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# The We Need Diverse Books Campaign and Critical Race Theory: Charlemae Rollins and the Call for Diverse Children's Books

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ways in which critical race theory (CRT) is used in the We Need Diverse Books (WNDB) campaign, which targets children's literature. WNDB has uniquely connected with its community from the beginning. By examining the campaign through the lens of CRT, the paper contributes points of action for library and information science (LIS) professionals to help support WNDB's momentum. It wishes to incite a sense of urgency in LIS professionals to better understand and utilize the depth of CRT's power to create a more equitable society for the community of youth that LIS practitioners serve. The push for diverse children's books is not a new one and has been championed by many for decades. One of these champions was Charlemae Rollins, an African American children's librarian at the Hall Branch Library, the first Chicago Public Library branch to open in an African American neighborhood, in 1932. However, only recently has the diverse-books issue achieved traction, thanks in part to the efforts of WNDB. LIS scholars and practitioners must ensure that this traction continues.

## INTRODUCTION

The We Need Diverse Books (WNDB) campaign, started in 2014, is a growing movement to publish children's and young adult books by and about diverse people in the United States. Critical race theory (CRT) is a model by cross-disciplinary activists that challenges the white-normative power structure present in our society. The purpose of this paper is to explore the connections between CRT and current and past activism for diverse books. By examining a current and dynamic example like WNDB through a CRT lens, this study aims to assist the campaign in maintaining

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its current momentum. A call to action is embedded in CRT and WNDB, and it is with this shared determination that the paper seeks to help the cause and define how the library and information science (LIS) field can contribute as well. First, an overview will be provided of the WNDB campaign and its natural connection to CRT. Next, the early work of pioneering librarian Charlemae Rollins and her role in the Chicago Black Renaissance and call for diverse books will be examined. Finally, this study will suggest how LIS programs across the nation can keep the momentum of WNDB going. No overview of the campaign would be complete without discussion of its originators and its connection to CRT.

### #WNDB AND THE CONNECTION WITH CRT

WNDB was inspired by two children’s literature authors, Ellen Oh and Malinda Lo. They took to Twitter in April 2014 to protest that every panel for Book Con, a popular and influential book convention, was comprised of white male children’s authors. From this extended, online, social-media exchange, a three-day Tweet event was planned to raise awareness that diverse children’s authors should be present in the conversation. In promoting the event, Aisha Saeed, an author of young adult novels, created the hash tag #WeNeedDiverseBooks. It started trending and eventually became the name of the campaign.

The Twitter discussion continued and focused on how little had changed since Nancy Larrick, an influential educator and author of the article “The All-White World of Children’s Books” (1965), pressed for the publication of more diverse books. The campaign cited statistics from the Cooperative Children’s Books Center (CCBC), a research library of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison devoted to the study of children’s and young adult literature. The discussion also featured Lee and Low Books’ infographic representation of CCBC’s statistics. These showed that in 2013 only ninety-three books out of the 3,200 children’s books published had African American characters. To give the statistics further gravitas, the campaign highlighted the *New York Times*’ essays in 2014 by renowned authors Walter Dean Myers and his son Christopher. Walter Dean Myers’s essay, “Where Are the People of Color in Children’s Books,” discussed his childhood search for identity through reading despite the lack of characters that were like him. When he became a writer he was one of only a few people of color writing books *about* people of color. In 2014 the number of diverse authors had not grown significantly, and he believed that this was an issue far more serious than simply books and authors, writing that “books transmit values. They explore our common humanity. What is the message when some children are not represented in those books?”

Christopher Myers’s essay, “The Apartheid of Children’s Literature,” explored the lack of stories made available to kids of color. This scarcity

creates an “apartheid of literature in which characters of color are limited to the townships of occasional historical books that concern themselves with the legacies of civil rights and slavery but are never given a pass card to traverse the lands of adventure, curiosity, imagination or personal growth.” Christopher took his father’s ideas of identity and self-worth and created “maps,” or examples of opportunity, to assist people of color in finding their place in the world. These maps are intended to help them decide their future—a privilege reserved for white kids in most children’s books. Kids of color deserve infinite choices, and not just the oppressive, repetitive slave/civil rights narrative that has consistently been published in the past.

Essays with the focus of the Myers are important, because they illustrate the dire repercussions of ignoring race representation in children’s books. They enlighten us by insisting that we are not talking about inconsequential kiddy lit, but children’s literature that helps bolster self-esteem and purpose. The Myers insisted that seeing oneself in books helped children to develop rich imaginations of who they could become when they see role models of color. Children of color are worthy of this basic human right; they need to see themselves in books so that they know they are worthy of discussion and being respected by society. These essays are more than opinion pieces in the *New York Times*; they are a call to arms for our children of color, a social justice movement whose time has finally come.

The demand for social justice can never be overstated, and, as one of the tenets of CRT, deserves more elaboration than this essay can afford. Inspired by early pioneers like W. E. B. DuBois, CRT was first developed by lawyers and later extended by law scholars (Bell, 1973; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Freeman, 1978; Matsuda, 1993; Tate, 1997). CRT developed into a multidisciplinary field attracting scholars, such as Dixson and Rousseau (2006) and Ladson-Billings (1995), who contributed to the field of education.

CRT directly relates to the work of the WNDB campaign. Delgado and Stefancic (2001, pp. 7–10) discussed the key tenets of CRT:

- The dominant power structure in the United States is inherently racist. Racism is not unique to one region, such as the South, but is present throughout the country.
- Because racism is not addressed overtly, it is difficult to counter or “fix.” American social constructs have firmly supported the idea of “color-blindness,” which can make defining certain acts “racist” much more difficult.
- Race is a construct used at its convenience and does not exist biologically.
- By nature of their experience with oppression, people of color communicate their experiences in ways that no white person ever could.

- Activism: CRT “tries not only to understand our social situation but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but to transform it for the better.”

Cappiccie, Chadha, Lin, and Snyder (2012, p. 47) extrapolate Delgado’s definition by creating the following lens through which WNDB is examined:

- CRT is committed to social justice, which focuses on all subordination on the basis of identities such as race, religion, ethnicity, and ability.
- Race and racism are at the core of the theory, but these constructs also are viewed at their intersection with other forms of oppression such as by sexual orientation, class, or gender.
- CRT acknowledges the importance of the experiential knowledge of persons of color in understanding and teaching its relation to racial subordination.
- CRT encourages an interdisciplinary perspective as an invitation for all educators to join the dialogue.

WNDB attempts to consider all diverse experiences, and this aligns with Cappiccie et al.’s concept of the intersectionality of various forms of oppression. The WNDB (2016) campaign’s mission states that it tries to be as inclusive as possible when it comes to defining diversity:

We recognize all diverse experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities. We subscribe to a broad definition of disability, which includes but is not limited to physical, sensory, cognitive, intellectual, or developmental disabilities, chronic conditions, and mental illnesses (this may also include addiction). Furthermore, we subscribe to a social model of disability, which presents disability as created by barriers in the social environment, due to lack of equal access, stereotyping, and other forms of marginalization. . . .

All kids benefit from being exposed to diverse books, because they reflect the world and people of the world, teach respect for all cultural groups, serve as a window and a mirror and as an example of how to interact in the world, show that despite differences, all people share common feelings and aspirations, can create a wider curiosity for the world, prepare children for the real world, and they enrich educational experiences. (n.p.)

Rudine Sims Bishop (1982), professor emerita of education at Ohio State University, created the concept of *windows and mirrors*, which parallels CRT’s idea of the importance of experiential knowledge and echoes the words of Walter Dean and Christopher Myers. The use of children’s books as a way of reflecting (mirrors) a child’s own experience is vital in order for that child to understand that she/he has value and worth in our society. To show a child another person’s experiences (windows) that are

quite different from her/his own transforms the child's view of that person into empathy.

Acknowledging "experiential knowledge" is furthered in that WNDB's advisory board is comprised of a varied group of authors and educators. Its campaign team, which does the bulk of organizing and outreach efforts, is diverse as well. From a CRT perspective, WNDB accomplishes this experiential knowledge by having people of diverse backgrounds lead the discussion on the culture of whiteness and how to overcome it.

Another aspect of the WNDB (2016) mission fulfills a vital tenet of CRT. It states that "in order to accomplish our mission, we reach out to individuals and groups involved in many levels of children's publishing—including (but not limited to) agents, publishers, authors, distributors, booksellers, librarians, educators, parents, and students" (n.p.). The "interdisciplinary perspective" that Cappiccie et al. discussed is a standard by which WNDB interacts with publishers and the publishing cycle.

In his estate Walter Dean Myers granted WNDB the rights to establish an award and grants in his name. This is a great honor and boon, since he was one of the most well-known and prolific authors of color up until his death in 2014. The first grants were announced in 2015. Five burgeoning authors and illustrators were given grants to help them with their creative endeavors. The call for submissions for "The Walter," as the award is called, states that authors must be from a diverse background, which is in keeping with WNDB's mission statement. The Walter was awarded to one author for the first time in 2016. The award focuses only on young adult fiction at this time, but it is hoped to extend it to middle grades and picture books in the future.

One of the key elements to WNDB's initial success was its Indigogo campaign, which launched in 2014. Between October and December 2014 it raised \$181,676. This money went toward funding its programming, as outlined below. In 2015 WNDB's internship program selected its first group of recipients: five students, whose goal was to pursue a career in children's literature publishing, were given monetary awards to help with the travel and living expenses while interning at a publishing house. Three of the students secured full-time employment with those houses at the end of their internships. Also in 2015 the WNDB mentorship program granted five authors the chance to be paired up with established, award-winning authors. Because of the popularity of this award (more than 300 applications were received), plans to double the mentor pairs in 2017 are underway.

The WNDB short story contest was created to further encourage and support diverse authors. Random House's Crown Books for Young Readers recently published a WNDB book geared toward middle-grade students. This short story anthology, titled *Flying Lessons & Other Stories*, features established authors, but has one chapter reserved for a new unpublished

author who won the contest. The format of the anthology was chosen so that it could easily be used in diverse classrooms.

Perhaps the most important function of WNDB is to help librarians, teachers, parents, and booksellers provide diverse books to children. In 2015 “WNDB in the Classroom,” which was a program focusing on Title I schools in Washington, D.C., sponsored monthly visits by diverse authors, who then presented students with copies of their books. WNDB partnered with Scholastic Book Club, one of the most popular book clubs in the country geared toward young students, to create a flyer that highlighted diverse books. These were distributed to schools throughout the United States, along with Scholastic’s offerings. WNDB Booktalking Kits were established to help librarians and teachers easily share diverse books with children. Partnering with the *School Library Journal* and the American Booksellers Association, these kits provided book lists with enticing summaries, readalikes, and seasonal book lists in an attractive, ready-to-go format for busy practitioners. This brief overview has examined the connections between the WNDB campaign and CRT, but today’s momentum would not have been established if not for the passion of one important though undercited historical figure.

### CHARLEMAE ROLLINS: A DIVERSE BOOKS PIONEER

The history of equity in depictions of people of color in children’s books would be incomplete without discussing the groundbreaking work of Charlemae Rollins. While Larrick (1965) is most often discussed as an early activist who campaigned for the publishing of diverse books more than fifty years ago, there were many scholars, librarians, teachers, and writers who advocated for diverse books earlier, but who are not often mentioned. One of these advocates, Charlemae Rollins, served as the children’s librarian at the Chicago Public Library’s Hall Branch from its opening in 1932 to her retirement in 1963. From the 1930s to the 1950s Chicago was one of the most sought-after destinations for African Americans fleeing the subjugation of the South. This migration greatly increased the population of African Americans in the city: from around 44,000 in 1910 to over 250,000 by the mid-1930s (Hine & McCluskey, 2012). This mass influx helped to create what is now called the Chicago Black Renaissance. Its main goal was to declare African American pride by fueling a dynamic effort to organize a collective voice to assert equal rights and respect. It was a time to passionately document the myriad contributions that African Americans had made to the United States that had gone unacknowledged. It was an energetic time to inspire hope, uplift, and show the beauty of being African American; and it was most certainly a time to counter the boundless persistence of racist acts and imagery steeped in U.S. culture. Library historian Michael Harris describes this time well:

The momentum of over 150 years of derogatory images and characterizations flowed down on our heads with real consequences because white power enforced and depended on black racial identity. We re-invented ourselves repeatedly to resist and frustrate the oppressive systems and representations that circumscribed us collectively, acting on the belief that we either became coproducers or might change the worldview by our actions. We re-presented ourselves to counter the other form of representation. (qtd. in Hine & McCluskey, 2012, p. 1)

Rollins was not alone; a collaborative sense of urgency brought together a variety of talent. Artists, scholars, activists, writers, dancers, civic leaders, and many others all worked together to help elevate the message of the Chicago Black Renaissance. Ida Barnett Wells, Carter Woodson, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Katherine Dunham, Zora Neale Hurston, and Gwendolyn Brooks are just a few of the people of color who contributed. While part of the vision was to care about human rights issues globally, these individuals also focused their efforts locally on the South Side of Chicago, or Bronzeville. Here, reverence was not only given to churches but also to institutions that embodied African American accomplishments. Knupfer (2006) wrote of this special place:

In 1930, the black newspaper, the *Chicago Sunday Bee*, held a contest to elect a mayor of Bronzeville. The renaming of their community as “Bronzeville” held deep political and social significance for the residents. It was no longer known as “the Black Belt,” a term used by sociologists and vice commissions to highlight increased rates of delinquency, dependency, and crime. Instead, Bronzeville, then the largest black community in the country, signified a collective spirit, with its own legendary mayoral elections. As such, Bronzeville became one of the centers, if not *the* center, of black Chicago culture. (p. 3)

Bronzeville fostered a sense of community by establishing places where people could gather and share ideas and information. The South Side Community Art Center, Richard Wright’s Southside Writers’ Group, radio station WMAQ, and the *Chicago Sunday Bee* newspaper were just a few of the many organizations that helped make Bronzeville a special place. The George Cleveland Hall Branch was one of these places. Named in honor of Dr. George Cleveland Hall, the first African American member on the Chicago Public Library board of directors and one of the founding scholars of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, the library was the first branch dedicated to the African American community in south Chicago when it opened on January 25, 1932. Vivian Harsh was the manager there for twenty-six years and worked tirelessly to create a reference collection devoted to African American history and accomplishments—the first of its kind. It was under her leadership that Rollins became the manager of the children’s department.

Knupfer (2006, p. 2) considered Hall Branch “to be one of the intellectual centers of Bronzeville,” and Turner (1997) wrote about its truly

unique aspects: "The library was far more than just a place to read. It featured book reviews, discussion groups, lecture, and hobby groups. Published writers like Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Margaret Walker, and Zora Neal Hurston made extensive use of the reference materials at Hall Branch and did much of their writing there. Often they sought out Rollins for her advice and encouragement" (p. 107).

Rollins was the quintessential children's librarian. Her talents encompassed a wide set of skills that all children's librarians dream of being able to possess. She was a master storyteller and a "lover of the word." Not only did she encourage others to write, but she herself was an author of six books for children. Rollins was devoted to supporting future librarians by being a university instructor and was actively involved in the American Library Association. Another purpose of the Chicago Black Renaissance was to free African Americans of the public image wrongfully conferred after centuries of violence against them. Rollins worked toward this goal her entire career by advocating for children's literature that eschewed stereotypes. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) commissioned her to compile a bibliography of criteria created by African Americans to aid librarians and teachers when selecting children's books for their collections. This bibliography, *We Build Together*, was published in 1941, with two subsequent editions. Augusta Baker helped write the final edition in the series in 1967, and throughout her career as a children's librarian and storyteller advocated for books that truly represent African Americans.

The first edition of *We Build Together* was a pamphlet created for the NCTE. Rollins introduction depicted an incident that inspired its creation. Two graduate students at the Chicago Teachers College were fulfilling their student-teaching requirements at an all-white school when they discovered, during a casual conversation with one of their eighth-grade students, that she would prefer not to ever have to attend a school in which African American students were enrolled. This prompted them to administer an anonymous questionnaire to all of their students, the results indicating that all felt the same way. The graduate students were greatly disturbed by this, and after consulting with the principal, who was equally disturbed, decided to include positive information about African American children in every aspect of their teaching. From photography to science, the graduate students hoped to present positive examples of African American contributions. Their efforts were almost thwarted, however, due to the lack of material readily available. When they sought help at Hall Branch they met Rollins, who specialized in creating lists focused on African American achievements and helped them find materials to use in their lessons with the eighth-grade students. After these lessons were completed with the new materials, the graduate students administered another anonymous questionnaire and found that twenty-eight students

reported that they felt “more friendly” toward African Americans, seven reported that they felt about the same, and none reported feeling worse (Rollins, 1941, p. 2).

It is important to point out that during this period many white families lived in segregated environments and may never have interacted with African Americans. Seeing the need and interest of teachers to be able to share positive depictions of African Americans with their white students was what prompted NCTE to engage Rollins to create such a bibliography to be distributed nationally. Her goal was to provide both teachers and librarians guidance on selecting the very best books about African Americans for their libraries. In particular, Rollins asserted that African Americans should help create these criteria. She anticipated what Christopher Meyers (2013) recently expressed: that by exposing white children to books that accurately and respectfully depict African Americans, “they will lose some of their feelings of condescension and they will gain in understanding” (Rollins, 1941, p. 3).

In discussing these criteria, Rollins asserted that all books for children should be selected for their high literary quality, just as librarians and teachers had been doing all along. However, there were many books of high literary quality at that time that did not fit the criteria in their depictions of African Americans. She believed that representing them in a realistic and not stereotypical way would positively influence society. Not only did the negative images of African Americans distort the reality of black lives to white children, but they also greatly impacted the self-conception of African American children: “The influence of books and reading upon the development of the child is of great interest to teachers, librarians, and others who desire to promote more democratic attitudes among boys and girls today. But using literature to advance democracy is not easy” (p. 4).

Rollins proposed three criteria to consider when selecting African American books: illustrations, language, and theme. These criteria, presented in 1941, are very similar to the CRT tenets present in the WNDB campaign seventy-three years later.

### *Illustrations*

Rollins emphasized the need for respectful illustrations in children’s literature. She discussed the impact of illustrations that ridiculed the African American child. She felt that African American children who read these types of books were either encouraged to adopt the ridiculing attitude of the illustrations and apply it to others that looked differently, or else it devastated their own self-esteem and esteem for their race. Rollins believed that children who felt the latter would not return to the library. She encouraged the production of books with illustrations that celebrated everyone, that made children laugh and enjoy themselves in a way that was healthy and left a child feeling good.

*Language*

Rollins took issue with certain authors who insisted on the use of what she called “Negro dialect.” She considered this to be a lie, because this dialect was not how the average African American spoke, and it was only present in some very specific communities within the country and only for a very specific time period. Thus the dialect was fabricated by the author and consequently perpetuated a disrespectful stereotype about African Americans, besides making for difficult reading for kids and detracting from the story.

Rollins challenged the use of degrading epithets by authors when referring to their African American characters, which angered all African American children and adults that read them. While she was surprised to find them in children’s books, they were most certainly present. *Dr. Dolittle* by Hugh Lofting and *Sing for Your Supper* by Eleanor Farjeon were examples of what Rollins felt were offensive. She even pointed out that *Horn Book*, a widely revered review journal of children’s literature, often contained reviews of books in which the reviewer included similar racial slurs (Rollins, 1941, p. 8).

Rollins disagreed with authors who explained their use of these degrading words only because they were documenting a time when slavery existed and the words were common, particularly in the settings of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. While Mark Twain’s books were considered classics, the language used to refer to African Americans was quite offensive. Rollins was concerned about children and teenagers reading these books, because the African Americans portrayed in them could not represent anyone they aspired to be.

She did, however, provide examples of authors who depicted this particular time period in a more appropriate manner. Hildegard Swift’s *Railroad to Freedom*, for example, provided a rationale for using these offensive words in an epilogue in an attempt to abate their impact. In addition, Julia Peterkin and Bontemps wrote stories about this time period without using any objectionable words.

*Theme*

Rollins pointed out that most books with African American characters were about either being children or distinctions of class. African American characters were typically portrayed as servants or support staff—or, as in plantation stories, as slaves. She believed that society needed to “democratize our young people” (Rollins, 1941, p. 9) by providing examples of African Americans who were not in subservient roles but instead were the ones that embodied characters that were independent, powerful, and substantive. Rollins also believed that the stereotype of the African American as a buffoon or someone to mock needed to be retired and replaced by upstanding African Americans that all should emulate. She cited the

1932 White House conference report on children's reading that stated that more positive books were needed about African American children, because they were so much more disadvantaged than other children.

Rollins's 1948 edition of *We Build Together* is very similar to the original. The criteria remained the same but were presented as a numbered list, as follows (p. 4):

1. Are the persons portrayed in the book natural or real? Or are they presented from a distorted point of view?
2. Does the book set up standards of superiority or feelings of inferiority in the minds of the young person reading it?
3. Does the book offend in some special way the sensibilities of Negroes by the way it presents either the chief character or any of the minor characters?
4. Is the book free from derisive names and epithets that would offend Negroes?
5. Do the characters speak in a language true to the period and section in which they live? Or in a dialect that is overdrawn or inconsistent? (A limited amount of dialect with some distortion of spelling is permissible, but the most satisfactory technique is the use of a distinctive word order or the idiomatic flavor of Negro speech.)
6. Does a story about modern times give a true picture of life as it is now? Or is it a nostalgic yearning for a romantic or traditional past?
7. Are the illustrations drawn by an artist of a kindly, human nature? Or are they caricatures ridiculing the race or group represented? Are they drawn with the normal proportions of the human frame? What conscious or unconscious impressions will they make on the minds of those who see them?
8. Does the book give a broader understanding of the democratic way of life without stressing differences of class, race, color, education, or religion in any inimical way?

In addition to this list, Rollins included instructions on how to use books that did not meet these criteria. She suggested that teachers develop pairings of books: one that incorporated the criteria and one that did not. Children should be encouraged to decide which one is respectful and which is not, and then be asked why. She included a list of paired books, based on illustrations and historical stories, in order to get teachers started with the exercise. Rollins also included examples of teachers and students who, after completing the exercise, wrote to authors and publishers to urge them to create books that realistically depicted African Americans (pp. 6–7). Because of the courageous and persistent work of Rollins and others, WNDB has a foundation upon which to expand and explore.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR WNDB

There are some key points of action that WNDB should explore to ensure that it moves beyond the campaign stage to establish sustainability and permanence. First, it needs to take a cue from Christopher Myers’s op-ed piece “Young Dreamers,” published in 2013 in *The Horn Book*. In it he discussed the importance of children’s books that depict kids growing up in the communities in which they live. In his version of society, communities would be diverse and socially just and culturally inclusive books would be readily available. WNDB needs to focus very clearly on why it is important for *all* children to be exposed to diverse books—not just for the diverse child’s benefit, but white children need to read about and see people of color as well. For instance, we need books in predominantly white communities that feature positive characters that are African American or Native American. We must have books in predominately able-bodied communities that feature differently abled children. It is not unusual for children’s librarians to be told that a certain branch does not need books that include people of color because it is unrepresentative of the community. This could not be further from the truth—it is precisely why we need such books in these libraries. Christopher Myers (2013, n.p.) believes that “if people can see us as young dreamers, boys with hopes and doubts and playfulness, instead of potential threats or icons of societal ills, perhaps they will feel less inclined to kill us.”

WNDB also needs to focus on raising money for school and public library collections. Even if the world suddenly changed and there were troves of diverse books that school and public librarians wanted to select for their collections, there would still be limited funding to create such collections. In her blog post about WNDB, Rothschild (2015), an elementary school teacher, discusses the decrease in budgets for books in school libraries. She called for building on WNDB momentum by adding political and media attention on funding for diverse collections. Williams and Deyoe (2014) found that more than a third of public libraries in the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) that spent over \$100,000 annually on materials did not achieve the minimal level for representations of diversity in their youth collections. WNDB could provide grants for school and public libraries to develop such diverse collections. Even if it is a small amount, they could couple these grants with matching funds from local Friends of the Library grants to create an ongoing legacy. In addition, they could create advocacy kits that provide lists of books that can be donated, and prioritize a few key steps in making connections within the community to help raise funds for the collection.

This latter suggestion is not limited to what WNDB can do; it is also a clarion call to LIS departments to fully support WNDB. Specifically, LIS programs should prepare future information specialists, whether it is in

an academic, corporate, school, or public environment, to serve their patrons in a culturally fluent way. They should prepare their students so that when they go out into their communities, a diverse collection is a naturally occurring phenomenon. Schroeder and Hollister (2014) worked with various types of librarians to understand their level of fluency with the concepts of critical theories, including CRT. They found that whether or not librarians understood what it was, they still identified advocating for social justice in their information communities as one of their main goals. For those who did know about critical theories, they rarely learned about it in their LIS program. Schroeder and Hollister suggest further study by providing the following research questions:

- What philosophies of librarianship are currently espoused by LIS programs?
- To what extent are critical theories included in LIS programs?
- Which type of critical theory (Frankfurt School, feminism, queer theory, and so on) is used?
- In which functional areas of librarianship (instruction, cataloging, technology, and so on) are these theoretical applications found? (p. 114)

There are current LIS scholars already doing this important work who focus on youth and CRT, as well as on its intersection with other critical theories: Hughes-Hassell and Cox (2010) consider babies and board books; Kurz (2012) addresses the lack of diverse literature in South Carolina's youth awards; Kumasi (2013) considers teenagers and how public libraries could better serve them; and Dahlen (2013) addresses transracial Asian-adoption literature for children and its evaluation.

This is not an exhaustive list of the faculty and students doing this challenging work. And even though they are working diligently at it, it is imperative that more LIS curricula focus on cultural fluency. This author has benefited greatly from the curriculum at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, particularly from Nicole Cooke's classes "Social Justice in the Information Professions" and "Information Services for Diverse Populations," as well as Kathryn La Barre's course "Naming and Power." These classes fundamentally changed how I view the world by incorporating the fundamental beliefs of CRT, and have inspired me to do the same for my future students. In addition to classes and books we also need more diverse faculty. LIS departments themselves need to reflect the diverse world of our students both now and in the future. Students need to see themselves reflected in the composition of the faculty, much like young readers need to see themselves in books.

## CONCLUSION

Diverse books are not limited to just children, much like CRT is not limited to the field of law. Yet, there are still faculty members and students

who believe that since they are not serving a diverse clientele or that they themselves are not ethnically diverse, they really do not need to discuss cultural fluency with their students or classmates. Rollins did not advocate for respectful depictions of African Americans in children’s books simply for the African American child’s sake; she did it to create a more equitable and democratic world for everyone. In this time of acute political division we need to ensure that everyone feels valued in society. Diverse books can do that. It is imperative that the greater LIS community not allow WNDB to lose its momentum. This white, cisgender, able-bodied scholar will resist, speak out, be an ally of, and most certainly support diverse books.

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