
Introduction

KAREN PATRICIA SMITH

THIS IS THE FIRST ISSUE of *Library Trends* to focus specifically on multiculturalism as it relates to literature for children and young adults. As we move toward the twenty-first century, concerns about literacy and the abilities of young people to fully participate in the appreciation of a national literary heritage—for information and recreation—are being further challenged by political, social, and economic factors. Simultaneously, and ironically, human diversity, so crucial to the richness of the arts and represented in a mosaic of ethnic, ideological, religious, and racial backgrounds, offers challenges to the very stability of American society.

The multicultural ethic in the United States should be, due to the demographic composition of the country, a concern of the populace at large as well as that of the service professions. However, interests in this area have proven to be of a cyclical nature, often determined by the political climate of the country. During the 1960s and 1970s, concern for the multicultural concept was deemed crucial in addressing the problem of racially disenfranchised minorities. Such concerns were strongly linked to the civil rights movement. In particular, the country noted an increased interest in the publication of materials designed to address the specific needs and interests of African-American and Hispanic members of the populace.

During the 1980s, interest in the publication of materials for a diverse populace continued but was tempered by the spirit of the times, namely by the more conservative political stance of the country. The pace in publication of books about minorities seemed to slow

in general when compared with the earlier era, and many books in this category were permitted to go out of print.

In the closing years of the 1980s, concerns regarding multiculturalism began to intensify once more as the racial ethnic composition of the populace continued to grow and change. According to the 1990 census figures, Black Americans represent 12.1 percent of the population (11.7 percent in 1980); Hispanic Americans, 9 percent (6.4 percent in 1980); Asian-Pacific Islanders, 2.9 percent (1.5 percent in 1980); and American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut persons, 0.8 percent (0.6 percent in 1980) of the population. Current domestic events show that the tensions between and among members of various racial and ethnic groups, and concerns regarding cultural misunderstandings in general, have failed to diminish. Andrew Hacker (1992) has said of racial tensions in his recent book: "That racial tensions cast a pall upon this country can hardly be denied. People now vent feelings of hostility and anger that in the past they repressed. Race has become a national staple for private conversation and public controversy" (p. 4). From the recurring tensions in Brooklyn, New York, to the recent disturbances of July 1992 in Los Angeles, California, and other parts of the country, the patterned course of human misunderstandings continues to surface again and again, calling upon fortitude, creativity, and dedication to resolve the delicate and often volatile business of social relationships.

It has been acknowledged that perceptions of people and events are often formed during childhood and adolescence. While no medium may be as effective toward bridging the differences among people as the actual process of meeting, speaking, and getting to know one another, sharing the cultures of others through the medium of literature can serve as a means toward creating a better understanding among individuals. Put another way, creating the conditions leading to such understandings and appreciations of the cultures of others can lead toward gaining and developing greater respect for the literary and cultural contributions of others.

OVERVIEW

This issue of *Library Trends* focuses on research done in the area of multicultural children's literature in the United States. Highlighted are issues regarding trends in the literature and associated areas over time, as well as the availability and promotion of the literature within various settings.

The term "multicultural" has experienced a changing and broadening definition regarding the specific populations to which it may apply. Given this fact and also the reality that within the framework of a single issue of *Library Trends* it is not possible to

include all representatives of the diverse population to whom the term may apply, the editor has chosen to focus the discussion upon the literary issues impacting people of color as those representative of the major racial groupings designated by the Office of Management and Budget of the federal government, "which provides standards on ethnic and racial categories for statistical reporting to be used by all Federal agencies" (Bureau of the Census, 1991, B-11; B-12). The categories designating people of color are: black, Hispanic¹, American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut and Asian or Pacific Islander. The contributed articles will focus upon literary concerns of these designated groups and are meant to be, in a phrase borrowed from Buenker and Ratner (1992), "suggestive, not prescriptive" (p. 2) in presentation.

MULTICULTURAL ETHIC AND CONNECTIONS TO LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

The first article in this issue of *Library Trends* and written by the editor, offers an introduction to the multicultural debate, its relationship to literature, and some of the specific issues encountered when discussing it in terms of literature for children and young people. The editor presents a framework against which multiculturalism may be discussed in regard to specific populations.

FRAMING AND REFRAMING IMAGES AND REALITIES

The image of minority individuals has moved through a cycle of changes during the twentieth century. Perceptions which were commonly accepted at the turn of the century are now often perceived quite differently in light of late twentieth-century sensitivities regarding stereotyping. The article by Kay E. Vandergrift examines images of ethnic minorities in early twentieth-century literature for children as seen in the work of several representative authors within a feminist theoretical framework.

The decade of the 1990s is a particularly difficult time for African-American youth. Caught up in the social problems during times which are economically difficult for all Americans, African-American youth face challenges which at times are overwhelming. In her article on African-American young adult literature, Carol Jones Collins suggests the positive role that young adult literature can play in the lives of African-American young people in helping to transform negative images and realities into a more positive action plan for the future.

In her article on Asian Indian literature for young people, Meena Khorana emphasizes a more active publishing agenda by Asian Indian authors in their focus upon the Asian Indian experience in the United

States. She traces the course of literary activity in this area, highlighting the progress of its development, and uses as a basic framework, references to the circumstances and literature of other Asian American groups. The development of the literary tradition here is seen to have strong social, economic, and political connections.

Arlene Hirschfelder presents a discussion of the literature written by and about Native Americans, delineating the types of literature available as well as perspectives about the circumstances and conditions under which it should be shared. Through a discussion of specific examples from the various genre, she offers for consideration some of the challenges faced by those seeking unbiased Native American literature.

LEARNERS, LITERARY OPPORTUNITY, AND ACCESS

Before students can avail themselves of multicultural opportunities available through literature, the materials themselves must be there, and those who are responsible for providing them must have a clear sense of collection-development goals, selection processes, and ways in which materials can be promoted to motivate and maintain the interest of young people. Adela Artola Allen presents a survey of school media centers carried out in eight urban areas of the United States and designed to elicit information about the promotion of Hispanic literature for children and young people. Sandra Champion, school media specialist, presents a case study of the Hialeah High School, in Hialeah, Florida, and examines the process through which Hispanic adolescents acquire meaning from literary texts and also shares some surprising findings regarding the types of texts for which they have a preference.

Renee Tjoumas examines developments in Native American literature. She reviews the professional literature written over the years on Native American library services and collection-development practices and presents a preliminary study of collection-development practices conducted within the setting of public libraries in areas of the United States with large populations of Native American people. Tjoumas discusses the need for adequate collection-development techniques in Native American literature and suggests some considerations which should be placed on future agendas to improve access to available materials.

SIGNIFICANT AND GROUND-BREAKING ACHIEVEMENTS FROM ALTERNATIVE PRESSES

Until recently, the public relied primarily upon large publishing houses to supply them with materials for children and youth. The 1980s and 1990s are showing some welcome activity from alternative

publishing houses. In her article, Kathleen Horning offers insight into the philosophies which motivated the publishers to embark upon a seemingly "risky" enterprise in their decisions to publish multicultural literature for children. She presents as well, a discussion of some of the major contributions made by alternative presses to the multicultural impetus, particularly in the area of African-American and Native American contributions.

NOTE

¹ The Census Bureau points out that Hispanic persons may be of any race. In the 1990 census, Hispanic individuals were asked to complete a self identification question in which they could indicate with which of the specific Hispanic categories they identified. For purposes of this issue, the editor refers to the broad category of Hispanic persons; it is made clear by contributors to which sub-divisions they are referring within the context of their commentaries.

REFERENCES

- Buenker, J. D., & Ratner, L. A. (1992). *Multiculturalism in the United States: A comparative guide to acculturation and ethnicity*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Hacker, A. (1992). *Two nations: Black and white, separate, hostile, unequal*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.