

The *We Need Diverse Books* Campaign and Critical Race Theory: A Call to Action for Library and Information Professionals

Cass Mabbott
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Abstract

The author will explore the ways in which Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used in the *We Need Diverse Books* (WNDB) campaign, targeting children's literature. By examining WNDB through the lens of CRT (and expanding it to Critical Theory), the author will contribute points of action for Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals to help support WNDB's momentum.

The author wishes to incite a sense of urgency in LIS professionals to better 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 books is not a new one and has been championed by many for decades. However, only recently has the diverse books issue achieved traction, thanks, in part, to the efforts of WNDB. What can LIS scholars and practitioners do to ensure that this traction continues?

Keywords: Diverse children's literature; youth services; LIS education; Critical Race Theory; social justice

doi: 10.9776/16528

Copyright: Copyright is held by the author.

Acknowledgements: Special thanks to Dr. Nicole Cooke, Dr. Christine Jenkins, Dr. Kathryn LaBarre, and Dr. Carol Tilley.

Contact: mmabbot2@illinois.edu

1 Introduction

The *We Need Diverse Books* (WNDB) campaign is a thriving movement to publish children's and young adult books by and about diverse people in American society. Critical Race Theory's (CRT) purpose is to explore and challenge the white normative power structure prevalent in our society through cross-disciplinary activism.

The goal of this work is three-fold. First, it will explore the ways in which CRT is used in the WNDB campaign. One of CRT's tenets is the call for social justice action; WNDB has uniquely embodied this tenet from the beginning due to its grass roots mission. In addition, WNDB has uniquely connected with its community, both online and in person from the beginning. By examining the dynamic example of WNDB through the lens of CRT, the author will contribute points of action for Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals to help support WNDB's momentum. Another purpose of this work will be to explore other areas of subaltern marginalization in children's literature—including, but not limited to, underserved populations, such as LGBTQIA and differently-abled youth.

A secondary goal is to incite a sense of urgency in LIS scholars and practitioners 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 books is not a new one and has been championed by many for decades. Yet, not until recently, has the diverse books issue achieved traction, thanks, in part, to the efforts of WNDB. What can LIS scholars and practitioners do to ensure that this traction continues? What can we learn from the scholarly work of those who focus on CRT as it pertains to LIS?

2 Conclusion

Finally, the author hopes to get feedback from current LIS CRT/Critical Theory scholars and LIS educators/practitioners.

3 References

- Baker, A. (1963). *Books about Negro life for children*. New York, NY: New York Public Library.
- Bell, D. (1973). *Race, racism, and American law*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.
- Bishop, R. S. (1982). *Shadow and substance: Afro-American experience in contemporary children's fiction*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Broderick, D. M. (1973). *Image of the Black in children's fiction*. New York, NY: R.R. Bowker.

- Cappiccie, A., Chadha, J., Lin, M. B., & Snyder, F. (2012). Using Critical Race Theory to Analyze How Disney Constructs Diversity: A Construct for the Baccalaureate Human Behavior in the Social Environment Curriculum. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 32(1), 46-61.
- Crenshaw, K. (1995). *Critical Race Theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New York: New Press.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- Dixon, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2006). *Critical Race Theory in Education: All God's children got a song*. New York: Routledge.
- Dunbar, A. W. (2008). *Critical Race Information Theory: Applying a CRITICAL race lens to information studies (Unpublished doctoral dissertation)*. UCLA.
- Elliott, Z. (2009, September 5). *Something Like an Open Letter to the Children's Publishing Industry*. Retrieved March 12, 2015, from zettaelliott.wordpress.com
- Freeman, A. D. (1978). Legitimizing Racial Discrimination through Antidiscrimination Law: A critical review of supreme court doctrine. *Minnesota Law Review*, 62.
- Harris, V. J. (1992). *Teaching multicultural literature in grades K-8*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.
- Horning, K. (2015). *Children's Books by and About People of Color*. Retrieved from <https://3A%2F%2Fccbc.education.wisc.edu%2Fbooks%2Fpcstats.asp>
- Kumasi, K. (2013). *The Library is Like Her House: Reimagining youth of color in LIS discourses (A. Bernier, Ed.)*. In *Transforming young adult services* (pp. 103-113). Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman.
- Kurz, R. F. (2012). *Missing Faces, Beautiful Places: The Lack of Diversity in South Carolina Picture Book Award Nominees*. *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*, 18(2), 128-145.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education*. *Teachers College Record*, 97, 47-68.
- Larrick, N. (1965). *The All-White World of Children's Books*. *Saturday Review*, September 11, 63-85.
- Lee and Low Publishers. (2013). *Diversity Gap in Children's Books Infographic 2015 [Digital image]*. Retrieved from <http://blog.leeandlow.com/2013/06/17/why-hasnt-the-number-of-multicultural-books-increased-in-eighteen-years/>
- Martin, M. H. (2004). *Brown gold: Milestones of African American children's picture books, 1845-2002*. New York: Routledge.
- Matsuda, M. J. (1993). *Words that Wound: Critical race theory, assaultive speech, and the First Amendment*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Myers, C. (2013, August 06). *Young dreamers - The Horn Book*. Retrieved from http://www.hbook.com/2013/08/opinion/young-dreamers/#_
- Myers, W. D. (2014, March 15). *Where Are the People of Color in Children's Books? The New York Times Sunday Review*.
- Rollins, C. (1943). *Children's Books on the Negro: To Help Build a Better World*. *The Elementary English Review*, 20(6), 219-223.
- Rollins, C. H., & Baker, A. (1967). *We build together; a reader's guide to Negro life and literature for elementary and high school use*. Champaign, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Rollins, C. H. (1941). *We build together; a reader's guide to Negro life and literature for elementary and high school use*. Champaign, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Rothschild, A. (2015, March 6). *The World of Children's Books Is Still Very White*. Retrieved March 12, 2015.
- Rumain, J. (n.d.). *Critical Race Theory Resource Guide*. Retrieved from <http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~jp49/>
- Schroeder, R., & Hollister, C. V. (2014). *Librarians' Views on Critical Theories and Critical Practices*. *Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian*, 33, 91-119.
- Tate, W. F. (1997). *Chapter 4: Critical Race Theory and Education: History, Theory, and Implications*. *Review of Research in Education*, 22(1), 195-247.
- W.E.B., D. B. (1903). *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and sketches*. Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co.
- Williams, V. K., & Deyoe, N. (2014). *Diverse Population, Diverse Collection? Youth Collections in the United States*. *Technical Services Quarterly*, 31(2), 97-121.