

Today probably 80% of all the more substantial children's books are bought by libraries, and the majority of those are in fact bought by and used in elementary schools.

Because the enormous number and variety of children's books makes it possible for a good school library to provide each child with books that appeal to his interests, are appropriate to his level of reading ability, are relevant to his background, and respond to his needs, they provide the schools with an extraordinarily potent and flexible resource to complement the textbooks and other basic instructional materials.

The special importance of children's books, precisely because of this variety and diversity, in providing understanding and cultural bridges among the children of America's varied and diverse religious and ethnic groups has long been recognized. This role of children's books has been a matter of special concern to authors, illustrators, and publishers of children's books for more than 20 years. Over that entire period attention to the problem has been continuous. It long antedates recent civil rights, educational, and anti-poverty legislation, although all of those acts have greatly aided this mission of children's books.

The latent concern over these issues became focussed during the second World War, when shock at Nazi racism forced a reexamination of racist attitudes in American life. During the war years educators, librarians, psychologists, and religious leaders began many efforts at an examination and appraisal of the overt and covert racial attitudes contained in children's books, sharing the concern of authors, illustrators, and publishers. They sought to identify and eliminate damaging stereotypes, but more importantly, to seek out and encourage the affirmative contributions to self-understanding and to the understanding of each group by others.

An article entitled "Intercultural Books for Children" by Mrs. Helen Trager appearing in the November 1945 issue of *Childhood Education* was able even at that early date to identify 22 lists of children's books that were recommended by various responsible agencies such as the Child Study Association, the Council on Books in Wartime, the American Jewish Committee, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and the National Conference of Christians and Jews for their value in making an affirmative contribution to intergroup understanding. These lists cited no less than 253 different books for that value.

Since that time, attention has been continuous and growing. The concern of authors, illustrators, and publishers owes more than it can ever repay to the efforts over two decades of two distinguished librarians, Augusta Baker and Charlamae Rollins, the directors, respectively, of children's services at the New York Public Library and the Chicago Public Library. Though as it happens both Mrs. Baker and Mrs. Rollins are Negroes, their affection for and understanding of all children of whatever race, is all encompassing; and they have both made indispensable contributions to the creation and use of children's books in ways that help all children better to understand themselves and each other. Each of them has been willing tirelessly to consult with and counsel writers, illustrators, editors, and publishers.

Another important factor in the development of a more sensitive and effective concern was the work of Lucy Sprague Mitchell of the Bank Street School. Mrs. Mitchell, in courses on writing for children, gave her students a special insight into the problems of the treatment of children of minority groups, and made a particular effort to recruit and train Negro authors of children's books.

To the more than 250 children's books that were cited for their contributions to intergroup understanding in the various lists compiled during the War and mentioned in Mrs. Trager's article could be added hundreds more that appeared in the late 1940's and 1950's. Most of these dealt with Negro life, but many gave attention to the children of other minority groups: East European immigrants, Mexican-Americans, Indians, and children of Chinese and Japanese descent. At the same time, numbers of older books, often quite popular and successful, were allowed to go out of print or were revised to eliminate objectionable features that had originally been quite innocently included. The attention of the industry was stimulated by frequent conferences with educators, librarians, social workers, and others concerned with the problem; and the treatment of human relations became one of the major factors considered in the appraisal of new children's books by review media and services.

There remained, however, two main problems: one intellectual and one commercial. On the intellectual or editorial side, it was easy to recognize and avoid certain negative elements; the use of an exaggerated, "fake" dialect by