A Feminist Perspective on Multicultural Children’s Literature in the Middle Years of the Twentieth Century

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ABSTRACT

Feminist theory, particularly the work of Peggy McIntosh, is used to examine the development of multicultural literature for children and youth in the middle years of the twentieth century. The work of four white women writers—Florence Crannell Means, Ann Nolan Clark, Marguerite de Angeli, and Lois Lenski—is used as an example of the fiction created by outsiders to introduce often invisible cultures into this literature.

INTRODUCTION

When one examines books for young people published during the first half of the twentieth century, it is clear that there was little or no multicultural literature within the United States available to young readers. Young Americans could more easily read about cultures of those in distant lands than they could about the various racial, ethnic, class, or religious differences within their own neighborhoods or nation. Undoubtedly, each of these groups of people had their own stories within their cultures, but the publishing community was not yet making these stories available to the larger dominant culture. Of course, there were selections from folktales and other forms of traditional stories in the mainstream of children's literature, but realistic portrayals of other than white middle class suburban life were generally unavailable. As a result, large numbers of American youth, not just those of color, could not recognize themselves in the literature supposedly created for them.
CONTRIBUTIONS OF FEMINIST SCHOLARS AND CRITICS

The work of feminist scholars and critics seems to be a logical beginning for discussion of multicultural literature for children and youth. Women have dominated the field of youth literature as editors, librarians, teachers, and mothers and most often served as direct intermediaries between children and books in spite of the male-dominated centers of money and power in the publishing community. As Alice Kessler-Harris (1992), the director of the Women's Studies Program at Rutgers University, writes:

An approach that respects and incorporates diverse cultural traditions is essential to the women's studies enterprise. . . . Without a commitment to multiculturalism, it would be impossible to separate what is gender specific from what is culturally particular. (p. 795)

In many ways, the history of the development of multicultural literature for children is similar to feminist theories in that a primary focus is on the subjects' need to define themselves rather than be defined by others. African-American feminist literary critic Barbara Christian (1985) elaborates on this point:

As poor, woman, and black, the Afro-American woman had to generate her own definition in order to survive, for she found that she was forced to deny essential aspects of herself to fit the definition of others. If defined as black, her woman nature was often denied; if defined as woman, her blackness was often ignored; if defined as working class, her gender and race were muted. It is primarily in the expressions of herself that she could be her totality. (p. 161)

Correspondingly, how must young people of color react to be defined by others when they are also often poor, working class, and often female as well as powerless. Young readers frequently lack even the very basic powers of expressive language which allows one to define and create oneself.

ISSUES OF MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE FOR YOUTH

A number of issues arise when examining multicultural literature for young people. First is the concern about insiders versus outsiders, whether these stories are by or just about members of the minority culture. Historically, the majority of works about African-Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and other minorities have been written by those outside the culture. This can be positive in that it introduces greater numbers of young readers to cultures other than their own, but it can be negative if the cultural content is biased, misinformed, or inadequately comprehended. In recent years, more and more critics have indicated that only those who are members of the culture or insiders can truly represent their culture in literary works. One cannot deny that children's and young adult literature would benefit from greater numbers of racial and ethnic minorities
writing for young people. The belief that only one of a culture can write authentically about that culture, however, would deny the very nature of aesthetic composition and perhaps eliminate the whole field of children's literature which is, of course, almost always written by adults. It is true that adults were once children, but, nonetheless, the insider argument, if carried to its logical conclusion, would result in a literary canon composed solely of autobiographies. It is no more reasonable to expect that a single African-American author, often from middle-class society, can, because of his or her cultural heritage, get inside the characters and situations of all those who share skin color or national origins any more than a single Caucasian author could adequately recreate the lives of all those many different peoples who share that identity. It is also true that outsiders, largely white women writers of the early twentieth century, paved the way for the multicultural children's literature both by and about various peoples available today.

Another issue is that of uniqueness versus universality. In one sense, all literature is accessible to others because it deals, in some way, with the commonality of human experience. It is equally true, however, that each character is a unique being shaped by a myriad of factors, not just by race, color, or ethnicity. In the beginnings of multicultural literature for children in this country, universality and commonality were stressed. Lyn Miller-Lachmann (1992), in the introduction to Our Family, Our Friends, Our World: An Annotated Guide to Significant Multicultural Books for Children and Young People, describes two parallel trends in recent publishing about minorities in the United States and Canada (p. 9). One is the type of book in which the minority characters are “essentially indistinguishable from middle-class white ones. . . . In such books, images of minorities are positive, though little of their heritage is shown” (p. 9). What these books emphasize, therefore, is not people's differences but their similarities. At the same time, there are many more books about minority characters which “focus exclusively on questions related to heritage, conflicts and issues within the minority community, and culturally specific developmental issues” (p. 9). Miller-Lachmann points to books about African-Americans dealing with class differences based on skin color, body type, or hair, or stories of immigrants in which distinctions are made based on the time of arrival in America or the region of the home country from which they came. Only when both of these types of stories are available for all peoples and in large numbers will literature for young people be truly multicultural.

A third and very controversial issue is that of literary or aesthetic criteria. Members of the dominant culture have often excluded works
by talented minorities on the basis that they do not meet accepted literary standards without recognizing or acknowledging that aesthetic standards are themselves cultural. Molly Hite (1989) writes:

Stories in the modern sense are always somebody's stories: even when they have a conventionally omniscient narrator they entail a point of view, take sides... One immediate consequence is that even though conventions governing the selection of narrator, protagonist, and especially plot restrict the kinds of literary production that count as stories in a given society and historical period, changes in emphasis and value can articulate the "other side" of a culturally mandated story, exposing the limits it inscribes in the process of affirming a dominant ideology. (p. 4)

**Interactive Phases of Curricular Revision**

Peggy McIntosh's (1983) "interactive phases of curricular revision" describes the study of history as progressing from (1) "Womanless History" to (2) "Women in History" to (3) "Women as a Problem, Anomaly or Absence in History" to (4) "Women As History" and finally to (5) "History Redefined or Reconstructed to Include Us All" (McIntosh, 1983, pp. 1, 3).

*Phase 1: Cultural Conformity*

If one substitutes "cultural diversity" or "people of color" for "women" in the above statements, the first phases at least seem to be a fairly accurate representation of the history of cultural diversity in literature for young people during the first half of the twentieth century. In phase one, the dominant white middle-class culture is presented as if all the world were one homogeneous group or at least as if all those who differ are unworthy of inclusion and, therefore, remain invisible. This deletion of significant portions of society in the literature presented to children has been a serious distortion of the understanding of the world.

*Phase 2: People of Color in History*

In phase two, a few people of other cultures are included in the mainstream of children's literature, but these few are those who have "made it" in the white, middle-class world—that is, those who are acceptable within the standards of the dominant culture. This phase supports the old fashioned melting pot notion of culture which assumes that the aim of all peoples is to become just like everyone else. Of course, the "everyone else" of this statement are those who dominate the social and cultural products of the nation. Thus a few biographical and fictional accounts of exceptional members of various peoples outside the dominant culture are presented to young people to demonstrate that it is possible to adapt oneself to, and achieve success in, the white middle-class world. This may have been a necessary step toward the acceptance of multiculturalism in children's
literature, but it also carried with it the not so subtle message that one must repress aspects of a personal heritage and accommodate oneself to the acceptable image of American society to be included. In becoming visible to the world, it was necessary for people of color to maintain the invisibility of much of their own culture, that with which unrepresented populations of young people might have identified. The acceptance of this early stage of cultural diversity in children’s literature assumed both this kind of denial of cultural uniqueness and a kind of didacticism which conveyed that if only one tried hard enough, he (or sometimes she) would “make it” in the white middle-class male world. Feminist scholars note the special difficulties encountered by women of color in that white male world.

It is particularly interesting to look at children’s literature, a field traditionally dominated by women editors, in this regard. On the one hand, women outside the primary culture because of their color, class, religion, or ethnicity had the added burden of gender working against them. On the other hand, it may have been true, in some instances, that women were more easily accepted into the mainstream literature than their male counterparts because their gender made them less of a threat to the status quo. It follows, therefore, that young protagonists from minority cultures, male as well as female, might have been more easily accepted than their adult counterparts because of the assumed powerlessness of young people. This is certainly a topic for further investigation.

Phase 3: Cultural Diversity as a Problem, Anomaly or Absence in History

Phase three in this development is characterized by a heightened social consciousness, recognizing that diverse peoples are not a visible part of the norm. There is anger at this discrimination and at the barriers that are set up to exclude whole groups of people. Many of the problem novels which dominated children’s literature beginning during the social unrest of the 1960s are examples of this phase in the history of cultural diversity in literature for young people. This was a period of major breakthroughs in children’s literature when publishers rushed to assure the proper complement of African-Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans as well as characters of other religious or national origins in books for children. Problems of prejudice and segregation were prominent in many of these stories. Alternately, it was common at that time to have contrived groups of one WASP, one African-American, one Jew, and one Asian American acting as a group protagonist in books for young readers. Sometimes these stories had little or no reflection of the various cultures supposedly represented in spite of the obvious intention to demonstrate that different peoples can live and play together in a harmonious multicultural world.
Phase 4: Cultural Diversity as History

One might make a case for the fact that, in the late 1970s, children's publishing in this country began to move into McIntosh's phase four in which the lives of all peoples are acknowledged and respected. At this time, stories about young people of various cultures moved from the very obvious "minority status as problem" to more realistically portrayed stories of all kinds of people going about the everyday business of living. Transferring McIntosh's statements about women to those of other cultures, readers and scholars in this phase no longer ask, Did members of other cultures write anything good? or What great works by people of other cultures can we include? Rather, it is assumed that all peoples have their own literatures and ask What did others write? or How have other cultures told their stories? In attempting to answer these questions, publishers sought new authors who could project the authentic voices of their cultures to established white middle-class American audiences as well as to their own people. There was limited success in this effort. Some people of color, particularly African-Americans such as John Steptoe, Virginia Hamilton, Alice Childress, and Walter Dean Myers, did break into the mainstream publishing community, but these exceptionally talented writers might have been included in phase two as exemplary minorities acceptable within the highest standards of all literature.

Unfortunately, progress through phase four toward a truly multicultural literature for young people slowed—in fact, almost reversed itself—during the 1980s when the number of books by and about people of color decreased (Myers, 1985, p. 224). There have been, however, signs that progress toward a multicultural world of children's and young adult literature is again moving through a period corresponding to the fourth phase of McIntosh's schema. In order to fulfill the promise of this stage of development, we must recover the lost literary canon, just as feminist literary critics have rediscovered early works of women writers. To locate lost works of other cultures, we might search out small publishers and church archives and encourage writers of color to record some of the oral narratives of their people to be published either by these small specialized presses or through mainstream publishing channels. Perhaps by the beginning of the twenty-first century we will have made real progress toward the final fifth phase in which literature for young people will be redefined or reconstructed to include the literary texts of all peoples.

Early History of Multicultural Literature for Youth

Those concerned about multicultural literature for young people might understand and appreciate these stages of development more
fully by looking back to phase two in the early part of this century. During the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, there were a few authors who recognized the need to provide a more inclusive cultural perspective in realistic literature for children and young people. The first edition of May Hill Arbuthnot's (1947) classic text *Children and Books* gives some indication of the status of multiculturalism in children's literature at that time. Arbuthnot devoted six pages to "Negroes" and "North American Indians" and then went on to discuss "other minority groups" including migrant workers, "Southern mountaineers," and "stories about so-called 'aliens,' a sad word for the newcomers to our shores." She states that:

The United States has a growing body of delightful realistic stories about the various minority groups. A few of these books are overearnest with too much emphasis on the problem of the group, but more and more they are becoming free from self-consciousness and they tell a good story light-heartedly. Perhaps this should be our criterion: whether the story is about an Amish, a Negro, an immigrant Italian, or an Indian child, it should be a good story and the characters should appeal to children from all groups. (pp. 380-81)

Although the social consciousness of the 1990s would cause today's reader to take issue with both the terminology and the tone of Arbuthnot's work, she was a leader for her time and much that she wrote in the 1940s still holds true today. For instance, in expressing concerns about "stories which hold up to the Negro child only the poverty stricken and the less educated members of its group," she states that:

White children may laugh over Augustus' vagrant family,[2] because they have dozens of books about more sensible and successful families. They can enjoy drawings of white children which are almost caricatures, like Louis Slobodkin's *Moffats* and Robert McCloskey's *Lentil*, because they have dozens of other books in which white children are shown to be idealistically beautiful and noble. In order to laugh at ourselves wholeheartedly, we must feel secure socially and confident personally. (p. 381)

What was true in 1947 is equally true today. Arbuthnot's comment also points to a very problematic area of consideration concerning books about other cultures—i.e., the fact that the critical acceptance of any one particular book is, in some part, dependent upon the total body of literature about that culture available to children. Perhaps we will have reached McIntosh's fifth phase of a totally reconstructed literature inclusive of all peoples when children of various cultures can admire, respect, be angry at, and laugh wholeheartedly at both those who share their heritages and those from very different cultures. For this to come about, there must be a vast array of stories which represent the various aspects of each
culture as fully as white middle-class youngsters are able to find their people in the books they read.

A number of women writers of the 1930s and 1940s made tremendous contributions to the beginnings of multicultural children's literature. Although these women could not be called feminists as we use the term today, they did exhibit many of the characteristics of feminism in their work, especially their concern for cooperation, connectedness, caring, diversity, and multiculturalism in a style that is associative and nonhierarchical.

Women's studies has enabled us to see in all areas what we've come to call the "invisible paradigms" of the academic system and the larger cultural context that marginalize or trivialize the lives of all women, the lives of Blacks and of ethnic minorities, and those outside the dominant class or culture. (Schuster & Van Dyne, 1983, p. 1)

Florence Crannell Means and Ann Nolan Clark repeatedly challenged those invisible paradigms that marginalized or trivialized the lives of young people separated from the primary culture by race, class, or ethnicity. They were prolific writers who specialized in stories about "outsiders" in our society, recognizing their similarities to others while celebrating the differences. As Norma Klein (1981) said much later: "The purpose of fiction is not to force any way of life on an unsuspecting reader. It is rather to make people transcend the boundaries of their own identity to understand in an intuitive or feeling way what it is like to be someone else" (p. 358). Means and Clark, along with their contemporaries Marguerite de Angeli and Lois Lenski, certainly transcended their own boundaries and have helped generations of children to do the same.

Florence Crannell Means was truly a leader in introducing young readers to other cultures. Transcending one's own boundaries to view life through the eyes of another is not an unusual goal of writers, but to do so steadily, creatively, and thoroughly for one marginalized group after another, as Florence Crannell Means did for African-Americans, Japanese Americans, Mexicans, migrant workers, and various Native American peoples for more than three decades is an accomplishment worthy of note. A rereading of many of her books for young people reveals the expected datedness of terminology and tone, but these stories continue to speak to the same human concerns of society's outsiders today as they did more than fifty years ago. In 1945, Anne Carroll Moore wrote the following:

It is her clear-sighted outlook upon the childhood and youth of many races scattered over this great country, her willingness to approach unfamiliar environments and peoples, to learn rather than to contrast, to identify herself with the emotions of youth, rather than to discuss or dissect them, which set Florence Crannell Means' books apart from those written to order from racial backgrounds. (p. 109)
Means always referred to her childhood and the fact that her father, a Baptist minister, had "visitors of every kind and color" in their home as the beginnings of her appreciation of, and respect for, various peoples. She began her literary career writing and illustrating stories about minority children for religious presses. Her first full-length novels, a trilogy including _A Candle in the Mist_ (1931), _Ranch and Ring_ (1932), and _A Bowlful of Stars_ (1934a), tell of the life of Janey Grant, a young pioneer whose westward travels were based on the life of Means's maternal grandmother. Grant's pioneer spirit was later reflected in the more than thirty stories, biographies, and plays based on Means's yearly visits to various Native American tribes and to other remote areas in this country inhabited by African-American, Hispanic, and Asian American peoples. Means (1940) believed that "the writer must herself deeply know the people she's writing about. She must go to them—when they are of her day—and be of them as well as among them" (p. 35). In discussing what she called the "mosaic" of the United States, she began with historic groups of the past.

Quite as vivid as the past, though, is the present with its varicolored racial groups, aboriginal and imported; and, shifting kaleidoscopically across the pattern of brights and darks, the continual trek of our migrant workers. It's since I've grown acquainted with the children of one after another of these groups that I've begun to harbor a deep desire: to fix this mosaic of American youth between book lids, one motif at a time. (p. 35)

For the next thirty years, Means did just that.

Means's view of multiculturalism, typical of the relatively few concerned and committed persons of that time, probably corresponded to McIntosh's phase two in which "others" were to be integrated into the primary culture. In a presentation to the Iowa Library Association, Means (1946a) remarked:

That brings us to the minority groups, and to the desire that has grown deep and burning in my own heart. That is the desire to present to our own white boys and girls the boys and girls of other races, other creeds and colors; to present them as just "folks," only superficially different from each other and from ourselves. To me this understanding of all peoples is the deepest need of a critical era; and, indeed, its only hope. (p. 87)

Today we consider "integration" to be a kind of cultural captivity in which those who are integrated give up aspects of their own identity in order to become a part of the primary culture. Now we are more likely to use terms such as "diversity" and "multiculturalism" to indicate the need to retain one's own cultural identity in a rich kaleidoscopic mix of peoples. "The task for the 1990s was to learn to appreciate differences and yet to eliminate them as the basis for
distributing power and privilege" (Davis, 1991, p. 384). In many of her books, written in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, Means did appreciate, even celebrate, differences among cultures. She also explored differences within cultures, but, as an author of realistic fiction, she also reflected the racial attitudes of those times in her work. Feminist scholars insist that a real redistribution of power and privilege will come about only when society deconstructs the white male hierarchies in which one succeeds by rising above others and reconstructs a network of connective relationships in which each member supports every other in a diverse, responsive, and inclusive society. For most people at the time that Means was writing for young people, such a society was virtually inconceivable, but she came close to achieving it in some of her stories.

Means was one of the first authors for young people to write realistically of African-Americans in America. Shuttered Windows, published in 1938, was certainly ahead of its time in its portrayal of class differences within racial boundaries. The New York Times review of Shuttered Windows stated:

In this, her latest book for older girls, she [Means] has undertaken a theme which has heretofore, so far as I know, been treated only in adult fiction, that of the educated Negro in relation to the more backward members of the race, and she has handled it in such universal terms as to appeal to schoolgirls of any race. (Buell, 1938, p. 10)

Means (1948) frequently stated her belief that, in order to write about other races or ethnic groups, one must spend enough time in a region "so that it becomes friend rather than acquaintance; so that you know it rather than know about it" (p. 107). After only a few weeks in the islands off the Carolina coast, however, the Gullah girls in the Mather school she was visiting asked her to write a book about them. In order to do so, she created a protagonist, Harriet Freeman, who left her cultured and advantaged home in Minneapolis to stay with her great-grandmother who, although she could not read or write, had a strength and nobility Harriet admired. Thus her main character was of the people but also first perceived them as an outsider looking into the lives of others. The poverty, the ignorance, and the superstition of her people are gradually offset by their goodness and strength, by the beauty of the island, and by the devotion of the teachers who worked to overcome the severe limitations of the school for "colored" girls. Great-grandmother's stories of "Moses Out of Arabia" and Harriet's growing friendship with Richie, the young agriculture student who wants to help his people, make Harriet realize that she too could help to open the "shuttered windows" for these people she had come to love and accept as her own. Wilhelmina Crosson (1940) wrote:
As a Negro woman, I feel *Shuttered Windows* no mere "flash in the pan" of books for young people, but a highly significant contribution to American juvenile literature. How gratifying to find a white woman who through her great tolerance has been able to treat so objectively, so sanely, and with such sympathetic understanding the life of a Negro girl. When one finishes *Shuttered Windows* one feels a piercing tenderness—an intimacy which causes one's enthusiasm to mount and to soar. (p. 324)

Suzanne Rahn (1987) remarks on Means being well ahead of her time when she creates a protagonist, Harriet, who is black, but also "strong, proud, and beautiful—in ways that reflect not only her individuality but her racial heritage." Rahn goes on to write: "As she talked with the students at Mather, Means must have sensed their need to find pride in their own racial heritage; in the characters of Harriet and Black Moses, she suggests—surely an unusual suggestion in the 1930s—that such pride is not only valid but necessary for their progress as a people" (p. 104).

One of the most interesting aspects of research into Means's work is the exchange of letters between her and Arna Bontemps in which she asks Bontemps for assistance in the creation of dialogue for her characters. The Bontemps Collection of the George Arents Research Library at Syracuse University contains approximately forty letters to and from, but mostly from, Florence Crannell Means written between 1937 and 1963. The earliest of these letters from Means, dated July 24, 1937, begins with "congratulations to the writer of so charming a book as *Sad-Faced Boy*." She goes on to say:

> I was especially charmed with your handling of dialogue. To avoid all the pitfalls and hurdles of contractions and misspellings and yet preserve the savor, the tempo, the rhythm—I myself have been seeking a solution of the problem which you have answered so brilliantly. I am writing a book for older teen age girls, set on the campus of one of the schools in South Carolina, largely attended by Negro girls from the coast and the sea islands. (Means to Bontemps, personal communication, July 24, 1937)

In another letter to Bontemps in November 1937, Means writes:

> If you should happen to see my *Shuttered Windows*, when it comes out, you may disapprove entirely of my use of the dialect. I did use contractions and misspellings—though I understand your decrying them and think your avoidance of them in *Sad-Faced Boy* a beautiful piece of work. My problem was a little different. In the first place, I am writing the book for teen age girls; in the second place, one of the points I want to get across is that individuals are individuals and to get that across I wanted to show that there is as much difference between the speech and custom of the Negro in Minneapolis and in Dafuskey as between any two groups anywhere.—But in the third place, such rendering of the dialect as you have accomplished requires a firmer hold on it than I have on the Gullah. (Means to Bontemps, personal communications, November 14, 1937)

In subsequent letters, Means again justifies her use of dialect in *Shuttered Windows*, writing in explanation:
But I've placed them [distortions and contractions] in the mouths of the uneducated characters in the story, as I should do with uneducated characters of any race—wishing especially to point to the fact that individuals are individuals, and that the Negro population presents the same range of education and ability as the white, but with far more restricted opportunity. (Means to Bontemps, personal communications, July 28, 1938)

Means asks Bontemps for help with background information for "another Negro book" in a letter dated April 22, 1942, in which she raises the question of whether the Booker T. Washington philosophy at Tuskegee would be acceptable. An April 28, 1942, letter from Bontemps to Means responds to this query and provides information on Negro colleges which might serve as settings for that novel. Bontemps writes:

My feeling is that Fisk and Atlanta and Bennett carry the traditions that are most acceptable to literate Negroes, where colleges for girls are concerned. The Booker T. Washington slant on industrial education is still approved, but I think that many Negroes like to think of Tuskegee as mainly a boy's school. I can't imagine what sort of career your heroine will select, but that would also be a factor. Atlanta has a school of social work, a library school, teaching courses, and the like. (Bontemps to Means, personal communications, April 28, 1942)

Bontemps was not the only one to whom Means turned for criticism prior to publication in an effort to make her books about other cultures ring true. She returned to the girls at the Mather school where she had been asked to write *Shuttered Windows* and gave prizes to those who criticized her manuscript. Her letters to Bontemps reveal that the manuscript for *Great Day in the Morning* (1946b) was revised in response to the comments of three writer friends and then returned to its original state when her editor preferred the earlier version and Bontemps and Charlemae Rollins did not find fault with it.

In *Great Day in the Morning*, twenty year old Lilybelle Lawrence has to choose between teaching and nursing. She also learns that misunderstandings can cause problems between races, but that good manners and right conduct can lead to respect. In this book, even more than in *Shuttered Windows*, the use of dialect may distract or disturb readers, but it is deftly handled in this serious story of a young minority character.

In 1945, Means won the Child Study Association Award for *The Moved-Outers*, a sensitive story of the evacuation and internment of a Japanese American girl and her family during World War II. In 1946, this book won a Newbery Honor. The author had previously written about the problems of Japanese assimilation in America in *Rainbow Bridge* (1934b), but it was the Ohara family of *The Moved-Outers* who touched the raw nerves of a war torn nation. Means met and talked with young California evacuees who were forced to
live behind barbed wire fences in the Amache relocation camp near her Colorado home and wrote this story at a time when many Americans were unaware of, or unwilling to acknowledge, what was happening to these U.S. citizens.

As this story opens, Sue Ohara is looking forward to a typical teenager’s weekend. Kim, her younger brother, had just won a high school debate with his fiery exhortations of patriotism, and Sue was looking forward to Christmas and then winning a scholarship and “four glorious years” in college (p. 7). Both Sue and Kim were bright and popular young people, but Sue fit into high school society as an All-American girl in spite of her Japanese heritage, while brother Kim stood somewhat apart and worried about the time when they would be “out of college into real life” (Means, 1945, p. 8). The first chapter ends with the author’s comment: “Everyone has a shadow; everyone with substance, amounting to anything. And your shadow is as much a part of you as the shape of your eyes and the color of your hair” (Means, 1945, p. 8). Unfortunately, the day was Friday, December 5, 1941, and by Sunday the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor brought the shadow descending on even the most loyal Americans with a particular shape of eyes and color of hair.

Howard Pease (1945), in a *Horn Book* article, praised Means’s treatment of this sensitive period of our nation’s history:

> Young Americans will find good reading in Mrs. Means’ story of a loyal Japanese-American family. It is her best book, beautifully written, profoundly moving, yet restrained. And it possesses that rare quality of saying something about our world today, here at home. It explains and interprets, it enlarges our sympathy and understanding, and it makes plain that the story of Sue and Jiro has implications far more important than what happens to one family or to one minority group. Possibly it is already late for us to decide that from now on we must be more forthright in our treatment of controversial subjects in our books for young people. Let us hope it is not too late. The reception accorded *The Moved-Outers* will be a test of our own intelligence and our own integrity. (p. 17)

The reception to *The Moved-Outers* proved to be a mixed one. In spite of its literary awards, many schools and libraries did not purchase this book. Anti-Japanese feelings, even against the Nisei or those born and educated in this country, still ran high at its time of publication on February 28, 1945, especially on the West Coast where large numbers of Japanese Americans had been very successful prior to Pearl Harbor. There has always been the suspicion that it was, at least in part, personal greed and racial prejudice directed against these successful “foreign-looking” immigrants which helped to fuel the negative feelings toward these citizens. When Japanese Americans were relocated, their property was often sold to others for less than its actual value. Those more sympathetic to the Nisei
were often embarrassed by the actions of this country's War Relocation Authority and did not want to expose their shameful actions to young people. For these reasons, *The Moved-Outers* did not achieve the readership or visibility it deserved and was, for a long time, one of those Newbery Honor books available but not generally known by young people.

Similar stories of Japanese American relocation during World War II began appearing in the early 1970s and brought Means's book back into consideration by those concerned with multicultural books for children and young people. Yoshiko Uchida's (1971) *Journey to Topaz* is based on the author's own experiences during this tragic period of history. The protagonist is much younger than Sue of *The Moved-Outers*, but otherwise the parallels between these two stories are amazing. This is especially true when one considers that they were written almost thirty years apart, the first, an outsider's observations during the heat of a terrible occurrence and the latter, an adult insider's reflections on her childhood experiences. Also in 1971, Japanese Canadian artist and author Shizuye Takashima's *A Child in Prison Camp* was released. This account of her experiences in a Canadian internment camp, poignantly presented in paintings as well as in words, was named the "Best Illustrated Book of the Year" by the Canadian Association of Children's Librarians the following year. Subsequently, *A Child in Prison Camp* (1974) was published in the United States and in many other countries and has won a number of additional awards.

In the 1980s, the case of United States versus Hohri, a 1983 class action suit by survivors of Japanese American internment camps, brought this dark period of American history to light for many, including young people. The legal and moral questions surrounding these events were debated in newspapers in both popular and scholarly articles and in adult books during this decade, and they also began to receive more attention in books for children. Daniel S. Davis's (1982) *Behind Barbed Wire: The Imprisonment of Japanese-Americans During World War II* and John Tateishi's (1984) *And Justice for All: An Oral History of the Japanese-American Detention Camps* present young readers with thoughtful realistic accounts of relocation camps. Sheila Hamanaka's (1990) *The Journey: Japanese Americans, Racism, and Renewal* uses a spectacular and beautifully detailed five-panel mural to present Japanese American history with an emphasis on the American concentration camps of World War II. The powerfully evocative visual experience and thought-provoking narrative of this book provides young people today with the kind of aesthetic encounter with this painful ordeal from our history that was not possible during the actual time of occurrence.
The Moved-Outers was a landmark book, one that dealt with this difficult topic during its own time and opened the door for these more recent books for young people. It is unlikely that any book on this subject written by a Japanese American would have been published in the 1940s or 1950s (the McCarthy period was certainly a recognizable obstacle). It was not until almost thirty years after the onset of relocation that Japanese Americans who had been children in the camps began telling their stories. Florence Crannell Means, as a sympathetic outsider, had been the first to present this injustice to young readers long before those oppressed were able to tell their own stories. This was probably true for most marginalized or oppressed peoples; someone from the outside had to tell their stories first before they were able to make their own voices heard. Sundquist (1988) writes in his assessment of the internment camps that:

there can be little question that the internment, however sound its motivations must have seemed at the time, was wrong and that a debt is owed Japanese Americans. The repayment of that debt cannot be made with money alone; it must also include apologies based on a clear historical understanding. (p. 547)

It is precisely this clear historical understanding that is critical to our young people. It is noteworthy that it took almost fifty years for the American government to first recognize, then admit to, and finally accept responsibility for, its actions with regard to its citizens. Children need to know such things, and it was Means who first presented this horror to young people.

Means also dedicated a great deal of time and effort to her work with and about Native Americans. Year after year she spent as much time as possible living with the Navajo or Hopi peoples and was always very precise in distinguishing among the lifestyles and customs of various tribes. She wrote pamphlets about Native Americans for the Baptist Missionary Society, but she really brought them to life in her stories for young people. Tangled Waters (1936) is the story of Altolie, a fifteen-year-old Navajo who had to rebel against her grandmother's wishes to get an education in the white school. Many details of Navajo beliefs and customs are woven sensitively into this story, showing the beauty as well as the harshness of this way of life. In a winter of famine, Altolie would have married a wealthy but unpleasant young Navajo gambler if a Boy she had met at school had not come to her rescue. The Boy was trying to learn the ways of white society so that he could combine the best of these ways with the best of his own Navajo heritage. The view of white culture presented in this work would be perceived as over-romanticized today,
but *Tangled Waters* was a very forward-looking book for its overall treatment of, and respect for, Native Americans at its time of publication.

A more somber view of Native American life is found in Means's *The Rains Will Come* (1954). The setting is a Hopi village in the midst of a severe two-year drought. Young Lohmay is obsessed with the thought that his irreverence toward Hopi religious symbols brought this punishment on his people. When the villagers confess their sins, however, he discovers that his own are very small. The power of this story is in its beautiful prose and in the authentic portrayal of Hopi life, especially their deep religious feelings, close-knit family life, and strength in times of trouble. There is humor here but *The Rains Will Come* also pictures a darker side of Native American life. Black and white illustrations by Hopi artist Fred Kabotic complement Means's text and add credibility to her treatment of this way of life.

Fifteen years later, Means published an even darker view of Hopi life. In *Our Cup Is Broken* (1969), Sarah left her village to live in the white world when she was orphaned at age eight. At age twenty she returns and finds that the world she remembers no longer exists. She finds it impossible to live in the white world but neither could she be comfortable with her Hopi people; she has no home. Sarah is raped, bears a blind child, marries for protection without love, and gives birth to a stillborn child. Thus, the tragedy is somewhat overstated, but Sarah is a compelling and believable character who demonstrates the personal cost of a culture that appears to be vanishing.

In addition to books about African-Americans, Japanese Americans, and Native Americans, Means wrote stories about other "outsiders" in American society. Mexican Americans, Spanish Americans, Chinese Americans, and migrant workers have all been honestly and sympathetically portrayed in her work. She was a pioneer in writing realistic stories about minorities for young readers. While she valued the uniqueness of each of these cultures, it is clear that she believed that all human beings are basically the same under the skin. Although this kind of "melting pot" view of the world is only at McIntosh's phase two and is no longer generally acceptable, Means's work was a giant step forward toward the kind of multicultural literature represented by McIntosh's fifth phase.

One of the best known writers of Native American stories for young people from the 1940s into the 1970s was Ann Nolan Clark. In *Journey to the People*, Clark (1969) wrote:

> My concern is for Indian children, because racial differences are greater than those of nationalities. Generally, differences in traditions and
customs can be met to mutual satisfaction with mutual generosity and humor. Differences of concepts, however, are more difficult to understand and more difficult to accept. I believe there are four Indian group concepts that differ greatly from concepts in our group pattern. These are the Indian feeling about land, about work, about time, and about the spiritual life. (p. 19)

The author goes on to explain these four concepts, and throughout her long career as teacher and writer she was careful to honor Native American traditions and beliefs.

Clark's first books for children were bilingual textbooks written for the children she taught for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In My Mother's House (1941) was written with and for five Tewa children in the Tesuque Pueblo in Santa Fe and was first called Home Geography because that is what it was. Both the author and the children she taught were dissatisfied with the textbooks available to them. Most were alien to their ways, and even the stories of their people were told from a white perspective, explaining what was already known, and often best left unsaid, to Native American youngsters. The Director of Indian Education, Willard Beatty, was so impressed with Home Geography that he sent it to children's book editor May Massee who saw its appeal for a larger audience and published it as In My Mother's House.

In My Mother's House has a rhythmic simplicity and a sensitivity to the details of the everyday life of the Pueblo people. Its cadence, reflecting the speech patterns of these Native Americans, and its short sentences made it an ideal reader, and its gentle reverence for their way of life made it an ideal introduction to that life for others. The poetic beauty of this work cries out to be read aloud.

My heart is the holding-place,
My heart is the keeping-place
For the things I know
About that lake in the mountains.
Always will I keep
In my heart
The things that belong there,
As lakes
Keep water
For the people (p. 24).

Little Navajo Bluebird (1943) is one of Clark’s many stories of young Native Americans caught up in the struggle between their own culture and the dominant white culture which tempts them to leave their homes and their people. This is the story of Doli, the little Bluebird of the title, who must decide whether to leave the
hogan and go to the white school that seems to have completely "Americanized" her older brother and is about to take her sister. Like In My Mother's House, this book is a celebration of a particular form of Native American life closely attuned to nature and the seasons. May Lamberton Becker's (1943) review of Little Navajo Bluebird says:

Mrs. Clark shows in her new book the same qualities that gave distinction to her earlier work. These are first of all the capacity to identify herself spiritually with the Navajo scheme of things, while retaining the power of looking at it from the outside. This is a gift rare enough to call for special tools by which to carry it out; these are provided by her other distinguishing quality—ability, whether natural or acquired and probably both, to speak and write in the Navajo rhythm and with these turns of phrase. (p. 8)

Secret of the Andes (1952), which won the Newbery Medal, is probably Clark's best known work. This quietly beautiful, almost mystical, tale of Cusi, the Peruvian boy who, with Chuto, the old herder, guards the llamas high in the Andes, introduces readers to the history, the mythology, and the music of the Incas. The sense of solitude and of mystery—a mystery of ideas rather than action—along with Clark's lyrical prose, may make this a difficult book for some of today's young readers who are used to the fast action and visual stimulation of television. Adults who share books with young people, however, might introduce this story by reading it aloud, encouraging listeners to savor the sound, the pacing, and the sensitivity of this tale.

Santiago (1955) is the story of an Indian boy of Guatemala who leaves the Spanish foster home in which he was raised to experience the lifestyle of his own people. During the five years of his travels, Santiago meets many people and tries out many lifestyles, each described with loving detail, until finally he decides to return to his own village to help the young people there. Anne Carroll Moore (1955) called this book "a triumphant story of a living, growing boy in today's world and adds another cubit to Mrs. Clark's stature as a writer" (p. 178). Another reviewer said:

Once you accept the compulsion of the boy Santiago to leave his gentle foster home to lead the primitive life of the Indian, you find yourself saying, "the greatest Clark yet." Not even in "Secret of the Andes" is the boy's reaction to life so poignant, the feeling of race so strong, the conception of beauty and mysticism so clarified. And all this in a book for young people in a thoroughly normal and fascinating story. (Johnson, 1955, p. 1510)

Ann Nolan Clark wrote many other books about Native American peoples, but she also created stories of young people of Costa Rica, South Vietnam, Finland, and Ireland as well as retelling a Vietnamese version of Cinderella. In 1968, Clark was awarded the Regina Medal which honors the body of her work.
Like Florence Crannell Means, Clark credits her childhood experiences with many different peoples for her ability to identify with, and sensitively portray, the lives of those of races and cultures different from her own. She was born and raised in Las Vegas, New Mexico, a frontier town where she met people from various states who clung to their European roots—French trappers, colonial Spaniards, Native Americans, Jews, and Irishmen—such as her own father and grandfather. In her Newbery acceptance speech, Clark (1955) spoke of her earliest memories of Native American culture and of her work as a teacher:

I have worked with Spanish children from New Mexico to Central and South America, with Indian children from Canada to Peru. I have worked with them because I like them. I write about them because their stories need to be told. All children need understanding, but children of segregated racial groups need even more. All children need someone to make a bridge from their world to the world of the adults who surround them. Indian children need this; they have the child problems of growing up, but also they have racial problems, the problems of conflicting interracial patterns between groups, and the conflicts of changing racial patterns within the group. (pp. 399-400)

Although increasing numbers of books for young people about Native American peoples have been published in the last two decades, most of them are still written by outsiders. Writers such as Paul Goble have been successful outsiders in the interpretation of the cultures of Native American peoples. His stories, drawn from the peoples of the Great Plains and the wonderful tales of the trickster Iktomi, offer an introduction to both the legends and culture of Native Americans. Russell Freedman's informational writing has chronicled in Buffalo Hunt (1988) the near destruction of the buffalo and the effects of this on native tribes. Virginia Hamilton's Arilla Sun Down (1976) tells the realistic story of Arilla who is part African-American and part Native American.

The 1980s have also brought some Native Americans into the mainstream of literature for young people. Te Ata's Baby Rattlesnake (1989) is a beautiful example of the translation of a traditional tale from the Chickasaw culture. Jamake Highwater's Ghost Horse trilogy—Legend Days (1984), The Ceremony of Innocence (1985), and I Wear the Morning Star (1986)—is written with the lyrical voice of a Native American. Louise Erdrich, part Ojibwa, has written a trilogy beginning with Tracks (1989), the first of the trilogy, although written last, Love Medicine (1984) and The Beet Queen (1986) which forms a realistic saga that begins in the nineteenth century and moves intergenerationally to the present. Thus we begin to see a new literature emerging but one not yet in the fullness of the McIntosh fifth phase.
Two other women writers born at the end of the nineteenth century helped to make dramatic changes in twentieth-century literature for young people by telling the stories of those previously invisible in the "all white world of children's books" (Larrick, 1965, p. 63). Although most of the characters in their books were white, Marguerite de Angeli and Lois Lenski did include children of many ethnic and religious groups and of migrant families previously unrepresented in this literature. Both de Angeli and Lenski were artists as was Florence Crannell Means, and their keen observations of various peoples were captured in verbal as well as visual images. De Angeli did write one story of an African-American child which, although very dated by today's standards, was a breakthrough book in the history of multicultural literature for young children. The protagonist of *Bright April* (1946) is the daughter of a close comfortable middle-class African-American family who first meets prejudice at age ten when a white girl refuses to sit beside her at a party. This book has been criticized because it is unlikely that April, who appears to move freely in white society, would have never before encountered racial prejudice. It has also been challenged because April, who says "I don't feel different," is indeed portrayed as just like her white friends in all but skin color. Even de Angeli's illustrations do not convey any real racial identity, but all her characters, similar to Kate Greenaway's before her, have basically the same sweet faces. Nonetheless, the creation of an African-American protagonist with whom young white children could identify was not a commonplace act for an author in the 1940s. De Angeli also wrote many other stories about minority children, especially those growing up near her Philadelphia home. Her belief that all children are basically alike comes through in her books about the Amish, Poles, Swedes, Quakers, Mennonites, and French Canadians. Even Robin, the hero of *The Door in the Wall*, de Angeli's Newbery award-winning novel set in thirteenth-century England, is a child who is "different"—in this story, one with a disability. De Angeli was also a winner of the Regina Medal, given by the Catholic Library Association, for the values expressed in the totality of her work.

Lois Lenski was another author who, in the 1940s, concentrated on introducing young readers to the different groups of peoples living within the borders of the United States. Her Round-about-America series books were written as easy readers for middle elementary school children, and her Regional Series was written for slightly older readers. Lenski lived among the people she wrote about and recorded and sketched their lives with meticulous detail. Most of these books tell the stories of the less fortunate members of American society—the poor, the homeless, the undereducated. Two of her stories are
about Native Americans. *Little Sioux Girl* (1958) describes the harshness of life on a reservation in 1950, and *Indian Captive: The Story of Mary Jemison* (1941) is based on an actual capture of a young girl by the Senecas. This is not a negative portrayal of Native Americans, however, as Mary learns to value the Seneca people and decides to stay with them.

**Conclusion**

These four white middle-class women—Means, Clark, de Angeli, and Lenski—were among the most prolific of those who, although they could not entirely break the boundaries of the society in which they lived, cared enough to go out and live and work with others very different from themselves. When they absorbed as much as possible of those cultures, they told their stories in books for children, believing that it is with the young that tolerance and respect for all peoples must begin. In the words of contemporary feminist scholars, these prefeminist women were doing "women's work"; they were working to create a more inclusive, a more caring world.

In this the last decade of the twentieth century, more and more young people can find reflections of themselves and their own cultures in the literature published for them. It is difficult to gain perspective on a particular time while living through it, but one hopes that history will prove that children's literature has finally reached at least McIntosh's fourth phase in which the stories of many peoples are told in a nonhierarchical tapestry of human lives. There is, nonetheless, still much to be accomplished before we reach her fifth phase in which all peoples are fully included, and the differences within cultures, as well as those among cultures, are available to readers both inside and outside those cultures.

As we look from the past to current and future trends in the history of multicultural literature for children and young people, the feminist perspective remains at least one useful lens with which to examine these works. Feminist theory has helped us to look at "the other side" of many issues, ideas, and disciplines and encourages us to accept, care about, and celebrate our differences while attempting to reconstruct a world that respects and nurtures all peoples. The ways in which women have defined themselves, as documented in feminist texts, may provide insight into how others outside the dominant culture have defined and empowered themselves. When American society acknowledges that, from a global perspective, those now called minorities are actually in the majority, our treatment of these peoples, in literature as in life, must change. Until that time, the acknowledged majority of women and the work of feminist scholars, often women of color or other oppressed groups finding
their own place in the mainstream culture may help others who have been ignored, marginalized, or victimized to be fully represented, accepted, and appreciated in literature for children and youth.

Notes

1 Although "people of color" is generally considered to be "politically correct" today, some believe that this phrase could be interpreted as patronizing, designed to make Americans perceive each other primarily in terms of race or color. This points out the difficulty in remaining "politically correct," a term which itself may rapidly become incorrect.

2 Karen Patricia Smith, the editor of this Library Trends issue, provided the following definition in her letter of invitation to contribute to this issue: "The phrase 'Multicultural Literature in the United States'—refers directly to literary contributions by those individuals who are, according to U.S. Federal Government designation, members of 'minority' groups. These include African-American, Hispanic American, American Indian, or Alaskan Native, Asian American, or Pacific Islander groups who reside in the United States."

3 For instance, Canadian born author Paul Yee has drawn upon his Canadian Chinese heritage as well as on archives of the immigrants from China who lived and worked in Canada during the gold rush, the building of the transcontinental railway, and the settling of the West Coast in the nineteenth century to write Tales From Gold Mountain (1989).

4 Of the seven authors of these books included here, only two, Arna Bontemps and Jesse Jackson, were themselves African-American. Ann Terry, who also had published books for children, was not included. Florence Crannell Means was one of the seven listed by Arbuthnot.

5 This refers to a series of books by Le Grand Henderson about a poor white family who live in a shanty boat on the Mississippi River.

6 American Playhouse produced a film written and directed by Julie Dash entitled Daughters of the Dust which was aired on July 22, 1992. The visually entrancing film captures many of the images that Means included in her book.

7 In 1972 it won the "Best Illustrated Book of the Year" medal of the Canadian Association of Children's Librarians and "Look of Books" Design Award. A CBC Armistice Day program presented a dramatization nationally. In 1974, the Japanese edition won the Sankei Shimbun Literary Award, and in 1975, a musical play by Gekidan Fuji was produced in Tokyo.

8 For instance, Beyond Words: Images From America's Concentration Camps (1987) brings together a strong collection of illustration from the camps which vary in style and mix elements from both Eastern and Western cultures; John Hersey's "Behind Barbed Wire" (1988) describes the exclusion of the Japanese Americans during World War II in light of Reagan's signing of the American apology and reparation in 1987, and Eric Sundquist's "The Japanese-American Internment" (1988) is a reappraisal of the U.S. government's guilt in this issue.

9 Although these and other books by Highwater have been highly recommended, there has been some challenge to the author's status as a Native American. See "The Golden Indian" in the 1984 late summer issue of Akwesasne Notes, published by the Mohawk Nation, Rosseveltown, NY 13683 (Adams, 1984).

10 This term was first used by Nancy Larrick in her September 1965 Saturday Review article.

References


