

Smalls' life, which spanned slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the period that Rayford W. Logan has called the Nadir is a challenge to the white supremacist of American history. His career after the Civil War embodies the whole sordid story of Negro disfranchisement and segregation.

Moreover, he is a genuine hero figure, who should appeal to children. Yet I have never seen a line about Robert Smalls in a school history text. My biography of him was published in 1958 when the South was busy saying "Never!" to the Supreme Court, and northern schools weren't concerned with Negroes, either.

Although reviewers seemed to find it well written and researched, only 11,255 copies of it have been sold in 8½ years. In the first 6 months of 1966, when the Education Act provided funds for school libraries, it sold 926 copies. During the same 6 months, a book I wrote on mosses, ferns, and mushrooms sold more than 3,000 copies. Can we permit our children to grow up knowing more about mushrooms than they do about their fellow Americans?

Moved by newspaper accounts of the Negro children who were braving mobs to enter integrated schools, I wrote a book called "Tender Warriors," based on interviews with a number of these courageous youngsters and illustrated with fine photographs by Myron Ehrenberg. It was published in 1958 by Hill & Wang and was, I believe, the first book on school integration.

Even today any Negro, adult or younger, could find in this book added reasons for conscious and purposeful pride in his group. I say "could," because the book was a commercial failure and has been out of print for some time. I would guess that very few copies ever reached school or public libraries.

My next book was "Mary Jane," a fictional account of a Negro girl's first year in an integrated school. Doubleday published this in 1959, with twinges of trepidation. One of their salesmen told me at the time that he would not dare to enter a bookstore in Chicago with a book that had a picture of a Negro on its jacket.

I don't know if any Chicago stores are displaying it now, but "Mary Jane" has been selling well in recent years. Total hard-cover sales now amount to 32,737 copies, with 3,752 copies sold since January 1, 1966. In addition, it has been brought out as a paperback which is marketed through schools by Scholastic Book Services, and there have been six foreign editions.

My most recent books on Negro history are "Forever Free, the Story of the Emancipation Proclamation," and "Lift Every Voice," the lives of W. E. B. DuBois, Mary Church Terrell, Booker T. Washington, James Weldon Johnson. Published in 1963, "Forever Free" has sold 22,112 copies. "Lift Every Voice" has sold 12,079 copies since its publication in the fall of 1965.

I have been lucky. I found publishers who were willing to take a chance with me back in the 1950's when books about Negroes were not in fashion. Other writers were less fortunate. Today, however, when we are in the midst of a civil rights revolution, it is difficult to understand why so few books about minority groups are appearing.

A recent issue of Publishers' Weekly lists the children's books to be published this fall. From their descriptions, only two or three are about Negroes or Puerto Ricans.