THE NEGRO IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
1930-1969

A Study
Presented to
the Director of the Honors Program
Ball State University

by
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. 1930-1939</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower elementary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle elementary</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper elementary</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. 1940-1949</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower elementary</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle elementary</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper elementary</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. 1950-1959</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower elementary</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle elementary</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper elementary</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. 1960-1969</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower elementary</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle elementary</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper elementary</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the study</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings of the study</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the study. When the white man began settling upon the land of the New World, he was determined to make the country his own. Before long he brought black men to the land to help with the struggle of survival and fortification. Although the black man was brought to America against his will, he soon adopted the country as his own. As a slave the black man was denied many of the pleasures and opportunities that the new nation possessed. He worked long hours, but the fruits of his labors helped entrench him deeper into the system of slavery. The white man prospered, the nation prospered, and slavery became more and more important.

Finally, slavery was abolished within the United States. The black man was no longer a slave, but his status changed little within the country. He lacked education and general knowledge about living in America. He was not properly prepared for freedom and the responsibilities that attend it. All this seemed to combine with the prejudice and resentment of the white man to bind him to endless despair and struggle.

Slowly the black man has striven to release himself from the ties of his past. Each man has become a symbol for his race; each man's deeds have become the deeds of his people.
Many people concede that the contributions of the Negro to America are many, but are black children aware of these contributions? Do these children understand the struggles of their forefathers? Can they find a presentation of black children as they know black children exist? Are white children able to find a realistic presentation of black people? Are they allowed to see that black children have much reason to be proud of their heritage? Are all children denied knowledge and understanding because the literature available to them reflects few, if any, of these considerations.

This study is an attempt to answer these and other questions. Summarily, its purpose is to determine whether the content of children's literature offers an honest, objective presentation of black people or whether the content corroborates and spawns prejudice and discrimination.

Procedure. To attain the above purpose, the writer has read sixty-nine books that have black people as main characters. To make workable units for consideration, the books have been divided by the decade in which they were first published. Generalizations about the books of each decade on the bases of content, setting, illustrations, stereotypes, and race relations have been made.

Six books of each decade have been examined more closely.
Two books each for lower (k-2), middle (3-4), and upper (5-6) elementary grade levels have been compared and contrasted. Special attention has been given to speech, illustrations, stereotypes and race relations in these examinations.
CHAPTER II

1930-1939

Before the fourth decade of the twentieth century the Negro in children's literature is almost non-existent. When he does appear, he is usually an uneducated slave like Jim of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Twain) or an ignorant native like Little Black Sambo (Bannerman). Although slavery has been outlawed for over sixty years in the United States at this time, the Negro remains bound in the minds and the literature of Americans. He is given names and is referred to with terms that remind everyone of his servitude. His struggle for understanding and acceptance is not helped by Negroes whom children and parents meet through books.

During the Depression years some authors of children's books take a new look at the Negro. In some cases he no longer speaks unreadable dialect; in some he is no longer a slave. The Negro child is presented with naturalness and charm, and his playmates are other Negro children. Some expression of the frustration and struggle of the race is heard for the first time.

Nevertheless many of the shortcomings of Negro representation remain. The number of books about black people as contributing citizens is small. Blacks remain slaves whose speech is almost incomprehensible in the majority of
cases. The illustrations present them as ugly people with distorted features. As characters they are uneducated and completely unworthy of admiration.

Only in books like Jerome Anthony (Evans), Tobe (Sharpe), and Zeke (Ovington) does the young Negro find people with whom he can identify. Sad-Faced Boy (Bontemps) is a much better representation than Little Black Sambo (Bannerman), but stereotypes are plainly visible and detract from its success. The slave girl of A Shipment for Susannah (Nolen) is not plagued by dialect, but the overall presentation seems to glorify slavery.

Compared to books of the same time the few titles above are milestones of accomplishment. In Nicodemus and His New Shoes (Hogan) the Negro children are so ugly and distorted that they look like comic caricatures, not children. Their language is ungrammatical and the presentation is wholly repulsive. The Negroes of Miss Jimmy Deane (Knox) are all ignorant slaves who do not want freedom because the white folks are so good to them. Terms like nigger, darky, and pickaninny are used liberally.

Lower elementary. Two books which are written for the youngest elementary children are Nicodemus and His New Shoes by Inez Hogan and Tobe by Stella Sharpe. Although both books have country settings, the presentations can be contrasted sharply.
The Hogan book is one of a series about Nicodemus which was popular prior to and during World War II. Nicodemus is a small boy who could have been an outstanding contributor to racial understanding if he had been presented realistically. He falls far short of this, however, because of his language and pictorial presentation. He speaks ungrammatical dialect which is hard to read. He refers to his mother as Mammy, and his best friend's name is Petunia. In one part of the book Nicodemus thinks to himself: "'What de name er goodness has dat chile got on her feet?'" Later Petunia wails; "'No, I ain't hurted but I is all muddy, an' my high heel shoes is ruined.'"2

Because the characteristic features of Negroes are emphasized and distorted, the illustrations are the most insulting element of the book. The children's lips are painted bright red, and Petunia's hair is in small pigtails all over her head.

The plot of the story is appropriate and meaningful for a small school child. As the title indicates, Nicodemus gets new shoes. Before the story is finished, the new shoes, Petunia, and Nicodemus' little sister are in the mud. The

1 Inez Hogan, Nicodemus and His New Shoes, p. 10.
2 Ibid., p. 27
shoes and the children are cleaned, and the story ends with
a song.

Tobe is an entirely different presentation of Negro
children. It is a picture book which attempts to familiar-
ize the reader with a Negro family and life on a farm. The
family is a pleasant change from the ones usually associated
with Negro families; both parents are at home, and the father
is employed.

Instead of illustrations, Sharpe chose to use photo-
graphs for her book. The black and white shots resemble the
type of pictures that might be found in a family album;
they are informal and realistic. The children are natural
and honest.

Tobe is the narrator of the book; he is the guide for
the farm tour. The language of the narration resembles a
beginning reading text. It is somewhat stilted and unreal-
istic, but the book could be read by a child who has some
reading experience.

Daddy has two pigs. They are big pigs.
We like to feed the pigs.
We feed them corn and sweet potatoes.
Sometimes we feed them peanuts.3

Middle elementary. Two books of this decade for children in
third or fourth grades are Miss Jimmy Deane by Rose B. Knox

3 Stella Sharpe, Tobe, p. 25.
and A Shipment for Susannah by Eleanor Nolen. Each book involves a slave girl and her relationship with her white mistress. The Nolen book, however, is far superior to the Knox effort.

Miss Jimmy Deane is the white mistress; Darling is her slave. Jimmy is the youngest child, and she is pampered and spoiled by the whole household. Darling is devoted to Jimmy and Jimmy, to her. They are a mischievous pair who have adventures wherever they go. When Darling has an opportunity to be free, she refuses and wants only to return to the wonderful white folks and Jimmy.

The picture on the cover of the book is representative of the black and white illustrations inside this book. The slave girl looks as if she has knobs on her head instead of pigtails. The one colored drawing is not so distorted; here Darling looks much more human and more natural.

Another offensive part of this book is the terms and the speech of the Negroes. All the slaves speak dialect, but the white folks have no Southern drawl represented in their speech. The dialect is similar to that used in Inez Hogan's book, but the contrast between black and white emphasizes its use here. The terms which would offend Negroes include nigger, darky, and pickaninny. The whites as well as the blacks use these terms to refer to the slaves.

The most disturbing element of the book is the attitude
toward being a slave which is presented. Although some slaves probably did have good care and were contented, the idea of one person's owning another remains disturbing. This book, however, leaves with the reader the idea that slavery was a great good and that free black people were to be pitied.

Similar shortcomings detract from Nolen's book, A Shipment for Susannah. The attitude toward slavery is similar, but the idea that all masters are not so kind as Susannah's is expressed. There remains no expression of the evils of slavery to balance the presentation, however. Although no attempt to present a dialect is made, the slaves do often use poor grammar.

The illustrations of this book are more acceptable than those in the Knox book. Susannah's hair is in pigtailed, but they look like pigtailed, not knobs.

This book is an historical fiction tale about the slave girl who might have been a companion to Nellie Custis, granddaughter of George and Martha Washington. The girls celebrate their birthdays, and the "shipment" in the title is a surprise gift for Susannah.

The most important contribution of this book is its information about plantation life. Susannah is trained in cloth making and other slave responsibilities. The reader becomes familiar with the small town quality of the plantation
through the activities and conversations of the character. The dependence upon outside supplies and the way of trading and purchasing of early colonial days are explained through the shipment which brings the surprise for Susannah.

Upper elementary. For the upper elementary children two books of this period are particularly worthwhile reading. Some shortcomings can be noted, but older children should be better equipped to evaluate and to understand these than beginning readers.

Mary Ovington's Zeke is concerned with the adjustment and maturation of a teen-aged boy who is spending his first year away from home. He is attending a vocational school where he meets new people and finds out about himself. Zeke suffers because he is accustomed to praise and encouragement and because he yearns to be "one of the guys."

The speech of the boys is grammatical most of the time. Sometimes they slip into old habits, but they are all struggling to speak correctly. Zeke's uneducated brother speaks ungrammatical dialect, but his language becomes a frame of reference for the accomplishments of the boys at the school.

The illustrations of this book are few in number, but they present the characters naturally and realistically.

The biggest drawback of the book, perhaps, is the presentation of Zeke's family. His father and mother are
dead when the story begins, but Zeke's recollections acquaint the reader with them. His father was a drunkard who was cruel to his wife and children; Zeke was glad when he died. His mother was a hard working woman who babied and pampered her youngest child, Zeke. Her aspirations have great influence on Zeke and his brother and sister. The stereotyping in these instances both add to and detract from the book. The plot is enhanced, but the Negro representation is hurt.

Two important ideas are presented in this book. Zeke lacks appreciation and awareness of the contributions and achievements of his race. He thinks, at first, that only white people have much money and are successful. He learns at school that his race has much reason to be proud. He sees blacks who are well-educated and respected. He is introduced to the accomplishments of other blacks. Another appreciation he gains involves a young African man with whom he rooms. This man is a noble chieftan who has come to America for education. Through him Zeke learns about the blacks of other lands. Zeke never seems to realize his connection with the African heritage that Natu, the chieftan, offers him, but the nobility and achievements that are Natu's are thoroughly respected.

Shuttered Windows by Florence Means is another worthwhile book of this period. Several important ideas are presented to the reader for contemplation in this story of
maturation and self-understanding.

The book involves a young Northern girl who is returning to the home of her dead father in the South. She is going to enter a new school and live with her grandmother during vacations. Her adjustment to the difference between opportunities and attitudes of the North and the South and her own responsibility to her race are the prime involvements of the book.

The few pictures of the book are extremely well done. The characters are presented as proud, beautiful people with strong features. They are Negroes who possess bodily strength and grace.

Means presents contrast in speech similar to that in Ovington's Zeke. The difference between educated and uneducated is made, but the difference between Northern and Southern Negro speech is added. The main character can barely understand her Southern counterparts, and the difference between her schoolmates and their families is clearly evident. The dialect used is very difficult to read and detracts somewhat from the whole presentation. The following is an example of the dialect used by the uneducated adults:

"Hit de wuss sto'm ever I knowed," she mussed aloud. "I mind it good. A young woman I was den-risin' thirty-fi'--; an' pow' ful, else you wouldn' be here dis day, honey chile.--Us done pick de cotton, me and yo' gre-granddaddy, and ready fuh dig de sweet taters. Hit
The Southern youth speak as follows:

"It was some no-count mischievous chile!" Richard said quickly. "Granpa, we ain' gwine think no more about it. They ain' no--any--magic anyway. Booker teach us that."5

The contrast between life in the North and in the South is an important part of the book. Harriet, the main character, is shocked by the living conditions and educational facilities of her people in the South. She encounters "Jim Crow" trains and waiting rooms for the first time and is disconcerted by the discrimination behind these rules. The book, then, leaves the reader with the feeling that life in the North is wonderful, especially in contrast to Southern life. There is no expression at all of any inequities that exist in the North.

The question of responsibility for others is also important. Harriet must choose between returning to the North and staying in the South. She must choose between her own selfish desires and the needs of her people. Her decision to stay and to fight illiteracy, suspicion, and despair is one which is timely even today. Each young person must decide some time whether to live for himself alone or for

4 Mary White Ovington, Zeke, p. 46.
5 Idid., p. 171.
himself by helping others.

The conflict between Negroes from different parts of America is clearly presented. Harriet and another Northern girl ridicule and scorn their classmates; the Southern girls resent the intrusion and protect their self-respect by ignoring the Northerners. Only when the girls realize that they are all Negroes who can help their people only if they work together, does the conflict end.

Conclusions. Thus children's literature of the Depression presents Negroes to the readers. In most cases the black people are rural inhabitants whose speech is different. The presentations of slavery persist in stressing the idea that slaves were well treated and that they did not desire freedom. Most illustrations are natural and appealing, but those few that are distorted are very distasteful. Some books for upper elementary children reflect the problems and feelings that Negroes are having, and the necessity of quality education for improvement is emphasized.

The most important reflection that the books of this decade mirror is the segregation of races that exists. Black children live, play, are educated, and attend church only with other black people. Only in the books which deal with the relationship of slave to mistress does any integration in any sense exist.
The Negro, then, has come a small way toward honest presentation, but the literature of the day reflects the inequities of life and the problems at hand that have to be resolved in the future.
CHAPTER III

1940-1949

During the decade of World War II the presentations of Negroes in literature change in many ways from the previous decade. The ideas of integration and brotherhood are introduced. The sports arena becomes a new setting for success, and the black people are becoming associated more with the city than with the country. Harlem especially is used as background for stories such as My Dog Rinty (Tarry and Ets), Hezekiah Horton (Tarry), and Steppin and Family (Newell). Federal housing projects are mentioned in Willow Hill (Whitney) and Melindy's Medal (Faulkner and Becker), and the effects of discrimination are introduced to the readers for contemplation in All-American (Tunis) and Skid (Hayes).

Books for primary grade children are not so numerous as they were during the previous decade, but an increased number of books is available for older children. Stories that appeal especially to boys because of the emphasis on sports and male main characters are written.

Some books that have Negro main characters are not attempting to influence readers toward a positive stand concerning integration but are attempting to present young Negroes as they truly exist. These books do not use racial turmoil and strife as a background; more pleasant realistic
situations and settings are chosen.

**Lower elementary.** The books of this decade for lower elementary children include Lorraine and Jerrold Beim's *Two is a Team* and Ellen Tarry's *Hezekiah Horton*. These authors have chosen different themes and settings, but both books are excellent presentations for young children.

*Two is a Team* is a book about working together. Although the main characters are small boys who are of different races, this difference has nothing to do with the plot of the story. The boys do disagree, but the motivation for their argument is each one's belief that he is more capable of doing a specific task than the other. They discover later that team work provides more fun and more success in their projects.

The illustrations of this book present both boys naturally. Although the medium chosen for the colored pictures does not allow the illustrator to define the facial features of the Negro boy, he is not distorted or stereotyped. Other Negro characters are featured with equal fairness.

The fact that the authors have chosen a black boy to be a friend of a white boy is the most important accomplishment of this book. The two boys are shown playing and working together, and each boy is a guest in the other boy's home. There is no sign of segregation or discrimination in this
book, and it lacks any didactic tones.

Hezekiah Horton is a book about a young boy who loves cars. He spends his free time sitting on the steps of his Harlem apartment building watching the traffic. His dreams come true when he and his friends are chauffeured around the block in the most beautiful car Hezekiah has ever seen.

The illustrations of the book present the Negro characters honestly. The characteristic features of the race are not emphasized or distorted. The speech of Hezekiah and the other Negro characters is no different from the white characters' speech.

This book reflects the segregation within the cities of this decade. Negroes live in apartment buildings which house other Negroes. There is, however, no fear or distrust of white people displayed by Hezekiah or his friends.

The only element of the book which might offend black readers is the allusion to Hezekiah's future life. The white man offers the boy a chauffeur's position when Hezekiah is older. Hezekiah is thrilled by the offer, but black children today might resent the implication of servitude.

Middle elementary. Melindy's Medal by Jeorgene Faulkner and John Becker and Bright April by Marguerite de Angeli are two books written for middle elementary readers. Both books
have female main characters, but the authors have different purposes for their stories.

*Melindy's Medal* is the story of a young black girl's bravery and the brave deeds of her forefathers. Most of the book is concerned with the exploits of Melindy's ancestors. These segments, which are related by her grandmother, add to the adventure of the book and give the reader some insight into the singular achievements of Negroes of earlier days.

The authors have presented Negroes without stereotyping and without prejudice. The speech used by Melindy and her family is not dialect. The family does not have two parents, but the explanation for the situation is acceptable. The illustrations also are done without prejudice; Melindy and her family are natural.

The problem of housing is introduced to the reader through the experiences of Melindy's family. The work of the Federal Housing Administration becomes quite important to them because they are allowed to move into a new apartment building. The reactions of these characters help the reader understand how important these projects are to black residents in a city.

*Bright April* concerns a young Negro girl's first confrontation with prejudice and discrimination. An understanding of the frustration and hurt that a child and concerned parents can experience because of the actions and words of
prejudiced people can be gained through this book.

The illustrations of this book are exceptionally well done. The soft quality that is achieved makes them appealing, and April and her family become more believable because of them.

Two qualities detract from the success of this book. The didactic tone which is readily perceived offends the reader. The Biblical passage "Ye shall know the TRUTH, and the truth shall make you free!" is used to emphasize the theme of the book. This sermonette and the attitude reflected by April's Brownie Scout leader hide some major gains made by the book. The leader expects April to accept with understanding and kindness all the cruelties she experiences and all the shortcomings that are displayed by the white girls. With the letters D.Y.B. signifying Do Your Best she reminds April to smile and to accept the disdain with which she is treated.

The major contributions of this book cannot go unmentioned. The type of family and home environment presented is important. The struggle of everyone in the family to work hard and well is significant. The bared feelings and emotions of people who face prejudice and discrimination for reasons that are complicated and difficult to understand make the book worthwhile reading. If the reader is not antagonized by the

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6 Marguerite de Angeli, *Bright April*, p. 88.
preaching, perhaps the good of the book will make him more understanding of the feelings of Negroes.

**Upper elementary.** Jesse Jackson's *Call Me Charley* and Florence Hayes' *Skid* are books for upper elementary readers. Both are concerned with the problems encountered by Negro boys who are enrolled in white schools.

*Call Me Charley* is the first of three books about Charley and his family and friends. Because his family has just moved into a white neighborhood, the book concerns Charley's adjustment to a new school, to new friends, and to new situations. Of equal importance to this book are the problems that his best friend who is white has as he seeks understanding of Charley's behavior and attitude.

The illustrations and speech of the Negro characters reflect understanding and respect. The only situation of the story which might distress black readers and which might lead white readers to stereotype Negroes is the employment of Charley's parents. His father is a chauffer and handy man; his mother is a cook and housekeeper. An implication of the story which is less tangible but just as distressing is the position of Charley's father in the family. His father seems less determined and less forceful than Charley's mother. She makes the important decisions, and the males abide by them. This supports the belief that Negro families are matriarchal
and that Negro men are less respected than Negro women.

An element of the book that enhances the presentation is the relationship between Charley and his white friend. His friend is not prejudiced, but he fails to understand Charley's problems. He is naive about the treatment and discrimination that Charley faces. He does not understand why the nickname Sambo offends Charley. He fails to comprehend that the school principal's attitude toward Charley is not normal. This naivete is difficult to accept, but perhaps this is one problem underlying black-white relations. The white man fails to understand the black man's problems and frustrations; the black man misunderstands the white man's attitudes.

Although Skid resembles Jackson's book in many ways, the differences between them are many. Skid is the only black student in an all-white school, but he has no close, white friends to help him. Skid's parents move from the South with concern about Skid's education uppermost in their minds; Charley's parents move because of a job offer. Both boys must prove their scholastic abilities to remain enrolled in their schools, and both must work hard to keep abreast of their peers. Charley faces more adult discrimination than Skid, but Skid has more problems with his parents' attitudes. A part in a play is very important to each boy. Charley must fight the prejudices of whites to get his role; Skid must
influence his parents to allow him to take part.

The illustrations of Skid are not distorted. The speech of Skid and his family differs little from that used by white characters.

The most important contribution of this book is the revelation of the fears and apprehensions of Negro parents. Skid's parents fear that he will be beaten or treated harshly his first day of school. These fears are not completely unfounded, but the treatment Skid receives is more subtle and much harder to fight. The apprehension appears when Skid wants to portray a butler in the school play. His mother feels strongly that he should not do this. She feels that Skid will help stereotype himself and those of his race. Only the persuasion of her husband and the pleading of her son move her to change her mind.

The position of white people who do not discriminate and who fear misunderstanding is also revealed. Skid's teacher almost refuses him the part because she does not want his parents to think that she is stereotyping Skid. Only when he assures her that he will explain her attitude to his parents, does she agree to let him be the butler.

Conclusions. This decade brings many changes to the Negro in children's literature. Black people move to the cities, and Harlem becomes an important setting. Sports are included
in more books, but slavery is an ignored subject.

The most important innovations of this decade are integration and the attack on discrimination. Black and white children are shown working and playing together. In some books both races struggle to improve the treatment that black people receive. The prejudices that gird discrimination are revealed for evaluation for the first time.

The promise of a new decade and the accomplishments of this one bring hope that remaining inequities will be resolved.
CHAPTER IV

1950-1959

The books of the decade 1950-1959 bring a new appreciation of the African heritage of black people. Amos Fortune, Free Man (Yates), The Long Black Schooner (Sterne), and Freedom River Florida 1845 (Douglas) include scenes which describe life in Africa and the kidnap of the natives by slave traders.

A new perspective to the presentations of slavery is added during this period. Because of the descriptions mentioned above and because of the accounts of the conditions on slave ships, slavery is viewed less ideally. The attempts of slaves to escape are important bases for books of this time. A Lantern in the Window (Fisher) and Escape to Freedom (Jones) depict the work of the Underground Railroad to get slaves into Canada.

The need for books with Negro characters continues for lower elementary children. Few black faces can be found in picture books or books for the beginning reader.

Race relations as they are presented in the books with contemporary settings differ little from those of the previous decade. The problems of prejudice and discrimination continue to hamper Negroes in The Barred Road (de Leeuw), Hold Fast to Your Dreams (Blanton), and The Swimming Pool
In South Town (Graham) violence and death are new dimensions of the problems that plague Negroes and their friends.

Lower elementary. Two books which were written for lower elementary children are Bronzeville Boys and Girls by Gwendolyn Brooks and Fun for Chris by Blossom E. Randall. The books have little in common, but they are both excellent presentations for young children.

Bronzeville Boys and Girls is a book of poetry which expresses the feelings of children in the city. The poems describe the joy and the sadness of city living. Many poems that are included in the book convey feelings that any child can understand. One boy wishes to push the crowding buildings away from him. Other children pretend that they are queens or knights of long ago. The feelings of Otto who did not receive any Christmas gifts that he wanted can be understood by any poor child. One girl is lifted with the song and singing of Marian Anderson.

Although the book expresses feelings of children of any color, the illustrations show all the children as Negroes.

Fun for Chris is the story of a small boy and his Negro friend, Toby. Included in the book is an explanation of why people are different colors. The boys are told that they are different colors because their parents are different
colors. Chris' friend is brown because "that is the way God planned him to be." The book also explains that more people in the world have dark skin than have light skin.

The illustrations of this book are colorful and natural. They help the book appeal to readers of all races.

One segment of the story indicates a true understanding of children. Chris wonders whether Toby is brown all over his body. Toby reveals his stomach which Chris touches to see if it is like his own. The warmth and texture of the Toby's skin assures Chris that everything is the same but the color. This awareness of the questioning mind of children and the way these questions are answered make this book a very good one for children.

Middle elementary. For middle elementary readers are the books, The Swimming Pool by Alice Cobb and Mama Hattie's Girl by Lois Lenski. These books have different settings and very different presentations of Negroes.

The Swimming Pool is set in an integrated neighborhood of a city and is concerned with racial and religious discrimination. Children who are Negro, Jewish, Italian, Catholic, and Protestant learn to work together; the adults learn to follow the example given by the children. The

7 Blossom E. Randall, Fun for Chris, p. 23.
children set out to improve the appearance of the neighborhood, and they are responsible for improving the inhabitants as well.

No distortion or exaggeration is evidenced in the illustrations of this book. The term nigger is used as an expression of derision, but it is used in anger and frustration. Its use adds to the theme and the purpose of the book.

Except for the stereotyping of the Negro family, this presentation is quite well done. The Negro boy's father is dead; this fact does not enhance or even seem necessary to the plot.

One scene of this book illustrates the irrational quality of prejudice. A Jewish man exclaims to his family and the black boy, Preston: "What a neighborhood! First it's niggers, then it's poor white trash. Now it's dagoes. And what next, I ask you?" He is completely unaware of the words he has used and cannot understand Preston's reluctance to enter his house. The man likes Preston, but the idea of Negroes in his neighborhood repels him.

*Mama Hattie's Girl* is a story of the maturation of a young Negro girl. She is unhappy with her life, her family, and her friends. She dreams of going North, but her

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illusions are ruined when she finally gets there. When she returns to her home, she and her home have changed.

Lenksi's presentation is not enhanced by the illustrations and the speech of the characters. Although the illustrations are not distorted, they are not so appealing as those in many books of this decade. The children seem to be a stereotyped image of Negro children with many pigtails and broad lips. The Negroes speak dialect with many grammatical errors; the few white characters speak faultless English. The dialect is not so hard to read as that found during the decade 1930-1939, but it continues to stereotype Negro characters in white readers' minds.

Many stereotyped characters of this book are readily perceived. The parents presented are separated, and the father seems unconcerned about his wife and daughter until they are reunited. He is presented as somewhat lazy and irresponsible. The mother is the dominant of the pair and makes the decisions. The grandmother is an uneducated, pathetic character. She is dependent in many ways upon her white folks; she always spends her money foolishly and irresponsibly.

The belief that a difference exists between conditions in the North and conditions in the South is emphasized in the book. The North continues to be the promised land of the children who live in the South. They invent stories of what life is
like there, and they all dream of going there some day.

A clear view of the segregation which exists is presented. The white people live in another part of town, but no one seems concerned. Segregation is an accepted part of life.

_upper elementary_. One of the upper elementary books of this decade helps the reader understand and appreciate the African heritage of Negroes. Another book for this level is one which includes violence and death in its presentation of prejudice and discrimination. These books, _Amos Fortune, Free Man_ by Elizabeth Yates and _South Town_ by Lorenz Graham, are excellent books about Negroes.

The Yates book, which won a Newbery Award, relates the experiences and accomplishments of a slave who earned freedom for himself and who bought freedom for others. Fortune is a character worthy of great respect from people of all races.

The illustrations convey the pride and grace of the Negro characters, and the speech they use is like that of the white characters.

The African heritage which this book brings to the reader is needed by all races. All races need to understand what the slaves were before their capture and bondage. All need to be aware of the warriors, chiefs, and other natives who were kidnapped from their homes, bound and forced to
work like animals to insure their safety. This book helps readers understand why black people have much reason to be proud of their African ancestry.

That Fortune as a free man makes valuable contributions to his race and to his community is an important element of this presentation. By helping others acquire freedom, he helps his race. His contributions to his community in the forms of hard work and money add to his esteem and to the esteem of his race.

This book also helps the reader understand the slavery system. The kidnapping, the trip to America, and the slave sales are described. The requirements that some slaves had to fulfill to acquire freedom and the ways slaves were sold among owners are explained in the book.

The presentation of slavery is not unfair. Fortune is well treated. He is taught a trade and is allowed to work for his freedom. Many slaves were not so fortunate as he.

South Town concerns the problems encountered by a Negro family who lives in the South. The prejudice that the members of the family experience daily and the discrimination that they can not escape are vividly detailed by this book. The problems of equal education and equal employment opportunities are emphasized, and other areas of differentiation are exposed.

The few illustrations of the book are not distorted.
All the black characters are realistic and natural. The speech of all characters reflects a southern influence, and the Negroes do not speak differently.

Because this book is presented from a young Negro boy's point of view, insight into his reactions and impressions can be gained. Through him the reader meets the disdain of his white employer and the suspicion of many of the white citizens. One understands his reaction to the demands of his white neighbor who feels that any of the boy's activities are less important than hers. Sharply the idea of white supremacy focuses.

The discrimination of employers against Negroes is an important factor in the story. The practice of pay differentiation between white and black workers is exposed. Advancement opportunities are also denied Negro characters because of their skin color.

Violence and the resulting death are new to children's literature involving Negroes, but in reality these are a common part of existence. The cruelty of white citizens is terrifying, and the anguish of Negroes is deeply moving.

The realization that policemen are not exempt from prejudice and that the treatment Negroes can receive from them is not always fair or honest is a disconcerting element of South Town. The frustration of having no legal protection is clearly illustrated by the predicament of the Negro family.
This book might strongly influence the reader to believe that race relations are much worse in the South than in the North. Although differences can be found in the two areas, prejudice and discrimination know no regional bounds.

Conclusions. During this decade an awakening interest in how the black man was brought to America is reflected by the literature. Slavery is viewed objectively, and the Underground Railroad is important in a number of books.

Little progress in race relations is reflected by children's literature of this time. Prejudices and the resulting situations differ little from those of earlier books. Negroes remain resigned to their second class status and continue to tolerate the treatment of whites.

For the first time the problem of discrimination is presented to the youngest elementary children in a few of the books which are available for them.

The decade closes with the challenge of much to be done in all areas of race relations. More books are needed for young children. Stories that are not concerned with the problems of being a Negro but of being a growing child are needed.

The realism of some books suggests that more violence will be presented in the next decade. It appears as if pressure for change is building.
CHAPTER V

1960-1969

In this decade the presentations of Negroes in children's literature are changed in several ways from the presentations of earlier decades. Young elementary children have a greater selection of books which have black characters. More books are written with black characters who could as easily be white or yellow or red. The ghetto or the inner city is a more prominent setting as socially and educationally the nation's eyes are focused on the plight of the children who live there. The attitude of Negroes is presented as being different; the Negroes do not appear so passive as their predecessors.

For the lower elementary child books like The Case of the Cat's Meow (Bonsall) and Hello Henry (Vogel) show black and white children playing happily together. The children in Corduroy (Freeman) and Whistle for Willie (Keats) are black, but they could be any race. The inner city is presented to young children in Evan's Corner (Hill) and Benjie (Lexau).

For older children the ghetto is part of The Mystery of the Fat Cat (Bonham) and Joe Bean (Agle). A Summer Adventure is about a boy who just happens to be black. The changing attitudes of blacks are reflected in Classmates by Request.
(Colman) and *A Wonderful, Terrible Time* (Stolz).

Many of the problems and situations are the same as those of previous decades. The troubles of the only Negro girl in a private white school are shown in *Tessie* (Jackson). The prejudices and the discrimination in *Shades of Difference* (Bartusiak) and *The Empty Schoolhouse* (Carlson) are too similar to those in books written during the years 1940-1949.

**Lower elementary.** Two excellent books of this decade are written for the lower elementary children. *Evan's Corner* by Elizabeth Star Hill reflects the growing concern for inner city children. Ezra Jack Keat's book, *The Snowy Day*, is one of the several books of this decade which have a black main character who could as readily have been white.

*Evan's Corner* is the story of a young Negro boy's desire to have a place of his own which is as perfect as he can make it. He discovers with his mother's help that it is not enough to make only his corner perfect; he must help someone else do the same.

The illustrations of this book are excellent. The background is the city—the city of crowded streets and bustling people. Everything that one usually associates with the city is there except the ugliness. The people are appealing and believable; the illustrations give the characters life.

The conditions with which Evan and his family live
are very important to this book and to ghetto dwellers.
Evan's family consists of six children and the parents, and
all of them live in two rooms. His mother has to share a
kitchen which is down the hall from their apartment. Evan
and one of his brothers sleep on a couch.

Materially Evan's family's needs are great, but spiritually
the family is rich. The warmth and love of the family
are conveyed by the text and the pictures. The relationships
among the children are a mixture of fun and respect. They
are not stifled by their surroundings, and they have not dis­
carded hope.

The Snowy Day, a Caldecott Medal winner, tells of the
fun and adventure that a small boy has playing in the snow.
It is a simple yet sensitive story of snowballs, snowmen, and
tracks in the snow.

The illustrations are colorful and humorous. Peter,
the main character, is natural and very childlike. The snow
is heaped and piled and swirled as Peter plays.

The important accomplishment of this book is the fact
that Peter is black. The story is of a child who is any
color, but the illustrations make him black. The story is
one with which any child can identify, but the illustrations
help the black child more readily to associate himself with Peter.

Middle elementary. The Empty Schoolhouse by Natalie Savage
Carlson and A Summer Adventure by Richard Lewis are two very good books about Negro children and their families.

The Empty Schoolhouse concerns the integration of a parochial school in Louisiana. The methods by which whites and blacks are intimidated and threatened by outside influences are exposed. It is the story of one girl and her relationship to the school, to the community, and to other children.

The illustrations and speech used in this book are not offensive or distorted. No dialect is spoken, and the characters are pictured realistically.

The manifestation of the prejudice of some of the townspeople of this story is the appeal to outside influences to keep integration out of the parochial school. Two men are hired to intimidate blacks and whites. Fear is fostered through public remarks, telephone calls, rocks thrown through windows, and open hostility. Because of the fear for life or because of the fear of losing a job, parents transfer their children from the school. This, of course, defeats integration.

The fear that is bred, however, is not unfounded. The threat of violence is fulfilled when the main character, a young Negro girl, is shot. This event illustrates how dangerous prejudice can be. It can twist the minds of people so that they can strike out even at young children.
Stereotyped characters and situations are not included in *The Empty Schoolhouse*. The Negro family is complete, and the father has a decent job. One of the daughters is a school drop-out who quit in the sixth grade. She intimates in the story that she failed often and that she had no desire to learn. She, however, is not presented as a stupid person. She is a hard worker who perhaps recognizes her own shortcomings. Her job as a scrub girl at a motel is in reality dependent upon her education as well as her color, but it is suggested that she would not have been allowed to quit at her age if she had been white.

The attitude of the Negro family is the most unrealistic element of the book. All members remain passive during the trouble. There is no anger and no call for action. They act defeated. Perhaps continuous defeat and humiliation have made them this way. In any case their attitude is much different from that expressed in other books of this time.

*A Summer Adventure* involves a young Negro boy who attempts to establish his own zoo. He catches and pens animals until he learns through his own experiences that confinement is not always good.

The illustrations of the book present Ross, the main character, as "all boy." He is natural and believable. The speech that he and his family use is not dialect and has no grammatical errors.
The family in this book is not stereotyped either. The family is complete, and the father is definitely dominant. He is greatly admired by his son who depends upon him to answer his questions.

The reason behind this book is not to show a Negro family's reaction to prejudice or discrimination. Although the theme emphasizes the importance of freedom to all creatures, the book seems to have been written for children who are interested in nature and in animals. It contains a great deal of information about animals' living habits and about the interdependence of the animal world.

Upper elementary. Two books for upper elementary readers are *Durango Street* (Bonham) and *Classmates by Request* (Colman). The setting for both books is the ghetto, but the view presented is quite different.

In *Durango Street* the reader meets the members of gangs who are fighting for life in the depression and ugliness of the ghetto. The members are caught between the police and the other gangs who are waiting to beat, to cut, or to kill them. The struggle is for self-respect and survival.

There are no illustrations in the book, and the speech is not stereotyped. The speech is not grammatically perfect, but the characters are school dropouts who do not have any reason or desire to speak properly. The grammatical errors
include the use of ain't and himself which might be used defiantly instead of ignorantly.

The family of Rufus, the main character, is one which is commonly associated with Negroes. His mother is responsible for the support of three children. Her husband deserted the family after the birth of the youngest child. The question of the identity of Rufus' real father is never answered. There are two forceful Negro males to counteract the impression left by the family situation, and the situation is important to the plot of the story.

The most important contribution of this book is the insight it presents about gangs and the young people who are trapped into belonging to them. The reader understands the necessity of organization as Rufus rationalizes his own behavior. If a boy has any pride, he must fight. To survive an attack by several boys he must have several boys to help him. One gang spawns another just as one fight leads to the next. The situation is a vicious and endless circle which traps the young of the ghetto.

The reader is not likely to feel complete sympathy for Rufus and his plight, however, because of his attitude and behavior. He shirks his responsibility to himself, to his family, and to the parole officer. He has little money and plenty of time. The one job that he gets he leaves because
the boss is prejudiced against Negroes and against reformatory boys. Rufus does not try again. He talks of getting a job, but spending his hours on the streets or at someone's home is what he chooses to do.

Race relations are involved very little with the plot or theme of the book. The prejudiced employer mentioned earlier is the only representative of black-white relations. Other minorities are caught in the web of the ghetto, and the relationship between Mexican-Americans and Afro-Americans is strained and hostile. There is no mention of the belief that "whitey" has trapped the Negro in the ghetto or that he is responsible for the poverty and ugliness of life there.

Although police officers are important to the story, no allusion to police brutality or prejudice is made. The boys do not cooperate with the police, but they do not attack them as bigots or racists either.

Classmates by Request is the story of two teen-aged girls who are trying to be friends but who are involved in situations which strain friendships. The white girl, Carla, and the black girl, Ellen, are fighting discrimination, but personal involvements and predicaments make them apparent enemies.

The book has no illustrations, and the speech of Negro characters reflects no discrimination or stereotyping.

Through Ellen's attitudes and behavior the reader
understands the problems and the responsibilities of being a Negro. Ellen does not want to boycott in behalf of the desegregation of the community schools because she fears the white community and because she is a senior who wants to finish her last year. Her family argues with her that she must not think only of herself but must consider her people. The boycott is for all Negroes, not just for those in school. She has a responsibility to other Negroes to participate. Later in the book Ellen changes her mind about demanding rights and justice when discrimination seems to have touched what is important to her. In the first instance she did not want to go to school with white students, but later she did want her father to have an opportunity that he had apparently been denied because of his race.

The attitudes of the Negro characters to the white community or to white individuals are varied. Ellen fears whites. She has no desire to be friends with a white person or to go to the home of a white person. She resents all whites and trusts none. Ellen's father understands the predicament of some white people better than does his daughter. He has friends who are white, and he believes that many whites are willing to help Negroes personally and collectively. Ellen's boyfriend understands how important the support and help of white individuals are to the fight for equality.
He is friendly with white teen-agers, but he does not exclude the possibility of discrimination.

The feelings of the white girl and her father are important for the understanding of this and other racial situations. Carla wants to be friends with Ellen, but Ellen ignores her. When they finally do begin a relationship, the happenings in the community make Ellen distrust whites again. She shuts Carla out of her life. Carla maintains, after several attempts to reach Ellen to prove that she is not like all whites, that to do anything more would not be "treating her like an equal, it's treating her like a baby who has to be indulged." She is persuaded to see that Ellen is different because of the experiences that she has had. Ellen must be treated as an individual, but Carla must understand that Ellen's mistrust of whites has been reinforced more often than has been her belief that whites can be trusted. Ellen's father understands and is sympathetic to the cause of the Negroes, but he will not compromise his beliefs or convictions to satisfy them. He will not choose any Negro who is not qualified for his integration commission. He understands and expects criticism, but he knows that he has not discriminated against any qualified Negro in the community.

This question of what is fair and non-discriminatory

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9 Hila Colman, Classmates by Request, p. 144.
attitude and treatment is very important to *Classmates by Request*. The book implies that in person-to-person relationships the problems and experiences of the Negro must be considered but in cases of qualification, education, or ability the Negro must be treated objectively. In either case the Negro must not be included or excluded because of his color.

Another important point of this book is the motivation behind boycotts and demonstrations. The reasons behind the demands for integration are not always to get close to whites or to be friends or neighbors with them. One reason is expressed by Ellen's boyfriend in the following conversation.

"Why do you want so badly to go to school with white kids?" she asked him abruptly.

"Oh, Ellen, I don't. But I don't want to be told that I can't. Do you see the difference?"10

Thus Negroes do not want to be denied certain opportunities, nor do they want their interests to remain without representation.

**Conclusions.** Some changes are made in the presentations of Negroes in children's literature during this decade. The greater volume of books which have black main characters is an improvement over preceding years. A more complete exposition of the problems of housing, education, employment, and survival that are complicated by prejudice and discrimi-

10 Hila Colman, *Classmates by Request*, p. 33.
nation is made. The attack against racism, prejudice, and discrimination hits at the fears and mistrusts that have spread these problems to both sides of the color line. The plight of the ghetto dwellers is described, and the reader sees the apathy and indifference of many of these people. Not all books are concerned with discrimination and prejudice; more books have black characters who could have been white. These books can help white readers accept black people as humans first and Negroes later.

The books continue to show prejudice and discrimination manifested in actions too similar to preceding years. Segregation continues as a way of life for many people. The books continue to mirror the inequities as they exist in reality.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Purpose of the study. The position of the Negro in American society has always been one of less stature, less respect, and less influence than that of white Americans. Since his people were once slaves, the Negro has been forced to live as a second class citizen. He has been denied equal opportunities in many areas of life because his skin is not white. He has attempted to better his position, but the prejudices of white men have continued to defeat his advancements. Some ground has been gained, but many inequities remain.

The writer began this study to answer the following questions: Are black children aware of the contributions of the Negro to America? Do black children understand the struggles of their forefathers? Can black and white children find a presentation of black people that is realistic? Are white children allowed to see that black people have much reason to be proud of their heritage? Does the available literature reflect any of these considerations? The most important purpose of the study was to determine whether the content of children's literature offers an honest, objective presentation of black people or whether the content corroborates and spawns prejudice and discrimination.
Procedure. To accomplish the above purposes the writer read approximately sixty books which have black people as main characters. To consider the accomplishments and shortcomings of all the books, the writer divided them into four groups. The group into which each book belonged was decided by the decade during which the book was first published. Generalizations about settings, content, stereotypes, illustrations, and race relations were made. Two books each for lower (k-2), middle (3-4), and upper (5-6) elementary grade levels were selected for detailed scrutiny; they were compared and contrasted in terms of race relations, illustrations, speech, and stereotypes.

Findings of the study. The answers to the questions posed above are all positive, but some are answered with reservations. The available children's literature does present to the readers the contributions of the Negro to America. The number of books which serve this purpose is small, and there is much room for improvement. The struggles of the forefathers of black people today are described in many books, but the majority of these books were published during the 1950's. Realistic presentations of Negro children do exist in children's literature. Each decade since 1930 has had several books which present Negro children honestly.

Some black characters are characterized honestly.
These characters are presented naturally and free from stereotype. Presentations of this type date from the 1930's.

Many books from each decade help corroborate and spawn prejudice and discrimination. These books contain distorted illustrations and stereotypes. These books may also support slavery or the idea of subordinate peoples.

The trend seems to indicate that future publications in children's literature will probably bring more honest and more objective presentations of Negroes because each successive decade has manifested steps in this direction.

Recommendations. Books having Negro characters are very necessary for the classroom experiences of children whether the children be black, white, yellow, or brown. Many of the problems of all Americans can be eased by educating the children of the nation with the truth about race. Stereotypes of any people are harmful, but the misinformation about Negroes is particularly destructive to human relations in this country.

Teachers especially must bear the burden of informing their students and the burden of arming their students with the tools of evaluation. These charges given to teachers suggest two major objectives.

1. Children must be acquainted with books that can expand their understanding of themselves and others.
2. Children must also be taught to read critically; they must not be allowed to accept any material as fact just because it is printed in a book. Children must be taught to look for stereotypes, and they must be encouraged to think, to weigh, and to evaluate the validity of the facts as they are presented.

For teachers to accomplish the first objective, they must be well informed about the books that are available. They must choose well the books with which they want to acquaint students or which might be used for classroom study. The second objective can be pursued primarily through the reading program, but critical reading should be an integral part of all areas of the curriculum. This is the more difficult of the two objectives to attain but also the more important.
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in others and in himself when he works at a community
center; excellent.

Boys teach a newcomer that color is no reason to dislike
someone; didactic.

Beim, Lorraine and Jerrold Beim, Two is a Team.  New York:
Teamwork makes a project more fun and more successful;
excellent.

Blanton, Catherine, Hold Fast to Your Dreams.  New York:
Prejudice and discrimination almost defeat Emmy Lou as
she dances toward success; excellent.

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excellent.

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a fortune; excellent.

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doorbells, too; excellent.

The neighborhood boys club discovers who ate the blue-
berry pie; excellent.
The young trumpet player ignores his grandfather's warning and plays for the devil's ball; excellent.

The adventure of three country boys discovering the city; stereotyped.

A collection of poems which express the feelings of inner-city children; excellent.

Allen raises a prize calf and discovers why Baily acts mysteriously; excellent.

Parochial school is integrated, but soon only one child appears; excellent.

Boys organize to build a swimming pool and to beautify their neighborhood; stereotyped, but good.

The struggles of a black and a white girl to understand each other and the world around them; excellent.

The attempts of a small boy to earn enough money to go to the circus; stereotyped parents.

An only child's new pet must redeem himself or be forced to leave; offensive names.

A young girl learns about discrimination, but she makes a friend in the end; didactic.
A new girl helps her schoolmates discover that they can do something to improve race relations; excellent.

The relationship between a young slave who yearns for freedom and his young master who desires a different way of life; excellent.

The adventures of a small city girl and farm boy in the country; excellent.

The escapades of a country boy and a city girl in the city; excellent.

Melindy's ancestors earned medals, and Melindy surprisingly earns one also; good.

Melindy, as an ambassador of good race relations, stays on a farm with a white family and learns much about herself; good.

A young Quaker boy helps his uncle operate an Underground Railroad station; good.

A small teddy bear is purchased even though he has lost a button off his coveralls; excellent.

A young Negro boy becomes a jockey so that he may ride Little Vic; good.

A Negro family faces and fights the discrimination and prejudice in a small southern town; excellent.
A young black girl idolizes an older girl who is descendant from the Watusi tribe; excellent.

A black family moves North where Skid is the only black student; excellent.

A black boy desires a corner of his own which is as perfect as he can make it; excellent.

New shoes must be saved from mud and from little sister; distorted illustrations and dialect.

Charley's family move into a white neighborhood, and Charley attends a white school; stereotyped parents.

Charley leaves the security of family and friends to prove that he can succeed on his own; excellent.

Tessie becomes the first Negro student at a private school, but she has trouble adjusting to the differences between Harlem and plush New York; excellent.

A young boy helps his father operate an Underground Railroad station; good.

A small Negro boy overcomes his shyness and fear of the white children of his new class; excellent.

Peter is jealous of his baby sister until he discovers that he has outgrown his baby things; excellent.
The adventures of a small boy on a snowy day; excellent.

Peter learns to whistle to call his dog, Willie; excellent.

The adventures of a young slave and her mistress; dialect, offensive terms and illustrations.

The training of a beginning witch by a more experienced witch who is just a girl; excellent.

Lula dreams of going North but is disappointed when she gets there, and going home is not what she expects; stereotyped and offensive illustrations.

A small slave girl protects and leads a young Union soldier; excellent.

A young Negro discovers that freedom is important to all beings; excellent.

A small boy overcomes his shyness because he wants to recover his grandmother's lost earring; excellent.

Everything goes wrong for Sam until he goes home to bed and starts the day again; excellent.

A free Negro woman helps a family go West to meet their father; dialect.
Toni goes away to school to find out about herself, her purpose in life, and to win back her boyfriend; excellent.

Harriet goes South where she is shocked by the conditions but where she makes many important decisions; dialect.

A minister succumbs to the pressure of his daughter and congregation to return a small black boy to an orphanage; excellent.

Mary Ellis and another Negro girl are chosen to attend an all-white nurse's school where they make many friends; excellent.

Steppin's dream to be a dancer is fulfilled; excellent.

A young slave tours the Mount Vernon to discover the job that he wants to learn to do; glorifies slavery but worthwhile.

A young slave gets a surprise birthday present, but she must continue her duties; glorifies slavery but worthwhile.

Zeke goes away to vocational training school but he must make many adjustments; dialect and stereotypes.

A mother attempts to explain why children are different colors; didactic.
A picture book of life on a farm with a large family; excellent.

A young migrant worker and his family find a place to live permanently; excellent.

Slaves on their way to America capture the ship to go back to Africa, but they reach America first; excellent.

Two young friends get to go to camp, but only one really enjoys it; excellent.

A dog's scratching and smelling abilities make him and his young owner famous; excellent.

A small boy's dreams come true when he gets to ride in the most beautiful car he has ever seen; good.

White teammates fight for the rights of the only Negro on the team; good.

Two small boys imagine living in a supermarket because they cannot find their mothers; excellent.

White students help each other and the community accept new Negro students and families; good.

The struggle of a slave to earn freedom for himself and others and his achievements as a good man; excellent.