

But these notable titles are the exceptions. "Really fine books are still scarce," says Augusta Baker, coordinator of Children's Services in the New York Public Library. Most of the books depicting Negroes are mediocre or worse. More than one-third have received unfavorable reviews or been ignored by the three major reviewing media in the juvenile book field—*The Horn Book*, *School Library Journal* and *Bulletin of the Children's Book Center* of the University of Chicago.

How well do recent children's books depict the Negro? To answer this question I enlisted the help of four Negro librarians who work with children in New York, Chicago, and Baltimore. They rated 149 of the books "excellent" and thirteen "objectionable" in their portrayal of Negroes either through illustration or text.

Among those listed as "objectionable" are three editions of *Little Black Sambo*. Another is *The Lazy Little Zulu*, which a reviewer in *School Library Journal* rated as "Not recommended" because it "abounds in stereotypes."

The identification of Negro stereotypes in adult fiction is vividly spelled out in the unpublished doctoral dissertation (1963) of Catherine Juanita Starke at Teachers College, Columbia University. By analyzing the work of popular American novelists of the past hundred years—from James Fenimore Cooper to James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison—Dr. Starke shows how the Negro in fiction has changed from the ridiculous stock character to the emerging individual who is first a human being and second a Negro.

Early novelists called the Negro "gorilla-like," gave him a name that ridiculed his servile status (Emperor, Caesar, or Brutus, for example), and made his dark skin and thick lips the epitome of the ludicrous. The Negro mother was described as uncomely and ungraceful, clothing her stout body in gaudy calico.

Concurrently there were protest novels which showed the "counter stereotype"—the Negro of unsurpassed grace and beauty, poetic language, great wisdom, and unfaltering judgment.

In the 1920s *The Saturday Evening Post* was building circulation on the Irvin S. Cobb stories of Jeff, the comic Negro menial. Twenty years later, the *Post* was still doing the same with stories by Octavius Roy Cohen and Glenn Allan, who wrote of Negroes who ridiculed themselves and their race.

Perhaps the public opinion which applauded this kind of adult fiction in the forties was responsible also for the 1946 Caldecott Medal award to *The Rooster Crows: A Book of American Rhymes and Jingles*, illustrated by Maud and Miska Petersham and published by Macmillan. Apparently the librarians who selected this book as "the most distinguished American Picture Book for Children published in the United States" in 1945 were not bothered by four pages showing Negro children with great bunions, feet, coal black skin, and bulging eyes (in the distance, a dilapidated cabin with a black, gun-toting, barefoot adult). White children in this book are nothing less than cherubic, with dainty little bare feet or well-made shoes. After eighteen years enough complaints had been received to convince the publisher that the book would be improved by deleting the illustrations of Negro children. In the new edition of *The Rooster Crows* (1964) only white children appear.

The 1964 Caldecott Award went to *The Snowy Day*, written and illustrated by Ezra Jack Keats and published by Viking. The book gives a sympathetic picture of just one child—a small Negro boy. The Negro mother, however, is a huge figure in a gaudy yellow plaid dress, albeit without a red bandanna.

Many children's books which include a Negro show him as a servant or slave, a sharecropper, a migrant worker, or a menial.

On the other hand, a number of books have overtones of the "counter stereotype" observed by Dr. Starke—the Negro who is always good, generous, and smiling in the face of difficulties. The nine-year-old hero of *Roosevelt Grady* is one of these. Cheerfully and efficiently he looks out for the younger children or works alongside his parents in the fields, does well at school when there is a school to go to, never loses his temper, and in the end finds a permanent home for the family. The book won the Nancy Bloch Award for the Best Intercultural Children's Book for 1963, although it includes no whites except the teacher, the social worker, and the owner of the trailer camp. Only the pictures indicate that the Gradys and their friends are Negroes.

When the Cleveland Board of Education recommended *Roosevelt Grady* for children's reading, a Negro newspaper deplored this choice because one picture shows a work-gang leader grappling with a fat knife-toting Negro who has threatened a young boy. "This is a gross stereotype," was the objection. "But the main story shows beautiful family life among Negroes," was the reply, and *Roosevelt Grady* remains on the Cleveland list.