

A NARRATIVE OF AUGUSTA BAKER'S EARLY LIFE AND HER WORK AS A
CHILDREN'S LIBRARIAN WITHIN THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Policy Studies
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016

Urbana, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

Augusta Braxton Baker (1911-1998) was a Black American librarian whose tenure within the New York Public Library (NYPL) system lasted for more than thirty years. This study seeks to shed light upon Baker's educational trajectory, her career as a children's librarian at NYPL's 135th Street Branch, her work with Black children's literature, and her enduring legacy. Baker's narrative is constructed through the use of primary source materials, secondary source materials, and oral history interviews. The research questions which guide this study include: 1) How did Baker use what Yosso described as "community cultural wealth" throughout her educational trajectory and time within the NYPL system? 2) Why was Baker's bibliography on Black children's books significant? and 3) What is her lasting legacy? This study uses historical research to elucidate how Baker successfully navigated within the predominantly White world of librarianship and established criteria for identifying non-stereotypical children's literature about Blacks and Black experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Philippians 4:13 New Living Translation (NLT)

”For I can do everything through Christ,^[a] who gives me strength.”

I thank GOD who is my Everything. Without Him I am nothing and would have been unable to enter into and complete this unique, necessary journey to obtaining my doctoral degree. *Hallelujah.*

I offer my highest praise to GOD for my entire family (real and fictive kin) whose prayers, love, faith, encouragement, and support have been (and continue to be) immense blessings to me. To my mother, Jean Carter, thank you for loving me despite my absence (at times) in body as well as mind. Thank you for *always* loving and accepting me as I am. To my father, Ronald Carter, thank you for encouraging me with a smile when words seemed to escape you. To my sister, Dr. Daphne Carter-McCants, and my niece, Nicole McCants, thank you for your inspiring words and for always believing in me. Aunt Lavoris, I thank you for the telephone calls and motherly advice you are always willing to give. I thank God for my maternal and paternal grandparents (especially Joe and Joanna Moore) for always praying with me, believing in me, and getting in my business about when I would finish my degree. I appreciate it all. Felicia Moore, thank you for being one of my first and best teachers. Roy Moore, Jimmie Moore, and Christopher Moore, thank you for being willing to travel long distances to haul my belongings up and down residential hall stairs without ever charging me a penny. I love you all dearly. To Asako Kinase-Leggett, thank you for keeping me balanced, helping me to feel at home away from home at your parents’ house, and for always being willing to patiently serve as my sounding board. Asako, you are indeed a phenomenal CU sister. To James A. Warren Jr., thank you for being my loving brother in Christ who was (and is) always willing to pray with me, listen to me, to offer a helping hand, and an open heart. Thank you also for lugging my

heavy burden of books, clothing, and life essentials from one residence to another. You are a loving angel of light in my life, and I am so grateful to God for you!

To my advisor, Dr. Anderson, thank you for giving me verbal permission to stalk you in order to finish my dissertation and for always stepping in just when I needed you. Thank you also for helping me to get “Fired up and ready to go.” I pray I stay that way.

Dr. Harris, my dear mentor and mother-figure, thank you so much for your wisdom, encouragement, time, and helping me to dream deep and limitlessly. Thank you for *everything*.

Dr. Dyson, thank you for encouraging me to believe in my story and to tell it boldly. Also, thank you for your kindness, understanding, and strength. Thank you for having an endless supply of popcorn and praise for students who simply need to hear “well done.”

Dr. Pak, thank you for your honesty, direction, and heartfelt advice, which are precious. Thank you for always encouraging me to press onward even when feeling overwhelmed.

Thank you to Laura Ketchum, Stephanie Rayl, and the entire Human Resources team at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) for helping to make my entire graduate school experience *phenomenal*. You all deserve an endless standing ovation because you are wellsprings of wisdom, intellect, and compassion. You all are truly a godsend.

Thank you to the custodial, maintenance, cafeteria, and housing staffs at the University of South Carolina (USC)-Columbia, Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), UIUC, and Phillips Exeter Academy (PEA), who made it possible for me to eat, sleep, and awake in peace. These are indeed blessings.

To Dr. Wallulis, my academic father, mentor, and staunch supporter from my undergraduate years up until the present time...thank you so very, very much for *everything*. You helped me to increase my confidence in myself and my abilities. I went from

acknowledging “*I think I can...I think I can*” to boldly asserting “*I know I can...I know I can.*” You have never ever left my side. I pray you remain my father-figure and mentor for as long as our lives last.

Thank you to all USC-Columbia TRIO Program personnel (including Dr. Beasley, Ms. Counts, Dr. Donaldson, Dr. Littlefield, Dr. Nesmith, and countless others) for awakening within me the desire to pursue an advanced degree and for cheering me through every step of the process until completion. Thank you to Dr. Dianne Johnson and Dr. Michelle Martin for showing me the way and for lifting me up on their shoulders when my strength was indeed small. Dr. Greg Carbone, Karen Beidel, and Frank (the cat), thank you kindly for opening your homes and hearts to me. Also, thank you so much for providing me with endless encouragement as I collected data for my study at USC-Columbia.

I offer my utmost gratitude to archivists at The South Caroliniana Library (especially Graham Duncan and Brian Cuthrell), Elizabeth Sudduth, The Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections staff at USC-Columbia. A special thank-you also goes to Steven Fullwood, Tal Nadan, staff at the New York Public Library’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and Stephen A. Schwarzman Building.

Thank you so very much to my library and information science mentors (especially Joyce M. Durant, Harriet Green, Dr. Binh Le, Katherina Lee, Raymond Pun, and Joyce Wright).

Thank you so much to faculty, staff and students at USC-Columbia, HGSE, and UIUC’s College of Education and Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

Thank you to my dear friends, colleagues, and supporters across the globe, including: Anthonia Ahonsi, Penny Ames, Derek Attig, Amani Ayad, Roy Brooks, Vandella Brown, Suzanne Cade, Dr. Cooke, Robin Copp, Naomi Coquillon, Tracy Drake, Omar Eaton-Martínez,

Meg Edwards, Danielle Forbes, Aisha Conner-Gaten, Jill Gengler, Jessica Gourdine, Meseret Hailu, Christa Hardy, Janice Harrington, Charlisa Hart, Tamara Hoff, Derek Houston, Sujin Huggins, Sharon Johnson, Lydiah Kiramba, Tony Laing, Karla Lucht, Lisa Massanisso, Dr. McDowell, Debarah McFarland, Ezella McPherson, Nancy O'Brien, Cornelia L.A. Paliama, Dinh Phan, Perzavia Praylow, Britni Puryear, the Radjamin family, Dr. Smith, Mi Yun Suh, Dr. Tilley, Dr. Vickery, Dr. Welton, Mrs. Lucille White, Jackie Bunn White, DeAnza Williams, Doug Williams, Dr. Williams, Dr. Wolske, Louise Womble, and others that are too numerous to name who have profoundly impacted my spiritual, intellectual and professional development.

I am tremendously grateful to Augusta Baker's son for his warmth and willingness to speak candidly with me, for the precious gift of his time, and for granting me his blessing to research his mother.

I also express my sincerest appreciation to my UIUC writing group members (Neet Bajwa, Michelle Castro, Rejane Dias, Juan Gerardo, Sari Hunt, Shana Riddick, Gabriel Rodriguez, Pasha Trotter, and Robert Wallon) and Augustus Hallmon. A huge thank-you to The Church of the Living God (TLC) and TLC N-God Ministries Bible study group in Champaign, Illinois; Stone Creek Church in Urbana, Illinois; Bible Way Church of Atlas Road in Columbia, South Carolina; and Bethel A.M.E. Church in Britton's Neck, South Carolina.

Thank you to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, UIUC Graduate College, and the PEA community. A special thank-you goes to Dr. Sami Atif, Peter and Grace Anderson, Sarah Anderson, Marilyn Bott, Lara Bradford, Tyler Caldwell, Khadijah Campbell, Marilyn Chew, Andrew Gatto, Melinda Dolan, Peter Frank, Shanna Hines, Catherine Holden, Lula Jebari, Becky Moore, Tad Nishimura, Peter Nelson, Willie Perdomo, Rosanna Salcedo, Dr. Erik Wade, Ron Kim, Beth Rohloff, Chris Roy, Gail Scanlon, Ethan Shapiro, Kathryn Lennon-Walker, Thomas

Wharton, Dr. Ellen Wolff, Class of 1945 Library, PEA English Department, PEA Thursday
Christian Prayer Group, PEA *Transitions*, and innumerable others who believed in me, my
abilities, and my scholarship.

Thank you all.

Ephesians 3:20 New International Version (NIV)

*“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his
power that is at work within us”*

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I am a scholar, researcher, educator, and librarian. I am also a Black woman whose intellectual pursuits span the fields of higher education and library and information science (LIS). My family ardently believes that a sound, rigorous formal education paves the way to enhanced emancipation, empowerment, and enlightenment. Not only does education help to improve one's personal and professional conditions but, person by person, it can function to improve one's community, country, and countless livelihoods across the globe.

In addition to education, public libraries have played a valuable role in my life. My affinity for public libraries stem from a personal childhood experience. When I was a child, a bookmobile stopped outside my home in Britton's Neck, South Carolina every Saturday. The lady who drove the bookmobile was a nice White woman who knew I treasured reading. One day the nice White lady did not show up. In her place was a Black woman who shared my mother's name—Jean Carter. I learned that she was a librarian—the first Black librarian that I could recall seeing. Ms. Carter was the sole Black librarian I encountered during my pre-collegiate years. The peculiarity of seeing so few librarians of color (more specially, Black librarians) intrigued me. This, along with the scant numbers of children's books published by and about Blacks, made a lasting impression on my life, my studies, and my career aspirations.

Augusta Braxston Baker (the subject of my research study) also had firm footing in the fields of education and LIS.¹ She used her personal background, academic training, and public influence to shape both fields. Her family was also passionate about education. Baker was

¹ Augusta Braxston Baker received two honorary doctorates—one from St. John's University in Jamaica, New York and another from the University of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina. However, instead of referring to her as Dr. Baker, from this point forward (until stated otherwise), she will simply be referred to as Baker. Augusta Baker Curriculum Vitae, n.d., Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

aware of libraries. However, she did not consider librarianship as a viable career option until she came to the realization that she did not wish to be an educator like her parents. Similar to me, Baker saw that there were few books about Blacks and she sought to remedy this.

Baker and I are both Black women with similar intellectual interests. As such, it is appropriate to note that these shared commonalities may have an influence upon my readings, writings, interpretations, and, ultimately, my construction of Baker's narrative. Nevertheless, I am confident that with my committee's guidance and through consulting as well as critically examining primary along with secondary source materials, I will be able to clearly articulate where my thought processes end and her story begins. It is my earnest hope that those who read this narrative will deem our converging intellectual interests and racial affiliation as being complementary rather than conflicting. Thus, this study will enable me to link my affections for children's literature and storytelling as I bask in the cognitive treasures of Baker—a woman who was trained as both an educator and a librarian, much like myself.

Overview of Research Study

Chapter One lays the groundwork for my research on Baker who began her career in 1937 as a children's librarian and concluded her tenure within the New York Public Library (NYPL) system as Coordinator of Children's Services in 1974.² I open with a discussion of my study's problem, purpose, and research questions. Afterward, I explain my methodological approach, theoretical framework, data collection and analysis procedures, and the study's significance. The overview concludes with a chapter outline.

² Augusta Baker Curriculum Vitae, n.d., Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Problem

The problem is not a problem in the traditional sense. Instead, the problem is indicative (or representative) of a scholarly void that exists as it pertains to the documentation and dissemination of critical narratives of Black children's librarians, particularly in the form of biography. As such, I seek to illustrate how Baker was instrumental in helping to combat biased portrayals of Blacks in children's literature while serving as a children's librarian.

Another problem stems from the lack of recognition Black librarians have historically received. Throughout history, Black librarians have fought for representation as well as recognition. Andrew P. Jackson, a Black librarian who previously served as the Executive Director of the Langston Hughes Community Library & Cultural Center of the Queens Library, posited, "I was unaware of ... early black librarians in America ... this history was omitted from the introductory course in a similar way that chapters of pre-American black history are missing from traditional history courses and textbooks."³ Not only have veritable gems of Black (librarian) history been blotted from texts, but Black librarians have had to fight for a place at the table within a profession where their experiences and identities have been trivialized or negated entirely. Historically, Black librarians have been flagrantly "... ignored, dismissed, denied jobs and promotions, [and] discriminated against in the workplace."⁴ This treatment occurred despite the fact that Blacks possessed the proper training, degree(s), and work experience to serve as librarians. Dr. Maurice Wheeler, associate professor of library and information science at the

³ Andrew P. Jackson, "Preface: The Need for Continued Activism in Black Librarianship," in *The 21st Century Black Librarian in America*, eds. Andrew P. Jackson, Julius Jefferson, and Akilah Nosakhere (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2012), 9. ProQuest ebrary. I capitalize the term "Black" because it is used to identify a particular group of people. However, when "black" is quoted directly from another source, I defer to the writer and only capitalize "Black" if the writer has done so.

⁴ Jackson, "Preface," 10.

University of North Texas, found “... no matter how exemplary the training or credentials of black candidates, they [were] always subject to ‘insinuations that merit was not the main factor in their appointment.’”⁵ When Blacks did secure employment, they still experienced opposition—especially when it came to receiving promotions. Librarian Margaret J. Gibson noted, “There were sentiments that on average when Black employees are rightfully promoted there is always a need to question the person’s abilities and qualifications.”⁶ My dissertation seeks to bring scholarly attention to unexamined yet crucial areas of Baker’s labor of love—her work with Black youth and Black children’s literature. It is my hope that this scholarly endeavor will serve as a tribute to Baker’s enduring professional legacy.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand Baker’s motivation(s) for advocating for positive depictions of Blacks in children’s literature. Moreover, this study seeks to elucidate how Baker’s work as a children’s librarian resulted in the creation and dissemination of children’s books with non-stereotypical portrayals of Black life and Black experiences.⁷

Community Cultural Wealth

I conceptualize this study using Tara J. Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth (CCW).⁸ I

⁵ Akilah Shukura Nosakhere, “Introduction,” in *The 21st Century Black Librarian in America*, eds. Andrew P. Jackson, Julius Jefferson, and Akilah Nosakhere (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2012), 19. ProQuest ebrary.

⁶ Margaret J. Gibson, “Dismiss the Stereotype! Combating Racism and Continuing Our Progress,” in *The 21st Century Black Librarian in America*. eds. Andrew P. Jackson, Julius Jefferson, and Akilah Nosakhere (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2012), 205. ProQuest ebrary.

⁷ Baker was not alone in advocating for non-stereotypical portrayals of Blacks in children’s literature. Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. DuBois, and others also argued for and created literature about Blacks and Black experiences before Baker became involved in this endeavor.

draw upon the six types of capital Yosso identified as encompassing CCW—aspirational, navigational, social, familial, linguistic, and resistant capital—to comprehend how Baker navigated within the predominantly White field of librarianship as a Black librarian and campaigned for positive portrayals of Blacks in children’s literature.

Definition of Terms

In order for the broadest audience to understand this study, it is essential that I define some key terms that are central to my research. These terms include: “colored,” “Negro,” “Black,” “African American,” “children’s literature,” “African American children’s literature,” “oppositional text(s),” “cultural authenticity,” “cultural insiders,” and “cultural outsiders.”

The use of the terms “colored,” “Negro,” “Black,” and “African American” as designators of Blackness has waxed and waned over time with regards to political correctness and acceptability among “cultural insiders”—namely, those persons who identify with and are actual members of a particular racial/ethnic group—in this case African Americans.⁹ The terms Black and African American are used to describe non-White people of African descent in the United States. For purposes of this study, Black and African American are used interchangeably and denote the acceptability of these terms in the 21st century. However, “All Black people are not American” and “when referring to people of African descent from outside the United States,

⁸ Tara J. Yosso, “Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (2005): 76, doi: 10.1080/1361332052000341006.

⁹ Kathy G. Short, “Ethics and Cultural Authenticity in International Children’s Literature” (presentation, 30th International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) Congress, Macau, China, September 20-23, 2006, <http://www.ibby.org/675.0.html>).

Black is a more appropriate term than African American.”¹⁰ I use the terms “colored” and “Negro” only if I am citing from a source or referring to one of Baker’s bibliographies that have this term in the title (for example, *Books About Negro Life for Children*). “Children’s literature” pertains to “books and other resources for children (ages 0-14)” that are “written and produced for ... information or entertainment ... [this] includes all non-fiction, literary and artistic genres and physical formats.”¹¹ “African American children’s literature” includes “books written by African Americans, focused on African American people and their life experiences, and primarily intended for children up until age fourteen.”¹² With regards to “oppositional texts,” these are types of texts where an author “consciously or unconsciously, creates a [narrative] that contradicts traditional portrayals of an ethnic, religious, linguistic, or gender group ... [and] engages in a cultural process that might ... change some perceptions of the group.”¹³ Oppositional texts are particularly relevant to this study because these are types of literature that Baker promoted and sought to place in the hands of youth—particularly Black youth. Moreover, oppositional texts are significant because this dissertation serves as an oppositional text that provides insight into Baker’s work as a Black children’s librarian and Black children’s book supporter. Hence, by penning Baker’s story, I am writing a narrative that is in opposition to historical portrayals of Blacks—more specifically, Black professional librarians—a group that

¹⁰ Rudine Sims Bishop, “Introduction,” in *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children’s Literature*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), xv.

¹¹ “Library of Congress Collections Policy Statements: Children’s Literature,” last modified November 2008, www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/chi.pdf.

¹² Rudine Sims Bishop, “Introduction,” in *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children’s Literature*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), xi.

¹³ Violet Harris, “From Little Black Sambo to Popo and Fifina: Arna Bontemps and the Creation of African-American Children’s Literature,” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 14, no.1 (1990): 110.

has traditionally been omitted from scholarly literature and afforded subpar recognition. Rudine Sims Bishop defines “cultural authenticity” as having to do with “the success with which a writer is able to reflect the cultural perspectives of the people about whom he or she is writing, and make readers from inside the group believe that the writer knows what's going on.”¹⁴ In sum, literature that is culturally authentic communicates the lived experiences, daily interactions, and/or unique perspectives of the cultural groups and/or people who are being written about. Finally, “cultural outsiders” are individuals who write and/or illustrate children’s books about a particular culture and/or group yet do not belong to that culture or group.¹⁵

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine Baker’s career as a children’s librarian and her work with Black children’s literature. As such, I seek to answer the following questions:

1. How did Baker draw upon her community cultural wealth (more specifically, aspirational, navigational, social, familial, linguistic, and resistant capital) throughout her educational trajectory and career as a children’s librarian within the New York Public Library (NYPL) system?

¹⁴ Rudine Sims Bishop, “Reframing the Debate About Cultural Authenticity,” in *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*, eds. Dana L. Fox and Kathy G. Short (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003), 29.

¹⁵ Rudine Sims Bishop, “Multicultural Literature for Children: Making Informed Choices,” in *Teaching Multicultural Literature in Grades K-8*, ed. Violet J. Harris (Norwood: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc., 1992) 37-53; Nina Mikkelsen, “Insiders, Outsiders, and the Question of Authenticity: Who Shall Write for African American Children?” *African American Review* 32, no. 1 (1998): 33-49. Mingshu Cai asserts, “In terms of literary creation the crux of the insider versus outsider issue is not the relationship between authors' ethnic background and literary creation but rather the relationship between imagination and experience.” Mingshu Cai, “Chapter 4: Can We Fly Across Cultural Gaps on the Wings of Imagination? Ethnicity, Experience, and Cultural Authenticity,” in *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*, eds. Dana L. Fox and Kathy G. Short (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003), 168.

2. Why was her bibliography on children’s books about Black experiences significant?
3. What is her legacy?

Methodology

The methodology section is divided into two parts. Part one explains my research approach and data analyses procedures. Part two explains the theoretical framework that undergirds this study—Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth (CCW).

Part I: Interpretative Research and the Biographical Approach

This study is qualitative in nature in that I employ the use of interpretative research methodologies with an emphasis on the historical. This methodological approach is especially useful because I seek to comprehend and make meaning of “texts, events, human actions, [and] narratives.”¹⁶ Another factor that compels me to draw upon interpretative methods stems from the fact that my focal participant, Baker, is deceased. Since I am unable to interview Baker, I seek to place a number of primary and secondary source documents in conversation with one another to arrive at a more informed understanding of her schooling experiences, her career as a children’s librarian, and her work with Black children’s literature.

This study is written as a biographical narrative due to its emphasis on a single individual and the “detailed information about the setting or historical context of the subject’s life.”¹⁷ I provide this narrative as a tribute to Baker who was renowned for her storytelling prowess and ability to select well-written and illustrated children’s books about Black experiences. Thus, a

¹⁶ “Interpretative Research Focus Area,” *Education at Illinois*, <http://education.illinois.edu/current-students/graduate/coe-graduate-handbook/phd/research-requirement/interpretive>.

¹⁷ John W. Creswell, “Chapter 5: Five Different Qualitative Studies,” in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2007), 87.

biographical narrative is a fitting form for a gifted teller who read and told stories herself.

Data Collection

This study utilized oral history interviews, archival materials, and secondary source materials. By analyzing primary and secondary source data as well as oral history interviews, I was able to bridge gaps I discovered in the current literature. I attempted to address some inconsistencies that arose by checking primary source documents against secondary ones.

Oral History Interviews

According to the Oral History Association, oral history “is a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events.”¹⁸ It is “the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating the written word ... ”¹⁹ Memory lies at the “core” of this methodology.²⁰ I interviewed four individuals who were familiar with Baker on a personal and/or professional level. Interviews were conducted to supplement primary and secondary source data. Engaging in oral history interviews afforded me another vantage point from which to interpret Baker’s work with Black children’s literature, her work as a children’s librarian, and her professional legacy.

The UIUC Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office informed me that oral history interviews were categorized as non-human-subject research. As such, I did not need to obtain IRB approval. The IRB office expressed, “Since you will be using archival data to write a biography on a late children’s librarian with the possibility of discussing her life with her living

¹⁸ “Oral History: Defined,” *Oral History Association*, <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/>.

¹⁹ “Oral History: Defined,” <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/>; Donald A. Ritchie, “Chapter 1: An Oral History of Our Time,” in *Doing Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

son and colleagues it would be categorized as Oral History and does not require IRB approval.”²¹
After receiving this notification, I began making preparations to conduct oral history interviews.

Interviewee Selection Process

For this study, I identified interviewees by utilizing a subset of purposive sampling known as “snowball sampling.”²² Snowball sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling technique where “new participants to the study are recruited when current participants refer other, potential participants to the researcher (e.g., as they are members of the same group or share similar interests that are relevant to the project at hand).”²³ I used this sampling method because finding interviewees who were knowledgeable about Baker was difficult. Many of the people who knew and/or worked with Baker during her tenure as a children’s librarian within the NYPL system are now deceased.

I employed the snowball sampling technique by establishing rapport with the Augusta Baker Chair on Childhood Literacy at the University of South Carolina (USC)-Columbia, Dr. Michelle Martin, and by attending the 41st Annual Children’s Literature Association Conference (ChLA), which was held in Columbia, South Carolina from June 18-21, 2014. After I became acquainted with Dr. Martin, she recommended that I connect with a professor of children’s literature, to whom I will refer to by the pseudonym Linda Fan, at USC-Columbia’s School of Library and Information Science. I located Dr. Fan’s email address and phone number online. I

²¹ UIUC IRB Office, email correspondence to Regina Carter, February 27, 2014.

²² “Types of Sampling,” UC Davis, http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/faculty_sites/sommerb/sommerdemo/sampling/types.htm.

²³ Kristie Saumure and Lisa M. Given, “Nonprobability Sampling,” in *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methodologies, Volumes 1 & 2*, ed. by Lisa M. Given (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc., 2008), 562.

emailed her to explain the purpose of my study, and I asked if she would be willing to be interviewed. She kindly accepted to be interviewed when I returned to USC-Columbia during the fall of 2014. In addition to connecting with Dr. Martin and Dr. Fan, I also became acquainted with Elizabeth Sudduth—the Director of the Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections.²⁴ Director Sudduth recommended that I contact Baker’s son, to whom I will refer to as Buddy.²⁵ However, she thoughtfully explained that she was unable to provide me with his telephone number out of concern for Buddy’s privacy. As such, I was compelled to search for Buddy’s telephone number online.²⁶ After locating his contact information, I called and explained that I would be writing my dissertation on his mother’s career as a children’s librarian and her work with Black children’s literature. I asked Buddy if he would be willing to help me with my study. He was receptive and agreed to provide assistance. That first phone call led to a series of other calls prior to my interviewing him in person in February 2015. Thus, attending the ChLA Conference helped pave the way for my successfully securing four interviewees for my study.

I identified three selection criteria for selecting interviewees. Each interviewee must 1)

²⁴ My mentor at USC-Columbia, Dr. Jerry Wallulis, was also instrumental in connecting me with people who knew Baker and/or who were familiar with her work during her time at USC-Columbia. He suggested that I reach out to Dr. Valinda Littlefield and Dr. Bobby Donaldson. It was through conversations with them that I was able to locate other potential interviewees. One professor provided me with the names and contact information of additional people who either knew Baker or were familiar with her work. Only one of these potential interviewees met my interview selection criteria—I refer to that interviewee using the pseudonym “Mr. Marcus Moore.”

²⁵ I refer to each of my interviewees by pseudonyms instead of using their legal names to protect their identities.

²⁶ Professor Janice Harrington wisely recommended that I try locating Buddy the old-fashioned way, by using a telephone directory. I took her advice, and it paid dividends. The online telephone directory enabled me to find Buddy’s telephone number and physical address.

have been acquainted with Baker for a minimum of one year, 2) possess some familiarity with Baker's work with Black children's literature, and 3) be able to speak to some aspect of Baker's lasting legacy. I focused upon these three aspects because this study is primarily concerned with Baker's work to combat stereotypical portrayals of Blacks in children's books.

Prior to interviewing anyone, I spoke with them via phone or corresponded via email. When I did so, I explained the purpose of my study and asked specific questions about how long they had known Baker, whether they were familiar with her work with Black children's literature, and whether they had some opinion about the importance of her work (and legacy) involving Black children's literature and/or librarianship. I did so to determine if they were suitable candidates to be interviewed for my study. As previously stated, I identified four interviewees. Two of the interviewees I chose knew Baker when she worked as a children's librarian at the NYPL's 135th Street Branch. The other two interviewees became acquainted with Baker during her time as Storyteller-in-Residence at USC-Columbia.²⁷ Acquiring input from individuals who knew Baker while she worked in New York and could speak to her work with Black children's literature, while also receiving input from those who knew her from a later time in her career, offered an interesting vantage point. By interviewing four people (two who knew Baker while she worked within the NYPL system and two who knew her while she worked at USC-Columbia), I was able to ascertain how interviewees interpreted Baker's contributions to the field of children's literature, librarianship, and her lasting legacy.

²⁷ I contacted another individual who was familiar with Baker. I will refer to her as "Holly." Holly and I only spoke once via telephone in a preliminary interview. I wanted to interview Holly again yet did not have an opportunity to do so. My attempts to reach her after my arrival in Columbia, South Carolina were unsuccessful. I later learned from a trusted source that Holly and the Baker family had a tense relationship. This may explain why Holly was "unavailable" to participate in subsequent interviews.

Brief Descriptions of Interviewees

Buddy

Buddy is Augusta Baker's only child.²⁸ He was reared in New York and Maryland. He served in the military and received his bachelor's degree in political science from John Hopkins University. Buddy also earned a master's degree in vocational rehabilitation from USC-Columbia. He currently resides in South Carolina.

Dr. Nelly Davis

Dr. Davis became acquainted with Baker while she worked at NYPL's 135th Street Branch, which is now known as the Countee Cullen Library. Dr. Davis received her doctoral degree in library science from a university in Florida and currently resides in Florida.²⁹

Mr. Marcus Moore

Mr. Moore currently resides in Carolina. He met Baker after she assumed her position as Storyteller-in-Residence at USC-Columbia. He was Baker's student and mentee. Mr. Moore credits Baker with helping him to discover his penchant for storytelling, which has allowed him to expand his career. He received his bachelor's degree from USC-Columbia and currently works as a professional actor, director, and storyteller.

Dr. Linda Fan

Dr. Fan met Baker at USC-Columbia. Dr. Fan knew her on a personal and professional level as they both taught at the USC-Columbia School of Library and Information Science. Dr. Fan earned her doctorate in library science and currently resides in South Carolina.

²⁸ Augusta Baker affectionately referred to her only child as "Buddy."

²⁹ When I asked Dr. Davis if she could recall when she worked with Baker at the NYPL's 135th Street Branch, she replied that "was over one hundred years ago." As such, I was unable to ascertain the exact dates the two worked together.

Oral History Interviews

Historian Donald A. Ritchie recommends that oral historians put in as “many as ten hours of research for every hour of interviews conducted.”³⁰ As such, I read and listened to oral history interviews (prior to conducting my own oral history interviews) to acquire a sense of how best to approach the oral history interview portion of my study.³¹ I also reviewed primary and secondary source materials about Baker’s childhood, her career as a children’s librarian, and her work with Black children’s literature. For example, I read published interviews, newspaper clippings, and magazine as well as journal articles.³²

After familiarizing myself with Baker’s background by reviewing primary and secondary sources, I constructed open-ended interview questions to fill knowledge gaps that were not addressed in the primary and secondary source materials I consulted. I used open-ended questions, because oral history interviews are not meant to be interrogations. Instead, they are “guided monologues” where the interviewer aims to be “unobtrusive” and attentive.³³ I created two sets of interview protocols. One was geared solely toward Buddy, because he was Baker’s son and knew her on a personal level. The other protocol was created specifically for Baker’s professional acquaintances who also might have known her personally. There was some overlap in the questions I asked each interviewee. However, this overlap was intentional and was useful for comparative purposes. The interview protocol covered three broad topics, which included:

³⁰ Donald A. Ritchie, “Chapter 1: An Oral History of Our Time,” in *Doing Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 85.

³¹ Ritchie, 85.

³² Ibid.

³³ “Oral History Primer,” University of California Santa Cruz, <https://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/oral-history-primer>.

1) the interviewee's relationship with Baker, 2) Baker's work with (Black) children's literature, and 3) Baker's lasting legacy.

Prior to conducting oral history interviews, and in an effort to gauge whether or not my questions were comprehensible, I asked my writing group to review my questions for clarity, consistency, and redundancy.³⁴ When I created my first interview protocol, it contained eight categories with over thirty questions. Ritchie recommends that having too many questions is better than having too few.³⁵ Yet I felt that my list of questions needed to be shortened, and that the questions themselves should be more exploratory in nature, which would encourage interviewees to tell their stories freely. As such, I revised my questions so that each was broader in scope. The final version of the interview protocol consisted of fewer, more open-ended inquires. It contained nine interview questions geared towards Buddy and eight questions geared towards Baker's professional acquaintances. I used this protocol during my oral history interviews and asked probing questions that were not listed in the final interview protocol.

I conducted each interview alone. After paring down my list of interview questions, I did a mock interview with a friend using my digital recorder to determine the comprehensibility of each question, to check my pacing, and to test my digital recorder in an effort to work out kinks before I conducted formal interviews. After conducting this mock interview, I scheduled interviews with each interviewee at a mutually agreed upon time. For those interviewees who resided in the Columbia, South Carolina area and who chose to be interviewed in person, I asked that they select their preferred interview location. I invited each interviewee to select his or her

³⁴ When I asked my writing group to review my questions, four members from the group agreed to do so. Each had expertise in a different area. For example, two members specialize in mathematics. Another is a former high school teacher with an interest in educational technology. Another member specializes in university and community partnerships.

³⁵ Ritchie, "Chapter 1: An Oral History of Our Time," 87.

preferred interview location because I wanted everyone to be at ease during the duration of the interview. I interviewed Buddy and Dr. Davis first because they served as what Ritchie refers to as “gatekeepers.” Buddy and Dr. Davis were gatekeepers because they were “the oldest and the most significant players” who knew Baker and had developed considerable “influence, respect, and standing” within their respective social or academic communities.³⁶

Buddy was a key interviewee because Baker was his mother and he possessed extensive knowledge of her personal and professional life. Dr. Davis was also a key interviewee. Dr. Davis served as a librarian alongside Baker at NYPL’s 135th Street Branch and was familiar with Baker’s work regarding Black children’s literature. After interviewing Buddy and Dr. Davis, I then interviewed Mr. Moore and Dr. Fan, each of whom had met Baker after she retired from the NYPL system. Mr. Moore’s and Dr. Fan’s input were equally invaluable, because they provided perspective on how Baker’s work continued to reverberate following her retirement from the NYPL in 1974 and subsequent death in 1998.

Garnering Interviewee Trust

Prior to interviewing, I spoke with each interviewee via telephone and corresponded with them via e-mail about my purpose for writing a narrative on Baker’s career as a children’s librarian and her work with Black children’s literature. I spoke with Buddy twice before interviewing him. From those conversations, I gathered that Buddy enjoyed swapping stories and identifying commonalities, such as the fact that both Buddy and I are Southerners and USC-Columbia alums.³⁷ I believe these shared commonalities helped to build trust between us and ease the oral history interview process. I spoke with Dr. Fan about my desire to bring heightened

³⁶ Ritchie, “Chapter 1: An Oral History of Our Time,” 88.

³⁷ Buddy was the only interviewee who gave me permission to contact him whenever I needed to do so, stating that I could call him “anytime.”

attention to the lasting legacy Baker created through her work with Black children's literature. I spoke with Mr. Moore and Dr. Davis once via telephone prior to interviewing each of them.

When conducting in person interviews, I made a conscious decision to dress professionally. For example, I put on my "Sunday best" in order to communicate that I was (and am) a serious scholar who values each person's story, presence, and time.³⁸ I felt that dressing conservatively and behaving professionally was essential because I am a scholar and person of color. History and experience has taught me that racial and ethnic minorities must surpass expectations in order to receive a fraction of the recognition that our White colleagues receive. As such, I was acutely aware of "the possibility that [my] color, speech, and body language could affect how [I was] accepted as [a] trustworthy confidant" and that being the "wrong" color, speaking non-Standard English, and being too lax in my posture could undermine my authority as a scholar-researcher.³⁹ In an effort to place interviewees at ease, I inquired into how they preferred to be addressed (e.g. as "sir," "ma'am," on a first/last name basis, etc.). Additionally, I informed all interviewees that I would supply them with a copy of their transcript for fact-

³⁸ I wore a two-piece skirt set when interviewing Buddy and a pants set when I interviewed Dr. Fan.

³⁹ April Few, Dionne P. Stephens and Marlo Rouse-Arnett, "Sister-to-Sister Talk: Transcending Boundaries and Challenges in Qualitative Research with Black Women," *Family Relations* 52 (Jul 2003): 207, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3700271>; Christa V. Hardy, "Piecing A Quilt: Jessie Carney Smith and the Making of African American Women's History," (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010), 93-94. These were the only in-person interviews I conducted. When I interviewed Buddy, he was initially cautious of my presence and asked pointed questions about my credentials as a scholar-researcher. During one visit, he asked if I actually attended a brick-and-mortar institution. This made me cognizant of the fact that not only was my physical appearance a determining factor in the type and scope of access I received, but so was my intellect and motive for seeking information about Baker's professional background. I ascertained that Buddy was suspicious of me, my intent, and my ability to carry out rigorous research about a person of great import in his life—his mother. In sum, I erroneously believed that being a young, Black, educated female from the South would be a help rather than a hindrance or limitation. Nonetheless, garnering Buddy's trust helped to pave the way for me to delve more deeply into my study and produce scholarship.

checking purposes and transparency. Moreover, I provided each interviewee with an opportunity to review their transcript prior to incorporating the transcripts into my narrative, because I sought to communicate to interviewees that they were valued contributors to this research endeavor.

Interview Details

All interviews were conducted between January and March 2015. Each was audio recorded using a digital recorder with a USB drive. I chose this type of recorder for three reasons: 1) high quality sound, 2) ability to upload audio directly onto a personal laptop, and 3) its compact size.

I asked each interviewee if they would please provide their written consent prior to being interviewed. Everyone was asked to read, sign, and return one copy of their consent form to me and was given a second copy to keep for their records.⁴⁰ I provided each interviewee with a self-addressed and stamped envelope to alleviate the financial burden of returning the consent form. I also asked each interviewee for permission to audio record their oral history interview. Everyone consented. Interviews were audio recorded to aid me during the transcription process and to ensure accuracy.

Each interviewee was given the option to interview in person, via telephone, or via Skype. Buddy and Dr. Fan were each interviewed in person. I interviewed Buddy at his home in Columbia, South Carolina. I interviewed Dr. Fan at her office in Columbia, South Carolina. Mr. Moore, who lives in Columbia, asked to be interviewed via telephone.⁴¹ I respected his request and scheduled his phone interview at a mutually agreed upon time. I also conducted a

⁴⁰ Buddy explicitly stated that he preferred to have his interview archived within The South Caroliniana Library. I presented a copy of Buddy's transcript to the archivist so that it could be deposited in the South Caroliniana Library's archive.

⁴¹ I preferred to conduct in person interviews when possible due to the insight that can be acquired from non-verbal cues.

telephone interview with Dr. Davis because she resides in Florida.

My shortest oral history interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and the longest lasted approximately two hours.⁴² At the conclusion of each interview, I uploaded the audio recording onto my MacBook Pro and began transcribing. Once each transcript was completely transcribed, I provided each interviewee with a copy of his or her transcript. This enabled the interviewees (as well as me) to fact-check the transcripts and make corrections—primarily to address spelling errors and ascertain whether I had properly recorded names, dates, and locales. I mailed each interviewee a handwritten “thank you” card post-interview in order to express my gratitude for their time and assistance.

Primary Source Materials

Archives

In this section, I will discuss my process for collecting primary source data. I visited four archival sites—The South Caroliniana Library, Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and Stephen A. Schwarzman Building. The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building are both part of The New York Public Library (NYPL) system. The South Caroliniana Library and the Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections are part of the USC-Columbia Library system.

My archival data consists of materials gathered from the South Caroliniana Library,

⁴² Mr. Moore’s interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, which was the shortest interview. He was asked the same set of questions as Dr. Fan and Dr. Davis. However, Mr. Moore had known Baker for the shortest amount of time and his relationship with her was strictly professional—he was Baker’s student and mentee. Buddy, Dr. Fan, and Dr. Davis had known Baker for several years on deeper, more personal levels. As such, they had more experiences and insider knowledge to refer to and expound upon.

which is where The Augusta Baker Collection is housed.⁴³ Baker's personal papers fill eight boxes, which contain 249 folders of materials such as letters, postcards, calendars, photographs, greeting cards, curriculum materials, library programs, published works, journal and magazine articles, conference proceedings, and newspaper clippings. My data also consists of materials from Baker's "Retirement Book," which is still the property of the Baker family. Baker's Retirement Book features letters, notes, and personalized illustrations from prominent children's authors, illustrators, and publishers she became acquainted while at the NYPL.

Additionally, I viewed the 135th Street Branch Records, which are housed within the Schomburg Center's Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division. I also reviewed items from the Augusta Baker Portrait Collection, which is located in the Schomburg Center's Photographs and Prints Division and watched Jean Blackwell Hutson's oral history interview with Baker. Hutson's interview with Baker is housed within the Schomburg Center's Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division.⁴⁴ I also examined various editions of Baker's bibliography on children's books about Black life, *Books About Negro Life for Children (BANLFC)*, which is housed in the Schomburg Center's Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division. I reread *BANLFC* to reacquaint myself with Baker's criteria for selecting exemplary children's

⁴³ The Augusta Baker Collection consists of Baker's personal papers, calendars, photographs, and other items regarding Augusta Braxton Baker that are historically significant.

⁴⁴ I spent a considerable amount of time at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture's Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division. Less time was devoted to reviewing materials from the Schomburg's Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division because only one item of relevance (Jean Blackwell Hutson's 1985 interview entitled *Oral History Interview with Augusta Baker*) was available. The Schomburg's Photographs and Prints Division's Augusta Baker Portrait Collection was also very limited in scope.

literature on Black experiences with regard to language, theme, and illustration.⁴⁵ Moreover, I consulted Detrice Bankhead's interview with Baker found in Kathleen de la Peña McCook's *Women of Color in Librarianship: An Oral History*, Robert V. Williams' interview with Baker, and the preface to Henrietta Smith's *The Coretta Scott King Book Awards: From Vision to Reality*. Finally, I reviewed a number of works Baker wrote such as: "Reading for Democracy," "Guidelines for Black Books: An Open Letter to Juvenile Editors," "My Years as a Children's Librarian," and "The Changing Image of the Black in Children's Literature."

I digitally photographed relevant documents found at each archival site, with the exception of portraits contained within the Schomburg Center's Photographs and Print Division.⁴⁶ I primarily photographed documents that pre-dated 1974 because my research questions focused on Baker's work with Black children's literature and her career as a children's librarian within NYPL's 135th Street Branch (1937-1953). I photographed personal correspondence, telegrams, Baker's Baltimore Public School and post-secondary report cards, and pages from Baker's Retirement Book.⁴⁷ After returning from each of my trips to the

⁴⁵ I provide more information about Baker's three criteria (language, theme, and illustration) for identifying well-written and illustrated children's books in Chapter Four.

⁴⁶ Photography was prohibited in this area.

⁴⁷ When I made my first visit to The South Caroliniana Library in the summer of 2014, I attempted to gather as much data as possible. I also ascertained which materials would prove most valuable to my research. This enabled me to focus my time and energies on specific segments of Baker's life and prevented me from unwisely attempting to photograph every article within the Augusta Baker Collection. I made multiple visits to each archival site, with the exception of the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building's Brooke Russell Astor Reading Room for Rare Books and Manuscripts. When I visited the Astor Reading Room, I was reviewed materials related to Baker's tenure within the NYPL system in one sitting. The relevant materials primarily consisted of newspaper clippings about Baker's time within the NYPL system and materials regarding President Franklin D. Roosevelt's initiative—the Works Progress Administration, which is explained in more detail in Chapter Two. I speak more about Baker's Retirement Book in Chapter Six.

archives, I organized photographs in Microsoft OneNote using the following categories: Baker's education, Black children's literature, Baker's work at NYPL's 135th Street Branch, and Retirement Book contents. Grouping images according to categories that corresponded with my research questions enabled me to later revisit, analyze, and place each of these documents in chronological order, which made the writing process much more manageable.

Secondary Source Materials

Secondary source materials were mostly drawn from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's (UIUC) print and digital collections. The secondary sources I reviewed include (but were not limited to): Maxine Merriman's dissertation, "Exponent of the Art of Storytelling: Using Video as Medium"; Lelia Gleason Rhodes' dissertation "A Career Analysis of Selected Black Female Librarians"; and James F. Flynn's *Negroes of Achievement in Modern America*. I also reviewed encyclopedia entries such as Jessie Carney Smith's "Sweet Sixteen: Black Women Librarians, 1882-1992," in *Notable Black American Women: Volume I*; Marilyn L. Miller's *Pioneers and Leaders in Library Services to Youth: A Biographical Dictionary*; and Darlene Clark Hine's *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*. Moreover, I read the following journal articles: *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*' "BCCB: Gone But Not Forgotten"; Ronald Chepesiuk's "Special Report: A Master Storyteller"; Nancy Tolsen's "Making Books Available: The Role of Early Libraries, Librarians, and Booksellers in the Promotion of African American Children's Literature"; Pam Barron's "Celebrating Black History: Celebrating Augusta Baker"; Alma Dawson's "Celebrating African-American Librarians and Librarianship"; and Barbara Bader's "Augusta Baker: Reformer and Traditionalist, Too."

Finally, I read texts involving the plight and successes of Black librarians in America.

Some substantive texts about Black librarians and their experiences include: E. J. Josey's *What Black Librarians Are Saying*, E.J. Josey and Marva L. DeLoach's *Handbook of Black Librarianship*, John Mark Tucker's *Untold Stories: Civil Rights, Libraries, and Black Librarianship*, and Andrew P. Jackson's *21st-Century Black Librarian in America: Issues and Challenges*. Secondary source materials were consulted for contextual purposes and to provide additional perspective concerning the status of Black librarians within the profession.

Data Analysis

Primary and Secondary Source Data

When analyzing primary and secondary source data, I grouped the digital photographs I had taken into the following categories: 1) Baker's schooling experiences, 2) her work as a children's librarian, 3) Black children's literature, and 4) Baker's Retirement Book. Each of these categories corresponded to at least one of my research questions. After grouping images by category, I reviewed each to determine document trustworthiness.⁴⁸

In order to determine primary source document trustworthiness, I engaged in "external criticism," which entailed that I review each text to determine if it was authentic.⁴⁹ I engaged in "internal criticism" to determine the veracity (or "accuracy of the information contained in the sources collected") and to arrive at a sound analysis of the details found within both primary and

⁴⁸ While at each archive, I strove to take a judicious approach when photographing documents. I did so because I had a limited amount of time and (due to site policy) could not photograph every single item. I had other motives for not photographing the entire collection—some items did not appear trustworthy. Thus, I considered document trustworthiness prior to the data analysis stage.

⁴⁹ Burke Johnson and Larry Christensen, "Chapter 15: Historical Research," in *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2012) 419.

secondary source materials.⁵⁰ For example, racial terms were examined to ensure that the proper meanings were noted according to time period. Document trustworthiness was also determined through “positive criticism,” which involved checking the meaning “conveyed in the various sources.”⁵¹ For example, terms used during earlier time periods might be obsolete in the present day, or they may take on new (or added) meaning(s).⁵² Engaging in “negative criticism” enabled me to determine the validity of information conveyed within a document through the processes of “corroboration,” “sourcing,” and “contextualization.”⁵³ Document comparison was conducted for *corroboration* purposes—namely, to determine if similar information and/or conclusions were conveyed within each.⁵⁴ *Sourcing* entailed an identification process that enabled me to determine source origin(s) with regards to what, where, and why the source was created and to determine the source’s creator.⁵⁵ Lastly, the *contextualization* process involved “when” as well as “where” an event manifested and the context(s) in which the event occurred.⁵⁶ After ascertaining document trustworthiness and fact-checking secondary source documents against primary source ones, I began placing primary source documents in chronological order. I did so for ease of reference and to expedite the writing process.

⁵⁰ Johnson and Christensen, “Chapter 15: Historical Research,” 419.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 419.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 421.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Interviews

In the “Oral History Interview” section, I explained that I actively sought to provide interviewees with a sense of ownership and vested interest in my study by inviting them to review their transcripts and make the necessary edits to ensure accuracy. After doing so, I read through each transcript a number of times and noted patterns. I discovered that interviewees repeatedly referenced items pertaining to the following: 1) Baker’s race, 2) Baker’s work with Black children’s literature, and 3) her bibliography. I noticed that interviewees spoke about how Baker’s race influenced her work as a librarian. Interviewees also spoke about Black children’s literature broadly, and at least two referenced Baker’s bibliography. While reviewing each transcript, I highlighted references interviewees made about Baker’s race in red, references about Baker’s work with Black children’s literature were highlighted in yellow, and references to her bibliography were highlighted in blue.

After going through each transcript sentence by sentence, I copied and pasted quotes that referenced Baker’s race, her work with Black children’s literature, and bibliography each into a separate Word document. Categorizing quotes this way (each with the proper interviewee pseudonym and Chicago Style Manual 16th Edition citation) was useful in that it enabled me to quickly locate pertinent quotes and incorporate them into my dissertation.

Challenges and Opportunities

In the course of completing this study, I encountered a number of challenges. As previously noted, one of these challenges was locating living persons who worked with and/or knew Baker while she worked as a children’s librarian at NYPL’s 135th Street Branch. After doing so, I needed to persuade as many of those persons as I could to participate in my study. Another obstacle was time. I spent a considerable amount of time gathering data from archives

within USC-Columbia Libraries. However, I could not devote all of my very limited time to the archives because I also needed to conduct oral history interviews. As such, I had to establish a delicate balance between frequenting the archives and building rapport with interviewees prior to conducting interviews. Although I arrived in Columbia, South Carolina, in mid-January 2015, I did not conduct interviews until February 2015. I needed that month's time to establish my creditability as a researcher and gain my interviewees' trust. When I visited The New York Public Library's archives, I reviewed anew each site's finding aids and collections to determine when and how to best allocate my time. After doing so, I decided to devote a considerable amount of time to reviewing materials housed within The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, because this site contained the vast majority of the materials I needed to construct Baker's narrative.

In conclusion, when I first began conducting research on Baker, I viewed my inability to devote equal amounts of time to each archive as a challenge. In retrospect, I have come to realize that being pressed to engage judiciously with archival materials was, in actuality, an opportunity to deeply consider best approaches to my data collection process. Thus, these challenges were opportunities in disguise and enabled me to mature as a researcher-scholar.

Part II. Framework

As I began researching Baker, I found that her story was unusual compared with most of the stories I had encountered about Black families and Black people from the early twentieth century. In one of my first conversations with Baker's son, he made it clear that his mother had not been born into abject poverty. Instead, she was raised in relative privilege in an exclusive Black neighborhood in Baltimore, Maryland.⁵⁷ Because Baker was atypically Black,

⁵⁷ Baker's earlier years will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

middle class, and educated, her narrative was all the more intriguing. It also presented an interesting dilemma with regards to conceptualizing this study. My first instinct was to utilize sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. Bourdieu posits:

Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.) ... and in the *institutionalized* state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because ... it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee."⁵⁸

Initially, I thought Bourdieu's theory would be useful in explaining how Baker was able to navigate predominantly White spaces due to her relatively high socio-economic status and exposure to White, middle class culture. However, I ultimately concluded that Bourdieu's theory was inadequate for my research. According to Chicana and Chicano Studies scholar Tara J. Yosso, Bourdieu's cultural capital theory "has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. This interpretation of Bourdieu holds White, middle class culture as the standard, and therefore all other forms and expressions of 'culture' are judged in comparison to this 'norm.'"⁵⁹ As Yosso notes, Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital is problematic because it recognizes White norms and values as the gold standard to which to aspire. Non-White norms and values are devalued. I acknowledge Bourdieu for his work in establishing a guiding framework. Yet, I must also understand that his notion of cultural capital is insufficient to examine Baker (and other racial and ethnic minorities) because it does not take into account the role of race and racism in its analysis.

Yosso conceptualized a different model of cultural capital known as the community

⁵⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," last modified 1986, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/bourdieu-forms-capital.htm#n1>.

⁵⁹ Yosso, "A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," 76.

cultural wealth (CCW) model. Yosso's CCW draws upon Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Daniel G. Solorzano, a professor at the University of California Los Angeles, defines CRT as a type of framework "or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of People of Color."⁶⁰ According to Yosso, there are "forms of cultural capital that marginalized groups bring to the table that traditional cultural capital theory does not recognize or value."⁶¹ In an effort to provide a more race-nuanced approach to Bourdieu's theory, Yosso challenges it by taking a CRT approach to cultural capital, which views People of Color and their knowledge systems as being resource rich rather than culturally poor.

Yosso's CCW builds upon Bourdieu's cultural capital theory by acknowledging that "Communities of Color" possess an "array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts," which "often go unrecognized and unacknowledged."⁶² She goes on to identify six unique types of cultural capital that Communities of Color possess, which are explained later. These varying forms of cultural capital consist of "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts," which enable those who come from Communities of Color "to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression."⁶³ Unlike Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, Yosso's CCW recognizes that cultural capital is not limited solely to those who identify as being White and middle class. She

⁶⁰ Daniel G. Solorzano, "Images and Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Racial Stereotyping and Teacher Education," *Teacher Education Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1997): 6, 16. Solorzano defines People of Color as those individuals who identify as being "of African American, Chicano/a, Asian American, and Native American ancestry."

⁶¹ Yosso, "A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," 76-77.

⁶² Yosso, "A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," 69.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 77.

posits that “White middle class communities” have been “the standard by which all others are judged” yet this need not be the case.⁶⁴ Yosso notes that people from all walks of life possess capital; they need only to recognize and effectively utilize the capital they possess.

In conclusion, as I delved deeper into my analysis of Baker’s schooling experiences, her work as a children’s librarian, and the contributions she made to Black children’s literature, I sought to identify a framework that recognized the multi-dimensional nature of Baker’s background and identity. After much reflection, I made the conscious decision to use Yosso’s community cultural wealth because this frame recognized Baker’s Blackness as an asset rather than an affront. In the next section, I define Yosso’s CCW and provide a justification as to why this framework is fitting for constructing Baker’s narrative.

Community Cultural Wealth

Aspirational Capital

According to Yosso, “aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers ... [.] This resiliency is evidenced in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals.”⁶⁵ Baker was Black, educated, and a member of the middle class. She lived in a well-kept neighborhood, and both of her parents were educators. Although one may be tempted to think that she “had it all” and though her family was economically stable, she (as were other Blacks) was seen as a second-class citizen. Many of the privileges Whites enjoyed were not extended to her. As such, one of Baker’s aspirations entailed being recognized and treated fairly despite being Black.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 82.

⁶⁵ Yosso, “A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” 77-78.

Navigational Capital

Another form of capital within Yosso's CCW is navigational capital. Navigational capital "refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions."⁶⁶ Navigational capital "infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind."⁶⁷ This form of capital consists of resources, "social competencies" and "cultural strategies" that empower and equip People of Color with the knowledge and skill sets to inform how they relate and "function" within a variety of settings, such as "schools," places of employment, and "health care and judicial systems."⁶⁸ For purposes of this study, navigational capital is a useful concept in understanding how Baker made the transition from her all-Black neighborhood and school in the South to predominantly White spaces in the North.

Social Capital

Social capital involves "networks of people and community resources" as well as "other social contacts" that offer "instrumental and emotional support" that benefit People of Color as they maneuver "through society's institutions."⁶⁹ Yosso posits "... historically, People of Color have utilized their social capital to attain education, legal justice, employment and health care."⁷⁰ As I pored over Baker's personal papers and reviewed secondary sources, I found that Baker thoughtfully used her social capital to gain admittance to and safe passageways through spaces that were historically hostile toward Blacks. Moreover, after she became established within her

⁶⁶ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 79.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 79-80.

profession, she used her increasing influence (and networks) to benefit other Blacks. Thus, social capital was immensely useful in helping me to understand how Baker was able to navigate seemingly impenetrable places as a Black professional prior to the Civil Rights era.

Linguistic Capital

Yosso also recognized that Communities of Color possess tremendous linguistic capital, which is an asset not typically associated with cultural capital. According to Yosso, linguistic capital is a real, relevant, and rich resource that deserves further examination. It entails “the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style.”⁷¹ Yosso explains that this type of capital takes into account the reality that “Students of Color arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills” and have some prior experience with a “storytelling tradition, that may include listening to and recounting oral histories, parables, stories (*cuentos*) and proverbs (*dichos*). This repertoire of storytelling skills may include memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme.”⁷² To date Baker has been acknowledged primarily for her superior storytelling skills. This is not unusual, given the fact that her grandmother was a gifted storyteller who passed on treasured tales to Baker while rearing her in the Braxton household. As a result of being exposed to a rich oral tradition through her grandmother and growing up in an all-Black neighborhood in Baltimore, Baker more than likely encountered an eclectic array of linguistic traditions that informed her own perceptions about Black speech, artistic expression, and life. When creating her bibliography of children’s books on Black life, Baker considered (and included) books that utilized standard

⁷¹ Ibid., 78.

⁷² Ibid., 78-79.

English as well as African American Vernacular English (AAVE).⁷³ As with the other forms of capital previously discussed, linguistic capital adds a rich vantage point from which to view Baker's life and work with Black children's literature.

Familial Capital

A fifth form of capital in Yosso's CCW is familial capital. This "refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition."⁷⁴ Family (in this sense) goes beyond the nuclear and may include extended family, fictive kin, friends, and others who are deemed trustworthy and supportive.⁷⁵ Baker drew heavily upon the familial capital she possessed as a child and even after she became an adult. I discovered that this was especially the case when she left home to attend the University of Pittsburgh and following her subsequent divorce from her first husband. In sum, familial capital was of great importance to Baker because it provided her with crucial "emotional, moral, educational, and occupational" support.⁷⁶

Resistant Capital

Finally, there is resistant capital, which "refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality."⁷⁷ Resistant capital takes on many

⁷³ By serving as a children's librarian and through telling stories, Baker imparted her knowledge and understanding of linguistic capital to both children and adults alike. I speak more about Baker's understanding of and use of linguistic capital in subsequent chapters.

⁷⁴ Yosso, "A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," 79.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Yosso, "A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," 79.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 80.

forms and may be both verbal and non-verbal.⁷⁸ Yosso asserts “maintaining and passing on the multiple dimensions of community cultural wealth is also part of the knowledge base of resistant capital.”⁷⁹ For instance, parents of color may pass on to their children lessons (or knowledge) of when (and how to) code-switch depending on whom they are speaking with and whether they are in settings where Standard English is privileged.

Justification for Using CCW

CCW provided an impressive toolkit with which to explore the multidimensionality of Baker’s upbringing, schooling experiences, and her work as a children’s librarian without negating her Blackness or relative economic privilege. As such, the necessity of utilizing Yosso’s CCW rather than Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory becomes apparent, because Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory does not truly take into account a “subordinate” group’s identity and the agency that comes with belonging to a particular racial/ethnic minority group.⁸⁰ CCW helps place the significance of Baker’s race and the varying forms of capital she possessed as a result of her ties to the Black community into context. Without this framework, the importance of Baker’s work with Black children’s literature and the empowering role she played as a Black children’s librarian may be lost or explored haphazardly. Moreover, CCW helps to conceptualize the resources Baker possessed due to her identity as a Black, middle class, educated woman as rich ones. In closing, because Yosso’s CCW was specifically designed with students of color in mind, this model can also be useful in understanding Baker’s schooling

⁷⁸ Ibid., 81.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 80.

⁸⁰ Ming-Cheng Miriam Lo, “Conceptualizing Unrecognized Cultural Currency: Bourdieu and Everyday Resistance Among the Dominated,” *Theory and Society* 44, no. 2 (2015): 130, doi: 10.1007/s11186-015-9249-4.

experiences, how she connected children (more specifically Black youth) with non-stereotypical Black children's literature, and her work as a Black children's librarian.

Significance

It is not an embellishment to refer to Baker as a librarian "legend." Quite a few people know her name even if they are oblivious to her affinity for the literary and work for positive representations of Blacks in children's literature. Baker will continue to receive subpar attention if her story is not substantiated with academic rigor and if she is not given the critical attention she so rightly deserves.

Chapter Outline

Chapter Two focuses upon Baker's childhood and schooling experiences. It provides background information into Baker's education within the Baltimore Public School System, her time at the University of Pittsburgh, and the discriminatory practices she encountered during her scholastic career at the New York State College for Teachers. It also acknowledges the difficulties she encountered in securing employment.

Chapter Three provides insight into Baker's work as a children's librarian at NYPL's 135th Street Branch and the impetus that spurred Baker to help establish the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection of children's books.

Chapter Four examines Baker's bibliographies on books about Blacks and Black experiences. It also examines the key criteria Baker used when selecting books to feature in her bibliographies, which include language, theme, and illustration. This chapter concludes with a discussion involving the implications of her bibliographic works.

Chapter Five offers a discussion of Baker's enduring legacy. It also provides insight into how she influenced the field of librarianship through her association with authors, illustrators,

and publishers. This is examined in the context of tributes gleaned from her Retirement Book. Chapter Five concludes with information pertaining to this study's limitations and directions for future research.

This dissertation has several appendices, which include: a copy of Baker's curriculum vitae, her published writings, interview protocols, interviewee consent form, and a partial list of persons who contributed to Baker's Retirement Book.

CHAPTER TWO: DRUID HILL AVENUE, BAKER’S SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES, AND HER EARLY ADULTHOOD

Overview

Chapter Two examines the neighborhood Braxton was reared in, her schooling experiences, and her early adult years.⁸¹ These aspects of Braxton’s life are addressed in my first research question: “How did Baker draw upon her community cultural wealth throughout her educational trajectory?” In order to address this question, I utilized primary source documents such as Braxton’s Baltimore Public School report cards, her New York State College for Teachers report cards and graduation program, published oral history interviews, and my own oral history interview with Baker’s son, Buddy.⁸²

Chapter Organization

Chapter Two is divided into two parts. Part One opens with Braxton’s parents’ marriage, describes the circumstances surrounding her upbringing, the historical significance of the Druid Hill Avenue neighborhood where the Braxton family lived, and Braxton’s experiences within the Baltimore Public School System. Part Two examines Braxton’s post-secondary foray at the University of Pittsburgh, and it explores the obstacles she encountered as a Black student at the New York State College for Teachers in Albany, New York. Chapter Two concludes with an analysis of how Braxton drew upon community cultural wealth (CCW) to achieve her educational aims.

⁸¹ Since this chapter is devoted to Augusta Braxton Baker’s childhood, she will be referred to by her maiden name “Braxton” until she weds James Baker II. At that time and thereafter, Braxton will be referred to as “Baker.”

⁸² I reviewed oral history interviews published by her former colleagues, Dr. Henrietta Smith (former NYPL employee and University of South Florida professor) and Dr. Robert Williams (University of South Carolina College of Library and Information Science professor). I also reviewed Detrice Bankhead’s oral history interview, which was published in *Women of Color in Librarianship: An Oral History*.

Part I: The Braxton Family

Winfort J. Braxton and Mabel R. Gough were married on July 8, 1908.⁸³ After three years of marriage, the couple welcomed their first and only child, Augusta Braxton, into their home and hearts on April 1, 1911—April Fools’ Day.⁸⁴ Yet the Braxtons were no fools.⁸⁵ They were young, gifted and Black. Mr. Braxton received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Morgan College in Baltimore, Maryland on June 17, 1923, and wrote what appears to have been a thesis entitled “The Functions of the Modern School.”⁸⁶ After completing his studies, Mr. Braxton became a teacher.⁸⁷ He worked at a number of public schools in Maryland such as the Harvey Johnson Junior High School 106, the Frederick Douglass Senior-Junior High School, the Colored

⁸³ 1908 marriage certificate for Winfort J. Braxton and Mabel R. Gough in the Gough family Bible. Record from Gough family Bible (King James Version), which dates from the 1880s.

⁸⁴ “Augusta Baker,” in *Notable Black American Women*, ed. Jessie Carney Smith, (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1992), 35; Spencer G. Shaw, “Augusta Baker,” in *Notable Black American Women*, ed. Jessie Carney Smith, (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1992), 35. Six years after his daughter’s birth, Mr. Braxton reportedly served in the First World War from 1917-1918. “Order by First Name, *find my past.com*, <http://search.findmypast.com/search/united-states-records/military-service-and-conflict~institutes-and-organizations?county=baltimore%20city%20no%2014&o=firstname>.

⁸⁵ The surname “Braxton” has two variations in spelling—“Braxton” and “Braxston”. For purposes of this study, I used the “Braxston” spelling. According to Buddy, “There were some other Braxstons, and we wanted to separate ourselves from them some years back. I don’t know when we added an “S” to our names.” Buddy, interview by Regina Carter, February 17, 2015, transcript, Office of Oral History at the South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, SC.

⁸⁶ “The Graduate Program of Morgan College, Baltimore, Maryland, June 17th 1923,” *rootsweb*, last modified November 21, 1997, <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/ROOTS/1997-11/64581>.

⁸⁷ Spencer Shaw, “Baker, Augusta (1911 -)” n.d., Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Henrietta Smith, “An Interview with Augusta Baker,” March 1, 1995, <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>. In this 1995 interview, Braxton recalled that she had a doll and a completely furnished dollhouse,” which her father had made. She also credits her father with making a “horse” that she used to “straddle . . . hold on to its ears, and push along with [her] feet!” It appears that Mr. Baker was a “master woodworker” in addition to being a teacher.

Training School at Mount and Saratoga Streets, and the Coppin Normal School No. 401.⁸⁸ Mrs. Braxton was also an educator by trade.⁸⁹ Prior to marrying, she worked as an elementary school teacher. However, “in those days, married women, when they married they had to stop. So that meant that as a mother, as an adult, [Mrs. Braxton] was a frustrated teacher” according to her daughter.⁹⁰ The Braxtons shared a home with Mrs. Braxton’s mother (Augusta Fax Gough) and Mrs. Braxton’s brother (Walter Gough). Mr. Walter Gough worked as a bootblack and owned his own shop.⁹¹ According to the 1910 United States Census, everyone in the Braxton-

⁸⁸ “Directory of the Public Schools of Baltimore, Maryland, 1914, 1927-1928,” last modified 2011, https://archive.org/stream/directoryofpubli1927balt/directoryofpubli1927balt_djvu.txt; “Faculty,” *The First Colored Professional, Clerical and Business Directory of Baltimore City 5th Annual Edition, 1917-1918, 1920-1921, 1923-1924, 1927, 1928*, last modified October 31, 2014, <http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000497/html/am497--49.html>; “Harvey Johnson Junior High School 106,” <http://morgue.afro.com/AfroOmeka/exhibits/show/west-baltimore-memories/schools/harvey-johnson-junior-high-sch>.

⁸⁹ Mabel Gough Braxton was a special education teacher. While her husband was alive, Mrs. Braxton took care of the home. However, when Mr. Braxton became ill, she returned to work. “Directory of Public Schools in Baltimore, MD 1940-1941,” https://archive.org/stream/directoryofpubli1940balt/directoryofpubli1940balt_djvu.txt; “Directory of Public Schools in Baltimore, MD 1935-1936,” https://archive.org/stream/directoryofpubli1935balt/directoryofpubli1935balt_djvu.txt; “Directory of Public Schools in Baltimore, MD 1931-1932,” https://archive.org/stream/directoryofpubli1931balt/directoryofpubli1931balt_djvu.txt; “Directory of the Public Schools of Baltimore, MD, 1946-1947,” <http://www.mocavo.com/Directory-of-the-Public-Schools-of-Baltimore-Md-1946-1947/217083/87>.

⁹⁰ Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” May 7, 1989, <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

⁹¹ “1910 Census Place: *Baltimore Ward 14, Baltimore (Independent City), Maryland*; Roll: *T624_557*; Page: *5B*; Enumeration District: *0233*; FHL microfilm: *1374570*.” Ancestry.com. *1910 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2006; Maxine Merriman, “Augusta Baker: Exponent of the Oral Art of Storytelling; Using Video As a Medium” (PhD diss., Texas Women’s University, 1983), 60, in ProQuest Digital Dissertations [database on-line]; available from <http://www.proquest.com/> (publication number 8401210); “1910 Census Place: *Baltimore Ward*

Gough household was literate.⁹²

The Braxstons resided at 2431 Druid Hill Avenue in Baltimore Ward 14, which was an Independent City in Maryland in the Old West Baltimore District. The family lived in a brick row house with “hardwood floors.”⁹³ It was “well-furnished ... [with] three floors and a basement underneath.”⁹⁴ Although their home might be considered lavish by contemporary standards, the Braxston family’s home was considered the norm rather than an exception in the

14, Baltimore (Independent City), Maryland; Roll: T624 557; Page: 5B; Enumeration District: 0233; FHL microfilm: 1374570,” Ancestry.com; 1910 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2006; “Baker, Augusta Braxton,” in *Pioneers and Leaders in Library Services to Youth: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Marilyn L. Miller, (Westpoint: Libraries Unlimited, 2003), 8; Detrice Bankhead, “Interview,” in *Women of Color in Librarianship: An Oral History*, ed. Kathleen de la Peña McCook, (USA: The American Library Association, 1998), 10-11; Buddy, interview by Regina Carter, February 17, 2015.

⁹² “Augusta L. Gough in the 1910 United States Federal Census,” <http://search.ancestryheritagequest.com>. This census indicates that 54-year-old Mrs. Augusta Fax Gough was widowed. In the 1880 US Census, Mrs. Gough was married to Mr. George Gough, who was 30 years old at the time and the head of household. Mr. Gough was a laborer and Mrs. Gough’s occupation was “keeping house.” “1880 United States Federal Census for George Gough,” <http://search.ancestryheritagequest.com>. According to the 1910 US Census, Mrs. Gough had five children--three of whom were living. I was unable to find much information on Mr. Winfort J. Braxston’s family. The sparse information I did find, however, was recorded in Chapter 4 of Maxine Merriman’s 1983 dissertation entitled “Augusta Baker: Exponent of the Oral Art of Storytelling; Utilizing Video as a Medium.” According to Merriman, Mr. Braxton had four brothers and two sisters; his parents were Mary Ann and Hamilton Braxton. When I researched the Braxton family using Ancestry.com’s *Heritage Quest*, I was only able to ascertain that Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton Braxton had two children: Jessie and Alice Braxton. Mr. Braxton’s name may not have appeared in the *Freedman’s Bank Records, 1865-1871* because he was not born until around 1886. “Hamilton Braxton” in the *Freedman’s Bank Records, 1865-1871*, Ancestry.com. *Freedman’s Bank Records, 1865-1871* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2005, Original data: *Registers of Signatures of Depositors in Branches of the Freedman’s Savings and Trust Company, 1865-1874*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, Micropublication M816, 27 rolls.

⁹³ Buddy, interview by Regina Carter, February 17, 2015.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Druid Hill Avenue area. Toward the end of the nineteenth century “Huge beautiful three-story townhouses, with ten to twelve rooms, marble mantle pieces, ornate staircases and chandeliers” were commonly found on Druid Hill Avenue, McCulloh Street, and Madison Avenue, which was east of Pennsylvania Avenue.⁹⁵

Old West Baltimore was a historically significant cultural center.⁹⁶ It served as “Baltimore's premier early African-American neighborhood”; beginning in the 1890s, Blacks began occupying houses on the main streets of this area, most notably Druid Hill Avenue.⁹⁷ The district spanned 175 city blocks “northwest of downtown Baltimore” and mainly consisted of row houses and some “grand mansions,” “alley houses,” a number of churches, and public buildings, which included primary schools and “commercial structures.”⁹⁸ Old West Baltimore was home to notable Blacks such as Carl Murphy (editor of the *Afro-American*, a Black newspaper with a national readership), Harry S. Cummings (Baltimore's first Black city

⁹⁵ Roderick N. Ryon, “Old West Baltimore,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 77, no. 1 (1982): 55. Some evidence suggests that Old West Baltimore may have previously been a predominantly White neighborhood. According to the *Baltimore City Heritage Area Management Action Plan*, “... prior to the Civil War, Baltimore was the home of the nation’s largest free black population, which numbered over 25,000.” However, after the war, former slaves “from the surrounding rural areas of Maryland and states to the south” settled in the area and “by the end of the century [they] had been compelled to move to the northwestern part of the city, to what were then predominantly German neighborhoods.” This area later came to be known as Old West Baltimore. Baltimore City Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation and the Citizens of Baltimore, “Management Action Plan Background: Heritage Resources,” in *Baltimore City Heritage Area Management Action Plan* (Bethesda: HRG Consultants, Inc., 2001), 10-13, <http://www.nps.gov/balt/learn/management/upload/Section-I-Background.pdf>.

⁹⁶ Ryon, “Old West Baltimore,” 58.

⁹⁷ “Historical & Architectural Preservation / Historic Districts / Maps Of Historic Districts / Old West Baltimore,” City of Baltimore, <http://archive.baltimorecity.gov/Government/BoardsandCommissions/HistoricalArchitecturalPreservation/HistoricDistricts/MapsofHistoricDistricts/OldWestBaltimore.aspx>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

councilman), Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, Cab Calloway (jazz singer, actor, and bandleader), and Lillie Carroll Jackson (civil rights activist and former head of the Baltimore NAACP), among other prominent Blacks.⁹⁹

It was on Druid Hill Avenue that Braxton's positive worldview of Blackness began to be formed. Many Black professionals lived on Druid Hill Avenue during the Jim Crow era.¹⁰⁰

Braxton lived in an "all-black neighborhood where her neighbors were doctors, teachers, lawyers, and dentists."¹⁰¹ To get a clearer sense of the community she was reared in, it should be noted that "Dr. Retter [lived] across the street and his children were [Braxton's] close friends.

⁹⁹ Ibid.; "Murphy, Carl (1889–1967)," Blackpast.org, <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/murphy-carl-1889-1967>; "Harry S. Cummings: 1866-1917," The Road from Frederick to Thurgood: Black Baltimore in Transition 1870-1920, last modified December 06, 2012, <http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/stagser/s1259/121/6050/html/11427000.html>; "Jazz Profiles from NPR Cab Calloway," npr.org, <http://www.npr.org/programs/jazzprofiles/archive/calloway.html>; "Lillie Carroll Jackson (1889-1975)," *Archives of Maryland*, last modified March 15, 2006, <http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/013500/013566/html/msa13566.html>. In 1910, approximately one year prior to Braxton's birth, there were 23,000 Blacks living east of Pennsylvania Avenue along with 7,500 Whites; Pennsylvania Avenue served as "the main street of the community." Druid Hill Avenue was "home" to "an upper strata of the city's entire black population" and was considered by many to be "middle class." Druid Hill Avenue was home to the *Baltimore Afro-American* (a Black newspaper with a national readership), the Druid Hill Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Bethel AME Church, which began offering services in 1910 and was home to a "congregation of hundreds." The west side of Pennsylvania Avenue was a different story. Only 8,000 Blacks lived on the west side on "a dozen or so alley streets behind all white blocks." "Historical & Architectural Preservation / Historic Districts / Maps Of Historic Districts / Old West Baltimore," City of Baltimore, <http://archive.baltimorecity.gov/Government/BoardsandCommissions/HistoricalArchitecturalPreservation/HistoricDistricts/MapsofHistoricDistricts/OldWestBaltimore.aspx>; Ryon, "Old West Baltimore," 56, 58.

¹⁰⁰ The Jim Crow era roughly spanned from the 1870s up until 1954. "The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow: Events," http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events.html.

¹⁰¹ Henrietta M. Smith, "An Interview with Augusta Baker," *Horn Book*, March 1, 1995, <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>; Ryon, "Old West Baltimore," 56. I would argue that not everyone who lived on Druid Hill Avenue held these types of occupational positions.

And also across the street was the White family.”¹⁰² Although Blacks who lived on Druid Hill Avenue tended to be relatively well-to-do, this affluence did not span across the entire area of the Old West Baltimore District. Midway between Druid Hill Avenue and Division Street was a smaller street where poorer Blacks lived; families on that street had “out-door toilets.”¹⁰³ Although Braxton understood that she was more economically advantaged than the youth who lived on this middle street, this did not deter her from befriending them. Braxton played with children from various economic backgrounds. Mrs. Braxton did not stop her daughter from socializing with the poor youth who lived on the middle street, either. Braxton attributed her mother’s socio-economic blindness to her being open-minded and accepting. She recalled, “My mother was not conscious of class and strata ... to her people were all the same.”¹⁰⁴ Aside from being humane, Mrs. Braxton desired for her daughter to have an active, well-rounded social life, which also happened to help bolster her daughter’s cultural capital. Mrs. Braxton sought to help develop within her only child “cultural wealth,” which Yosso describes as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression.”¹⁰⁵ Knowingly or unknowingly, by encouraging her daughter to associate with children from various socio-economic conditions, Mrs. Braxton helped Braxton to amass social capital. Moreover, Mrs. Braxton helped hone her daughter’s relational skills while introducing her to the reality that not all Blacks hailed from

¹⁰² The family’s surname was “White”; however, the family that lived there identified as being Black.

¹⁰³ Bankhead, “Interview,” 11.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Yosso, “A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” 77, 80.

middle class backgrounds.

By allowing Braxston to associate with the less fortunate, Mrs. Braxston may have also inadvertently fostered within her daughter a form of “aspirational capital.” According to Yosso, aspirational capital entails “the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality.”¹⁰⁶ Braxston’s less financially sound peers’ aspirational capital may have also been heightened by their association with Braxston who came from an educated, Black, middle class family.

Although there were White families whose educational and economic backgrounds were similar to the Braxston family’s background, Braxston was initially unaware of this. For example, when she was asked about her childhood, Braxston indicated: “Curiously enough, I knew no white people in positions which were equal to our own [Black] kind of middle-class way of life. Our doctor was a Negro, all the teachers I knew were Negroes.”¹⁰⁷ She went on to add, “The only white people we saw were the garbage collectors, the hucksters, the mailman, and other workers. If we went to town, we saw white people in the stores who waited on us! I was well along in years before I realized that white people were equal to us!”¹⁰⁸ Braxston gradually realized that, outside of her community, Blacks were considered to be inferior to Whites. She noted, “When I was coming along [in the 1920s], and even as a young person, [Baltimore] was more Southern in its cultures and its mores and certainly in its biases, than the deepest of the Deep South, and it was truly a segregated society, so that you grew up in one area and one ethnic

¹⁰⁶ Yosso, “A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” 77.

¹⁰⁷ James Flynn, “Augusta Baker, Librarian,” in *Negroes of Achievement in Modern America* (New York, Dodd, Mead, 1970), 97-98.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, “An Interview with Augusta Baker,” <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>.

culture and one racial culture as against another.”¹⁰⁹ As Braxston advanced in years, it became painfully clear to her that racism was alive, well, and not going anywhere anytime soon.

Early Informal Education

As Braxston acquired knowledge about her physical surroundings and the racial climate of the time, Mrs. Braxston strove to ensure her only daughter was well-educated. Education was highly valued within the Braxston home, and Mrs. Braxston made certain that Braxston knew how to read before she began school.¹¹⁰ Although there was a heavy emphasis on scholastics within her home, Braxston still managed to squeeze in some time for fun. For example, she recalls that she was “very good at jumping Double Dutch, and [she could] remember playing Lotto.”¹¹¹ The third floor of the family home served as Braxston’s playroom, where she entertained her friends. She remembers “once receiving a large wooden box filled with all the Bobbsey Twins stories.”¹¹² When that box arrived, Braxston read [the Bobbsey Twin stories] very quickly, because one really did not have to think when reading those books.”¹¹³ After

¹⁰⁹ Miriam Braveman, “Enoch Pratt Free Library,” in *Youth, Society, and the Public Library* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1979), 225; Brendan Phibbs, “Herrlisheim: Diary of a Battle,” in *The Other Side of Time: A Combat Surgeon in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987), 117–63.

¹¹⁰ Smith, “An interview with Augusta Baker,” <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>.

¹¹¹ Ibid. Lotto is a type of game for children where “numbered discs, counters, etc., are drawn at random and called out while the players cover the corresponding numbers on cards, the winner being the first to cover all the numbers, [or] a particular row, etc.” *The Free Dictionary*, s.v. “lotto,” <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/lotto>. Lotto is akin to the game bingo. *Oxford Dictionaries: Language Matters*, s.v. “lotto,” http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/lotto.

¹¹² Smith, “An Interview with Augusta Baker,” <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>.

briefly engaging with these texts, Braxton and her friends took the wooden box [that these books were shipped in] and “played funeral! [They] buried just about everyone and cried and moaned and mourned and fell out until play time was over.”¹¹⁴ Playtime was essential for a child growing up in the 1900s. During that time, television was nonexistent.¹¹⁵ Instead, there were stories. Braxton’s grandmother, Mrs. Gough, helped to stave off her granddaughter’s boredom with her “wonderful” storytelling skills.¹¹⁶ Braxton noted, “As an only child I was entertained for hours with her wonderful stories.”¹¹⁷ Through the use of stories, Mrs. Gough imparted life lessons onto her granddaughter. For instance, Braxton recalls, my grandmother “...told me the

¹¹³ Ibid. It is unclear how old Braxton when she received the box of Bobbsey Twin stories. Although this quotation is brief, it indicates Braxton’s growing awareness of well-written literature. This quote speaks volumes in that it provides a glimpse into the type of literature that was available to children and young adults in the United States in the early and mid-1900s. Edward Stratemeyer, a children’s book publisher and author, penned the first Bobbsey Twins book using the pseudonym Laura Lee Hope, which appeared in 1904. With regard to the Bobbsey Twins, there are two sets of twins: “Flossie and Freddie, age four, and Nan and Bert, age eight.” The twins are White, upper-middle class, and live in North America. They have a posh life with many conveniences, such as living near a lakefront with businesses, a public school, and a shopping center in close proximity to their home. The twins even have a live-in Black chauffeur and handyman, Sam Johnson, who stays at the family home with his wife, Dinah Johnson, who serves as the family’s housekeeper and cook. Meghan O’Rourke, “Nancy Drew’s Father,” *The New Yorker*, November 8, 2004, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/11/08/nancy-drews-father>; Deidre Johnson, “Keeping modern amid changing times: The Bobbsey Twins--1904, 1950, 1961,” *Book Research Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (Winter 1990/1991): 31-32.

¹¹⁴ Smith, “An Interview with Augusta Baker,” <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>.

¹¹⁵ Dianne Young, “Voices of the South, *Southerners*, March 1991, 91; Jack Janowski, “The Story’s in the Telling,” Trends Today in the *Albuquerque Journal*, October 25, 1977, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ “Baker, Augusta Braxton,” in *Pioneers and Leaders in Library Services to Youth: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Marilyn L. Miller, (Westpoint: Libraries Unlimited, 2003), 8; Smith, “An Interview with Augusta Baker,” <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>.

old English tales and, of course, Brer Rabbit stories, but not with dialect.”¹¹⁸ Mrs. Gough chose to share Brer Rabbit tales, which are trickster tales, with her granddaughter. Perhaps Mrs. Gough hoped these tales would teach her granddaughter important life lessons, such as how to resist oppressive forces. Resistant capital, which is one of form of capital in Yosso’s CCW, is defined as those “knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality.”¹¹⁹ By sharing stories about Brer Rabbit, Mrs. Gough may have helped to instill within Braxton the understanding that though she was a Black, female, and a child, she was powerful, just like Brer Rabbit. As such, Braxton could rely on her intellect to combat forces (or people) that threatened her happiness, health, and security. Thus, in a society where race mattered, Brer Rabbit stories took on added meaning that they otherwise might not have when told to child from a different racial, ethnic, or cultural background.

Aside from keeping her occupied, Braxton’s fostered instilled within her granddaughter a

¹¹⁸ Smith, “An Interview with Augusta Baker,” <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>; “Baker, Augusta Braxton,” in *Pioneers and Leaders*, 8; Bankhead, “Interview,” 10-11. Joel Chandler Harris, a White journalist from North America, collected Brer Rabbit stories in the 1800s and published them in the *Atlanta Constitution*, an Atlanta, Georgia-based newspaper. Harris reportedly gleaned Brer Rabbit stories from a former slave on his father’s plantation, whom Harris referred to as “Uncle Remus.” Multiple interpretations and motives have been offered about how Brer Rabbit exhibits the “values” and “experiences” of “enslaved Africans and of indigenous African American culture”; however, for purposes of this study, I focus upon Mrs. Gough’s rationale for sharing Brer Rabbit tales with her granddaughter. Mrs. Gough may have done so to equip Braxton (as a Black child) with the knowledge and skills to survive (and ideally) thrive in a predominantly White America where race mattered. Anne Ruth Leslie, “Brer Rabbit, A Play of the Human Spirit: Recreating Black Culture through Brer Rabbit Stories,” *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 17, no. 6 (1997): 59-83. Aside from the topical significance of Brer Rabbit stories, it is important to emphasize that Mrs. Gough did not tell Braxton stories with dialect. Braxton’s early introduction to Standard English evidently made a lasting impression upon her. After Braxton became an adult, she upheld her family’s high educational and literary standards by insisting that books about Blacks not have heavy dialect because it was not truly representative of how Blacks spoke or communicated.

¹¹⁹ Yosso, “A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” 80.

love for words, which bolstered Braxton’s linguistic capital. Braxton expressed:

There were the positive values of these stories. They gave pure, unrestrained joy to a sometimes lonely child who needed it. I was an only child, and I had a lively imagination. These stories strengthened it and guided it into constructive and aesthetic channels. I learned new words—long, difficult, beautiful words—for my grandmother did not know about vocabulary control and short sentences.¹²⁰

Accumulating linguistic capital entails more than learning new words. It also involves communicating effectively. By sharing stories with Braxton, her grandmother helped to strengthen her granddaughter’s linguistic capital by encouraging Braxton to develop her “memorization” skills and to effectively use “dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme.”¹²¹ In essence, as a result of exposing Braxton to a variety of stories, her grandmother may have increased Braxton’s propensity to draw upon “various language registers, or styles, to communicate with different audiences,” which served Braxton well in her later career as a children’s librarian and storyteller.¹²²

As previously noted, Mrs. Gough did not tell stories in dialect. Mrs. Gough’s refusal to tell stories using exaggerated speech remained with her granddaughter into her adult years, where she demonstrated an appreciation of well-written children’s literature about Black experiences by requiring that all books featured in her bibliography adhere to certain language criteria.¹²³ Braxton’s early education and exposure to literature gifted her with the ability to exercise discretion. This exposure undoubtedly profoundly influenced Braxton’s interactions

¹²⁰ Augusta Baker, “Once Upon A Time,” in *Come Hither! Paper’s on Children’s Literature and Librarianship*, (Los Angeles: The Yeasayers Press, 1966), 10.

¹²¹ Yosso, “A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” 79.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ The language standards that she adhered to in her bibliography that featured books about Black life are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

with, reception of, and later work selecting non-stereotypical children's books about Black life.

Personal and Public Libraries

Braxton received a number of other enriching educational experiences within her home. This was due in part to her parents' and her maternal grandmother's zest for knowledge. Braxton explained that her father had a considerable influence upon her reading tastes. She credited him with fostering within her a love for "the classics, particularly Robert Louis Stevenson. [She] read everything he wrote."¹²⁴ Mr. Braxton was a voracious reader who was dismayed "at the caliber" of children's books that were available to his daughter.¹²⁵ As such, he made a deliberate decision to introduce Braxton to literary classics.¹²⁶ Although Braxton loved books, she mostly enjoyed books from her home. She noted, "... certainly most of the professional blacks in Baltimore, then, you just had your personal library, your parents bought books."¹²⁷ For this reason, Braxton "grew up on a kind of diet of adult books."¹²⁸ It was during

¹²⁴ Smith, "An interview with Augusta Baker," <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>; Robert Louis Stevenson was a poet, playwright, anthropologist, and historian. Some of his more famous works include *Treasure Island* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. RLS Website, "Welcome to the RLS [Robert Louis Stevenson] Website," <http://robert-louis-stevenson.org/>.

¹²⁵ Dianne Young, "Voices of the South, *Southerners*, March 1991, 91; Jack Janowski, "The Story's in the Telling," Trends Today in the *Albuquerque Journal*, October 25, 1977, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

¹²⁶ Ibid. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Curriculum and Instruction professor emerita, Violet J. Harris, places "classic" books into two categories: traditional and contemporary. Harris goes on to say that "criteria for both [traditional and contemporary classics] include literary and/or artistic merit as determined by experts, selection by readers over several generations, and books in the vanguard of creativity that reach a small audience but challenge, advance, or reinterpret prevailing themes, characterizations, language, and so forth." Jonda McNair, "Classic African American Children's Literature," *The Reading Teacher* 64, no. 2 (2010): 96.

¹²⁷ Braveman, "Enoch Pratt Free Library," 227.

this time that Braxton “... became aware of good writing;” she retained this awareness throughout her life.¹²⁹

Everyone, however, did not have the luxury of having a home library like the Braxton's. As such, these persons (both Blacks and non-Blacks) were compelled to use public libraries. Yet not all were equally welcome. For example, due to Jim Crow laws, the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore, Maryland was off-limits to Blacks.¹³⁰ The only library that served Baltimore's Black residents during the 1920s was the Pitcher Street Branch. Braxton described the Pitcher Street Branch as being “the oldest branch,” “dark” and not “very attractive” because it was housed in “such an old, dingy building in a very run-down area of the city.”¹³¹ Although the Pitcher Street Branch was the only option for some Blacks, it was never really one for Braxton. She “lived a number of blocks away in another section of the city, and [her] parents would not let [her] go through the Pennsylvania Avenue neighborhood to get to this section.”¹³² According to Braxton, the only branch that was within walking distance of her home was a “branch which I believe was called the North Avenue Branch;” this was a “newer branch.”¹³³ However, Blacks were “discouraged from going [to the North Avenue Branch] because all Negroes were to go to this Pitcher Street branch, THE black branch. And if [a black person] went to other branches of

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Dianne Young, “Voices of the South, *Southerners*, 91, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

¹³⁰ Braveman, “Enoch Pratt Free Library,” 226-227. Ironically, Dr. Carla Hayden currently heads this branch. Dr. Hayden was the first Black and first woman nominated to become the Librarian of Congress.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Braveman, “Enoch Pratt Free Library,” 226-227.

the library, [they] were certainly not made very welcome, and ... could be met at the door and turned away.”¹³⁴ This was yet another reminder to Braxston that her economic status and education were secondary. She was first and foremost Black, a reality that Jim Crow laws would not allow her to forget.

Baltimore’s Black Public Schools

Not only did segregationist practices pervade public places like libraries, it also extended to the school system. Historically, Black schools in the Baltimore area were not well equipped, and they paled in comparison to the educational facilities that served White students. Public schools were present within the city by 1829; by 1866, eighty-eight schools had been erected, but solely to benefit Baltimore’s White children.¹³⁵ While public schools were in place for the education of Whites, Black children attended private educational institutions—the majority of these were run by Methodist and Baptist Churches.¹³⁶ Beginning in 1867 and ending in 1900, twenty-seven public schools were erected to serve Baltimore’s Black students. In 1867, thirteen Black primary schools were established.¹³⁷ On September 1, 1869, Black grammar schools were opened; both primary and grammar schools “occupied the same frame buildings” and “the courses offered were similar to those of the white grammar schools.”¹³⁸ A public high school for

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ William Hand Brown, Louis Henry Dielman, Maryland Historical Society, and Bettye C. Thomas, “Public Education and Black Protest in Baltimore, 1985-1900,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 71, no. 3 (1976): 382.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ William Hand Brown, Louis Henry Dielman, Maryland Historical Society, and Bettye C. Thomas, “Public Education and Black Protest in Baltimore, 1985-1900,” 383, 386.

¹³⁸ William Hand Brown, Louis Henry Dielman, Maryland Historical Society, and Bettye C. Thomas, “Public Education and Black Protest in Baltimore, 1985-1900,” 384.

Blacks was established in 1882.¹³⁹

Braxton's Baltimore Public School (BPS) Experiences

Braxton attended segregated facilities within the Baltimore Public School (BPS) system from the time she began school until she graduated from Frederick Douglass High School.¹⁴⁰ When Braxton began the first grade, she was already “way ahead” with regards to academic preparation for her grade level, thanks to Mrs. Braxton’s insistence that her daughter be literate prior to starting school.¹⁴¹ This early, purposeful preparation “nearly drove [Braxton’s] teachers crazy” because teachers had difficulty keeping the precocious child occupied.¹⁴² As such, she “skipped” through the 1st grade ... [and] through the 1st part of the 2nd grade.”¹⁴³ According to one oral history interview, Braxton entered the “second part of the second grade” at the age of six or seven.¹⁴⁴ However, I was unable to locate any of Braxton’s report cards for grades 1-3

¹³⁹ William Hand Brown, Louis Henry Dielman, Maryland Historical Society, and Bettye C. Thomas, “Public Education and Black Protest in Baltimore, 1985-1900,” 387.

¹⁴⁰ According to James Flynn, Braxton may have attended the segregated Henry Highland Garnet School (also known as Public School 103 or PS 103) in Baltimore, Maryland. PS 103 was a “model elementary school” and the school of choice for families who resided in East and South Baltimore. Although it is probable that Braxton did attend PS 103, I have been unable to substantiate this claim. Thurgood Marshall, the first black Supreme Court Judge attended this. Flynn, *Negroes of Achievement in Modern America*, 97-99; Baltimore National Heritage Area, “*The Legacy Continues Preserving Thurgood Marshall’s Elementary School*,” <http://explorebaltimore.org/the-baltimore-experience/legacy/public-school-103/>; Ryon, “Old West Baltimore,” 57.

¹⁴¹ Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” May 7, 1989, <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

¹⁴² Detrice Bankhead, “Interview,” 12; Smith, “An interview with Augusta Baker,” <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#> ..

¹⁴³ Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” May 7, 1989, <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

within the Augusta Baker Collection at the South Caroliniana Library. The earliest report card available within the archives for Braxston was from grade 4. As such, I was unable to substantiate the claim that she skipped multiple grades. The only available evidence that supported the claim that Braxston excelled during her elementary school years was age.¹⁴⁵

Mr. Braxston was not pleased that his daughter received multiple grade promotions in such a short time span. As such, he “put his foot down” and halted the practice, refusing to allow his daughter to receive additional grade advances because, in his opinion, she “was too young for the children with whom [she] was in school.”¹⁴⁶ Braxston may not have simply skipped grades solely due to her superior intellectual ability. Instead, she may have been promoted multiple times because she unsettled quite a few educators due to her inquisitiveness and assertiveness. Braxston believed that she was just as knowledgeable and qualified to teach as her instructors. She noted, “I was a further discipline problem, but I thought it was perfectly all right for me to help the teacher teach.”¹⁴⁷ She went on to acknowledge that she might have been too presumptuous, for “even in those days, teachers didn't really need that kind of student assistance.”¹⁴⁸ The confidence in which she exhibited her intellectual prowess may be attributed to the caliber of cultural capital she accrued from her upbringing, such as linguistic capital and

¹⁴⁴ Bankhead, “Interview,” 12.

¹⁴⁵ Braxston graduated from high school and entered college at the age of sixteen. Smith, “An interview with Augusta Baker,” <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>.

¹⁴⁶ Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” May 7, 1989, <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

navigational capital.¹⁴⁹ Her linguistic capital stemmed from her being immersed in her grandmother’s oral storytelling tradition at an early age in addition to receiving formal literacy instruction from her mother.¹⁵⁰ Braxton also possessed substantial navigational capital—namely, possessing a set of skills for “maneuvering through social institutions”—due to both of her parents being educated *and* educators.¹⁵¹ As such, by virtue of their training, profession, and insider knowledge of the educational structures of the BPS system, Braxton possessed both academic skill sets and insider knowledge, which may have enabled her to surpass the benchmark performances established for her grade level.

Braxton performed well in some subjects more so than others. Braxton’s earliest report card available was dated 1919-1920 and contained markings for her performance in Grade 4a. According to that report card, Braxton received a perfect score of 100 in “Reading” during the November and December months.¹⁵² She also excelled in “Composition,” “Language or Grammar,” and “Spelling,” where she scored at least a 95 in each subject area during the months of October, November, April, and May. According to the report card’s scoring rubric, Braxton’s work was deemed “Excellent” in each of those subject areas.¹⁵³ However, she did not perform so well in mathematics. Braxton received her lowest marks in “Arithmetic,” where she

¹⁴⁹ Yosso, “A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” 78-80.

¹⁵⁰ Yosso, “A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” 78.

¹⁵¹ Yosso, “A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” 80.

¹⁵² Baltimore Public Schools Report Card, Grade 4a, Augusta Baker Papers 1911-, Series IV Education, Baltimore Public Schools, 1919-1928, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

¹⁵³ Baltimore Public Schools Report Card, Grade 4a and 4b, Augusta Baker Papers 1911-, Series IV Education, Baltimore Public Schools, 1919-1928, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

scored 81 and 85.¹⁵⁴ Although receiving an 81 and 85 was not deemed “Excellent,” scores that clustered within the 80-89 range were still considered “Good” within the BPS system.¹⁵⁵

Braxton continued to excel consistently in reading and spelling as she progressed throughout the BPS. Similarly, she continued to receive lower (though not necessarily “poor”) scores in arithmetic in grades 4-7. For example, she received low marks in arithmetic while in grades 4a, 4b, 5b, 6a, and 7b. Interestingly, while in 5b, Braxton began receiving “Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory” marks instead of numerical scores. There was no explanation or special note on her report card to indicate why she received “satisfactory/unsatisfactory” designations in lieu of numerical markings at this point in her academic career. It was also intriguing that while in grade 5b, Braxton received two unsatisfactory marks in “penmanship,” which meant that she received a score of below 70 in this subject area.¹⁵⁶ Despite obtaining two unsatisfactory markings, drawing upon the BPS scoring system, it could be argued that Braxton was still an objectively “good,” if not an “excellent” pupil. This inference could be justified based upon other high markings she received coupled with her “conduct” scores where she

¹⁵⁴ Baltimore Public Schools Report Card, Grade 4a, Augusta Baker Papers 1911-, Series IV Education, Baltimore Public Schools, 1919-1928, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

¹⁵⁵ In an effort to provide context for what constituted “excellent” versus subpar work, please note that (at the time) Baltimore Public Schools defined “Excellent” work as work that received a score of “90-100,” “Good” work received a mark of “80-89,” “Fair or moderate” between “70-79,” “Poor” between “60-69,” and “Deficient” between “1-59.” Markings that were below “70” were “regarded as “unsatisfactory.” Augusta Baker Papers 1911-, Series IV Education, Baltimore Public Schools, 1919-1928, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

¹⁵⁶ “Baltimore Public Schools Report Card, Grade 4a, 4b, 5b, 6a, and 7b,” Augusta Baker Papers 1911-, Series IV Education, Baltimore Public Schools, 1919-1928, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. These were the only report cards available in the archives. There was no information available about how Braxton performed in the second grade, which was when she reportedly skipped multiple grades due to her strong intellectual capabilities.

consistently received 85 and above.¹⁵⁷ Another indicator that supports my claim for why Braxton was a “good” student was that she successfully matriculated to secondary school.

Frederick Douglass High School

Braxton attended Frederick Douglass High School (FDHS), which was a highly esteemed, segregated educational facility where her father taught.¹⁵⁸ FDHS was a fine educational establishment that underwent renovations during Braxton’s time there. The first class entered the new FDHS building in 1925; this new building contained a “gymnasium, a library, [and] a cafeteria.”¹⁵⁹ Although having a library might be considered the norm today—a resource that is traditionally found in even the most destitute schools—having an onsite library in an all-Black school in the 1920s was rare. Baker recollects:

In high school ... we had a good school library at Frederick Douglass Senior High School. I don’t think we could borrow books. I don’t remember bringing books home, but I do remember there was a school library and a librarian ... [.]¹⁶⁰

Although Braxton attended a premier secondary school and completed her studies at age sixteen, not much else is known about Braxton’s high school years.¹⁶¹ For example, it is

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Flynn, “Augusta Baker, Librarian,” 97; Bankhead, “Interview,” 10.

¹⁵⁹ “Frederick Douglass High School: *A Cherished Tradition Since 1885*,” *The Academies at Frederick Douglass High School*, <http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/Page/27375>. In addition to having state-of-the-art facilities, FDHS also boasted an “illustrious” cadre of alumni such as Thurgood Marshall, Cab Calloway, attorney Juanita Mitchell, and congressman Parren J. Mitchell. Moreover, according to Ryon, some FDHS faculty had advanced degrees and hailed from Harvard, Fisk, Howard, Brown, and the University of Pennsylvania. Ryon, “Old West Baltimore,” 58. The school received a makeover around the time that it became an accredited educational institution. “Frederick Douglass High School: *A Cherished Tradition Since 1885*,” *The Academies at Frederick Douglass High School*, <http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/Page/27375>.

¹⁶⁰ Braveman, “Enoch Pratt Free Library,” 227.

unclear what sort of curriculum or standards Braxston had to meet prior to graduating. However, it is clear that Braxston graduated from FDHS in 1927.¹⁶²

Part II: Postsecondary Education

After graduating, Braxston's parents began planning for their daughter's college career. Braxston had few postsecondary schools to choose from due to segregationist laws. Braxston's schooling choices were further limited because at least one of her parents was against sending her to a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), although there is some dispute about whether it was her mother or her father, and it may have been both parents.¹⁶³ Braxston's parents may have disallowed their daughter to attend a HBCU because they wanted Braxston to learn how to associate (and co-exist) in a majority White world where Blacks were often devalued or ignored. However, by encouraging Braxston to attend a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), Mr. and Mrs. Braxston may have desired to help their daughter increase her social and navigational capital. Up until that point in time, Braxston had primarily only been

¹⁶¹ Williams, "Interview with: Augusta Baker," May 7, 1989, <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

¹⁶² First Reunion of the Frederick Douglass High School February and June Graduating Classes, Augusta Baker Papers 1911-, Series I Biographical, 7 July 1934-26 January 1949, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. According to Buddy, FDHS reportedly only offered classes up to the eleventh grade around the time his mother graduated. Buddy, phone conversation with Regina Carter, October 28, 2015; "Baker, Augusta Braxton," in *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia: A-L*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1993), 68.

¹⁶³ In Braxston's oral history interview for the *Women of Color in Librarianship: An Oral History* project, she asserts, "It was my mother who wanted to me to go to a mixed college with no discrimination." In *Negroes of Achievement in Modern America*, however, James Flynn asserts that Braxston's father (not her mother) insisted that their daughter attend a PWI so she could understand "there were all sorts of white people." Either Mr. or Mrs. Braxston (or perhaps both parents) recognized that their daughter had a limited understanding of White America and needed further and more sustained exposure. As such, they sought to provide her with this through her post-secondary schooling experiences. Bankhead, Interview, 10; Flynn, *Negroes of Achievement in Modern America*, 98.

exposed to Baltimore's Black district; she had limited interactions with Whites from backgrounds similar to her own. As such, in order for Braxton to have a healthy understanding of her race and race relations within North America, it was imperative that she interact *and* (if possible) befriend Whites who might one day become allies and supporters. With regards to navigational capital, by attending a PWI, Braxton would have an opportunity to acquire skills and strategies of relating to and resisting oppressive forces that could (and actually did) prove useful when she became one of the few Black librarians in a predominantly White profession.

University of Pittsburgh

Mr. and Mrs. Braxton finally decided on which postsecondary institution to send Braxton to based upon familial capital. According to Yosso, familial capital is “nurtured by our ‘extended family’, which may include immediate family (living or long passed on) as well as aunts, uncles, grandparents and friends who we might consider part of our kinship network. From these kinship ties, we learn the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to our community and its resources.”¹⁶⁴ Braxton “had an aunt who had moved and lived in Pittsburgh, and, of course, the University of Pittsburgh was there. [Her parents] decided [she] should go to the University of Pittsburgh.”¹⁶⁵ Having family in the area was a bonus. Since Braxton would attend the University of Pittsburgh, her aunt could provide her with emotional and social support, which was helpful given that Braxton had not spent considerable amount of time away from her nuclear family and would be attending a PWI.

Although the University of Pittsburgh was integrated by the time Braxton arrived, it had not always been that way. In 1893, William Hunter Dammond became the first Black male to

¹⁶⁴ Yosso, “A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” 79.

¹⁶⁵ Bankhead, “Interview,” 10.

graduate from the Western University of Pennsylvania (which is now known as the University of Pittsburgh) with a degree in civil engineering.¹⁶⁶ In 1906, Jean Hamilton Walls became the first Black woman admitted to the University; she majored in mathematics and physics.¹⁶⁷

After being admitted, Black students still struggled to find safe, welcoming spaces at a campus that still condoned discriminatory practices. For example, the University was slow to offer its Black student body access to its clubs and facilities. With the exception of the Young Women's Christian Association, Black women were barred from joining many organizations on campus. As such, in 1922, the Council of Negro College Women was formed to “foster intellectual growth, leadership, and friendship among black women at the University of Pittsburgh.”¹⁶⁸ In addition to having an aunt who lived in the area, the gains that Braxton's Black predecessors made at the University may have further assured Mr. and Mrs. Braxton that their daughter would be in good company.

Housing and social support aside, Braxton still experienced difficulty at the University. This was not due to Braxton's race but due to her age. She graduated from high school when she was sixteen years old. As such, she was considerably younger than her peers; this placed her somewhat at a disadvantage. Braxton found herself:

really struggling ... with relationships -- two kinds of relationships. One, relating to

¹⁶⁶ “The Testimony of William Hunter Dammond (1873-1956) — the first African American graduate of the University of Pittsburgh,” Pitt Campaign Chronicles, The University of Pittsburgh, <http://chronicle2.pitt.edu/media/pcc010205/dammond.html>.

¹⁶⁷ “Black Women at Pitt,” The University of Pittsburgh, <http://www.provost.pitt.edu/whistory/black/black.html>. Not only was Walls the first Black female admitted to the University of Pittsburgh, she was also the first Black to receive a doctoral degree from the institution, which she earned in 1938. Besides being Black and female, Walls had another link to Braxton. At one point in her career, she had taught at FDHS in Baltimore.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

people who were maybe two or three years older who were all freshmen at the University, and I also had to adjust to this kind of relationship with white students. Because I had come from an all-black situation.”¹⁶⁹

Although Braxton managed to successfully navigate the hurdles of age and race, she encountered another: academic preparation. Braxton had attended an all-Black high school that was good but not as well-equipped as White high schools. Braxton soon learned that her high school curriculum had not been rigorous enough, and that initially placed her at a disadvantage. She recalls:

My freshman year was most difficult. There is no use kidding ourselves about ‘separate but equal’ schools. This is not true. When I went to college, I was an honor student from high school. I soon discovered what I did not know, so I had to make up a great deal of work.¹⁷⁰

Despite the hardships she experienced in her academic as well as in social life, Baker found solace in co-curricular all-Black social activities. For example, on December 28, 1928, during her second year at the University, Baker was one of eleven young women who made their “first appearance into society” as debutantes at The Half Century Club dance.”¹⁷¹ Braxton also

¹⁶⁹ Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” May 7, 1989, <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

¹⁷⁰ Flynn, “Augusta Baker, Librarian,” 99.

¹⁷¹ “The Half Century Club,” Education, Baltimore Public Schools, 1919-1928, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; “Pat to Pansy: Miss Duff in Hostess to Girligags—Eleven to Be Presented at Half Century Club’s Formal Dance on December 26th—Housekeepers Art Club’s Reception on New Year’s Day,” Education, Baltimore Public Schools, 1919-1928, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Spencer Shaw, n.d., “Augusta Baker,” Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. It is my understanding that the Half-Century Club was an elite organization of affluent and influential Blacks from the Baltimore, Maryland area. I found one book referenced the “Half-Century Club Ball” yet it did not provide details into the club’s origins or history. Gilbert Sandler, *Small Town Baltimore: An Album of Memories* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 29-32.

found time to pledge Delta Sigma Theta Sorority during her time at the University.¹⁷²

Unfortunately, while Braxston was away at college, her father became ill. When Mr. Braxston's health declined, Mrs. Braxston "had to jump in and take over, because she had not been allowed to work."¹⁷³ Mrs. Braxston had left her teaching post after marrying Mr. Braxston. As such, by the time she began to actively seek work again, Mrs. Braxston had been a homemaker for over fifteen years.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, she was still able to secure a position that enabled her to support the Braxston household.

Mr. Braxston's health did not improve, and he passed away in 1928.¹⁷⁵ Although the Braxston family's primary breadwinner was now deceased, the family still managed to remain afloat financially. This occurred because Mrs. Braxston was able to return to work *and* because Mr. Braxston had planned ahead. While alive, Mr. Braxston made arrangements to ensure that his family's financial well-being was secure. He reportedly had "a pretty good insurance policy,

¹⁷² haw, n.d., "Augusta Baker," Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. The Mu Chapter of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, was established on November 21, 1921, at the University of Pittsburgh. "Mu Chapter Herstory," Delta Sigma Theta Incorporated, <http://muchapterdst.com/mu-chapter-herstory/>.

¹⁷³ Buddy, interview by Regina Carter, February 17, 2015.

¹⁷⁴ Mrs. Braxston may have been discouraged from resuming her teaching duties post-marriage on two accounts 1) the "marriage bar" and 2) her middle-class status. The marriage bar was a policy "adopted by firms and local school boards, from about the early 1900s to 1950, to fire single women when they married, and not to hire married women." Goldin, Claudia, "Marriage Bars: Discrimination Against Married Women Workers, 1920's to 1950's," NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH, Working Paper 2747, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w2747.pdf>. It is my understanding that the marriage bar was primarily orchestrated to discourage White (rather than Black) women from being both married and employed. Sabrina Thomas, "Marriage Vows and Economic Discrimination: The Married Teacher Problem" (master's thesis, Marshall University, 2010), 21-22, <http://mds.marshall.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1286&context=etd>.

¹⁷⁵ Winfort J. Braxston, Ancestry.com. *U.S., Find A Grave Index, 1600s-Current* [database online]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012; Buddy, interview by Regina Carter, February 17, 2015.

which was unusual for Black people during that time” because Whites “did not want to sell Black people insurance back then.”¹⁷⁶ As a result of that policy, Mr. Braxton left his wife financially well-off, which enabled her to take care of the house and finance her daughter’s postsecondary education.¹⁷⁷

With her mother’s support, Braxton resumed her studies at the University of Pittsburgh. When Braxton returned, she became acquainted with James Baker. He was working toward attaining a master’s degree in sociology on an Urban League scholarship.¹⁷⁸ The two courted and wed during Braxton’s sophomore year of college.¹⁷⁹ After Mr. Baker received an assignment to work for the Albany Interracial Council (which was an extension of the National Urban League), he relocated to Albany, New York with his new wife.¹⁸⁰

While residing in Albany, Baker applied for admittance to the New York State College for Teachers (NYSCT).¹⁸¹ She was determined to complete her bachelor’s degree, because she

¹⁷⁶ Buddy, interview by Regina Carter, February 17, 2015.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Flynn, “Augusta Baker, Librarian,” 99; Smith, “An Interview with Augusta Baker,” <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>.

¹⁷⁹ James Baker will be referred to as Mr. Baker from this point onward. Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

¹⁸⁰ Smith, “An Interview with Augusta Baker,” <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>; “Augusta Baker,” in *Notable Black American Women*, 36. I will refer to Braxton simply as Baker from this point forward.

¹⁸¹ The New York State College for Teachers is now known as the University at Albany or the State University of New York (SUNY) at Albany. Kendall Birr, “BACK TO THE FUTURE: An Illustrated History of The University at Albany,” <http://www.albany.edu/uahistory/>; “Origins of UAlbany,” <http://www.albany.edu/spirit/history.shtml>.; “Augusta Baker,” in *Notable Black American Women*, 36.

had promised her father that she would do so.¹⁸² When Baker submitted her application for admission, she was denied because she insisted on gaining teaching experience at NYSCT's experimental school, which was the all-White Milne High School.¹⁸³ Officials would only grant her admission to NYSCT if she agreed to teach at a "segregated school off-campus."¹⁸⁴ Baker was adamant about teaching at Milne. She refused to teach at the segregated school. As such, Baker continued to press administrators about their decision to deny her admission, which clearly demonstrated her resistant capital, which "refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality."¹⁸⁵ She consciously set out to challenge discriminatory practice that forbade Blacks from teaching at Milne. Baker recalled:

I was forced to threaten suit against the State of New York for admission to this college with the right to practice teach at Milne High School. I could attend the college, but [only] if I agreed to practice teach in [an] all-black public school. It was unthinkable that I should teach white children in a high school attached to the College as a laboratory school. I was finally admitted to the College and I taught at Milne High School, but for two years the President refused to speak to the only black student on campus.¹⁸⁶

According to Baker, only one Black woman had graduated from that college before her, and Baker surmised that the officials must have determined that no other Black would be allowed to earn a degree.¹⁸⁷ Baker maintained that the director of the college was "very, very

¹⁸² Smith, "An Interview with Augusta Baker," <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ "Baker, Augusta Braxton," in *Pioneers and Leaders*, 8.

¹⁸⁵ Yosso, "A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," 80-81.

¹⁸⁶ Augusta Baker, "My Years as a Children's Librarian," in *The Black Librarian in America*, ed. E.J. Josey (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1970), 120.

¹⁸⁷ Bankhead, "Interview," 13. Three Black women had been admitted to the NYSCT before Baker arrived. Records indicate that only two of those women graduated. From 1858-1859,

prejudiced” and did not want to see another Black matriculate through their institution.¹⁸⁸ Yet this blatant act of discrimination only intensified Baker’s desire and determination to gain admittance there. So she set to work rallying social support for her cause. She recollected:

When the [New York State College for Teachers] fooled around letting me in, I insisted that they send to the University of Pittsburgh to get my record of transfer. I let the University of Pittsburgh know that this little [New York State College for Teachers] was questioning my admission. I said there was no segregation in Albany, New York, so they just didn’t want this black person to come out of their school ... the University of Pittsburgh was very upset and insulted. I remember back and forth they were saying to this one Dr. Blubocker, if I was good enough to go to the University of Pittsburgh, I was surely good enough to go there to Albany.¹⁸⁹

Baker was so incensed that the NYSCT barred her from being admitted that she sought help from University of Pittsburgh officials who were “very upset” and “insulted.”¹⁹⁰ By doing so, she tapped into the power and prestige of her social capital, which were the “networks of people and community resources” she had amassed during her time in Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and Albany.¹⁹¹

Mr. Baker also drew upon his social networks; he intervened on his wife’s behalf by directly enlisting the aid of the then Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt’s wife, Eleanor

Charlotte V. Usher was the first African-American woman to attend NYSCT, which was then simply known as the “Normal School.” There are no records that indicate Usher graduated. Evelena Williams was the “first identifiable African American” to graduate from the State Normal School on January 25, 1884. On June 11, 1911, Georgine Sheldon Lewis, who was African-American, received her B.S. degree. She was the first African American to receive a graduate degree from the NYSCT; she earned her master’s degree in 1931. *Geoff Williams*, “African-Americans at the University at Albany and its Predecessor Institutions - 1858-present,” <http://www.albany.edu/news/uablackhistory.php>.

¹⁸⁸ Bankhead, “Interview,” 13.

¹⁸⁹ Augusta Baker, interview by Detrice Bankhead, n.d., transcript, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Bankhead, “Interview,” 13.

¹⁹⁰ Bankhead, “Interview,” 13.

¹⁹¹ Yosso, “A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” 79.

Roosevelt.¹⁹² Mrs. Roosevelt was instrumental in getting [Baker] into the Milne School.¹⁹³ According to Baker, Mrs. Roosevelt “went after” the NYSCT; afterward, Baker “went right in” to the College.¹⁹⁴ The Baker family’s social capital was instrumental in Baker being admitted to the College. Thus, as a result of the capital she and Mr. Baker had acquired and astutely utilized, Baker was admitted to the school of her choice and purportedly became the first Black person to teach at the prestigious Milne High School.

Having an opportunity to practice teach at Milne was transformational for Baker and provided her with a stunning revelation: She “did not like teaching, but [she] did like books.”¹⁹⁵ Her parents were educators who may have expected (though certainly did not require) Baker to follow in their footsteps. There were also societal pressures for Baker to assume a teaching career for there “were few positions open to Negro women, and it was just taken for granted that [she] would be a teacher.”¹⁹⁶ Despite her family’s rich teaching legacy, and there being limited employment options available to women, Baker realized that she did not desire to become an educator. Instead, she had another calling: librarianship.

Dr. Harold Thompson, folklore historian and storyteller, suggested that Baker connect with Margaret Caroline Pritchard—a White woman who was the Director of the Library School

¹⁹² Augusta Baker, interview by Bankhead, n.d., transcript, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Bankhead, “Interview,” 13.

¹⁹³ Smith, “An Interview with Augusta Baker,” <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>.

¹⁹⁴ Bankhead, “Interview,” 13.

¹⁹⁵ Flynn, “Augusta Baker, Librarian,” 101. It is unclear what subjects Baker taught while at Milne.

¹⁹⁶ Flynn, “Augusta Baker, Librarian,” 100.

at Albany.¹⁹⁷ Pritchard recommended that Baker think deeply about pursuing librarianship as a vocation.¹⁹⁸ At Pritchard's urging, and after receiving her bachelor's degree in education from NYSCT on June 17, 1933, Baker settled into her new home at the library school.¹⁹⁹ She became the first Black person to earn a bachelor's degree in library science from the College in 1934.²⁰⁰

Works Progress Administration (WPA)

Baker began her job search in 1934 after having earned two degrees from the NYSCT. Based on her educational credentials alone, Baker should have been a highly sought after candidate for employment. However, this was not the case. Although she was qualified and ready to work, securing a position was difficult.

While Baker was in college, the 1929 stock market crash occurred, which triggered the

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 101; M. E. Grenander Department of Special Collections & Archives University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York, "Finding Aid for the School of Information Science and Policy Records, 1926-1986, last modified June 30, 1997, <http://library.albany.edu/speccoll/findaids/ua671.htm>.

¹⁹⁸ Flynn, "Augusta Baker, Librarian," 101.

¹⁹⁹ Many secondary sources state that Baker received her BA in education. The NYSCT graduation program indicates that Baker received a "bachelor of arts" degree; yet, it does not specify which discipline she received her degree in. In contrast, Baker's college report cards indicate that she was in the "Department of Education" and the "Department of Library Science." Her curriculum vitae supports this claim and indicates that she received an A.B. with a major in education from the "State University of New York, Albany" in 1933 and a B.S. in library science from the same institution in 1934. New York State College for Teachers Graduation Program, Education, New York State College for Teachers, 1930-1934, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Augusta Baker, interview by Detrice Bankhead, n.d., transcript, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Spencer Shaw, "Augusta Baker," Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; "Augusta Baker," in *Notable Black American Women*, 36.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

Great Depression. This depression lasted from 1929 until around the 1940s.²⁰¹ In addition to the country's economic downturn, Baker's employment prospects were further restricted due to her gender. It was difficult being a female on the job market in the 1930s. She recalled, "Women couldn't get a job if they finished school and if their husbands had not only a job, but a fairly good job."²⁰² In addition to being female, Baker had at least two other strikes against her: 1) being married and 2) being financially stable. Baker elaborated, "I couldn't find a job any place. When they discovered that my husband was with [the] Urban League, I went places where they made me feel ashamed even to ask for a job."²⁰³ Baker was denied employment opportunities due to her gender, marital, *and* economic statuses. Her initial efforts to find work were fruitless.

Although one may question whether race played a role in her employment predicament, Baker rejected the notion that she was not hired due to her skin color. She remembers:

No, it wasn't because I was black, but because the family had enough money—the two of us. The majority felt that, if you took a job, you were taking a job away from someone who had no other income.²⁰⁴

Despite Baker's claims, race did factor into who was hired during this time of extreme economic uncertainty in America. By 1931, "white unemployment had hit an extraordinarily high rate of 31.7 percent in 1931"; yet Black Americans were disproportionately impacted

²⁰¹ "Stock Market Crash of 1929," Federal Reserve History, last modified on November 22, 2013, <http://www.federalreservehistory.org/Events/DetailView/74>. "The Great Depression," *American Experience*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/dustbowl-great-depression/>.

²⁰² Bankhead, "Interview," 13.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

because over 50 percent of Blacks were unemployed at this time.²⁰⁵

In May 1935, approximately one year after Baker began her job search, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order no. 7034, creating the Works Progress Administration (WPA).²⁰⁶ The WPA remained active for eight years (1935-1943). At its apex in 1938, the WPA employed 3.3 million people.²⁰⁷ As a result of this initiative, a number of federally funded projects were completed. For example, public schools served 1.2 billion lunches and 39,000 public schools were either constructed, improved, or repaired.²⁰⁸ Library services were grouped under the auspices of “public activities projects” (PAP), which included (but were not limited to) “recreational and library services,” “museum assistance,” and “music, art, writing, and (until 1939) theater projects.”²⁰⁹ WPA workers “operated about 1,700 libraries and gave assistance to nearly 4,400 libraries” within the “3-month period ending June 30, 1942.”²¹⁰ Within large urban libraries, WPA performed a variety of tasks ranging from “routine clerical

²⁰⁵ “The Great Depression,” *Amistad Digital Resource*
http://www.amistadresource.org/plantation_to_ghetto/the_great_depression.html.

²⁰⁶ John E. Hansan, “WPA: The Works Progress Administration,”
<http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/?p=9226>; “This Day in History: FDR Creates the WPA,”
History, <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/fdr-creates-the-wpa>.

²⁰⁷ Hansan, “WPA,” <http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/?p=9226>; Smith, “An Interview with Augusta Baker,” <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>. The WPA paid an average salary of \$41.57 monthly and employed more men than women. During the WPA’s peak year of employment, the WPA’s workforce was only 13.5% female.

²⁰⁸ Hansan, “WPA,” <http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/?p=9226>.

²⁰⁹ “Service Projects,” in *Final Report on the WPA Program: 1935-43*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943): 59,
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/gdc/scd0001/2008/20080212001fi/20080212001fi.pdf>.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

work, cataloging, indexing, and bibliographical work.”²¹¹ Professional and semiprofessional librarians supervised every library project.

Baker’s Unemployment Spell Prolonged

Similar to the resilience she displayed in the midst of the Milne controversy, Baker refused to be deterred by her dim employment prospects. She simply began searching for alternate routes to securing employment—one of those being directly through the WPA. Baker realized that in order to qualify to work for the WPA, she could not have any other source of income. This was problematic because she was married to Mr. Baker. As such, Baker went downtown without her husband’s knowledge to inquire about a job. In order to avoid being associated with her husband, Baker used her maiden name, “Braxston” and submitted an application for employment. Baker sat “in this waiting room with a zillion other people looking for jobs” only to realize that “the head of that WPA office was a personal friend of Mr. Baker’s.”²¹² Baker thought she had been successful in her attempts to avoid being detected as a financially sound, married woman. However, she soon realized that her latest effort to find work had been thwarted. Mr. Baker’s friend notified him of Baker’s whereabouts, telling Mr. Baker over the phone that his “wife [was] down here applying for WPA.”²¹³ While she was sitting in that waiting room, Baker looked up and saw her husband, and he was “furious!”²¹⁴ Baker recalled, “Jimmy said to me, ‘You get home.’ I got right up like a sweet child and went straight

²¹¹ “Service Projects,” 62,
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/gdc/scd0001/2008/20080212001fi/20080212001fi.pdf>.

²¹² Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” May 7, 1989,
<http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

home oh, [Mr. Baker] was upset.”²¹⁵ Needless to say, Baker did not receive a job offer, and she was further scolded upon returning home. Mr. Baker chided, “It is unpatriotic for you to be looking for a job when I have a good job, able to take care of the family. And you're taking a job then away from someone who really needs it ... We can manage. We can hang together and manage financially. But you're taking a job away from some person who needs it just to live.”²¹⁶ Baker expressed, “those were frustrating times” and she “felt terrible.”²¹⁷ After that rocky, shameful episode with her spouse, Baker suspended her search for employment. However, before doing so, she submitted an application for consideration at the NYPL.

The NYPL was a promising prospect because Baker was a credentialed librarian. As such, she “insisted on filling out applications.”²¹⁸ Despite her stubborn insistence and putting forth her best efforts, Baker “didn’t get a job. There were no jobs.”²¹⁹ In 1936, which was approximately two years after she began her search, Baker was still unemployed. However, there was a silver lining. On September 24, 1936, Baker gave birth to her first and only child, lovingly referred to as “Buddy.”²²⁰ Baker recalled, “I guess [my husband and I] decided to have a child when I couldn’t get a job.”²²¹ With the new addition to the family, Baker busied herself with caring for her newborn child.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” May 7, 1989, <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Bankhead, “Interview,” 14.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ “Augusta Baker,” in *Notable Black American Women*, 36.

²²¹ Bankhead, “Interview,” 23.

Conclusion

In Chapter Two, I sought to elucidate how Baker's CCW empowered her to exist as a Black person in the segregated South and how CCW served her well when she encountered oppressive systems in the North. This chapter explained how Baker drew upon the social, aspirational, resistant, navigational, linguistic, and familial capital she possessed. Through her family, Baker's linguistic capital—her love of reading, words, and storytelling—were nurtured. Baker began developing social capital from an early age during her playdates with children from both high and low socio-economic statuses. She continued to accumulate social capital during her time at the University of Pittsburgh and after relocating to Albany, New York. Baker drew upon her resistant and navigational capitals to challenge the NYSCT's decision to deny her admission on the basis of race. She tapped her aspirational capital and never discarded her desire to teach at the all-White Milne School. Her familial capital held to sustain Baker through each ordeal she encountered. In sum, Baker's CCW enabled her to hold onto her convictions and maneuver within White America. Chapter Three describes the challenges and opportunities Baker encountered while she served as a children's librarian at NYPL's 135th Street Branch.

CHAPTER THREE: WORKING AT THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY'S 135TH STREET BRANCH

Overview

Chapter Three explores Baker's work within the New York Public Library's (NYPL) 135th Street Branch along with her efforts to bring heightened attention to Black children's literature. This chapter seeks to address the second part of my first research question, which asks: How did Baker draw upon her community cultural wealth during her career as a children's librarian? This chapter opens with a brief history of the 135th Street Branch and proceeds with a discussion about the branch's changing leadership. Afterward, Baker's earliest years at the branch and her roles within this remarkable space are explored.

The Story of the 135th Street Branch Library

The NYPL's 135th Street Branch opened in 1905 after Andrew Carnegie provided McKim, Mead and White with funds to design the space.²²² When the branch first opened, it primarily served American Jews.²²³ In 1906, the chief of the circulation department, Dr. Arthur Bostwick, hired Anne Carroll Moore to become NYPL's Supervisor of Work with Children, where she managed the newly created Office of Work with Children (OWC).²²⁴ As the head of

²²² About the Countee Cullen Library," New York Public Library, <http://www.nypl.org/about/locations/countee-cullen>. Around 1951, the 135th Street Branch was renamed the Countee Cullen Library in homage to Countee Cullen, a poet and teacher, who was a significant figure of the Harlem Renaissance and the "library's friend and neighbor." Historic Districts Council, "Manhattan Carnegie Libraries- West 135th Street Branch/Schomburg Collection for Research in Black Culture-Photos," <http://hdc.org/hdc-across-nyc/manhattan/carnegie-libraries/west-135th-street-branch-schomburg-collection-for-research-in-black-culture/photos>.

²²³ Arna Bontemps, "The Schomburg Collection of Negro Literature," *The Library Quarterly* 14, no. 1, (1944): 188.

²²⁴ The New York Public Library Archives and Manuscripts, "Anne Carroll Moore papers 1898-1960," <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/2048>. Anne Carroll Moore was a children's librarian and

the OWC, Moore “hired and trained children’s librarians, oversaw book purchases and planned children’s rooms for many neighborhood library branches” including the 135th Street Branch.

Eleven years after the 135th Street Branch was erected, Harlem experienced a demographic shift. Blacks began to outnumber the Jews who previously populated the area. This shift occurred as a result of the Great Migration, which began around 1916 and lasted through around 1970, when approximately six million Blacks left the South and resettled in the Midwest, West, and North.²²⁵ Blacks abandoned the South in hopes of finding industrial work and better pay.²²⁶ In addition to Southern Blacks moving to Harlem, people of South American, British West Indian, and Spanish descent also settled in the area.²²⁷

By 1920, Blacks comprised half of Harlem’s population, which was when Ernestine Rose, a White woman, began her tenure as the 135th Street Branch Librarian.²²⁸ Rose remained at the 135th Street Branch until 1942.²²⁹ She was hired during the height of the Great Migration with the “express purpose of adapting the staff, service, and book stock of the branch” to meet

children’s book critic. Moore previously “headed the Children’s Department of the Pratt Institute Library from 1896 to 1906.” The New York Public Library Humanities and Social Sciences Library Manuscripts and Archives Division, “Anne Carroll Moore Papers 1898-1960,” last modified May 2004,

<https://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/archivalcollections/pdf/mooreac.pdf>.

²²⁵ “Great Migration,” History.com, <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/great-migration>.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Betty L. Jenkins, “A White Librarian in Black Harlem,” *Library Quarterly* 60, no. 3, (1990): 219.

²²⁸ Bontemps, “The Schomburg Collection,” 188.

²²⁹ Jenkins, “A White Librarian in Black Harlem,” 216; Anne Sanford, “Rescuing Ernestine Rose (1880-1961): Harlem Librarian and Social Activist,” *Long Island History Journal* 22, no. 2 (2011): 3.

the needs of Harlem residents.²³⁰ Rose was convinced that Harlem would be better served if both Whites and Blacks worked collaboratively at the branch. She worked to ensure that the 135th Street Branch served as a “cultural center” during the Harlem Renaissance.²³¹

In an attempt to transform the branch into a true cultural hub, Rose sought to address the paucity of literary materials available about Black life. She was compelled to do so after discovering (in 1924) that books about Black life were highly sought after and heavily used by Black community members and, as a result, tended to deteriorate quickly.²³² Upset by the deprived state of her beloved branch and its holdings, Rose summoned a cohort of well-respected community intellectuals and leaders to address this problem. Prominent Harlem figures such as Arthur A. Schomburg, James Weldon Johnson, Hubert H. Harrison, and John Nail responded to Rose’s distress call.²³³ The group decided to take rare literary materials off the shelves and put

²³⁰ Bontemps, “The Schomburg Collection of Negro Literature,” 188.

²³¹ Jenkins, “A White Librarian in Black Harlem,” 216; “Augusta Baker,” in *Notable Black American Women*, 36. The “Harlem Renaissance” occurred roughly between 1917-1935 and was also known as the “Negro Renaissance” or the New Negro movement”; the Harlem Renaissance marked a period of race pride that was “fueled in part by the militancy of the ‘New Negro’ demanding civil and political rights.” During this historical period, gifted Black writers, artists, musicians, photographers, and scholars released innovative works and “civil rights organizations, unions, and other associations” materialized. “The Harlem Renaissance,” PBS.org, http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_harlem.html; Aberjhani and Sandra L. West, “Introduction: Black Phoenix Rising,” in *Encyclopedia of The Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2003), xviii.

²³² Bontemps, “The Schomburg Collection,” 188.

²³³ Bontemps, “The Schomburg Collection,” 188. Hubert H. Harrison was a “writer, orator, educator, critic, and political activist in Harlem during the early decades of the 20th century.” In 1903, one of his “letters to the editor” appeared in *The New York Times*. Columbia University Libraries Archival Collections, “Hubert H. Harrison papers, 1893-1927,” http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/archival/collections/ldpd_6134799/. John E. Nail joined the Harlem based Afro-American Realty Company and helped to foster friendly relations between Black renters and White landlords, which resulted in undermining the “unwritten ‘covenant’” that only Whites could reside on certain blocks within Harlem. Nail helped to settle Black

them into a separate, non-circulating collection.²³⁴ The public responded favorably to their appeals for support. Gifts and loans came from private libraries and from high-profile individuals of the time including Schomburg, Harrison, J.E. Bruce, Louis Latimer, George Young and Dr. Charles D. Martin.²³⁵ On May 8, 1925, the Division of Negro Literature, History, and Prints opened.²³⁶ When called upon to give a public statement about the long-term ramifications of the Division, Rose posited that the collection most assuredly could “become one of the largest and most valuable in the whole country.”²³⁷ She elaborated:

To begin with, there is the question of availability. Works of this nature in private collections and in institutions are not readily accessible to great numbers of students of these problems, either white or colored. We have here in Harlem the greatest Negro city in the world—approximately 175,000 colored inhabitants. There should be available for these people and for those who have their interest at heart the most interesting and complete collection that can be formed. These books will foster the interest of the

tenants into dwellings on Fifth and Seventh avenues even after receiving complaints from White property owners. Nail became the first Black member of the Real Estate Board of New York. Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance: Volume 1 and Volume 2* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

²³⁴ Bontemps, “The Schomburg Collection,” 188.

²³⁵ Bontemps, “The Schomburg Collection,” 188. John Edward (J.E.) Bruce was of African descent and an American serial novelist. The only information I uncovered about George Young’s background was that (similar to Schomburg) he was a bibliophile. Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance: Volume 1 and Volume 2* (New York: Routledge, 2004). Louis (also spelled Lewis) Latimer was an African-American inventor. Latimer was the only African American *Edison Pioneer*, which was “Thomas Edison’s engineering division of the Edison Company.” Lewis Howard Latimer: Inventor, Engineer (Mechanical and Electrical), last modified November 25, 2007, <https://webfiles.uci.edu/mcbrown/display/latimer.html>. Dr. Martin was a pastor. In 1908, he established “Beth-Tphillah, which was the fourth Moravian church in Harlem, New York.” Like Schomburg, Dr. Martin owned an impressive book collection that contained theological materials and “books on Black culture and books dealing with West Indian and African culture.” North Carolina Central University Libraries, “Treasure Room: Martin Collection,” last modified February 3, 2014, <http://web.nccu.edu/shepardlibrary/resources/martin-collection.html>.

²³⁶ Bontemps, “The Schomburg Collection,” 189.

²³⁷ Ibid.

children and young folk in the history of their own race and inspire them to develop their own talents. The collection should be available equally to scholars, to the man in the street and to schoolchildren of all races.²³⁸

Rose stressed that materials housed within the Division would be well cared for and, more importantly, accessible. She might have been overly optimistic given that the collection was still in its infancy. However, her prediction and vision for the Division did not miss its mark. L. Hollingsworth Wood, Charles D. Johnson, and Eugene Kinckle Jones—all of whom were National Urban League officials—approached the Carnegie Corporation with the express purpose of purchasing Schomburg’s collection.²³⁹ For the sum of \$10,000, which “was regarded as token payment [and] a mere fraction of the collection’s actual worth,” the Carnegie Corporation sealed the deal.²⁴⁰

Catherine Latimer, who was reportedly the NYPL’s first Black librarian, served as the Schomburg Collection’s first curator.²⁴¹ The 135th Street Branch’s prominence within Harlem

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Bontemps, “The Schomburg Collection of Negro Literature,” 191. Arturo Alfonso Schomburg was an acclaimed “Puerto Rican-born Black scholar and bibliophile” whose personal collection of materials regarding Black life in America and across the globe consisted of “more than 5,000 books; 3,000 manuscripts; 2,000 etchings and paintings; and several thousand pamphlets.” “About the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,” New York Public Library, <http://www.nypl.org/about/locations/schomburg>.

²⁴⁰ Bontemps, “The Schomburg Collection,” 191. According to Draft #1 of the “Proposed Resolution for the Trustees of the New York Public Library Collection of Arthur A. Schomburg,” the collection was to be “known as The Arthur A. Schomburg Collection of Negro Art and Literature” and “kept as a separate collection to which, from time to time, additions may be made of selected books, pictures, manuscripts, and objects of art, and that it be made part of the reference library of the NYPL.” Wood, L. Hollingsworth, Schomburg Committee of the Trustees of New York Public Library collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

²⁴¹ Bontemps, “The Schomburg Collection,” 191; Ethelene Whitmire, “The New York Public Library,” in *Regina Anderson Andrews, Harlem Renaissance Librarian* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 87. Yet, as fate would have it, the collection’s previous owner, Schomburg

and North America was solidified as an institution that preserved and valued Black history and culture—thus realizing Rose’s early vision of the branch’s potential and promise.

Harlem, New York

Harlem’s Black population soared 158 percent between 1920-1930; at that time, 186,000 of Harlem’s residents were Black. By 1930, Harlem was considered to be the “largest and most diverse urban Black community.”²⁴² By the 1940s, 267,000 Black residents lived in the area, and 33,000 of those residents were children.²⁴³ “While the majority [of Blacks] migrated from the South, one quarter of Harlem’s residents was foreign born, immigrating from over fourteen Caribbean nations.”²⁴⁴ While Rose busied herself with making the 135th Street Branch a lively, viable, and accessible cultural center for its diverse Black patronage, Moore, head of the NYPL’s OWC, concentrated on diversifying the 135th Street Branch’s staff. She hoped to do so by bringing a Black children’s librarian onboard.

Baker’s Big Break: Employment Offer at the 135th Street Branch

Three years had passed since Baker earned her bachelor’s degree in library science. She had completed her studies during the “heart of the Great Depression,” which signified a tumultuous time in North American history.²⁴⁵ Although employment prospects were slim, Baker still had opportunities. She received employment offers from schools because she had

himself, was named curator in 1932. “The Schomburg Center Opens,” http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/schomburg-center-opens.

²⁴² Lauri Johnson, “A Generation of Women Activists: African American Female Educators in Harlem, 1930-1959,” *Journal of African American History* 89, no. 3 (2004): 224.

²⁴³ Johnson, “A Generation of Women Activists” 224.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 224.

²⁴⁵ Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

passed a school exam. However, she did not accept any of these offers, and her name was removed from the school employment list. Baker desired to work, but she would not settle for just any job. She consciously chose not to work within the school system because she did not want to be subjected to “curriculum pressures” and preferred public library work.²⁴⁶ As such, when Moore asked Baker to come to her office at the NYPL in February 1937, Baker listened. She recounted, “I got this very terse letter: Please come to my office ten o'clock Monday morning. And it was signed, Anne Carroll Moore.” Moore informed Baker “she needed a black children's librarian up at 135th Street.”²⁴⁷ Moore confided that the Black librarian who had previously been working at the 135th Street Branch “had gone into the school systems” because “those high schools paid so much more money, and vacations and this kind of thing.”²⁴⁸ As such, there was now a vacancy that Moore sought to fill.

This signaled an interesting turn of events. Yet Baker was cautious. When Baker initially submitted her application for employment, the NYPL “didn't want it. They didn't know what do with [her]” because she was Black.²⁴⁹ However, since “the few, handful of black librarians all went into the schools,” Baker’s previously shunned employment application suddenly became a relevant, sought-after commodity.²⁵⁰ She was now seen as a credentialed Black librarian who could fill a critical need. Despite this, Baker did not immediately agree to

²⁴⁶ Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>. It is unclear when Baker received the school library job offers she referenced in her oral history interview, which schools extended offers, or when she applied to these schools.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. The 135th Street Branch is now known as the Countee Cullen Library.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

take the position. Instead, she mulled over whether or not to accept Moore's offer. She was reluctant to do so because she was a new mother. Before she could even begin to consider working, Baker needed to find a caregiver for her son, Buddy. Fortunately for Baker, her mother and her mother-in-law both agreed to help care for him. Baker noted:

I had a wonderful mother-in-law. She lived in Virginia, but she came up to New York ... to take care of the baby so I could go to work. Eventually, my mother in Baltimore said she would be responsible for him because I would have to work two nights a week. By this time [Mr. Baker] and I had separated, so I'm a lone mother and that's how [Buddy] was raised, really in Baltimore. He didn't want to come to New York to live. He never liked New York.²⁵¹

After her childcare concerns were addressed, Baker finally agreed to accept the children's librarian position in 1937.²⁵² From the very beginning, Baker operated with the understanding that her job was temporary. Yet Moore hoped that Baker would adjust and become fond of her position. Baker soon did. She noted:

Well, I began to love [my job]. So in my mind, I began to think, how can I make home adjustments, because I liked this ... working with the children, no curriculum pressures and this kind of thing, but a real cultural experience and literary experience for these children. And lord knows they needed it.²⁵³

Sometime later Moore admitted to Baker, "I never looked for anyone else ... I knew you could adjust."²⁵⁴ Baker loved working at NYPL's 135th Street Branch as a children's librarian so much that she was perfectly content with doing so for the remainder of her life. She reflected:

²⁵¹ Augusta Baker Interview, p. 28, Series III Correspondence, 7 July 1934-26 January 1949, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. This is another example of how Baker's familial capital benefited Baker during a difficult time in her adult life. Without her mother and mother-in-law's support, Baker may have been unable to begin her career even after she was offered a position.

²⁵² Williams, "Interview with: Augusta Baker," <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

Working with the children was one of the most exciting parts of my professional life. I was with them for seventeen years, and I was where I belonged and where I was happiest.²⁵⁵

Serving as a children's librarian was the perfect position. Baker's years at the NYPL's 135th Street Branch promised to be formative ones for both her and the children she served. Although she began as a librarian, she also served as an advocate and teacher for Harlem's Black youth.²⁵⁶

Baker as Advocate and Teacher

As a children's librarian, Baker "brought all that [she] could to the boys and girls who came to that children's room in Harlem, and [was] repaid many times by the success which has come to many of these children."²⁵⁷ One of the children she took under her wing was James Baldwin. Baker remembered Baldwin as being a lover of libraries, even if he was somewhat peculiar. She noted:

I remember, [James Baldwin] was one odd duck! His brother was named David. And David was a bright, outgoing boy. James was very much an introvert, [and] was not as physically attractive as David. When I got to know their father, who was -- I guess today you would call him an evangelical minister -- fundamentalist -- and kind of harsh, you know, strict. But James turned out to be smarter than David, but you'd never know it. The library was like a haven for him. And this was true of many of those children.²⁵⁸

To young Baldwin, the library was both a liberating force and a fortress. It provided him with both access to and safety from the strange and the familiar. Baldwin recounted:

I went to the 135th Street Library at least three or four times a week, and I read everything there. I read every single book in that library. I read books like they were some weird kind of food. I was looking for in books a bigger world than the world in which I had

²⁵⁵ Augusta Baker, "My Years as a Children's Librarian," in *The Black Librarian in America*, ed. E.J. Josey (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1970), 119.

²⁵⁶ "Augusta Baker," in *Notable Black American Women*, 36.

²⁵⁷ Baker, "My Years as a Children's Librarian," 120.

²⁵⁸ Williams, "Interview with: Augusta Baker," <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

lived. In some blind and instinctive way, I knew what was happening in those books was also happening all around me. And I was trying to make a connection between the books and the life I saw and the life I lived ...[.] You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me the most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive or who had ever been alive.²⁵⁹

Baker realized that Baldwin had a genuine love for and interest in literature. This is why she was not perturbed when he snuck upstairs to view items from the Schomburg Collection, which was off-limits to children. She noted:

Well, James knew how you could sneak up those back steps, and he'd come out in the work area of the Schomburg you see ... here were these wonderful, wonderful books on the black experience, which even then this was the thing in which he was interested.²⁶⁰

Despite Baldwin's intense interest in learning more about Black experiences, due to his youth, he was expected to remain in his place and only frequent the children's room. Whenever a staffer found Baldwin using the Schomburg Collection, s/he would simply alert Baker and request that Baker escort the young man back to the children's section of the library. However, keeping tabs on Baldwin was wearying work. Discouraging him from using adult books did nothing to satiate his intellectual hunger and desire to learn more about Black life. Baker was aware of this and became Baldwin's advocate. She resisted library policies that forbade young people (particularly Baldwin) from using the Schomburg Collection. She believed that allowing children to use this would help cultivate their aspirational capital.²⁶¹ Baker recalled, "And I even sassed Schomburg.

²⁵⁹ Augusta Baker, "Pioneer in the War on Poverty: NYPL," *School Library Journal* 11, no. 1 (1964): 3375-3376; James Baldwin, "My Childhood," *Channel 5, WNEW-TV* in New York, May 31, 1964, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Bob Usherwood, *The Public Library as Public Knowledge* (London: Library Association, 1989), 147-148.

²⁶⁰ Williams, "Interview with: Augusta Baker," <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

²⁶¹ Yosso, "A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," 77.

I said, ‘Couldn't we make an exception and let this boy use this collection? He's bright... [.]’²⁶²

Baker sensed that “maybe for all [Baldwin’s] life this is going to be his real interest.”²⁶³ She

also spoke out on Baldwin’s behalf because the library “didn't have young adult departments.”²⁶⁴

A noted writer, Audre Lorde, also patronized the 135th Street Branch as a child.²⁶⁵ She visited the branch with her mother and two older sisters.²⁶⁶ One day while at the branch, Lorde burst into a tantrum. According to Lorde, Baker approached her and asked, “What’s wrong, little girl? ... Well, would you like me to read you a story?”²⁶⁷ Lorde noted, “my mother never read to us. Reading and books were something my parents valued, but it was just not a part of our family culture for the children to be read to.”²⁶⁸ Thus, Baker’s story-time offer must have been irresistible.

Baker read several stories that day to Lorde, which included: Dr. Seuss’ *Horton Hatches the Egg*, Ludwig Bemelmans’ *Madeline*, and *Hubert*.²⁶⁹ After that encounter, Lorde began to

²⁶² Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ It is unclear how old Lorde was when she first met Baker at the 135th Street Branch. Though she must have been quite young. In her autobiography (*Zami Sister Outsider Undersong*) Lorde explained, “I learned to read at the same time I learned to talk, which was only about a year or so before I started school.” Audre Lorde, “Chapter 3,” in *Zami Sister Outsider Undersong* (Berkeley: The Crossing Press and New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1993), 21-22.

²⁶⁶ Nina Winter, “Audre Lorde,” in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, ed. Joan Wylie Hall (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi. 2004), 10.

²⁶⁷ Winter, “Audre Lorde,” 10.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

think, “ ... reading was something I wanted to do. What [Baker] did, I was going to do that too, and was going to have it for my own.”²⁷⁰ During that encounter, Baker introduced Lorde to the beauty of words. By simply sharing a story or two, Baker helped to increase Lorde’s aspirational capital so that the young girl was convinced that she too could become a librarian and tell stories. Moreover, by sharing stories with Lorde, Baker engendered a love of reading and stories that remained with the girl for years to come. Lorde praised Baker for her work and credited the librarian with transforming her life:

I learned to read from Mrs. Augusta Baker, the children's librarian. ... If that was the only good deed that lady ever did in her life, may she rest in peace. Because that deed saved my life, if not sooner, then later, when sometimes the only thing I had to hold on to was knowing I could read, and that could get me through.²⁷¹

After her serendipitous encounter with Baker, Lorde learned how to read and write.

Eventually, she, too, became a librarian.

By serving as an advocate, teacher, and librarian, Baker instilled within Harlem’s Black youth (such as Baldwin and Lorde) a sense of aspirational capital. As a Black librarian, she introduced youth to innumerable possibilities through the gifts of books and storytelling. By occupying a position of authority and serving as a Black professional, Baker alerted them to the possibility that they too could become professionals and effect change. Harlem may have been their home, yet the whole world (which was not all White, nor all Black) awaited them.

²⁶⁹ Baker may have read Bill Peet’s 1959 text entitled *Hubert’s Hair Raising Adventure* (and simply referred to the text as *Hubert*); however, I am unable to substantiate this.

²⁷⁰ Winter, “Audre Lorde,” 10.

²⁷¹ Lorde, “Chapter 3,” in *Zami*, 22. It is interesting that Lorde credits Baker with “teaching” her how to read, given that Baker professed to dislike teaching. It is ironic that Baker taught throughout her career and actually enjoyed the experience.

Books About Black Life

Baker also took a woman by the name of Ellen Tarry under her wing. Tarry, an Alabama native, left her teaching post in Birmingham in hopes of becoming a writer.²⁷² She moved to New York in 1929 and befriended Harlem Renaissance icons such as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen and Claude McKay. Each of these men were also Baker's acquaintances.²⁷³ One day Margaret Wise Brown, a White woman who was an acclaimed children's book author, went to NYPL's 135th Street Branch and "asked about Claude McKay because they wanted a 'name' from Harlem and somebody that looked like Harlem" to write children's books.²⁷⁴ Tarry noted, "When Augusta Baker came to us about this [with Brown's proposition to write children's books], I was with Claude, and he said, 'Children's books! I don't want to write children's books! Let Miss Tarry go do that.'"²⁷⁵ Tarry felt that writing children's books was a suitable vocation. Doing so became even more appealing when Tarry became the first Black individual to receive a scholarship at the Bank Street School, which housed the Writer's Laboratory. Erected in October 1937, the Writer's Laboratory encouraged "the writing of children's literature that show[ed] an understanding and appreciation of the language of growing children, [an] aware[ness] of and responsive[ness] to children's real and imagined worlds, and affirm[ed] the

²⁷² Katharine Capshaw Smith, "From Bank Street to Harlem: A Conversation with Ellen Tarry," *Lion and the Unicorn: A Critical Journal of Children's Literature* 23, no. 2, (1999): 271-285, https://muse-jhu-edu.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/journals/lion_and_the_unicorn/v023/23.2smith.html.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

social and cultural heritage of every child.”²⁷⁶ Baker and Roberta Bosely Hubert, who was also a Black librarian, were thrilled when Tarry received the Bank Street Scholarship.²⁷⁷ They understood that there was an urgent need for books of merit to be created specifically for Black children (and their White peers) about Black experiences. Tarry sought to fill this need by co-writing a book with Marie Hall Ets entitled *My Dog Rinty* with photographs by Alexander and Alexandra Alland.²⁷⁸ This book was published in 1946 and was one of the few at the time that depicted Black life through photography. An added bonus was that *My Dog Rinty* featured a photograph of Baker conducting story time at the 135th Street Branch.²⁷⁹

Black Children’s Books

Black children’s books were hard to come by.²⁸⁰ When Baker was fortunate enough to

²⁷⁶ Bank Street College of Education, “Writer’s Lab,” <https://www.bankstreet.edu/center-childrens-literature/writers-lab/>. In 1916, Lucy Sprague Mitchell, an educator, formed the Bureau of Educational Experiments, which was later known as the Bank Street College of Education. Sherry L. Field and Michelle Bauml, “Lucy Sprague Mitchell: Champion for Experiential Education,” Our Proud Heritage, last modified September 2014, https://www.naeyc.org/yc/files/yc/file/201409/YC0914_Our_Proud_Heritage.pdf.

²⁷⁷ Smith, “From Bank Street to Harlem,” https://muse-jhu-edu.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/journals/lion_and_the_unicorn/v023/23.2smith.html.

²⁷⁸ Other books about Black life that utilized photography were Stella Gentry Sharpe’s 1939 text entitled *Tobe* (with photography by Charles Farrell) and Jane Dabney Shackelford’s 1944 text entitled *My Happy Days*.

²⁷⁹ Merriman, “Augusta Baker,” 81; Ellen Tarry and Marie Hall Ets, *My Dog Rinty* (New York: Viking Press, 1964).

²⁸⁰ Although finding books that depicted Blacks non-stereotypically was challenging, there were some available. For example, in 1921, Carter G. Woodson founded The Associated Publishers, an independent publishing company with a mission to educate all youth on the “history and achievements” of Blacks in America and Africa. Through The Associated Publishers, Woodson published “folklore collections, biographies, poetry anthologies, and histories” that were fashioned to “educate, entertain, and emancipate.” Woodson published his own work, *African Myths Together with Proverbs*, and Mary Effie Lee Newsome’s *Gladiola Garden*, among others. Woodson used his press to provide counter-stories to works that circulated inaccurate

find books with Black characters, she discovered that most of those texts depicted Blacks in a demeaning manner. She mused, “When I started, I couldn’t find books that did not portray the Negro as a servant.”²⁸¹ When Baker began her career at the 135th Street Branch, she found:

Most of the books which included black characters represented them as shiftless, happy, grinning, dialect-speaking menials. This was what was being written for children and what they read.”²⁸²

This was upsetting given that some Black youth had limited knowledge of Black history and culture. When Baker started working, she also discovered:

...[T]he children of Harlem had little knowledge of their cultural heritage and background. With the exception of one school in the area, where the principal was a black woman, there was little interest in the subject on the part of the schools, teachers, parents—and librarians.”²⁸³

Schomburg was also well aware of the children’s “ignorance in the area of black history.”²⁸⁴ As such, he insisted that Baker do something about the dismal lack of quality books about Black life. Schomburg urged, “These books must be published, and it is the responsibility of you and other children’s librarians to get them written and published.”²⁸⁵ Baker did do something.

Baker understood that she was fortunate to be affiliated with the NYPL, which was the largest library in the nation. Additionally, New York was a publishing hotbed. Baker soon

information about Blacks. Rudine Sims Bishop, *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children’s Literature*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), 41-54; Violet Harris, “African American Children’s Literature: The First One Hundred Years,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 59, no. 4 (1990): 548.

²⁸¹ Flynn, “Augusta Baker, Librarian,” 102.

²⁸² Augusta Baker, “My Years,” 118.

²⁸³ Augusta Baker, “My Years,” 117.

²⁸⁴ Augusta Baker, “My Years,” 118.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

found herself “going around making little talks about the importance of not having stereotypes in children’s books. That’s how [she] built up a relationship with the publishing houses.”²⁸⁶ For example, on January 22, 1941, she wrote a letter to Carter G. Woodson, proprietor of the private press known as The Associated Publishers, requesting that Woodson send her a copy of Effie Lee Newsome’s *Gladiola Garden*.²⁸⁷ Baker alerted Woodson to the fact that if she found Newsome’s book to be well-written, thoughtfully illustrated, and suitable for (Black) children, “there would be a strong possibility of a large sale, for every branch would have a chance to order it.”²⁸⁸ She went on to inform him that “if all of your juvenile [books] were given such treatment the publicity would be excellent and the sales would be helped.”²⁸⁹ In order to further convince Woodson of her credentials and good intentions, Baker stressed, “All books that deal with the Negro or have Negro characters in them are sent to me to be reviewed, and so you can see that practically every Negro juvenile [book that is] published is sent to me.”²⁹⁰ In essence, Baker was a force to be reckoned with in the area of Black children’s literature. She made sure

²⁸⁶ Bankhead, “Interview with Augusta Baker,” 17.

²⁸⁷ Augusta Baker to Carter G. Woodson, letter, 22 January 1941, Baker, Augusta Miscellaneous items, Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries. Mary Effie Lee Newsome’s *Gladiola Garden* is a book of verse about plants, insects, and nature. Illustrator Lois Mailou Jones’ artistic renderings are Afro-centric and communicate to readers that Black children and the natural splendor of their physical characteristics are the central focus (or heart) of Newsome’s poetic work. A “gladiola” is a flower indigenous to Africa. Rudine Sims Bishop, *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children’s Literature* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), 54; Katharine Capshaw Smith, *Children’s Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 220-222.

²⁸⁸ Augusta Baker to Carter G. Woodson, letter, 22 January 1941, Baker, Augusta Miscellaneous items, Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

publishers like Woodson understood the significance of her insider status and institutional clout.

Aside from Woodson, Baker was also well acquainted with Frederick G. Melcher, a publisher at R. R. Bowker Company.²⁹¹ Melcher was instrumental in furthering Baker's agenda regarding the production, promotion, and dissemination of non-stereotypical books about Black life. He was "one of [Baker's] first allies in the fight for better, unbiased children's books about black life."²⁹² Melcher introduced Baker to a group of people affiliated with what is now known as the Children's Book Council, and he asked if Baker would speak with children's editors at a gathering. She accepted the invitation and spoke candidly to White editors; "some listened," though others resented her for being present.²⁹³ Publishers were not alone in their lax attitude about producing unbiased books about Black life. Salesmen were also dismissive; some "said that they couldn't handle these books in the South and that the North wasn't too interested."²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ The American Library Association (ALA) Executive Board approved the creation of the Newbery Medal, which is "awarded annually by the American Library Association for the most distinguished American children's book published the previous year." The Newbery Medal aims "To encourage original creative work in the field of books for children. To emphasize to the public that contributions to the literature for children deserve similar recognition to poetry, plays, or novels. To give those librarians, who make it their life work to serve children's reading interests, an opportunity to encourage good writing in this field." Melcher suggested that the Caldecott Medal be created in 1937, which the ALA's Section for Library Work with Children and the Executive Board approved. The Caldecott Medal is awarded "to the artist who created the most distinguished picture book of the year" and named in honor of the nineteenth-century English illustrator Randolph J. Caldecott. Melcher helped to establish both the Newbery and Caldecott Medals. Augusta Baker, "My Years," 120; Association for Library Service to Children, "The Randolph Caldecott Medal," <http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/caldecottmedal/aboutcaldecott/aboutcaldecott>; Association for Library Service to Children, "The John Newberry Medal," <http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/newberymedal/aboutnewbery/aboutnewbery>.

²⁹² Augusta Baker, "My Years," 120. Baker, Augusta (1911-), Conferences and Workshops, lecture: "The Black Experience in Children's Non-Fiction: Past, Present, and Future-1982," Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

²⁹³ Augusta Baker, "My Years," 120.

Although there was an intense need for thoughtfully written and illustrated books about Blacks, according to Baker, “ ... by 1940 there were few books being published on the subject.”²⁹⁵ The same was true in 1958. Nonetheless, changes within the publishing industry gradually began to occur.²⁹⁶ For example, although the “first edition of *Books About Negro Life for Children* had about forty titles. ... The 1963 revision had nearly 250 titles, and [Baker projected] the 1970 revision [would] have nearly twice that number.”²⁹⁷ This gradual increase can be attributed to the efforts of publishers like “Viking, Doubleday, and Harper” who listened, and “organizations such as the Child Study Association, the Bureau for Intercultural Education, and the National Council for Christians and Jews [who] joined the ‘cause’.”²⁹⁸ Baker continued to engage in conversations with publishers, authors, and illustrators because work still needed to be done with regard to how Blacks were portrayed in children’s books. This need became painfully apparent during one of Baker’s storytelling sessions.

Inez Hogan’s The Mule Twins

During one story time, Baker haphazardly selected Inez Hogan’s 1939 book entitled *The Mule Twins* from the shelf to read to a group of children.²⁹⁹ She had not familiarized herself

²⁹⁴ Augusta Baker, “My Years,” 120-121.

²⁹⁵ Augusta Baker, “My Years,” 120.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 121.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Augusta Baker, “Significant Factors in Selecting and Rejecting Materials” (Proceedings of the Conference on The Georgia Child’s Access to Materials Pertaining to American Negroes, Atlanta University School of Library Service, 52-53, Atlanta, Georgia, November 10-11, 1967); Merriman, “Augusta Baker,” 72.

with the book beforehand. Baker admitted that this had been a mistake.³⁰⁰ *The Mule Twins* is a story about a young Black boy named Sim who owns twin mules. When the twin mules refuse to perform circus tricks on command, Sims is reduced to tears. Upon seeing Sim cry, the mules decide to perform tricks after all. The illustrations in Hogan’s text depict Sim and other Black characters with stereotypically exaggerated features such as wide lips and kinky hair. Hogan also uses dialect, which Baker detested.

As she read the book, Baker could not help but think to herself, “This is a terrible book...Should I just try to struggle through to the end and ignore the whole thing and think that they are ignoring it along with me?”³⁰¹ The children did not ignore it. One young man was especially disturbed with the book’s illustrations. At the end of story time, he asked to borrow the book to examine it more closely.³⁰² He returned and asserted that the mule twins were “cuter than the [Black] boys.”³⁰³ At that moment, Baker decided “We’d better do something with *The Mule Twins*.”³⁰⁴ She had “seen the hurt and baffled expression of [the] child as he has turned away from a book which [had] made the animals more attractive than the Negro characters.”³⁰⁵ Baker realized that the young Black boy who examined *The Mule Twins* was devastated because Sim—the Black male protagonist in the story—had been made to appear as less aesthetically

³⁰⁰ Augusta Baker, “Significant Factors in Selecting and Rejecting Materials” (Proceedings of the Conference on The Georgia Child’s Access to Materials Pertaining to American Negroes, Atlanta University School of Library Service, 52, Atlanta, Georgia, November 10-11, 1967).

³⁰¹ Baker, “Significant Factors,” 53.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Augusta Baker, “Charity Begins at Home,” *School Library Quarterly* 2, (1947): 6.

pleasing than his pets. Baker expressed, “The white child who is given this book learn[s] that Negroes are a little less becoming than the animals and the first seeds of false racial superiority are sown. He has been hurt worse than the Negro child.”³⁰⁶ Baker concluded that the White child suffered more than the Black child because s/he may have limited to no exposure to Blacks and Black life outside of books and the media. As such, the White child (unlike the Black child who was more than likely exposed to Black life and culture on daily) may mistakenly believe that the gross misrepresentations of Blacks in this book were accurate and have limited opportunities to have these falsehoods dispelled.

That unpleasant incident compelled members of the James Weldon Johnson Literary Guild, under the direction of branch librarian Roberta Bosely Hubert, to create the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection (JWJMC) of children’s books.³⁰⁷ Literary Guild members donated seventy-seven dollars to the 135th Street Children’s Room to help facilitate the purchase of books that were suitable for young readers. Books that appeared in the JWJMC collection “portrayed the black making some worthwhile contribution to the society” and contained illustrations that portrayed “the black child in an attractive and appealing manner.”³⁰⁸ Baker headed the

³⁰⁶ Baker, “Charity,” 20.

³⁰⁷ This collection was named for James Weldon Johnson. In 1938, Johnson died in a “car/train accident.” Baker (and others) felt this collection could “memorialize” Johnson as having been “a close friend of the branch.” Merriman, “Augusta Baker,” 74; The Schomburg Children’s Collection, “Program,” April 16, 1983, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; “My Years,” 118; The New York Public Library’s Online Catalogue, “Augusta Savage Portrait Collection,” http://browse.nypl.org/iii/encore/record/C__Rb11527558?lang=eng§ion=bib_info.

³⁰⁸ Merriman, “Augusta Baker,” 74; The Schomburg Children’s Collection, “Program,” April 16, 1983, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

committee charged with deciding which books to include in the JWJMC.³⁰⁹ Under her leadership, the committee selected about “forty-one children’s books.”³¹⁰

One aim of the JWJMC was to enable and encourage the “Negro child” to “develop a racial pride as well as a national one.”³¹¹ Additionally, the JWJMC sought to “impart” knowledge of Black history, culture, art, life, etc. onto “the white child so that he [could] develop a deeper understanding and respect for his fellow American.”³¹² The JWJMC was created with the hopes of providing youth with counter-narratives to stereotypical portrayals of Black life within America and throughout the world. It was also designed to benefit Black youth by communicating to them that they, like their predecessors, were capable of accomplishing great things and improve conditions for all humankind.

The 135th Street Branch Library—A Cultural Center

While Baker was working at the 135th Street Branch, it underwent major renovations. By July 1, 1942, the library had been expanded to make room for exciting amenities such as a theater, a large auditorium, and clubrooms.³¹³ This expansion would not have been possible

³⁰⁹ The Schomburg Children’s Collection, “Program,” April 16, 1983, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Baker, Augusta, Conferences and Workshops, Lecture: “The Black Experience in Children’s Non-fiction: Past, Present, and Future—1982,” Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³¹⁰ The Schomburg Children’s Collection, “Program,” April 16, 1983, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Bankhead, “Interview,” 17.

³¹¹ Augusta Baker, “Script for WNTC/WNYC-February 10, 1953,” p.3, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³¹² Baker, “Script for WNTC/WNYC-February 10, 1953,” Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³¹³ A. Van Doren & Claude McKay, “Talk by Dorothy Homer,” OWI Special Events, Caribbean Program, 135th Street Branch NYPL, Programs 1929-1950, New York Public Library, 135th Street Branch Records, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public

without the vision and dedication of library leaders, like Rose, whom Baker credits with making the 135th Street Branch a vibrant community hub.³¹⁴ Under Rose’s leadership, the 135th Street Branch became a center of cultural enrichment, offering activities such “ ... poetry readings, music ... Puppet shows, everything you can think of...[.]”³¹⁵ The American Negro Theater was established in the 135th Street Branch’s basement.³¹⁶ Baker recalled:

Many black writers and artists got their start right in the basement of that library...Down there in the basement they turned it into a great combination workroom. The American Negro Theater was born there. Aaron [Douglas] made absolutely gorgeous murals on that wall that depicted the history of the black race, to repay Rose and the library. ... So you have the theater going, and then if you wanted to do poetry—more poets came out of that cellar—there would be rooms where you could work. If you were trying to be a writer or an author or a poet or something, Rose set up a big program for you. Then the neighborhood would come to that.³¹⁷

The American Negro Theater (ANT) Group showcased up-and-coming Black artists in such as “poets Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and James Weldon Johnson, the artist Aaron Douglas, and the actor Frederick O’Neal.”³¹⁸ O’Neal (a New Theatre School and American Theatre Wing graduate) and Abram Hill (who studied at Columbia University and the New School for Social Research) met with twenty-eight others in Harlem on June 5, 1940 to discuss

Library; African American Registry, “The Schomburg Opens,” http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/schomburg-center-opens.

³¹⁴ Bankhead, “Interview,” 15.

³¹⁵ Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>; Bankhead, “Interview with Augusta Baker,” 15; “Augusta Baker,” in *Notable Black American Women*, 36.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Bankhead, “Interview,” 15.

³¹⁸ “Augusta Baker,” *Notable Black American Women*, 36.

forming an all-Black acting company.³¹⁹ This led O’Neil and Hill to found ANT, which was referred to as the Harlem Library Little Theater.³²⁰ Thus, Rose’s dream of the 135th Street Branch becoming a cultural center was realized.

When Rose retired in 1942, Dorothy [Dot] Robinson Homer, an African American, succeeded her.³²¹ With Homer at the helm, the 135th Street Branch continued to offer exemplary cultural and educational programming. Baker recounted:

Classes came from all parts of New York and from the surrounding communities for Negro History Lectures. The boys and girls in our neighborhood schools came for regularly scheduled class visits during which they received book talks and tours of the Schomburg Collection.³²²

The cultural excursions Harlem’s Black youth embarked upon were not purely for pleasure. 135th Street Branch librarians were purposeful in their programming and outreach efforts because they were aware that Harlem’s children’s “book background was weak.”³²³ As such, these children received various book talks that “consisted of three types of books: one classic, one new title, and one book about Black history.”³²⁴ In addition to these book talks, Baker “arranged

³¹⁹ The New York Public Library Archives & Manuscripts, “American Negro Theater Records, 1940-1981” [bulk 1940-1950], <http://archives.nypl.org/scm/20535>.

³²⁰ In 1945, the ANT was “forced to move” to the Elks Lodge at 15 West 126th Street and was renamed the “American Negro Theater Playhouse.” The New York Public Library Archives & Manuscripts, “American Negro Theater Records, 1940-1981” [bulk 1940-1950], <http://archives.nypl.org/scm/20535>.

³²¹ Sanford, “Rescuing Ernestine Rose,” 6-7. Baker was still a children’s librarian at the 135th Street Branch at this time.

³²² Baker, “My Years,” 119.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid. Book talks may be likened to an “advertisement or a commercial” that is designed to “convince” someone to read a particular book. “What is a booktalk?” *booktalking Colorado*, <http://ppld.org/booktalking/tips>.

concerts, guest appearances of prominent black artists, and other activities to help enrich black children's appreciation of their cultural heritage."³²⁵ Baker and other children's librarians also:

told stories, read aloud, showed fine art, [and] gave concerts. [They] were dedicated to the cultural growth of [their] children. [They] had reading clubs where Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes read their poetry and then encouraged the children to write their own poems. [They] invited Aaron Douglas, the black muralist, to meet with groups of children to explain and discuss the exciting Negro History Murals, which he had painted on the walls of [the] library auditorium. Frederick O'Neal talked to [the] Drama Club about the theater and then gave the club members a tour of the American Negro Theatre (it was in the Library's basement). Attilio Galti, one of the first white men to be accepted by the Pygmies, spoke to [the] boys and girls and rolled up his pants leg to show where he had been bitten by a poisonous snake and to illustrate how a Pygmy had saved his life. African stories were told in story hours and African art shown in exhibitions. A Haitian diplomat showed slides of Haiti and discussed the history and culture of his country. He read aloud 'at the drop of a hat' and black boys and girls, so-called non-readers, were motivated to read and enjoy books."³²⁶

The branch also offered free movies on Friday and featured "music appreciation talks, artists and writer appearances, and "carrie[d] on inter-cultural work between the Negro people and people of other nationalities and races."³²⁷ Homer initiated a series of monthly concert recitals in the 135th Street Branch's auditorium. Renowned opera singer Marian Anderson performed there. On October 12, 1943, the Harlem community paid tribute to Anderson by holding a program at the library in her honor. Homer also made a special presentation in Anderson's honor.³²⁸

³²⁵ Louise Pettus and Ron Chepesiuk of the Winthrop College Faculty, "South Carolina's Story: The Making of a State," Sept. 23, 1988, n.p., Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³²⁶ Baker, "My Years," 119.

³²⁷ Eugene Gordon, "Library Plays Big Part in Harlem Cultural Life," Daily Worker, New York, Friday, June 2, 1914, Newspaper Clippings, 1943-1968, 135th Street Branch Records, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

³²⁸ "Serenading Marian Anderson: A Community Tribute to a Great Artist," October 12, 1943, NYPL, Programs 1929-1950, 135th Street Branch. Records, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

By offering a variety of programming and resources, 135th Street Branch librarians did what they could to bolster the community cultural wealth of Harlem's Black youth. Black youth accumulated aspirational and social capital through their interactions with noted Black scholars, artists, and intellectuals. Black youth's linguistic capital was broadened by their exposure to a large number of well-written books that offered non-stereotypical portrayals of Blacks in a variety of occupations and settings. Black youth's resistant capital and navigational capitals were enriched through programming and stories Blacks shared about achieving personal and material success in the midst of adversity.

Baker's Home Life

After Baker began working at the 135th Street Branch, she separated from and later divorced her husband, Mr. Baker.³²⁹ However, sometime later Baker met a man by the name of Gordon Alexander. The two wed on November 23, 1944.³³⁰ The Alexanders moved to 115-33 174th Street in St. Albans, Queens, New York, where they remained until they relocated to 830 Armour Street in Columbia, South Carolina following Baker's retirement from the NYPL.³³¹

³²⁹ I was unable to unearth any documents about the events that led up to Baker's separation and divorce. However, I did not dwell on this because my research focuses on Baker's professional life and not her personal one.

³³⁰ Professionally, Baker retained her former husband's surname. However, she was known as Mrs. Gordon Alexander privately. Baker and Gordon Alexander remained married for 43 years, until Mr. Alexander's death in 1987. Merriman, "Augusta Baker," 80-81; Wolfgang Saxon, "Augusta B. Baker, 86, Storyteller, Editor and Children's Librarian," <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/06/arts/augusta-b-baker-86-storyteller-editor-and-children-s-librarian.html>; Augusta Baker interview p. 29, Correspondence, 7 July 1934-26 January, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Jack Janowski, "The Story's in the Telling," Trends Today in the Albuquerque Journal, October 25, 1977, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Williams, "Interview with: Augusta Baker," <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

³³¹ Buddy, interview by Regina Carter, February 17, 2015; Kentucky Association School Librarians, "Home Address," 1970s, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library,

According to Buddy, the family “moved from the city to St. Albans [in Queens] around 1947. [His mother and stepfather] bought a house in an upscale area of the suburbs. One of their neighbors was Jackie Robinson.”³³² Buddy described the family’s home in St. Albans as being a “single dwelling [establishment] with grass in the front and grass in the back;” this allowed Baker to engage in one of her favorite pastimes—gardening.³³³

The James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection and The National Library Project

Being a newlywed did not distract Baker from her work at the 135th Street Branch. She understood that more needed to be done to help educate and enlighten Harlem’s Black youth, which was a charge she took very seriously. One of the ways Baker responded to this charge was through her continual involvement with the JWJMC. For example, on May 19, 1946, Baker and several other librarians—Myrtle McLean, Ernestine Lipscombe, and Maude L. Watkins (the National Library Project Chairman)—planned a book tea as part of the “Delta Sigma Theta Sorority National Library Project.”³³⁴ These librarian selected books from the JWJMC to ship to schoolchildren in rural Mississippi. Soror Shirley Graham, author of several biographies on

University of South Carolina.

³³² Buddy, interview by Regina Carter, February 17, 2015.

³³³ Buddy, interview by Regina Carter, February 17, 2015; Spencer Shaw, “Augusta Baker,” Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. In 1980, Baker and Mr. Alexander moved to Columbia so that Baker could assume her new role as Storytelling Specialist at USC-Columbia.

³³⁴ “Gotham Deltas Plan Book Tea,” Courier, May 18, 1946, News Articles, 1940s, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. All of the librarians involved in the National Library Project were members of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority. The Alpha Sigma chapter of Delta Sigma Theta was first known as “Alpha Beta.” By 1960, the sorority had undergone another name change and was known as the New York Alumnae Chapter. This was Delta Sigma Theta’s first graduate chapter; it was approved in December 1920 at the national convention and chartered in January 1921. The New York Alumnae Chapter pledged “academic excellence,” “cultural enrichment,” and “social welfare and community service.” These were all values Baker. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, “History,” “<http://dstnyac.org/chapter-information/history/>” <http://dstnyac.org/chapter-information/history/>.

prominent Blacks such as George Washington Carver, Paul Robeson, and Frederick Douglass, served as guest speaker for the book tea.³³⁵

Racism at the American Library Association (ALA)

In addition to working in her local community, Baker was actively involved in the New York Library Association and the American Library Association (ALA). She attended numerous conferences. However, the 1948 ALA Annual Conference, in Atlantic City, New Jersey, was particularly memorable. Virginia H. Matthews relayed in the 1998 *American Libraries* “Opinion” section that she and Baker were at this annual conference when they encountered complications checking into a room at The Claridge Hotel. Matthews recounted:

We arrived at the Claridge Hotel with our confirmed reservation, but we were told we could not stay there. At first they “could not find” the reservation, but it became apparent they did not take African American guests. All hell broke loose as we plowed through layers of managers. Upon being informed that this outrage would be reported far and wide to conference organizers, the visitor’s bureau, and the newspapers, we were eventually ushered to our room. Augusta was the epitome of cool dignity and determination as she reinforced my near-tantrum, but it worked and we felt triumphant.³³⁶

The demeanor and restraint Baker exhibited during this taxing ordeal was characteristic of the children’s librarian. Those who knew and worked with Baker often commented upon her solid sense of self, belief in her abilities, and calm resolve in the midst of chaos. Matthews added:

I should say at this point that I never felt any fear in these encounters with segregation

³³⁵ A number of Graham’s books were featured in the JWJMC and Baker’s bibliography. Graham, also known as Lola Shirley Graham DuBois, was heralded as being the first Black American woman “to write and produce an opera with an all-Black cast” when she penned *Tom-Toms: An Epic of Music and The Negro*. Graham later married noted intellectual and activist W. E. B. Du Bois. Blackpast.org, “DuBois, Shirley Graham (1996-1977),” <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/dubois-shirley-graham-1896-1977>.

³³⁶ Virginia H. Matthews, “Opinion: Augusta Baker Remembered,” *American Libraries*, April 1998, Augusta Baker Staff Biographical File, The New York Public Library Archives, The New York Public Library.

that Augusta would be embarrassed or personally wounded. Her tremendous sense of security in who she was seemed to protect her from harm, and of course, she had already breached many barriers and seemed glad of the opportunity and the help in knocking down some more. Her feeling was that the time had come to end the injustices and the stupidities.³³⁷

Similar to how Baker exhibited courage in the midst of discriminatory practices at the New York State College for Teachers, she resisted discriminatory practices at The Claridge Hotel, remaining resolute in the midst of covert racist practices. This may be due to the fact that each of her prior experiences (as uncomfortable as they may have been) helped her channel her resistant capital and calmly confront hotel management.

Dutton-Macrae Award

There were also joyous occasions in Baker's professional life. For example, Baker received the Dutton-Macrae Award for "Advanced Study in the Field of Work with Children and Young People" at the 72nd annual ALA conference, which was held in Los Angeles, California.³³⁸ Baker also received a monetary gift totaling one thousand dollars, which she used to execute a "study on the 'Role of the Children's Library in Inter-Cultural Education with

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ The E.P. Dutton Award was formally known as the "E.P. Dutton Fellowship for Library Work with Children." This award was designed to "train children's librarians or to offer opportunities for advanced study which shall encourage creative work in the special field. This version of the award was administered from 1930-1932 and then terminated due to funding." "E.P. Dutton Fellowship for Library Work with Children," *American Library Association*, <http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/ep-dutton-fellowship-library-work-children>. The award Baker received in 1953 was called the the Dutton-Macrae Award for Advanced Study in the Field of Library Work with Children and Young People. The Dutton-Macrae Award was "designed to give the recipient an opportunity for formal or informal study of some aspect of the field that will be beneficial both to the person and to library service. This award was reestablished in 1952 by Mr. Elliot B. Macrae of E.P. Dutton Company and given to the A.L.A. as part of its centennial celebration." Baker was the first Dutton-Macrae award recipient. "Dutton-Macrae Award for Advanced Study in the Field of Library Work with Children and Young People," *American Library Association*, <http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/dutton-macrae-award-advanced-study-field-library-work-children-and-young-people>.

Special Emphasis on the Negro.”³³⁹ Baker focused upon the Black population because this was the “largest minority group in America” at the time.³⁴⁰ Although her study would focus on Blacks, Baker understood that her research could also benefit “children’s librarians working with all kinds of groups.”³⁴¹ She explained:

Even communities of one racial or ethnic or religious group should understand and appreciate other groups. I plan to select libraries from representative sections of the country in order to study their intercultural programs with the purpose of evaluating them. After analyzing them, I expect to formulate some suggestions and proposals that would assist librarians anxious to carry out similar work with children.³⁴²

The Dutton-Macrae award also allowed Baker to expand her bibliography, *Books About Negro Life for Children*, which would benefit librarians and the larger public.³⁴³ She sought to create “similar biographies . . . such as a short basic list of adult books that [would] be useful for the children’s librarian herself.”³⁴⁴ Baker understood that she was not alone in her campaign for bringing increased attention about the need for more non-stereotypical books about Blacks and Black experiences. The field of Black children’s literature experienced growth due to the efforts

³³⁹ Libby Clark, “Negroes’ Contributions Cited As Library Association Meets,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, July 11, 1953, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; American Library Association, Past Annual Conferences, 1876-present, <http://www.ala.org/conferences/past/pastannualconferences>. E.P. Dutton Company representative, Marguerite Vance, presented Baker with the Dutton-Macrae award. Merriman, “Augusta Baker,” 82; “Arna Bontemps Gets High Post of Librarians,” *News Articles*, 1950s, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. Fellow librarian and children’s book author, Arna Bontemps, was also recognized at the 72nd annual conference. Bontemps was elected to serve as an ALA council member from 1953-1957.

³⁴⁰ “Congratulations to Mrs. Baker,” *Top of the News*, *News Articles*, 1950s, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

of “many people...” and Baker simply felt “privileged to be part of the movement.”³⁴⁵ Upon returning from the ALA conference, Baker continued to work at the 135th Street Branch to foster in children a love for literature and to ensure that Black life was depicted positively in children’s books. Her dedication to her profession did not go unnoticed.

Promotions within the New York Public Library

The year 1953 was a colossal. As previously noted, in the summer of 1953, Baker received the acclaimed Dutton-Macrae award. Later that year, NYPL administrators approached her with an interesting proposition. Frances Lander Spain, a University of Chicago graduate who had a “reputation for being one of the top public library administrators in the country,” had recently been named NYPL’s Coordinator of Children’s Services.³⁴⁶ Spain needed an assistant, and some administrators approached Baker about vying for that position. John Mackenzie Cory, Chief of the NYPL’s Circulation Department, was one of those administrators. Cory admitted that the assistant coordinator position would be a huge undertaking for Baker as well as the library.³⁴⁷ He expressed the significance of what having a “black, even assistant coordinator, [could have] on the profession.”³⁴⁸ According to Baker, Cory indicated that, “[the] New York Public [Library]’s reputation [was] national and [that she might] be called upon to go in the

³⁴⁵ Baker, “My Years,” 121.

³⁴⁶ Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>; Bankhead, “Interview with Augusta Baker,” 19.

³⁴⁷ Cory served as Chief from 1951-1963. In 1963, he was appointed Deputy Director of the NYPL; he served in this capacity from 1971-1978. The New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives, “John Mackenzie Cory records, 1949-1963,” <http://archives.nypl.org/nypla/5564>.

³⁴⁸ Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

South or wherever ... ”³⁴⁹ Cory asked her, “ ... are you willing to stand up to this kind of pressure? New York Public Library, by putting your name in the hopper, says it's willing to back you.”³⁵⁰ Although the NYPL was supporting her, Baker was still uneasy. She had reservations about her suitability and qualifications for the position. Despite this, Baker still applied.

Baker recalled, “[The NYPL] had four or five names. Now, before they asked me if I was willing to have my name submitted, they talked with me and John Cory.”³⁵¹ She was cognizant of the fact that at least two other [presumably White] women were also being considered for the position. These women were “children's librarians who had been with the New York Public Library longer, who were really more knowledgeable than [she was], when it came to children's literature and this kind of thing.”³⁵² Nonetheless, Baker was still given an opportunity to compete for the coveted “storytelling specialist” position. Although it may have been improbable (from a qualifications standpoint) that Baker would receive the job, she still agreed to be considered, which demonstrated her immense aspirational capital—namely her ability to remain optimistic “in the face of real and perceived barriers.”³⁵³ Years later, Baker confided that she was convinced “the powers that be on the [NYPL] board decided they wanted a Black in the administrative structure.”³⁵⁴ Baker had to be ready and willing to serve in a highly

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>; The New York Public Library Archives and Records, “John Mackenzie Cory records, 1949-1963” <http://archives.nypl.org/nypla/5564>.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Yosso, “A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” 77.

visible position during a time when America was still struggling to resolve racial.

Baker did not really believe she would be offered the position. However, she concealed her personal doubts, while the search was underway. She did not feel particularly inclined to share that “there were far better storytellers than [her].”³⁵⁵ Instead, Baker reflected inwardly, “...[W]ell, you know, they can put my name in if they want to, but no way will this woman [Frances Lander Spain] select me ... regardless of race.”³⁵⁶ Yet, Spain did.

Spain was impressed with Baker’s dedication and commitment to children’s services. For example, when Spain was visiting the New York area, Cory took her to tour the children’s room at the 135th Street Branch. When Spain arrived at the Branch, story hour was underway and Baker did not have much time to entertain the prospective Coordinator of Children’s Services. When Baker met Spain, she simply said, ““Yes, how do you do, charmed, very pleased to meet you.” Then Baker “ignored” Cory and Spain and continued to “take care of [her] work.”³⁵⁷ She had “learned to put [her] children first and [she] didn’t trot around” with visitors, because someone was always frequenting the “big Harlem Branch.”³⁵⁸ Baker’s professionalism solidified Spain’s belief that she was the right librarian to become the next assistant coordinator and storytelling specialist.

Before Spain officially selected Baker to become her assistant, the two had a candid conversation. Baker and Spain talked about “generalities in children's work” and the issue of

³⁵⁴ Bankhead, “Interview with Augusta Baker,” 16.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Williams, “Interview with: Augusta Baker,” <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

race.³⁵⁹ Spain inquired, “Do you object to working with a southern white woman?”³⁶⁰ Baker must have assured Spain that her racial and geographical backgrounds were inconsequential, for on October 1, 1953, the NYPL’s public relations office released a statement announcing that Baker had been appointed as NYPL’s “Supervisor of Storytelling.”³⁶¹ Baker received this appointment at a critical point in the nation’s history. One year after Baker’s promotion, the U.S. Supreme Court found school segregation to be unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Not only was Baker’s promotion newsworthy for the city of New York as well as the nation, it was also a momentous moment for her professionally. With her new title came added responsibilities.³⁶² For example, Baker was now responsible for coordinating city park story hours held during the summers, story and picture book hours “held in branches from Halloween to May Day,” and the “extension service” which enabled storytellers to visit other “local institutions;” Baker was also in charge of the NYPL’s storytelling publications.³⁶³

Storytelling Struggles

It is somewhat ironic that Baker even became the Supervisor of Storytelling. Although she had spent years listening to her grandmother tell stories, Baker did not believe that she was

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Anna L. Giants, NYPL, press release, October 1, 1953, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³⁶² According to Baker, there was an “administrative opening in the office of children’s services for a “storytelling position. At that time, it was not a system coordinator, it was just head of storytelling, but within the year they reorganized the titles and the position.” When the reorganization occurred, Baker became “assistant coordinator of children’s services and head of storytelling.” “Augusta Baker Interview,” n.d., Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³⁶³ Anna L. Giants, NYPL, press release, October 1, 1953, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

naturally gifted at telling.³⁶⁴ According to Baker, when she first began working at the 135th Street Branch, she struggled to tell a good story. Yet she felt compelled to perfect her performance. All children's librarians were expected to tell stories and tell them well. If they could not, these librarians would be transferred to the adult department. Baker confided, "I used to say to myself: who wants to work in the adult department?"³⁶⁵ Baker balked at the prospect of being booted out of the children's department. As such, she worked hard at becoming a better storyteller. She recalls, "I failed storytelling the first time; I was terrible. Miss Mary Gould Davis said this, she said, 'The only thing you have is potential.'"³⁶⁶ According to Baker, Davis was unimpressed with her storytelling skills. Yet, this did not deter her from striving to become a better storyteller. Instead, it fueled Baker's desire to work harder and do better. As such, she put in grueling work to perfect her storytelling skills. Baker remembers:

It seems I did in-service for a thousand years before [Mary Gould Davis] thought I was capable of a full-blown program — and nobody argued with Mary Gould Davis's decisions. So I had to wait and work and wait. It was during this period, the late 1930s, that Mary Gould Davis started the Story Teller's Symposium, an annual gathering on Staten Island where the star tellers of each year were chosen to tell a special story. Mary Gould Davis handpicked the tellers each year. To my frustration, I was never chosen.³⁶⁷

Baker's persistence paid off. When she became Supervisor of Storytelling, she finally told a story on Staten Island. Baker recalls, "I don't remember *what* I told, but I'll never forget that I

³⁶⁴ Williams, "Interview with: Augusta Baker," <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid. Mary Gould Davis was formerly a children's librarian and later served as supervisor of storytelling from 1922 - 1944. She had also served as a teacher, writer, and editor. "Biographical Sketch," Mary Gould Davis Papers, <http://special.lib.umn.edu/findaid/xml/CLRC-338.xml>.

³⁶⁷ Smith, "An Interview with Augusta Baker," <http://www.hbook.com/1995/03/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/an-interview-with-augusta-baker/#>.

told.”³⁶⁸ Baker had earned the right to tell stories and oversee NYPL’s entire storytelling program, which was a responsibility she absolutely relished.

Consultation, Teaching, and Committee Work

The mid-1950s were a busy time for Baker. Not only was she responsible for coordinating NYPL’s storytelling events, she was also a highly sought-after consultant and instructor. Carlton Comma, Director of the Trinidad Public Library (TPL), requested that Baker visit the TPL for one month.³⁶⁹ From September 1955 until October 1955, Baker resided in Trinidad. While there, she reviewed book collections, conducted an “in-service training workshop” for librarians within the children’s department, and examined the library’s children’s programming.³⁷⁰ Baker also told stories. Baker noted, “I shall never forget the eager, ‘book-thirsty’ children on the Island. Many days we locked the doors at 4 p.m. so that no more children could enter the Children’s Room because of safety precautions. There were hundreds of children at our first story hour...[.]”³⁷¹ Similar to children at the 135th Street Branch, those at the TPL also responded eagerly and favorably to story time. In December 1955, Baker spoke at New York Public School 181’s book fair. The Parent-Teacher Association spearheaded the event, which was designed to increase the numbers of books given as gifts during Christmas time while

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ “Cocktail Party at Public Library,” *Trinidad Guardian*, September 21, 1955, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; “Mrs. Augusta Baker Spending Month in Trinidad Library,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 24, 1955, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³⁷⁰ “Mrs. Augusta Baker Spending Month in Trinidad Public Library,” *Baltimore African American*, September 24, 1955/1953, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; “Personals,” *Junior Libraries* (1955): 33, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³⁷¹ Baker, “My Years,” 121.

encouraging children and adults to become better readers.³⁷² Baker taught a “Writing for Children” course at the New School for Social Research from 1954-1956 and storytelling at the City College of New York’s Extension Division from 1956-1958.³⁷³

Baker was also actively involved in a number of committees. For instance, she served as Chairman to the Advisory Committee to Westinghouse Broadcasting Company’s television series “Reading out Loud” from 1959 to 1960.³⁷⁴ The Westinghouse series was created to encourage more families to read together. The “Reading Out Loud” program consisted of “30-minute readings by celebrities,” which included famous individuals such as Eleanor Roosevelt, who read *The Butterfly that Stamped*; Mr. and Mrs. Jackie Robinson, who narrated *The Red Badge of Courage* and Daugherty’s *Abraham Lincoln*; Eva Le Gallienne, who read “*The Ugly Duckling*,” and Cyril Ritchard, who narrated Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*.³⁷⁵

Spain and Baker’s Working Relationship

Spain remained at the NYPL from 1953-1961. During that time, she and Baker’s professional relationship grew. Spain made certain that Baker received superior training. Baker

³⁷² “School 181 P.T.A. To Hear Librarian,” *Baltimore Evening Sun*, December 8, 1955, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; “N.Y. Storyteller to be at School 181,” *Afro-American*, December 3, 1955, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³⁷³ In 1965, Baker began teaching a storytelling course at Rutgers University’s Graduate Library School in New Brunswick, N.J. It is unclear when she discontinued her teaching duties at Rutgers. The New School for Social Research was renamed The New School in 2005. Baker taught a “Writing for Children” course there from 1954 to 1956. She taught storytelling for two years at the same institution from 1957 to 1959. “Augusta Baker: A Biographical Checklist,” n.d., Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³⁷⁴ Baker, Augusta CV, October. 11, 1965, p.2, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³⁷⁵ Augusta Baker, “Reading Out Loud” Series, *Top of the News*, December 1959, Vol. 16, 62-63.

recalled that Spain used to assign her the same duties she, the coordinator, was responsible for executing, and “then watched how [Baker] did things.”³⁷⁶ It was Spain who encouraged Baker to become actively involved in ALA. From 1958 to 1961, Baker served on the ALA Board of Directors and did so again from 1966 to 1969. She served on the Board of Directors for the CSD from 1958 to 1961 as well.³⁷⁷ Baker also served on ALA’s Children’s Services Division (CSD) Book Evaluation Committee from 1963 to 1966 and on the ALA Executive Board 1968-1972.³⁷⁸

Conclusion

Chapter Three discussed how Baker drew upon her community cultural wealth while working at the NYPL. Baker drew upon her social capital to create culturally relevant programming for youth who frequented the 135th Street Branch. She relied upon her resistant and navigational capitals to resist racist policies at the The Claridge Hotel. She tapped into her linguistic capital to become a better storyteller. Baker also continued to advocate for unbiased Black children’s literature through her bibliography, which is examined in Chapter Four.

³⁷⁶ Bankhead, “Interview with Augusta Baker,” 19.

³⁷⁷ The CSD is now known as the Association for Library Services to Children. Baker, Augusta CV, October. 11, 1965, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³⁷⁸ Augusta Baker curriculum vitae, n.d., Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE BLACK EXPERIENCE IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Overview

Chapter Four seeks to address the following question: Why was Baker's bibliography on children's books about Black experiences significant? It explores how Baker's bibliography served as a resource for those who sought (yet had difficulty unearthing) well-written and thoughtfully illustrated books about Blacks.³⁷⁹ It then enters into a discussion regarding Baker's decision whether or not to include Helen Bannerman's book, *Little Black Sambo*, in her bibliography. This is followed by an explanation of the literary criteria Baker drew upon to create her bibliography. Chapter Four concludes with a discussion about the implications of Baker's bibliographic work.

Books About the Negro for Children: A Resource

Before Baker's seminal bibliography, *Books About the Negro for Children (BANFC)*, was published, she was already at work compiling a list of books about Black experiences that were suitable for children. This early (non-published) book list was first mentioned in Catherine A. Latimer's letter to Baker. In this letter, Latimer communicated to Baker that her book list would be a huge boon. On July 7, 1934, Latimer wrote the following:

... I think it is excellent and very unique with book reviews and illustrations. The annotations seemed simple and concise for young people and the choice of books good. I particularly enjoyed and thought your introduction appropriate ... as I stated before, I think it is excellent and we should like very much to have a copy for our files.³⁸⁰

This correspondence shows that, by 1934, Baker was already garnering the attention of

³⁷⁹ Three of Baker's bibliographies are discussed in this chapter: 1) *Books About the Negro for Children*, 2) *Books About Negro Life for Children*, and 3) *The Black Experience in Children's Books*. *Books About the Negro for Children* was Baker's first bibliography.

³⁸⁰ Latimer was a reference librarian who worked at the NYPL, Catherine A. Latimer to Augusta Baker, 7 July 1934, New York Public Library Circulation Department, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

NYPL staffers, even before securing her first position within that library system. Approximately two years later, she was hired as a children's librarian at NYPL's 135th Street Branch. On June 13, 1939, Baker's former acquaintance, Dr. Pritchard (head of the librarianship department at the New York State College for Teachers at Albany) also requested a copy of Baker's list. Pritchard wrote, "We shall certainly want a copy of your bibliography of the books by and for Negroes suited for children's rooms."³⁸¹ Baker's illustrious list was a highly sought-after commodity.³⁸²

On June 25, 1939, Principal Gertrude Elise Johnson McDougald Ayer sent a letter to Ernestine Rose (the 135th Street Branch Librarian) gushing about the appeal of Baker's book lists and her work with schools in the New York area.³⁸³ In Ayer's letter to Rose, the principal stated:

I wish to express my appreciation for the excellent cooperation and service which Mrs. Baker as acting-head of the 135th St. Library has given to my school ... She has also been helpful in furnishing us with various reading lists. Only recently I had occasion to use one of these lists in an official capacity at the Board of Education ... She is giving an excellent service to our community.³⁸⁴

³⁸¹ Martha Caroline Pritchard to Augusta Baker, 13 June 1939, New York Public Library Circulation Department, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³⁸² None of the bibliographies I consulted (which included the 1946, 1949, 1963, and 1971 editions) contained "illustrations."

³⁸³ In 1936, Ayer became principal of Public School 24 (or P.S. 24) Manhattan, which was located on 128th Street between Fifth and Madison in Harlem, New York. At that time, 95 percent of the student body at P.S. 24 was Black. Principal Ayer remained at P.S. 24 until 1945. Lauri Johnson, "A Generation of Women Activists: African American Female Educators in Harlem, 1930-1950," *Journal of African American History* 89, no. 3 (2004): 229; Jessie Carney Smith, *Black Firsts: 4,000 Ground-Breaking and Pioneering Historical Events*, (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 2013): 211. I was unable to unearth copies of the book lists Latimer, Pritchard, and Ayer referenced in their letters. I was also unable to ascertain if they all received the same lists or different lists with similar titles.

³⁸⁴ Ms. Ayer to Ms. Rose, 25 June 1939, New York Public Library Circulation Department, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. Ms. Ayer was the first African American principal following desegregation at P.S. 24, which is where James Baldwin went to school. She followed in the footsteps of another first. Ayer's father was one of the first African American physicians in New York City. Lauri Johnson, "A Generation of

It is unclear what genres of books were included on the “reading lists” Baker gave Principal Ayers. However, it is clear that Baker’s reading lists were an “excellent service to the [Harlem] community.” Thus, it can be inferred that, in order to be of service, some of Baker’s earlier lists more than likely addressed aspects of Black culture, history, experiences, and life.

Baker labored to bring increased, positive attention to Black experiences through literature in the Northeast. Another Black children’s librarian, Charlemae Hill Rollins, toiled at the Chicago Public Library’s Hardin Square Branch in the Midwest. Neither woman’s work was in vain. In 1941, the National Council of Teachers in English released Rollins’ bibliography, *We Build Together: A Reader's Guide to Negro Life and Literature for Elementary and High School Use*. This bibliography emphasized “really good books for children and young people that would present Negroes as human beings and not stereotypes.”³⁸⁵ In 1943, the NYPL published Baker’s bibliography, *BANFC*.³⁸⁶ *BANFC* contained titles culled from the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection (JWJMC). The JWJMC of children’s books was located within the NYPL’s 135th Street Branch, which is now known as the Countee Cullen Library. Books found within the JWJMC and featured in Baker’s *BANFC* served two purposes: 1) to “acquaint Negro boys and girls with their own heritage as well as racial achievements” and 2) to “help

Women Activists: African American Female Educators in Harlem, 1930-1950,” *Journal of African American History* 89, no. 3, 229-231.

³⁸⁵ Charlemae Rollins, “Forward,” in *We Build Together: A Reader's Guide to Negro Life and Literature for Elementary and High School Use*, (Champaign, Ill., National Council of Teachers of English, 1967): ix.

³⁸⁶ If this was Baker’s first published bibliography, her list was the second of its kind—Rollins’ list was the first.

white children gain a truer, more sympathetic picture of their fellow Americans.”³⁸⁷ Both Baker and Rollins recognized that all youth (especially Black youth) needed to see their lived experiences reflected in literature. They understood that there were no authoritative guidelines available that librarians, caregivers, educators, and other interested individuals could consult to find well-written and illustrated books about Black experiences. So they created their own.

In 1946, the Bureau for Intercultural Education printed Baker’s newly titled booklist, *Books About Negro Life for Children (BANLFC)*. The NYPL reissued *BANLFC* in 1949, 1957, 1961, and 1963. The first edition of *BANLFC* contained approximately “forty titles, half of which should not have been included.”³⁸⁸ Baker admitted, “...the black characters were all servants” and further expressed, “My God, how could anybody say that one is not full of stereotypes?”³⁸⁹ During the 1940s, large quantities of children’s books that depicted Blacks non-stereotypically were still not being published.³⁹⁰ For every well-written and illustrated book about Black life Baker discovered, there were many more that portrayed Blacks unfavorably.

³⁸⁷ Baker, “Introduction,” *Books About the Negro for Children*, 140, 1943. Achieving the first goal of acquainting Black youth with their heritage could also help to develop or further cultivate within Black youth a desire to excel and improve their conditions, which closely aligns with Yosso’s definition of aspirational capital.

³⁸⁸ After securing a copy of the 1946 edition of Baker’s *BANLFC*, I found that it contained approximately 131 titles (not 40 titles as Baker expressed during her interview with Bankhead.) I could not account for this discrepancy yet acknowledge that Baker might have been referring to another bibliography. Augusta Baker, “My Years,” 121. In a speech she delivered on June 2, 1973, Baker credited Ursula Nordstrom, a White woman, with being the first editor to publish the small quantity of literature about Black experiences during the 1930s and 1940s. However, W.E.B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson also published literature on Black experiences in the 1920s and 1930s. Augusta Baker-June 12, 1973, speech p.14, Correspondence, 16 October 1970 – 26 December 1973, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

³⁸⁹ Bankhead, “Interview,” 17.

³⁹⁰ Baker, “My Years,” 120.

One of those books was Helen Bannerman's *Little Black Sambo (LBS)*.

Little Black Sambo

LBS was one of (if not) the most contentious titles that appeared in the 1943 edition of *BANFC* and the 1946 edition of *BANLFC*.³⁹¹ *LBS* is a children's story about a young Indian boy named Sambo who has a suit of fine clothing (one version reads that Sambo received a red coat, blue trousers, green umbrella, and purple shoes). Sambo goes for a walk one day in the jungle where he meets a number of tigers. In order to not get eaten, he agrees to give each of the tigers one piece of his clothing. The tigers eventually meet up and debate about which of them looks "grandest." The tigers argue and then chase each other around the tree so quickly that they turn to butter. Sambo scoops up the butter and takes it home to his mother, Black Mambo. She then makes a lot of pancakes.³⁹² This book is controversial because the name "Sambo" is considered to be a racial slur. Additionally, some versions of the book contain questionable illustrations. For example, some depict Sambo as having very dark skin, thick pink lips, and wide eyes—much like the stereotypical "pickaninny."³⁹³ Baker vehemently opposed this text's inclusion in her bibliography, but she acquiesced to NYPL officials' request to have it included in order to ensure that her bibliography was published. Baker called to mind the specific circumstances that compelled her to include Bannerman's controversial text:

I remember that there was a great discussion about putting *Little Black Sambo* on the list. I put it off. Ms. Moore [who was head of the NYPL's children's division] said to me, '...the most important thing is to get this list published. Now, remember, the only thing

³⁹¹ Bannerman's *Little Black Sambo* was first published in 1889 and reprinted in 1923. Violet Harris, "American Children's Literature: The First One Hundred Years," *Journal of Negro Education* 59, no. 4 (1990): 542.

³⁹² The Sterling Times, Helen Bannerman's *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, <http://www.sterlingtimes.co.uk/sambo.htm>.

³⁹³ Ibid.

that's really derogatory is the title, *Little Black Sambo*. There is no dialect. Today children love the story with the pans and the tigers going around with the butter.' The only thing that was objectionable really was the title. [Moore] said to me, 'We want to get this list approved for publication.'³⁹⁴

Baker's decision to include *LBS* in her bibliography was a compromise. Baker had to receive official permission from the NYPL in order to release her list. If she excluded *LBS*, library officials might refuse to print her bibliography for fear of angering library users who loved *LBS*. By agreeing to include *LBS*, Baker gained the NYPL's approval, which ensured that her bibliography was printed. Having *BANFC* published was (at the time) Baker's ultimate goal. Baker saw *LBS*' inclusion as "the lesser evil" because it meant that her book list would have the NYPL's backing and be available for public consumption.³⁹⁵

Although Baker reluctantly agreed to include *LBS*, she privately plotted the text's demise. Moore understood and sympathized with Baker. Moore assured her, "'We will revise [the list] next year, and we can drop [*Little Black Sambo*].' [Moore] was a smart woman. So we did that. ... We revised the list a couple of times.'³⁹⁶ *LBS* did not appear in later printings of Baker's bibliographies, which shows how Baker (through exercising her resistant capital) stealthily and successfully removed a racist text from her list.³⁹⁷

Baker's Bibliography and Black Children's Community Cultural Wealth

When Baker created her bibliographic works, she exercised her resistant capital. On a small scale, Baker opposed the inclusion of *LBS*. However, on a larger scale, Baker sought to tackle a more insidious issue—the dearth of children's books available that provided non-

³⁹⁴ Bankhead, "Interview," 17.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ The last list that *LBS* appeared on was the 1946 edition of *BANLFC*.

denigrating portrayals of Black people and Black life. It grieved Baker that only White children could readily see their lives, histories, and cultures represented, affirmed, and reaffirmed through literature. Black children had very few books with which to engage that spoke to the import of their own lived experiences, which may have helped to undermine this demographic group's aspirational capital. As such, Baker created a bibliography of children's books about Black experiences that could serve as oppositional texts. These books could help empower and equip Black children with the necessary skills for maneuvering through hostile situations and spaces, thus strengthening their navigational capital. Baker toiled to provide Black children with non-stereotypical literature; she also worked to provide all children with literature that did not degrade Blacks. She believed that by doing so, America could become a more just society.

The Black Experience in Children's Books (TBECB)

Baker also hoped to instill within Black youth self-pride, self-confidence, and hope (aspirational capital) for a better, brighter future, where Blackness was celebrated transnationally rather than scorned. As such, when creating her bibliography, Baker consciously selected books that addressed three pressing questions: 1) "How will black children react to these books?" 2) "Will they want to read more of them?" and 3) Do these books offset the distorted picture of black life in other children's books?"³⁹⁸ She posed these key questions because she desired for all youth to regularly encounter narratives and illustrations of Blacks that were attractive, appealing, and non-affronting. Moreover, Baker sought to combat negative visuals and literal descriptions of Black life that were prevalent in mainstream literature.

³⁹⁸ Augusta Baker, "The Changing Image of the Black in Children's Literature," *The Horn Book Magazine* 51, no. 1 (1975): 82.

The NYPL published Baker's bibliography, *TBECB*, in 1971.³⁹⁹ Unlike her earlier bibliographies, *TBECB* is more diverse with regards to book genre, subject matter, and setting. For example, *TBECB* features a section dedicated to books regarding Civil Rights in America, a topic that burgeoned following the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.⁴⁰⁰ Prominent Black Americans such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Frederick Douglass also have their own sections. Another intriguing aspect of *TBECB* is the Biography section. This section includes "General" and "Science and Inventions" subsections, which feature fiction and non-fiction books about the "science" of skin color and race.⁴⁰¹ For example, Robert Cohen's *The Color of Man* provides facts about anthropology, heredity, and discusses the concept of prejudice.⁴⁰² The "Reference, Periodicals" section features encyclopedic works about Black history. The geographic spread of materials in *TBECB* is also more diverse. This is significant because Baker strove to debunk myths about Blacks worldwide. For example, in *TBECB*, Baker provides a general description of where each story occurs (e.g. South and Central America: The Caribbean) in the Table of Contents. She also includes a section dedicated exclusively to books set in England.

³⁹⁹ Later editions of *TBECB* published in 1974, 1979, 1984, and 1985. However, Barbara Rollock (who succeeded Baker as NYPL's second Black Coordinator of Children's Services) was first author to a number of these editions. Baker's name is only associated with some of the 1974, 1979, and 1984 editions, which suggests that she provided limited (if any) input for the revised 1985 edition. *The Black Experience in Children's Books*, WorldCat.org, http://www.worldcat.org/title/black-experience-in-childrens-books/oclc/1694607/editions?start_edition=1&sd=desc&referer=br&se=yr&editionsView=true&fq=.

⁴⁰⁰ Augusta Baker, *The Black Experience in Children's Books* (New York: New York Public Library, 1971), n.p.

⁴⁰¹ Baker, *The Black Experience in Children's Books*, 40-46, 51-52.

⁴⁰² Baker, *The Black Experience in Children's Books*, 34.

Baker's decision to include books that portrayed Black experiences outside of North America suggests that problematic portrayals of Black life were not merely a national issue but a global one. As such, she included texts that provided holistic, global perspectives of Blacks and Black experiences in Africa, the "Islands," and America.⁴⁰³ The literary and geographic diversity represented in Baker's bibliography demonstrate that varied voices and literary styles are necessary to adequately portray the complexities of Black life, speech, history, and culture.

Books as Socializing Agents and Humanizers

One of Baker's former colleagues from the 135th Street Branch, Dr. Davis, noted that Baker was passionate about many issues—especially the depiction of Blacks in children's literature. Dr. Davis expressed that one of Baker's concerns involved the "culture of the Black child ... who the Black child was." She further elaborated:

[M]any of the illustrations that you see in children's picture books of the Black child in those days, you know, the big lips and the big eyes. And the ugly words, you know, and the use of the word nigger ... those kinds of things, that's why she [Augusta Baker] did the work that she did on the bibliography for books for the Negro boys and girls[.] ... Our children don't look this way. They don't speak this way...[.] And that was one of her things. That was one of her focuses. What do we do about making people realize who the Black child really is? And how to help that child to know who he and she really are in looks and in language?⁴⁰⁴

Baker believed strongly in the power of books to promote understanding and acceptance. She understood that books provided children with:

...a means for gaining knowledge, attitudes, ways of thinking, and social skills. They are a way of developing awareness and they can carry readers into the experiences and feelings of people different from themselves. They serve to help children become aware of preconceived ideas about people, which they have learned about in their family and community cultures.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ Baker, *The Black Experience in Children's Books*, n.p.

⁴⁰⁴ Dr. Davis, interview by Regina Carter, Columbia, SC, February 2, 2015.

Although Baker knew that books were socializing agents, she also understood that meaningful human interactions were equally (if not more) important than printed texts when it came to educating young people about the world and one another. Baker emphasized:

Books cannot take the place of first hand contacts with people. However, they can prepare children to meet people, to discount unimportant differences, and to appreciate cultural traditions and values unlike their own. They can give children a pride in their own racial heritage and give them a knowledge of themselves.⁴⁰⁶

Thus, Baker's rationale for compiling bibliographies of books about Black experiences was designed to help build a more socially just and humane society. She aspired to captivate the minds and hearts of youth through exemplary literature about Blacks and Black experiences—literature with noteworthy language, themes, and illustrations.

Baker's Bibliographic Criteria: Language, Themes, and Illustrations

The literary criteria (i.e. language, themes, and illustrations) Baker used when selecting books for her bibliography are explored in this section. Language was one of the criteria Baker identified due to the damaging effects demeaning terms used to describe Blacks (such as “nigger” and “pickaninny”) could have upon the psyches and self-esteem of all youth—particularly Black youth. Secondly, Baker focused upon themes because she recognized that the “picture of the Negro's part in American life should be represented completely and not limited to nostalgic accounts of the old South, with its plantations and loyal servants.”⁴⁰⁷ She noted, “There are Negro doctors, lawyers, judges, soldiers, sailors, teachers; Negroes, in fact, are found

⁴⁰⁵ Baker's Speeches, "Introduction, p. 4, 3a," Series VIII Conferences and Workshops Lectures/Addresses, n.d., Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Augusta Baker, “Introduction,” in *Books About Negro Life for Children* (New York: New York Public Library, 1963), 6.

in every walk of life.”⁴⁰⁸ As such, children’s books should reflect this fact. Thirdly, she turned her attention to book illustrations, because she understood that illustrations were “the first thing which a child investigates in a book.”⁴⁰⁹ In essence, Baker featured books that portrayed a wide spectrum of Black life rather than focusing only upon a small segment of this demographic.

Language

With regard to language, Baker emphasized the importance of excluding books that described Blacks using derogatory names and epithets. Baker explained that some terms were so racially inflammatory and distressing they were “quite often erased, cut or blotted” from books.⁴¹⁰ Although Baker prioritized excluding books that belittled Blacks through the use of insensitive language, she made some exceptions. Baker felt that derogatory names and epithets should only be utilized when situated within the appropriate historical context(s). Using derisive terms and epithets to refer to Black people was unacceptable except when used for “historical accuracy ... [and] should be done in such a manner that their unacceptability will be obvious to the reader.”⁴¹¹ Baker reflected:

There are certain phrases and certain instances in books for children where you would use such words as “pickaninny,” “darky” and “nigger,” but you would have them used by the villain. If the villain uses these words, then he uses them to reinforce his bigotry. In no circumstances should the hero of the book use them, nor should the editor of the book use them.⁴¹²

Any texts that condoned the unqualified use of defamatory and/or disparaging language would

⁴⁰⁸ Baker, “Introduction,” in *Books About Negro Life* (1963), 6.

⁴⁰⁹ Baker, “Significant Factors,” 52.

⁴¹⁰ Baker, “Charity,” 6.

⁴¹¹ Baker, “Introduction,” in *Books About Negro Life* (1963), 6.

⁴¹² Baker, “Significant Factors,” 54.

not be tolerated. Including them could severely damage the psyches of impressionable youth.

Speech was another aspect of language that deeply concerned Baker. As a strong supporter of Standard English, Baker labored to provide children with counter-narratives of Black life by promoting works that thoughtfully utilized Standard English and occasional vernacular. However, poorly used dialect was unacceptable. She was wary of “heavy dialect” because it “is too difficult for a child to read and understand, and since it is often not authentic, but has been created by authors themselves, it is misleading.”⁴¹³ One example of mischaracterized Black speech can be found in Inez Hogan’s *The Mule Twins*. Hogan depicts Sim, the Black male protagonist, as being uneducated and incapable of communicating using Standard English. In Hogan’s book, Sim speaks using phonetically written dialect or eye dialect. For instance, when Sim’s pet mules misbehave during feeding time, Sim is flustered and utters, “Lawdy, lan’! you never knows what dem mule twins is gonna do nex[.]”⁴¹⁴ Throughout *The Mule Twins*, Hogan has Sim speak in what she may believe is indicative of Black speech. However, it is not, which is problematic. Sim’s speech is not easily comprehensible and feeds into stereotypical notions of Black speech patterns.

Baker was leery of dialect because Blacks often did not speak using the dialect White authors presented in their stories. She reasoned:

Dialect is a stereotype. It’s what the authors think that comes out of the mouths of Black people, and you don’t hear this. It’s the Uncle Remus pattern of speech, which is old fashioned, which is out-of-date, and which is really a stereotype of a pattern of speech.⁴¹⁵ During her presentation at Atlanta University, Baker voiced her opposition to Rose Knox’s

⁴¹³ Augusta Baker, *Books About Negro Life for Children* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1949), 3.

⁴¹⁴ Inez Hogan, *The Mule Twins* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1939), n.p.

⁴¹⁵ Augusta Baker-June 12, 1973, speech p.13, 16 October 1970 – 26 December 1973, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

“plantation stories,” such as *The Boys and Sally Down on a Plantation*. In these stories, Knox wrote about “Negro and white children” who were all raised on a plantation and seldom left the area.⁴¹⁶ Both groups of children “loved each other” and “played together,” yet curiously, the White children were always portrayed as being more intellectual.⁴¹⁷ Baker noted, “When they spoke, the Negro children were unintelligible, but the white children spoke as though they had just received Ph.D.s from Harvard or Oxford.”⁴¹⁸ Baker disapproved of this gross misrepresentation. She believed that “If [the characters] all came from the same place, with roughly the same economic standing and [had] the same general education, they’re going to speak pretty much the same way.”⁴¹⁹ The noticeable differences in speaking styles were not only “misleading,” delusional, and demeaning (especially to Blacks), they could also significantly lessen a story’s appeal to children in general.⁴²⁰ Dialect also detracted from the authenticity of books, lessened a text’s ability to represent the “human experience,” and could diminish a child’s ability to connect with stories.⁴²¹ However, Baker held that some vernacular was tolerable. By expressing that vernacular also had a place in children’s books, Baker affirmed the validity and import of linguistic capital. Although Standard English was (and is) the standard in North America, Baker understood that not everyone spoke this way. Many children of color “arrive at

⁴¹⁶ Baker, “Significant Factors” 54.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Augusta Baker, “Guidelines for Black Books: An Open Letter to Juvenile Editors,” *Publishers Weekly* 196, (1969): 131.

⁴²⁰ Baker, *Books About Negro Life* (1949), 3.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

school with multiple language and communication skills.”⁴²² As such, children’s books should reflect these children’s lived, linguistic experiences. Baker promoted linguistic diversity by judiciously selecting books that did a good job showcasing it. For example, Baker asserted, “[t]he use of regional vernacular is acceptable” in John Steptoe’s *Stevie*.⁴²³ Steptoe’s use of language in *Stevie* is representative of what Baker identifies as “regional vernacular,” which, she argued, enabled Steptoe to capture “the language of the streets perfectly.”⁴²⁴ Thus, by including

⁴²² Yosso, “A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” 78.

⁴²³ Baker, “Introduction,” in *Books About Negro Life* (1963), 6. Steptoe’s use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in Steptoe’s 1969 children’s book entitled *Stevie* is effective because Robert, the young, Black male protagonist in *Stevie*, is engaged in the meaning-making process of having a little-brother figure move into his home and heart. Robert is the only child in his home until the new boy, Stevie, shows up and becomes a little brother to him. Robert learns to share and make a concerted effort to be kind to Stevie even though Stevie is annoying. Stevie plays with Robert’s toys without first asking, muddies Robert’s bed, and usually gets to have his own way. Although Robert acts tough, he sticks up for Stevie. The two grow close over time and Robert becomes a big-brother figure to Stevie. Because Steptoe chooses to use AAVE and provide clear, non-stereotypical depictions of the lived experiences of two inner-city Black boys, *Stevie* provides a fine perspective on Black life.

⁴²⁴ Baker, *The Black Experience in Children’s Books* (New York: New York Public Library, 1971), ii. Another notable book about Black life that provides non-stereotypical themes and illustrations where characters primarily speak Standard English with some “Haitian patois” is Langston Hughes’ and Arna Bontemps’ *Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti*, which was published in 1932. This text was part of the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection of children’s books. In this story, the daily joys and concerns of a nuclear Haitian family are recounted. This family consists of Papa Jean and Mama Anna along with their children: Popo (age 8), Fifina (age 10), and Pensia (who is a baby). Hughes and Bontemps emphasize the family’s dignity by demonstrating that though they are not wealthy, they can make ends meet through combined efforts.⁴²⁴ Papa Jean is a fisherman. Mama Anna is a homemaker and sells fish at the market. Popo and Fifina become entrepreneurs and clean pots to earn money. This family represents a counter-narrative to the stereotypical notions of non-U.S. Blacks as being indolent, uncivil individuals. In sum, Hughes’ and Bontemps’ collaborative work provides young readers with an “appreciation for Pan-Africanism,” respect for “the life and culture of ordinary Black folk,” and “a sense of self-love and race-pride.” Violet Harris, “From Little Black Sambo to Popo and Fifina: Arna Bontemps and the Creation of African-American Children’s Literature,” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 14, no.1 (1990): 118-119; Rudine Sims Bishop, *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children’s Literature*

Steptoe's *Stevie* in her bibliography, Baker helped to affirm the importance of linguistic diversity and reiterate the reality that Standard English was not the norm for everyone.

Theme

Baker also tackled the use of themes in books about Black experiences. Theme was tremendously important because Baker sought to instill within Black youth a “New Negro” ideology where they would feel free to demonstrate their racial pride, be confident, and “seize” the “right to define what it meant to be a Negro and the effects of being a Negro in a society which denigrated the group in all aspects.”⁴²⁵ When considering whether to include a book in her bibliography, Baker asked the following question: “Is the Negro character a clown and a buffoon, the object of ridicule, and the butt of humor, or is he a person who is making some worthwhile contribution to the progress of society?”⁴²⁶ Only those texts that portrayed Blacks as contributing to societal progress appeared in bibliographies Baker compiled after 1949.⁴²⁷

Illustration

Baker also promoted texts that provided counter-narratives of Black life through illustration. She charged that the “... depiction of the Negro is exceptionally important in books for children. An artist can portray a Negro child—black skin, crinkly hair and short nose—and

(Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), 47; Katharine Capshaw Smith, *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 239.

⁴²⁵ Violet Harris, “Race Consciousness, Refinement, and Radicalism: Socialization in *The Brownies' Book*.” *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1989): 192-196.

⁴²⁶ Baker, “Introduction,” in *Books About Negro Life* (1963), 6.

⁴²⁷ I single out the 1949 edition of Baker's bibliography and later versions because Baker was compelled to include *LBS* in her earlier bibliographic works. Moreover, as time passed, additional books about Black life were published and Baker could be more selective in the titles that she chose to feature in her bibliographies.

make him attractive or make him a stereotype and a caricature.”⁴²⁸ Baker believed that portrayals of Black people should be visually appealing and that Black characters should be cast in “everyday scenes.”⁴²⁹ If Black characters were perpetually shown in subservient positions, Baker felt that the Black children who read those works would be “deeply hurt, feel defeated, or become resentful and rebellious” and White children who saw “the stereotyped presentation of the black person [could] begin to feel superior and to accept this distorted picture or ‘type.’”⁴³⁰

Baker further elaborated:

Negro children who read books which ridicule their race take one of three attitudes: first, the attitude of the white child—enjoyment at the expense of someone else, or second, ‘It looks like someone I know.’ They immediately think of poking fun at the child whom the picture brings to their minds. The third reaction is by far the most dangerous—the bitter, resentful child who strikes out blindly.⁴³¹

Baker understood that books have the ability to heal *and* to hurt. As such, she established these criteria out of concern for the adverse effects that poorly themed, written, and illustrated book about Black experiences could have upon all youth—especially Black youth.

Implications of Baker’s Bibliographies

Baker was one of the first to compile a bibliographic list of books about Black experiences suitable for children. Her bibliography was revolutionary on four accounts: 1) it was one of the “original” bibliographies that focused on books about Black life for children; 2) it was created within New York—the publishing mecca of North America; 3) it was compiled using resources housed within the preeminent NYPL, which was renowned for its Children’s Services

⁴²⁸ Baker, “Introduction,” in *Books About Negro Life* (1963), 7.

⁴²⁹ Baker, *The Black Experience*, ii.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴³¹ Baker, “Charity,” 20.

Division; and 4) it was created toward the end of the literary and artistic movement known as the Harlem Renaissance. In sum, Baker had access to a wealth of resources she could draw upon to construct her bibliographic list.

If a bibliography of children's books about Blacks had to be birthed, New York was the perfect place, the NYPL was the ideal institution in which to do it, and Baker was the right person to assume this tremendous task. As a result of her position as a Black children's librarian at NYPL's 135th Street Branch, Baker was well positioned to create a ground-breaking bibliography on Black life and experiences, which is exactly what she did.

For those interested in reading and/or learning more about Black life domestically and abroad but did not know which books were available (or where to look), Baker's bibliography was a significant, timely publication. Library systems, educational institutions, librarians, educators, parents, caregivers and those interested in reading and/or acquiring resources about Black life suitable for children found Baker's bibliography to be most helpful.

Josette Frank, Director of Children's Books and Mass Media at the Child Study Association of America, reaffirmed the import of Baker's bibliography in his May 3, 1961 which read:

...I want to tell you how delighted I am to have the revised pamphlet, BOOKS ABOUT NEGRO LIFE FOR CHILDREN. It was so important that this be brought up to date, since so much has happened recently in this field. Thank you for sending it to me.⁴³²

Booksellers also benefited from Baker's work. For instance, the proprietor of the first Afro-Asian Bookstore in Buffalo, New York, activist Martin X. Sostre, explained his interest in and need for Baker's bibliography in a November 9, 1965 letter where he expressed:

Recently I wrote to Mr. John Henrik Clark, associate editor of Freedom Ways, requesting

⁴³² Josette Frank to Augusta Baker, letter, 3 May 1961, Correspondence, 15 June 1953-28 November 1955, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

a list of books for pre-school Negro children. He informed me that a friend of his, you, has compiled a list of books for Negro children and that I should write to you explaining my problem and see if you have an up-to-date list of the above-mentioned books. If you do have such a list, I would appreciate a copy of it. In addition to books for pre-school children I would also like a copy of the list of books for Negro children of all ages. I have had many requests for such books but have been unable to obtain them because I do not know which publishers have them.⁴³³

As is evidenced from the above excerpt, Baker's list was also a boon to booksellers. In sum, Baker's bibliography was a desperately needed resource that librarians, booksellers, caretakers, educators, and others who struggled to find age-appropriate, non-degrading children's literature about Black life could consult.

Baker's bibliographies were a coveted resource because they provided annotations and grouped texts according to genre, which could be useful for teachers to consult for lesson planning or story times. Moreover, Baker's bibliographies might also serve as a template from which other book lists could be created. Although her bibliographies were undeniably helpful, they were not a fix-all. Baker cautioned, "We should be using these lists ... and the materials, as guides for formulating our own criteria since we cannot depend upon lists during our entire careers."⁴³⁴ Although Baker's book lists served as exemplary guides, they were not intended to be relied upon for perpetuity.

Baker's bibliographies were also unique because she was a cultural insider. Baker understood and lived Black life. She was an authority on literature about Black life because she relied upon her identity, understanding, and labor as a Black woman, mother, educator, librarian,

⁴³³ Martin X. Sostre to Augusta Baker, letter, 9 November 1965, Correspondence, 31 January 1964 – 8 December 1966, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Warren L. Schaich and Diane S. Hope, "The Prison Letters of Martin Sostre: Documents of Resistance," *Journal of Black Studies* 7, no. 3, (1977): 281-300, <http://www.freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/Black%20Liberation%20Disk/Black%20Power!/SugahData/Essays/Schaich.S.pdf>.

⁴³⁴ Baker, "Significant Factors," 55.

professional, intellectual, and individual to inform the conceptualization and construction of her bibliographies. Her educative and personal experiences with literature also helped her to establish the three criteria (language, theme, and illustration) that she used to identify non-stereotypical children's books about Black life.

Baker believed that being Black provided her with unique perspectives about what Black life entailed; however, she did not believe that *only* Blacks could write convincing narratives about Blacks or Black experiences. She was also not set on solely including works written and illustrated by Blacks in her bibliography. This would have shown partiality. It would also have resulted in the omission of noteworthy and award-winning books that featured Black characters, such as Ezra Jack Keats' *The Snowy Day*. Although *The Snowy Day* was not specifically about Black experiences, it represented Blacks in "everyday scenes" and had a universal appeal.⁴³⁵

Baker reflected, "Blacks and whites have each, from their own vantage point, made a contribution to the 'Black Experience' in the past and in the present, and they will both contribute to it in the future."⁴³⁶ Baker foresaw that those who identify as being part of the insider culture should not be the sole creators of Black children's literature. In order to demonstrate her belief in and commitment to supporting and promoting quality literature, Baker also included books written and/or illustrated by cultural outsiders. She sought to promote literature that provided balanced, non-demeaning views of Black life to all children.

Baker's Bibliography Provides Access to Children's Books About Black Experiences

⁴³⁵ Baker, *The Black Experience*, ii. Keats' 1962 children's book entitled *The Snowy Day* is a story about a young Black boy, Peter, who lives in the city. One day, it snows, so Peter puts on his red suit and goes outside for an adventure. Prior to going indoors, Peter gathers a ball of snow and stuffs it in his pocket as a keepsake. The snowball melts, but this is okay. It snows again later that night and Peter goes out again to play the next day. Ezra Jack Keats, *The Snowy Day* (New York: The Viking Press), 1962.

⁴³⁶ Baker, *The Black Experience*, iii.

The “Introduction” to the 1963 edition of *BANLFC* states, “All books on this list may be consulted in the Countee Cullen Regional Branch of The New York Public Library as they comprise the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection for children. Many of them are also in other Children’s Rooms of the Library.”⁴³⁷ Those who desired to purchase books contained in Baker’s list could also do so easily in New York. However, for those who resided outside of the New York area, locating children’s books on Black life may not have been so easy. This reality was expressed in a September 1973 letter Baker received from Dorothy S. Carlsen, a media specialist from the Stamford Public School System in Connecticut. Carlsen wrote Baker a letter requesting advice on locating reading materials. She confided:

I am writing you in hope you can give me some advice on locating books for poor readers in the fifth and sixth grades. These children are black children being bused into my school from our inner city. Most of them are reading on about a second grade level. Our collection has the same old Beim books, a lot of “readers”, and other books whose format turns these children off because they look babyish. There must be something somewhere for these students. I have talked to our reading people and have come up with nothing.⁴³⁸

As can be inferred from the above letter, those who did not live within vicinity of the NYPL could not readily benefit from the books contained within the JWJMC. This is why Baker’s bibliography was so important. It served as a guide to help teachers locate notable Children’s books about Black life where there were few other resources available. Baker’s list also benefited parents. Baker wrote:

Parents have a particular obligation to protect and strengthen the natural tolerance of their children. It is their duty to refrain from buying books for them, which portray minority groups in an unsympathetic, inaccurate manner. If publishers find that they cannot sell

⁴³⁷ Baker, “Introduction,” in *Books About Negro Life* (1963), 7.

⁴³⁸ Dorothy S. Carlsen to Augusta Baker, letter, 24 September 1973, Correspondence, 16 October 1970 – 26 December 1973, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

these books ... they will stop publishing them. Schools, too, have a strategic position to foster tolerance and promote cooperation. The attitude of the teachers in the daily life of the school is most important. Not only must they purge themselves of prejudices but they must also be familiar with the acceptable literature about minority groups so that they can guide their students toward a better racial understanding.⁴³⁹

One parent, Mrs. Margaret Walker of Ontario, Canada, solicited Baker's help to identify literature for her biracial children. She did so by penning a letter, which read:

Dear Madame,

I was very sorry to have missed your program on "Interracial Literature for Children" on Wednesday June 14th. I am married to a Jamaican Negro and we have 2 small children, (I should mention that I am a white English woman), hence my particular interest in this subject.

I was wondering if you could give me any help in regard to this subject, bibliography etc.

Thanking you, I am

Yours very truly
(Mrs.) Margaret Walker⁴⁴⁰

Marianna Hane, Coordinator of In-Service Training at the Lexington-Richland Economic Opportunity Agency in Columbia, South Carolina, also contacted Baker to request a copy of her bibliography. Hane's desire to possess a copy is expressed in her letter, which read:

"It has come to our attention that you are the authoress of a syllabus entitled Books About Negro Life for Children [*BANLFC*]. As the syllabus cannot be found in the city of Columbia, South Carolina, it would be most appreciated if you could help us locate a copy for our work. The Lexington-Richland Economic Opportunity Agency is involved in working with pre-school children, predominately Negro[es] of underprivileged areas, and we believe your syllabus would be a great asset to our program.⁴⁴¹

BANLFC was designed to help entertain, educate, and enlighten youth by highlighting noteworthy books on Black experiences. Baker firmly believed that, "Books play an important

⁴³⁹ Augusta Baker, "Books for Children: The Negro in Literature," *Child Study* (1944-45): 63.

⁴⁴⁰ Mrs. Margaret Walker to Augusta Baker, letter, 3 August 1967, Correspondence, 2 June 1967 – 25 May 1969, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁴⁴¹ Marianna Hane to Augusta Baker, letter, 9 August 1967, Series III Correspondence, 2 June 1967 – 25 May 1969, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

part in combating or fostering racial prejudice, and no one working with books and children will deny the powerful influence of the printed word upon them.”⁴⁴² Baker realized that many Black youth had been bombarded with negative imagery and ideologies regarding Black life, so she sought to remedy this. She asserted that the surest way of helping to build a more socially just society with cohesive communities was through literature. As such, she labored to enlighten children of all ethnicities and nationalities through literature in an effort to help them understand and eventually reject error-ridden, preconceived notions about Blacks and one another.

Although Baker used three simple criteria to identify non-stereotypical children’s books, these criteria had a profound influence upon the ways in which library professionals, publishers, and the general public perceived and interacted with children’s books about Black life. Baker noted:

I feel very strongly that all the bibliographies in the world, all of the books published on the subject, all of the workshops, all of the conferences, all of the everything that we have means nothing if we do not take some of the things to heart that we hear. If we do not work very privately on attitude, we are simply wasting time.⁴⁴³

Thus, Baker’s bibliography signaled a beginning rather than serving as a definitive end to help combat problematic portrayals of Blacks in children’s books.

Conclusion

Baker believed that bibliographies “prepared by competent people in the field of intercultural education [would] serve as guides in our selection of books until thorough understanding and

⁴⁴² Augusta Baker, “Books for Children: The Negro in Literature,” *Child Study* (1944-45): 58.

⁴⁴³ Augusta Baker-June 12, 1973, speech p.1, Correspondence, 16 October 1970 – 26 December 1973, Box 1, Folder 38, Augusta Baker Papers 1911-, The South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina Libraries.

knowledge [would] enable us to act as our own critics.”⁴⁴⁴ However, compiling and consulting bibliographies was simply not enough. Additional steps needed to be taken to help ensure that all youth had access to non-stereotypically written, illustrated, and themed books about Black life. As such, Baker urged librarians, educators, caregivers, and other interested persons to request (and, if need be, demand) that more non-demeaning books about Black life be published and made accessible. In conclusion, Baker’s bibliographies were significant because they provided inquiring minds with a standard by which to identify well-written and illustrated books about Black experiences during a time when such books were seldom being created and disseminated.

⁴⁴⁴ Baker, “Charity,” 21.

CHAPTER FIVE: BAKER'S LEGACY

Overview

Chapter Four discussed the import of Baker's highly acclaimed bibliographies. It also provided details on the criteria Baker used for selecting non-stereotypical children's books about Black life. Chapter Five concludes Baker's narrative and provides insight into her enduring legacy. It is divided into two parts. Part I discusses Baker's legacy. Part II discusses this study's implications, limitations, and offers directions for future scholarship.

Part I: Legacy

Black Librarianship

Baker rose through the ranks of the NYPL and received numerous appointments and praise. Despite this, she was never allowed to forget that, although she was an American, she was first and foremost Black. Yet, simply being Black *and* a librarian was not enough for Baker. She sought to be continually involved within the profession and to effect change.

Baker expressed, "I cannot stress too much the value of membership in professional organizations. It is particularly important for Black librarians to become members and make themselves heard. We need to be where the action is and to participate in the establishment of policies and goals for our profession. We can not [sic] sit back and let 'Joe' do it."⁴⁴⁵ Being proactive, knowledgeable, and willing to assume leadership positions was necessary in order to ensure that the profession was steadily progressing yet not overlooking the unique needs and desires of its non-White colleagues or users.

Baker actively sought to further the public's understanding of the role of librarians generally (and Black librarians specifically) through her writing. One of the ways she

⁴⁴⁵ Baker, "My Years," 122.

accomplished this aim was through her scholarship. For instance, she submitted an autobiographical essay to fellow librarian and historian E.J. Josey who hailed from the Bureau of Academic and Research Libraries at the State University of New York. Josey solicited a manuscript from Baker (as well as a number of other prominent Black librarians) to include in his book, *The Black Librarian in America*.⁴⁴⁶ Baker's personal essay, "My Years as a Children's Librarian," was printed in this publication. In that essay, Baker issued a call for more Blacks to enter into children's librarianship. She shared:

Library work with children has had a great past and has a still greater future. Young black women and men have an opportunity to be a part of this exciting future and for the sake of their children they should be. Today they can contribute to the awakening interest in the black man. They have a chance to work with authors, illustrators, and editors in the creation of still much needed materials. Black authors and illustrators are coming into their own and black librarians have a chance to advise them, help them, and support them. The black child needs the image of a black librarian—and white children need this image also. It hasn't been too long since a class of junior high school white children in New York City thought 'all Negroes are drunks.' The community needs the black children's librarian who will relate to it and understand its unique problems. Black children need books and reading so that they can enter into the mainstream of society. I predict a great and exciting future for black children—and for black librarians.⁴⁴⁷

Baker recognized that all library users could benefit from the expertise and experiences Black librarians had to offer. According to Baker, Black librarians could inspire a renewed interest in Black history, culture, and scholarship. Moreover, they could directly impact children's publishing—as she had done—by cultivating relationships with authors, illustrators, and publishers. Moreover, Baker posited that Black librarians could connect Black children with oppositional texts. These texts could help Black children survive (and ideally thrive) in a nation where hostility towards Blacks was all too common. After leaving the NYPL, Baker divulged:

⁴⁴⁶ E.J. Josey to Augusta Baker, letter, 20 February, 1969, Correspondence, 2 June 1967 – 25 May 1969, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁴⁴⁷ Baker, "My Years," 122-123.

I have never in my life forgotten that I'm black. So I'm looking at these maneuverings and behind the scenes workings and whatnot from the point of view of blacks. And let's get more black librarians in.⁴⁴⁸

Throughout her professional tenure Baker consciously accepted appointments and cultivated relationships with an aim for Black representation. She oftentimes felt compelled to perform certain jobs and serve on committees because there were no other Blacks at the time doing that particular work or being represented on committees. Baker noted:

I would accept positions and jobs because I felt that if I said no, blacks would not be represented so well. So I found myself being, for instance, on that Intellectual Freedom Committee when it was formed. See, every time they asked me, . . . to be on a committee, they were getting two or three things in one. Because they were getting children's work represented, and they were getting blacks represented. And they were getting library schools represented.⁴⁴⁹

Thus, one aspect of Baker's legacy was representation. Throughout her career, she fought for representation on a plethora of fronts—the most notable revolving around non-stereotypical portrayals of Blacks in children's literature and encouraging more Blacks to join the profession.

Children's Literature

From the onset of her career, Baker was committed to providing only the best to children and their families. She had a predisposition toward well-written and illustrated books about Black life that contained robust vocabulary. She promoted exemplary literature by helping to establish the JWJMC of children's books and by compiling bibliographies.⁴⁵⁰ ALA president Edward G. Holley valued Baker's passion for the profession by acknowledging that Baker had

⁴⁴⁸ Williams, "Interview with Augusta Baker,"
<http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Black Caucus Newsletter: Augusta Baker Retires, May 1974, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Williams, "Interview with Augusta Baker,"
<http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

“been aware of the book needs of children from [her] earliest moments in the profession ... [a]s a consultant and lecturer to librarians and publishers around the world” where she “served as a leader at national and international levels, setting standards for service and standards for literary value.”⁴⁵¹ Edythe O. Cawthorne, the Coordinator of Children’s Services at the Prince George’s County Memorial Library System, echoed Holley’s sentiment by stating:

The time is drawing near, I know, and I cannot let you retire without some word of appreciation for all that you have done for public libraries, children, and blacks. I have mixed emotions on this occasion ... it is very difficult to imagine libraries getting along without the kind of services we have come to expect from you.⁴⁵²

Even those outside the library realm took note of how Baker’s work had forever changed the field of librarianship and children’s literature. Congresswoman Bella S. Abzug (Democrat-District 19, New York City) recognized Baker for her service on October 14, 1971.

Congresswoman Abzug offered the following tribute:

We who are here to pay tribute to Augusta Baker are honored to be in her presence. Augusta Baker is the greatest children’s storyteller of our age. She is a great teacher and librarian and has played an unusual role in encouraging and inspiring writers of new children’s books. What is said tonight reflects but a small measure of the love and admiration she instills in thousands of children for books and learning; of librarians in towns and cities across the country who would be lost without her guidance; of her students to whom she imparts a sense of her own dedication; and of writers of children’s books who seek her out for theme and substance for their writings.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵¹ “Augusta Baker Honored at ALA.” *School Library Journal* 22 no. 1 (September 1975): 16.

⁴⁵² Edythe O. Cawthorne to Augusta Baker, letter, February 22, 1974, Correspondence, 5 February 1974 – 27 February 1974, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Williams, “Interview with Augusta Baker,” <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/oralhistory/bakertran.htm>.

⁴⁵³ “Bella Abzug Speaker at (Constance Lindsay Skinner Award) CLS Dinner,” pp.1-2, Honors and Awards, 1966-1979, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Congresswoman Abzug praised Baker for her deliberate aims to educate and inspire both children and children’s book authors.⁴⁵⁴ She acknowledged how Baker was instrumental in influencing the field of children’s literature by “direct[ing] and encourage[ing] writers to write children’s books about the Black experience, [and] to do battle with the overt racism and covert discriminatory silence which marks our culture.”⁴⁵⁵ Baker recognized that simply introducing children to books was not enough. In order to combat bigoted and biased children’s books, Baker addressed the source: publishers, authors, and illustrators.

The New York City congresswoman summarized Baker’s legacy nicely by noting that Baker was “concerned about the horrors of racism and the widespread ignorance about Black people” and noted how the children’s librarian had “worked hard and fruitfully to overcome the biased, discriminatory and blank spaces on library shelves about the Black experience.”⁴⁵⁶ Baker’s commitment to ensuring that children’s books that provided counter-narratives about Black life was undeniable. So was her dedication to the beneficiaries of these books—children. Susan Hirschman, a Greenwillow Books editor, also commended Baker for her “passionate commitment to bring the best to children.”⁴⁵⁷ Virginia H. Matthews, a fellow librarian, concurred with Hirschman by noting that Baker would “forever be a part of all good things that

⁴⁵⁴ Baker also advised and supported children’s book illustrators. Her commitment to both children and children’s book creators is further demonstrated in her Retirement Book.

⁴⁵⁵ “Bella Abzug Speaker at CLS Dinner,” p.2, Honors and Awards, 1966-1979, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Ann Hill, “A Story Well Told: Augusta Baker’s Love of Books and Reading Leaves Many Lives Richer,” August 5, 1994, *USC Times: The University of South Carolina System*, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

happen through libraries for children and their families.”⁴⁵⁸ Baker’s mentee, Mr. Moore, also attested to Baker’s dedication to ensuring that children received only the finest books and services. Mr. Moore sensed, “...Baker always wanted more and believed that children deserved the best that we could give them. You know the best writers, illustrators ... the best storytelling, the best environment you could create.”⁴⁵⁹ This sentiment was clearly communicated in Jack Janowski’s article, where Baker stated, “I am active in the work of UNICEF [the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund] and feel that all children should have the opportunity to learn—to learn anything and everything, and be exposed to everything that is good in literature, and be enriched by the beauty of good writing and story-telling that has stood the test of time.”⁴⁶⁰ As is evidenced from the previous remarks, the foundation of Baker’s work and lasting legacy was her commitment to and concern for children. Baker reiterated her passion for serving youth in the following quote:

I think the highlight of my career has been the opportunity to work with children. I have become an advocate for children, since children don’t always have the ability to speak out for what is good and valuable in their learning experience[.] ... I am retired now, but I seem to be busier than ever working for children. And that gives me a good feeling and keeps me young, seeing those youngsters listen to stories, pick out books to read, and develop their minds to appreciate good writing. That makes all my work seem worthwhile.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁸ Virginia H. Matthews, “Opinion: Augusta Baker Remembered,” *American Libraries*, April 1998, Augusta Baker Staff Biographical File, The New York Public Library Archives, The New York Public Library.

⁴⁵⁹ Mr. Moore, interview by Regina Carter, February 17, 2015, transcript.

⁴⁶⁰ Jack Janowski, “The Story’s in the Telling,” *Trends Today in the Albuquerque Journal*, October 25, 1977, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁴⁶¹ *New Mexico Media Association*, “An Evening with Augusta,” Jack Janowski, “The Story’s in the Telling,” *Trends Today in the Albuquerque Journal*, October 25, 1977, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Baker's profound respect and desire for children to receive only the best made her work within libraries all the more pleasurable. Her sheer delight in being able to serve as a librarian is clearly conveyed in the following excerpt:

I'd like to go on record to say that all these years, and if you subtract you can see how many years I have been a librarian and in the profession, I've loved every minute of it. I'm fond of saying that when I'm involved, I can never remember getting up in the morning and saying to myself, 'Oh God, I wish I didn't have to do this, I wish I didn't have to go to work, I wish I didn't have to go to the class or to lecture.' I've loved every minute of it."⁴⁶²

Baker's contributions to the fields of librarianship, children's literature, and children are innumerable. However, one of the best summations of Baker's enduring legacy is duly noted in her 1971 Constance Lindsay Skinner Award citation, which read:

Librarian, folklorist, storyteller, administrator, anthologist—an emissary from the world of imagination to children everywhere. She has worked directly with them—black and white, rich and poor—and has touched the lives of many thousands more through the adults she has inspired and guided. Always aware of the role that books play in shaping self-image and lifelong values, Augusta Baker has insisted that nothing but the best in style, format and substance is ever good for children. Convinced that all children can learn to love books and reading if only given the opportunity, she has worked to strengthen library service to children and to get books into the hands, homes, and hearts of all.⁴⁶³

Hence, serving children and meeting (as well as exceeding) children's literary expectations were Baker's top priorities. She had an unstinting commitment to providing only the absolute best books and services to young library goers. Doing anything less was simply unacceptable.

Baker's Retirement Book

One of the greatest testaments to Baker's brilliant career and lasting legacy is her

⁴⁶² Augusta Baker interview p. 36, Correspondence, 7 July 1934-26 January 1949, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Bankhead, "Interview," 27.

⁴⁶³ "Bella Abzug Speaker at CLS Dinner," p.1, Baker, Honors and Awards, 1966-1979, Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Retirement Book. This book consists of a compilation of letters, artistic renderings, and notes from numerous publishers, authors, and illustrators Baker had either worked with and/or mentored during her tenure within the NYPL system. The opening page of Baker's Retirement Book reads: "To Augusta Baker: Children's Librarian, Colleague, Friend, and Inspiration from Children's Book Authors, Illustrators and Publishers 1974."⁴⁶⁴ Baker's Retirement Book contains tributes from over 120 contributors. For example, Refna Wilkin, the 1974 Children's Book Council President, acknowledged Baker's illustrious career with the following tribute:

The Board of the Children's Book Council joins the contributors to this Festschrift in their appreciation of everything you have done for authors, artists, editors, and most of all for children.⁴⁶⁵

This tribute acknowledges Baker's work with a variety of stakeholders in the children's book realm and attests to her unwavering dedication to children. Franklyn M. Branley, a prolific writer who authored numerous children's books on science, summed up Baker's years of service and steadfast commitment to educating and uplifting all children in the following letter:

Dear Mrs. Baker,

What an inspiration your work has been for those of us who write for children...Necessarily, there is a gap between us and our readers, for we cannot meet them daily face to face. You have bridged that gap, making the words real, getting from them and transmitting to children one hundred percent (and even more) of what the author intended.⁴⁶⁶

In the above excerpt, Branley acknowledges how Baker bridged the gap between authors and their young readers. Unlike authors and illustrators, Baker interacted daily with the children she

⁴⁶⁴ The Augusta Baker Retirement Book is still the property of the Baker family. The Retirement Book is on deposit in the Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries.

⁴⁶⁵ The Augusta Baker Retirement Book, Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

served and learned how young users made sense of texts. As such, Baker was well positioned to pass on this insider knowledge and expertise with children's book creators.

In addition to Branley, other renowned author-illustrators who contributed to Baker's Retirement Book included: Eric Carle, Tomie dePaola, Don Freeman, Ashley Bryan, Tom Feelings, Ezra Jack Keats, Maurice Sendak, John Steptoe and others. Authors such as Virginia Hamilton, Scott O'Dell, Sharon Bell Mathis, and P.L. Travers also contributed to Baker's Retirement Book.⁴⁶⁷ Travers, who authored *Mary Poppins*, blessed Baker with these words: "Here is somebody who understands authors as well as books—a double gift from the gods—and I hope that the riches she has bestowed on the world of Children's Books will be returned to her a thousand fold."⁴⁶⁸ William Cole (anthologist, editor and writer) also added his voice to the collective chorus of Baker's beneficiaries.⁴⁶⁹ The following is an excerpt from the poem Cole penned in Baker's honor:

Augusta Baker
Doer, Maker
Mover, Shaker...⁴⁷⁰

In this poem, Cole speaks to Baker's affinity for the unconventional. Each verb can be aligned with some aspect of Baker's life and career in librarianship. For example, when there were few non-stereotypical children's books about Blacks available, Baker became a "Doer" by helping to

⁴⁶⁷ The Augusta Baker Retirement Book, Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Eric Pace, "William Rossa Cole, 80, Author and Editor of Children's Books," *The New York Times*, August 8, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/08/arts/william-rossa-cole-80-author-and-editor-of-children-s-books.html>.

⁴⁷⁰ The Augusta Baker Retirement Book, Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries.

establish the JWJMC of children's books. Baker served as a "Maker" by creating her own bibliographies of children's books about Black life. Baker was as a "Mover" in that she traveled around the country and the world professing the necessity of connecting children with books that reflected their lived experiences. She became a "Shaker" when she insisted on teaching at Milne High School and became the first Black person to do so. Cole's tribute was one out of many heartening homages Baker received that provided insight into her lasting legacy in librarianship.

Publishers also joined in congratulating Baker on her thirty plus years of tremendous service. Some of those publishers include: Ursula Nordstrom (Harper & Row), Evelyn Diggs (Little, Brown and Company), Edward A. Sand (Parents' Magazine Enterprises, Inc.), Ann Durell, Mimi Kayden (from E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc.), Dorothy Bryan (founder and former director of the Children's Book Department at Dodd, Mead), and Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.⁴⁷¹

Baker's Retirement Book contains a hodgepodge of hearty well wishes from some of America's most revered authors, illustrators, and publishers that Baker corresponded with during her time at the NYPL. It serves as a testament to Baker's renown within the children's literature realm and the countless lives she touched during her tenure at the NYPL.

Conclusion

Baker's quest to ensure that Blacks were respected and acknowledged as intelligent, compassionate, and competent beings in children's literature was ongoing. From her earliest days at the 135th Street Branch up until the time she retired, Baker was relentless in her efforts to ensure that Black life was properly represented in language, theme, and illustrations. It was not enough for Blacks to be presented as backdrops. Baker pushed for authors and illustrators to feature Blacks in prominent positions and for publishers to print these texts. Baker battled for

⁴⁷¹ The Augusta Baker Retirement Book, Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of South Carolina Libraries.

better books about Black experiences not solely for Black children but for *all* children. She did so to help disseminate the truth that Blacks, Whites, and *all* people deserve to be recognized and treated with dignity, decency, and respect.

Part II: Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

The implications for this study are many. Findings may contribute to scholarship within the fields of LIS, children's literature, and history. As a former student-scholar at one of the premier library and information science schools in North America, I cannot recall ever having been introduced to or taught the history of non-White LIS professionals in any of my courses, which severely limited my aspirational capital. As a Black woman who aspired to enter into librarianship, my knowledge of Black LIS professionals who preceded me was virtually non-existent. I knew few current practicing LIS professionals who were People of Color with the exception of my two mentors. At times, I grappled with the following notion: Who was I to dare and dream to become a librarian when those within the field were threatened by or opposed to my presence within the profession?

My dismay was further exacerbated by the fact that I was constantly bombarded with scholarship and curriculum materials about Whites who helped shape the field of librarianship and children's literature, such as Anne Carroll Moore and Frances Clark Sayers. I cannot recall a single time a racial or ethnic minority librarian's name was uttered in any of my courses, which is a scathing indictment of my schooling. Moreover, being exposed solely to White LIS professionals was an affront to my sensibilities. In my mind, the absence of Black scholarship was debilitating. The contributions of Blacks (like Baker) and other racial as well as ethnic minorities who had made tremendous headway in the field of librarianship generally and children's services specifically were simply never taught.

It was only after I engaged in independent study that I became acquainted with Baker and other librarians of color. Thus, the importance of this study stems from my aim to demonstrate that Baker birthed more than stories. Her life and struggles as a Black librarian who dedicated her life to ushering Black lives from obscurity into literary works of art suitable for children is one beautiful narrative that is not told often enough.

My study contributes to history and LIS, broadly, in that there are few narratives on Black librarians.⁴⁷² To date, I have only uncovered a few biographies that chronicle the lives of Black librarians. These works shed light upon the lives of E.J. Josey (a librarian, activist, and Black Caucus of the American Library Association co-founder), Regina Anderson Andrews (a librarian-administrator), and Dorothy Porter Wesley (a scholar and archivist). This study focuses upon Augusta Braxton Baker who labored to usher outstanding, non-stereotypical children's books about Black life from obscurity.

Limitations

All research has its limitations. This study is no exception. It was limited by the type and volume of archival materials available. The Augusta Baker Collection at The South Caroliniana Library consisted of eight boxes with 249 folders. Not every document contained within that collection pertained to my research questions. There were also some items in the collection that were not catalogued. For example, there were photographs in the collection that were devoid of names, dates, and locale, which made it difficult to ascertain the time period in which a photograph was taken, its significance, and its relevance to Baker's tenure as a children's librarian within the NYPL system.

⁴⁷² Much of the information I have read about Black librarians have been from biographical sketches and other abbreviated sources such as online encyclopedias, personal webpages, and books containing little known Black history facts.

Due to the limited amount of archival data available regarding Baker's early life, I encountered considerable difficulty writing about her childhood. There were not many items available aside from a few of her school report cards. As such, I was compelled to draw upon secondary source materials such as journal articles, biographical dictionaries, and encyclopedia entries. I also used published oral history interviews to make sense of what Baker's childhood may have been like up until the time she graduated from Frederick Douglass High School in 1927. Despite having limited information about Baker's childhood, I found solace in historian Richard White's *Remembering Ahanagan: A History of Stories*. In this text, White asserts:

What any of us know of our birth, we learn from others. It is a beginning we ourselves cannot recall, so we commit the story to memory. We claim it and incorporate it into our story of ourselves. We thus begin the story of our lives with an intimate event that we can only know secondhand.⁴⁷³

Similar to how Baker relied upon the stories of her own birth, I also relied upon second-hand stories Baker's son, Buddy, offered about his mother's childhood. Nonetheless, this foray into second-hand remembrances (though enlightening) have their own complications. White notes "... only careless historians confuse memory and history. History is the enemy of memory."⁴⁷⁴ This is not to say that memory cannot be drawn upon; instead, memory must be thoughtfully considered and used carefully as a "guide" rather than an absolute truth.⁴⁷⁵ In essence, "memory can mislead as well as lead."⁴⁷⁶ In an attempt to understand Baker's childhood, I used memory as a point of departure (or beginning) rather than an end point for my inquiries and investigation.

⁴⁷³ Richard White, *Remembering Ahanagan: Storytelling in a Family's Past*, (New York: Hill and Wang: New York, 1998), 20.

⁴⁷⁴ White, *Remembering Ahanagan*, 4.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

Another study limitation stemmed from the fact that I was unable to speak with Baker directly. It would have been ideal to interview Baker and ask her my own questions instead of solely relying upon past interviews. Doing so would have afforded me an opportunity to ask her to describe her own legacy. If she were alive and in good health, I would have had an opportunity to share my findings with her.

It is difficult and taxing work to construct a deceased person's narrative because the subject is not available to provide context, comments, or clarification. Nonetheless, this limitation is also a strength, because I now have definite parameters to work within. This may not have been the case if Baker were still active in the field of librarianship.

Lastly, I must account for my own personal biases as a Black, female, librarian-scholar. Although I have the utmost respect for Baker and her work, I actively sought to avoid creating a hagiographic narrative of Baker as an illustrious, indomitable librarian-leader. Instead, I sought to present her as an ambitious and relatable yet flawed human being.

Future Research

The study focuses upon Baker's schooling experiences, her work as a children's librarian, her bibliographies, and lasting legacy. In my future scholarship, I aspire to closely examine Baker's Retirement Book. I am particularly interested in determining if any themes emerge with regards to how authors, illustrators, and publishers described Baker's legacy with regard to librarianship and Black children's literature. Moreover, I am interested in ascertaining the racial and ethnic identities of Retirement Book contributors. It would be fascinating to determine if racial and ethnic minorities contributed more (or less) frequently to her Retirement Book and to examine the contents of their contributions—namely, to investigate whether their tributes speak primarily to Baker's race or broader aspects of her legacy.

I am also intrigued with Baker's physical image. One of my earliest dissertation ideas involved the physical appearances of Black librarians. As such, I am interested in revisiting this topic and learning how the politics of respectability and Barbara Welter's "cult of true womanhood" may have informed Baker's dress, speech, and comportment. In closing, I am captivated with how Baker's image evolved as she rose through the ranks within her profession and am interested in understanding the politics of her appearance.

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM⁴⁷⁷

THE SOUTH CAROLINIA LIBRARY

Office of Oral History
at the
South Caroliniana Library

RELEASE FORM

Oral History Collection/Project Name: _____

Accession# _____

I, _____, hereby permanently give, transfer, assign and (Interviewee) convey all of my rights, title, and interest, including any copyright and related interests that I may possess in an interview recorded with me by _____ (Interviewer) on _____ in _____ to the South Caroliniana Library (Date) _____ (Location: city/state) _____ at USC, as an unrestricted gift.

In so doing I understand that this recorded interview, hereafter referred to as “the work”, will be made available to researchers and may be quoted from, published or broadcast in any format or medium, including on the World Wide Web, that the South Caroliniana Library shall deem appropriate. It is agreed that the work will be made available for research on an unrestricted basis, subject only to those conditions or restrictions specified below:

I understand that this deed covers the audio/video recording of “the work” and any copies, transcripts, and reformatted versions that the South Caroliniana Library may produce from the original recording. This agreement does not preclude any non-exclusive use that I may want to make of the information in the work.

Interviewee: _____

(Signature) _____

(Date) _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Interviewer: _____

University of South Carolina
910 Sumter St.
Columbia, SC 29208
(803) 777-3133

⁴⁷⁷ Office of Oral History at the South Caroliniana Library, “Release Form,” <http://library.sc.edu/socar/oralhist/RELEASE%20FORM%20master.pdf>.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS (ORIGINAL VERSION)

Professional Acquaintance Interview Protocol

Opening Questions

How long did you know Augusta Baker?
What kind of relationship did you have with Baker?
How did you become acquainted with her?
What was Baker's most memorable characteristic?
What do you remember most about her?

Baker's Philosophical/Ideological Convictions

How did Baker believe Blacks should be represented in children's literature?
What or who do you think influenced her view(s) on Black children's literature?
What was her favorite (children's) book?

Youth & Community Engagement

Was Baker an advocate? If so, what kind?
What was Baker's relationship like with children and/or young adults?

Children's Literature and Librarianship

Why did Baker advocate so intensely for Blacks to be positively portrayed in literature?
What personal and/or professional motivations do you think fueled her passion?
What was Baker's greatest accomplishment as a children's librarian?
What is Baker's lasting legacy?

Physical Appearance

How did Baker dress?
What type of clothing did she usually wear?
What was her favorite color?
What type of jewelry and/or accessories did she wear, if any?
Where did she shop for her clothing?
How did she usually wear her hair?

Memorial Qualities/Traits

What is one word or phrase you would use to describe Baker?
What was her gift to you? Children and young adults? Librarianship?

Issues of Race

What stories did Baker share about race?
Why do you think Baker was so concerned about the portrayals of Blacks in children's literature?

Interview Leads

Who should I interview to learn more about Baker's work as a children's librarian?

Personal Acquaintance Interview Protocol

Personal Knowledge of Baker

What type of relationship did you have with your mother?
What role(s) did she assume in your life?
How often did you see and speak with her?
What was your mother's most memorable characteristic?
What do you remember most about her?

Baker's Philosophical/Ideological Convictions

What or who do you think influenced your mother's view(s) on Black children's literature?
What was her favorite (children's) book?

Youth & Community Engagement

Was your mother an advocate? If so, what kind?
What was her relationship like with children and/or young adults?

Children's Literature and Librarianship

Why did she advocate so intensely for Blacks to be positively portrayed in literature?
What personal and/or professional motivations do you think fueled her passion?
What was your mother's greatest accomplishment?
What is her lasting legacy?

Physical Appearance

How did your mother dress?
What was her favorite color?
What type of jewelry and/or accessories did she wear, if any?
Where did she shop for her clothing?
How did she usually wear her hair?

Baker's Private Persona

What was your mother's personality like?
Who were your mother's role models?

Memorial Qualities/Traits

What is one word or phrase you would use to describe your mother?

Issues of Gender

What stories did your mother share about being a Black woman?
What did she say (if anything) about motherhood, being a daughter, and/or a wife?
How important was immediate and extended family to her?
How important were working relationships?
Where did your mother tend to conduct business? (e.g. At home, the library, etc.)

Issues of Race

What stories did your mother share about race?

What stories did she share about her work?

Why do you think Baker was so concerned about the portrayals of Blacks in children's literature?

Interview Leads

Who should I interview to learn more about your mother's work as a children's librarian?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS (FINAL VERSION)

Baker's Personal Acquaintance

1. Please describe the type of relationship you had with your mother.
2. What role(s) did she assume in your life?
3. How would you describe her?
4. What was your childhood home like and what were the neighborhood demographics?
5. What was a typical day like in the Baker household?
6. Please tell me about your mother's work with Black children's literature.
7. Please tell me about her time at the New York Public Library.
8. What was your mother's lasting legacy?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Baker's Professional Acquaintances

1. How long have you known Mrs. Baker?
2. Please describe the type of relationship you two shared.
3. How would you describe Mrs. Baker?
4. What was she passionate about?
5. What stories (if any) did she share about racism or discrimination?
6. How did she influence you personally and/or professionally?
7. What was Mrs. Baker's greatest contribution or legacy?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of Vice Chancellor for Research
Institutional Review Board
528 East Green Street
Suite 203
Champaign, IL 61820



February 27, 2014

RE: Biography of a Children's Librarian

Dear Ms. Regina Carter:

Thank you for contacting the IRB about your upcoming research on a children's librarian. From the information you provided us in your email it has been determined that your research would be considered Not Human Subjects Research. Since you will be using archival data to write a biography on a late children's librarian with the possibility of discussing her life with her living son and colleagues it would be categorized as Oral History and does not require IRB approval.

It has been determined that this project as described does not meet the definition of human subjects research as defined in 45CFR46(d)(f) or at 21CFR56.102(c)(e) and does not require IRB approval.

This determination only applies to the research discussed in our email correspondence. Please note that modifications to your project need to be submitted to the IRB for review and status determination or approval before the modifications are initiated.

We appreciate your commitment to university policies and regulations regarding human research. If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me, the IRB Office, or visit our website at <http://www.irb.illinois.edu>.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Van Tine, MS
Assistant Human Subjects Research Specialist, Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX E: BAKER'S CURRICULUM VITAE⁴⁷⁸

Name: Augusta Baker

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:

- (1933) State University of New York, Albany – Education major- A.B.⁴⁷⁹
(1934) State University of New York, Albany – Library Science- B.S.

AERA OF SPECIAL COMPETENCE: Children's Work

LIBRARY WORK EXPERIENCE:

- (1939-1953) New York Public Library, 135 St. Branch – Children's Librarian⁴⁸⁰
(1953) Trinidad Public Library, Trinidad – organized library work with children
(1953-1961) New York Public Library, Central Office-Assistant Coordinator and Storytelling Specialist
(1961-1974) New York Public Library, Central Office-Coordinator of Children's Services
(1980-current) Storyteller-in-Residence-University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.

WORK EXPERIENCE OUTSIDE LIBRARIES:

- (1955-1960) Syracuse University, School of Library Science – 2 week workshops
(1956-1980) Columbia University, School of Library Science
(1965-1967) Rutgers University, Graduate Library School
(1965–present) University of Nevada, Las Vegas-alternate years, storytelling and the Black experience in children's books-1 week
(1970) White House Conference on Children- Participant
(1973) Australian Library Association-Guest; Speaker at Plenary Session II-1 week in 4 cities, visiting and consulting in area of children's work
(Apr. 1973) University of Southern Florida, Tampa- 2 week workshop in "Black Experience in Children's Books" and "Storytelling"
(Feb. 1974) Canadian Teachers Association

WORK EXPERIENCE OUTSIDE LIBRARIES: *(continued)*

- (Mar. 1974) Madison, N.J. Board of Education
(Apr. 1974) Jacksonville, Florida Board of Education
(Apr. 1974) Kentucky Association of School Librarians
(Apr. 1974) North Carolina Central University- workshop
(Aug. 1974) University of Tennessee, Knoxville- 2 week storytelling institute

⁴⁷⁸ Augusta Baker curriculum vitae, n.d., Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁴⁷⁹ New York State College for Teachers, Albany, N.Y.

⁴⁸⁰ According to Baker's October 11, 1965, curriculum vitae, she began working at the 135 Street Branch in 1937.

(Oct. 1974)	Cleveland, Ohio Board of Education
(1974-1979)	Council on Library Resources- consultant
(1975-present)	Texas Woman's University-2-week summer workshop
(July-1980)	University of Tennessee, Knoxville-1-week workshop
(current)	Simmons College, Boston, MA-Center for Study of Children's Literature- Advisory Board

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS:

(1955) *The Talking Tree*, Lippincott
 (1960) *Young Years*, Editor in Chief, Parents Magazine Press
 (1960) *The Golden Lynx*, Lippincott
 (1964) *Once Upon a Time*, Editor, New York Library Association
 (1971) *The Black Experience in Children's Books*, NYPL
 (1974) Consultant for 1974 revision of *The Black Experience in Children's Books*
 (1977) *Storytelling: Art and Technique*, Bowker, co-author, Ellin Greene
 (1987) Introductions to 6 books

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Since 1938, research in the field of Black literature for children
 In 1941, founded the special collection for children housed at the New York Public Library,
 Countee Cullen Branch
 In 1953, was awarded the first Dutton-Macrae Award by ALA for research in area
 Completed 1974 revision of nationally known list, *The Black Experience in Children's Books*

HONORS AND AWARDS:

(1953) Dutton-Macrae Award
 (1966) Parents' Magazine Medal
 (1968) ALA Grolier Award
 (1971) Constance Lindsay Skinner Award
 (1974) ALA Clarence Day Award
 (1974) Distinguished Alumni Award, State University of New York, Albany
 (1974) Harold Jackson Memorial Award
 (1975) ALA Honorary Life Member
 (1978) Honorary Doctorate, St. John's University, Jamaica, NY
 (1986) Honorary Doctorate, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC
 (1987) Nelson A. Rockefeller Award, State University of New York, Albany

ACTIVITIES IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS:

(1940's-1965) New York Library Association
 (1953-current) American Library Association
 South Carolina Library Association
 Southeastern Library Association

COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS AND OFFICES HELD:

American Library Association

Board of Directors, Children's Services Division 1958-1961, 1966-1969
Councilor 1965-1968, 1968-1972
Chairman Newberry-Caldecott Committee 1966
President Children's Services Division (CSD) 1967-1968
Executive Board 1968-1972
ALA/Children's Book Council Joint Committee; Public Library
Association's Task Force Committee

New York Library Association

Executive Board, Children's and Young Adult Services Section (CYASS)
1960
School of Library Service- Field Work Committee-Columbia University
American Library Association International Board on Books for Young
People (IBBY) to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 1974-1979

CIVIC ACTIVITIES:

Non-governmental organization-UNICEF 2nd Vice President- 1975-1979
Friends of Children's Services-NYPL Co-Chairman-1975-1979

APPENDIX F: BAKER'S SELECTED WRITINGS⁴⁸¹

Articles, Books, and Essays

- Baker, Augusta. "The American Negro." *American Unity*. November-December 1953: 17-19.
- "The Black Experience in Children's Books: An Introductory Essay." *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*. March 1971: 143-146.
- "Books to Read." *Highlights: The Monthly Book for Children*. December 1973: 13.
- "The Changing Image of the Black in Children's Literature." *Horn Book*. 51 (February 1975): 79-88.
- "Charity Begins at Home." *School Library Quarterly*. May 1947: 5-6, 20-21.
- "Children's Books in a Changing Culture." In *Diversity in Our Society: Challenge to the Schools Conference 1960*. pp. 31-35. New York: Bank Street College of Education, 1960.
- "The Children's Librarian in a Changing Neighborhood." *Top of the News*. 11 (March 1955): 40-41.
- "Guideline for Black Books: An Open Letter to Juvenile Editors." *Publishers Weekly*. 14 July 1969: 131-133.
- "My Years as a Children's Librarian." In *The Black Librarian in America*. pp. 117-123. Edited, with an introduction by E.J. Josey. Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1970.
- "Once Upon a Time." In *Come Hither!* pp. 9-14. Edited by Lawrence Clark Powell. Los Angeles: The Yeasayers Press, 1966.
- "Pioneer in the War on Poverty: NYPL." *Library Journal*. September 1965: 23-27.
- "Reading for Democracy." *Wilson Library Bulletin*. October 1943: 140-144.
- "Significant Factors in Selecting and Rejecting Materials." In *The Georgia Child's Access to Materials Pertaining to American Negroes*. pp. 49-55. Edited with an introduction by Annette Hoage Phinazee. Atlanta: The University School of Library Service, 1968.
- "Trinidad's Children and Their Library." *Bulletin of The School Library Association of California*. 27 (May 1956): 5-9.

⁴⁸¹ Augusta Baker: A Biographical Checklist, n.d., Augusta Baker Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

Introductions

Baker, Augusta. Introduction. *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*. By Langston Hughes. 1932. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986.

----. Introduction. *Lift Every Voice and Sing: Words and Music*. By James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1970. Illustrated by Mozelle Thompson.

----. Introduction. *On Our Way: Poems of Pride and Love*. Selected by Lee Bennett Hopkins. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974.

----. Introduction. *Tales from the Story Hat; African Folk Tales*. By Verna Aardema. New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1960. Illustrated by Elton Fox.

----. Introduction. *The Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit*. As told by Julius Lester. New York: Deal Books, 1987.

----. Introduction. *A Street of Little Shops*. By Margery Williams Bianco. 1932. Boston: Gregg Press, 1981.

APPENDIX G: PARTIAL LIST OF RETIREMENT BOOK CONTRIBUTORS⁴⁸²

Refna Wilkin/ President, The Children's Book Council 1974

Adrienne Adams & Lonzo Anderson
Arnold Adoff
Lloyd Alexander
Mary Jo Aman
William Armstrong
Jose Aruego & Ariane Dewey
Isaac Asimov
Atheneum Books for Children / Suzanne M. Glazer, Jean Karl, Margaret K. McElderry
Harold Berson
Bradbury Press / Jane Botham, Dick Jackson, Bob Verrone
Franklyn M. Branley
Marcia Brown
Ashley Bryan
Dorothy Bryan
Clyde Robert Bulla
Bob Burch
Betsey Byars
Eric Carle
Natalie Savage Carlson
Joy (BJ) Chute
Marchette Chute
Ann Nolan Clark
Bill & Vera Cleaver
Lucille Clifton
Barbara Cooney
Harold Courlander
Robert Crowell
Thomas Y. Crowell Co. / Ann Beneduce, Sophie Silberberg
Crown Publishers / Mary Holdsworth, Norma Jean Sawicki
Ingri & Edgar Parin d'Aulaire
Marguerite deAngeli
Delacorte Press (art by Ronald Himler) / Alice Bregman, Ron Buehl
Elizabeth B. de Trevino
The Dial Press (art by Rosemary Wells) / Phyllis Fogelman
E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., / Ann Durell
Eleanor Estes
Tom Feelings

⁴⁸² This list of contributors was culled from Augusta Baker's Retirement Book, which is still the property of the Baker family. It is on deposit with the Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at the University of South Carolina Libraries in Columbia, South Carolina.

James J. Flynn
Paula Fox
Don Freeman
Lorenz Graham
Margaret Bloy Graham
Virginia Hamilton
Harper & Row Junior Books Department
Virginia Haviland
Holiday House / John Briggs
Jesse Jackson
June Jordan
Ezra Jack Keats
Alfred A. Knopf Inc. (photograph by David Parks)
Little, Brown and Company / Evelyn Diggs
Arnold Lobel
Joseph Low
Sharon Bell Mathis
Ursula Nordstrom
Scott O'Dell
Parents' Magazine Enterprises, Inc. / Edward A. Sand
Charlemae Rollins
Maurice Sendak
John Steptoe
Viking Press / George Nicholson, Roy Oakley, Harry Simmons
George A. Woods
Elizabeth Yates
Jane Yolen
Ed Young