happens to people who are Black in America. It is the relentless force of assimilation. Although not everyone included in my definition of Diaspora is here by choice (forced migrants), the state of being is the same: In America we are seen as “just” black. We are made to be a homogenous racial identity that does not acknowledge different cultural experiences. It is by this that I am arguing that children’s literature is radicalized when it becomes more multicultural and takes on traits of integrations and not assimilation.

Dehumanization and internalized oppression are the social consequences of the invalidation of students of color and their experiences in the class room. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire categorizes dehumanization as not only "whose humanity has been stolen, but also those that have stolen it" (Freire 44). Therefore, students of color have had their real life human experiences stolen by their white teachers and classmates. Moreover, it is the job of the oppressed to take back what was stolen for them, because they know their oppression the best. Freire states, "They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the Praxis of their quest for it, through the recognition of them since the necessity to fight for it." However, how can students of color being the oppressed, recognize the necessity to fight against racial oppression if there is no conversations to the why, who, what, when, where, and how of this issue of racism? Moreover, this is where Freire discusses the phenomenon that occurs in which the oppressed begin to view themselves as their oppressors view them (Freire). This sense of "self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed which derives from their internalization of the opinion of the oppressors' hold of them" (Freire 63). The oppressed being victims of dehumanization, internalize their oppression, leading to their lack of self-worth.

This is why teachers need to foster classrooms in which antiracist education is a priority. If not, the racism will never cease to exist, and the growth and development of students of color will be greatly affected negatively. Through my paper I have made important examples that illustrate how deep the gap in African children's picture books is. This real evidence should be taken into consideration when examining quality education practices and the well-being of students. With the list that I have compiled of exemplary Diasporic books, I suggest that educators work to incorporate these books into their classrooms. But I also suggest that schools actively seek out additional books that reflect African people and ask their students what kinds of

narratives they wish to see in their schools so that young people are being heard. I invite people to challenge their stagnant comfortability. Question that systems around us that exist to disenfranchise those made to sit on the margins. Ask what is uncomfortable to educate yourself and others. Listen more and be open to self-reflective headspaces. Most importantly, make space for narratives that are not being prioritized. They matter.

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