

Milestones for Diversity in Children's Literature and Library Services

KATHLEEN T. HORNING

Many people seem to think that the discussion of diversity started in 1964 with Nancy Larrick's seminal article, "The All-White World of Children's Books," published in the *Saturday Review* on September 11, 1965. This time line shows, however, that a lot happened prior to that. Influential library leaders such as Pura Belpré, Charlemae Hill Rollins, Augusta Baker, and Clara Breed championed diversity long before the 1960s.

In the children's book world, awards matter a great deal. They can reflect social mores and the critical mind-set of children's librarians, both historically and currently. And they have always had a big impact on what gets published next. Success breeds imitation, so when authors and illustrators of color win book awards, particularly the Newbery and Caldecott Medals, it can lead to greater diversity in literature overall. We saw this happen in the mid-1970s with African American literature after big wins by Virginia Hamilton, Leo and Diane Dillon, and Mildred D. Taylor. We saw it again in the early 2000s with Newbery Medals going to Linda Sue Park and Cynthia Kadohata, after which we noted a marked increase in the number of novels being published by Asian American authors.

Progress is often measured by firsts—the first Newbery Medal given to an author of color, first African American president of ALA's Children's Services Division (now the Association for Library Service to Children/ALSC), and so forth. Each of these firsts represents a breakdown of barriers.

Sometimes these barriers seem to have been broken easily; we can't know, for example, how much discussion there was back

in 1928 about awarding the Newbery to a book set in India by an author of East Indian descent. Other times, they clearly represent the work of tireless advocates. We can appreciate the effort that must have gone into the launching of *The Brownies' Book* in 1920 and the heartbreak that must have followed two years later when they had to close the venture down.

Reading this time line, it should become clear that, as a group, children's librarians have been on the forefront for diversity from the beginning, striving to serve all children. If anything, our predecessors in the library field had a much better track record for it than we ourselves have had over the last forty years. Ultimately this time line shows that we still have a long way to go.

1916—Children's Book Week is established.

1919—Macmillan establishes the first department devoted exclusively to children's books and hires Louise Seaman (later Bechtel) as the first children's book editor.



Kathleen T. Horning is the Director of the Cooperative Children's Book Center, a library of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



Charlemae Hill Rollins

1920—A new monthly magazine, *The Brownies' Book*, is founded. Created for African American children, it was the brainchild of W. E. B. Du Bois. Unfortunately, it never got enough subscribers to sustain itself and ceased publication after just twenty-four issues.

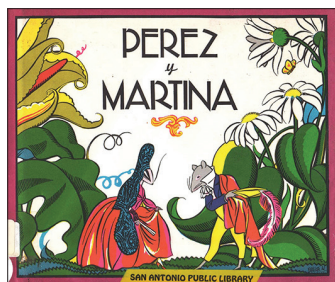
1921—Pura Belpré is hired by the New York Public Library. Originally from Puerto Rico, she would pioneer bilingual storytelling and library services to Spanish-speaking children in New York City.

1922—The Newbery Medal is established to encourage distinguished writing for children.

1927—Charlemae Hill Rollins is hired as a children's librarian by Chicago Public Library. In succeeding decades, she would lead the charge against the stereotypical portrayal of African Americans in children's books.

1928—Dhan Gopal Mukerji becomes the first person of color to win the Newbery Medal for *Gay-Neck: The Story of a Pigeon*, a book set in his native India.

1932—*Perez and Martina* by Pura Belpré, a picture-book folktale retelling, is the first book published in the United States by a Puerto Rican author.



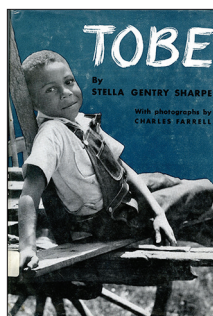
1932—*Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti* by Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes is the first children's novel by and about blacks. It was illustrated by E. Simms Campbell, an African American artist.

1937—Augusta Baker is hired by New York Public Library. She spent the early years of her career at the 135th Street Branch in Harlem and became nationally known for her storytelling and leadership in children's librarian services.

1938—The James Weldon Johnson Collection is established at the Countee Cullen Branch of the New York Public Library. Under the direction of Augusta Baker, forty books representing positive portrayals of blacks were selected for the initial collection.

1939—One year after the establishment of the Caldecott Award for distinguished picture-book illustration, the Medal goes to

Thomas Handforth for his portrayal of a contemporary Chinese girl in *Mei Li*.

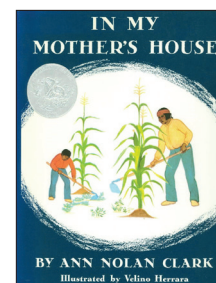


1939—*Tobe*, a 121-page picturebook by Stella Gentry Sharpe, is published by the University of North Carolina Press. Written in response to a student's question about why there were no books with kids that looked like him, the story details the life of a seven-year-old African American farm boy, documenting it with black-and-white photos by Charles Farrell.

1940—A young artist named Ezra Jack Keats cuts a series of four photos out of the June 14 issue of *Life* magazine. They show an African American toddler before and after a blood test from a public health nurse, and nearly twenty years later, they inspire the creation of his character Peter.

1941—Charlemae Hill Rollins publishes *We Build Together: A Reader's Guide to Negro Life and Literature for Elementary and High School Use*, a list of recommended books that countered the negative images prevalent in children's books.

1942—Velino Herrera, a Zia Pueblo artist, wins a Caldecott Honor for *In My Mother's House* by Ann Nolan Clark, becoming the first illustrator of color recognized by the Caldecott Committee, and so far, the only Native book creator to be recognized by either the Newbery or Caldecott committees.



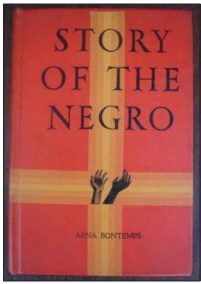
1942—Clara Breed, president of the ALA's Children's Services Division, becomes a vocal opponent of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 ordering Japanese American citizens into internment camps. Breed corresponded with her young patrons from the San Diego Public Library throughout their imprisonment, and those letters today are part of the Japanese American National Museum.

1944—Plato Chan, a twelve-year-old Chinese American boy, wins a Caldecott Honor for *The Good-Luck Horse* by Chih-Yi Chan; he still holds the record for youngest illustrator ever to be awarded.

1945—African American author Jesse Jackson publishes *Call Me Charley*, the first contemporary children's novel with an African American protagonist.

1945—*Two Is a Team* by Lorraine and Jerrold Beim, illustrated by Ernest Crichlow, is the first picturebook illustrated by an African American artist.

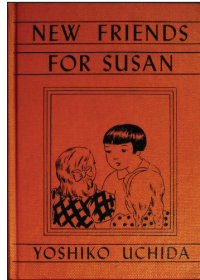
1946—*My Dog Rinty* by Ellen Tarry and Marie Hall Ets is published by Viking. The contemporary story about an African



American boy in Harlem was illustrated with black-and-white photographs to avoid bias and distortion.

1949—*Story of the Negro* by Arna Bontemps wins a Newbery Honor, making him the first African American to win a major ALA award.

1951—Yoshiko Uchida's first novel *New Friends for Susan* deals with a Japanese American girl. It represents an early example of Asian American children's literature.



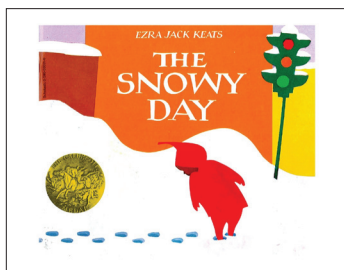
1955—Augusta Baker publishes "The Changing Librarian in a Changing Neighborhood" in the ALA Children's Services Division's journal *Top of the News*. In this article, she offers advice on how to make children of color feel welcome at the public library.

1957—Charlemae Hill Rollins is elected as president of ALA's Children's Services Division, becoming the first African American to hold that position.

1958—*Rifles for Watie* by Harold Keith wins the Newbery Medal on the understanding that some stereotypical language about African Americans will be changed in the second printing. The changes were quietly made without the author's knowledge or consent. The original text was restored in the third printing at the author's request.

1961—Augusta Baker becomes head of New York Public Library's children's department.

1963—Charlemae Hill Rollins retires from her position as head of children's services at Chicago Public Library.



1963—*The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats wins the Caldecott Medal. Although the book's author/illustrator was white, it was notable as the first picturebook about a modern African American child to win the Caldecott. Today, it is considered a children's classic.

1964—"The All-White World of Children's Books" by Nancy Larrick is published in *Saturday Review*. In her report, Larrick looked at the 5,206 children's books published by sixty-three publishers from 1962 through 1964 and found that only four-fifths of one percent of the children's trade books published in the United States during that time period were about contemporary African Americans.

1964—The Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) is established in response to a dearth of books available to Mississippi's Freedom Schools. The coalition of authors, illustrators, and educators advocated for more diverse books and for the eradication of stereotypical images in books for children.



Walter Dean Myers

1966—The first issue of *Interracial Books for Children* is published by the CIBC. The influential newsletter published critical reviews of books past and present and ran contests for unpublished authors of color.

1967—Augusta Baker is elected president of the Children's Services Division.

1968—Pura Belpré retires from New York Public Library.

1968—Walter Dean Myers wins the CIBC's first contest for his picturebook text, *Where Does the Day Go?* Charlemae Hill Rollins was a member of the selection committee, along with adult authors Leronne Bennett Jr. and Paule Marshall. In the teen category, they awarded Kristin Hunter for *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*.

1969—Augusta Baker addresses children's book editors directly in "Guidelines for Black Books: An Open Letter to Juvenile Editors," published in *Publishers Weekly*. She laid out what they should do and what they should not do when publishing books about African Americans.



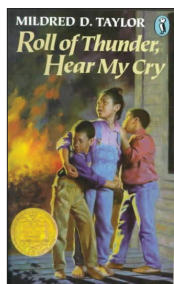
Virginia Hamilton

1969—The Coretta Scott King Award is established. The award encouraged African American authors and illustrators to create outstanding books for children. The first award in 1970 went to Lillie Patterson for *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Man of Peace*.

1974—Augusta Baker retires from the New York Public Library.

1974—Barbara Rollock is elected as the Children's Services Division's President, making her the third African American librarian to hold the office.

1975—Virginia Hamilton becomes the first African American to win the Newbery Medal, for *M.C. Higgins, the Great*. The book also won the National Book Award and the Boston Globe-Horn



Book Award. Louis Sachar's *Holes* is the only other book that has won all three awards.

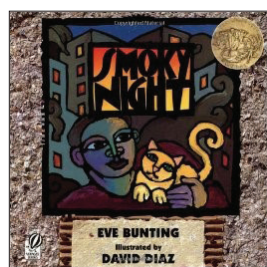
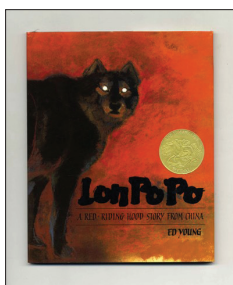
1975—Spencer Shaw becomes the Children's Services Division's fourth African American and first male president. No person of color has been elected to this position since.

1976—Leo and Diane Dillon win the first of two back-to-back Caldecott Medals, representing the first time an African American artist (Leo) had been awarded.

1977—Mildred D. Taylor wins the Newbery Medal for *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, becoming the second African American winner. She had won the CIBC's award for unpublished authors of color just four years earlier for *Song of the Trees*, the first book in the Logan family saga.

1984—Jamake Highwater, who claimed Native ancestry, is exposed as a fraud by an investigative report published in a Native newspaper, *Akwesasne Notes*. Highwater had written several children's books on Native subjects, including 1978 Newbery Honor Book *Anpao*.

1985—The Cooperative Children's Book Center in Madison, Wisconsin, begins to document the number of books published each year that are written and/or illustrated by blacks. In that year, there were just eighteen books by black authors and artists, out of about 2,500 published. Nine years later, they expanded the count to all authors and illustrators of color.



1989—Walter Dean Myers publishes an editorial in the *New York Times* called, "I Actually Thought We'd Revolutionize the Industry." He wrote of his disappointment with the fact that all the progress made in the late 1960s and 1970s seemed to have been lost.

1990—Ed Young wins the Caldecott Medal for *Lon Po Po: A Red-Riding Hood Story from China*. Although several Asian American artists had won Caldecott Honors in the past, he was the first to win the gold.

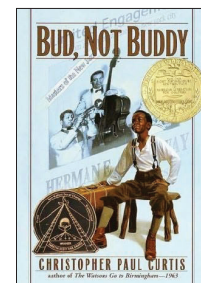
1995—David Diaz becomes the first (and so far, only) Latino artist to win the Caldecott Medal, for *Smoky Night*, a picture-book about the Los Angeles riots.

1995—Virginia Hamilton becomes the first person of color to win the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award for her lifetime contributions to children's literature.

1996—The Pura Belpré Award is jointly established by ALSC and REFORMA to encourage books by Latino/a authors and illustrators about Latino experiences in the United States. The inaugural awards went to Judith Ortiz Cofer for *An Island Like You: Stories of the Barrio*, and Susan Guevara for *Chato's Kitchen*.

1997—Pat Mora founds *Día de los niños/Día de los libros*. Based on a Mexican holiday, Children's Day, Mora added books to the equation to celebrate literacy and bilingualism. Celebrated on April 30 each year, today *Día* is administered by ALSC.

2000—*Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis wins the Newbery Medal, becoming the first book to win both a Newbery and a Coretta Scott King Award.



2002—Linda Sue Park wins the Newbery Medal for *A Single Shard*, making her the second Asian American to win the award and the first since Dhan Gopal Mukerji won in 1928.

2003—The Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA) confers its first awards for children's books portraying Asian/Pacific Americans, their history and culture. The awards went to Janet S. Wong for *Apple Pie Fourth of July* and An Na for *A Step from Heaven*, which had also won the Young Adult Library Services Association's Printz Award.

2005—Cynthia Kadohata becomes the third Asian American author to win the Newbery Medal, for her book *Kira-Kira*.

2006—The American Indian Library Association establishes a Youth Literature Award to honor the best writing and illustration by and about American Indians. The first awards went to Louise Erdrich for *The Birchbark House*, Joseph Bruchac for *Hidden Roots*, and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes for *Beaver Steals Fire: A Salish Coyote Story*.



Cynthia Kadohata



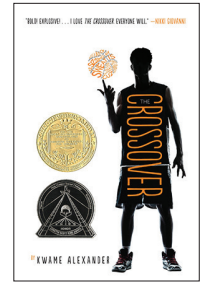
Jerry Pinkney

2009—Margarita Engle wins a Newbery Honor for *The Surrender Tree: Poems of Cuba's Struggle for Freedom*, becoming the first Latino/a to be recognized by the Newbery Committee.

2010—Jerry Pinkney becomes the second African American artist to win the Caldecott Medal. Prior to winning the award for *The Lion & the Mouse*, he had had five Caldecott Honor

Books, tying with Maurice Sendak for the record number of honors before winning the gold.

2014—We Need Diverse Books is established. Much like the Council on Interracial Books fifty years earlier, it originated as a coalition of authors, illustrators, and librarians concerned about the lack of diversity in books for children and teens. A savvy use of social media has given the group wide visibility and has kept the discussion of diversity going on a national level.



2015—For the first time since 1977, both the Newbery and the Caldecott Awards go to people of color. African American Kwame Alexander wins the Newbery Medal for *The Crossover* and Asian American Dan Santat wins the Caldecott Medal for *The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend*. 🐾

San Francisco Snapshots

The 2015 ALA Annual Conference in San Francisco was the site of numerous celebrations of diversity in children's literature. Here are photos from two of those events.

Pura Belpré Award winners and honorees were saluted at a celebration on Sunday afternoon, June 28. Along with heart-felt acceptance speeches by the authors and illustrators, highlights included a vibrant performance by Quenepas, a Bomba youth song and dance ensemble, and book signings. Civil rights activist Sylvia Mendez, subject of Duncan Tonatiuh's Belpré Honor Book, *Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation*, also spoke to attendees. (See below.)



Duncan Tonatiuh accepts an honor plaque for *Separate Is Never Equal* with (l to r) Silvia Cisneros, 2014–15 REFORMA president, Sylvia Mendez, and Ellen Riordan, 2014–15 ALSC president.



(front row l to r) Lauren Castillo, Caldecott Honoree; Mary GrandPré, Caldecott Honoree; Dan Santat, Caldecott Medalist; Jillian Tamaki, Caldecott Honoree; Yuyi Morales, Caldecott Honoree. (back row l to r) Cece Bell, Newbery Honoree; Kwame Alexander, Newbery Medalist; Donald Crews, Wilder Medalist; Mariko Tamaki, author of *This One Summer*; Melissa Sweet, Caldecott Honoree; Mac Barnett, author of *Sam & Dave Dig a Hole*; and Jon Klassen, Caldecott Honoree. (Not pictured: Jacqueline Woodson, Newbery Honoree.)

Librarians, children's book creators, fans, and publishers gathered again on Sunday evening for the 2015 Newbery-Caldecott-Wilder Banquet. Speeches by Newbery Medalist Kwame Alexander, Caldecott Medalist Dan Santat, and Wilder Medalist Donald Crews highlighted the evening and did not disappoint. The night concluded with a reception line where attendees were able to chat with the winners and honorees. Before calling it a night, the honored guests posed for a photo together. (See above.)