“YES, IT’LL BE ME”: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE BROWNIES’ BOOK AND CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE
WRITTEN BY PATRICIA MCKISSACK

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to conduct a comparative analysis of The Brownies' Book, one of the first periodicals created primarily for black children during the Harlem renaissance, and contemporary African American children’s literature written by Patricia McKissack. The major research questions guiding the study were: 1) What are the areas of continuity in terms of themes, underlying ideologies, goals and values within these two bodies of work and 2) What are the areas of divergence in terms of themes, underlying ideologies, goals and values within these two bodies of work? The theoretical framework undergirding this study was critical race theory (CRT), a multidisciplinary epistemology situated within the legal field, which places race at the center of critical analysis. The main sources of data included issues of The Brownies’ Book, children’s literature written by Patricia McKissack and the transcript of a telephone interview conducted with the author. The results of the study indicated that both bodies of work challenged dominant perspectives via storytelling, were committed to social protest and depicted literacy as important. Unlike The Brownies’ Book children’s literature by McKissack placed more of an emphasis on the working class and on the importance of community/family relationships. McKissack’s work also contained strong feminist overtones.
Dedicated to my Mama, Wanda B. McNair and the memory of my Daddy, John O. McNair,

who on his deathbed wished that he could live to see his daughter get her Ph.D.
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3. McNair, J. C. (2003) It Really Is the Little Things! More Thoughts About the


**FIELDS OF STUDY**

Major Field: Education

Children’s Literature, Early Literacy Development and Multicultural Education
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   Timeline of the Study
You’ve taken my blues and gone—

You sing ’em on Broadway

And you sing ’em in Hollywood Bowl,

And you mixed ’em up with symphonies

And you fixed ’em

So they don’t sound like me.

Yep, you done taken my blues and gone.

You also took my spirituals and gone.

You put me in Macbeth and Carmen Jones

And all kinds of Swing Mikados

And in everything but what’s about me—

But someday somebody’ll

Stand up and talk about me,

And write about me—

Black and beautiful—

And sing about me,

And put on plays about me,

I reckon it’ll be

Me myself!

Yes it’ll be me.

Langston Hughes “Note on Commercial Theatre”

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Children’s literature functions as an important tool in the educational process within schools and it serves as a means by which to socialize children and shape their values, cultural norms, and worldviews. Multicultural children’s literature in particular has the potential to expose children to the beliefs and perspectives of racial and ethnic groups outside of their own. Rollock (1991) states:

Literature is fundamental to children’s literacy and literary development, and it provides an excellent medium for children to explore, understand and strengthen their identities. Literature also provides the means for children to reach out beyond their own world to explore the worlds of others. Multicultural literature plays a major role in the process of supporting self-awareness and an appreciation of cultural and ethnic diversity. (p. xv)

Perhaps children’s literature that reflects and affirms children’s cultural experiences can play an important role in students’ educational success.

Because literacy development is critical in order to achieve academic success, it could be argued that multicultural literature, African American children’s literature in this case, has the capability to increase the educational achievement of African American children. For example, A.P. Schmidt, a statistician, discovered “that on a reading comprehension passage about life-style changes in Mexican-American families, Mexican-American students scored significantly higher than they did on
reading comprehension passages whose content was less related to their lives" (as quoted by Meier, 1995, p. 181). According to Purves and Beach, (1972) research contends that children tend to prefer and are more likely to become engaged with literature that reflects their personal experiences. Similarly, Patricia McKissack (as quoted by Elliot, 1993) states "If you don’t see yourself in literature after a while, it becomes ‘I don’t like to read.’ Then, after a while, it becomes ‘I have failed because I can’t read’" (p. 59).

Many scholars of multicultural education such as Geneva Gay (2000), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), James Banks (1997) and Lisa Delpit (1995) have begun to address the huge disparities between the educational achievement of white and black students. In an article that examined the teaching practices of exemplary African American teachers, Mitchell (1998) stated “national test scores, grades and special education designation demonstrate that the educational achievement and attainment of African American students have long lagged behind that of white students” (p. 104). African American students are less likely to attend college and more prone for failure to complete high school (Mitchell, 1998). Scholars of multicultural education have begun to theorize in terms of pedagogical practices that will allow African American students equal opportunities to achieve academic success. These scholars have found that various factors in the American educational system such as low teacher expectations, ability grouping, culturally biased standardized testing and monocultural tradebooks and textbooks prevent African American children from receiving equal opportunities to succeed. At the turn of the
twentieth century, scholars of color were also concerned about the academic success of African American children.

For example, Carter G. Woodson, a well-known historian often referred to as the “father of black history,” and W.E.B. Du Bois, a renowned activist, author, educator and historian, were both troubled about the education of African American children. Woodson and Du Bois both believed that the American educational system “miseducated” black children. In his classic book, The Mis-Education of the Negro, Woodson (1933; 2000) wrote, “The education of the Negroes, then, the most important thing in the uplift of the Negroes, is almost entirely in the hands of those who have enslaved them and now segregate them” (p. 22). Similarly, Du Bois (1921) stated:

Heretofore the education of the Negro child has been too much in terms of white people. All through school life his text-books contain much about white people and little or nothing about his own race. All the pictures he sees are of white people. Most of the books he reads are by white authors, and his heroes and heroines are white. . . . The result is that all of the Negro child’s idealism, all his sense of the good, the great and the beautiful is associated with white people. . . . He unconsciously gets the impression that the Negro has little chance to be great, heroic or beautiful. (p. 63)

Du Bois was fully cognizant of the power of children’s literature to damage and impair black children’s developing sense of self.

In an attempt to educate African American children and give them a sense of their beauty, importance and cultural and historical legacy, W.E.B. Du Bois, along with members of The Crisis staff, created The Brownies’ Book, one of the first periodicals directed primarily at black children. The Crisis functioned as the official publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
(NAACP), the largest and oldest civil rights organization in the United States. W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the founders of the NAACP, served as the editor of The Crisis for several decades. In regard to The Brownies’ Book, Du Bois (1919) articulated seven objectives that he hoped to accomplish with the publication of this magazine:

1. To make colored children realize that being colored is a normal, beautiful thing;
2. To make them familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race;
3. To make them know that other colored children have grown into useful, famous persons;
4. To teach them delicately, a code of honor and actions in their relations with white children;
5. To turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition and love of their own homes and companions;
6. To point out the best amusements and joys and worthwhile things of life;
7. To inspire them for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifices. (p. 286)

W.E.B. Du Bois created The Brownies’ Book to challenge overt racism in mainstream children’s literature. At approximately the same time that The Crisis was announcing the debut of The Brownies’ Book, the poem “Ten Little Niggers” appeared in St. Nicholas Magazine (Sinnette, 1965). Considered one of the most highly regarded mainstream children’s periodicals of its era, St. Nicholas Magazine was in existence from 1875 until 1940 and many well known authors and illustrators such as Louisa
May Alcott, Rudyard Kipling, Eudora Welty, Emily Dickinson, Joel Chandler Harris, Mark Twain, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Norman Rockwell and Howard Pyle contributed to this periodical. *St. Nicholas Magazine* either ignored the existence of African Americans or worse depicted them in a stereotypical and grossly dehumanizing manner.

Stereotypical stories that ridiculed African Americans were commonplace in *St. Nicholas Magazine*. For example, in the July 1919 issue of *St. Nicholas Magazine* there is a drawing which depicts a child, who appears to be black, eating a large slice of watermelon. The caption underneath the drawing reads “Satisfied.” This drawing was submitted by a fourteen year old child and was awarded a gold badge in the magazine’s prize competition. As this example illustrates, *St. Nicholas Magazine* even went so far as to reward its young readers for reinforcing racist stereotypes. It was out of this context that African American children’s literature came into existence and evolved.

From its very inception, then, African American children’s literature has battled against racism, which remains deeply ingrained within American society, just as it was nearly a century ago. In fact, critical race theory (CRT), a multidisciplinary epistemology that places race at the center of critical analysis and is concerned with altering the relationship between racism and power, maintains that racism in American society is normal and not aberrant. Given such a history, and given the fact that literature reflects the struggles, experiences and aspirations of its creators, it is not surprising that African American children’s literature, as created by African American writers, has developed distinct characteristics and has focused to a large
extent on affirming black life, culture and history. I maintain that just as *The Brownies’ Book* focused on the aforementioned themes, much of contemporary African American children’s literature, such as that which is written by Patricia McKissack, an African American, also focuses on similar themes.

Scholars of African American children’s literature such as Violet Harris (1986) and Dianne Johnson (1990) contend that *The Brownies’ Book*, in terms of its objectives and underlying ideologies, laid the foundation for a new tradition in children’s literature; a tradition that challenged the stereotypical depictions of African Americans in mainstream children’s literature. In this research study I attempted to verify their claims by conducting a comparative analysis of *The Brownies Book* and contemporary African American children’s literature written by Patricia McKissack. In her definitive research study of *The Brownies Book*, Violet Harris discovered the following eight major themes: “race pride,” “duty and allegiance to the race,” “intelligent Blacks,” beautiful Blacks,” “moderation,” political and social activism,” “knowledge of and respect for African culture,” and the “inculcation of specific values such as kindness, truthfulness, egalitarianism, and love” (p. 207). I intended to compare these themes with those that I discovered upon analysis of African American children’s literature written by Patricia McKissack.

Patricia McKissack, like W.E.B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson before her, began writing due to her concern over the lack of suitable reading materials featuring African Americans for her eighth grade students (Bishop, 1992). Her first book, *Paul Laurence Dunbar: A Poet to Remember*, was published in 1984. Since then she has authored or co-authored over 100 books spanning several genres including
fantasy, biography, non-fiction, and fiction. McKissack has garnered critical acclaim and earned several of the highest awards in children’s literature including a Newbery Honor, a Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, several Coretta Scott King Awards and the NCTE’s Orbis Pictus Award for nonfiction. Because McKissack is currently writing, is well respected as a writer, has such a large body of work and chooses to write mainly about the African American experience, she served as an excellent choice for exploring the extent to which the themes and underlying ideologies expressed within *The Brownies’ Book* are truly foundational within the context of contemporary African American children’s literature.

**RESEARCH PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study was to explore, through the lens of critical race theory, whether there was continuity between the stated goals and underlying ideological stance of *The Brownies’ Book* and those of contemporary African American children’s literature as exemplified by the work of contemporary author, Patricia McKissack.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the areas of continuity between the critically important historical texts published in *The Brownies’ Book* and the prominent modern texts written by Patricia McKissack?

   - What common themes do both texts embrace?
   - What ideological stances do they have in common?
   - What goals and values do they communicate?
2. What are the areas of divergence between the texts published in *The Brownies’ Book* and those written by Patricia McKissack?

- What are the differences in themes?
- What are the differences in ideological stances?
- How do goals and values diverge?

3. To what extent do Patricia McKissack’s texts appear to embrace the major themes within *The Brownies’ Book*?

4. What are Patricia McKissack’s unique contributions to the field of children’s literature that add to or modify the major themes within *The Brownies’ Book*?

What follows is a description of the limitations of this study in the following respects: illustrations, the selection of books and co-authorship.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

**ILLUSTRATIONS**

Although a significant amount of Patricia McKissack’s children’s literature consists of picture books, she is not an illustrator; therefore her picture books are illustrated by various children’s book artists such as Floyd Cooper, Jerry Pinkney, Brian Pinkney, James Ransome, Rachel Isadora and Giselle Potter. Picture books convey messages via the text and illustrations, so the fact that my content analysis will focus only on text and not illustrations is a limitation. Children’s literature scholar, Perry Nodelman, (1996) states:

> We must consider not only their [illustrations in picture books] beauty but also how they contribute to our unfolding knowledge of the story. In fact, everything in such pictures is less important a source of aesthetic delight than a source of information about a story. Their shape, their style, their
composition are means of conveying information about how we’re to respond to the story. (p. 219)

Arguably, picture book illustrations themselves contain major themes and ideologies in addition to those expressed through the text.

**SELECTION OF BOOKS**

Because Patricia McKissack has written over 100 children’s books, for practical purposes, many of her books will not be included in the study. Also, a number of the books that Patricia McKissack has written are retellings of folk tales such as *Cinderella* and *Country Mouse and City Mouse*, which do not feature African Americans. I chose books that Sims (1982) would label as “culturally conscious” for the purposes of my research study, however it would be erroneous to assume that books such as the folk tales are not representative in some aspects of Patricia McKissack’s body of work for children.

**CO-AUTHORSHIP**

It should be noted that several of the books selected for this research study such as *Black Hands, White Sails: The Story of African-American Whalers* (McKissack & McKissack, 1999) and *Black Diamond: The Story of the Negro Baseball Leagues* (McKissack & McKissack, 1994) were co-authored by Patricia McKissack. She has written one book with her son, Fredrick McKissack, Jr. and many books with her husband, Fredrick McKissack. Patricia McKissack has noted that her husband serves an integral role in creating, researching and writing their nonfiction books (Bishop, 1992). The fact that I am choosing not to focus any literary attention on her husband could be considered a limitation as well. The decision to focus solely on
Patricia McKissack was made for several reasons. First of all, most of Patricia McKissack’s fictional stories such as *Flossie and the Fox* and *Goin’ Someplace Special* are generally her own work. Secondly, because McKissack and her husband work so closely and share many of the same ideologies, it could be argued that an emphasis on her work will also reveal the perspectives and ideologies of Fredrick McKissack.

**VIII. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study is significant for several reasons. First of all, it offers support for the importance of sharing African American children’s literature with children of all races. African American children’s literature, in the past and up to the present, has possessed unique, distinctive characteristics such as the affirmation of African Americans, their historical legacy and their cultural norms. Because we live in a society that usually assigns negative attributes to blacks, all children are likely to benefit from exposure to African American children’s literature. Books that refute the misconceptions of African Americans in regard to their contributions to American history, for example, are important for all children.

Also, this study provides a critical analysis of the work of one the most talented and prolific contemporary authors of African American children’s literature. Patricia McKissack has earned some of the highest awards in children’s literature and I believe that a scholarly examination of her children’s literature and its ideological underpinnings is warranted. Up until this point, I have found no evidence of a thorough, in-depth, scholarly examination of her work.

Finally, this study is significant in that it places critical race theory (CRT) specifically within the context of children’s literature. CRT is a theoretical framework
that originated within the field of critical legal studies. Although scholars of education such as Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998, 2000) and William Tate (1997) have examined the application of CRT in education to explore the implications of educational policies such as standardized testing and tracking for students of color, few scholars have argued for the application and relevance of CRT within the field of children’s literature. A more in-depth discussion of CRT will be provided in chapter two. I contend that CRT, with its race-conscious perspective, has the potential to provide explanations and unique insights into phenomena such as the exclusionary practices of literary canons, misrepresentations of people of color featured in literature written by European Americans and the underlying ideologies within African American children’s literature.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter one, “Introduction,” includes a discussion of the background of the study, its purpose, research questions, limitations of the study and its potential significance. Chapter two, “Review of the Relevant Literature, consists of a categorized literature review that will form a contextual background for the study while chapter three, “Research Methodology and Procedures” offers a description of the qualitative research methodology used in this study and the way in which the research data were categorized for major themes and ideological stances. Chapter four, “The Brownies’ Book” will include an in-depth description and analysis of Violet Harris’ definitive study of this publication and the relevance of W.E.B. Du Bois’ philosophy in relation to The Brownies’ Book while chapter five “Analysis of African American Children’s Literature Written by Patricia McKissack” describes the
analysis of an interview with Patricia McKissack and of her selected children’s
literature. Chapter five also contains the comparison of her work to The Brownies’
Book. Chapter six, “Conclusions and Recommendations” describes the findings of the
study and offer conclusions and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature consists of the following four sections: racial identity development in African American children, critical race theory (CRT), *The Brownies’ Book* and the work of Patricia McKissack. Racial identity development is included as a section because literature is recognized as one of the vehicles by which children receive affirmations of themselves, their values, beliefs and cultural norms. The theoretical position that undergirds this research study is critical race theory because it provides an explanation for the unique, distinct characteristics of African American children’s literature, which to a large extent has been shaped and influenced by responses to racism. I provide a description of critical race theory and its application within the contexts of education and children’s literature. A section on *The Brownies’ Book* is included in order to examine the research studies that have focused on this groundbreaking publication, to explore its historical significance as well as its importance within the context of African American children’s literature. In addition, chapter four of the dissertation entails a thorough description of Violet Harris’ definitive study of *The Brownies’ Book*. A discussion of children’s book author Patricia McKissack provides a description of research projects involving her books.
RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

In this section I explore the complexities of racial identity development in African American children and highlight significant, related research studies. Children’s literature scholar Nancy Tolson, (1998) contends that from an early age, African American children learn that the word “black,” which describes them, is often used to denote negativity. For instance, “black sheep” has a negative connotation while “white lie” has a positive connotation. In his book entitled Black Misery (1969, 1994), Langston Hughes wrote “Misery is when you first realize that so many things bad have black in them, like black cats, black arts, blackball” (unpaged). For African American children existing in a society that is fundamentally racist, the development of a positive and healthy sense of racial identity is no easy task. Noted African American psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint (1974) states:

The psychological development of black children is greatly affected by prejudice, discrimination and racial segregation. Black children, like all children, come into the world victims of factors over which they have no control. In the looking glass of white society, the supposedly undesirable physical image of “Tar Baby” – black skin, wooly hair and thick lips – is contrasted unfavorably with the valued model of “Snow White,” – white skin, straight hair and aquiline features. (p. 158)

Arguably, racism has a significant impact on the process by which African American children develop a sense of racial identity.

According to Tatum (1996), “Researchers have found that adolescents of color are more likely to be actively engaged in an exploration of their racial or ethnic identity than are white adolescents” (p. 53). A likely explanation for this phenomena is that in American society whiteness is constructed as “normal”, therefore individuals who are not white, as a result of their social interactions, become much more cognizant
of their racial identity. For example, in the book, *Crossing the Color Line*, Maureen Reddy, a white professor of English and women’s studies who is the mother of biracial children, (1994) asserts:

> Perhaps the greatest privilege of white skin is the lack of consciousness about race; most white people are free to spend entire weeks, months, even years without thinking about race at all, or thinking of it in terms of others only. In contrast, I doubt that there are many black people above the age of six in the United States who can forget about race for even a single day. (p. 56–57)

Unlike European American children, African American children, from an early age, have a heightened sense of racial awareness that must be addressed and nurtured by adults.

According to Banks (1993), research studies conducted over a span of fifty years have consistently demonstrated that from an early age, children are aware of racial and ethnic differences and have often internalized the perspectives, worldviews and cultural norms of the dominant societal group. Among the best known of these studies are those by African American psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark (1947), who conducted research studies with young children involving racial preferences, racial differences and racial self-identification. In one of their studies, the Clarks selected 253 African American students between the ages of 3 and 7 from nursery schools in Arkansas and Massachusetts and asked them a series of questions related to brown and white dolls. The Clarks discovered that more than 90% of the children were able to identify the dolls based on their race. So, when asked by the researcher to point out the colored doll or the white doll, the majority of the children were able to successfully complete the task. Also, when asked which dolls resembled
them, 66% of the children selected the colored dolls while only 33% selected the white dolls.

The Clarks found that when given a choice between the two dolls the majority of the children chose the white one. When asked which of the dolls “looked bad,” 59% of the children selected the black doll, while only 17% thought the white doll “looked bad.” Banks (1993) states:

The Clarks interpreted the tendency of African American children to make incorrect racial self-identifications and to prefer white to brown images as an indication that the children were aware of and had internalized the dominant society’s attitudes, perceptions, and evaluations of blacks and whites. (p. 238)

Due to the research studies conducted by the Clarks and other researchers who confirmed their findings, social scientists began to presume that most black children had low self-esteem and harbored negative feelings about being black (Banks, 1993). Recently, researchers such as William Cross have critiqued these studies for methodological weaknesses and reinterpreted their findings by suggesting, for example, that it is possible for black children to exhibit a pro-white bias and still maintain a positive sense of self-esteem (Cross, 1991).

Cross (1991) has created a model on the psychology of nigrEssence, or the psychology of becoming black, which encompasses the following five stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization and internalization-commitment. For the purposes of this research, which focuses on children’s literature, I describe the first two stages since they are most pertinent for children and young adults. According to Cross, in the pre-encounter stage, which typically occurs at the elementary school age, black children are likely to internalize notions, ideas and
beliefs that are in accordance with Eurocentrism and place more value on the cultural norms of the dominant culture as opposed to their own. Although most children in this stage are aware of their race, they haven’t begun to think critically about their racial identity (Cross, 1991). In the pre-encounter stage blacks tend to think that they will be judged as individuals in spite of their race (Howard, 1999).

Experiences with racism precede a transition into the encounter stage, which usually occurs around junior high school age. Encounters with racism force individuals at this stage to begin to “grapple with what it means to be a member of a group targeted by racism” (Tatum, 1996, p. 55). According to Howard (1999), “In the encounter stage there is a realization that race alone, independent of other qualities of the individual, can lead to negative treatment” (p. 87). As opposed to perceiving Cross’ stages of racial identity development as progressing in a linear fashion, it should be noted that the process is recursive, in that blacks who are in the later stages of racial identity development often revisit earlier stages. It is also the case that some blacks never move beyond the pre-encounter stage. Considering the difficulties of living in a racist society, it is not surprising that racial identity development among African Americans is quite complex and multi-faceted. Derrick Bell (1992), a legal scholar considered to be the father of critical race theory, argues that “racism is a permanent component of American life” and so it should come as no surprise that racism has a significant impact in regard to the racial identity development of black children and is addressed within the context of African American children’s literature (p. 13).
CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Bell (1995) states, “critical race theory is a body of legal scholarship… a majority of whose members are both existentially people of color and ideologically committed to the struggle against racism, particularly as institutionalized in and by law” (p. 898). For the purposes of this study, I define racism as a system of privileges which works to the advantage of whites and to the detriment of people of color. Critical race theory (CRT) is an outgrowth of the critical legal studies movement. The critical legal studies movement attempted to demonstrate how “legal ideology has helped to create, support and legitimate America’s present class structure” (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1350). Critical race theorists were concerned that the critical legal studies movement failed to acknowledge racism in its critique. (Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 2000). What follows is a description of critical race theory and its application within the contexts of education and children’s literature.

Underlying critical race theory are a number of basic tenets, most of which are applicable to children’s literature. The first is that racism is embedded into the fabric of our everyday lives and often appears natural, instead of abnormal, to most Americans. Richard Delgado, a Professor of law and critical race theory scholar, (1995) states:

Critical race theory sprang up in the mid-1970s with the early work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, both of whom were deeply concerned over the slow pace of racial reform in the U.S. (p. xiii). CRT maintains, first of all that racism is “normal”, not aberrant in American society. (p. xiv) Therefore, because racism is so embedded and entrenched within the fabric of our everyday lives, it often appears natural and ordinary to many people.
Albeit the term “critical race theory” was coined after the death of W.E.B. Du Bois in 1963, strong elements of CRT are evident within his writing. For example, on April 17, 1935 in correspondence to George Streator, a younger, black activist, Du Bois wrote:

When I was at your age, I did not expect race prejudice suddenly to disappear, but I did think that under a barrage of facts and arguments, it would in a generation noticeably decline. This has been true in some respects, but the decline has not been nearly as decisive and rapid as I had expected, and I have come to the conclusion that we have got to regard race prejudice in this country as fairly permanent for practical purposes. (as quoted by Aptheker, 1976, p. 87)

A second feature of CRT is to make use of storytelling in order to subvert dominant constructions of social reality. Bell (1995) states, “[c]ritical race theory writing and lecturing is characterized by frequent use of the first person, storytelling, narrative, [and] allegory” (p. 899). According to Ladson-Billings, “The primary reason then, that stories, or narratives, are deemed important among CRT scholars is that they add necessary contextual contours to the seeming “objectivity” of positivist perspectives” (p. 11). Richard Delgado (as quoted by Tate, 1997) claims that the practice of exchanging what he refers to as “counterstories” about racial experiences is commonplace among people of color and that these stories are important in that they challenge and subvert dominant versions of reality.

CRT also maintains that liberal legal perspectives must be challenged since they often neglect to recognize the limitations of the legal system to bring about substantive social change. A fourth feature of CRT is the notion that whites have benefited from civil rights legislation more than people of color. For instance, Guy-Sheftall (as quoted by Ladson-Billings, 2000) found that white women have been the
“major beneficiaries of affirmative action hiring policies” (p. 264). Whites, who are much more likely to maintain positions of authority, are largely responsible for enforcing the hiring policies of affirmative action and so it appears as if they selectively enforce them in a manner which maintains white dominance. Although there are differing perspectives among critical race theorists, a common interest is in examining the construction and maintenance of white supremacy and changing the relationship between the legal system and racial power (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Recently CRT has been applied by scholars such as Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995; 1998) and William Tate (1997) within the context of education. Because racism is omnipresent in American society it influences all of our cultural institutions as well as the actions that individuals undertake. Within the context of education, critical race theory is useful for providing insights into educational phenomena such as curriculum, pedagogy and school funding.

For instance, critical race theorists are likely to view school curriculum as a social construction which functions as a tool to maintain white supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Scholar of multicultural education, Sonia Nieto, (2000) states:

Curriculum is the organized environment for learning what is thought to be important knowledge. But because only a tiny fraction of the vast array of available knowledge finds its way into textbooks and teachers’ guides, the curriculum is never neutral. It represents what is perceived to be consequential and necessary knowledge by those who are dominant in a society (p. 97).
Children who are not members of the dominant group, such as African Americans, are unlikely to find representations of themselves within the curriculum and if so, they are usually distorted (Nieto, 2000).

Critical race theory can also provide insights into the manner in which race impacts pedagogical practices. For example, the fact that in American society African Americans have historically been considered inferior to whites is problematic (Feagin, 2000); especially when one considers that the majority of the nation’s schoolteachers are white (Delpit, 1995; Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Even the most well-meaning white teachers, unless they have unpacked their racial assumptions, are likely to consider many, or most, of their African American students as “deficient” and have lower expectations for them (Delpit, 1995). Unfortunately, teachers of color, who are socialized in a racist society, may exhibit similar perspectives although, because of their scarcity, their teaching practices are much less likely to have the same amount of social resonance as those of European American teachers.

In her book, Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflicts in the Classroom, renowned scholar of multicultural education, Lisa Delpit, (1995) related an incident that was conveyed to her by an African American parent. According to Delpit, this parent expressed concerns about her son’s schooling experiences at a predominantly white private school:

As an involved parent, she had spoken to each of his teachers several times during the first few months of school, all of whom assured her that Terrence was doing “just fine.” When the first quarter’s report cards were issued, she observed with dismay a report filled with Cs and Ds. She immediately went to talk to his teachers. When asked how they could have said he was doing fine when his grades were so low, each of them
gave her some version of the same answer: “Why are you so upset? For him, Cs are great. You shouldn’t try to push him so much.” (p. xiii)

It is obvious from the teachers’ responses that they had low expectations for Terrence, arguably due in part to the fact that Terrence was an African American.

In terms of school funding issues, critical race theory can offer explanations for the huge disparities in terms of the educational facilities and opportunities afforded white and black students in America’s public schools. Ladson-Billings (1998) states, “[p]erhaps no area of schooling underscores inequity and racism better than school funding…. Almost every state funds schools based on property taxes. Those areas with property of greater wealth typically have better funded schools (p. 20). In his book, Savage Inequalities, Kozol (1991) explores these inequities and provides examples of how black and white students who live within short distances of one another often attend schools that are strikingly different. For example, Kozol offers the following description of two elementary schools in Paterson and nearby Wayne, New Jersey. Kozol states:

The school in Wayne, which is a white community, is 33 years old and holds 325 children. The school in Paterson is 60 years old and holds 615 children. The first school has 385 square feet per child, the second 87 square feet. The first school has 40,000 square feet of playing area, the second 5,000 square feet. The kindergarten in the first school holds 15 to 18 children. A room the same size in the second school holds 60 children divided into two groups of 30 each and separated only by a row of file cabinets. (pp. 164-165)

Of course, it could be argued that class is the most significant feature in this case, as opposed to racism, but the fact is that institutional racism ensures that a disproportionate amount of African Americans will remain in the underclass, and therefore be subject to attend schools with a reduced amount of funding. As the
abovementioned examples demonstrate, critical race theory can provide new insights into educational policies and procedures. I contend that critical race theory can also be useful within the context of children’s literature.

Because critical race theory maintains that racism is a “permanent fixture” in American society, it provides an explanation as to why African American children’s literature has maintained particularly unique characteristics over time. In an essay entitled “Race and the Negro Writer”, Hugh Gloster (1968) states:

From the beginnings of his active authorship in this country the Negro writer has been preoccupied with racial issues and materials. This obsession with race is not hard to explain, because the tragic plight of the colored population of the United States has forced the Negro writer to stand with his people and to voice their suffering, reverses, triumphs, and aspirations. … [T]t is only natural that the Negro writer has focused on the themes of racial defense, protest and glorification. (p. 255)

From The Brownies’ Book to contemporary African American children’s literature written by Patricia McKissack, blacks have used the power of the pen to challenge racist and stereotypical notions of African Americans and their cultural and historical legacy (Johnson, 1990). Du Bois (1926) stated:

I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent (p. 296).

In regard to her career as a children’s book author, McKissack states:

I continue to write because there is a need for books about African American people, African Americans who have made contributions to the growth and development of this nation yet they have been left out of literature, and out of a lot of our textbooks, especially so when I started writing. (as quoted by Owens, 2000, p. 150)
Many of the crucial tenets of CRT, which borrows from disciplines such as economics and psychology, can provide insights into phenomena that have transpired within the context of literature (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). For instance, Derrick Bell’s theory of interest—convergence contends that in order for blacks to make racial advances, these advances must also intersect with the interests of whites. Bell (1987) argues, “reforms resulting from civil rights legislation invariably promote the interests of the white majority” (p. 63). He believed that concern over the United States’ political and economic interests abroad and at home was the major reason for the “successes” of the 1960s civil rights era. Bell (1992) states:

> When whites perceive that it will be profitable or at least cost–free to serve, hire, admit, or otherwise deal with blacks on a nondiscriminatory basis, they do so. When they fear—accurately or not—that there may be a loss, inconvenience, or upset to themselves or other whites, discriminatory conduct usually follows. (p. 7)

Evidence of the interest—convergence theory is also evident in Du Bois’ writing. For example, in correspondence to a white minister who inquired about Du Bois’ opinion in regard to the relationship between the Southern Presbyterian Church and the Southern Negro, Du Bois (as quoted by Aptheker, 1976, p. 195) wrote:

> Your church is an expression of economic organization, a group for social purposes with members composed of persons for the most part who receive an income above the average and whose primary solicitude is to protect that interest. Whatever ethical action does not interfere with that income is permissible and encouraged and often exceedingly well done. On the other hand, any action or program that threatens income has little chance for recognition and none for adoption.

The increase in publishing of African American children’s literature during the late sixties illustrates Bell’s notion of interest—convergence theory. According to Dianne Johnson (1997), “One of the most important stimulants to the publishing of African
American children’s literature, largely as a response to political agitation, was the federal government’s commitment to provide funding to school districts to purchase books created by African Americans” (p. 137). Therefore, providing literature that affirmed African American children wasn’t the primary motive; instead economic incentives took precedence in that publishers capitalized on an opportunity for financial gain.

In relation to psychology, critical race theorists maintain that racism serves not only the economic interests of the wealthy, but also the psychological interests of whites. Most whites, including those who are not wealthy, benefit from viewing themselves as superior to blacks (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Derrick Bell (1992) states:

Black people are the magical faces at the bottom of society’s well. Even the poorest whites, those who must live their lives only a few levels above, gain their self-esteem by gazing down on us. Surely, they must know that their deliverance depends on letting down their ropes. Only by working together is escape possible. Over time, many reach out, but most simply watch, mesmerized into maintaining their unspoken commitment to keeping us where we are, at whatever cost to them or to us. (unpaged)


Although the economic benefits of white privilege have gone in disproportionately large amounts to the employer class, all white groups derive at least some psychological benefit from having a group below them, from the feeling of superiority that is especially important for whites who are not doing well economically. (p. 6-7)


They [poor, white men and women] have been raised to believe, and by now they helplessly believe, that no matter how terrible some of their lives
may be and no matter what disaster overtakes them, there is one consolation like a heavenly revelation—at least they are not black. (p. 716)

Literature can serve to affirm and provide ideological support for the misconception that blacks are inferior and content with their treatment as second-class citizens thereby reinforcing the psychological interests of whites.

For example, in his book, *Betrayal of the Negro*, Rayford Logan, a Harvard trained historian (1954) examined the portrayal of African Americans in prominent magazines and Northern newspapers during the Reconstruction era and found that derogatory terms such as nigger, pickaninny, mammy, aunt, uncle, darkey and coon were regularly used in stories, cartoons and poems. Thomas Nelson Page even went so far as to write an article in *Harper’s* entitled “All the Geography a Nigger Needs to Know.” Blacks were ridiculed and bestowed with bizarre names and titles such as Abraham Lincum (sic), Prince Orang Outan and Lady Adeliza Chimpanzee among others. They were depicted as being superstitious, ignorant, happy-go-lucky and lazy. They also used big “words” that they didn’t understand and loved watermelons and chickens (Logan, 1954).

These very same stereotypes and gross misrepresentations also appeared in children’s literature written during the Reconstruction era. For instance, in the preface to the book, *Diddie, Dumps and Tot, or Plantation Child-Life*, (Clarke–Pymelle, 1882), the author states:

I know not whether it [slavery] was right or wrong (there are many pros and cons on the subject); but it was the law of the land, made by statesmen from the North as well as the South, long before my day, or my father’s or grandfather’s day; and born under that law a slave-holder, and the descendant of slave-holders, raised in the heart of the cotton section, surrounded by Negroes from my earliest infancy, “I KNOW whereof I do
speak”; and it is to tell of the pleasant and happy relations that existed between master and slave that I write this story of Diddie, Dumps, and Tot. (unpaged)

From the viewpoint of slaves, one must consider what the “pros” of slavery could have possibly been. This passage is illustrative of the manner in which children’s literature can serve to affirm the psychological interests of whites and provide ideological support for white supremacy. By emphasizing the supposedly “happy relations” between slaves and their masters and not explicitly questioning the right of one human being to own another, the author chooses to appease the consciousness of whites and validate racism.

Later in this same book, a male slave who could “play the fiddle and pick the banjo” and “pick more cotton than any other Negro on the plantation” is distraught over his relationship with a female slave who is toying with his affections (unpaged). At one point, he considers killing himself by jumping into a creek, but then decides “I ain’t got no right ter be killin’ up marster’s niggers dat way; I’m wuff er thousan’ dollars, an’ marster ain’t got no thousan’ dollars ter was’e in dis creek.” (unpaged).

When the slave who is the object of his affections, discovers his intentions, she tells him that she was “jis’ er projeckin wid ’im” and she decided “that any Negro who took such good care of his master’s property would make a good husband” (unpaged). This exemplifies the astonishing extent to which some white authors would go to in order to rationalize slavery and make it appear as if slaves valued their master’s feelings more than their very own lives and right to freedom.

My contention is that critical race theory is particularly applicable and relevant within the context of this research study for several reasons. I believe that
several strong parallels can be made between the tenets of critical race theory and
literary phenomena. First of all, critical race theorists argue that the law is a social
construction that is not colorblind or neutral, and that functions to recreate the social
order status quo. Similarly, literary canons are also social constructions that are not
colorblind or neutral and they function to recreate the social order status quo as well.

For instance, *A Light in the Attic* (Silverstein, 1981), *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*
(Carle, 1969) and *James and the Giant Peach* (Dahl, 1961) are children's books that
most students will be exposed to throughout their schooling while books by African
American authors such as *Honey, I Love* (Greenfield, 1978), *Some of the Days of*
*Everett Anderson* (Clifton, 1970) and *Zeely* (Hamilton, 1969) often go unknown and
ignored by teachers and school curricula.

Secondly, critical race theory is committed to social justice and aims to alter
the relationship between the law and racial power. From the slave narratives of
Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass to the poetry of Langston Hughes and
Gwendolyn Brooks to the essays of James Baldwin to the novels of Richard Wright
and Toni Morrison, African American literature has focused, to a large extent, on
racial protest (Jackson, 1989). Ralph Ellison (as quoted by Graham & Singh, 1955;
1995, p. 8) stated:

I recognize no dichotomy between art and protest. Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* is, among other things, a protest against the
limitations of 19th century rationalism; *Don Quixote, Man’s Fate, Oedipus Rex, The Trial* – all these embody protest, even against the limitation of
human life itself. If social protest is antithetical to art, what then shall we
make of Goya, Dickens and Twain?
W.E.B. Du Bois and Patricia McKissack have shown a commitment to social protest and have aimed, through their writing, to alter the relationship between literature and racial power. W.E.B. Du Bois created *The Brownies' Book* during an era in which poems such as “Ten Little Niggers” were appearing in *St. Nicholas*, a reputable mainstream periodical for children (Sinnette, 1965). He wanted to provide black children with positive and realistic depictions of themselves. Similarly, Patricia McKissack began writing when she found that there were few suitable reading materials for her 8th grade students featuring African Americans. W.E.B. Du Bois and Patricia McKissack both have created African American children’s literature in order to challenge overt and subtle racism within children’s literature.

A final argument for the use of critical race theory is the utilization and significance of storytelling on the part of critical race theorists to challenge racial objectivity. One instance of storytelling within the context of children’s literature occurred in an article Andrea Pinkney (2001) wrote in *The Horn Book*, which was in response to an earlier article written by Marc Aronson. Aronson, (2001) a European American children’s book editor and author, had criticized children’s literature awards such as the Coretta Scott King Award and the Pura Belpre Award, which were created specifically to recognize the talents of authors and illustrators of color. Aronson argued that several decades ago, these awards were necessary, but that now they were no longer needed since the publishing industry was, in his opinion, becoming more diverse and because now African Americans were winning mainstream children’s literature awards. Unfortunately, Aronson’s reasoning, which I would argue is flawed, parallels the viewpoints of most white Americans who believe
that since the passage of civil rights legislation, racism is no longer a serious problem and that African Americans now have equal opportunities in all respects.

In response to Aronson, (2001) Andrea Davis Pinkney (2001), a well known African American children’s book editor and author, began her essay by describing a purported “comprehensive” survey of picture books presentation she recently attended only to discover that distinguished African American picture book illustrators such as Tom Feelings, Jerry Pinkney and the late John Steptoe were excluded in spite of the fact that all three have been awarded Caldecott Honors. Pinkney argued that the exclusion of African American illustrators was a subtle form of racism and indicative of a much larger problem within the field of children’s literature. Pinkney stated:

In his article, Mr. Aronson makes the point that the Coretta Scott King Award was more necessary in the 1960s when “there were relatively few African Americans working in the field.” But there are still only a handful of African Americans in the children’s literature arena. I have worked in publishing for sixteen years. I can count the number of black children’s book editors on fewer than my ten black fingers. (p. 537)

Pinkney (2001) agreed that an African American author, Christopher Paul Curtis, had indeed recently received a Newbery medal, but she also highlighted the fact that it had been twenty-five years since the last Newbery Medal had been awarded to an African American, Mildred Taylor. Andrea Pinkney’s article functioned as a counterstory in that she subverted Aronson’s version of events which reflected a dominant perspective. Aronson minimized racism in his article, but by sharing her personal experiences with racism in the field of children’s literature, Pinkney challenged his version of the “truth.”
Because reality is socially constructed, the “truth” as people of color perceive it is usually quite different from the “truth” as whites perceive it. Pinkney (2001) noted that most of the other attendees at the picture book presentation were white and it is likely that most of them, if not all, walked away from the presentation feeling that it was indeed “comprehensive”, objective and informative, whereas Andrea Davis Pinkney’s perspective was quite different. However, the fact is that dominant social groups have the power to validate their stories, experiences and versions of the “truth,” while negating those of social groups with less power, such as African Americans.

Stories have also been used by W.E.B. Du Bois and Patricia McKissack to challenge racial objectivity and racism. For instance, in the author’s note of her book, *Red Tail Angels: The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II*, Patricia McKissack tells a story involving an African American college student taking an American history course. The student explained to the professor that her father had been a pilot during World War II, only to be told by the professor that her father was probably just making up a story. Even after having her father send proof, which she shared with her professor, he never acknowledged her father’s participation in World War II as a fighter pilot. The fact that a college professor could be unaware of the role that African American fighter pilots played during World War II and furthermore refuse to believe it in the face of evidence is indicative of the level of racism in American society. By writing a book about the Tuskegee Airmen, Patricia McKissack challenged racist and uninformed misconceptions regarding the role of African Americans in World War II and affirmed their outstanding accomplishments.
Many of the books written by Patricia McKissack such as *Goin’ Someplace Special*, for example, could also be considered counterstories in that they subvert dominant versions of reality by presenting the differing perspectives of people of color. W.E.B. Du Bois (1935) argued that Negroes “ought to study intelligently and from their own point of view, the slave trade, slavery, emancipation, Reconstruction, and present economic development” (p. 333). In *Goin’ Someplace Special*, Patricia McKissack interprets segregation from her own point of view in that the reader is given a glimpse into the manner in which Tricia Ann, along with other African Americans within her community, negotiate their existence in a segregated society while maintaining their sense of dignity and questioning the injustice of Jim Crow laws. I contend that critical race theory, which places race at the center of critical analysis, would serve as a useful theoretical paradigm by which to highlight and explore issues related to race within the context of African American children’s literature.

*BROWNIES’ BOOK MAGAZINE*

In this section I provide a synopsis of research studies (Sinnette, 1965; Roberson & Hill, 1989, Johnson, 1990 and Lee, 2000) that have also focused on this magazine. A more thorough description and analysis of *The Brownies’ Book* will be provided in chapter four. Elinor Sinnette (1965), a former New York children’s librarian, wrote the pioneering, contemporary article on the significance of *The Brownies’ Book*, labeling it a “pioneer publication for children.” In her article, Sinnette critiques *St. Nicholas*, a mainstream children’s periodical publication during the existence of *The Brownies’ Book*, for its negative and racist portrayals of African
Americans. Sinnette also compares its handling and reporting of current events and argues that *The Brownies’ Book* exhibited a “more mature attitude.” She also discussed the concern of W.E.B. Du Bois, Jessie Fauset and Augustus Dill in regard to the education of black children and the importance of reading materials that accurately reflected their lives and experiences. Sinnette refocused modern attention on *The Brownies’ Book* and its significance as a literary publication for children.

Courtney Vaughn-Roberson and Brenda Hill (1989) conducted a content analysis of *The Brownies’ Book* and compared it with *Ebony Jr.*, a periodical published for black children primarily from 1979 through 1985. The study focused upon the following seven themes, which were present in both periodicals: “pride in African and Afro-American heritage,” “the importance of Afro-American unity,” “the need for class and racial consciousness,” the diasporic nature of racial awareness,” the belief in the benefits of basic values and education,” “the focus on family loyalty”, and “the need for Afro-American males and females alike to command respect” (p. 497). The authors cited examples of the aforementioned themes from both periodicals and argued the importance and necessity of literature in the education of black children.

Dianne Johnson (1990) in her content analysis of *The Brownies’ Book* noted instances of class and color bias on the part of the magazine’s creators; however she argues that these problematic aspects don’t diminish the importance of this publication. Johnson contends that this magazine addressed the unique needs of African American children and impacted writers such as Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps who would later write for children. According to Johnson:
The ultimate importance of *The Brownies’ Book* rests in its articulation of the rationale and objectives at the foundations of the very creation of Black children’s literature. It is not an overstatement to say that the very existence of *The Brownies’ Book* precipitated the development of the body of work now called African American children’s literature. (p. 30-37)

Lenetta Lee (2000) conducted a research study of *The Brownies’ Book* in which she examined it from an Africalogical perspective. According to Lee (2000), “the Africalogical method of study calls for the researcher to place Africa and Africans at the center of the analysis” (p. 9). Lee also explored the periodical’s potential to serve as a template for subsequent literature for African American children as well as the ideologies of W.E.B. Du Bois and Jessie Fauset, which heavily impacted *The Brownies’ Book*. When examining *The Brownies’ Book* from an Africalogical perspective, Lee found that it portrayed African characters as beautiful people who were fully competent of making their own decisions. Lee also contends that Du Bois and *The Crisis* staff brought the periodical “full circle in the African tradition” by incorporating historical figures such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Sojourner Truth along with children who were alive at the time and achieving great things (p. 152).

**PATRICIA MCKISSACK**

In this section I address the research projects involving Patricia McKissack and why this research study is unique and worthwhile. In his article, “Reading Children’s Literature Multiculturally”, Daniel Hade (1997) addresses the sociopolitical messages that Patricia McKissack has imbedded within her book, *Flossie and the Fox*, a story about a young girl who is sent on an errand by her
grandmother to deliver a basket of eggs. Along the way Flossie encounters a fox that is determined to steal them from her. According to Hade, McKissack “uses race, class and gender to produce political satire of the powerful” (p. 120). Flossie is black, female and poor, all of which are attributes associated with weakness. However, Flossie is fully in control of the situation and able to outsmart the fox. The fox is male, speaks “King’s English” while Flossie is female and speaks black vernacular, a language which is generally not held in the same regard as “standard” English. Flossie tells the fox that she will not be afraid of him until he can prove to her that he is a fox, which makes him angry. It could be argued that McKissack, through Flossie, challenges white, male dominance by lifting Flossie from “victim to agent” (p. 121).

Irene Owens (2000) focused her dissertation study on factors that influence the following African American, female children’s book authors: Lucille Clifton, Pat Cummings, Patricia McKissack and Irene Smalls. Owens wanted to examine the philosophies of these writers and the manner in which their philosophies impacted their writing for children. Owens found that truth and determination were two key elements in their reasons for writing children’s books and they wanted to make sure that African Americans don’t define themselves by “traditional Eurocentric images” (p. 183). Disseminating information about African American history was another prevalent theme as well. The authors also revealed that their stories were strongly influenced by their earliest memories and interactions with family members. Patricia McKissack mentioned the influence of the strong storytelling tradition with her family.
No studies that I have encountered related to African American children’s literature thus far have examined the relationship between *The Brownies’ Book* and contemporary African American children’s literature. The goal of this research project was to determine whether there is continuity between the stated goals and underlying stance of *The Brownie’s Book* and those of contemporary African American children’s literature as exemplified by the work of Patricia McKissack. This research project explored how African American children’s literature, from *The Brownies’ Book* up to present day children’s literature by contemporary writer Patricia McKissack has changed in some ways and in other ways remained steadfast in terms of its themes and underlying goals and assumptions.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this research study was to explore, through the lens of critical race theory, whether there is continuity between the stated goals and underlying stance of The Brownies’ Book and those of contemporary African American children’s literature as exemplified by the work of Patricia McKissack. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the areas of continuity between the critically important historical texts published in The Brownies’ Book and the prominent modern texts written by Patricia McKissack?

   • What common themes do both texts embrace?
   • What ideological stances do they have in common?
   • What goals and values do they communicate?

2. What are the areas of divergence between the texts published in The Brownies’ Book and those written by Patricia McKissack?

   • What are the differences in themes?
   • What are the differences in ideological stances?
   • How do goals and values diverge?

3. To what extent do Patricia McKissack’s texts appear to embrace the major themes within The Brownies’ Book?
4. What are Patricia McKissack’s unique contributions to the field of children’s literature that add to or modify the major themes within *The Brownies’ Book*?

**DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY**

This research study was composed of two parts. The first part consisted of a re-examination and content analysis of *The Brownies’ Book* in order to elaborate on and provide support for the major themes that Violet Harris discovered in her definitive study of this publication. Harris (1986) completed a content analysis of all twenty-four issues of *The Brownies’ Book* and generated the following major themes: “race pride, duty and allegiance to the race, intelligent blacks, beautiful blacks, moderation, political and social activism, knowledge of and respect for African culture and the inculcation of specific values such as kindness, truthfulness, egalitarianism and love” (p. 207). The first part of the study also included the analysis of issues of *St. Nicholas Magazine* for comparison with *The Brownies’ Book*. The second part of the study consisted of a content analysis of children’s literature written by Patricia McKissack as well as other relevant documents. This part of the research study entailed the reading and rereading of many children’s books by Patricia McKissack and scholarly publications such as dissertations and articles.

Below is a time line that details the steps that I took during this research study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>Content analysis of <em>The Brownies’ Book</em> (June, August and December issues from 1920 and 1921) in order to support and confirm Harris’ eight themes and to uncover any additional ones. Examination of issues of <em>St. Nicholas Magazine</em> that were published in 1919, 1920 and 1921.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. Weeks 1-8</td>
<td>Interview Patricia McKissack by telephone (Sept. 27th @ 10:00 a.m.), transcribe the interview and begin the analysis of it. Also begin reading many of Patricia McKissack’s children’s books and relevant documents such as articles and dissertations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. Weeks 17-24</td>
<td>Continue reading many of Patricia McKissack’s children’s books in order to develop the initial categories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.-Feb. Weeks 18-32</td>
<td>Select the 15 books by Patricia McKissack and begin conducting the content analysis of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March-April Weeks 32-40</td>
<td>Continue the content analysis of the 15 selected books by Patricia McKissack. Also begin the comparison of the results of TBB’s analysis with the analysis of Patricia McKissack’s children’s books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-June Weeks 41-48</td>
<td>Complete the comparison of the results of TBB’s analysis and the analysis of Patricia McKissack’s children’s books. Also complete the member check with Patricia McKissack and meet with a debriefer to determine the reliability of data categorization procedures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 3.1**
METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research was particularly appropriate for this study since it enables researchers to provide rich, detailed descriptions of people, places, events and phenomena such as children’s literature. Content analysis is an important tool that qualitative researchers utilize in order to analyze and interpret non-numerical data. In *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, Krippendorf (1980) defines content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context” (p. 21). Content analysis allows for the interpretation of documents such as children’s books. In order to ground my interpretations to the data, I noted the frequency of categories and key ideas within sources of data. For example, I found that during the analysis of the telephone interview with Patricia McKissack she stated at least six times that African Americans have their own stories to tell. By tallying up the number of times that she made similar statements, I was able to provide support for the assertion that telling stories from a black frame of reference is a key theme within Patricia McKissack’s children’s literature.

Content analysis enables researchers to determine the presence of key themes, concepts and ideas within sources of data. The main sources of data in this study included issues of *The Brownies’ Book*, children’s literature written by Patricia McKissack, journal articles relating to Patricia McKissack’s books and the transcript of a telephone interview with Patricia McKissack. On the morning of Friday, September 27, 2002, Patricia McKissack answered questions (see Appendix B) and spoke for approximately an hour about her goals and beliefs regarding children’s
literature. The interview was then transcribed, categorized and analyzed for its major themes, issues and ideologies.

**DATA COLLECTION**

In order to obtain a representative sampling of *The Brownies' Book* for content analysis, I selected every fourth issue of the twenty-four issues that were published. Therefore, I analyzed the April, August and December issues from 1920 and 1921. As I read and reread these six issues, I looked for affirming evidence of the eight themes that Harris discovered and I noted recurring themes and underlying assumptions within the publication that were not addressed by Harris such as an emphasis on books and reading. I also read issues of *St Nicholas Magazine* that were published in the years 1919, 1920 and 1921. These issues were examined with the purpose of obtaining examples of the manner in which African Americans were depicted in mainstream children’s literature prior to and during the existence of *The Brownies' Book*.

In order to obtain a representative sampling of the books by Patricia McKissack, I examined all of the books that focus on African Americans and categorized them by genre. Patricia McKissack has written books in the following genres: biographies, non-fiction, historical fiction and literary folktales, however, the majority of the books were either in the genres of biography or non-fiction. The books selected for content analysis were chosen based on expert opinion, book reviews and dates of publication so as to ensure that they would span Patricia McKissack’s career as a children’s book author. For example, *Paul Laurence Dunbar: A Poet to Remember*
(McKissack, 1984) was McKissack’s first book while *Goin’ Someplace Special* (McKissack, 2001) is one of her most recent publications.

**Biographies**


**Non-Fiction**

1. *Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters* (1994)*

**Literary Folk Tales**


**Historical Fiction**


The asterisk indicates that the book was written in collaboration with her husband, Fredrick McKissack.
DATA ANALYSIS

Bruce Berg (2001), a scholar of qualitative research methodology, states “the categories researchers use in a content analysis can be determined inductively” and that “an inductive approach begins with the researchers “immersing” themselves in the documents… in order to identify the dimensions or themes that seem meaningful to the producers of each message” (p. 245). Upon reading the abovementioned documents, I generated initial categories based on pervasive, recurring ideas that were apparent in Patricia McKissack’s children’s books. These categories were created in order to guide analysis and interpretation of documents related to Patricia McKissack and to generate interview questions for her as well. (See Appendix A). According to Dey (1993), also a scholar of qualitative research methodology (1993), “The categories that we create become the basis for organizing and conceptualizing our data. Categorizing is therefore a crucial element in the process of analysis” (p. 112). The initial categories were as follows: African American historical figures, attitudes toward black vernacular, community/family relationships and strong black females. Dey also contends that it is important to create a “set of criteria in terms of which we can decide when and where to assign the category to the data” (p. 102). Brief descriptions of the criteria for the categories are listed below.

- **African American Historical Figures** – Any passages that dealt with African Americans, famous or otherwise, who have played a significant role in shaping American history or achieved outstanding accomplishments were placed within this category. For instance, in *Black Hands, White Sails The Story of African American Whalers*, the following passage was labeled in this manner:
Lewis Temple, for example, was an African-American blacksmith who made a very important contribution to the whaling industry... he often heard the whalingmen talking about how easily their harpoons pulled out of the whale once it had been struck. Temple developed a “toggle” harpoon with barbs that stuck into the whale’s body and wouldn’t pull out easily. Temple changed the design of the harpoon forever. (p. 56)

• **Attitudes Towards Black English** – Passages that displayed either a positive or negative attitude towards Black English were deemed relevant. For instance, the following passage from *Color Me Dark: The Diary of Nellie Lee Love* (McKissack, 2000) was categorized in this respect:

> She [Mama] insists that Erma Jean and I [Nellie] use perfect English. Our verbs must agree with our subjects. And we can’t slur our words or drop the g’s off the “ings” ... “Speak the king’s English,” Mama says when we try to get away with it sometimes. I want to ask her so bad, “Who is the king?” (p. 54)

• **Family/Community Relationships** – Passages were considered to be relevant in this respect if they expressed the importance of and a respect for family and community along with the necessity of placing group interests above individual ones. Passages were categorized in this respect if they included any of the following behaviors: accepting responsibility for family and community, maintaining extended family relationships, showing respect for elders, assuming responsibility for issues affecting family and community members and taking part in community institutions such as the black church and social and political organizations like the NAACP (Carmichael, 2000). For example, the following passage from *Color Me Dark: The Diary of Nellie Lee Love* was deemed relevant:

> Erma Jean says I should write about what is important to me or interests me. Well, that’s not so hard. My family is first. Then after that, everything else interests me. I’m curious about all kinds of things from elephants to mosquitoes. (p. 4)
• **Strong Black Females** - Passages that dealt with women being depicted as challenging patriarchal hierarchies, gender stereotypes and taking an active role in challenging the social order status quo were considered to be relevant in terms of “strong black females”. For example, the following passage from the short story entitled “A Home Run for Beth Ann” (McKissack, 1997) was categorized in this respect:

> The idea of cooking wasn’t something that interested Beth Ann. Since baseball had come into her life, she had been hardly able to think of anything else. On her eighth birthday during the summer, she had gone to see the Kansas City Monarchs play against the Birmingham Black Barons. For months now, all she’d been able to think about was hitting, scoring runs, and pitching — hard and fast just like the great Satchel Paige. (p. 46)

This passage is an example of the fact that on a few occasions, passages could be categorized in multiple ways in that it challenges gender stereotypes while simultaneously incorporating African American history related to the Negro baseball leagues and Satchel Paige.

A more in-depth analysis of the interview with Patricia McKissack and her children’s literature generated the following additional categories: emancipatory literacy, racial activism challenges to classism and challenging dominant perspectives via storytelling.

• **Emancipatory Literacy** - This category was deemed relevant for passages that stressed the importance of reading and the connection between literacy and freedom.

For example, the following passage from *A Picture of Freedom: The Diary of Clotee, a Slave Girl* (McKissack, 1997) is a case in point here.

> Words got magic. Every time I read or write a word it puts a picture in my head…. Ma’ Henley thinks he owns everything here at Belmont, but he
don’t own all of me – not really. I know, he can tell me to come and I got to come… But I done learned that he can’t tell me what to think – and feel– and know. He look at me every day but he can’t see what’s in my head. (p. 5)

**Racial Activism** – Passages that address a variety of ways in which blacks question, challenge racism and resist their oppressors were considered to be relevant. For example, in *Goin ’Someplace Special* (McKissack, 2001), Tricia Ann in the following passage, demonstrates her resistance to unfair Jim Crow laws:

The girl [Tricia Ann] squared her shoulders, walked to the back, and took a seat behind the Jim Crow sign that said COLORED SECTION. Tricia Ann had seen such signs all her life. She recalled the first time she and Mama Frances had taken this bus ride, and her grandmother had told her, “Those signs can tell us where to sit, but they can’t tell us what to think.” “I’m gon’ think about Someplace Special.” Tricia Ann said to herself and turned to look out the window. (unpaged)

- **Challenges to Classism** – Passages that highlighted class biases and challenged negative stereotypes of working class people were deemed relevant. For example in *Color Me Dark: The Diary of Nellie Lee Love* (McKissack, 2000), while describing the climate of Chicago around the turn of the 20th century, Patricia McKissack writes:

Some well established white families wanted nothing to do with poor whites. And, ironically, some upper-class blacks had the same attitude towards poor blacks.…. There was far less overt racism than in the South. But there was plenty of class bias. The social stratification in Chicago was rigid and unmoving, especially within the black community, where newcomers were viewed as “spoilers” who brought disgrace on the race with their lack of culture and sophistication. The “Black Elite”, usually mulattoes who were wealthy and well-educated, distanced themselves from the masses by retreating into restricted private social clubs and organizations where members were handpicked. (p. 196-197)

- **Challenging Dominant Perspectives Via Storytelling** – Passages were categorized in this respect if they subverted the perspectives of whites by offering a contrasting perspective from blacks on a similar issue. For example, in the book *African–
American Inventors (McKissack & McKissack, 1994), the following passage was selected as being representative of challenging dominant perspectives via storytelling:

[In 1903] a Maryland politician claimed in a speech that the “Negro was not entitled to vote because he has never evidenced sufficient capacity to justify such a privilege, because not one black person has ever yet reached the dignity of an inventor.” Even as this man spoke, Granville T. Woods, a mechanical engineer, and Lewis H. Latimer, an electrical draftsman, both African-American inventors, were actively involved in developing improvements to the electric light bulb (with Thomas Edison) and the telephone. (p. 9–10)

As I read the books, I noted and marked passages based on their relevance to the aforementioned categories. After reading the books several times, I filled out a literary analysis sheet for each one (See Appendix B). In order to ensure that my analysis was thorough and in–depth, each time I read a book, I set aside two categories in particular to guide my readings. So for example, the first time I read Color Me Dark: The Diary of Nellie Lee Love (McKissack, 2000), I was looking for references to African American historical figures and attitudes towards black vernacular, whereas during the second reading of the same book, my analysis was guided by references to community and family relationships and strong black females. During these rereadings, I also noted whether new categories appeared to be emerging within the fifteen books that I chose for the purposes of this research study. I anticipated that further analysis of these categories would yield themes that could be compared with the eight themes Violet Harris (1986) discovered in The Brownies’ Book.
ESTABLISHING TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Janesick (2000), “qualitative researchers accept the fact that research is ideologically driven. There is no value-free or bias-free design” (p. 385). I position myself as a young, middle-class, African American female and I have no qualms about stating my personal belief that the country in which we live is fundamentally racist and that race matters within the context of African American children’s literature. It is from this position that I am conducting this research study and I make no claims of objectivity in that respect. I would argue that all research is subjective in that researchers have a vested interest in their scholarship and a perspective from which they operate, even if the perspective isn’t directly stated. Because I embrace a particular theoretical standpoint, this should in no way negate the significance of my research findings.

Four methods to establish trustworthiness were utilized in this study. The first was prolonged engagement with the sources of data. This process involved intensive readings and re-readings of the literature over a period of several months (see timeline). For example, the selected picture books and novels written by Patricia McKissack were reread several times over a period of four months so that I could familiarize myself with them and make observations that I may not have been able to make had I only read the books once. For example, during my initial reading of McKissack’s book, *Mirandy and Brother Wind* (McKissack, 1988), I did not consider this book to be protest literature. However after reading an article by cultural critic and poet, June Jordan (1974) in which she argued against the dichotomizing of protest literature and stated that “affirmation of Black values and lifestyle within the
American context is, indeed, an act of protest” (p. 87), I began to reconsider my initial interpretation of this book during later rereadings.

The second method was to triangulate the data sources in order to support my interpretations. For instance, if I wanted to assert that in the book, Flossie and the Fox, Patricia McKissack challenges the negative associations associated with black English and those who speak it, I could utilize book reviews from publications such as Horn Book and School Library Journal, scholarly articles such as “Flossie Ebonics: Subtle Sociolinguistic Messages in Flossie and the Fox” by Milner (1997) as well as the following comments made by Patricia McKissack: “I had to play with the language of the fox, allowing him to use a very prim and proper over-exaggerated language, and then Flossie used the dialect” (as quoted by Owens, 2000, p. 137).

Third, in order to determine the reliability of the criteria for placing data into the aforementioned categories, I asked a doctoral candidate specializing in children’s literature to serve as a peer debriefer. This doctoral student was selected based on her expertise in African American children’s literature and her knowledge of qualitative research methodology. Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln (1989), renowned scholars of qualitative research methodology define peer debriefing as “The process of engaging, with a disinterested peer, in extended and extensive discussions of one’s findings, conclusions, tentative analyses, and, occasionally, field stresses” with the intention of trying out “the findings with someone who has no contractual interest in the situation” (p. 237). This student was given the descriptive criteria for the aforementioned categories and five pages of a children’s book written by Patricia McKissack to categorize. I had meetings with this student in order to compare her categorization of
passages with my own. Because of the nature of human interpretation, it would be unreasonable to expect that she and I would have categorized all five pages in the exact same manner; instead the purpose of this task was to determine if my descriptions for categorizing data were clear or needed to be refined or revised.

A final method for establishing trustworthiness was to conduct a member check by having Patricia McKissack provide feedback via e-mail regarding my interpretations about the major themes and ideologies present within her children’s books. According to Guba and Lincoln, (1989) member check refers to:

The process of testing hypotheses, data, preliminary categories, and interpretations with members of the stakeholding groups from whom the original constructions were collected... If the evaluator wants to establish that the multiple realities he or she presents are those that stakeholders have provided, the most certain test is verifying those multiple constructions with those who provided them. (p. 238-239)

Upon sharing my major findings with Patricia McKissack she responded:

What you have written is right on target. May I add one more thing to what you have written about my work? It is important to me. One of my first books was MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. A MAN TO REMEMBER. (Children’s Press 1982). Although I grew up during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, it wasn’t until I researched the life of King that I realized the importance of non-violence. At the root of all my books is my belief in the power of non-violence. Flossie uses wit, not a gun as does A. Philip Randolph [who] uses commitment and courage to defeat the Pullman Company. Look at my work with this in mind, and you’ll see it there, hidden between the lines in the white spaces. (personal communication, 2003)

Member checks are considered to be one of the most important means by which to establish trustworthiness.
CHAPTER 4

THE BROWNIES’ BOOK

This chapter presents an account of significant sociological factors, such as the great migration, the Harlem renaissance and the emergence of a black intelligentsia, which impacted The Brownies’ Book and the era in which it was published. It offers a description of The Brownies’ Book, its objectives and Violet Harris’ definitive study of this periodical. The theory of the selective tradition, which was the theoretical framework in Harris’ study, and its connection to critical race theory will also be explained. Lastly, this chapter provides a description of Harris’ methodology, major themes she discovered within The Brownies’ Book and additional findings which I uncovered during my analysis of this periodical.

GREAT MIGRATION

The great migration refers to the mass exodus in the early twentieth century of hundreds of thousands of African Americans from the rural South to Northern cities such as Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, and New York City. African Americans moved to these cities in search of greater economic, social, and political freedom. In his book, The New Negro, Alain Locke (1933) wrote:

The tide of Negro migration, northward and city-ward, is not to be fully explained as a blind flood started by the demands of a war industry coupled with the shutting off of foreign migration, or by the pressure of poor crops coupled with increased social terrorism in certain sections of the South and Southwest. Neither labor demand, the boll weevil nor the Ku Klux Klan is a basic factor, however contributory any or all of them
may have been. The wash and rush of this human tide on the beach line of the northern city centers is to be explained primarily in terms of a new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom, of a spirit to seize, even in the face of an extortionate and heavy toll, a chance for the improvement of conditions… Take Harlem as an instance of this. Here in Manhattan is not merely the largest Negro community in the world, but the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life. It has attracted… the man from the city and the man from the town and village; the peasant, the student, the business man, the professional man, artist, poet, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social outcast. Each group has come with its own separate motives and for its own special ends, but their greatest experience has been the finding of one another. Proscription and prejudice have thrown these dissimilar elements into a common area of contact and interaction (p. 6)

The convergence of African-American artists, entertainers, intellectuals, musicians and writers played a significant role in the Harlem Renaissance.

**HARLEM RENAISSANCE**

Although historians can’t agree on exact dates, the Harlem Renaissance, also known as the New Negro Movement, took place sometime between 1916 and 1940 (Haskins, 1996). In his book, *The Harlem Renaissance*, Steven Watson, a cultural historian, (1995) states:

The Harlem Renaissance was primarily a literary and intellectual movement composed of a generation of black writers born around the turn of the century. Among its best known figures were Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and Jean Toomer. They were not the first noteworthy black writers in America—for novelists Charles Waddell Chesnutt and James Weldon Johnson and dialect poet Paul Laurence Dunbar preceded them—but these younger writers constituted the first self-conscious black literary constellation in American history. (p. 9)

Similarly, in his book, *Black Manhattan*, James Weldon Johnson (1930) wrote:

Until this decade of literary renaissance, Negro writers had been less successful in fiction than in any other field they had tried. They had to their credit two remarkable autobiographies, several good historical words, some splendid collections of essays, a still larger number of
collections of good poetry, and a great mass of volumes of polemical
discussion on the race question. One could look back to only one good
writer of fiction, Charles W. Chesnut. But now, and for the first time, the
output of fiction exceeded that of poetry. Within the past ten years more
fiction has been published by Negro writers than had been brought out by
them in the preceding two hundred and fifty years. And every bit of this
fiction—that is, every bit that has been published in a way calculated to
reach the general public—has been written by writers of the Harlem
group. (p. 275)

Many of the same themes that were dealt with in the fiction written during the
Harlem Renaissance were also addressed within *The Brownies' Book*. Sterling Brown,
a literary critic, noted five key themes that permeated the movement: "1) Africa as a
source of race pride, 2) black American heroes, 3) racial political propaganda, 4) the
black folk tradition, and 5) candid self-revelation" (as quoted by Watson, 1995, p. 9).
Considering the fact that *The Brownies' Book* was under the editorial direction of key
Harlem Renaissance figures, W.E.B. Du Bois and Jessie Fauset, it is not surprising that
*The Brownies' Book* would embrace many of these same themes.

W.E.B. Du Bois played an important role in the Harlem Renaissance by
showcasing the talents of prominent writers such as Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen
and Claude McKay in *The Crisis*. *The Crisis* was initially published in 1910 and by
1920 had reached a circulation of 100,000, which included readers in Europe, Asia
and Africa. Du Bois nurtured the talents of prominent authors by publishing their
writings and penning book reviews. For example, in July of 1929, Du Bois offered a
glowing review of *Passing* (Larsen, 1928). He wrote:

"Nella Larsen’s *Passing* is one of the finest novels of the year... Nella
Larsen is learning how to write and acquiring style, and she is doing it very
simply and clearly,... If the American Negro renaissance gives us many
more books like this, with its sincerity, its simplicity and charm, we can soon
with equanimity drop the word “Negro.” Meantime, your job is clear. Buy
the book. (p. 254; 249)"
Du Bois believed that literature could serve as an important tool for social propaganda. Similarly, Watson (1995) argued “The most effective strategy for race-building depended on art and literature, so a dual mission was thrust upon these [Harlem Renaissance] writers: they were simultaneously charged with creating art and bolstering the image of their race” (p. 9). Du Bois was cognizant of the power of literature and therefore utilized his position as editor of *The Crisis* to support and promote the work of talented black writers.

Like W.E.B. Du Bois, Jessie Fauset also played a major role in the Harlem Renaissance. Fauset penned three novels during the Harlem Renaissance and served as literary editor of *The Crisis*. Jessie Fauset was considered by Langston Hughes to be one of the midwives of the Harlem Renaissance. She was gifted in her ability to recognize literary talent and she encouraged and helped to nurture gifted Harlem Renaissance writers such as Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer and Countee Cullen. Du Bois, a Harvard graduate, and Fauset, a graduate of Cornell University and a Phi Beta Kappa, were representative of an African–American intelligentsia that was in existence during the Harlem Renaissance.

**BLACK INTELLIGENTSIA**

Harris (1990) states:

> The expansion of the new literary tradition awaited the development of an educated African American middle class which demanded culturally authentic literature for African American children. Enhancement of the new tradition also necessitated the emergence of an educated group of persons interested in writing as a vocation or avocation (p. 545)

During the Harlem Renaissance there was certainly an educated African–American middle class which demanded culturally authentic literature for African–American
children. Educated African Americans, like W.E.B. Du Bois and Jessie Fauset, wanted to create suitable reading materials for “children of the sun” that countered negative and demeaning images of themselves that they were likely to find in mainstream children’s literature. For example, Fauset saw a need for more biographies of famous Blacks. Fauset (as quoted by Starkey, 1932, p. 220) stated:

> No part of Negro literature needs more building up than biography. It is urgent that ambitious Negro youth be able to read of the achievements of their race. When I was a child I used to puzzle my head ruefully over the fact that in school we studied the lives of only great white people. I took it that there simply have been no great Negroes, and I was amazed when as I grew older, I found there were. It is a pity that Negro children should be permitted to suffer from that delusion at all. There should be a sort of Plutarch’s Lives of the Negro race. Some day perhaps, I shall get around to writing it.

The Brownies’ Book served as a much needed addition to the field of children’s literature. Up until and even during its publication, African Americans were typically being depicted in demeaning and stereotypical ways in mainstream children’s literature such as The Story of Little Black Sambo (Bannerman, 1899) and St. Nicholas Magazine, a mainstream children’s periodical. W.E.B. Du Bois was fully aware of the power of children’s literature and of the complexities involved in raising emotionally healthy African American children in a racist society. Therefore, he decided to publish a magazine designed especially for the “children of the sun.”

THE BROWNIES’ BOOK AND ITS OBJECTIVES

The Brownies’ Book was published monthly for two years with Jessie Fauset serving as literary editor. It contained news pieces, games, fiction, columns and folk tales that aimed to educate black children. Several well known Harlem Renaissance literary figures such as Langston Hughes and Nella Larsen, submitted selections to
The Brownies’ Book (Johnson-Feelings, 1996). In describing The Brownies’ Book, Du Bois (1919) wrote: “It will be a thing of Joy and Beauty, dealing in Happiness, Laughter and Emulation.” With the publication of this magazine, Du Bois and members of the Crisis staff hoped to entertain “Kiddies from Six to Sixteen” and simultaneously achieve the following objectives:

1. To make colored children realize that being colored is a normal, beautiful thing;

2. To make them familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race;

3. To make them know that other colored children have grown into useful, famous persons;

4. To teach them delicately, a code of honor and actions in their relations with white children;

5. To turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition and love of their own homes and companions;

6. To point out the best amusements and joys and worthwhile things of life;

7. To inspire them for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifices. (p. 286)

Below I elaborate briefly on each of the seven objectives:

1. To make “colored” children realize that being ‘colored’ is a normal, beautiful thing.

Du Bois realized that the exclusion of African Americans from children’s literature or the inclusion of them with distorted physical features, such as large, protruding eyes, would likely make African American children feel that being ‘colored’ was neither
normal nor beautiful. Broderick (1973) conducted a content analysis of fiction for children featuring African Americans published between 1827 and 1967 and found that blacks were generally depicted as unattractive via the text and illustrations. Therefore, it is understandable that Du Bois would feel it necessary to emphasize the beauty and normalcy of being ‘colored.’

2. To make them familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race.

Du Bois was also cognizant of the fact that the achievements and accomplishments of African Americans were not likely to appear in textbooks or reading materials and that black children needed to learn that their ancestors have played a major role in the development of the United States. For this reason, a number of biographies of famous African Americans such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman and Benjamin Banneker were frequently included in *The Brownies' Book.* Du Bois realized that learning about the accomplishments of African Americans would be inspiring to black children.

3. To make them know that other colored children have grown into useful, famous persons.

By highlighting the accomplishments of famous and useful African Americans, African American children could be imbued with a sense of racial pride. They could also receive the message that they too were capable of achieving great things.

4. To teach them delicately a code of honor and action in their relations with white children.
Du Bois believed that black children must be instructed on how to handle racial
issues from an early age since they were likely to be affected by racism in all facets of
their lives. In his book, *Darkwater*, Du Bois (1920; 1969) wrote:

The truth lies between extremes. It is wrong to introduce the child to race
consciousness prematurely; it is dangerous to let that consciousness grow
spontaneously without intelligent guidance.... The day will dawn when
mother must explain gently but clearly why the little girls next door do
not want to play with “niggers”; what the real cause is of the teachers’
unsympathetic attitude; and how people may ride in the backs of street
cars and the smoker end of trains and still be people, honest high-minded
souls. (p. 205)

In her analysis of fiction, Broderick (1973) also noted that blacks were generally
depicted as being dependent upon whites whereas Du Bois encouraged black
children to work towards solving their own problems.

5. To turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition and love of their
homes and companions.

Du Bois attempted to encourage black children to emulate blacks like Benjamin
Banneker and Harriet Tubman and to strive to match their accomplishments in spite
of the racial difficulties that they would face. He wanted black children to channel
the hurts and resentments that they were most certain to experience in a positive
manner.

6. To point out the best amusements and joys and worthwhile things in life.

Du Bois wanted to entertain black children and provide them with examples of
activities for them to participate in such as music lessons, reading “classic” pieces of
literature and learning to speak foreign languages.
To inspire them to prepare for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of 
sacrifice.

Du Bois coined the term “talented tenth” to describe the small portion of elite, black 
intellectuals whose duty he felt it was to uplift the race. It is no surprise therefore that 
he would encourage young black children to prepare for careers and work towards 
helping the black race.

**SELECTIVE TRADITION**

To date, the most thorough, scholarly study of *The Brownies Book* is the 
dissertation produced by Violet Harris, a prominent scholar of African-American 
children’s literature. Because of the pioneering contribution of the Violet Harris 
study, it served as a framework for comparison with the themes that I discovered 
within the children’s literature of Patricia McKissack. The purpose of Violet Harris’ 
(1986) research study was to determine whether or not *The Brownies’ Book*
challenged the selective tradition in children’s literature. The theoretical perspective 
undergirding Harris research study was Williams’ (1977) concept of the selective 
tradition. Williams (1977) defined the selective tradition “as an intentionally 
selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully 
operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification” (p. 115).

Williams contended that “Most versions of ‘tradition’ can be shown to be radically 
selective,” and that “certain meanings and practices are selected for emphasis and 
certain other meanings and practices are neglected or excluded” (p. 115). In other 
words, the selective tradition refers to the process by which certain images and 
characterizations are selected and validated over others even though these images
may be inauthentic. Two examples that illustrate the manner in which the selective tradition operates are the image of the welfare queen and Abraham Lincoln.

In her book, *The Color of Welfare*, sociologist Jill Quadagno writes:

> When David Duke, former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard, was elected to the Louisiana State House of Representatives, he declared, “This isn’t a victory for me, it is a victory for those who . . . choose to work hard rather than abuse welfare.” Unspoken but understood was that the hard workers were white, the welfare abusers African American. As president, one of Ronald Reagan’s favorite anecdotes was the story of a Chicago welfare queen with “80 names, 30 addresses, 12 social security cards and a tax-free income of over 150,000.” (p. v)

Quadagno utilizes the aforementioned examples featuring David Duke and former President Ronald Reagan in order to demonstrate the manner in which racism is encoded into their discourse about welfare recipients. In spite of popular opinion, which is strongly impacted by powerful white men such as Duke and Reagan, the average person on welfare is white, not black, has two or three children as opposed to seven or eight and only remains on welfare for about two and a half years (Feagin & Vera, 1995). Yet, the image of the welfare queen as a black woman with scores of children who refuses to work is selectively reinforced and remains persistent. A similar phenomenon takes place in regard to the image of Abraham Lincoln.

> European American historians have generally depicted Abraham Lincoln as “the great emancipator”, a hater of slavery, a lover of humorous stories and a “folksy, down-to-earth attorney whose practice consisted largely of participation in petty civil suits” (Garrison, 1993, p. 44). These images persist and remain deeply imbedded within the psyche of many Americans despite historical documents which indicate that Lincoln deliberately crafted the Emancipation Proclamation so that it didn’t free
slaves. In regard to the Emancipation Proclamation, renowned social historian Lerone Bennett (1999) states:

What Lincoln did—and it was so clever that we ought to stop calling him honest Abe—was to “free” slaves in Confederate-held territory where he couldn’t free them and to leave them in slavery in Union-held territory where he could have freed them. (p. 7-8)

Contrary to popular opinion, it was the 15th Amendment, not the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed blacks.

Lincoln has been depicted as a hater of slavery, yet he once served as counsel for a slaveholder and endorsed the infamous Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. In fact, according to Bennett (1999), Lincoln encouraged white citizens to support the Fugitive Slave Act by going out into the streets to help capture runaway slaves. It is incomprehensible, at least to this author, how anyone who supposedly hated slavery could defend such a shameful law. Lincoln has been considered as the merriest and most cheerful of presidents who enjoyed telling stories, yet most Americans don’t know that he also enjoyed telling “nigger jokes,” many of which poked fun at the dialect and intellect of African Americans. Lastly, in spite of his image as a “folksy, down-to-earth attorney,” Lincoln was one of the highest paid attorneys in the state of Illinois and at one point was earning a salary which was more than three times that of the governor of Illinois (Garrison, 1993). Although there have been scholars, such as Lerone Bennett and Thomas DiLorenzo (2002) who have written books that challenge these myths, the dominant image of Abraham Lincoln remains largely intact.
This dominant image is pervasive within the context of children’s literature as well. For example, in his Newbery Medal winning book, *Lincoln: A Photobiography*, Russell Freedman, a prominent author of non-fiction, projects the mythologized image of Lincoln. In his 100 plus page book, Freedman, for example, fails to mention the fact that Lincoln used the word “nigger” habitually in private and in public, voted for Jim Crow legislation as an Illinois senator, endorsed the Fugitive Slave Act and advocated the deportation of blacks. An interesting question to consider would be whether or not Freedman’s book would have been awarded the Newbery Medal, had he mentioned any of the abovementioned facts. Similarly, a recently published nonfiction book entitled *Abraham Lincoln* (Cohn & Schmidt, 2002) generated controversy in the field of children’s literature due to the fact that it was incorrect in stating that “After nearly two years of war, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring all slaves free” (unpaged). In an article in the November/December 2002 issue of *The Horn Book*, the editor, Roger Sutton acknowledged this error and yet in the January/February 2003 issue of this same publication, *Abraham Lincoln* was selected as one of the best books of 2002 and placed on the “Horn Book Fanfare List.”

Considering the fact that one of the most basic criteria for evaluating nonfiction is accuracy of information, it appears unusual that this book, out of the thousands that were published in 2002, would have been chosen. However, when applying the theory of the selective tradition, it is understandable that this book was chosen because it projects the mythologized image of Abraham Lincoln as “the great emancipator” even though the editor of the publication acknowledged that this book
misinformed readers. The fact that this book was selected as “one of the best books of 2002” by a reputable periodical which circulates among thousands of librarians, teachers and scholars of children’s literature also illustrates the power of the selective tradition to affirm and perpetuate the social order status quo.

Harris (1986) states:

Perhaps, most essentially, selective traditions are used as instruments of power and are used to legitimize the established order. Selective traditions are not neutral entities or processes. Those groups that exert power, especially economic power, are those groups that determine culture. (p. 12)

Harris (1986) contended that stereotypes are integral components of the selective tradition. Stereotypes, which can be negative and positive, reflect the social status groups (Perkins, 1979). For example, Asian Americans are people of color, yet they are considered “model minorities,” and so many of the racial stereotypes associated with people of Asiatic descent, such as extreme intelligence, are positive. African Americans, on the other hand, are not considered “model minorities,” and so the majority of racial stereotypes associated with blacks such as the image of the welfare queen, are negative. In children’s literature “Minority characters and culture were either excluded, stereotyped, or presented sporadically” (Harris, 1986, p. 20). Harris argued that “the selective tradition in children’s literature stereotyped Blacks and Black culture” (p. 16).

Although the selective tradition is different from critical race theory, the theoretical perspective which undergirds my study, I would argue that CRT provides insights into the manner in which the selective tradition operates within the context of children’s literature. For instance, as an example of “selective traditions as
instruments of power,” Harris (1986) mentioned a forum conducted by *The Crisis* in which black writers discussed the difficulties of getting their work published if it didn’t “reflect a particular view of Black life. Publishers, they asserted, only wanted the tawdry aspects of Black life” and tended to reject culturally authentic portrayals of black life. (p. 13). Through the rejection and selection of certain manuscripts, publishers had the power to affirm and perpetuate the selective tradition which stereotyped African Americans. Du Bois (1927) wrote:

> [T]he themes on which Negro writers naturally write best, with deepest knowledge and clearest understanding, are precisely the themes most editors do not want treated. These are themes which white readers are tired of or do not wish to hear. What is the “freedom” cry to a white American or “discrimination”? He is fed up on this which is the breath of life to black folk. While the feelings of insulted men, their reaction to the color line—well this he will not read about. Consequently the chief reading public in America will not buy precisely the sort of thing that Negroes must write about if they are sincere and honest. White Americans are willing to read about Negroes, but they prefer to read about Negroes who are fools, clowns, prostitutes, or at any rate, in despair and contemplating suicide. Other sorts of Negroes do not interest them because, as they say, they are “just like white folks.” But their interest in white folks, we notice, continues. This is a real and tremendous handicap. It is analogous to the handicap of all writers on unpopular themes, but it bears hardest on young Negroes because its bar is broader and more inclusive. It puts a premium on one kind of sadistic subject. (p. 276)

Du Bois was fully cognizant of the fact that in literature certain images of African Americans—even if they were inaccurate—were more likely to be given enhanced standing as opposed to others.

Critical race theory maintains that whites, even the poorest ones, benefit psychologically from racism in that they gain a sense of superiority in regard to blacks. This would explain why whites prefer to read about “Negroes who are fools, clowns, prostitutes, or at any rate, in despair and contemplating suicide” and the
difficulties of blacks getting their work published if their writing challenged negative, racial stereotypes (Du Bois, 1927, p. 276). In response to questions from Du Bois regarding the portrayal of the Negro, literary and social historian Benjamin Brawley replied that “publishing was a business enterprise and not a missionary enterprise. As such, publishers published those materials which would generate a profit” (as quoted by Harris, 1986, p. 27). Derrick Bell’s theory of interest-convergence is applicable in this case since publishers were not going to profit financially from selling books which presented culturally authentic portrayals of blacks and black culture.

**HARRIS’ METHODOLOGY/FINDINGS**

Harris (1986) utilized qualitative research methodology such as archival research and content analysis of *The Brownies’ Book* and documents related to the publication and its creators. Harris’s analysis was at times both global and specific. Global analysis allowed for the comparison of *The Brownies’ Book* with other mainstream periodicals of its era such as *St. Nicholas*. Specific analysis of *The Brownies’ Book* allowed Harris to examine the unique features of *The Brownie’s Book*. Harris argued that *The Brownies’ Book* challenged the selective tradition in children’s literature and so through document analysis, she attempted to identify its oppositional features.

After reading several issues, Harris (1986) created a coding scheme based on research done by Broderick (1973) which analyzed the image of Blacks in fiction. Broderick discovered that Blacks were depicted differently from whites in a number of aspects such as language, class, and race pride. Harris’ initial “coding scheme
consisted of eight categories. The categories were gender, social status, geographical location, language style, adult occupation, religion, nationalist sentiments, and family type” (p. 136). As the analysis proceeded, Harris generated additional categories such as the portrayal of Whites, age of characters, magic and personification. Upon analysis of The Brownies’ Book, Harris discovered the following eight major themes: “(1) race pride, (2) duty and allegiance to the race, (3) intelligent Blacks, (4) beautiful Blacks, (5) moderation, (6) political and social activism, (7) knowledge of and respect for African culture, and the (8) inculcation of specific values such as kindness, truthfulness, egalitarianism, and love” (p. 207).

In order to provide affirming evidence of these eight major themes, I will provide examples of key textual passages based on my content analysis of The Brownies’ Book. In order to have a representative sampling of The Brownies’ Book, I selected every fourth issue for content analysis; therefore all of the examples of textual passages which are offered in the remainder of this chapter come from the six issues which I analyzed. As I read the six issues, I noted passages based on Harris’ eight themes and I also noted recurring ideas or themes which were not addressed in Harris’ research study.

RACE PRIDE

According to Harris (1986) race pride was the most prevalent theme in The Brownies Book. I found that one of the ways in which the periodical instilled a sense of race pride was by providing a plethora of information about aspects of American history related to African Americans. Most issues of The Brownies’ Book contained at least one in-depth description of a famous African American and other sections of the
publication incorporated aspects of African-American history as well. For example, the April 1920 issue contained a two page narrative of Sojourner Truth entitled, “A Pioneer Suffragette.” In the section, “As the Crow Flies,” which kept readers informed of national and international current events, the text states:

The man who discovered the North Pole, Robert E. Peary, died recently in Washington, D.C., at the age of sixty-four. With him at the time he reached the Pole, was Matthew Henson, a colored man. Mr. Henson is today the only living human being who has stood at the North Pole. (p. 119)

*The Brownies’ Book*, in contrast to mainstream literature of its era, made sure to include the outstanding accomplishments of African Americans. The “Playtime” section of the August 1921 issue contained questions pertaining to African-American history such as “Who was Attucks?,” “What Negro helped to survey Washington City?” and “Who made the first clock in America?” Similarly, on the last page of this issue an advertisement reads:

“The Crisis Calendar” for 1920 contains twelve pages—one to each month—bearing the facts of Negro American heroes of the Great War, with military citations. The cover reproduces Roscoe C. Jamison’s inspiring poem, “Negro Soldiers.” The whole is done in a rich brown color—a superb work of art and of great historical value. Let your children look upon the faces of these heroes of the darker hue and be inspired. (unpaged).

Correspondence from readers of *The Brownies’ Book* suggests that its readers were indeed inspired by the inclusion of information about African American history. For instance, in the April 1920 issue, Ada Simpson from Jersey City, New Jersey wrote:

I thought you might like to know about my scrap-book… In it I keep all the pictures I can find of interesting colored people and the interesting things they do. I have pictures of Frederick Douglass, Bishop Allen, Harriet Tubman, Paul Lawrence [sic] Dunbar, and lots of others. I like the pictures especially. But now that I am reading *The Brownies’ Book*, I see there must be a lot of important colored people that I didn’t know about.
I’d love to see pictures of Katy Ferguson and Captain Cuffe. If you have them, won’t you print them, so I can cut them out and put them in my book? (p. III)

Race pride was a pervasive theme in the writings of Du Bois so it should come as no surprise that this theme would pervade the pages of The Brownies’ Book as well.

**DUTY AND ALLEGIANCE TO THE RACE**

W.E.B. Du Bois spent the majority of his life—as an activist, educator, historian and scholar—dedicated to the uplift and advancement of African Americans, so it is understandable that “duty and allegiance to the race” would be emphasized throughout The Brownies’ Book. In the December 1920 issue of The Brownies’ Book, a biographical depiction of Samuel Taylor Coleridge states:

> He was only 37 years of age, but think of his accomplishments, his fame and his heritage to the world of mankind and to a race of people whose struggles and sufferings even echo and re-echo in the hearts of their children. (p. 372)

Similarly, in the August 1920 issue, a biographical depiction of Phillis Wheatley states, “In the first place, she is the first Negro in America to win prestige for purely intellectual attainments. Secondly her writings influenced and strengthened anti-slavery feeling” (p. 253). What is striking about these two descriptions is that they frame the individual accomplishments of these two individuals within the context of African Americans as a racial group. Du Bois saw these accomplishments as not only speaking for these two people, but also as being representative of all African Americans.
INTELLIGENT BLACKS

In *The Brownies’ Book*, Blacks were depicted as intelligent as opposed to being ridiculed and portrayed as foolish and stupid. W.E.B. Du Bois strongly contested notions of black intellectual inferiority throughout his life.

For example, Du Bois (1920) wrote:

> For a century or more it has been the dream of those who do not believe Negroes are human that their wish should find some scientific basis. For years they depended on the weight of the human brain, trusting that the alleged underweight of less than a thousand Negro brains, measured without reference to age, stature, nutrition or cause of death, would convince the world that black men simply could not be educated. Today scientists acknowledge that there is no warrant for such a conclusion and that in any case the absolute weight of the brain is no criterion of racial ability (p. 118–119)

W.E.B. Du Bois challenged notions of intellectual inferiority throughout *The Brownies’ Book* by highlighting the scholarly accomplishments of famous African Americans. In the August 1920 issue of *The Brownies’ Book* in the “Little People of the Month” section, the text reads:

> Now when one speaks of brilliant scholars, kiddies, they dare not leave us out, for here’s some scholastic record: William Pickens, Jr., is in the second year of high school at the age of 15. Harriet Ida Pickens is in the eighth grade and is scheduled to enter High School at the age of 11. Ruby Annie Pickens will enter the fifth grade at the age of 9. Their father, Williams Pickens, Sr., was recently featured in the “Men of the Month” section of *The Crisis* (p. 254)

Likewise, in the “Little People of the Month” section of the August 1921 issue, the text reads:

> Hortense Phram has completed her studies at the Springfield, Mass., Technical High School, where she was an honor pupil during her last two years. She has also been a violin student at the Springfield Conservatory of Music, having studied with Florence Shortsleeve Fay. (p. 240)
I found it interesting to note that in the biographical sketch entitled “A Pioneer Suffragist” which appears in the April 1920 issue, the following description is provided of Sojourner Truth: “Being uneducated, of course, she spoke in dialect or broken English, which I shall not attempt to reproduce here, though her speech, evidently, lost nothing by its use” (p. 121). Although it is true that Sojourner Truth could not read and write, this passage seems to equate “broken” English with a lack of intelligence or education as if it is not possible to speak in dialect or “broken” English and be educated at the same time. A similar assumption is apparent in a story entitled “The Quaintness of St. Helena.” The article describes life on this island off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia and offers the following account in regard to the language capabilities of its inhabitants:

Teaching technical English to children who have always lived among the islands is almost hopeless. They can rattle off definitions; they can analyze sentences; some of them can even write a creditable letter—but oh, pass a crowd of them on the road! “Oh I show bin love dat gal orright! She show smart!” (p. 247)

Both of the aforementioned passages seem to indicate a somewhat negative bias towards the speakers of black vernacular and a pro-bias for “standard” English. However, this should be noted in light of the fact that mainstream children’s literature of this era depicted blacks as speaking in ways that were unintelligible. For example in the January 1919 issue of St. Nicholas there is a story about a white boy named Fen who is spending time recuperating from an accident aboard a yacht in Egypt. He is taken care of by a black mammy who “did not at all approve of Egypt” (p. 245). At one point a magical figure named Djinn appears and has a conversation with Fen.

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Upon hearing this conversation the Mammy rushes into the room and shouts in a
“terror-stricken voice”:

Oh lan’ s sake! Oh, Lawdy, Lawdy! One ob dem heathen men! Hyah, you!
Git out ob here! Did n’ I allus says dis was a onnatchel lan? I ain’ nebbah
seen such a onnatchel lan—nebbah! Oh, Massa Fen! Honey chile, doan’ let
dat air E-gypshun critter tech you! (p. 246)

Passages such as this one demonstrate why Du Bois and members of The Crisis may
have felt it necessary to emphasize blacks as capable speakers of “standard” English.

BEAUTIFUL BLACKS

W.E.B. Du Bois believed that it was essential to help black children learn to
see themselves and people within their racial group as beautiful. For example, in a
letter written in October of 1914 to his daughter, Yolande, who was attending school
in England, Du Bois (as quoted by Aptheker, 1973, p. 208) wrote:

You will meet, of course, curious little annoyances. People will wonder at
your dear brown and the sweet crinkley hair…. Remember that most folk
laugh at anything unusual whether it is beautiful, fine or not. You,
however, must not laugh at yourself. You must know that brown is as
pretty as white or prettier and crinkley hair as straight even though it is
harder to comb.

Du Bois realized that due to stereotypical images of blacks as unattractive in
mainstream culture and in children’s literature that it was necessary to emphasize the
beauty of blacks. Consequently, images of blacks as beautiful and attractive, via the
text and illustrations, pervaded the pages of The Brownies’ Book. For example, in the
December 1920 issue of The Brownies’ Book, the biographical portrait of musician,
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, offers the following description of his wife: “She was dark,
attractive and vivid and had a beautiful voice both for singing and speaking” (p. 372).
Similarly in a story in the August 1920 issue of The Brownies’ Book entitled “How the
Turtle Got His Marks,” the main character is described as “a very pretty brown
skinned girl” (p. 236). Also, most issues of The Brownies’ Book included photographs
of children of various hues, from light-skinned to dark-skinned.

In spite of this emphasis on blacks as attractive, there do appear to be some
contradictions within The Brownies’ Book in terms of a bias towards Eurocentric
beauty standards. For example, an advertisement for Madam C.J. Walker products
such as “Wonderful Hair Grower” and “Complexion Soap” in the December 1920
issue of The Brownies’ Book reads:

Once upon a time there lived a Good Fairy whose daily thoughts were of
pretty little boys and girls and of beautiful women and handsome men
and of how she might make beautiful those unfortunate ones whom had
not given long, wavy hair and a smooth, lovely complexion. (unpaged)

The underlying assumption of this advertisement is that children with dark skin and
nappy hair, physical characteristics common among many African Americans, are
“unfortunate.” However, a perusal of The Brownies’ Book indicates that overall the
magazine’s creators did attempt to challenge stereotypical portrayals of blacks as
unattractive. Du Bois (1920a) wrote that as African Americans we needed to “train
ourselves to see beauty in black” (p. 266) and it can be argued that The Brownies’
Book forged a step in this direction.

MODERATION

According to Harris, (1986) moderation was another theme that was
emphasized throughout The Brownies’ Book. For instance, in a column entitled “The
Judge,” the Judge offers the following advice to children after a discussion of things to
do for fun: “Run, but don’t strain your muscles; eat, but stop when you are no longer

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hungry; read, but read the worth while things; talk but now always; dance—some” (p. 109). Considering that Du Bois was a critic of capitalism for most of his life, it seems logical that he would discourage children from being excessive in most respects of their lives.

**POLITICAL AND RACIAL ACTIVISM**

Another prevalent theme in *The Brownies' Book* was political and social activism. W.E.B. Du Bois, among his crucial roles as an author, educator, and historian, was also an activist. Although Du Bois wanted children to read *The Brownies' Book* for enjoyment, he also wanted to help them to develop a social critical consciousness, become aware of injustices and work towards creating a more just world. For instance in the August 1920 in the “As the Crow Flies” section the text reads:

> O, the hate and hurt of war! We are told how the children and babies are dying in Eastern Europe. Who are the murderers? We are. We sold them ammunition and supplies to fight with and sold it on credit (p. 234).

Similarly, in the April 1920 issue, the text reads:

> The U.S produces 300 million barrels of petroleum a year, and needs 400 million. The demand is increasing, while the production cannot increase further. This is the reason that many people want to interfere in Mexico, where Americans own over 200 oil wells, which produces 200 million barrels a year. Mexico is willing for us to have the oil on reasonable terms and after paying taxes, but she wants no interference with her government. Mexico is right. (p. 119)

These passages are indicative of Du Bois' belief in helping children to become aware of injustice. Du Bois himself was critical of America in terms of its treatment of African Americans and its foreign policies.
KNOWLEDGE OF AND RESPECT FOR AFRICAN CULTURE

Knowledge of and respect for African culture was also a theme that was emphasized throughout The Brownies' Book. Harris states (1986):

Just as Europe was viewed as the cultural foundation for American intellectual and artistic origins in mainstream children's literature, so was Africa deemed in “The Judge” column as the intellectual and artistic cradle for Blacks, and to a certain extent, Europe. The assertion of an advanced African cultural past is in stark contrast to the portrayal of Africa in children’s literature. (p. 157)

In “The Judge” section of the August 1920 issue during a discussion in regard to books about Africa with three children the Judge stated: “Formerly a lot of trash has been written about Africa. But lately all that has changed and one is able to get nowadays a pretty definite array of facts concerning that wonderful and mysterious land” (p. 224). The Judge promised to compile a list of books about Africa for the children to read. Du Bois wanted black children to be proud of their ancestral homeland and cognizant of the fact that Africa was not the “dark” continent it was portrayed as in mainstream children’s literature.

INOCULATION OF SPECIFIC VALUES SUCH AS KINDNESS,
EGALITARIANISM AND LOVE

A final theme Harris (1986) discovered was the inoculation of certain values such as kindness and love. Although W.E.B. Du Bois wanted to make children aware of social injustices, at the same time he didn’t want them to become bitter and hateful. In the “Opinion” section of The Crisis when announcing the debut of The Brownies’ Book, Du Bois (1919) quoted a letter from a twelve year old black girl who wrote: “I want to learn more about my race, so I want to begin early…. I hate the white man,
just as much as he hates me and probably more" (p. 285). Du Bois realized that it was
harmed for black children to take a stance such as this one. One of the ways *The
Brownies' Book* countered hatred towards whites was to highlight those who have
aligned themselves with blacks in the struggle for racial equality.

For example, in the August 1920 issue in a story entitled "Girls Together," the text
reads:

> While slavery existed it created evil and sorrowful feelings, and when it
> ceased to exist, it left behind a terrible trail of pain, passion and prejudice.
> Still, all the while, there has been a great deal of love and kindliness
> between white and colored Americans and, moreover, there has always
> been a special bond of affectionate sympathy between those white people
> who, for more than a hundred years, have been trying to help colored
> people. (p. 109)

Similarly, in this same story the following description is offered of the abolitionist,
William Lloyd Garrison:

> William Lloyd Garrison founded in 1832 the New England Anti-Slavery
> Society, which demanded the immediate abolition of slavery. All previous
> anti-slavery societies, in the country, had advocated a gradual liberation
> of the slaves.... Mr. Garrison and his followers felt that to work for such
> gradual action, though better than doing nothing, did still imply that the
> slave-holder had a sort of moral right to hold human beings as property
> for a time. So he and eleven other men formed this New England Anti-
> Slavery Society, to declare, to all America, that it was a sin for anybody to
> treat a fellow human being as property for a single hour. (pp. 109-110)

Stories such as this developed the idea that not all whites were racists and white
supremacists to be distrusted.

In "The Little People of the Month" section, children were rewarded and
recognized for exhibiting worthwhile values such as studiousness and politeness. For
example, in the August 1921 issue, there is an endearing photograph of a smiling, six
year old, snaggle-toothed, dark-skinned black boy named Paul Rayfield Johnson.
The caption describing Paul’s accomplishments states:

Of course, there are many little Brownies who are ever so polite; but out in Chicago, a little Brownie boy has won a prize of $50 for his politeness…. You see, the Chicago Tribune awarded daily $50 prizes to the politest person discovered by its “Polite Editor.” On the third of January, our little Paul was discovered at the corner of Wabash Avenue and 35th Street. Paul is a newsboy and his politeness “overwhelmed” the editor…. His only relative in Chicago is an aged grandmother, to whom he gives the credit for his fine manners. (p. 124)

*The Brownies’ Book* attempted to make children socially conscious while simultaneously instilling a sense of moral values.

**IMPORTANCE OF LITERACY**

I also noted another pervasive theme in *the Brownies’ Book* which was not mentioned in Harris’ research study. The importance of literacy and reading was stressed in many ways throughout this publication. For example, on the last page of the April 1920 issue the text states: “We are prepared to recommend books and periodicals for children. Why not begin a library for your boy and girl today?” (unpaged). Similarly, in the August 1921 issue there is an advertisement for a book by Elizabeth Ross Haynes entitled, *Unsung Heroes*, stating: “Add this new book of inspiration to your children’s library…. The lives of seventeen men and women of the Negro race are told in a way to inspire the children of our time” (p. 214). The advertisement lists the names of famous African Americans included in this book such as Frederick Douglass, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Harriet Tubman, Phillis (sic) Wheatley, Sojourner Truth and Benjamin Banneker. It seems apparent from these advertisements that the editors of *The Brownies’ Book* wanted to instill the importance of reading in its young readers.
According to Harris (1986), the eight themes were utilized in order to challenge common stereotypes of Blacks in mainstream children’s literature. Harris argued that The Brownies’ Book achieved the seven objectives that Du Bois articulated for the magazine and that “in meeting the objectives and challenging the selective tradition, it espoused alternative views that led to an emergent tradition in children’s literature” (p. 257–258). My content analysis of The Brownies’ Book supported Harris’s claims in regard to the eight major themes pervading the publication and thereby challenging the selective tradition in mainstream children’s literature. I was able to provide affirming evidence of the presence of all eight of these themes as well as additional ones that I uncovered. In the final issue of The Brownies’ Book, the text reads:

DuBois and Dill announce with regret the discontinuance of The Brownies’ Book. Recognizing the great need which exists for literature adapted to colored children, and indeed to all children who live in a world of varied races, we have for two years made the experiment of publishing at our own expense, The Brownies’ Book. . . . The total number of subscribers to The Brownies’ Book has gradually risen to 3,500 and it is increasing very slowly. The magazine cannot, however, pay expenses with less than 15,000 subscribers. As there is no prospect of getting this number of subscribers within less than four or five years we cannot afford to continue the experiment. (p. 354)

Although The Brownies’ Book was only in existence for two years this magazine was significant in that it took into consideration the unique and important interests of “the children of the sun.” This study contends that contemporary writers of African American children’s literature, such as Patricia McKissack, continue to consider the unique and special interests of “the children of the sun.”
This chapter described the sociological factors that affected the era in which *The Brownies’ Book* was published. It also provided a description of *The Brownies’ Book* and its objectives. A description was provided of the theory of the selective tradition, Violet Harris’ study of *The Brownies’ Book* and her findings as well as my own. The next chapter presents an analysis of children’s literature written by Patricia McKissack in addition to a comparison with the aforementioned themes that were discovered in *The Brownies’ Book*. 
CHAPTER 5
ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE WRITTEN BY
PATRICIA MCKISSACK

The previous chapter described and provided affirming evidence of the following eight major themes Violet Harris (1986) discovered within The Brownies’ Book: “(1) race pride, (2) duty and allegiance to the race, (3) intelligent Blacks, (4) beautiful Blacks, (5) moderation, (6) political and social activism, (7) knowledge of and respect for African culture, and the (8) inculcation of specific values such as kindness, truthfulness, egalitarianism, and love” (p. 207). Two additional themes, the importance of literacy and a negative attitude towards black vernacular, which I uncovered and described in the previous chapter, were also introduced. These themes were used as a framework by which to compare the themes that were found in the literature of Patricia McKissack. This chapter provides a description of the content analysis of Patricia McKissack’s children’s literature and other relevant documents such as the interview transcript. This analysis doesn’t highlight individual documents, but instead focuses on major themes that were found across all of the documents selected for the purposes of this research study.

Critical race theory is also incorporated in order to show its relevance as a theoretical framework within the context of this study. This chapter also includes the comparison between the themes found in Patricia McKissack’s and those within The
Brownies’ Book. The areas in which these two bodies of work converged included challenging dominant perspectives via storytelling, social protest against racism and emphasizing the importance of literacy and reading. The areas of divergence between The Brownies’ Book and children’s literature written by Patricia McKissack included attitudes towards black vernacular, strong black females, an emphasis on the working class and the importance of family and community relationships.

CHALLENGING DOMINANT PERSPECTIVES VIA STORYTELLING

One common theme in the children’s literature of Patricia McKissack and in The Brownies’ Book was the challenging of dominant perspectives through storytelling. In the introduction to Critical Race Feminism, Adrian Wing states “CRT’s critique of society often thus takes the form of storytelling and narrative analysis…. These stories help expose the ordinariness of racism and validate that the experiences of people of color are important” (p. 3). Storytelling and first person narrative play a key role in critical race theory scholarship since critical race theorists view the law as a collection of stories which reflect “positioned perspectives” that are not neutral or objective. Derrick Bell (1995) writes:

The problem is that not all positioned perspectives are equally valued, equally heard, or equally included. From the perspective of critical race theory, some positions have historically been oppressed, distorted, ignored, silenced, destroyed, appropriated, commodified, and marginalized—and all of this, not accidentally. Conversely the law simultaneously and systematically privileges subjects who are white…. We [critical race theorists] seek to empower and include traditionally excluded views and see all-inclusiveness as the ideal because of our belief in collective wisdom. (p. 90)
Critical race theorists utilize storytelling and first person narratives as a means by which to include and give voice to the “positioned perspectives” of people of color which have been historically excluded from the law.

Critical race theorists contend that people of color tend to have different perspectives especially in regard to race-related issues as a result of their life experiences. These perspectives often subvert those of whites, which reflect a dominant worldview. Bell states (1995):

> I prefer using stories as a means of communicating views on the emotionally charged subject of race. People enjoy stories and will often suspend their beliefs, listen to the story, and then compare their views, not with mine, but with those expressed in the story. (p. 902)

Similarly, critical race theorist, Richard Delgado (1995) states:

> Stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset—the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place…. As Derrick Bell, Bruno Bettelheim, and others show, stories can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo. (p. 65)

There are numerous instances of Patricia McKissack subverting the perspectives of whites and challenging the status quo. For example, in her book, *Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters* (McKissack & McKissack, 1994) when a white man from the Big House describes the hanging of John Brown which took place the month before in November of 1859 he offered the following description of Brown’s hanging, “[h]is eyes blazed like those of a madman” (p. 48). However in the Quarters the slaves speak of John Brown in a very different manner. One of the slaves who witnessed the hanging of Brown stated:

> I was there that Friday morning. His eyes were filled with strength and determination. He stopped on his way to the gallows to kiss a black baby.
My massa say John Brown was crazy. I say John Brown was Truth marching on. (p. 50)

Across her children’s books there are numerous examples such as this. In the book, *Color Me Dark: The Diary of Nellie Lee Love* (McKissack, 2000) when describing the Chicago riots of 1919, Nellie states:

[W]e are right in the middle of a race riot. It’s hard to describe what is going on. The white newspapers say that Colored people started the riot at the beach. The *Defender* newspaper says the riot started because whites were the cause of Eugene Williams’ drowning and they did nothing to save him (p. 122)

The descriptions of Africa provided by Patricia McKissack also serve as examples as to how the perspectives of African Americans can subvert those of whites. In *Color Me Dark: The Diary of Nellie Lee Love* (McKissack, 2000) after attending youth services at a local church Nellie states:

I had never heard of kingdoms in Africa. Far as I knew, Africa was a place where people ran around half naked with bones in their noses. But Reverend McDonald told us something very different. Before slavery time, there were big cities in Africa. They had large trading markets where gold and salt were traded. There were well-respected universities in places called Gao and Timbuktu. They even had libraries. Can you imagine that? (p. 94).

*The Brownies’ Book*, like McKissack, also painted a very different portrait of Africa to its young readers. In fact one of the eight themes that Harris discovered in *The Brownies’ Book* was “knowledge and respect for African culture.” Harris (1986) states:

Just as Europe was viewed as the cultural foundation for American intellectual and artistic origins in mainstream children’s literature, so was Africa deemed in “The Judge” column as the intellectual and artistic cradle for Blacks, and to a certain extent, Europe. The assertion of an advanced African cultural past is in stark contrast to the portrayal of Africa in children’s literature. Children’s literature pictured Africa as, literally, the dark continent, a teeming cauldron of savage and heathen people. But “The Judge” columns depicted Africa in a far more favorable
and realistic manner. The June through September 1921 columns developed the idea that Africa was the cradle of humankind and culture. (p. 157–158)

Although “knowledge and respect for African culture” did not emerge as a dominant theme in McKissack’s books as it did in The Brownies’ Book, there were certainly passages such as the aforementioned in which Patricia McKissack did offer an admirable and positive depiction of Africa. Again, the portrayal of Africa by The Brownies’ Book and Patricia McKissack serves as an example of black people having an interpretation of events or phenomena which are different from that of most whites.

During her telephone interview Patricia McKissack stated at least six different times her belief that African Americans have their own stories to tell. At one point in the interview McKissack stated:

I’m digressing here but what I’m coming back to is the importance of people seeing their history and their stories in books to preserve those stories and to keep those stories. Growing up on a farm… Our farm life was very different from the farm life of whites. Most of our farm life, they [blacks] were sharecroppers… We had blacks who did own their property however and have been owning it for centuries for generations not just for one or two but families who can go back to the civil war and beyond and have owned their property. You don’t see those stories. You don’t see the stories of blacks who were seamen. When I discovered that there were black whalers, I was like what? Whalemen! Let me find out more about this. (unpaged)

This quote not only addresses the different perspectives and ways of living of African Americans but it simultaneously illustrates that uncovering and highlighting aspects of American history related to African Americans, such as the experiences of black whalers, is also a way in which to challenge dominant ways of storytelling. Storytelling was incorporated by critical race theorists for this same reason; to include the stories of people of color which were excluded from legal discourse (Bell, 1995).
In this respect *The Brownies’ Book* also challenged dominant perspectives via storytelling by providing information about African American history. Aspects of African American history pervaded the pages of *The Brownies’ Book* from the biographical sketches, to the “As the Crow Flies” section to the many advertisements. For example in the August 1920 issue of *The Brownies’ Book* an advertisement for a Crisis calendar reads:

Have You Told Your Children of the Part Which Negro Soldiers Played in the Great War? Then let them have before their eyes the CRISIS CALENDAR FOR 1920 Which contains twelve pages each carrying the picture of a Negro American Hero of the Great War, with military citations (unpaged)

W.E.B. Du Bois realized that aspects of American history pertaining to African Americans, such as the role of blacks in World War I, were not likely to be included in mainstream publications such as *St. Nicholas Magazine*.

Two of the remaining themes that Harris uncovered, beautiful blacks and intelligent blacks, could also be considered as ways of challenging dominant perspectives through storytelling. By focusing on the intelligence of blacks and their attractiveness *The Brownies’ Book* took a different approach from mainstream children’s literature, such as *St. Nicholas*, which poked fun at the intelligence of blacks and depicted them as unattractive via the text and illustrations. Although Patricia McKissack’s literature does not overtly emphasize the intelligence and beauty of blacks to the extent that *The Brownies’ Book* did, the fact that she has written so many biographies and nonfiction books about African Americans and their accomplishments attests to the fact that blacks are indeed just as intelligent as whites and have contributed much to the development of American society. In her book
Color Me Dark: The Diary of Nellie Lee Love (McKissack, 2000), McKissack does challenge Eurocentric beauty standards and embraces the physical characteristics commonly associated with African Americans such as dark skin. For example, when describing her sister, Nellie states:

We’re sisters but we don’t look anything alike; I’m fair-skinned—like our Mama’s people. Erma Jean is very dark like the Loves—those are our Daddy’s folks. … Some people are so color struck. They think being light skinned is better than being dark! Mama says that’s nonsense and I think so, too. … Daddy won’t stand for color talk, either. He says a Colored family is like a beautiful bouquet of flowers—all different colors, sizes, and shapes. But each one just as beautiful in his or her own way. (p. 5)

Similarly, in the book, Mirandy and Brother Wind (McKissack, 1988), McKissack offers the following description of Mirandy at a cakewalk, “[f]olks still talked about how Mirandy was a picture of pretty, dressed in yellow with two colorful scarves tied ‘round each wrist” (unpaged). The description of a black girl as “a picture of pretty” in itself challenges dominant perspectives considering the Eurocentric beauty standards that pervade American culture. McKissack (as quoted by Bishop, 1992) states:

The reason I wrote Flossie, Mirandy, and Nettie Jo is that I wanted black kids to see a book with a picture of a beautiful black child on it—be it male or female—and say, “Oh, there’s me in a book.” And feel good about it. I wanted to have a little girl who was sharp and smart, learning a little bit about her history and a little bit about our language. That’s why I wrote those books. (p. 72)

This quote suggests that Patricia McKissack was indeed intending to depict blacks as beautiful and smart. I would argue that The Brownies’ Book and the children’s literature of Patricia McKissack both challenge dominant perspectives via storytelling. In accord with the tenet of critical race theory in relation to storytelling,
The Brownies' Book and children's literature written by Patricia McKissack both tell stories from a "positioned perspective" that is often ignored, suppressed and excluded. Bell (1995) states:

The narrative voice, the teller, is important to critical race theory in a way not understandable by those whose voices are tacitly deemed legitimate and authoritarian. The voice exposes, tells and retells, signals resistance and caring, and reiterates what kind of power is feared most—the power of commitment to change. (p. 907)

The following section will demonstrate that not only have Du Bois and McKissack told stories from their perspectives thereby subverting dominant perspectives, but they have also both shown a commitment to change in the form of social protest against racism.

SOCIAL PROTEST AGAINST RACISM

Social protest against racism was another common theme within Patricia McKissack's children's literature and The Brownies Book. In this respect, there are strong correlations with CRT since critical race theorists are concerned with protesting the racial injustices within the legal system and changing them. W.E.B. Du Bois and Patricia McKissack have used literature as a means of social protest against racism. McKissack accomplished this by describing how African Americans have protested against racism. For example, in her book African–American Inventors (McKissack & McKissack, 1994) she writes:

He [James Forten] developed a sail-handling device that was particularly useful in rough waters and built a lucrative business around his invention. Among the free black inventors of the early American period, Forten is probably the most recognized.... Forten was an outspoken critic of slavery and Northern racism and discrimination and he took action against them whenever he could.... Forten also wrote a series of letters to the Pennsylvania State Congress, the governor, and other leaders attacking the arguments of whites who wanted to limit the number of free blacks
entering Pennsylvania. Forten donated a sizeable amount of money in 1831 to William Lloyd Garrison, who published *The Liberator*, an antislavery newspaper. … Forten refused to rig slave vessels with sails. (pp. 21-23)

Within the passage, McKissack provides biographical information about a prominent inventor and highlights the fact that he took an active role against racism and discrimination by protesting in various ways such as letter writing and providing financial support to the abolitionist movement.

In the book, *Black Hands, White Sails: The Story of African-American Whalers* (McKissack & McKissack, 1999), the text reads:

> Opposition to slavery was immediate and strong beginning first among those slaves who resisted their condition. From sabotage to armed insurrections slaves used any opportunity to free themselves. Running away, however, was the most common form of rebellion. A surprising number of runaways were led to freedom via the Underground Railroad by both white and black sailors and captains. (p. xviii)

Similarly, in the book, *Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters* (McKissack & McKissack, 1994) the text states, “Some slaves refused to celebrate Christmas. They used the time off to study or plan an escape” (p. 63). The abovementioned examples from McKissack’s books illustrate how African Americans have protested against racism.

Three of the remaining themes that Violet Harris (1986) discovered in *The Brownies’ Book*—racial pride, social and political activism and duty and allegiance to the race—indicate that it was also committed to social protest against racism. W.E.B. Du Bois realized that one of the many negative effects of institutional racism was the damaging of black children’s sense of racial pride. Mainstream periodicals such as St. Nicholas depicted blacks in ways that would lead black children to have
very little knowledge about their history and be ashamed of their race. In order to
counter these negative effects, *The Brownies’ Book* imbued its readers with a sense of
racial pride by challenging notions of black inferiority and providing children with a
sense of pride about blacks, their history and their achievements. Most likely, Du Bois
was also cognizant of the fact that children who considered themselves equals would
be more inclined to fight for their social and political equality.

Readers of *The Brownies’ Book* were encouraged to become socially and
politically active against racism and were made aware of other blacks who did so. For
example, in the “As the Crow Flies” section of the August 1921 issue the text reads, “In
race rioting in the Negro section at Tulsa, Oklahoma, thirty persons were killed and
300 wounded; the property loss is $1,500,000. The cause of the riot was the successful
effort of the colored folk to prevent a lynching” (p. 225). This passage illustrates that
blacks did actively resist racism and it also serves as a means by which to inspire
children to protest against racism themselves. Duty to the race was also another
manner in which *The Brownies’ Book* encouraged its readers to fight against racism.
Readers were shown that their actions would serve to uplift the race and represent
blacks. Du Bois realized that in order for blacks to challenge racism it would require a
concerted effort on the part of most African Americans and that children needed to
trained from an early age to do this.

**AN EMPHASIS ON LITERACY AND READING**

An emphasis on literacy and reading was another prevalent theme that
appeared in the work of Patricia McKissack and in *The Brownies’ Book*. Historically
reading has been regarded by African Americans as an important tool for protesting
racism and gaining freedom. In his book, *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community*, Thomas Webber (1978) details stories of numerous slaves who learned to read and taught others despite the risk of severe penalties if caught. For instance, Webber mentions W.E. Norcross who told “of spending all of his Sundays without food on the mountain struggling to learn to read from his blue-back speller” and Will Caper who “conducted a secret night school for men during plantation days” (p. 133). Webber writes:

Evidence of the slaves’ belief in the desirability of learning to read and write comes not only from the many stories of individuals struggling for learning. More importantly, in terms of the slave community as a whole, this theme finds expression in the pride with which informants talk of other slaves who learned to read or write and in the esteem in which they were held, in the intensity and the frequency of the anger at slavery for limiting their newly emancipated slaves to secure schooling for themselves and their children. One stimulus to learning was the recognition received from one’s fellow slaves…. Not only could such persons keep the other slaves abreast of the news, write them passes, and read to them straight from the Bible, but they disproved the racist notion promulgated by whites that blacks were incapable of such learning. (p. 156)

In the book, *Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters* (McKissack & McKissack, 1994) the text reads, “[a] copy of the *North Star* newspaper, published by the runaway slave Frederick Douglass, is smuggled into the Quarters. The secret reader shares Douglass’s words about freedom and the abolitionist movement” (p. 21). Similarly, in *A Picture of Freedom: The Diary of Clotee, a Slave Girl* (McKissack, 1997), Clotee is provided with a copy of an abolitionist newspaper by a white abolitionist who has come to the slave plantation where she lives. Clotee states:

He left me a copy of the *Liberator*, put out by an abolitionist named William Lloyd Garrison from the Boston. I read the pages to Aunt Tec and Spicy. The listened to every word—stories about black abolitionists. I
read about a woman named Sojourner Truth, who speaks out against slavery everywhere she goes. (p. 130)

Reading publications such as abolitionist newspapers like The North Star and The Liberator allowed African Americans to keep abreast of issues central to the black community.

Going Someplace Special (McKissack, 2001), centers around Tricia Ann making a trip to the library during the era of segregation. Although on her way to “Someplace Special,” Tricia Ann has to sit in the “colored” section of the bus and is insulted by a white man for accidentally entering a hotel, she realizes that going to the library is worthwhile. In the author’s note at the end of the book Patricia McKissack states:

[T]he more I read, the better I understood why my grandmother believed the library was someplace more exciting, more interesting, and more informative than hotels, movies, restaurants, and amusement parks. She, like Andrew Carnegie, whose great wealth helped to build the library, knew that “reading is the doorway to freedom.” (unpaged)

The emphasis on literacy and reading that pervaded the pages of The Brownies’ Book indicates that W.E.B. Du Bois was also cognizant of the importance of literacy. Most issues of The Brownies’ Book contained numerous advertisements regarding children’s books and the importance of building a library for children. For example in the April 1920 issue on the last page there is an advertisement that reads, “[w]e are prepared to recommend books and periodicals for children. Why not begin a library for your boy and girl today” (unpaged)? Although the connection between literacy and freedom was not as explicit as in McKissack’s books, based on quotes such as the abovementioned one, it seems reasonable to assume that Du Bois was aware that reading provided the opportunity for black children to “free” their minds and
become more knowledgeable about themselves and their history. The last two remaining themes that Violet Harris found in the Brownies’ Book—moderation and the inculcation of values—were not major ones within the children’s literature of Patricia McKissack. Her literature seems less didactic than the Brownies’ Book. A lack of didacticism in McKissack’s literature might be explained by the following statement that she made during the telephone interview, “I try to write it [my story] by saying here it is, you look at it and come to your conclusion. I write religious books the same way. I don’t tell kids what to believe” (unpaged). The following themes are ones that set Patricia McKissack’s children’s literature apart from The Brownies’ Book.

LANGUAGE

The great Harlem renaissance writer, Zora Neale Hurston, was often criticized by a number of her black male counterparts for her use of black vernacular. Writer Gayl Jones (1993) contends that the minstrel tradition played a huge role in shaping the negative attitudes of early African American writers towards black dialect. Jones states:

Because audiences as well were used to hearing “dialect” only in comic contexts, even the writers who used it for other purposes or with different intentions were often accused, as Richard Wright accused Zora Neale Hurston, of “perpetuating the minstrel tradition” even though her own work was not only necessary for the “authentic” representation of the speech of her characters but also contributed to broadening the range of dialect in literature. (pp. 142-143)

Zora Neale Hurston was in a sense ahead of her time in that she was focused on affirming the richness and distinctiveness of African American speech forms. Hurston’s use of the black vernacular in books such as the classic, Their Eyes Were Watching God, was an accurate portrayal, unlike the representations that were
commonplace in mainstream culture such as minstrel shows. The negative attitudes of African American writers such as Richard Wright caused many of them to shy away from incorporating the black vernacular into their writing.

Paul Laurence Dunbar also had similar experiences in regard to the reception of his poems that were written in dialect. In her book, *Paul Laurence Dunbar: A Poet to Remember* (McKissack, 1984) McKissack writes:

[E]ducated blacks criticized Paul’s poems as playing into the hands of racists. They accused the poet of further compromising the race by representing blacks as inferior. It was not the poet’s representation of his people that was at fault. Rather, it was other people’s interpretation of his poems. Dunbar’s poems were enjoyed by racists for the wrong reasons. They used the poet’s work to stereotype blacks and to promote their ideas that blacks were ignorant-talking, uneducated people. This is not what Paul wanted to happen. He resented his poems being used that way. (p. 100)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is probably due to inaccurate representations of black speech in mainstream children’s literature that the editors of *The Brownies’ Book* tended to utilize “standard” English in an attempt to counter the misconceptions of blacks as inarticulate and unable to speak properly.

Patricia McKissack contends that “language is a tool, not a cage, and I refuse to be caged by language” (as quoted by Bishop, 1992, p. 74). Language, in the form of first person narratives and storytelling, functions as an important tool used by critical race theorists to expose racism and protest against it. Most of McKissack’s books—nonfiction especially—are written in “standard” English but she also incorporates black vernacular whenever she feels it is appropriate. For example, in the book, *Mirandy and Brother Wind* (McKissack, 1988), when Mirandy asks her Grandmama Beasley how to catch Brother Wind, her Grandmama responds by saying, “Can’t
nobody put shackles on Brother Wind, chile. He be special. He be free” (unpaged). In the telephone interview when asked about switching back and forth between different forms of language when writing, Patricia McKissack stated:

[Paul Laurence] Dunbar was the one who gave me permission to do it. When I read him I said,”Oh, you can do this.” You know. Second of all, my grandfather allowed me to do it because he told his stories in dialect…. To try to write it [his stories] in some other voice would not be [an] honest story, so I wrote it in the language of my grandfather. ….I respected his language. I loved his language. I understood it. I embraced it. Then also I am a codeswitcher. I codeswitch. I look at my environment and I code my language to fit my environment and I consider this a marvelous gift and it is a gift that my family gave me. (unpaged)

By incorporating black vernacular into her stories, McKissack affirms its normalcy and validity. The use of black vernacular in Flossie and the Fox (McKissack, 1986) is especially representative of the challenging of negative assumptions that are generally associated with black vernacular and its speakers. Flossie and the Fox is the story of a young girl who is sent on an errand by her grandmother to deliver a basket of eggs. Along the way Flossie encounters a fox, an animal usually depicted as clever, and knowingly outsmarts him.

By doing this, children’s literature scholar Daniel Hade (1997), contends that Patricia McKissack produces a “political satire of the powerful” (p. 120). Hade writes:

Flossie is poor, black, and female. She speaks the black dialect of rural Tennessee…. The fox is male, and his use of ”King’s English” suggests that he is also white and rich…. The fox by virtue of being male and talking like a rich white man, is powerful, the kind of character who takes from victims. These are conventional signs of domination…. McKissack… subverts these signs, lifting Flossie from victim to agent and deflating the rich, white, male fox. (pp. 120-121)
By utilizing black vernacular within stories and by portraying speakers of black vernacular as intelligent and cunning, McKissack affirms the legitimacy of the language form and its speakers.

**STRONG BLACK FEMALES**

Another prevalent theme which pervades the children’s literature of Patricia McKissack is the portrayal of black females as strong, clever and independent. Mirandy and Flossie both exemplify these character traits by taking charge of their situations and finding ways to solve their own dilemmas and challenges. McKissack states (as quoted by Owens, 2000):

> In *Flossie and the Fox*, in *Mirandy and Brother Wind* and in *Nettie Jo’s Friends*, I tried to take some universal fairy tale themes, and rewrite them with African American girls or just girls in general who were able to overcome obstacles and solve their problems without the help of a husband, without running away from the problem and not handling it. (p. 143)

In *Nettie Jo’s Friends* (McKissack, 1989), the female protagonist also has similar traits. The story revolves around Nettie Jo’s attempts to find a needle to sew a dress for her doll, so the doll can attend a wedding with her. Nettie Jo sets off by herself to locate a needle and asks several animals that she meets along the way for help. Although several of the animals that she encounters are afraid of a panther, she summons up the courage to confront the panther and ask him if he can be of assistance. When the panther approaches Nettie Jo, the text reads, “Nettie Jo wanted to run but thought better of it. She held her head high and spoke right up” (unpaged).

Oftentimes, these black females were aware of gender stereotypes and defied them through their actions or questioned their validity and fairness. For example, the
short story, “A Home Run for Beth Ann,” begins with the following description of Beth Ann playing baseball:

Beth Ann saw the ball coming. She was fast, fast enough to beat it—if she slid. Forgetting it was Sunday, forgetting she had on a pink organdy dress, forgetting everything, Beth Ann lunged for home plate. “Safe,” she shouted. (p. 43)

This passage illustrates the defiance of gender stereotypes in that Beth Ann is not concerned with her “pink organdy dress,” but instead with landing safely on home plate.

In the book, Color Me Dark: The Diary of Nellie Lee Love, (McKissack, 2000) Nellie questions institutional racism on a number of occasions as it pertains to the social and political equality of women. For instance, Nellie states:

Mama was a schoolteacher for a summer when she was at Hampton, Virginia. Then she married Daddy. I just don’t understand why there’s a rule against married women teaching. Men teachers can be married. (p. 54)

McKissack also provides a plethora of biographical information about many strong black females such as Sojourner Truth, Zora Neale Hurston and Ida B. Wells. In the book, Color Me Dark: The Diary of Nellie Lee Love, McKissack offers the following description of Ida B. Wells:

Another founder of the NAACP and a prominent national leader was Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931). Born in Mississippi, after attending Rust College, Ida B. Wells moved to Memphis, Tennessee, and took a job with a newspaper, the Memphis Free Speech. In 1882 at the age of twenty, Wells became a part owner of that paper. She made many enemies when, in her outspoken editorials, she challenged segregation as unconstitutional. She sued and won a case against a conductor for physically throwing her off a streetcar when she refused to sit in an all-black section. She protested against inferior black schools and public facilities. … She organized the Ida B. Wells Women’s Club of Chicago in 1895 and the Alpha Suffrage
Club in 1913. Through these two organizations black women all over the
country organized and presented a united front in a common cause. (p.
193–194)

It should be noted that The Brownies’ Book did feature biographical
information about notable black women such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and
Phillis Wheatley and there were a few examples of sexism being challenged. For
example in the August 1921 issue in “The Judge” column, the text reads:

Formerly a lot of trash and misinformation used to be written about Africa.
But lately all that has changed and one is able to get nowadays a pretty
definite array of facts concerning that wonderful and mysterious land.
Some of it is rather sad reading, but all of it is interesting, and I’m not sure
but that even the sadness has its good points, because it may cause some
gifted young men of this generation to turn their thoughts toward
remedying the causes of that sadness. “And gifted young women too,”
Wilhelmina put in jealously. “By all means, the young women; we can’t do
anything without them. (p. 224)

Overall, The Brownies’ Book did not have strong feminist overtones, as compared
with those found in the children’s literature of Patricia McKissack. Although W.E.B.
Du Bois was considered to be progressive in terms of his perspectives regarding
feminism, contemporary scholars such as his biographer David Levering Lewis and
Hazel Carby, a feminist scholar, have criticized Du Bois for failing to acknowledge his
own complicity in sexism. For example, in an essay entitled “W.E.B. Du Bois and the
Intersection of Race and Sex in the Twenty-First Century, Rufus Burrow (2001) writes:

There is absolutely no question that he [Du Bois] was the quintessential
champion of black women’s rights. However, Du Bois failed to name or to
see himself as a beneficiary of women’s oppression. The naming and seeing
are crucial, especially for one with the public stature and influence of Du
Bois. In addition, the failure to name and to see himself as being in
complicity with sexism are just as telling. This prompts me to wonder
whether some unacknowledged undercurrent regarding the role of black
women, for example, was at work shaping and informing Du Bois’s way of
being, thinking, and acting. (p. 126)
Similarly, in her book, Race Men, Hazel Carby contends that Du Bois was sexist in the sense that he was unable to imagine black women as intellectual leaders. Although Du Bois’s wife, Nina Gomer, whom he met at Wilberforce College was well educated in comparison with most black women of her era, her role as the wife of W.E.B. Du Bois was basically as a mother and homemaker. In his Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Du Bois, David Levering Lewis (1993) writes:

Nina Yolande Du Bois’s role as an effaced and dutiful wife was not entirely of her own choosing…. A theoretical feminist [W.E.B. Du Bois] whose advocacy could erupt with the force of a volcano (as in “The Burden of Black Women” in the November 1907 Horizon, or in “The Damnation of Women” in the 1921 collection of essays, Darkwater), Du Bois proved to be consistently patriarchal in his role as husband and father. The all-too-commonplace truth is that he increasingly acted as a well-intentioned tyrant at best and a bullying hypocrite at worst…. If his expectations of Nina were narrow, they remained exacting. She had the duty not to hinder his own private and public involvements and to follow his prescriptions for their daughter’s intellectual development. (p. 435; 451)

Unlike The Brownies’ Book, the children’s literature of Patricia McKissack has strong feminist overtones in terms of the depiction of strong black females who are central characters as well as the challenging of sexism.

AN EMPHASIS ON THE WORKING CLASS

Another theme that resurfaced in the books of Patricia McKissack was an emphasis on the working class. In the telephone interview she stated:

[Y]ou have adults who are embarrassed about the fact that they grew up in the projects and don’t want you to know because the image of the projects is so very negative. But for me it was a warm, clean, comfortable, roomy place for us to live. My parents divorced. My mother had to find a place for us to live in Tennessee. The projects were warm. It was safe. It was comfortable. Everybody knew everybody and it was a good place to live. I don’t have negative memories about it. I know that there is a lot of negativism now and it’s been allowed to get that way, but we had a wonderful sense of community when I grew up in the projects. (unpaged)
Arguably, Patricia McKissack's personal experiences as a member of a lower working class community have provided her with a perspective which contrasts with that of many middle-class Americans. It is also no surprise that many of the characters in Patricia McKissack's books such as Flossie, Mirandy and Nettie Jo appear to be members of working class communities. In McKissack's books there is no negativity or sense of shame associated with people or the communities from which they come because they are not well-off.

There are several instances of McKissack critiquing classist attitudes of characters in her books. For instance, in the book, *Color Me Dark: The Diary of Nellie Lee Love* (McKissack, 2000), while traveling on the train to Chicago, Nellie and her family encounter an upper class African American male named Mr. Hill who displays negative attitudes towards the poor. The text reads:

> Mr. Hill gave us an unexpected view of Chicago. He said the city was nice before the war and race relations were good. But now the city was being overrun by poor, ignorant Negroes, and race relations had turned sour. “Look at them,” Mr. Hill said, pointing to the people around us. “They bring disgrace to the whole race by their common ways, superstitions, and loose morals. They have nothing and want nothing but a big time. Those of us who have worked hard to build a little something for ourselves are not being lumped into one bag with these … people. With my eyes closed Mr. Hill was saying many of the things I have heard whites say about us. (p. 77–78)

This is one of the ways in which McKissack’s work diverges from *The Brownies' Book*.

Children’s literature scholar, Dianne Johnson (1990) states:

> The letters of the readers, as well as photographs they sent in, make the late twentieth century reader ever–mindful of the political and socio–cultural implications of *The Brownies' Book*, its concept, readership, and very existence” although the editors, both Ivy League educated, consciously work against blatant in–group discrimination, there is often an undercurrent of tension related to color and social/class status. (p. 25)
An example of social class bias surfaces in a story entitled “Herbert and Frederick” in the August 1921 issue. The opening of the story reads:

Since the first day that Herbert Marshall’s mother carried him to the Stanley School for enrollment, the thought which was uppermost in Herbert’s young mind was to emulate, or rather to imitate, young Frederick Butler. You see, Frederick Butler's father was a doctor and had just lots of money and lived up in a great house on the Terrace, with wonderful trees surrounding it and a beautiful garden of roses on the side nearest the street. Many times had Herbert passed the great house and longingly stood with his bare feet scorching in the hot sands of the village street and watched Frederick’s mother, a kindly appearing woman, as she plucked a little rose bud and tenderly pinned it on Frederick’s lapel. And Herbert thought how nice it must be to have such a mother and to have such a garden and as he watched Frederick descend the broad granite steps with head erect, and light mount his bicycle, then it had first dawned upon Herbert that Frederick lived in a different world. Herbert lived around the corner from the great house in the basement of the building where his father was the janitor and where his mother did the washing for all the fine ladies who lived in the apartments above. Only once had Herbert received a real thrill in his young life and that was on the morning in September when his mother had informed him that he was to enter school. (p. 219)

As one reads the remainder of this story there is no evidence to indicate that Herbert’s parents were abusive or cruel to him and so it seems questionable that Herbert’s situation is considered to be so awful as opposed to Frederick’s. Having a beautiful home and lots of money are no guarantees for a peaceful and happy life. Patricia McKissack depicts her working class characters as having as living rich, satisfying lives in spite of a lack of material wealth.

**EMPHASIS ON FAMILY/COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS**

The last major divergence between the children’s literature of Patricia McKissack and *The Brownies’ Book* is McKissack’s strong emphasis on family and community relationships. This theme resurfaces in many of McKissack’s books in a
number of ways such as the closeness of family and community members, respect for elders and involvement in organizations such as the church and the NAACP. McKissack’s book, *Goin’ Someplace Special* is an excellent example of the way in which family and community relationships are deemed vital. In this story, Tricia Ann is headed to the library on her own for the first time but before she leaves her grandmother, Mama Frances, tells her “[a]nd no matter what… hold yo’ head up and act like you b’long to somebody” (unpaged). The first person that Tricia Ann runs into after boarding the bus is Mrs. Grannell, a friend of her grandmothers. Tricia Ann demonstrates respect for her elders in this story by standing up to give Mrs. Grannell her seat. Upon getting off the bus, she is told by Mrs. Grannell to “[c]arry yo’ self proud” (unpaged). Another community member that Tricia Ann encounters is Jimmy Lee, a street vendor, who reminds her to not “let those [Jim Crow] signs steal yo’ happiness” (unpaged). All along the way to the library, Tricia Ann meets people from her community who encourage her and remind her to forge ahead.

Becoming involved in community organizations such as the NAACP and the church was another way in which an emphasis on community was displayed. In *Color Me Dark The Diary of Nellie Lee Love* (McKissack, 2000), Nellie’s father is a member of the NAACP and continues to obtain copies of *The Crisis* even when it is dangerous for him to do so. Nellie states:

Daddy came home from an NAACP meeting. He’s real excited. The tenth anniversary of the NAACP will be celebrated at the annual conference in Cleveland. Daddy has been selected to attend the conference and to even make a speech about how difficult it is to be a member of the NAACP in the South. (p. 100)
Not only does he participate in national organizations like the NAACP but he also
takes an active part in local organizations as well. In regard to her father, Nellie states:

Most Colored people here in the Corners look up to Daddy because he is a
successful businessman. Mr. Leroy James, the Colored Barber, is also well-
respected. His house is four doors down from ours and his daughter, Josie
James, is the only girl our age who lives within five miles of us. Daddy and
Mr. James started the Colored men’s Improvement Association. Daddy’s
the president and Mr. James is the treasurer. And they are both trustees of
the church. I guess in a lot of ways our fathers, along with a few others, are
leaders in the Colored community. (p. 10)

Nellie’s mother is also active in the community and attends a women’s club that
protests against lynching and is involved with the women’s suffrage movement.

Critical race feminists are concerned with the intersection of oppression as it relates to
black women. Adrien Wing, (1997) a critical race theorist, contends that critical race
feminists “emphasize conscious considerations of the intersection of race, class, and
gender by placing them at the center of analysis. So for example, not only is Nellie’s
mother protesting against the racism that perpetuates lynching but she is also
challenging sexism as it relates to women being refused the right to vote.

In the short story “A Homerun for Beth Ann” there is an emphasis on being
involved in the church. Beth Ann’s primary interest is in playing baseball and she’s
considered a tomboy by some of her friends. Cooking is not something that interests
Beth Ann but when her church has a special function and each person is required to
bring a dish, Beth Ann fulfills her obligations in spite of her misgivings about her
ability to cook.

 Although The Brownies’ Book did encourage its readers to become active in
the uplift of the race, there was not as strong as an emphasis on the importance of
family and community relationship as depicted in the children’s literature of Patricia McKissack. In Patricia McKissack’s books it is through strong family and community relationships and active involvement in organizations that her protagonists deal with the challenges of the world.

The comparative analysis of these two bodies of work indicates that although there were differences among them, there were also strong similarities in terms of racial overtones. Since critical race theory contends that racism is a permanent component in American life, it is understandable that racism would impact the way in which *The Brownies’ Book* and children literature’s by Patricia McKissack was written. Both bodies of work protest against racial injustice in various ways and demonstrate that African Americans have historically protested against racism and continue to do so. Both bodies of work also advocate the importance of reading and tell stories from a black frame of reference. This is not to say that blacks are monolithic in terms of their perspectives but instead it suggests that blacks see and tell stories from the perspectives of members of an oppressed group.

In line with critical race feminism, which is a part of critical race theory, McKissack moves beyond focusing only on race, but instead she focuses on challenging race, class and gender oppression and the manner in which they intersect and affect the lives of black people, female and male. Unlike *The Brownies’ Book*, McKissack embraces aspects of African American culture such as black vernacular as opposed to avoiding them and striving to emulate white, middle-class values. McKissack appears to advocate embracing blackness in all of its richness and diversity.
CHAPTER 6

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine, through the lens of critical race theory (CRT), whether or not there was continuity between *The Brownies’ Book* and children’s literature written by Patricia McKissack. Critical race theory is a body of theoretical scholarship that places race at the center of analysis. CRT is typically situated within the legal field but has been recently applied within the context of education in regard to issues such as curriculum, school funding and teacher expectations by scholars like Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998, 2000) and William Tate (1997). CRT was deemed relevant for this study because both *The Brownies’ Book* and children’s literature written by Patricia McKissack contained strong racial overtones. The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What are the areas of continuity between the critically important historical texts published in *The Brownies’ Book* and the prominent modern texts written by Patricia McKissack?

- What common themes do both texts embrace?
- What ideological stances do they have in common?
- What goals and values do they communicate?
2. What are the areas of divergence between the texts published in *The Brownies' Book* and those written by Patricia McKissack?

- What are the differences in themes?
- What are the differences in ideological stances?
- How do goals and values diverge?

3. To what extent do Patricia McKissack's texts appear to embrace the major themes within *The Brownies' Book*?

4. What are Patricia McKissack's unique contributions to the field of children's literature that add to or modify the major themes within *The Brownies' Book*?

This study involved a content analysis of *The Brownies' Book* and fifteen books, featuring African Americans, written by Patricia McKissack which were representative of the different genres that span her work. The transcription of a telephone interview conducted with the author was also analyzed and incorporated into the study. Content analysis allowed for the systematic interpretation of the abovementioned non-numerical documents. This final chapter consists of the following three sections: a summary of the findings, their significance within today's educational settings and recommendations for further research.

**AREAS OF CONVERGENCE**

The first research question sought to identify the areas of continuity in terms of themes, underlying ideologies, goals and values that were common to *The Brownies' Book* and children's literature written by Patricia McKissack. There were three common themes in *The Brownies' Book* and in children's literature written by
Patricia McKissack. First, both bodies of work consistently challenged dominant perspectives via storytelling. This was done in at least two ways. The first way was to subvert dominant ways of seeing and telling. For example, there were numerous instances in which information, such as that about Africa, was provided that directly opposed dominant ways of presenting information on that same topic. For instance, both *The Brownies' Book* and Patricia McKissack’s children’s literature offered positive descriptions of Africa. Positive descriptions of Africa can be considered subversive in that oftentimes in mainstream discourse, Africa is considered to be a “dark” continent which is inferior to Europe. The second way was to provide a plethora of information about aspects of American history related to African Americans, which is typically excluded from mainstream discourse. For example, *The Brownies’ Book* and children’s literature by Patricia McKissack included information about African American abolitionists, inventors, whalers, writers and musicians. Both bodies of work make it clear that African Americans do indeed have their own stories to tell. In line with the storytelling component of critical race theory, both Du Bois and McKissack used stories as a means by which to give voice to the experiences and perspectives of African Americans.

The second theme was social protest against racism. W.E.B. Du Bois was motivated to create *The Brownies’ Book* based on overt racism. Overt racism was prevalent in the era of *The Brownies’ Book* in the form of gross stereotypes in mainstream children’s literature and in the form of blatant social injustices that were regularly committed against blacks. Events such as lynchings and race riots were mentioned in the “As the Crow Flies” section of *The Brownies’ Book*. Patricia
McKissack was motivated by covert racism when she, as a teacher, discovered the scarcity of books about famous African Americans she thought her students should know about such as Paul Laurence Dunbar. During the telephone interview McKissack also acknowledged that growing up during the era of legalized segregation impacted her work and made ideas such as freedom and justice ones that she wants to convey to her readers. Both *The Brownies’ Book* and children’s literature by Patricia McKissack address issues of racism and highlight the ways in which African Americans have protested against racism. This theme is also in line with one of the tenets of critical race theory. Just as critical race theorists are committed to social protest against racism and use storytelling in order to accomplish this task, so do W.E.B. Du Bois and McKissack.

A third common theme was the importance of literacy. *The Brownies’ Book* encouraged its subscribers to read books and start their own libraries. McKissack not only emphasized the importance of literacy but she also demonstrated the strong historical connection within the African American community between literacy and freedom. McKissack appears to believe as did the famous abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, that people who learn to read are forever free.

In terms of the convergence of *The Brownies’ Book* and children’s literature by Patricia McKissack in regard to ideologies, both are concerned with entertaining and educating children but there is also an underlying assumption that race does indeed matter and that it should be addressed within the context of children’s literature. W.E.B. Du Bois and Patricia McKissack realize, as do critical race theorists, that racism is very much a part of American life and children should be prepared to
encounter it in their lives. Because both of these bodies of work have these underlying assumptions related to race, it is no surprise that one of their common goals is to use literature as a political tool to challenge racism and prepare children to resist it while not letting it destroy their lives. Another common underlying ideological assumption centered on the belief that all children, African American children especially, deserve to see accurate and positive representations of the culture, experiences and history of African Americans in literature. In light of this underlying assumption, it is understandable that another common goal shared by these two bodies of work was to present accurate information about African Americans, which is often excluded in mainstream discourse.

ARIEAS OF DIVERGENCE

The second research question focused on the ways in which The Brownies’ Book and children’s literature written by Patricia McKissack diverged in terms of themes, underlying ideologies, goals and values. In relation to the divergence of themes, Patricia McKissack’s work diverged from that of The Brownies’ Book in the following four ways: 1) attitude towards black vernacular, 2) strong black females, 3) emphasis on the working class and 4) emphasis on family and community relationships.

McKissack embraces black vernacular in several of her stories. She code switches as a writer and switches back and forth between the two depending on her authorial purpose. The Brownies’ Book exhibited a preference for “standard” English and a somewhat negative bias towards speakers of black vernacular. In all likelihood, The Brownies’ Book probably avoided black vernacular due to stereotypical
misrepresentations of black speech patterns that were prevalent in mainstream
culture at that time. However, it should be noted that negative attitudes towards
black vernacular continue to pervade American culture. In his book, Racist America,
sociologist Joe Feagin (2000) writes:

In recent years the vicious mocking of black Americans’ language and
culture seems to be spreading. On the Internet, for instance, whites with
computer literacy have recently developed at least two dozen websites
that feature crude, hostile, and racist parodies of what these whites
consider to be black speech. … In the movies, on television, and in
newspaper and magazine columns, well-educated whites are often those
who mock or ridicule black language and behavior. Moreover, in
Hollywood films the “good guys” often speak prestige versions of the
English language, while those portrayed as “bad guys,” including black
Americans and other Americans of color, often speak some negatively
stigmatized version of English. Some cartoon movies have made use of
mock black English accents for certain animals appearing in the movies. In
this manner language is mapped onto a particular group, as part of an
aural stereotyping process, and the old racist understandings are
perpetuated in new forms. … While it may appear harmless, this mocking
enables whites to support traditional hierarchies of racial privilege and
degradation without seeming to be racist in the old-fashioned, blatant
sense. … Language mocking and subordination are not about standards for
speaking as much as they are about determining that some people are not
worth listening to and treating as equals. (p. 118–119)

In spite of the negative attitudes towards black vernacular held by many white
Americans, Patricia McKissack chooses to utilize black vernacular and validate its
credibility as a valid and acceptable language form.

In contrast to The Brownies’ Book, another prevalent theme in Patricia
McKissack’s books was the challenging of sexism and the presentation of strong black
female protagonists like Flossie, Mirandy and Nettie Jo as self-sufficient characters
who often challenge gender stereotypes. The Brownies’ Book did include
biographical information about famous African American women such as Phillis
Wheatley, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth and Harris (1986) noted that information about the women’s suffrage movement was provided in the “As the Crow Flies” section. However, black women were not depicted as independent, self-sufficient and assertive to the extent that they were depicted in this manner by Patricia McKissack. Overall, Patricia McKissack’s books contained much stronger feminist tones.

Also, in her children’s literature, Patricia McKissack places an emphasis on the working class and challenges negative attitudes towards them. The Brownies’ Book demonstrated class prejudices in a number of stories such as “Herbert and Frederick” and gave the impression that working class people should emulate the values and cultural norms of those who were more financially well-off. In her interview McKissack stated that she believes children should see themselves in books and that as a black child growing up during the 1950s in the projects, this would have been virtually impossible for her. Arguably, her experiences growing up in a low-income community have impacted her portrayals of working class people in a positive, non-stereotypical manner.

Lastly, unlike The Brownies’ Book, Patricia McKissack places a strong emphasis on the importance of family and community relationships. The Brownies’ Book did not ignore the importance of family and community relationships. In fact, one of the seven objectives articulated by W.E.B. Du Bois (1919) was to “turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition and love of their homes and companions” (p. 285). However, the emphasis on family and community relationship in Patricia McKissack’s books—fiction especially—was much stronger. Many of her
characters often gained strength through their relationships with family and community members. For example, it is through her relationships with her grandmother and the people in her working class community that Tricia Ann, in the book *Goin’ Someplace Special* (McKissack, 2001) is able to accomplish her goal of arriving at the library. The protagonists in McKissack’s books also show respect for their elders and are frequently depicted as being active in communal organizations such as the NAACP and the church.

In contrast to *The Brownies’ Book*, an underlying ideology within McKissack’s books is an awareness of issues of race, class and gender and how they affect black people. As a result of this awareness, a goal of McKissack is to challenge racial, gender and class stereotypes in her children’s books. The aforementioned examples of the ways in which McKissack’s work diverges from *The Brownies’ Book* provide ample evidence of the fact that there are numerous ways in which she makes her own contributions to the field of children’s literature.

The aforementioned description of the similarities and differences within these two significant bodies of work appears to indicate that even though much time has passed since *The Brownies’ Book* was initially published, many of its themes, underlying ideologies, goals and values continue to hold significance in today’s world. It is still imperative to imbue black children with a sense of racial pride so they will be able to survive in a world in which “racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component” (Bell, 1992, p. ix). It is equally important that they know the history of protest and resistance involving African Americans so they can continue in this tradition of protest against racial injustice. In her books Patricia
McKissack not only protests against racism, but she also challenges sexism and
classism. This is critical because there are multiple forms of oppression, which
oftentimes intersect, and children should be taught to see and resist oppression in all
of its forms.

**IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY**

This study has implications for the manner in which issues of race are explored
and discussed with children within the context of children’s literature. In their book,
*The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism*, sociologists Vans Ausdale and
Feagin (2001) describe the interactions of young children at a daycare center and
suggest that they are much more knowledgeable concerning issues of race than most
adults believe. For example, at the very beginning of their book Van Ausdale and
Feagin write:

> Carla, a three-year-old child, is preparing herself for resting time. She
> picks up her cot and starts to move it to the other side of the classroom. A
> teacher asks what she is doing. “I need to move this,” explains Carla.
> “Why?” asks the teacher. “Because I can’t sleep next to a nigger,” Carla
> says, pointing to Nicole, a four-year-old Black child on a cot nearby.
> “Niggers are stinky. I can’t sleep next to one.” … Like most of the children
> we observed, Carla is not the unsophisticated, innocent child of many
> adult imaginations. This three-year-old knows how to use racial material,
> such as a hurtful epithet, which she has learned from other sources. But she
> is not just imitating what she might have heard in some other social
> setting. She applies this particular bit of racial knowledge to a distinctive
> and personal interactive encounter. The range of concepts she has linked
> together are remarkable. She has not acted indiscriminately, using an
> ugly name only to foster a reaction in the other child. Instead, Carla uses
> “nigger” to explain and justify her action to an interested onlooker, the
> teacher. This shows a level of forethought. She has considered what a
> “nigger” is, to whom the appellation applies, and why such a label is useful
> in explaining her behavior to an adult. This is not the thoughtless blunder
> of a sleepy child…. As we’ll demonstrate throughout this book, three-,
> four- and five-year-olds often hold a solid and applied understanding of
> the dynamics of race. (p. 1-2)
At the young age of three, Carla has already internalized racism and is acting in ways that are oppressive and racist towards people of color.

Literature by and about African Americans such as The Brownies’ Book and children’s literature by Patricia McKissack have the potential to counter some of the racism and negative stereotypes of African Americans that are so prevalent in mainstream American society. Sharing African American children’s literature also provides opportunities for teachers to engage children in discussions about race and racism (Copenhaver, 2000; Tyson, 1999). This will be beneficial for teachers and children of all racial groups, but especially for African American children since they will not have the luxury of being able to ignore racism. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) state, “In contrast, [to most white adults] most black adults and other adults of color are of necessity much more aware that their young child are forced to deal with racial matters” (p. 2). This study is also significant because of the capability of children’s literature to help children learn to read the world and the world (Freire and Macedo, 1987). Children’s literature scholar, Rudine Sims Bishop, (1987) states:

[L]iterature can be used to develop an understanding of the effects of social issues and forces on the lives of ordinary individuals. In the United States, as in many societies, there are social issues that must be faced if our major problems are to be solved. Racism and poverty are two of the worst problems, and they disproportionately victimize people who are members of nonwhite minority groups. Inevitably, some of the books that center on characters from those groups deal with such social issues. (p. 60)

Because much of African American children’s literature has a strong social justice component to it, using books written by and about African Americans offers increased opportunities to raise students’ social consciousness and engage them in discussions of equity and fairness in regard to issues surrounding race, class and gender. African
American children’s literature can also serve as a starting point in helping children learn to examine social justice issues within the context of children’s literature written by white authors since the responsibility for addressing social justice issues should not be placed solely within the context of literature by and about African Americans.

In her book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997) describes her attempts to help her young son see the sexist overtones in *The Box Car Children*. Tatum writes:

> We are better able to resist the negative impact of oppressive messages when we see them coming than when they are invisible to us. While some may think it is a burden to children to encourage this critical consciousness I consider it a gift. (p. 47)

I, too, consider it important to imbue children with a sense of social awareness and believe that children’s books can serve as a catalyst for helping children learn to read the word and the world.

A study such as this also has serious implications for teacher education programs. Teachers should be encouraged to openly discuss issues pertaining to race and racism. In her book, *Race in the Schoolyard*, sociologist Amanda Lewis (2003) writes:

> Race is continually at play inside and outside schools. It is present in the “hidden curriculum,” in explicit historical lessons, in discipline practices, and in interpersonal relations; race is a part of what is happening in schools as much as it is anywhere else. (p. 151)

While conducting research at a predominantly white, suburban Chicago school, Lewis noted numerous instances in which white teachers reproduced racial inequalities while simultaneously professing to be “colorblind.” Immersing teachers in discussions related to the centrality of race can provide opportunities for them to
closely examine the role that race plays in their underlying assumptions and in the
decisions they make about issues ranging from discipline to student expectations to
book selection criteria.

This study is also significant in that it provides an in-depth analysis of Patricia
McKissack’s children’s literature. No study up to this point had examined a significant
portion of the body of her work for its themes, underlying ideologies and goals.
Patricia McKissack is a highly regarded author and she has garnered a number of
prestigious children’s literature awards. Therefore a scholarly examination of her
work was necessary. In that respect, this study forges a step in filling a void.

Lastly, this study is significant in that it places critical race theory within the
context of children’s literature. Children’s books are social and cultural products
which reflect the perspectives, cultural norms, and biases of their creators. They are
not created in vacuums and consequently are not free of cultural phenomena such as
racism as preservice teachers often assume (McNair, 2003). In an article which
applied CRT within the context of young adult literature, Franzak (2003) contended
that it is critical to develop the “ability to examine the construction of racial privilege
and oppression as played out in the texts our students encounter” (p. 54).
Franzak (2003) stated:

While discussion on new literary theories in the classroom has gained
momentum, the contribution to be made by critical race theory has not yet
been adequately explored. It is important for readers of young adult
literature to have the analytical tools necessary to fully read the world
and the world. . . . Talking about race is not common classroom practice . . .
but it is essential if we are to create spaces for all students to succeed. (p.
54)
Teacher educators can utilize critical race theory as a valuable tool for helping preservice teachers to see how issues of race are operative within the contexts of children’s literature and education.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There are several studies that could be conducted to expand upon what I have done. For example, one of the limitations of this study was that I did not analyze the illustrations in any of the picture books. The illustrations in picture books are just as important as the text since the two function together to tell the story. Many of the themes, such as social protest against racism, that were found within The Brownies’ Book and the children’s literature by Patricia McKissack could also be accomplished via art. Many prominent African American artists such as Jacob Lawrence, Betye Saar and Henry Ossawa Turner have used their artwork to comment on social issues such as racism.

For example, one of Henry O. Tanner’s most famous paintings, “The Banjo Lesson,” could be interpreted as protest art. Judy L. Larson, an artist, writes:

In 1893 most [European] American artists painted African-American subjects either as grotesque caricatures or sentimental figures of rural poverty. Henry Ossawa Tanner, who sought to represent black subjects with dignity, wrote: “Many of the artists who have represented Negro life have seen only the comic, the ludicrous side of it, and have lacked sympathy with and appreciation for the warm big heart that dwells within such a rough exterior.” The banjo had become a symbol of derision, and caricatures of insipid, smiling African Americans strumming the instrument were a cliché. In The Banjo Lesson, Tanner tackles this stereotype head-on, portraying a man teaching his young protégé to play the instrument — the large body of the older man lovingly envelopes the boy as he patiently instructs him. If popular nineteenth-century imagery of the African-American male had divested him of authority and leadership, then Tanner in The Banjo Lesson recreated him in the role of
father, mentor, and sage. The Banjo Lesson is about sharing knowledge and passing on wisdom. [http://www.pbs.org/ringsofpassion/love/tanner.html]

It could be argued that this painting which subverts the stereotypical image of the banjo as it was used to ridicule African Americans is an example of protest art. Now there is a growing number of African American children’s book illustrators, which includes notables such as Jerry Pinkney, Pat Cummings, James Ransome, Floyd Cooper, Faith Ringgold and E.B. Lewis. Studies that examine the themes, ideologies and goals expressed via picture book illustrations created by African Americans are also worthy of scholarly attention.

Another possible way to extend this study would be to incorporate the children’s literature of other African American children’s book authors such as Nikki Grimes, Angela Johnson and Jacqueline Woodson. Angela Johnson and Jacqueline Woodson would serve as good choices in order to examine how contemporary authors are beginning to address controversial issues that affect children such as mental illness, death, homosexuality, interracial relationships, child neglect and the incarceration of family members. Books such as these do indeed expand upon the objectives and goals that W.E.B. Du Bois articulated for The Brownies’ Book. It is imperative that there be continuous and sustained research such as the abovementioned to study the works of African American children’s book authors and illustrators, who by choosing to write about the beauty, culture and history of blacks have, in the words of Langston Hughes, decided that “yes, it’ll be me.”
REFERENCES


CHILDREN’S BOOKS CITED


1. Who do you consider to be your primary audience?

2. What are your major reasons for writing African American children’s literature?

3. What factors have influenced your decision to become a children’s book author? Was there a specific incident or incidents that was/were significant? For example, in one of your interviews, you mentioned the difficulty of finding reading materials featuring African Americans for your 8th grade students.

4. Do you feel any particular responsibility as an African American who is a writer? If so, or if not please comment on this.
5. In an interview, you were quoted as saying that you are not a 'black author' but an 'author who chooses to write about the African American experience.' What do you mean when you say you are not a 'black author'?

6. How do you define African American children's literature? What do you think it has to offer children?

7. Could you elaborate on whether or not you believe black children, in particular, as a result of social issues they face, deserve or need literature which speaks to their unique experiences?

8. Paul Laurence Dunbar, like you, switched between the black vernacular and 'standard' English when writing. Could you speak about your use of black vernacular in your books?

9. In interviews, you have also discussed the importance of Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poetry? What other writers have influenced you as an author?
10. A major theme in your work seems to be the idea that black people have contributed a lot to American society? Does this sound like your work? Are there other ideas that are important to you that you’d like readers to take away from your work that you return to in many of your books?

11. I’ve noticed "strong black females" in a number of your stories as well as challenges to sexist practices and ideas about what women can or can’t do? Is this intentional? Are you modeling the strong black females after yourself? Do you consider yourself a "womanist" writer?

12. In interviews you have mentioned the prominence of storytelling in your family. How has this shaped and impacted your writing?

13. How did growing up in the South during segregation influence your life and your writing? I’ve noticed in several of your books the depiction of relationships within the family and larger community as important? Is this deliberate? For example, in *Goin’ Someplace Special*, Tricia Ann receives support and encouragement from her grandmother as well as various people in the community on how to maintain her dignity and self respect.
14. Several critics have suggested that you challenge issues of class in *Flossie and the Fox*, especially in terms of the language patterns between Flossie and the Fox? Is this something you intended to do? Do you wish to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about the working class?

15. In the author's note of your book about the Tuskegee Airmen, you tell a story of a college student in an American history class whose professor refused to believe that her father was a fighter pilot during WWII. Did that cause you to want to write this book?

16. What motivates you to write your nonfiction books? How do you decide what topics to write about? (ex. whalers, slave revolts, Negro baseball leagues, scientists, inventors, etc.)

17. The majority of your books fall within the nonfiction genre. Why is this so?
APPENDIX B

ANALYSIS SHEET FOR PATRICIA MCKISSACK’S CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

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Language Use (code switching, “standard” English, Black vernacular, etc.) Relevant Quotes or Passages
Other

Racial Issues/Racism/ Relevant Quotes or Passages
Strong Black Females/Sexism/Relevant Quotes or Passages

Other
Counterstories/Narratives as a challenge to racial objectivity/Relevant Quotes or Passages


Other


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APPENDIX C

CHILDREN’S LITERATURE WRITTEN BY PATRICIA McKISSACK


APPENDIX D

CHILDREN’S LITERATURE CO-WRITTEN BY PATRICIA MCKISSACK


