

Race Consciousness, Refinement, and Radicalism: Socialization in *The Brownies'* Book.

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Race Consciousness, Refinement, and Radicalism:
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Violet J. Harris (bio)

W. E. B. DuBois in an article entitled "The True Brownies," published in a 1919 edition of *The Crisis* (285), heralded the publication of a new periodical for Black children, titled *The Brownies' Book*. The new periodical, in general, evolved from historical and cultural conditions that denigrated Black culture and people. More specifically, the periodical resulted from the requests of Black children for information about their heritage in order to counteract the negative images they encountered in children's literature and textbooks.

DuBois received the inquiries from children in his capacity as editor of *The Crisis*, the official publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP was a major political organization for Blacks during the early 1900s. Each year, *The Crisis* published a "Children's Number" which DuBois characterized as the most popular number of the publication. The "Children's Number" provided readers with poetry, stories, games, and photographs, as well as accounts of educational achievements, political occurrences, and lynchings. DuBois, however, was concerned about the effects of reports of lynchings and other violent attacks on children. He wrote: "To educate them in human hatred is more disastrous to them than to the hated; to seek to raise them in ignorance of their racial identity and peculiar situation is inadvisable—impossible" (DuBois 285).

The alternative for DuBois was the publication of "a little magazine for children—for all children, but especially for ours, 'the Children of the Sun'" (DuBois 285). DuBois delineated seven steps intended to ameliorate the effects of the deprecation of Blacks and their culture. The seven steps as indicated in *The Crisis* (1919 286) were:

1. To make colored children realize that being "colored" is a normal, beautiful thing.
2. To make them familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race.
3. To make them know that other colored children have grown into beautiful, useful and famous persons.
4. To teach them a delicate code of honor and action in their relations with white children.
5. To turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition and love of their

homes and companions.

6. To point out the best amusements and joys and worthwhile things of life.

7. To inspire them to prepare for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifice.

DuBois, in stating these goals, proposed a model of social action or behavior that would counter the effects of the negative images of Blacks and Black culture pervasive in American culture. Indeed, DuBois deliberately sought to nurture and socialize a group of children with attributes associated with the "New Negro."

DuBois, along with literary editor Jessie Redmon Fauset, and business manager, Augustus Granville Dill, combined their diverse talents, energies, and financial resources to publish twenty-four issues of *The Brownies' Book* for the period 1920-21 (Sinnette 1965; Saul 1984; Harris 1986). *The Brownies' Book*, the first periodical created in the United States for Black children, represents one of the first literary manifestoes to explicate the socialization function of literature for Black children (Sinnette 1965; Saul 1984).

The Brownies' Book symbolized challenges to tradition in children's literature that had become a selective tradition. Tradition represents the power of individuals or groups of individuals to determine not only the structure and institutions of a culture, but also the knowledge and meanings of a culture. Moreover, tradition becomes selective as individuals or groups attempt to maintain their control and power. Williams defines selective tradition as "an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification" (115). Taxel, drawing upon Williams, writes that "selective traditions are said to be of a 'specific social class' because they provide a sense of predisposed continuity . . . which offers a historical and cultural ratification of a contemporary order."

The selective tradition in children's literature in the early twentieth century represented the values and power of a class identified by Kelly (1974) as the gentry class. The gentry class consisted of "cultured"

... "Trends in Juvenile Biography." *Try of the West*, American Library Association 31 (1987): 135-67.

Wynham, Ian. *Writing for Children & Teenagers*. Revised by Arnold MacLure. Cincinnati: Writers Digest, 1987.

Linda Girund's interest in biography is evidenced by her work arti-

cle in *Book Buzz*, "The Truth with some Sketches" (July 1988) as well as her own biography, *Barth, Sen, and Sky: The Work of Edmund Spenser* (Allen: Whitman, 1985). She has written nine picture books and her poetry has been published in such journals as *Midwest Quarterly*, *Mississippi Valley Review*, *Connecticut Review*, and *Aspen*.

Race Consciousness, Refinement, and Radicalism: Socialization in *The Brownies' Book*

by Violet J. Harris

W. E. B. DuBois in an article entitled "The True Brownies," published in a 1919 edition of *The Crisis* (185), heralded the publication of a new periodical for Black children titled *The Brownies' Book*. The new periodical, in general, evolved from historical and cultural conditions that designated Black culture and people. More specifically, the periodical resulted from the requests of Black children for information about their heritage in order to counteract the negative images they encountered in children's literature and textbooks.

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The alternative for DuBois was the publication of "a little magazine for children— for all children, but especially for ours, the Children of the Sun" (DuBois 185). DuBois delineated seven steps intended to ameliorate the effects of the deprecatory of Blacks and their culture. The seven steps as indicated in *The Crisis* (1919: 286) were:

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DuBois, along with literary editor Jessie Redman Fauset, and business manager, Augustus Granville Dill, combined their diverse talents, energies, and financial resources to publish twenty-four issues of *The Brownies' Book* for the period 1910-22 (Summers 1967, Surr 1984, Harris 1986). *The Brownies' Book*, the first periodical created in the United States for Black children, represents one of the first literary manifestations to explicate the socialization function of literature for Black children (Summers 1967, Surr 1984).

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The selective tradition in children's literature in the early twentieth century represented the values and power of a class identified by Riley (1974) as the *gentle class*. The *gentle class* consisted of "cultured" individuals who espoused traditional values such as truth, honor, acceptance, prudence, justice, polite speech, culture, refinement, and discipline. As the same time, the selective tradition espoused by these individuals included social intolerance, institutionalized discrimination, and social inequality. Furthermore, the selective tradition in children's literature suggested that Blacks were inferior, *lucky*, *lucky*, and *childlike*. The selective tradition in children's literature also taught whites that they were the natural leaders of Blacks and to treat Blacks in paternalistic ways. Additionally, children's literature taught Blacks that they were the caretakers of whites, and that they should submit to the paternalistic guidance of whites, and that they should know their place (Broderick). An example from *Old Nigger* (1893) illustrates these concepts:



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