

(Not included in the recording) **Sara L. Scwhebel**: Welcome to the Center for Children's Books 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary lecture series!

This is lecture #3 of our 4-part series. If you missed the earlier lectures by Professor Emerita Betsy Hearne and associate professor Kate McDowell, the former is now up on our website and the latter will be so shortly. Huge thanks to CCB GAs Josh Altshuler, Alexandra Byerly, and Helen Salkeld for their behind-the-scenes work to make that possible.

In a moment, a survey will pop up on your screen: please complete it to help us learn about the people gathered with us today.

Before I introduce our speaker, Dr. Sarah Park Dahlen, and her lecture, titled "Advocacy and Infographics: Doing the Work for Diversity in Youth Literature and Librarianship," I want to offer some historical context about its theme, diversity and representation in children's books and the children's book world, and its connection to the CCB.

From the earliest years of the Center for Children's Books, the *Bulletin* editors have been attentive to issues of diversity and the need for children to see, in Rudine Sims Bishop's words (1990) "windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors" — that is, reflections of themselves in books, as well as entry points into the lives of others—or into another version of their own lives. During the first lecture in this 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary series, Professor Emerita Betsy Hearne reminded us that the *Bulletin* reviewed the now classic middle grade novel *Harriet the Spy* (1964) whereas *Booklist* refused to and the ALA bypassed it for inclusion on its list of notables. By contrast, the CCB's Zena Sutherland described the quintessentially queer children's book as "marvelously shrewd," a text displaying "fierce candor." A few years later, Sutherland described Robert Lipsyte's young adult sports novel *The Contenders* (1967) this way, "the book has a vitality and honesty that are impressive. There is drama without melodrama, and a realistic treatment of the burdens and problems of Harlem life" – a review that reads quite differently from *Booklist's*, "A Negro dropout finds relief from outside pressures and inner conflicts at a Harlem boxing center."

The CCB advisory committee has included such luminaries as Charlemae Rollins, the longtime head of the children's department at Chicago Public Library and a tireless advocate for diverse children's books (*We Build Together: A Reader's Guide to Negro Life and Literature for*

*Elementary and High School Use*) and Carla Hayden, the current Librarian of Congress and the first African American and the first woman to hold the post.

Rudine Sims Bishop gave the CCB's second endowed Gryphon Lecture: "Stony the Road We Trod: African American Children's Literature, Stories of a People's Journey" (2006). And more recently, Kafi Kumasi gave a Gryphon lecture titled, "Check the Rhyme: Harnessing Hip Hop's Enduring Literacies with Youth in Libraries" (2017).

Yet it is undeniable that the core reviewers for the *Bulletin*—and most speakers for the Gryphon—have been white, a reality that mirrors the demographics of the library profession as a whole. Today, we stand at a moment of renewed and reinvigorated interest in #OwnVoices literature for youth *and* in what has been termed #OwnVoices scholarship. We look with pride at Dr. Sarah Park Dahlen, an Illinois graduate who logged hours in and among the CCB's bookshelves and more importantly, in conversation with other scholars working at and visiting the Center. Her work has, unquestionably, helped to bring about our current moment.

I will keep my introduction brief because as many here today know, we've had the privilege of hosting Dr. Dahlen at Illinois this academic year! (That's how important she is to our field). A 2009 (PhD and MSLIS) graduate of the iSchool, Sarah Park Dahlen is now an associate professor in the MLIS program at St. Catherine University, where she has established herself as the foremost expert in diversity in contemporary U.S. literature and media for youth through her scholarship, advocacy, and mentorship—and through her co-founding of a transformative, open-access peer reviewed journal, *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*. Today, she'll share some of her work in that area, tracing its roots back, in part, to the CCB.

## Advocacy and Infographics: Doing the Work for Diversity in Youth Literature and Librarianship

By Sarah Park Dahlen

2021 March 23 on the occasion of the University of Illinois iSchool CCB's 75th Anniversary

Portions of this talk were adapted from: Dahlen, Sarah Park. (2020). "We Need Diverse Books": Diversity, Activism, and Children's Literature." In *Literary Cultures and Twenty-First Century Childhoods*, edited by Nathalie op de Beeck. Palgrave.

**Sarah Park Dahlen:** Thank you to the iSchool and to Sara Schwebel for inviting me to speak here at the CCB's 75th anniversary celebration. Congratulations to you and to all past and present colleagues who have made it what it is. As a graduate student, the CCB was a crucial space of learning and building community, and I have fond memories of meetings there. Today, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary, I'm honored to share a bit about diversity advocacy. First, I'll share my personal motivation for doing this work, and then because it's important to know the rich tradition of activism and advocacy that preceded us, I'm going to share many highlights from history. We'll talk about some of the work my colleagues and I have done, and then we'll close with where we are in this particular moment and the work ahead.

I'll start by reading from an essay I wrote titled "A Step from Heaven: On Being a Woman of Color in Children's Literature Studies" that was published in 2017 in *The Lion and the Unicorn*. I read from this essay to show how for many people, myself included, doing the work for diversity in youth literature and librarianship is both personal and academic. My essay begins,

"I didn't know I was invisible until college.

When I was a child, I did not see myself in youth literature. My teachers and librarians did not connect me with the scarce Korean American children's books that were then available. In college, I majored in history and Asian American Studies (AAS), and learned that my stories - and the stories of Chinese railroad workers, incarcerated Japanese, Vietnamese and Hmong refugees, Korean adoptees had been rendered invisible in the classroom and on library shelves.

But in 2001, Linda Sue Park published *A Single Shard*, a historical novel set in Korea, and won the John Newbery Medal the following year. Also in 2001, An Na published her immigrant coming-of-age young adult novel *A Step from Heaven*, which won the Michael Printz Award. In 2002, we commemorated the ten-year anniversary of the Los Angeles Uprisings. North Korea was in the news. By the time I began my Asian American Studies master's degree program, Korean pop culture (*Korean Wave*) was spreading like wild re across the globe.

It was in this context that I first read *A Step from Heaven* - I saw my culture in many places, but it was the **first** time I saw myself in youth literature.... My family was (is) very patriarchal, and I often felt invisible next to my brother. Like many Korean American families, we had domestic troubles, enormous pressure to do well in school, and other issues. And like many Korean American families, we didn't talk about them. So when I saw all of these through Young Ju's eyes, I almost couldn't breathe. *I wasn't alone*. I saw for the first time that these things happened to other people too, other people who looked like me... Each time I read *A Step from Heaven* I am overcome with emotion because I *see* myself, my story. *A Step From Heaven* is my mirror, the first and clearest mirror I have ever had.

Today, young people still have too few mirrors in which to see themselves, and windows to see others.”

The first time I met a Korean American children's book author was when Linda Sue Park came to the Koreatown branch of the Los Angeles Public Library in 2003. I was in my twenties.

Fast forward 11 years - my daughter met Linda Sue Park when she was a few months old, and she's also met and broken bread with Gene Luen Yang, Paula Yoo, Lisa Yee, Debbi Michiko Florence,

Andrea Wang, Bao Phi, Kao Kalia Yang, and Mike Jung. She's seen pictures of me hanging out with Minh Le, Ellen Oh, and Christina Soontornvat. Today she has shelves full of Asian American children's books. Her experiences as a child reader are already very different from mine.

But these writers and their books did not simply emerge. It took years of advocacy to get to this point, so let's step back into history and trace our way back into the present.

How far back should we go? We could start in “1492 when Columbus sailed the ocean blue”...

and began to kill and kidnap Indigenous communities. Or we could start in 1620 when Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock and began to destroy Indigenous livelihoods. Or we can start that same period with the kidnapping and enslavement of Africans. These events resulted in destroying existing civilizations. These events have also been warped and presented to young people uncritically as truth in countless picture books. But these events also shaped what we see here.

We don't have an anti-slavery alphabet without enslavement, without white supremacist ideology that says that Black people are not human, that Black lives do not matter. "free" "slave" "equal" "skin" "darker hue" "white man's slave." White women of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1846 were acutely aware of the injustice of enslavement and its relationship to whiteness. They believed this primer could educate young people about these injustices.

We cannot excuse racism and oppression by saying that enslavement was acceptable or normal at the time. It never was and not everybody believed in enslavement and many actively fought against it.

We could also go back to the original inhabitants of this land. In the 1800s (1829) a Pequot man named William Apess criticized white people's stereotypes of and prejudices against Native people. Stereotypes and prejudices fed the greed that led to policy such as Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act.

In the 1920s WEB DuBois and his colleagues created *The Brownies Book*, a magazine especially but not only for Black child readers, and in the 1920s and 1930s Puerto Rican librarian Pura Belpre did outreach to Spanish speaking communities in New York (and you can read about her in the excellent article "Tracing Activist Genealogies" by Lettycia Terrones in *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature* 1.2). In the 1930s librarian Augusta Baker started compiling bibliographies of the few children's books that depicted Black people.

In short, Indigenous people, people of color, and allies have been resisting, creating, and counter-storytelling for a long time.

This activism is global. In the aftermath of World War II, Jella Lepman believed that children's literature had the power to build empathy and understanding; she conceived of the International Youth Library (IYL) in Munich as a space where children's books from around the world could be gathered and made available for the purpose of cultural exchange. She also created the

International Board on Books for Young People organization because she believed sharing and discussing diverse children's books could promote global peace and understanding.

The second half of the twentieth century was tumultuous with decolonization, desegregation, the ongoing fight for women's rights, the Civil Rights Movement, resistance to the American war in Vietnam, and so on.

Underrepresented and oppressed groups fought for self determination, and students, faculty, and staff at San Francisco State University and UC Berkeley fought for ethnic studies programs. I am not alone in arguing that ethnic studies classes need to begin in K-12 to support the healthy identity development of BIPOC youth, and also so all youth know that ethnic studies history is American history.

The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act funded the increasing demand from teachers and caregivers for diverse books, so publishers began creating and marketing these new books to libraries and schools. But Joel Taxel notes that "government money for libraries was radically reduced" by the 1980s, and when a conservative backlash targeted the inclusive gains of the Civil Rights Movement, the output of diverse books also became stagnant.

But at the same time, our country's children continued to become more diverse.

Regardless of setbacks, people kept fighting. The Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) was established in 1965, and they labored for two decades to "promote a literature for children that better reflects the realities of a multi-cultural society" (*Council vii*, quoted in Ban eld). To this end, one of its enduring legacies is a guide titled "10 Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Racism and Sexism." First published in 1974, it has been updated on the Social Justice Books website. The Council also published *The Bulletin of Interracial Books for Children*, which included articles on topics such as orientalism in *The Five Chinese Brothers* (1938).

Another legacy is the opportunities it provided to writers of color and Native writers. Through its new writers' contests, the CIBC helped launch the careers of writers such as Walter Dean Myers. The CIBC was a significant force while it was operational.

Around the same time, multicultural children's literature publishers emerged. Children's Book Press, founded in 1975, was "the country's first publisher to focus exclusively on quality

multicultural and bilingual literature for children.” Bobby and Lee Byrd established Cinco Puntos Press in 1985. In 1988, Wade Hudson and Cheryl Willis Hudson founded Just Us Books, with the goal of publishing “positive, vibrant Black-interest books.” In 1993, Philip Lee and Thomas Low established Lee & Low Books with the goal “to publish contemporary diverse stories that all children could enjoy.” Lee & Low acquired Children’s Book Press and other smaller publishers, making them now the “largest multicultural children’s book publisher in the country.” While Lee & Low continues to grow, and as their books continue to garner critical acclaim, diversity imprints have also sprung up at major publishing houses: for example, Salaam Reads (2016) at Simon & Schuster, Rick Riordan Presents (2016) at Disney-Hyperion, Versify (2018) at Houghton Mifflin in Harcourt, Kokila (2018) at Penguin Young Readers, and Heartdrum (2021) at HarperCollins.

But why diverse books? Why diverse media? Why diverse toys? In the 1940s Clark doll test, children of different backgrounds were asked to choose among black and white dolls. The majority of children chose white dolls, demonstrating that Black children also internalize white supremacist ideas about blackness and beauty. This test, which was used as evidence in the legal fight against segregation, was [recently adapted](#), and the results were the same: children, Black or white, prefer white dolls and they mistreated the Black dolls, such as by stepping on them, while never stepping on the white dolls.

In 1965 Nancy Larrick published her landmark article, “The All-White World of Children’s Books,” in which she observed that the majority of children’s books hardly depicted any Black people, even in books taking place at the Central Park Zoo or on basketball courts. In addition to the harm this invisibility caused to children of color, she wrote that “the impact of all-white books upon 39,600,000 white children is probably even worse. Although his light skin makes him one of the world's minorities, the white child learns from his books that he is the king sh.”

Studies show that exposure to stereotypical depictions such as Pocahontas and mascots such as Chief Illiniwek cause “negative psychological consequences” for Native youth. The iSchool should be able to relate; in 2000, then GSLIS faculty wrote a statement declaring that “the continued use of a symbol now widely seen as racist creates a chilling atmosphere for all students who for whatever reason do not see themselves as in the mainstream... Moreover, it directly contradicts

much of the content of our teaching, especially when addressing the importance of providing accurate information, adopting a service perspective on providing information, and challenging stereotypes in literature.”

Similarly, the lack of diverse children’s books has a negative impact on identity development, while the presence of an ethnic studies programs in K-12 and higher ed result in higher engagement and retention rates for students of color. And let’s be honest, diverse books and an ethnic studies curriculum are good for everyone: white students need to know our stories as well.

We can draw a straight line from William Apess’ criticisms of Indigenous stereotypes to Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal Act. Similarly, we can draw a line from so-called Indigenous mascots to the erosion of Indigenous sovereignty, to the ongoing, modern day takeover of Indigenous land. We can draw a line from the invisibility and mockery of Black people to the modern day disregard for Black lives. We can draw a line from the anti-Chinese political cartoons of the 1800s to the exclusion of Chinese immigrants to the spike in anti-Asian hate crimes that is happening literally right now. According to the Pyramid of Hate, biased attitudes can lead to acts of bias, which can lead to discrimination and then bias motivated violence. Ultimately, unchecked biased attitudes can go up the pyramid and lead to genocide. And when and how might biased attitudes take root? In childhood, and through children’s literature.

And since people make children’s books, it’s important to know the diversity of the industry. In 1972, Viking editor Velma Varner noted that publishing needed more diversity. How are we doing now, about 50 years later?

In 2014, Lee & Low Books, the largest multicultural children’s book publisher in the United States, recognized that we didn’t have good data about how diverse or not diverse American publishing was, so I partnered with them to administer what became known as the Diversity Baseline Survey 1.0.

We found that US publishing was predominantly white, female, heterosexual, and able bodied.

And this surprised no one: the higher up the executive chain, the more white and male the data become. So, who holds power in publishing?

In comparing our 2015 data with their 2019 data, Laura Jimenez found that though the diversity numbers had ticked up a little, “There is no discernible change to any of the other racial categories. In other words, the field is just as White today as it was four years ago.”

The whiteness of publishing is documented by the Diversity Baseline Surveys and the smaller *Publishers Weekly* Salary Survey and is similar to the whiteness of librarianship and K-12 education.

Across the US, 87% of librarians are white and 80% of K-12 teachers are white; in both Wisconsin and Minnesota, 95% of teachers are white.

Speaking of librarianship, in 2016, ALSC published a blog post with member responses to the question “What Kinds of Programs do ALSC Members Want at ALA Annual 2017?” I was pleased to see that members had ranked “diversity in children’s lit” as their number one topic choice, but then my jaw dropped when I saw that “diversity in the profession” came in at number ten (Guest Contributor 2016). I interpreted this as, “We want to discuss diversity in children’s books, but not with the people that those books represent.”

And this brings me to social location, or our “place or position in history or society.” According to the Public Religion Research Institute, most white people are socially located in homogenous communities, in spaces where they tend to discuss important matters with people who share their identity categories. This means that if they talk about race at all, it’s likely with a group of fellow white people, whose experiences with and perceptions of race and racism are unlike those of people of color and Indigenous people. It’s no surprise, then, that white people tend to exhibit white fragility, a state in which they are unable to tolerate discussions of racism, even and especially as it pertains to white people.

And let me be clear: proximity does not make one anti-racist. Remember that white slave owners were proximate to those they enslaved.

What kinds of books does such a homogenous industry publish?

We’ll use the Newbery and Caldecott as one measure. Pop quiz! Go ahead and put your answers in the chat.

When was the Newbery Medal established? **1922 (99 years)**

How many Asian Americans have won the Newbery Medal? Can you name them and their books?

**1928** *Gay Neck, the Story of a Pigeon* by Dhan Gopal Mukerji (Dutton)

**2002** *A Single Shard* by Linda Sue Park (Clarion Books/Houghton Mifflin)

**2005** *Kira-Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata (Atheneum Books for Young Readers/Simon & Schuster)

**2018** *Hello, Universe* by Erin Entrada Kelly (Greenwillow/HarperCollins)

**2021** *When You Trap a Tiger* by Tae Keller

When was the Caldecott established? **1938 (83 years)**

How many Black people have won the Caldecott Medal? Can you name them and their books?

**1976** *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears* by Leo & Diane Dillon;

**1977** *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions* by Leo & Diane Dillon;

**2010** *The Lion & the Mouse* by Jerry Pinkney

**2017** *Radiant Child* by Javaka Steptoe

**2020** *The Undeclared* by Kadir Nelson

How many white people have won the Newbery? The Caldecott? I quit counting after 20, going backwards from 2020 to the 2000s. If I ask you to put their names and titles in the chat, we'd be here all day.

Since 1985, the Cooperative Children's Books Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education has been tracking the "by" and "about" of children's books. Between 1985 and 2014 the "about" number fluctuated between 7-14%. It jumped to 20% in 2015 and 31% in 2017.

Last year, when the CCBC posted the 2019 data, they included a new series of graphs, such as this one, which shows the 2018 and 2019 numbers side by side. They write, “The above chart shows the percentage of the total number of books we received. Take a look at the first two columns on the left, labeled "Black/African." In 2018 (blue), 5.8% of the total books we received were written and/or illustrated by at least one person who is Black/of African descent. In 2019 (red), that number dropped slightly to 5.7%.”

And remember these numbers depict only *inclusion* - not the quality of the writing, the time periods in which the stories are set, genres, perspectives, accuracy, authorship, etc. Remember that a lot of books - historically and even those published today - contain both covert and overt stereotypes and inaccuracies. We have to unmake dominant, stereotypical images that are fiercely lodged in our minds, and remake more accurate images. In short, we have a lot of unlearning and relearning to do.

Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop said readers need to read about their own experiences as well as experiences unlike their own. **Window** books “[o]er] views of worlds that may be real or imagined,” and “are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created by the author.” In **mirror** books, “we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience,” which, Sims Bishop argues, is a “means of self-affirmation.”

Dr. Debbie Reese built on the windows and mirrors concept, saying sometimes

curtains are closed to keep people out. For example, some Indigenous stories may not be appropriate for telling during the summer or in front of non-Indigenous audiences. In these cases, the curtains are closed, and we non-Indigenous people need to respect that.

In 2016, in partnership with the CCBC, illustrator David Huyck and I created this infographic, using Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop's concept of mirrors and windows, to communicate not just how many of the books depicted Indigenous youth and youth of color, but also to show how many depicted white children, animals, and other inanimate objects. In this infographic we see immediately that each BIPOC child has a small mirror, while the white child has multiple mirrors in which to see himself.

In 2019, we released the 2018 infographic, adding the element of cracked mirrors to demonstrate that not all books are accurate or authentic. Those distortions, inspired by conversations with Debbie Reese, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, and Edith Campbell, are represented here by cracks in the mirrors and shards of glass on the ground.

David and I made both infographics publicly available on my blog in both PDF and JPG format so that they could be used to push forward more discussions about the lack of diversity in youth literature publishing. They have been presented at countless conferences and published in books and articles.

Citing Dr. Sims Bishop, graphic novelist Gene Luen Yang published a comic about how *not* having exposure to stories about himself and his classmate inhibited him from seeing himself *and them* in their full humanity. As an adult, he wondered if he had read children's books depicting South Asians, and if his classmate had read books depicting Chinese Americans, they might not have disliked each other so much. He cited the spunky Indian protagonist of *The Grand Plan to Fix Everything* by Uma Krishnaswami and Mike Jung's *Geeks, Girls, and Secret Identities*, which depicts a biracial Asian kid fighting villains with his friends. Had they had these books as children, might their relationship have been different?

The CCBC data also shows that while the publication of books depicting Black people has increased, the number of books written by Black people has **not** increased proportionally.

#OwnVoices was coined by Dutch author Corinne Duyvis to amplify books where the protagonist shares identity categories with the book's creator. They are books written by insiders.

According to this graph, there is a growing gap between the by and about data points, meaning fewer of the books are #OwnVoices.

Librarian Edith Campbell wrote, “The call came out for more diverse books and white authors asked ‘how can I write diverse characters’ when *they should have asked* how can I support authors of color...”

On *The Brown Bookshelf*, writer Paula Chase Hyman wrote, “Just barely half of the books about us were written by us (51%) in 2007. And ten years later, though there was a 48% increase in books showcasing African Americans, **only 33% were written by us**. More books about us, but even less by us.

...We want to tell our stories. All of them. Urban. Rural. Suburban. Historical. Contemporary. Fantastical.

Sorry, but no we don’t want anyone else telling our stories, because they’re OURS.” (2018)

This diversity problem does not exist in isolation. The “diversity gap” is a problem in power and media industries generally. A few years ago, Lee & Low made infographics using the CCBC data and other industries. For example, in Silicon Valley, men make up 82% of the workforce.

In Hollywood, 99% of the Academy Awards for best actress went to white women.

In American politics, decisions affecting an increasingly diverse populace are made by mostly cis gender white men of a certain age.

In 2014, all the right pieces fell into place to catapult the diversity movement forward. Social media erupted when people learned that a panel at BookCon was set to feature thirty white authors and a grumpy cat. In reaction, a diverse group of 22 authors, publishers, and bloggers organized a #WeNeedDiverseBooks twitter campaign to push for a conversation with a “roar that can’t be ignored.” We Need Diverse Books was established and the organization now provides diverse booktalking kits, grants awards for new books, and works with Scholastic to diversify their book catalogs. They host writing classes, have published short story anthologies, launched an app, and at my invitation participated in the first two Asian American Literature Festivals hosted by the Smithsonian and Library of Congress. Undoubtedly, WNDB is a major presence at all kidlit related conferences. The late Amy Rothschild wrote, “The efforts of We Need Diverse Books echo those of

the Council on Interracial Books for Children... Indeed, movements to change the faces of children's literature often come hand in hand with broader social movements. It may be no accident that the year that brought us #BlackLivesMatter also brought us #WeNeedDiverseBooks."

And here I'll just make it plain: if we believe in the importance of diverse books, we must also

believe in the fight for Black lives, for queer lives.

If you Google "We Need Diverse Books" you'll find the logo, book displays, event flyers, and selves such as this by Mike Jung. He wrote, "#WeNeedDiverseBooks because my daughter was 3 when she first said she hates having brown eyes & hair." When my daughter was 3, I thought about this every day. My daughter is now 7, and I *still* think about this every day.

"#WeNeedDiverseBooks so LGBT teens aren't killing themselves or feeling alone or ashamed." Access to diverse and affirmative representations can literally be a matter of life and death for young people. We *all* need to see windows and mirrors in the books we read.

What if most of the books that depict people who look like you focus on your oppression... but, it's not quite oppression? Both *A Fine Dessert* (2015) and *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* (2016) were concerned with American history and depicted, without much comment within the text, enslaved people who appeared content with their circumstances. So content, they were smiling. When *George Washington* was published, public pushback led to the trending of hashtag #slaverywithasmile on Twitter.

Initially, some of the blame was leveled at the whiteness of the publishing industry, because both author and illustrator of *A Fine Dessert* are white women, and the book reviewers are also likely white women. The conversation became more complicated with *Birthday Cake*, whose author, illustrator, and editor are all women of color.

Within days, Scholastic recalled *Birthday Cake*, saying it didn't meet their standard for quality. This was unprecedented.

*Birthday Cake* was the first in what became a growing list of recalls and revisions. Shannon Gibney was reading an ARC of *Sky Blue Water*, an anthology to which she had contributed, when she read in the introduction something about the Vikings being in MN before Columbus discovered America. [beat] Haven't we established that Columbus didn't "discover" America? [beat] The editor

revised the sentence. Then, we learned that a non-Black writer made up a fake Black dialect in the novel *When We Was Fierce*. After mounting criticism, Candlewick postponed publication. And in *Out of Darkness*, Ashley Hope

Perez revised the phrase “Nah, I’m a low man on the totem pole” after Debbie Reese pointed out that totem poles are not hierarchical. Perez replaced it with “Nah, no such luck.”

And just last week, Debbie Reese shared that in the new edition of *Because of Winn-Dixie*, Kate Di Camillo had swapped out *Gone with the Wind* for *David Copperfield* because in the original her characters were “reading from a book that I cannot in good conscience recommend to my readers.” What Di Camillo does *not* say is that last year, after St. Paul Public Library selected *Winn-Dixie* as its One Book, One Minnesota program, concerned community members pushed back. The timing is, as we say in Minnesota, *interesting*. And to demonstrate once again that pushback to *Gone with the Wind* is not new, here is an image that Debbie Reese found showing Black people protesting the book and movie in the 1940s.

White allies have also been showing up to dismantle racism. In 2015, a group of white librarians established Reading While White with the goal of “understanding how our Whiteness impacts our perspectives and our behavior.” This blog is a tremendous resource and these librarians are in the trenches alongside Indigenous people and people of color activists.

We also need diversity and advocacy in our scholarship. In 2016 I was invited to speak at the Children’s Literature Association’s Needs of Minority Scholars panel. ChLA recognized that the eld was experiencing a crisis, first where there were few people of color among its membership, and second, where even those of us who *were* active members were not always made to feel welcome. I spoke alongside Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, Marilisa Garcia Jimenez, and Laura Jimenez (who are not related) to a standing room only audience. We were all junior faculty at the time, so after the conference our moderator Katharine Slater gathered up our talks and proposed to publish them in the *ChLA Quarterly*, the association’s journal. They declined, saying our essays were not a good t. So instead, we proposed them to *The Lion and the Unicorn*, who published them under the title #WeNeedDiverseScholars in their very next issue. But that winter, colleagues and I decided that if even the journal of our association, who had *solicited* our panel, declined to then publish our essays,

then perhaps it was time for a new journal, so we started *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature* (or RDYL) and published our first issue in 2018.

In 2019, *RDYL* published an essay titled, “The Cat is Out of the Bag: Orientalism, Anti-Blackness, and White Supremacy in Dr. Seuss’ Children’s Books” by Katie Ishizuka and Ramon Stephens. They analyzed 59 Seuss books in terms of how human characters are racialized and how they present issues of power, master narrative, and subservience - and how these depictions echo the racism found in his political cartoons and other works. Okay, trigger warning, here come some racist images.

Ishizuka and Stephens weaved together many instances of racism in Theodor Geisel’s life and works, such as his Blackface performances, his racist depictions of Japanese Americans in political cartoons before and during World War II, and stereotypical renderings of Native Americans in his college newspaper and advertisements. They demonstrate a *pervasive pattern* of racism. In terms of power, they document for example that in one particular series of advertisements, “Many of these Flit ads featured racist and xenophobic depictions of Arabs, Muslims, and Black people as caricatures or monkeys in subservient positions to White men” (p. 4). He created over 400 political cartoons for a New York publication, and many exhibited “explicit anti-Japanese racism and depicted Japanese and Japanese Americans as a violent threat to the United States” (p. 4). Ishizuka and Stephens state that “His work dehumanizing and vilifying the Japanese fueled paranoia and suspicion of the entire ethnic group during the war” (p. 5).

Along with scholar Philip Nel, Ishizuka and Stephens elaborate on the well documented fact that *The Cat* is based on blackface minstrelsy. In 2017, writers Lisa Yee, Mike Curato, and Mo Willems refused to participate in a festival celebrating the opening of the Seuss museum because the museum had put up a mural from a page in *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*. On the upper right you can see the original image of the man with yellow skin, and on the bottom right, the mural where his skin is no longer yellow, but he’s still otherwise rendered stereotypically.

You may be thinking, but he was a product of his time! To which Ishizuka and Stephens point out the consistency of his racist cultural production between the 1920s to his death in 1991. Not all white people “of his time” engaged in overt racism, or used their platforms to disseminate

racist narratives and images nationally, and globally, as he did. Minimizing, erasing, or not acknowledging Seuss' racial transgressions across his entire publishing career denies the very real historical impact they had on people of color and the way that they continue to in consequence culture, education, and children's views of people of color" (35).

Just a few weeks ago, on March 2, Seuss Enterprises announced that it was ceasing publication of 6 books because they "portray people in ways that are hurtful and wrong." It was the right decision, but we knew what would happen next: one of the unfortunate responses to decisions such as these are accusations of censorship or #CancelCulture, or what some of us like to call "accountability" or "consequences."

In 2016, in the immediate aftermath of the *Birthday Cake for George Washington*iasco, writer [Daniel Jose Older](#) wrote an article titled "The Real Censorship in Children's Literature: Smiling Slaves is Just the Half of It," in which he says, "Pulling a book because it's historically inaccurate and carries on the very American tradition of whitewashing slavery is classified as 'censorship', while maintaining an ongoing majority white industry that [systematically excludes narratives of color](#) is just business as usual." Accusations of censorship and #CancelCulture also rippled through the youth literature community in the summer of 2018. Earlier that year, ALSC had charged a task force with examining the names of its awards, beginning with the [Laura Ingalls Wilder Award](#). After conducting research and surveying membership, at the 2018 ALA Annual conference the task force presented a thorough report to the ALC Board, which voted unanimously to change the award name to the Children's Literature Legacy Award. Like our Seuss article, like the Seuss Enterprises decision, like #SlaveryWithaSmile, pushback was erce and immediate. ALSC had to remove board members' names and their places of employment from the website because of the onslaught of angry emails and phone calls. In the aftermath of the Seuss Enterprises announcement, I too had to remove my phone number, email, and mailing address from the university website and take Ishizuka and Stephens' email addresses o the article.

Finally, while I have your attention, a few comments about where we are in this particular political moment. Were you *surprised* by the killing of 6 Asian American women last week? For many of us, as Association for Asian American Studies president Jennifer Ho said on NPR, we are not

only *not* surprised, we *knew* this would happen. After more than a year of the “Chinese virus” and “kung flu,” it was only a matter of time.

Since March 2020, the organization Stop AAPI Hate has been tracking incidents of harassment against Asian Americans. By the end of February, they had received almost 3,800 reports, mostly verbal harassment, and mostly experienced by women. Some of the worst reports include having acid thrown in their face, stabbings, a violent push that led to death.

Despite Asian American Studies having just celebrated its 50th anniversary, the histories and cultures of Asian Americans in the United States have been invisible at worst, distorted at best. We are not seen as equal or as human. As actor John Cho reminds us, the reality is that our Americanness is conditional, depending on the needs of the majority culture. They needed us to build the transcontinental railroad. They incarcerated us during World War II. They needed to call us the model minority so they could put down Black people. And now, with the coronavirus, we’re no longer the model minority or exceptional Americans, instead we are once again diseased yellow peril. This pivot is sudden but has always been lurking, and sometimes, sometimes it manifests in a mass shooting.

It’s not enough to celebrate us in May or to publish a reading list during a spike in anti-Asian racism. No, we need a seismic shift in society and especially in education. As Pawan Dinghra, incoming president for the Association for Asian American Studies wrote for [CNN](#) last week, “Education needs to go beyond the bare resources offered for Asian American Heritage Month every May... teachers across the country should routinely incorporate Asian Americans into their existing lessons to show how they are part of the American story.” And Dr. Nicole Cooke said last year in June, “reading is an important first step. Anti-racism is a long game. Instead of just reading, I want to challenge you to go the distance. I want you to do the real work of becoming anti-racist.” She then listed 3 stages: critical self reflection; critical consciousness; and action and advocacy (and you can read her full article in *Publishers Weekly*).

So this is where you come in. This is where library staff and K-12 educators and caregivers *and you* come in. Children’s books with Asian Americans existed when I was a child. In my Gryphon Lecture I demonstrated how white people could write good books depicting Koreans in the 1940s.

Laurence Yep has been publishing since the 1970s and Marie Lee published her young adult novels in the 1990s, when I was a teenager. **But no one told me about them.** As far as I know, my friends didn't have them either. An entire generation of Asian American adults claims *The Baby-Sitters Club's* Claudia Kishi because she was the only Asian American teenager we ever saw in a book. This invisibility impacts not only us, it also impacts non-Asian American readers. In the absence of a variety of reflections of Asian Americans and our experiences, non-Asian Americans are left to see us as caricatures and stereotypes. That's why it's important to do Asian American programming year round.

Invite Asian American Studies scholars and community activists to give lectures and run workshops. Make space for community dialogue. If you make a display of civil rights materials, include for example, Paula Yoo's *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial that Galvanized the Asian American Movement*. In terms of broader changes outside the library, advocate for the inclusion in ethnic studies in K-12 curriculum, and/or the creation of ethnic studies programs at your local colleges and universities. Study the 1960s Third World Liberation Front movements that activated for ethnic studies in San Francisco and Berkeley, and ght for ethnic studies today. Work with teachers to get that content into the curriculum. Students, demand that your teachers and professors include this content in your classes as well.

The convergence of the killings of Black people including Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Philando Castile, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, John Crawford, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, as well as the rise of #Ferguson, #BlackLivesMatter, #OscarsSoWhite, #WaterIsLife, increasing Islamophobia and homophobia, gun violence, anti-Asian violence, and other movements are absolutely related to the ongoing conversations around children's literature and race.

However, as long as industries and professions remain overwhelmingly white, and until there is diversity at all levels and in all types of positions in publishing, education, and librarianship, change will be slow. As Frederick Douglass said, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will." Change must be demanded. It must be systematic and intentional, and it must be achieved together. It is the responsibility of everyone in publishing, education, and librarianship to produce, teach, and promote diverse literature by people of color and Indigenous

people, and this must be done with volition, purpose, and hope. Philip Nel writes, “we must recognize that We Need Diverse Books and Black Lives Matter are not just slogans. They are directives” (Nel, 202).

In 1969, in an open letter to editors, Augusta Baker noted that in the 1930s people had recognized the need for children’s books for African American children and provided guidelines on what editors “should and what they should not do when publishing books about African Americans” (cited in Horning 2015). We have yet to fully heed her guidelines or meet her demand. Forty years later, Zetta Elliott’s open letter to the publishing industry issued a similar demand: “again and again I hear white editors deploring the lack of publishable material— ‘Those stories just don’t cross my desk!’ Maybe, dear editor, you need to get up from your desk and go out into the world, into the communities where these writers reside” (Elliott 2009, “Something ...”). Given that the publishing industry, like librarianship and education, is demographically homogeneous, it is time to take more seriously Baker and Elliott’s call. In the era of #WNDB, #DivPitch, #OwnVoices, and other movements, agents and editors can no longer claim that they don’t have access to good stories written by people with the lived experiences depicted in those stories. Librarians can not claim they don’t know good diverse books or how to get kids to read them. As ALSC board member Amy Koester says, a librarian’s job is to get good diverse books into every readers’ hands.

Last week, award-winning writer [Grace Lin](#) wrote a moving reflection on Facebook. After sharing that she has been publishing for 22 years, she wrote, “I know this borders on arrogance and self-absorption, but my first thought was how I had failed. How the books have failed. That while at every book conference and book festival someone proclaims, ‘Books save lives!’ to rapturous applause, the books did not, could not save the 8 people in Atlanta. They did not, could not make the 6 Asian women human to the killer's eyes” (March 19, 2021).

She continued, “But the books have never been enough. They are just tools and tools must be used to work. For the books to work, they need people to use them. They need all of you” (March 19, 2021).

Our young people need all of us to do the work.

We have *long* advocated and activated for diverse children’s books, but there have been times when efforts stalled, when pushback was fierce. KT Horning warned that there had been “the

beginning of what seemed to be a genuine change” both in the 1960s and the 80s, “and both times everything stopped.” We can’t stop. Quite literally, this is a matter of life and death.

The work that began in the 1800s with William Apess speaking up against inaccurate Indigenous representations continued through the early 1900s with Pura Belpre and Augusta Baker working to get mirrors in front of Puerto Rican and Black children. It continued with the work of the Council on Interracial Books for Children in the 1960s and 1970s. The work continues today as we fight for Black Lives and against anti-Asian hate and for clean water and for families to stay together. We can read echoes of Augusta Baker’s words in the words of Zetta Elliott, and echoes of the CIBC in the work of the We Need Diverse Books movement. But echoes fade unless they ricochet and are amplified, and our work today and moving forward is to amplify all our work and all our words. Our work today and moving forward is to maintain the “roar that can’t be ignored.”

We must come together to advocate for our communities, especially but not only our communities under attack. With all these tools - books, infographics, data, and yes, social media too - we must keep doing the work. By coming together and advocating for and amplifying one another, we can change the trajectory of our children’s lives. Let’s do the work. THANK YOU.