

It is not unusual for critics to disagree as to the effectiveness of the picture of the Negro in a book for children. For example, one of the librarians who helped me gave *Tolliver*, by Florence Means (Houghton Mifflin), a rating of "excellent" for its picture of the Negro. Another criticized it as a modern story set in Fisk University as it was twenty-five years ago. "There has been a revolution down there since then," she wrote. "As a result the book seems somewhat condescending."

Whispering Willows, by Elizabeth Hamilton Frierhood (Doubleday), also brought mixed response. It tells of the friendship of a white girl who is a high school senior in the class of 1911 and a Negro girl who works as a domestic in a white home. One librarian gave the book top rating. Another objected to the stereotype of the gentle Negro serving-girl who "knows her place."

These divergent opinions point up the dilemma faced by publishers of children's books. As Albert R. Levinthal, president of Golden Press, explains it, "Golden Press has been criticized from both sides. . . . Almost every time we reissue *Little Black Sambo* we receive mail deploring it. When it is not available in our Little Golden Book series, we have had letters asking why we do not keep this classic in print"

One irate Mississippi mother (white) denounced a Little Golden Book of Mother Goose rhymes in a long letter to the Jackson *Clarion-Ledger*. She was aroused by the old rhyme, "Three babes in a basket/And hardly room for two/And one was yellow and one was black/And one had eyes of blue."

"I bought one of the Little Golden Books entitled *Counting Rhymes*," she wrote. "I was horrified when I was reading to my innocent young child, and, behold, on page 15 there was actually the picture of three children in a basket together . . . and one was a little Negro! I put my child and the book down and immediately called the owner of the drugstore and told him he would not have any more of my business (and I buy a lot of drugs, for I am sick a lot) if he didn't take all the rest of his copies of that book off his shelves."

The illustration shows the Negro baby looking down at a mouse. Determined to get the whole truth about basket integration, the Mississippi mother said she got in touch with the author, presumably Mrs. Goose herself. She said the author gave this explanation of the black child: "He was aware he didn't belong there, and he was looking down in shame because somebody (a symbol for the outside meddling yankees) has placed him in the same basket with the white child, where he didn't really want to be. Also he was looking down at the mouse as if he recognized some kinship to animals."

It's an amusing story. But the sad fact is that many publishing houses are catering to such mothers of the South and of the North. As one sales manager said, "Why jeopardize sales by putting one or two Negro faces in an illustration?"

Caroline Rubin, editor of Albert Whitman, tells of three books brought out in the 1950s: *Denny's Story*, by Eunice Smith, which shows Negro children in illustrations of classroom activity; *Fun for Chris*, by Blossom Randall, with Negro and white children playing together; and *Nemo Meets the Emperor*, by Laura Bannon, a true story of Ethiopia. "The books won favorable comment," writes Mrs. Rubin, "but the effect on sales was negative. Customers returned not only these titles but all stock from our company. This meant an appreciable loss and tempered attitudes toward further use of Negro children in illustrations and text."

Jean Poindexter Colby, editor of Hastings House, faced similar opposition in 1959 when she told her salesmen about plans for *A Summer to Share*, by Helen Kay, the story of a Negro child from the city who visits a white family in the country on a Fresh-Air-Fund vacation. "Galleys on the book had been set and art work was in preparation," Mrs. Colby wrote in the April 1965 issue of *Top of the News*, published by the American Library Association. "I told the salesmen present about the book and immediately encountered such opposition that I felt we either had to cancel the book entirely or change the book to an all-white cast. I wrote apologetically to the author and artist, explaining the situation. They were both cooperative and the racial switch was made." *A Summer to Share* came out in 1960 with the Negro child turned into another white one.

Mrs. Colby's experience with *New Boy in School*, by May Justus (1963), was quite different. This is a simple story for second and third graders about a Negro boy who enters an all-white class. "We had a great deal of trouble selling *New Boy in School* in the South," she writes. "Ed Jervis, our southern salesman, reported that one big jobber would neither stock nor sell it. Another one would only fill special orders." But then favorable reviews began to come in—from *School Library Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Chattanooga Times*,